

Claus Offe: *Europe Entrapped*

Cambridge 2015: Polity Press, 136 pp.

The title of political sociologist Claus Offe's latest volume suggests a book about external factors and their negative effects on the European Union. But from the first pages, the author clarifies his take: the European Union's entrapment is not the making of some external forces, but of its own. The last sentence of the introduction clearly sets the stage for the book's argument: 'It is the untamed and institutionally unembedded dynamics of the EMU and the Euro itself that threatens to disintegrate the European Union' (p. 5). The following chapters include a sharp analysis of the developments that have generated the current institutional arrangements and the ability (or rather the lack thereof) of these institutions to manage current economic and political processes within Europe's borders. Europe's trap is a management trap.

The first chapter explores a classic question—namely the connection between market capitalism and the mode of governance. Offe's exploration of the links between market capitalism and the European Union uncovers a complex picture of the ways in which the energies of market capitalism are stimulated by the European Union, a space in which obstacles to economic exchanges have been eliminated. However, the chapter ends with a sobering reminder that, in spite of playing under the same regulatory environment, the participants in the game have very unequal positions. These positions in turn influence how they perceive the economic crisis and how they react to it, and most importantly how they react to proposed policy solutions.

The second chapter elaborates a sharp analysis of the crisis. Offe's keen eye and sharp pen lay out for the reader the intricate mechanisms that connect states, domestic banks, EU institutions, the European Central Bank, and the strategic preferences that guide their actions. The role of

debt and the ability of austerity measures to help out the crisis-stricken EU Member States are also discussed. The third chapter further elaborates these topics and shows that different macro-economic agents that interact at the European level (financial industries, the states and their fiscal authorities, the real economic actors, such as workers, investors and consumers, and the citizens of EU Member States) are entangled in processes which more often than not move in different directions, thereby creating 'doom loops' (p. 32). These doom loops occur in countries with both strong and weak economies, which all share the fact that their membership in the monetary union prevents them from using monetary policy instruments to deal with effects of the crisis.

The fourth chapter turns its attention to the issue of the Euro and convincingly argues that, in spite of it being built on an uneven base and being endowed with insufficient policy capacities, there is 'no return to square one' where the monetary union is concerned (p. 48). Offe shows that both the losers and the winners of the monetary union have developed strong incentives to support the common currency. His conclusion is that 'the Euro, in short, is a mistake the undoing of which would be an even greater mistake' (p. 55).

As the economic crisis has unveiled the contradictions embedded in the institutions and the mechanisms of the European Union, it calls into question the overall integration project. Having arrived at this point in his argument, Offe posits that political agency is needed, but it is not clear from where this agency might draw its roots and creative energies. He discusses several possible sources of such energies that might provide a way out of the trap. In spite of his sobering account of the problems plaguing the European construction, his solution is not to abandon ship. On the contrary, the second part of the book explores several solutions which build on the

European integration project. Far from seeing only their benefits, the author subjects these solutions to the same critical analysis, pointing out whether current developments are moving in a promising direction or not.

The first place where Offe looks is, not surprisingly, the discursive-ideological spectrum. On the one hand, he brings in sharp focus several discourses that have mobilised groups, coalitions, and Member States behind European integration as a political project. These discourses appeal to several constituencies, but Offe notes that, although the European Union opens opportunities for elites (and, I would add, risk-averse mobile individuals), 'there is little reason to assume that the appreciation of Europe and its integration on the part of these elite segments will "trickle down" and eventually become a mass phenomenon' (p. 74). The reason for this is the sense of injustice that many experience due to their position as victims of economic decline and losing control to 'rule from above', a sense of injustice that is fertile ground for Euro-scepticism seeds. On the other hand, his analysis of the configurations of political forces and preferences reveals that there are deep left/right, national/supranational and debtor/creditor cleavages (p. 89) that structure the discourses on possible solutions. This discursive scene is likely to have freezing effects on the actors' ability to find solutions because of its extreme fragmentation and disposition for action in opposite directions.

The second place Offe looks at is, to some extent unavoidably, Germany. Unavoidably, because many voices have noted by now that Germany is tacitly recognised as the leading country in Europe. Offe's analysis explores whether Germany assumes this role, and with what consequences. An excursus into the impact of the peculiarities of the German language for framing the economic crisis and garnering support for certain policy solutions,

into Germany's interests and obligations in the Euro zone, leads Offe to conclude that Germany is the entity which bears greatest remedial responsibility, but that the German elites are reluctant to take the role.

The third place is EU citizenship and the EU institutional construction. Offe's analysis brings forth well-known problems of representativity, of decision-making, and of democratic deficit. In spite of these problems, Offe argues, completing the European construction and turning the EU into a democracy, with its plethora of institutions based on representation, accountability, and elections, is part and parcel of the effort of finding a way out of the trap.

Last, but not least, Offe addresses a topic of major importance—redistribution across state borders. The relevance of and the need for redistribution is embedded in the need to deal with the differences and cleavages that criss-cross the economic and social European landscape. Offe argues that if other possible solutions might fail in stirring up 'passions and ambitions of broad coalitions', then the ideas of social justice might have 'a greater potential for the mobilization of a kind of agency capable of carrying out viable responses to crisis' (p. 121). In this more optimistic light, Offe argues that measures needed to put in motion the social Europe project are feasible: What is needed is an increase in the fiscal capacity at the level of the Union, a Union-level unemployment benefit scheme, and EU legislation that enforces binding employment and social standards (p. 129).

The book does not hide its author's social-democratic preferences. The sharp analysis, bringing into focus the contrasts embedded in the EU institutional framework, the liberalisation critique, and the accurate description of the pivotal and, at times, cynical role played by banks, are arguments which have been distilled in the circles of the European left. Unsurprisingly then, the preferred solution, namely the

construction of the social Europe through some radical measures, has also a strong left flavour. While this solution is not new, Offe's effort to show the problems of the other potential solutions makes it stand out more. However, in his desire to make the case for social justice policies, the author fails to recognise that this solution also has weaknesses: the agents most likely to push through such radical changes are likely to be the ones paralysed by the crisis. In sum, the pertinent analysis and the flowing argument make this a must-read book for social science scholars interested in disentangling the intricacies of the processes we witness nowadays in Europe. But the book's potential reach is wider, as it speaks to all European citizens who feel entrapped and are searching for a way out.

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Daniel Beland and Klaus Petersen (eds.):
Analysing Social Policy Concepts and Language: Comparative and Transnational Perspectives
Bristol 2014: Policy Press, 344 pp.

Although the push towards modern welfare states could not have been done without ideational foundations, the role of ideas has for quite some time been an Achilles' heel for social policy studies. By delving into the historical development of ideas, concepts, and language, Beland and Petersen's book represents a significant contribution to bridging this gap, as it complements mainstream literature on ideas and social policy with conceptual history tools. The research scope is truly impressive—across fifteen dense chapters the book covers worlds of welfare from Sweden to New Zealand and from the United States to Japan, and nation-states as well as highly influential international organisations. The

book tackles head on many of the problems that mainstream historical institutionalists have been facing with regard to the role of ideas in shaping policies.

If the accumulation of inequalities followed *national* patterns [Kaufmann 2012: 25], *do welfare states also evolve with distinct policy languages?* All contributors rightly note that existing answers in the literature focus mostly on the role of ideas, without paying much attention to concept formation and policy language. The book offers a two-layered affirmative answer. First, as a concept with Old Norse origins (p. 13), but British-centred spread and fame (p. 60), welfare states appear as a response to the functional necessities of industrialisation, as a nexus of the worthy-unworthy debate from the English Poor Laws and the social mediation function from the early 19th-century German Hegelian tradition [Kaufmann 2012: 59]. Second, welfare states evolved and were fundamentally shaped through concept-formation fundamentally linked with constructing the national community and national institutions (p. 297). Beyond the linguistic genealogy, which in general is given slightly too much space, the fundamental processes at play are diffusion (p. 132) and adaptation via nation-building.

Although 'concepts have a life, and like all lives, it is probably not linear' [Petersen and Petersen 2013: 177], the importance of conceptual history can be seen in the fact that, contrary to English, where the concept-notion distinction is blurred, in German and French (competing influential languages of social policy) a clear separation exists between concept and idea/notion (pp. 66–68). This is an important point and it relates to two fundamental issues. On the one hand, concepts that underpin institutions tend to have long internal temporal horizons [Koselleck cited in Escudier 2013], further lengthened by visions of nationhood. On the other, ideas have a more conflictual life on the intellectual and polit-