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The gift as philosophical critique of the social grant system in South Africa

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The purpose of this article is to undertake a philosophical reflection on the South African social grant system from the perspective of the gift as presented by Marcel Mauss, Alasdair John Milbank, Jean-Luc Marion and Jacques Derrida. Mauss's and Milbank's view of the gift is based on reciprocity and a circular economy that highlights a reductionist understanding of the gift and possibly of the social grant system. On the other hand, Marion's saturated gift emphasises givenness as a transcendent phenomenon that moves beyond the donor-receiver relationship and may end in a mystical theology. The aneconomics of Derrida will be presented as an alternative to these reductions as a function of the appearance of the other. The appearance of the other interrupts economic circularity and opens the possibility of hospitality. This appearance is a continuous event in which case the aporia remains intact. The gift is not an object or finalisation. It is the continuous interface with the other that deconstructs circularity and maintains the dignity and flourishing of the participants.

Keywords: Reciprocity, the gift, Derrida, Marion, Mauss, Milbank, South African social grant system, economic circularity.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to undertake a philosophical reflection on the South African social grant system from the perspective of the gift. This will be done by discussing the general understanding of the gift from the perspective of Mauss and Millbank. Their perspective reveals an imbedded reductionism in the South African social grant system where there is reciprocity and a circular economy between the recipients of grants and the governing party that occurs with the appearance of the gift. This reciprocity manifests a dependency between the two parties that may be detrimental to society and responsible politics in South Africa.

The alternative perspective to that of Mauss and Millbank is generally associated with the philosophy of Marion whereby the notion of the gift is saturated and transcendent. This represents a reduction that focuses on givenness and donation that eclipses the donor-receiver relationship which renders the gift saturated – a life of givenness. The problem is that the excess of gifting that attempts to transcend the giver and recipient may end in a mystical theology that may deter from the purpose of grants as a means to alleviate poverty and inequality. The reason for this is that the saturated phenomenon becomes the focus that may fail to support the purpose of social grants, which is to address poverty and inequality and to restore the dignity of the recipient.

The problem is the appearance of the gift, as such, that highlights reciprocity and debt found in Mauss and Millbank's understanding of the gift. On the other hand, the saturated gift of Marion may be counterproductive and impede the purpose of social grants. Therefore, Derrida indicates that the appearance of the other is the deconstructive moment when the economic cycle is interrupted and the possibility of hospitality and aneconomics emerges. This makes it possible that the social grant system achieves its purpose without returning to an economic cycle and debt. And at the same time, aneconomics is not a final reconstruction of problems relating to circularity and dependence; the face of the other continually disrupts exchange by highlighting accountability and dignity of the participants, specially the poor who are dependent on the social grant system, without arriving at a final conclusion. It remains open, questioning, disrupting and engaging.

Literature indicates that the South African social grant system contributes significantly to the economy of South Africa. Social grants are established with the theoretical objective to financially assist vulnerable groups within the South African context (SASSA 2017). It is argued that vulnerable groups (to whom social grants are directed) may represent the "other" as marginalised even insignificant individuals within society (Severson 2012: 12, Johnstone 2004: 2), because of their vulnerable socio-economic position typically characterised by unemployment, inequality and poverty. In this form, social grants may represent the philosophical notion of the

gift to the other to assist the other. From this perspective social grants seem like an honourable and noble notion where social grants are given to the other as pure gift with the sole intent of assisting the beneficiaries (others) in alleviating their low socio-economic position, without serving self-interest.

It is interesting to note that “gift” in the German language refers to poison. It might be interpreted in direct contrast to what the true gift metaphorically represents (as in the previous paragraph). Deconstruction may direct us to discover that social grants are used for less honourable and noble purposes where social grants are appropriated to create an economy between the giver of the gift (the governing party) and the beneficiary thereof (the other). The aforementioned economy is characterised by reciprocity and debt between the parties involved which makes the gift impossible and destroys sustainable economics for political gain and populist economics.

This article has been structured as follows: firstly, a brief oversight will be provided of social grants in general and specifically within the South African context. Secondly, I will consider the philosophical notion of the gift within the South African social grant system. Mauss and Milbank’s notions of circularity and reciprocity will be explored as well as the manifestation thereof in the South African social grant system. I will then explore Marion’s notion of the gift and whether South African social grants may be provided in the context of givenness or donation. Thirdly, Derrida’s notion of the gift is discussed. Deconstruction may provide an alternative understanding of social grants that exposes reciprocal relations and at the same time moves beyond givenness that ends in a mystical theology. Finally, institutional recommendations for the South African social grant system will be discussed.

Social grants and the South African context

The idea of social grants may be based on the recognition of vulnerable individuals and the need to provide collective support to these individuals to possibly participate with dignity in the economy. In the international community organisations such as the United Nations (UN) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) are key role players in this regard. These organisations, among many things, crucially strive to protect people against injustice.¹ In organisations such as the ILO, there is a communal effort to protect those individuals that particularly need it, e.g. vulnerable and marginalised individuals – the other. This effort or care for the other is not only present in international organisations

1 A practical example can be given of the ILO utilising the decent work agenda to promote and protect the rights of particularly vulnerable workers.

such as the UN or the ILO, but also within countries themselves. Most countries, particularly in Europe and the West, have adopted various forms of the social contract between the governing party and the citizen wherein the governing party has endorsed various legal provisions that actively seek to protect and help the others or the vulnerable individuals. It can therefore be argued that social grants are forms of gifts that are distributed to people in need.

When considering social grants within the African and specifically the South African context, they may have particular connections with cultural and communal values, norms and traditions as the assistance provided by social grants originate from an interest or care for these vulnerable individuals or the other. In the South African context, this may arguably bear strong similarities to the theoretical principle of *Batho Pele* (where other people and their needs are put first in relation to my own needs). *Ubuntu* is another theoretical South African notion that implies humanity to others.

Social grants have a crucial impact on the South African economy.² This can be seen in the fact that R180 billion has been allocated towards social protection for 2017/18, which accounts for around 12% of the total consolidated government expenditure (National Treasury Republic of South Africa 2017. Budget review 2017: preamble v), which translates into the allocation of around 17 229 386 monthly social grants in 2016 (SASSA 2016: 1), which account for around 30% of the South African population. This is a significant proportion of the South African population that is dependent on social security measures.³

2 “Social assistance system is very large compared to those of other middle-income countries” (Lekezwa, 2011: 88).

3 In South Africa, social security provisions originate from the South African Constitutional prerogative as stated in Section 27 (1) (c). Accordingly, everyone has the right to have access to social security, including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependents. Social security forms part of socio-economic rights. Socio-economic rights originate from the recognition that human rights and the basic social conditions in which people live are interconnected (Currie and De Waal 2013: 564). The right to social security S27(1)(c) is mainly realised through the legislative framework as contained within the social assistance act (2004) and is the responsibility of the Department of Social Development. The South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) works under the domain of the Department of Social Development and is responsible for the administration, management and payment of social assistance (The South African Social Security Agency Act 53 (a). According to the White Paper for Social Welfare of August 1997 chapter 7 (1): social security includes a “wide variety of public and private measures that provide cash or in-kind benefits or both, first, in the event of an individual’s earning power permanently ceasing, being interrupted, never developing, or being exercised only at unacceptable social cost and such person being unable to avoid poverty and secondly, in order to maintain children”. In the South African context, social security refers to the child support grant, the care dependency grant, the foster child grant, the disability grant, the older persons grant, the war veteran’s grant and the grant in aid (The Social Assistance Act S1).

The idea of social grants arguably originates from the notion of care and attentiveness for the vulnerable individual or other. According to the White Paper for Social Welfare of August 1997, social security⁴ is utilised to aid in “poverty prevention, poverty alleviation, social compensation and income distribution” (chapter 7). These are serious challenges in the South African context. Their magnitude is reflected in the fact that in 2015 South Africa was the country with the most unequal income distribution in the world (ILO 2015). In recent years there has been an increase in unemployment (Trading economics 2017) to where it now is at around 27,8% (STATSSA 2017). When individuals who have given up looking for employment are included, this figure rises to 36% (National Minimum Wage Panel Report 2016).

In 2016 around 51% of the population lived below the poverty line, according to the National Minimum Wage Panel Report (2016). It is also relevant to note that poverty has increased in recent years (STATSSA Poverty trends 2017: 14). It is therefore evident that unemployment, inequality and poverty are major challenges that South Africans face today and they present a profound reason for the high dependency rate on social security measures. These three challenges hold various threats for a wide range of issues including economic growth, development and social cohesion (Saunders 2002: 18).

Social security in the form of social grants (cash provisions) may assist the beneficiaries of grants (others) in dealing with these challenges by possibly alleviating poverty. By alleviating poverty, inequality may also be reduced as the gap between rich and poor is narrowed. This may then have an impact on unemployment as the recipients of grants are spending more, thus stimulating economic growth that could ultimately result in increased employment. As indicated by this, these three challenges are interrelated (Chibba and Luiz 2011 and Tregenna 2008: 4).⁵ Thus, by influencing one of these challenges, the other two will also be affected. It is therefore apparent that social grants (if effectively implemented and managed by the governing party) holds definite potential in assisting to deal with unemployment, inequality and poverty (Damas and Israt 2004: 8).

The notion of social grants as gifts can be viewed from a variety of philosophical perspectives. Therefore, in the next section a philosophical reflection on the gift

4 Social security is considered a basic human right according to International Labour Organisation conventions and United Nations instruments that can be defined as the protection that a society provides to individuals and households to ensure access to health care and to guarantee income security, particularly in cases of old age, unemployment, sickness, invalidity, work injury, maternity or loss of a breadwinner (ILO, date unknown: www.ilo.org/publication/wcms_067588).

5 See Heppell (2016: 94, 138).

will be done by exploring the work of Marcel Mauss, Alasdair John Milbank and Jean-Luc Marion. It will be argued that this reflection reveals that the gift can succumb to reductionism by either becoming a circular economy or end in a mystical theology that may not assist those in need.

The gift and reductionism

Circularity and reciprocity of Marcel Mauss and Alasdair John Millbank

Although Mauss and Milbank structure their approaches regarding the gift differently they both see the gift within the context of circular exchange/reciprocity. This section will look to determine whether Mauss or Milbank's notions of the gift are appropriate within the South African social grant system.

Marcel Mauss

In *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* Mauss focused on the custom of gift exchange in pre-Modern cultures where he found a "pattern of symmetrical and reciprocal rights that are embedded in the tradition and culture of a group" (Rathbone 2017: 7). The research done by Mauss helps us to understand these archaic societies and their inner practices, which is also helpful in understanding our own society at present (Mauss 1966:ix).

Mauss understands the gift within a circular economy of exchange, giving and receiving (reciprocity). Accordingly, it is expected of the giver to give and of the receiver not only to accept the gift but also to return the gift (Mauss 1966: 11). As such an implicit social contract of sorts is established (Mauss 1966: 13, 33, 34 and 61). The giver gives because he/she is forced to do so, "because the recipient has a sort of proprietary right over everything which belongs to the donor" (Mauss 1966: 11). The recipient has the obligation to accept as a token of friendship, bond and to show that no ill will is held (Mauss 1966: 11). As a result, there are a series of rights, obligations and duties associated with giving and receiving (Mauss 1966: 11 and 64). Mauss constructs his perspective of the gift around reciprocity, which is a reductionist view of the gift.

The reciprocity associated with gift giving may well be rooted in self-interest where the intent is to ensure that the recipient of the gift remains in your debt (Mauss 1966:30-36 and Milbank 1995: 127). In this context the giver may give in excess to ensure that the recipient remains in more debt than you are indebted to him. In other words, the gift may be given with the intent to get something in

return (e.g. respect, admiration, power/authority or something physical).⁶ With this in mind let us now move towards an assessment of the South African social grant system.

When analysing the social grants in South Africa from the perspective of Mauss one may argue that social grants as a gift assumes a reductionist position because of reciprocity between the giver of the gift and the beneficiary. The giver in this context represents the governing party supplying social grants to the recipients thereof (the other). The recipients/beneficiary of grants or other in this context refers to the dependent marginalised individuals of vulnerable socio-economic standing. Reciprocity between these parties consists of the governing party providing a gift (social grants) to the recipients (the other), which places the other in debt that is then repaid by supporting and favouring the governing party. In turn, the support and favour of the other consequently creates debt, duty and obligation on the governing party to provide the other with the gift (social grants). We can consequently foresee a possible circular reciprocal economy between the governing party and the other.

The governing party may assume an authoritarian position where it utilises its power to gather the support, favour of the beneficiaries of grants (others) that ultimately manifests in the form of votes, in favour of the governing party. Therefore, social grants may correspond to Mauss's notion of the gift where self-interest assumes a fundamental role within gift giving. The fundamental role of self-interest within this reciprocal relationship is evident by the fact that the governing party may only provide gifts to benefit themselves in the form of support and favour that may ultimately manifest in the form of votes in favour of the governing party that ultimately keeps the governing party in power. The recipients of social grants (the other) may also act in self-interest by supporting the governing party because in doing so they are assured of the gift (social grants). In this context a circular economic relationship is created between the aforementioned parties characterised by mutual obligations and debt between the parties – which is characteristic of Mauss's notion of reciprocity (1966: 70).

This notion of Mauss's reciprocity (1966: 70), indicates the formation of a dependency between the governing party and the recipients of grants (the other), where the recipients (the other) are dependent on grants to sustain themselves and the governing party is dependent on the support of the beneficiary (the

6 The importance of self-interest in gift giving can be illustrated by the Hausa where wheat is given to the poor in order to prevent a fever epidemic (Mauss, 1966: 15) or "the rich man who shows his wealth by spending recklessly is the man who wins prestige" (Mauss, 1966: 35) also see Milbank, 1995: 127; the gift is given to ensure "continuing bondage of devotion and respect towards you" (the giver-provider).

other) to stay in control of the country. This perspective may help to explain the prominent position of social grants within the South African context (see introduction) and the fact that unemployment, inequality and poverty figures are not decreasing as it may be utilised to create power imbalances between the others and the governing party that ultimately only benefit the governing party as the other is not afforded sufficient opportunity to escape his or her low socio-economic position.

This is an unhealthy relationship that does not ultimately benefit South Africa for many reasons, the main one being that the recipients of grants (the other) are kept in a position of dependence. The financial assistance that social grants provide may assist in alleviating the effects of unemployment, inequality and poverty but may be insufficient for grant recipients to fully escape their low socio-economic position over the longer term.

Furthermore, the governing party may to a degree be made unaccountable for their actions or the lack thereof, because they have the recipients of grants in a position of dependence, which implies that the governing party could be to a degree assured of support, irrelevant of their performance or effectiveness in the broader political arena. This may be detrimental to South Africa as a whole. Elsewhere in the world one may find similar situations, such as Brazil, where social security measures are seemingly used as a political tool to gain support and ultimately votes for the Working Party (Watts 2013: 1). From this perspective, grants enter the circular economy of giving (grants) and receiving (support for the governing party). From the discussion thus far, it is evident that when theorised in terms of Mauss's conception of the gift, the social grant system in South Africa may be detrimental to the recipients (the other) as well as to South Africa as a whole in the long term.

From here we move to Milbank who, like Mauss, also regards the gift as part of exchange while focusing on free expression.

Alasdair John Milbank

Milbank also understands the gift in terms of a mutual exchange or reciprocity. Milbank differs from Mauss in the sense that he does not see the return of the gift (in other words from the recipient to the initial giver) as part of a fixed pattern, instead he understands the return of the gift as free expression. Accordingly, the return of the gift results not out of duty, necessity or obligation but out of free expression. With this in mind Milbank explains a gift by referring to two features that almost always apply:

Firstly, a return gift (in other words from recipient to initial giver/provider of the gift) should not be provided immediately (Milbank 1995: 125). Milbank contends that the immediate return of the gift implies a “lack of gratitude, a desire to discharge a debt as soon as possible” (Milbank 1995: 125). As a result, there must be a delay from the time the initial gift is received and the time the return gift is given.

Secondly, the gift that is returned must be different to the initial gift or else one is faced with an evident insult (Milbank 1995: 125). An example could be receiving a green painting of a tree and then reciprocating the gift by also giving a green painting of a tree back to the initial giver. This could give the impression that you are only repaying an obligation and not giving out of free expression.

Milbank utilises the notion of active reception where one gives love received from God to others. “This is the one given condition of the gift, that we love because God first loved us” (Milbank 1995: 154). Milbank considers this as mutual gift giving that he defines as asymmetric reciprocity, which is a dynamic/purified gift exchange. Milbank therefore utilises agape to achieve a purified gift exchange where the gift is replicated in gratitude (Milbank 1995: 131 ;154).

It could be argued that Milbank’s notion of the gift is not present within the context of the South African social grants system. This is because was there agape (Greek for charitable love) within this system then the giver/provider of social grants (the governing party) would arguably have given the gift (social grants) in such a manner and extent as to truly benefit the recipients thereof (the other) in a sustainable and progressive manner by providing a framework that enables the recipients (the other) to escape their vulnerable socio-economic position and ultimately provide lasting long term relief that stretches further than material basic daily needs. It could be contended that in its current format South African social grants are only covering basic needs thus maintaining the recipients’ (the others’) dependency on the giver of the gift (governing party) which allows and reinforces the reciprocity between these parties. This reciprocal relationship between the other and the governing party is arguably rooted in self-interest which prevents agape from truly reflecting in the context of giving.

Both Mauss and Milbank understand the gift in terms of reciprocity. A possible alternative to the gift as reciprocity is represented by Marion.

Jean-Luc Marion’s gift and givenness within the South African social grant context

Marion, as Derrida’s pupil, shares some understanding with Derrida of the gift such as the fact that the gift should be seen outside the economy horizon (Severson

2012: 10), but they also differ. Marion contends that the gift “can and must be freed from exchange” (2017: 7, Johnstone 2004: 12) to such an extent as to transcend giving without any object or substance holding gift (Marion 2017: 7–9, 12). One may find gift objects (such as a ring) that may be a symbol of the real gift but the real gift always transcends the gift object. As such Marion holds a phenomenological view of the gift where he extracts the gift from the context of the economy and exchange (in other words free from the rules and regulations of reciprocal giving) (Marion 2017: 7, Malo 2012: 159, Severson 2012: 10).

In the context of givenness the gift is freed from reciprocity associated with economy (exchange) to where the gift assumes an unconditioned immanent position where the gift is wrapped up in unconditioned freedom to where it:

“never lacks anything, which would prohibit it from self-giving, since even without putting to work the terms of exchange, it still achieves itself, and even better” (Marion 2017: 7).

In order to reduce the gift to givenness, the giver should disappear by becoming detached from what he gives. In this form, what the giver gives (thing) assumes an autonomous position free from the giver, where it overshadows the giver and it results in the appearance of the gift (Marion 2017: 8). The consequence of the giver disappearing is that the very process of giving (process of the gift) also disappears (Marion 2017: 8). The disappearance of the giver and the process of giving, need to happen for the recipient to take the gift as his own and to break any connotation, power and influence that the giver may have (Marion 2017: 8).

At this point some may argue that there may possibly be a paradox of the gift in this context because the disappearance of the giver and the process of giving is required for the gift to appear, yet the giver and giving has disappeared, so we find “only the neutral and anonymous presence, left without any origin, of a thing, of a being or of an object, coming only from itself, never from elsewhere – neither from a giver, nor from a process of giving” (Marion 2017: 9).

In other words, the gift decides itself by itself. Within this context the gift and giving is isolated from any causality (Severson 2012: 10). That is to say, giving a gift is presented exactly for what it is. In the context of givenness it means a life of givenness where we give ourselves and it is owed to all (Severson 2012: 11).

Marion wants the gift to return to its origins, where one is to give as part of the self to the sphere of givenness as opposed to the context of economy and causality (Severson 2012: 10). In this form giving and receiving take place within the phenomenality of givenness (Marion 2017: 12–14). Marion's strong emphasis on the phenomenology of givenness may hold that the gift may give rise to a sense of obligation or debt, (which is contrary to Derrida's notion of the gift as

obligation annuls the gift) not to the giver/provider of the gift but to the horizon of givenness where we owe all in life (Severson 2012: 11). The problem is that Marion reduces the gift to givenness or donation. Marion's gift is reductionist as it regards the gift from a saturated, transcendent view that focuses on the phenomenology of givenness, which results in the eclipse of the other (person) and the relationship between giver, donor and recipient – a mystical theology.

Marion emphasises and focuses on the phenomenology of givenness to such extent that it may become a mystical theology to where social grants (as the gift) may not achieve or pursue their goals of alleviating poverty and inequality because the other is not recognised. Coincidentally the other's voice and needs are not acknowledged and as such, social grants may be unable to improve the vulnerable position of the other within the South African context by reducing unemployment, inequality and poverty. Accordingly, the gift may become reductionist and ultimately counterproductive, which may not serve to restore the dignity of those who rely on social grants.

Reductionism and the social grant system

It may be contended that social grants are utilised to create a reciprocal economic relationship (as indicated in 3.1.1 in the discussion of Mauss) between the governing party (as provider of social grants) and the recipient thereof (the other). Accordingly, social grants are utilised by the South African governing party to win the support and ultimately the votes of the recipients of grants. In this context, grants become reciprocal in the sense that grants are supplied to the beneficiaries (others) with the implicit expectation of support for the governing party. This relationship between the recipients of grants (others) and the governing party represents a reciprocal dependency where both parties are dependent on each other.

This is a relationship where the parties need each other in a mutual interdependence, which is rooted in self-interest (Mauss 1966: 66, 68). Mauss's approach structures the gift within a reciprocal context which makes the gift impossible and reductionist. With self-interest serving as the basis for reciprocity, the governing party utilises the social grant system to such an excessive extent as to include as many individuals as possible in the reciprocal relationship. However, as Van der Walt (2018) pointed out, Mauss's perspective on the gift cannot be reduced to simple reciprocal economics. It is more complex and incorporates the notion of obligation as found in the *kula*.

Milbank's conceptualisation of the gift may not be possible within this context because the reciprocity is rooted in self-interest which halts the exchange, reciprocity out of free expression and results in reductionism where *agape* does

not assume a central role. The presence of agape would arguably have resulted in giving in such a manner and extent that the other would have truly benefited to the point of improvement in their socio-economic position.

Marion constructs the gift by emphasising and centralising the phenomenology of givenness to such extent that it may result in the eclipse of the other and the relationship between giver and recipient (other). This could result in reductionism as the other is not recognised and his/her needs are not truly prioritised and pursued which means that social grants may not attain their goals of alleviating poverty and inequality.

Within the reciprocal relationship of Mauss, Milbank and Marion's emphasis on the phenomenology of givenness the focus is not on the other (person) but on the gift as object (social grants) which makes the gift impossible and reductionist. This reciprocal relationship is characterised by obligation and debt between the parties and as such it annuls the notion of the gift.

These reductionist approaches of Marion, Milbank and Mauss render the gift impossible because the giving is reduced to the gift (object) only, without consideration of the other (person). Let me now consider a possible alternative approach to these reductionist perspectives of the gift within the South African social grant system. Let me now move on to Derrida's view of the gift.

Deconstruction and Jacques Derrida's gift within the South African social grant system

Aneconomics

Derrida highlights that the reciprocity associated with the appearance of the gift (Mauss) annuls it and therefore the appearance thereof is the basis for its impossibility. This does not mean that Mauss's reciprocal economics is deconstructed by Derrida's non-reciprocal economics (Van der Walt 2018). Deconstruction reveals a more encompassing and destabilising phenomenon. It emphasises that the gift makes aneconomics possible (Derrida 1992: 7). Accordingly, the gift should not enter the circularity associated with economics and exchange (giving and receiving). For Derrida the gift should be provided *bona fide*, without self-interest, any duty, expectation, obligation or debt on either an implicit or explicit level (Derrida 1992: 7, 12, 23, Rathbone 2012: 24, Harvey 2011: 14). The notion of the gift can be compared to a rose. When a rose blooms it does not think upon itself or ask for it to be seen, it is just a rose without questioning its

existence, similar to Marion's givenness (Severson 2012: 13)⁷. For Derrida the gift should be the same as a rose: it should just be, without affirming its presence as object requiring a response – thus not creating inequalities and subsequent obligations or debt. The rose is a gift.

However, for Derrida there are certain conditions applicable to the gift in that; "some 'one' gives some 'thing' to some 'one other'" (1992: 12). These conditions are what make the gift possible but it is also what makes the gift impossible (Derrida 1992: 12, 16). Derrida regards the gift as impossible because the recognition of a gift as a gift by either the giver or the recipient creates debt that annuls the gift (Derrida 1992: 7, Severson 2012: 11). Even if the giver expects nothing in return:

"the mere fact of being conscious of giving a gift opens the giver up to self-congratulation or a feeling of self-indulgence for having given a gift" (Kruger 2017: 522)⁸.

The recipient of the gift faces the same dilemma in that the recognition, awareness of the gift creates debt which leads to reciprocity, exchange and economics. However, when a gift is not recognised as a gift then it is not a gift. The aforementioned is the reason why Derrida considers the gift impossible (Caputo 1997: 163, Severson 2012: 11). The impossibility of the gift can be described as madness because the gift cannot be what it is, except if it is what it is not (Derrida 1992:35, Royle 2003: 142).⁹

However, the impossibility of the gift is also its possibility.¹⁰ Even though the gift becomes the impossible we still "think it, we name it, we desire it. We intend it" (Derrida 1992: 29, Severson 2012: 11). Derrida contends that the impossibility of the gift is its very possibility (1992: 29), which is to come (Harvey 2011: 16). Milbank explains: "[W]e cannot elide the human desire to give, that there should

7 Severson explains how Caputo illustrates Derrida's notion of the gift.

8 Derrida (1992: 23): "The simple consciousness of the gift right away sends itself back the gratifying image of goodness or generosity, of the giving-being who, knowing itself to be such, recognizes itself in a circular, specular fashion, in a sort of auto-recognition, self-approval, and narcissistic gratitude".

9 Derrida 1992: 24: "If the gift is annulled in the economic odyssey of the circle as soon as it appears as gift or as soon as it signifies itself as gift, there is no longer any 'logic of the gift'..."; also see Rathbone 2017: 8.

10 "The conditions that make the gift possible simultaneously make it impossible" (Caputo, 1997: 163).

be a gift. Such desire is constitutive of our humanity and ensures that there will always be an appearance of gift" (1995: 130).¹¹

When considering the South African context, social grants might be given to the beneficiaries as pure gift with the sole intent as to assist the beneficiaries (others) in alleviating their vulnerable socio-economic position, without serving self-interest. From this perspective social grants may represent Derrida's notion of the gift where grants are provided to the beneficiaries (others) without the manifestation of obligations, expectations or return (impossibility of the gift) (Rathbone 2012: 24). However, deconstruction allows us to look past the apparent noble façade of social grants that is captured in its aims and goals¹² to where one may find ulterior workings and motives of the social grant system.

Aneconomics and social grants

In order to break through reciprocity (narcissism)¹³ associated with economics one has to answer the call of the other (Rathbone 2017: 8). Rathbone explains:

[F]or the gift to remain a gift the narcissism of the cycle must be broken by what is absent – giving without self-interest, a moment of madness or sacrifice when the other enters the cycle and disrupts the narcissism. It is the moment the gift is given without reappropriation – forgetting that a gift was ever given (Rathbone 2012: 26).

In order to move past the impossibility of the gift and reductionism it is necessary to shift emphasis away from the appearance of the gift towards the other (person). This can be achieved by adopting Derrida's (section 4) approach of aneconomic¹⁴ hospitality where the recognition of the other allows us not to fall into the trap of reductionism. Within this context Derrida argues for a more comprehensive form of narcissism known as hospitable narcissism that highlights the aporia embedded in the social grant system when an interface with the other takes place (Rathbone 2017: 8, Derrida 1995: 199). Rathbone explains hospitable narcissism as: "economics embedded in ethics – the presence of the other" (2017: 8). This holds that reciprocity/exchange is interrupted by the presence of

11 "If the gift is another name of the impossible, we still think it, we name it, we desire it. We intend it. And this even if or because or to the extent that we never encounter it, we never know it, we never verify it, we never experience it in its present existence or in its phenomenon" (Derrida, 1992: 29); see also Derrida (1992: 31).

12 See introduction for objectives of the South African social grant system.

13 "... narcissism is at the core of reciprocity" (Rathbone 2017: 8); also see Derrida, 1992: 23.

14 See Derrida 1992: 7.

the other which makes the gift possible. As such the other assumes a prominent position in the process of giving to where the gift is not objectified and trapped in reductionism of reciprocity (Mauss and Milbank) or givenness (Marion). However, the presence of the other does not dissolve the aporia present in the social grant system because the other continues to appear and highlights the tension in any form of reduction. Engagement with the other is disruptive and a moment of sanity in which those in power are held accountable and the flourishing of society is highlighted. Therefore, aneconomics may serve as an alternative perspective that exposes oppressive reductions by highlighting the impossibility of the gift (reciprocity and exchange). The gift interrupts reciprocity and exchange through interface with the other (the subject or person) and not the object of the gift that inadvertently “initiates the cycle of reciprocity” (Rathbone 2017: 8).

Derrida states that: “there is gift, if there is any, only in what interrupts the system as well as the symbol, in a partition without return and without division [repartition], without being-with-self of the gift-counter-gift” (1992: 13)

In other words, the other interrupts reciprocity and exchange and enables the possibility of the gift because the other has nothing to reciprocate/exchange and therefore requires hospitality which takes on the form of interpersonal interaction based on self-recognition and the ability to listen (Rathbone 2017: 8, 10). The aforementioned is an aneconomic position where ethics assume a central role and one avoids the trap of reductionism (Rathbone 2017: 8)

Derrida’s ethics of the other (presence of the other) not only interrupts reciprocity but also demands hospitality by being open to the experience of the other. By acknowledging the other, the other assumes a central position within our realm of interactions and from this position the other’s true needs desire to be acknowledged. Hospitality and the presence of the other may require of us to recognise and assist the other within his/her low socio-economic position characterised by inequality, poverty and unemployment to the point where action is needed to improve the other’s position with lasting effect (in the long term). In other words, the focus shifts from the presence of the gift as object to the presence of the other. From this perspective it is contended that social grants may still have a place in assisting the other (in improving his/her low socio-economic position) but they should be utilised and institutionalised differently so the benefits associated thereto are optimised.

Alternatively, the presence of the other does not only accentuate the aporia present in the social grant system; it also exposes the possible hierarchy of circular economics that is a function of debt and creates dependence and control of the powerful over the poor. It is not about narcissistic self-interest but rather sympathy with the poor that challenges excess and control, thus retaining the

tension between self-interest and sympathy that was so crucial for the economics of Adam Smith (Rathbone 2015, 2018, 2019). Social grants are therefore rather a means to assist citizens to participate in the economy and flourish and not the self-interest of the powerful. The increase of the sovereign debt of South Africa is a clear indication that the circularity and dependence created by the system is unsustainable. What is needed is a social grant system that empowers citizens with jobs, alleviates poverty and reduces economic inequality. The dignity and empowerment of citizens is crucial and not the monetary object that indebts people through populist politics and economics.

Various studies¹⁵ indicate the positive impact that South African social grants have in alleviating the effects of unemployment, poverty and inequality. However, it is argued that the current South African social grant system does not offer sufficient progressive long-term relief to the other by providing a platform for the others to truly lift themselves out of their low socio-economic position. As a result, institutional changes to the South African social grant system are recommended based on the recognition of the other.

Institutional recommendations regarding social grants

We reiterate that the other should assume a central position within the concept of the gift and the South African social grant system and from this premise the following recommendation is made.

That the beneficiaries of grants (others) still receive grants contingent on the realisation of certain predetermined conditions such as the enrolment in education programmes for children and the attainment of certain predetermined school attendance figures as well as regular preventative medical check-ups. Quality and adequate education may hold various beneficial possibilities for individuals and the economy alike¹⁶, especially when considered in the long term. Through education, the other may be able to develop himself/herself into a more powerful position, it may place the other in a more equitable relationship to the governing party where the power is not as disproportionately distributed between the governing party and the other, which could ultimately lead to better political governance because the governing party is held more accountable for their action or inaction. Equally important are regular preventative medical check-ups that will benefit the health and wellness of the other as preventative health care measures are arguably better and more cost effective than reactive healthcare

15 See Lekezwa 2011 and Satumba 2016.

16 See Earth Policy Institute 2011 and De Freitas 2011 on the benefits of education.

measures. At the heart of the aforementioned measures is the recognition of the other (person) and not the gift object.

Quality and adequate education and regular preventative medical check-ups may hold various beneficial possibilities for the others and the economy alike, especially when considered in the long term. If the economy prospers it may ultimately reflect on the performance, abilities and success of the governing party, therefore also benefiting the governing party.

By determining certain conditions associated with the allocation of grants the financial benefit that social grants represent (the gift) is leveraged in an attempt to attain certain desirable progressive goals (in terms of education and healthcare). It may be argued that a reciprocal relationship may still be upheld by leveraging social grants against the attainment of certain determinations which may once again render the gift impossible. However, the gift remains possible because the other (Derrida's ethics of the other and hospitality towards the other) is at the heart of this reciprocal relationship. Because of the importance placed on the other, it is the other that ultimately benefit from the gift and not the governing party. The aforementioned reciprocity differs from the current detrimental reciprocity of Mauss in that it offers incentives to enrol children in schools and have regular preventative medical check-ups, among others, that may help to establish a platform for the other (recipients of grants) to escape their low socio-economic position and break the detrimental reciprocal dependent relationship between the other and the governing party.

Conclusion

A deconstructive approach from the perspective of the gift reveals embedded reductionism within the South African social grant system. The reductionism may be detrimental to every citizen, the economy and responsible politics in South Africa.

At the heart of the imbedded reductionism is the fact that the other does not assume a central position within the concept of the gift and social grants in the South African context. Instead the appearance of the gift assumes a central position which might lead to reciprocity and economic exchange (Mauss and Milbank) or the gift structured within the phenomenon of givenness (Marion). The appearance of the gift ultimately results in the others' dependence on social grants characterised by high levels of inequality, poverty and unemployment with little prospects for true long-term improvement thereof.

Derrida's ethics of the other is offered as a possible solution to where the emphasis on the appearance of the gift (reductionism) is shifted to place

emphasis on the other. The presence of the other (ethics of the other) interrupts reciprocity and the phenomenology of givenness and requires the needs of the other to be acknowledged and given necessary attention. In other words, the other (person) should be at the heart of the gift and social grants. Within this perspective social grants may still be useful to the other in alleviating his/her low socio-economic position subject to institutional changes to where certain conditions are established for the allocation of grants. These conditions (education and regular preventative medical check-ups) will benefit the other in the long term and may lay the foundation for others to escape their low socio-economic position, which would inevitably affect South Africa's high levels of inequality, poverty and unemployment.

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