



# **A philosophical critique of the social grant system in South Africa**

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## **Declaration**

I confirm that this paper is not currently being reviewed by any other journals.

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I am humbly thankful to our Heavenly Father for the ability and opportunity to have done this paper. Thank you to Prof Mark Rathbone, you are a true inspiration. Without him this paper would not have been possible.

## Preamble

The purpose of this study is to undertake a philosophical reflection on the South African social grant system. Literature indicates that the South African social grant system takes up a significant position within the South African socio-economic context. A deconstructive perspective or reading may reveal imbedded reductionism that may be destructive to the future of South Africa

This study will engage in applied philosophy from the perspective of deconstruction by doing a literature review of relevant philosophical texts, statistics, legislation and law. Various sources will be utilised to ensure the validity of the findings.

The following resources were consulted in the research: Library catalogue of the North-West University, research articles through various databases, the internet and newspaper articles.

This mini-dissertation is presented in the form of an article, in accordance with rule A.7.2.5 of the general academic rules of the North-West University. The article will be presented for publication in the journal *Acta Academica* at a later stage. In this regard, the guidelines for publication of this journal are included in the appendix. The article contains the following divisions:

1. Introduction
2. Social grants and the South African context
3. The gift and reductionism
  - 3.1 Circularity and reciprocity of Marcel Mauss and Alasdair John Millbank
    - 3.1.1 Marcel Mauss
    - 3.1.2 Alasdair John Milbank
  - 3.2. Jean-Luc Marion's gift and givenness within the South African social grant context.

- 3.3 Reductionism and the social grant system
- 4. Deconstruction and Jacques Derrida's gift within the South African social grant system
  - 4.1 Aneconomics
  - 4.2. Aneconomics and social grants
- 5. Institutional recommendations regarding social grants
- 6. Conclusion

In the next section, the research article is presented with a bibliography and an abstract of the article in English and Afrikaans, in accordance with the prescriptions of *Acta Academica*. In the final sections of the document, some general conclusions, the limitations of the study and recommendations for further research are presented. This is followed by the appendix with prescriptions for research articles submitted to *Acta Academica*.

## Research article

### Abstract

The purpose of this article is to undertake a philosophical reflection of 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.

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

## **Abstrak**

Die doel van hierdie artikel is om 'n filosofiese weergawe van die Suid Afrikaanse maatskaplike toelaestelsel te doen aan die hand van die perspektief van die “gift” soos voorgehou deur Marcel Mauss, Alasdair John Milbank, Jean-Luc Marion en Jacques Derrida. Mauss en Milbank se siening van die “gift” is gebaseer op wederkerigheid en 'n sirkulêre ekonomie wat 'n reduksionistiese begrip van die “gift” beklemtoon en moontlik ook van die maatskaplike toelaestelsel. Daarteenoor staan Marion se begrip van die volbringde “gift” wat “givenness” beklemtoon as transendente fenomeen wat verder strek as die gewer-ontvanger-verhouding en wat kan eindig in 'n mistiese teologie. Die “aneconomics” van Derrida word voorgestel as alternatief tot reduksionisme as 'n funksie van die verskyning van die ander (“other”). Die verskyning van die ander (“other”) onderbreek ekonomiese sirkulariteit en open die moontlikheid van welwillendheid.

**Sleutelwoorde:** wederkerigheid, die “gift”, Derrida, Marion, Mauss, Milbank, Suid-Afrikaanse maatskaplike toelaestelsel, ekonomiese sirkulariteit

## 1. 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 focusses 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 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.

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 at) 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 as to assist 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.

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. Thereafter I will 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.

## 2. 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. 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 injustices.<sup>1</sup> In organisations like the ILO, there is a communal effort to protect those individuals that particularly need it, e.g. vulnerable and marginalised individuals – the other. The aforementioned effort or care for the other is not only present in international organisations 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 is distributed to people in need.

When considering social grants within the African and specifically the South African context, it 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.<sup>2</sup> 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,

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

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

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.<sup>3</sup>

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 security<sup>4</sup> is utilised to aid in “poverty prevention, poverty alleviation, social compensation and income distribution” (chapter 7). The aforementioned domains create serious challenges in the South African context. The magnitude of these challenges 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 currently stands at around 27,8% (STATSSA, 2017). When individuals that have given up looking for employment are included, this figure rises to 36% (National Minimum Wage Panel Report 2016).

It is not surprising that 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 take note of the fact 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 present a profound reason for the high

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<sup>3</sup> 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 & 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 S 3 (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 S 1).

<sup>4</sup> 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](http://www.ilo.org/publication/wcms_067588)).

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 the lower and upper part of the labour market is narrowed. Unemployment may then be impacted as the recipients of grants are spending more, thus stimulating economic growth that may ultimately result in increased employment. As indicated by the aforementioned illustration, these three challenges are interrelated (Chibba & Luiz, 2011 and Tregenna, 2008:4)<sup>5</sup>. 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, which is a particularly important aspect to vulnerable groups that often experience the aforementioned challenges more profoundly than other groups in the economy (Damas & 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 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.

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<sup>5</sup> See Heppell (2016:94, 138).

### **3. The gift and reductionism**

#### **3.1 Circularity and reciprocity of Marcel Mauss and Alasdair John Millbank**

Although Mauss and Millbank 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 Millbank's notions of the gift is appropriated within the South African social grant system.

##### **3.1.1 Marcel Mauss**

In *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* Mauss focussed 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 & 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).<sup>6</sup> 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 bearing favour towards 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 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

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<sup>6</sup> The importance of self-interest in gift giving can be illustrated by the Hausa people 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).

obligations and debt between the parties – which is characteristic of Mauss's notion of reciprocity (1966:70).

The aforementioned 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 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 the low socio-economic position.

The aforementioned 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 it may be insufficient to fully escape the low socio-economic position characterised by inequality, poverty and unemployment 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 are to a degree assured of support, irrelevant of their performance or effectivity in the broader political arena. This may be detrimental to South Africa as a whole. Elsewhere in the world one may find a similar situation in Brazil where social security measures are used as a political tool to gain support and ultimately votes for the Working Party (The Guardian, 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 Mauss's appropriation of the gift within the South African social grant system is not beneficial to either the recipients (the other) or to South Africa as a whole in the long term.

From here we move to Milbank who similarly to Mauss also regards the gift as part of exchange whilst focussing on free expression.

### 3.1.2 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 the aforementioned 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). The example can be given of receiving a green painting of a tree and then reciprocating the gift by also providing a green painting of a tree back to the initial giver. The aforementioned may 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 the aforementioned 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 may 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 if there was *agape* (Greek word for

charitable love) within this aforementioned 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 may 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 hinders agape to truly reflect 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.

### **3.2. Jean-Luc Marion's gift and *givenness* within the South African social grant context.**

Marion as the pupil of Derrida share some correlation in their understanding of the gift such as the fact that the gift should be seen outside the economy horizon (Severson, 2012:10), but they also share some differences. Marion contends that the gift "can and must be freed from exchange" (2017:7 & Johnstone, 2004:12) to such 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 possibly 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 focusses 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 focusses 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 its 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.

### **3.3 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). The approach of Mauss structures the gift within a reciprocal context which makes the gift impossible and reductionist. With self-interest serving as basis for reciprocity, the governing party utilises the social grant system in such an excessive extent as to include as many individuals as possible in the reciprocal relationship.

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 benefitted to where their low socio-economic position would have been improved.

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 may result in reductionism as the other is not recognised and as such his/her needs are not truly prioritised and pursued which means that social grants may not attain its goals of alleviating poverty, 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 notion of the gift.

The reductionist approaches of Marion, Milbank and Mauss is apparent at this stage which renders 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.

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

### 4.1 *Aneconomics*

Derrida's 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. Alternatively, Derrida 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. Accordingly, when a rose blossoms it does not think upon itself or ask for it to be seen, it therefore is just a rose without questioning its existence, similar to Marion's givenness (Severson, 2012:13)<sup>7</sup>. 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)<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Severson explains how Caputo illustrates Derrida's notion of the gift.

<sup>8</sup> 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".

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).<sup>9</sup>

However, the impossibility of the gift is also its possibility.<sup>10</sup> 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 be a gift. Such desire is constitutive of our humanity and ensures that there will always be an appearance of gift” (1995:130).<sup>11</sup>

When considering the South African context, social grants may be given to the beneficiaries thereof, 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 goals<sup>12</sup> to where one may find ulterior workings and motives of the social grant system.

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<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> “The conditions that make the gift possible simultaneously make it impossible” (Caputo, 1997:163).

<sup>11</sup> “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).

<sup>12</sup> See introduction for objectives of the South African social grant system.

## 4.2. *Aneconomics* and social grants

In order to break through reciprocity (narcissism)<sup>13</sup> 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 *aneconomic*<sup>14</sup> 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 where one is open to the experience of the other (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 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).

This approach may serve as alternative to overcome the impossibility of the gift (reciprocity and exchange) by interrupting reciprocity or exchange by presenting the other (person) instead of the gift because “the gift initiates the cycle of reciprocity” (Rathbone, 2017:8). In this form “the gift is the presence of the other and not the object, not the presence of reciprocity” (Rathbone, 2017:8). This may allow us to overcome the reductionist views of the gift as object.

Derrida argues 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)

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<sup>13</sup> “... narcissism is at the core of reciprocity” (Rathbone, 2017:8); also see Derrida, 1992:23.

<sup>14</sup> See Derrida 1992:7.

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 roam 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 where steps need to be taken to improve the aforementioned 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 it should be utilised and institutionalised differently so the benefits associated thereto are optimised.

Various studies<sup>15</sup> indicate the positive impact that South African social grants have in alleviating the effects of unemployment, poverty and inequality characterised by their low socio-economic position. 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 other 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.

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<sup>15</sup> See Lekezwa, 2011 and Satumba, 2016.

## **5. Institutional recommendations regarding social grants**

I 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 alike<sup>16</sup>, especially when considered in the long term. Through education, the other may be able to develop himself/herself into a more authoritarian or powerful position, that 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 that may ultimately lead to better political governance because the governing party is held more accountable for their actions or the lack thereof. 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 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 benefitting the governing party.

Through education the other may be able to develop himself/herself into a more authoritarian or powerful position, which may place the other in a more equitable and less dependent relationship to the governing party where the power is not as disproportionately distributed between the governing party and the other – thereby doing away with the

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<sup>16</sup> See Earth Policy Institute, 2011 and De Freitas, 2011 on the benefits of education.

detrimental reciprocal relationship. Regular preventative medical check-ups may also assist the others in terms of health care and wellness and it may act as a cost saving measure, as preventative medical measures are better than reactive medical measures.

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, amongst 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.

## 6. 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 being kept in a position of 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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## **8. Conclusions, limitations and recommendations**

### **8.1 Purpose of the study and conclusions**

The purpose of this study is to undertake a philosophical reflection of the South African social grant system from the perspective of the gift as set out 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 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 offers 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.

### **8.2 Limitations of this research**

This paper utilises a specific approach (narrow approach), in considering the gift within the social grant system in South Africa. This suggests vast opportunities for exploring and researching more alternatives in the international arena.

### **8.3 Contributions of this study**

The consideration of this paper is unique in the sense that (according to my knowledge) it has not been done before. This paper will be of value in two main domains: firstly, from a philosophical perspective it will develop the field of applied philosophy by practically manifesting philosophical ideas within the current socio-economic status quo in South Africa. This may be of value to philosophy as it makes philosophical ideas more perceptible or more applicable to our current circumstances. Secondly, from a socio-economic and political perspective this paper may be of value in explaining the current dismal South African position by utilising a philosophical perspective.

## 8.4 Recommendations for further research

Further research can be done on the following topics:

1. A broader study into the gift within the political context.
2. The origins of reciprocity of the gift within human society.
3. Derrida's *aneconomics* as mechanism to breach reciprocal constraints.

## **9. Appendix**

### ***Acta Academica* guidelines for authors**

*Acta Academica* is an academic journal dedicated to scholarship in the humanities. The journal publishes scholarly articles that examine society, culture and politics past and present from a critical social theory perspective. The journal is also interested in scholarly work that examines how the humanities in the 21st century are responding to the double imperative of theorising the world and changing it. The journal appears four times a year and two of its issues are thematically focused.

### **General considerations for publication**

Papers submitted to *Acta Academica* will only be considered for possible publication if the author(s) have certified in writing that the paper in question is not under consideration by another journal, and will not be submitted to such a journal until and unless a final, written rejection decision from the present journal has been received.

Papers submitted to the journal must ensure that the existing relevant literature is appropriately and fairly cited. Efforts should always be made to ensure that reference is made to the first report of a finding or conceptual insight rather than a later elaboration.

The journal indicates in all cases the date of reception of the manuscript and the date of acceptance by peer review.

### **Practical considerations**

Word length of manuscripts should be 5 000 to 8 000 words, including notes and references with an abstract of up to 150 words and five keywords. Authors should supply a biography of 50 to 100 words.

A cover sheet should accompany the manuscript providing full name, institutional address, email address, telephone and fax numbers and the address where proofs and offprints should be sent if different from the above.

Authors should allow three months for consideration of their paper, but upon acceptance, they will be asked to make any necessary corrections and submit a final hard copy as well as an electronic copy.

Titles and section headings should be clear and brief. Lengthy quotations (exceeding 40 words) should be displayed, indented, in the text. Essential notes should be indicated by superscript numbers in the text and collected on a single page at the end of the text.

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*Acta Academica* adheres to an adapted Harvard reference style. Please note the following:

References cited in the text should read: Arendt (1958:63-4); Brown and Smith (1984, 1989). Use '*et al.*' when citing a work by more than two authors.

The letters a, b, c, etc. should be used to distinguish citations of different works by the same author in the same year.

All references cited in the text should be listed alphabetically and presented in full after the notes, using the following style. Books: Laclau E and Mouffe C (1985) *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics*. Trans. W Moore and P Cammack. Verso: London.

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