

[Moni Ovadia, interviewed by Gabriella Caramore](#) during the [Torino Spiritualità](#) conference on September 26, 2010. The theme of the 2010 conference was gratuitousness [*gratuità*].

*My translation (transcription below):* “Gratuitousness is basic to the life of a person, because this is how we know ourselves to be human. Gratuitousness is an escape from alienation and commoditization. Today more than ever the powers that be want us to believe that life should be lived by these rules: “Produce, consume, shut up, and die. You are nothing but a social and biological accident whose life is irrelevant.” An act of gratuitousness breaks these chains and liberates us. An act of gratuitousness is something you do for your neighbor, and doing something for your neighbor is in and of itself receiving. There is no need for mediation, for the mechanism, say, of a goods/consumption relationship. Naturally, gratuitousness should be thought of as the engagement of an individual with his or her neighbors, the immediate community, and the larger community of humanity. There is a great danger that gratuitousness could again be exploited [lit: instrumentalized] by the mechanisms of economic power (which today is power *tout court*), to ease one’s conscience, to ease one’s responsibility, of the fact that it is necessary to take action in the public economy to intervene in social needs.”

Listening to this, his opening statement, I was immediately struck how startlingly similar this is to [Luigino Bruni’s conclusions on gratuitousness](#) as the response to the reduction of all relationships to impersonal, self-interested, contractually defined market relationships. Ovadia clearly sees the danger of the reduction of helping others to simply participating in the market society, mediated by the market relationships of producing and consuming goods, thus helping others by creating opportunities for work, and so forth. Gratuitousness, offering something of ourselves freely and directly to another, breaks the sterility and impersonality of market-mediated relationships, renewing life giving human relationships—because the other is valuable for who he or she is, not for what they can do for us, nor for what we can gain from them in a market transaction.

*My transcription:* “La gratuità è fondamentale nella vita d’un uomo perché si riconosca come essere umano. Perché nella gratuità c’è l’uscita dalla alienazione e la mercificazione. Cioè, oggi più che mai ci vogliono far credere che la vita si svolga secondo questi canoni: produci, consuma, taci, e poi muori. Cioè, si è un accidente socio-biologico la cui vita è irrilevante. L’atto di gratuità spezza queste catene e libera, perché l’atto di gratuità è qualcosa che tu fai per il tuo simile, perché fare qualcosa per il tuo simile è in sé ricevere. Non c’è bisogno dell’intermediazione, del meccanismo, diciamo, del rapporto merce-consumo. Naturalmente, la gratuità deve essere considerata l’impegno del individuo nei confronti del suo simile, della sua comunità e della comunità più allargata degli esseri umani. C’è un grande pericolo che la gratuità venga di nuovo strumentalizzata dai meccanismi del potere economico, che oggi è il potere *tout court*, per sgravarsi la coscienza e sgravarsi la responsabilità del fatto che bisogna attivare processi di economia pubblica per intervenire nel sociale.”

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