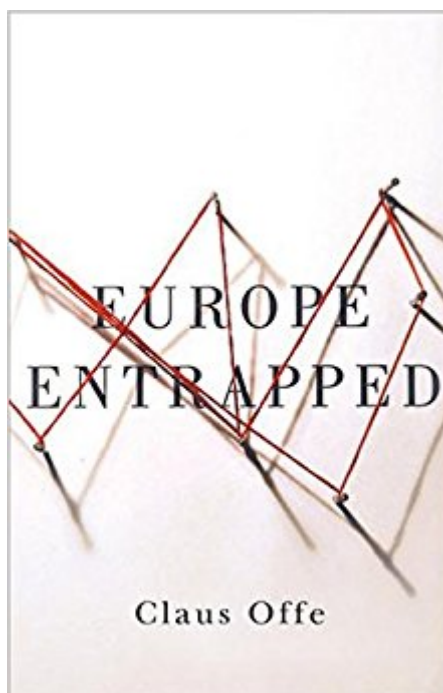


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# Europe Entrapped



## Synopsis

Today Europe finds itself in a crisis that casts a dark shadow over an entire generation. The seriousness of the crisis stems from one core political contradiction at the heart of the European project: namely, that what urgently needs to be done is also extremely unpopular and therefore virtually impossible to do democratically. What must be done - and almost everyone agrees in principle on the measures that would be needed to deal with the financial crisis - cannot be sold to the voting public of the core member states, which so far have been less affected by the crisis than those on the periphery, nor can the conditions that core members try to impose be easily sold to voters in the deficit countries. The European Union is therefore becoming increasingly disunited, with deepening divides between the German-dominated "core" and the southern "periphery", between the winners and the losers of the common currency, between the advocates of greater integration and the anti-Europeans, between the technocrats and the populists. Europe finds itself trapped by the deepening divisions that are opening up across the Continent, obstructing its ability to deal with a crisis that has already caused massive social suffering in the countries of the European periphery and is threatening to derail the very project of the European Union. In this short book, Claus Offe brings into sharp focus the central political problem that lies at the heart of the EU and shackles its ability to deal with the most serious crisis of its short history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The title of his book says it all: Europe finds itself in a trap of its own making. Offe has no easy answers as to how the continent might escape. But his 130-page essay is a model of analytical clarity and should be required reading for anyone who wants to grasp the core issues of the crisis – and eschew simple slogans and facile apportionment of blame to single nations (whether Germany or Greece)." *Current History*

"This is a strangely heart-warming book. While Claus Offe analyses the weaknesses and failures of European integration with ruthless precision, he also reminds us powerfully of the values of the European ideal, and shows how we could come closer to realising them - if only political leaders had the will and tenacity to do so. In the current climate of Europhobia, this is the nearest thing to realistic optimism that we are likely to get." Colin Crouch, University of Warwick

"Claus Offe has written a passionate, probing, and deeply perturbing book that both excoriates the European Union and provides a glimpse of hope in the struggle for a social Europe." Gary Marks, UNC-Chapel Hill and RVU Amsterdam

"After so many years without a resolution, it is hard to feel hopeful about the euro crisis. If there are grounds for hope they lie in this volume. In it Claus Offe describes how the citizens of Europe, and of Germany in particular, frame the crisis. He explains how that framing defines the range of feasible policy options. Offe shows how it is in the capacity of those citizens and their leaders -- of European society, in other words -- to modify that framing in ways that open the door to a more constructive policy response. Offe's careful analysis deserves a wide audience. If it receives one, Europe will be a better place." Barry Eichengreen, University of California, Berkeley

"At the core of this book is the proposition that, though the Euro was a mistake, its undoing would be a greater mistake. Around this insight, Offe describes the logic of the economic, institutional, political and cultural traps that have been sprung on European polities. The great merit of this book is that it poses the fundamental question implicit in any attempt to escape such traps: who is to be the agent of change? No one reading this book will think that this question has an easy answer; they will realise that an answer is desperately called for." Albert Weale, University College London

"Europe Entrapped brilliantly summarizes the huge complexity of the EU that hinders its effective crisis management, and comes with a passionate call for more material solidarity among EU citizens... Offe contributes a most welcome counterweight to all the short and simple arguments attributing blame for the crisis to a small group of people, persons, or institutions. For everyone interested in the Euro crisis and annoyed or confused by the barrage of media coverage on it, I highly recommend this book." *International Studies Review*

"Offe provides a lucid explanation of the Eurozone crisis and how Europeans should reform their institutions. While

assembling the intellectual tools to dissect this predicament, he paints a full picture of the challenges facing welfare states under globalization. The silver lining of this book is that it is partisan in the best possible way: provocative but not distorting, critical but not irascible. Most of all: its political rallying cry to citizens, namely that the Europe we have is flawed and the one we stand to gain is worth fighting for, is both urgent and true. Constellations This is an important read for any Europhile who thinks that anything economically or socially rational must also be politically realistic. Times Higher Education

Claus Offe is Professor of Political Sociology at the Hertie School of Governance in Berlin. He is author of numerous books, including *Contradictions of the Welfare State*, *Disorganized Capitalism*, *Modernity and the State*, and *Reflections on America: Tocqueville, Weber and Adorno in the United States*.

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A good read. Offe argues that more than mere rhetoric is needed for reforms leading to a more just and compassionate EU.

It is an excellent and professional book that anyone interested in the Euro Crisis needs to read.

"Europe Entrapped" is one of many dissertations on the crisis of the European Union published by European intellectuals in recent years. Claus Offe is German, Professor Emeritus of Political Sociology at the Hertie School of Governance and Humboldt University. He focuses primarily on the crisis of the Euro, whose disintegration he believes will result in the unraveling of the entire European project, and addresses the European Union's (EU) broader problems and proposes his own solutions in the last couple of chapters. Claus Offe is ideologically hard-left and a supporter of the EU, as it was envisioned, somewhat abstractly, by similar-minded persons. Like many European intellectuals, he disapproves of the technocratic rule and democratic deficits that characterize the current political structure of the EU. His view that one nation, Greece, leaving the Eurozone will result in the abandonment of the Euro and eventually the EU project is alarmist, and I don't agree. I should say that I am anti-EU -and not for the reasons that Offe mentions- but I appreciate this book, because it lays out the unviability of the Euro, as conceived, in several chapters. I don't think Offe will ever be accused of being an eloquent writer, at least not in English, but I didn't find the book

difficult to understand. It is written in what I take to be typical German style for this type of analysis: The organization is straightforward, but the prose is less so, which could be off-putting if you're not accustomed to it. Offe begins by identifying the Eurozone crisis as "the cumulative outcome of a financial market crisis, a sovereign debt crisis, and economic/employment crisis, and an institutional crisis of the EU, its Eurozone and its democratic qualities." By its nature, the crisis has paralyzed the forces that might be capable of overcoming it, so we will be looking for some agent that can get the job done, the difficulty being that a solution cannot be democratically accomplished. In his first chapter, Offe presents the features of the model of political economy that he will be using in his analysis. In short, it is a state-instituted capitalist market society which is far from self-enforcing or self-sustaining, principally because it is easy to subvert in the pursuit of one's own interests and considerably more so in the EU-wide market than it was under the regulatory regimes of individual nation-states. Now that we know where the author is coming from, Chapter 2 discusses the Euro's two major defects: It was created wrongly in a "highly inhomogeneous market space, the divergence of which it further propels," and "it is institutionally deficient as its policy-making capacity is severely limited in areas of fiscal, economic, and social policies." The next chapter leans toward turgid. In it, Offe explicates four "doom loops", which pit financial industries, Eurozone states, the real economy, and citizenry against one another in basically a bunch of paralyzing Catch-22s. Chapter 4 lays out Offe's argument for the Euro as an "irreversible arrangement." He admits, loudly, that the Euro was a mistake, but he believes strongly that undoing it would be a bigger mistake. We all know how the core Eurozone nations benefit from the Euro and would suffer from its breakup, but his arguments for the benefits of the Euro to the periphery nations is weak. Greece would lose its political leverage at the European level, and it would suffer inflation. Chapter 6, "Finalities", is an exploration of the purpose of the EU, not the Eurozone, seven goals and visions that theoretically drive the integration process, followed by Offe's analysis of whether or not the EU has met these goals. Pretty much "no," so Offe admits that arguments for Europe have lost force so that "the stealth mode of self-propelling incremental integration...is no longer viable." The next chapter takes on four groups or ideologies that oppose European integration and concludes that they are impotent. Offe believes that Germany has a responsibility to be the agent of change that Europe needs, as it has benefitted the most from the European Monetary Union. So far, Germany has refused. I think Offe wants Germany to reduce its dependence on exports by increasing domestic spending and wages, forgive some Greek debt and recapitalize Greek banks. Interesting to a non-German is Offe's explanation of the "semantic ambiguities" employed by German politicians and partisans to promote the austerity for periphery nations and deflect blame. After the requisite criticism of the European

Central Bank, European Court of Justice, and European Commission for being so removed from democratic accountability, Offe posits the EU as a "supranational democracy" but admits in a footnote that achieving this is unlikely. The last chapter includes Offe's proposals for how to politicize the EU, mostly through European-wide social welfare guarantees and lots of taxes. "Nothing less will do than a carefully designed set of EU-sponsored material entitlements." Claus Offe wants to use the EU crisis to promote a leftist utopia. This doesn't address the EU's fundamental flaws. It only attempts to buy the support of a disgruntled citizenry. To what practical end, I'm not sure. Oh, yes, the seven goals mentioned in Chapter 6. Most are either unappealing or implausible. The others can be accomplished by a European trading bloc, without reviving the outdated concept of an unwieldy, unadaptable, transnational empire, this time with ideological basis. That's a discussion for another day. Offe's proposed solutions for the EU are very much what one expects from a European leftist academic. You could read Jürgen Habermas or any number of others and get the same idea, though Offe seems to have a better grasp of finance than Habermas. I don't give his vision for Europe much credit, but his analysis of the Eurozone crisis is cogent and interesting.

Was the European Union such a great idea? At the time it seemed brilliant, a way to speed trade, add a level of regulatory oversight, and assist in creating stability throughout the continent. With all the years that have passed, however, so many issues have arisen that make the EU a questionable solution. For one thing, we have the recent news of Greece and their austerity issues, being solved by Angela Merkel and Germany. It was a dramatic issue affecting millions of people, but membership in the EU really didn't help the ordinary person. Years ago it was Ireland that had the issues. Austerity measures make no one happy, and yet other solutions are not readily available. It seemed like a good idea: the mixture of large and wealthy nations with smaller and more fragile countries, new to their own financial systems, being combined with oversight for the betterment of all. It simply hasn't happened that way. A book written ages ago called *Austerity in Britain* contained far more information and was presented in a way that made the material fascinating, not dry. This is written by a German financial scholar, Offe, and he's got the information and reputation but the writing is stiff and unlikely to make you eager to read it. Perhaps as a college text, but for everyday readers, even those in the financial sector, may find it hard to relate to his writing style. Also, the title is a bit deceiving. I don't feel Europe is entrapped: the larger nations will always be in control and stable. It's the smaller ones that are admitted into the EU and then find their membership comes at great cost.

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