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## Laying aside the spear: Hobbesian warfare and the Maussian gift

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## **LAYING ASIDE THE SPEAR: HOBBESIAN *WARRE* AND THE MAUSSIAN GIFT**

RAYMOND CORBEY

*Abstract* The pacification of a primordial, violent natural state of humankind by a social contract based on reciprocal exchange is a widespread preconception, from Thomas Hobbes and Enlightenment social thought to Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss. In this contribution, the structure, historical backgrounds, and current roles of this assumption in several lines of research are analysed. Subsequently, it is argued that socioecological theories of conflict and cooperation can elegantly supplement Durkheimian approaches, and help to avoid a too dualistic, *homo duplex* view of culture.

### *Contents*

1. From violence to sociality
2. Society as biology or society as culture?
3. Ethnology held captive by *homo duplex*
4. Conclusion

Ethnologists inevitably come to their subjects with a certain philosophical baggage which is part of their own, North Atlantic universe of cosmological and moral meaning, and influences the way they gather and interpret their data. In the following, I will examine one particular, widespread assumption informing Maussian and structuralist theorizing on gifts and reciprocity: the idea of violence as a basic tendency of human nature. While the other contributions to this volume focus on detailed archaeological and ethnographic data pertaining to conflict and violence more directly, the present one looks at historical and epistemological backgrounds of one particular, quite influential way of handling such data theoretically and conceptually.

### *1. From violence to sociality*

The notion of disorder and conflict as a “natural,” “primordial,” or “original” state of humankind, and at the same time of human nature, is continually present in Marcel Mauss’ *Essai sur le don*. It guides his empirically directed work as a conceptual or ontological presupposition, linking his thought to that of the leading social theorists of the Enlightenment. In his analysis, *état naturel* refers to both humankind before history and

civilisation - its natural history - and a state of “raw nature” that is partly constitutive for human society, as a condition that must continually be transcended to make humanness possible. Becoming human, as Mauss analyses it, happened in (pre)history, but it is also, ontologically speaking, a permanent, structural feature of humans who, according to this view, continually transcend the state of nature, by exchanging. The “natural state” is seen as primordial, both ontologically and phylogenetically, and social order as discontinuous with nature in both respects.

Mauss holds exchange to be constitutive of social life and social order because it is the chronologically earliest and ontologically most fundamental solution to the Hobbesian *warre* of all against all that, in Hobbes’ view, ensues from man’s selfish nature. “Societies have progressed,” he writes in the conclusion to the *Essai sur le don*, “in so far as they themselves, their subgroups, and, lastly, the individuals in them, have succeeded in *stabilizing* relationships, giving, receiving, and finally, giving in return. To trade, the first condition was to be able to lay *aside the spear*. From then onwards, they succeeded in exchanging goods and persons, no longer only between clans, but between tribes and nations, and, above all, between individuals. *Only then* did people learn how to create mutual interests, giving mutual satisfaction, and, in the end, to defend them *without having to resort to arms*” (Mauss 1990, p. 82; my italics).

In the “natural” state which is overcome through gift exchange the “fundamental motives for human action: emulation between individuals of the same sex, that <basic imperialism of human beings>” (*ibid.*, p. 65) still had free reign, but in the end reason overcomes the folly of unbridled primeval *warre*: “It is by opposing reason to feeling, by pitting the will to peace against sudden outbursts of insanity of this kind that people succeed in substituting alliances, gifts, and trade for war, isolation and stagnation” (*ibid.*). Social order is conceived of as the constraining, taming, subduing of a primitive, primordial condition of violence and warfare; the pacifying gift brings about co-operation and sociality.

More recently a number of ethnologists have put insights of Marcel Mauss and his disciple Louis Dumont to use in their research on a number of mostly tribal societies, focussing on patterns of exchange. Time and again they show by detailed ethnographic analysis how in such societies certain “ideas/values” - *idées-valeurs* - perpetuate themselves beyond the life or death of particular individuals, imposing themselves in all the various sorts of social relations (e.g., Platenkamp 1988; Geirnaert-Martin 1992; Barraud et al. 1994). The plethora of exchanges going on in a village every day form, and constantly renew, the value-orientated matrix of the “sociocosmos” which is constitutive for social order and, at the same time, for the individuals involved, including the dead and the spirits. “Subjects and objects intertwine ceaselessly,” Barraud *et al.* write, underlining one of the key insights of Mauss’ analysis of the gift, in a tissue of relations which make of exchanges the permanent locus where these societies reaffirm, again and again, their highest values.” (*ibid.*, p. 105). Exchange is here not taken in a narrow economic sense, but as *symbolic* exchange, as a *fait social total*, a “total social phenomenon,” with many, non-separated aspects, normative, economic, jural, religious, and so on. It is, with what is probably the best known dictum from Mauss’ *Essai*, “one of the human foundations on which our societies are built” (Mauss 1990, p. 4).

According to these Durkheimians, in small-scale traditional, non-state societies not only social order but also personal identity, Mauss' *personnage* (Mauss 1995: 331-361), is constituted through gifts and exchange. Persons are not primarily seen as particular biological organisms, but as coming about and being transformed - for instance, from living to dead - by the ritually and intergenerationally bestowing upon each other of souls, names, titles, rights, and duties that are part of the family clan. This happens not only in birth ceremonies, marriages, funerals, and other important rituals that punctuate the life cycle, but also in the context of subsistence activities such as hunting and horticulture, usually conceived of as an exchange with spirits inhabiting the landscape, as well as in the context of such seemingly trivial everyday activities as greeting, gossiping, and sharing food.

The influential structuralist approach of Claude Lévi-Strauss shares the Maussian presupposition of social order as a *human* imposition upon a relatively unstructured, chaotic, brute state of nature: "The social life of monkeys does not lend itself to the formulation of any norm ... [The] monkey's behaviour is surprisingly *changeable*. Not only is the behaviour of a single subset inconsistent, but there is *no regular pattern* to be discerned in collective behaviour" (Levi-Strauss 1969, p. 6-7, my italics; cf. Rodseth et al. 1991, p. 222, 233). In Lévi-Strauss' opinion, a particular animal became human and social organisation came into being only by the prohibition of incest. "[Humankind] has understood very early," he states in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, "that, in order to free itself from a wild *struggle for existence*, it was confronted with the very simple choice of <either marrying-out or being killed-out>. The alternative was between biological families living in juxtaposition and endeavouring to remain closed, self-perpetuating units, *overridden by their fears, hatreds and ignorances*, and the systematic establishment, through the incest prohibition, of links of intermarriage between them, thus succeeding to build, out of the artificial bounds of affinity, a true human society ..." (Levi-Strauss 1956, pp. 277/78, my italics). Social, political, and economic order, in this view, come about by giving; they are a consequence of the exchange - of giving and receiving, giving and giving-in-return - of women between male-dominated descent groups. Hereby the natural state is transcended and a truly human existence is attained.

This particular way of conceptualising the relation between society and nature is analogous to Thomas Hobbes' social contract theory. "The finall Cause, End or Designe of men," Hobbes wrote in the first part of *Leviathan*, "... in the introduction of ... restraint upon themselves, ... is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby; that is to say, of getting themselves out from *that miserable condition of Warre, which is necessarily consequent to the naturall Passions of men*, when there is no visible Power to keep them in awe" (Hobbes 1972 [165 1], p. 223, my italics). Social order, according to Hobbes, is not in human's nature, but is installed by a social contract that constrains and pacifies the natural state of humankind and the solitary individual's brutish natural tendencies. Most Hobbes commentators stress that the natural state is but a hypothesis, an imagined, fictional condition facilitating the analysis of how social order is constituted, but Hobbes regularly alludes to American Indians and the prehistory of humankind.

At a certain point, the analogy stops, for while in Hobbes' thought the state is an instrument of selfish individuals, for the Durkheimians, the social fabric which is constituted by exchange is a moral and religious

order. Their approach was critically pitted against the liberal, in their view, too individualistic, voluntaristic, and utilitarianist *homo oeconomicus* approach to the foundations of society of the social contract theorists of the Enlightenment. The Maussian gift can be seen as “the primitive analogue of the social contract ... the primitive way of achieving the peace that in civil society is secured by the State” (Sahlins 1972, p. 169, my italics).

The Durkheimian view of the “primordial nature” of humans is clearly quite close to that of Enlightenment authors who postulate a progress from a savage primordial state to the civilized condition. Both positions are heir to a typically European, dualistic perception of humans and reality that issues from Platonic and Christian ideas on the spirit and the flesh, innate sinfulness and redemption (Corbey 1993; Sahlins 1996; Carrithers 1996). More specifically, the view of humans and nature underlying Mauss’ analysis of the transition of war of all against all to exchange of all with all, or, at least, of many with many, is the Durkheimian one of *homo duplex*. It was formulated succinctly by Emile Durkheim in an article from 1914. The individual, in his view, has “a double existence ... the one purely individual and rooted in our organisms, the other social and nothing but an extension of society” (Durkheim 1960, p. 337; cf. Sahlins 1996, p. 402, and Rapport 1996).

A deep antagonism between the demands of the individual organism and those of social order is postulated, a conflict in which Durkheim and Mauss are firmly on the side of the *morale de la réciprocité*, which triumphs over the primordial *intérêt personnel*. One particular animal species becomes human phylogenetically, ontogenetically, ontologically, and morally, through inculcation in a different order of existence: the spiritually, morally, and intellectually superior world of society, language, and culture, thus rising above its naturally selfish animal individuality which is directly rooted in the organism. Such and similar dualistic views of humans and society, nature and culture, determine how most ethnologists, in the French Durkheimian-cum-Maussian tradition, but also, along slightly different lines, in the American Boasian tradition, conceive of their discipline: as a *human science*.

## 2. Society as biology or society as culture?

There are baffling divergences in styles of scientific explanation between as well as within disciplines depending on whether natural sciences types of approach are followed or interpretive, typically human sciences ones. Explanations of human violence and warfare are a case in point. Support to the Hobbesian perception of human nature has been lent in recent decades by a number of researchers working with biological, evolutionary approaches, in the wake of the ethology of Konrad Lorenz, Irenaeus Eibl-Eibesfeld, and Nico Tinbergen; the sociobiology of Edmund Wilson; Richard Alexander’s theory of the maximization of reproductive success; the biosocial anthropology of Robin Fox; as well as, more recently, the inclusive fitness theory, dual inheritance theory, and evolutionary psychology. Johan van der Dennen, for example, in his 1995 analysis of the evolutionary origin of war, takes a rigorously biological approach, analysing warfare as a highly effective, high-risk/high-gain male-coalitional adaptive and reproductive strategy. This is a Hobbesian *bellum omnium contra*

*omnes*, not Malthusian society read into nature, as Karl Marx once wrote to Friedrich Engels upon reading Darwin, but exactly the opposite. For the Maussians, altruism means the suppression of selfish instincts; for inclusive fitness theory, their articulation.

Combining human sociobiological insights with cultural ecological ones, anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon, in his research on the Yanomami of Venezuela, stresses the inclusive fitness of male warriors in the complex interrelationship between individuals, groups, and their natural environment (e.g., Chagnon 1988). The more women they realize access to, the better the proliferation of their genes. Most cultural anthropologists, however, conceive of their discipline as a typically human science, and, unlike Chagnon, conceive of society as a cultural and normative order, not primarily a biological one. Accordingly, they interpret warfare and violence as predominantly cultural phenomena, following collective rules and values, or rationally responding to historical or environmental circumstances such as resource scarcity, rather than issuing from individual basic drives. “Indeed,” Leslie Sponsel (1996: 909) writes, “in recent decades diverse lines of evidence have converged to strongly suggest, if not to demonstrate, to everyone’s satisfaction, that human aggression, including warfare, is overwhelmingly determined by culture.” This sharply contrasts with Van der Dennen’s claim that warfare is overwhelmingly determined by biology, and explainable only by a rigorously neodarwinist approach.

It has been argued (by the authors contributing to Sponsel & Gregor 1994, among others) that peacefulness, not war, sociality, not aggression, is the natural, normal condition. In their view, aggression and warfare do not issue from basic human nature, but are triggered by specific historical and cultural circumstance. The Hobbesian idea of aggression as germane to the human condition has accordingly been criticized as social Darwinist ideology. Biologically orientated authors have retorted to ethnologists of that persuasion that peacefulness is but a romantic, utopian dream - a case of primitivist wishful thinking.

Controversies between, globally taken, researchers who stress natural determinants and those who favour a culturalist approach have led to characterizations of certain peoples as explicitly aggressive and fierce or, alternatively, unambiguously gentle and peaceful. Against Chagnon’s vengeful Yanomani aggressors, beating up women and warring constantly, the Chewong and Semai Senoi from Malaysia, and the Sakkudei from Indonesia, among others, have been thrown in the balance as decisively peaceful peoples. The Kalahari Desert !Kung too were initially cast as a gentle, harmless people. However, the considerable role of preconceived ideas in research is shown once again by the fact that most of such claims have been contested. Jacques Lizot, for example, has sharply criticized the image of the Yanomami as a “fierce people” (Lizot 1994). Biologically orientated authors, on the other hand, have highlighted the occurrence of violence among the !Kung as well as the Semai Senoi. Something similar happened to Margaret Mead’s fieldwork among Samoan adolescents in the 1920s; her underestimation of the role of jealousy, abuse, rape and violence was criticised as a culturalist bias by, again, a biologically orientated anthropologist (Freeman 1984).

Violence and peacefulness as interpretive shablones have a remarkably analogous role to play in primatology. Traditionally, violence has been one of the main ascribed characteristics not only of non-western peoples, but also of nonhuman primates. Both categories were perceived as primitive, brute and unrestrained,

and associated with the savage beginnings of humankind's progress to civilization (Corbey 1989). In recent primatology, a divergence similar to the one just described for ethnography exists. Primatologist Frans de Waal on the one hand, in publications with such telltale titles as *Peacemaking Among Primates* (1989) and *Good Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals* (1996), stresses mechanisms for avoiding, reducing and resolving conflicts in the social life of all primates, including humans. Whereas in the Hobbesian-cum-Durkheimian view morality and reciprocal altruism are to be found in culture as a layer superimposed upon the violent and selfish nature of humans, De Waal sees it as part and parcel of the biological make-up of humans and other primates. Empathy and sympathy, reconciliation and forgiveness in his view are ultimately more adaptive than aggression.

Harvard primatologist Richard Wrangham, on the other hand, sums up his in this respect at least diametrically opposed, Hobbesian approach in his 1996 book with Dale Peterson on *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origin of Human Violence*. Males are selected by females for exploitive and aggressive behaviours, leading to competitive success. Like de Waal's books, this one too was written for a broad audience, but reports on a substantial body of detailed empirical studies. "We are cursed," Wrangham and Peterson conclude, "with a demonic male temperament and a Machiavellian capacity to express it - a 5-million year stain of our ape past." (Wrangham & Peterson 1996, 258). In the seventies, the positive image of chimpanzees that had emerged in the 1960s had started to change to a less positive, more ambiguous one - in much the same way as that of !Kung Bushmen - when it was discovered that neither the Gombe reserve nor the Kalahari desert were idyllic Shangri-La's after all: in both cases murder and violence turned out to be present next to gentleness and cooperation. The same goes for the Arnhem Burgers Zoo colony of chimpanzees studied by de Waal.

Summing up, we have seen how the Maussian perception of a violent primordial condition of humankind which is to be transcended for real morality and sociality to be possible is partly supported by biological approaches such as those of Wrangham and Van der Dennen. Primatologist de Waal, however, stresses innate morality instead of innate aggression. Most ethnologists, on the other hand, seek to explain war and violence on the level of culture and history, and relativize the role of aggression, explicitly posing peacefulness as the basic human condition.

Researchers in a functionalist, Malinowskian tradition have taken issue with Durkheimian views of social exchange stressing moral altruism. The latter take reciprocity as elementary morality and as a means of maintaining equality within the total moral universe, within, in the terminology of Dumont, De Coppet, Barraud and others, the "sociocosmos" of "ideas/values" (Barraud et al. 1994). Mauss himself, for example, has criticized Malinowski's work on Melanesia as too individualist and utilitarianist (Mauss 1990, 71 ff). However, in spite of his eye for agonistic aspects of ritual exchange, Mauss' own work has in recent decades been criticized for underestimating precisely the - indeed Hobbesian - dimension of utility. Annette Weiner and others have pointed to the neglect, in the Maussian camp, of the calculation of outputs and the maximization of returns, and analysed ritual exchanges not so much as

adhering to basic values, but as strategic action increasing power and inequality. Weiner re-examines Maussian and other “classic anthropological exchange theories and the ethnographies that validated these theories [in order] to demystify the ahistorical essentialism in the norm of reciprocity which has masked the political dynamics and gender-based power constituted through keeping-while-giving” (Weiner 1992, 17).

Here again - in parallel to the aforementioned accusations of ideology between proponents of *warre* and proponents of sociality - the Maussian assumption that modern, western exchange is predominantly Malinowskian, while “archaic”, pre-modern exchange is Maussian, has been criticized as primitivist. The Malinowskian view of pre-modern exchange, on the other hand, has been accused of fallaciously and ethnocentrically reading modernity into non-modern cultures.

Regrettably, as another instance of the traditional cleavage between biological and ethnological approaches, the Malinowskian viewpoint is largely out of touch with biology, even though it converges considerably with such viewpoints as reciprocal altruism and inclusive fitness, as a quote from sociobiologist Van der Dermen clearly shows. “I regard human beings”, he writes, “as shrewd social strategists, clever manipulators, and conscious, intelligent decision-makers in the service of their inclusive fitness, operating within the constraints of their cultural semantics: the signification and interpretive frameworks ... provided by the culture they happen to be born in” (Van der Dennen 1995, 9). It is but a small step from here to Malinowski’s and Weiner’s self-interested actors who constantly calculate their costs and benefits, also on the level of sacral and spiritual esteem. According to Weiner’s line of argument with its stress on utility, social life and the Maussian gift are not the eclipsing, but the very expression of Hobbesian selfishness and Machiavellian manoeuvring.

### 3. *Anthropology held captive by homo duplex*

We have by now encountered at least three different stances with respect to the idea of Hobbesian *warre* as the quintessential mark of the human beast. The first, Durkheimian one, sees it subdued and transcended by a holistic “sociocosmos” of ideas/values, reproduced in pacifying gift exchange. A second, biological one, in terms of inclusive fitness, supports it, in an updated and more subtle version. A third major theoretical stance are individualist and functionalist approaches in ethnology, which lend indirect support to the preconception of war as a fundamental condition by regarding utility as all-important in social life.

Of course, nobody would subscribe to such ahistorical essentialisations as either war or peacefulness as the basic nature of humankind, or of certain groups; everyone would agree that fierceness and gentleness do not exclude one another and have both roles to play; nobody would deny that there are biological *and* environmental *and* cultural *and* historical aspects to warfare. Still, and nevertheless, as is clear from the foregoing, such preconceptions are capable of creating considerable theoretical divergence. One of the challenges for

21st-century anthropology lies in combining the efforts of biological and ethnological approaches. This may not be simple, because the repudiation of biology is nearly constitutive of much of anthropology's disciplinary identity, especially in the French, Durkheimian tradition and the American, Boasian one. In both traditions, culture is taken as what transcends human biology, and thus gives anthropology its own identity vis-a-vis the biological sciences.

Mauss himself has provided a starting point for overcoming the unproductive *homo duplex* view - which opposes emotion and reason, primordial war and the pacifying gift - with his programmatic heuristic of *phénomènes de totalité* and *hommes totaux*. We hardly ever find man divided into several faculties ("L'homme divisé en facultés"), he wrote in 1924 (Mauss 1995, p. 303); we always come across the whole human body and mentality, given totally and at the same time, and basically, body, soul, society, everything is mixed up here ("Au fond, corps, âme, société, tout ici se mêle"). The gift is perhaps the best example of such a total social phenomenon (*fait social total* or *prestation totale*).

Given what was known in Mauss' day on behavioural genetics, kin selection, reciprocal altruism, gene-culture coevolution, the neurological basis of cultural behaviour, and epigenetic development, it may not be held against him that he did not entirely live up to this valuable methodological adage as far as corporeality and the biology of behaviour were concerned. Durkheimian-orientated authors from recent decades, however, are here confronted with an exciting and important challenge. In fact, as we now know, and as quite a few theoreticians on exchange fail to realize, human nature results from the co-evolution of genetic make-up and cultural as well as social behaviour. Our hands, for example, were shaped while wielding chopping tools and handaxes; parts of our brains and respiratory tracts when our ancestors started to use arbitrary symbols. Stone tools and spoken language are thus integral parts of our biological existence. Similarly, the acquisition and intergenerational, partly symbolic transmission of cultural and social abilities in humans is crucially dependent upon a whole gamut of cognitive and motivational capabilities that are part of our specific biological equipment. A complex, subtle, and well-timed interaction of these capacities with social environmental influences is of vital importance - an interaction which can also be described on the level of epigenetic neuronal development.

There is a clear biological dimension to various forms of reciprocity in humans, who, as experiments show, solve abstract logical problems more quickly when framed in terms of compliance or cheating with social rules. This shows the importance of social calculation in humans, more specifically their aptness at tallying mutual benefits as an adaptive feature (Cosmides & Tooby 1992). Analogously, *Desmodus rotundus* vampire bats in Costa Rica exchange blood they have sucked with others in the group according to strictly registered and respected patterns of reciprocity. Thus they enhance their chances of survival considerably, for not all flights are successful, and three unsuccessful nightly flights in order may lead to death by starvation (Denault & McFarlane 1995). According to socioecology, the mutual exchange of gifts, services, or women in hominids benefits all parties in such transactions, and is highly adaptive, for example as an ecological safety network to fall back upon in difficult times. Such practices are part of the sociality of hominid and human kin, evolving through selective pressures on reproductive success.

Our nature thus was, and is, social and cultural from its very beginning. That there is a brutish, impulsive animal nature deep within us, in the need of being restrained and subdued in order to make civilisation and social order possible, is a conviction that, at least in this form, does not hold in the light of recent insights. Much of what is social does not come about through a symbolic exchange or contract that restrains the biological, but is biological, that is, natural, itself. How much the Maussian perspective underestimates the role of that purportedly “raw” organic nature, both phylogenetically and ontologically, is illustrated forcefully by recent work on sociality, individuality, politics, motivation, and communication in nonhuman primates, for example, chimpanzees (Rodseth et al. 1991; Quiatt and Reynolds 1993; Ducros, Ducros and Joulian 1998). The challenge here is better to understand the interaction between biology, sociality and cultural meaning.

Evolutionary perspectives dealing with biological aspects of living together cannot replace cultural interpretive ones which deal with subjective, symbolic dimensions of life, but they can supplement them in approaches which focus on the interaction and reciprocal relations between biological, symbolic, sociodemographic, politicoeconomic, and other dimensions of the wielding and the laying aside of spears, of conflict and contract.

In general, evolutionary-biological approaches have adduced solid evidence that human individuals “favour genetic over classificatory kin, that patterns of residence, descent and marriage are in part affected by reproductive considerations, and that wealth and status are converted into reproductive advantage” (Borgerhoff Mulder 1987: 8; cf. Betzig, Borgerhoff Mulder & Turke 1988). Napoleon Chagnon’s aforementioned work on the Yanomami provides a convincing example of this line of argument, as does the analysis of kinship and marriage in humans and other primates in Quiatt and Reynolds (1993, Chapters 9 and 10; cf. Fox 1989). In addition, and more specifically, Robert Trivers’ (1985) reciprocal altruism theory, which claims that individuals may donate resources to nonkin if equivalent aid is returned in the future, provides an interesting complementary perspective on patterns of exchange as analyzed in detail by Maussian and other ethnographers.

#### 4. Conclusion

Mauss’ and the Maussians’ stimulating views of exchange can be put to good use in confrontation and concurrence with recent biological insights such as the aforementioned. To some extent this goes beyond what Mauss intended, but it remains faithful to his heuristic principle of a “totalising” approach which must take the natural into account too, against the grain of *homo duplex* approaches. It is worthwhile to try and bring *homo symbolicus*, constitutive of much of cultural anthropology as a discipline, back down to earth, to nature, by bringing the richness of evolutionary biology to bear upon the idea of man the symbolic and cultural animal. Such approaches as dual inheritance theory, behavioural socioecology, and evolutionary psychology, “total” in Mauss’ sense and well in tune with the traditional holistic intention of anthropology, approach cultural symbolism as a biological phenomenon. They can help taking human culture, sociality and society not too

onesidedly as a predominantly Darwinian instinctual order, nor as an exclusively Durkheimian normative order, but as a complex and subtle interaction of both.

The Maussian paradigm, valuable though it is, is flawed by a too radically dualistic view of humans, and stands in the need not so much of being overthrown, but of being rethought and updated. While for Durkheim and Mauss altruism meant the cultural suppression of selfish instincts, for evolutionary biology it is precisely the opposite: the expression of such - altruistic, but on another level of analysis selfish - instincts. More can be learned by asking how the symbolic behaviour, altruism and Maussian gifts that make human societies and identities possible may be *rooted in nature* than by asserting that they constitute the difference that *sets humans apart from nature* (cf. Quiatt & Reynolds 1993, p. 265).

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