

European Union and the Economy of the Gift*

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Abstract

The paper offers two parallel reflections upon the contemporary European predicament through the concept of the gift. First, the paper focuses on the existing critique drawing from ‘moral economy’ theories, according to which the European project has abandoned its own idealized ‘gift economy’, that is, its founding principles of solidarity and equality, in favor of an immoral market economy. This emphasis on the ‘immoral’ functions of market economy prevents us from recognizing that its basic principles and values have themselves become the organizing moral basis of contemporary European society. The key problem here is that all those values now associated with the EU—even those that the theories of moral economy would have recognized as ‘moral’—are now conceptualized in a manner pursuant to neoliberal capitalism. Second, the paper offers an alternative narrative of the historical development of European integration, through four successive stories marked by distinct arrangements in the virtuous-circle relation between the gift and the expectation of a gift in return, read as *doron-antidoron*. Read in parallel with the historical development of neoliberal capitalism, the progress of European integration is thus represented as embedded in a series of choices between gratuity-charity for the plenty and profit-making for the few, never abandoning a European ‘gift economy’, which has fundamentally been an economy of exchange.

“Vorsicht: Gift!”

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Spruchhaftes* (1869-1888)

Gift means poison in German And *poisson* means fish in French.

... Poison, too is a funny word, a gift horse Given by deceitful Greeks:
look in its mouth And see: it sounds what it says, it seems.

— David Lehman, “Gift Means Poison in German” (2013)

As a limit idea, the gift sparks off a notable analytical challenge and charm. The modern gift is conventionally understood as tailored according to social convention and market rules¹, often marginally moving within the grey zones of social and business ethics (‘palm oil’, bribery, product gifts, bonuses, etc.). When idealized as ‘pure gift’, it may even be conceptualized as an essentially anti-political concept, similar to forgiveness, at least to the extent that it remains alien to the principles of reciprocity and retribution. Yet, if forgiveness is the mirror of justice, the gift is the mirror of friendship, perhaps the most political of all concepts born in and through the Aristotelian *polis*. When in *The Merchant of Venice* Antonio is negotiating the terms of the loan he offers to guarantee for young Bassanio, he says to Shylock: “If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not / As to thy friends, for when did

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¹ According to Marx, commodity exchange, either in the form of barter or of sale, constitutes an exchange of alienable things between transactors who are in a state of reciprocal independence. K. MARX, *Capital*, vol. 1 (Moscow 1867), 91. As a corollary, non-commodity (gift) exchange is “an exchange of inalienable things between transactors who are in a state of reciprocal dependence”. C.A. GREGORY, *Gifts and Commodities* (London 1982), 12. To the extent therefore that gift exchange takes place between agents embedded in social relations and reaffirms these relations, it is closely dependent upon the social net that brings together the members of the community. As Theodore Caplow notes, commenting on gift practices in market economies, “gift exchange is a language that employs objects instead of words as its lexical elements. ... In the dialect of Christmas gift giving, the absence of a gift is also a lexical sign, signifying either the absence of a close relationship ... or the desire to terminate a close relationship.” T. CAPLOW, *Rule enforcement without visible means* (1984) 89 *AM J SOCIOL* 1320-21.

friendship take / A breed for barren metal of [from] his friend?”² Lending with interest — what the pre-modern, catholic Venice clearly addressed as usury— is totally foreign to friendship³.

Undeniably, the idea of the gift presents its own paradoxes and conceptual complexities⁴. The retributive dimension of the gift is so well distorted by its idealization as a unilateral act, that its recovery is both difficult and important. The *Oxford English Dictionary* connects the primary meaning of the gift to the action of giving, and defines it as almost a synonym to the free gift: “1. a. The action of giving, an instance of the same; a giving, bestowal. †*of gift*: as a gift, gratuitously, for nothing.” Similarly, the *Robert* dictionary defines giving (*donner*) as follows: “to deliver over to someone in an intention of generosity, or without receiving anything in return, something one possesses or which one enjoys.” The lexicological interpretation is clear. The emphasis is placed on the absence of reciprocity, on the absolute asymmetry between giver and receiver⁵. Nevertheless, a more careful etymological research in various languages reveals a far more complicated picture⁶ that affirms exactly the opposite claim: that no human gift is truly free from the spirit of exchange⁷. Marcel Mauss’s work on the gift as the archaic mode of exchange is suggestive here⁸. Mauss examines the gift as the opposite not of exchange in general, but of the market form of exchange, and of the self-interested calculating spirit, which have been already summarized seventy years before Adam Smith’s work, in the subtitle of Bernard Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees*: “private vices” are “public benefits”⁹.

The submission of the gift to the whims of market economy is not natural, but a historically and culturally specific conceptual shift that was activated with the transition from feudalism to capitalism. With some minor exceptions, the gift has never been conceptualized as free from the practice or the expectation of exchange. What changed with the transition to capitalism and market economy is the calculating and self-interested connotation of this

² W. SHAKESPEARE, *The Merchant of Venice* (Cambridge 2009), 17 (1.3.129-31).

³ W.N. WEST, Nothing as given (1996) 48 *COMP LITERATURE* 1-18; H.S. TURNER, The problem of the more-than-one (2006) 57 *SHAKESPEARE QUART* 413-42.

⁴ M. GODELIER, *The Enigma of the Gift* (Cambridge 1999); O. PYYHTINEN, *The Gift and Its Paradoxes* (Farnham 2014); H. LIEBERSOHN, *The Return of the Gift* (Cambridge 2011); G. MOORE, *Politics of the Gift* (Edinburgh 2011).

⁵ P. RICOEUR, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago 2004), 480. This asymmetry is central in Georges Bataille’s own emphasis on the agonistic character of the gift obliging its recipient to confirm her subjection, thus embodying the Hegelian master-slave dipole within the act. G. BATAILLE, *The Accursed Share* (New York, 1991). See also K. SYKES, *Arguing with Anthropology* (London 2005), 151-68.

⁶ E.g. New Orleans creole *lagniappe* (an extra item given by a dealer to a customer to encourage patronage); Old Norse *lan* (loan) (a gift from God); Greek mythology *Pandora* (giver of all gifts, and ills); Latin *corollarium* (gift, and logical sequence); Latin *munus* (gift or service, duty, office); Medieval Latin *gratuitas* [free gift, yet soon conceptualized as money given for favor or services (1530s)]; English *endowment* [gift, power, advantage (early 17c.)]; Old English *bletsunga*, *bledsunge* (bless, gift from God); Latin *oblatio* (an offering, gift, sacrifice); Persian *bakhshish* [literally ‘gift’, from verb *bakhshidan* ‘to give’ (also ‘to forgive’)]; English *donation* from Latin *donare* (give as a gift); English *dowry* from Old French *doaire* (dower, dowry, gift); Chinook jargon *potlatch* (gift), later (1865) in sense ‘ceremony in which gifts are exchanged’; English proverbial expression ‘*Indian gift*’ (a present for which an equivalent return is expected); Latin phrase from Virgil’s *Aeneid* ‘*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*’; French *morganatique* from Old High German *morgangeba* (morning gift, signifying the gift traditionally given to the wife on the morning after consummation in an unequal marriage between a man of royal blood and a common woman, representing the only share she and her children may claim in the husband’s estate); Old Norse *giptask* (of women), from *gipta*, (to give, gift); Old High German *gift* (poison). See also M.L. SATLOW (ed.), *The Gift in Antiquity* (Chichester 2013). The above etymological references are not proposed here, of course, as a lexicological search for an original, authentic, *etymon* (true) meaning, to which the concept of the gift should return.

⁷ L. MCGOEY, *No Such Thing as a Free Gift* (London 2015).

⁸ M. MAUSS, *The Gift* (Chicago 2015). With his *Essai sur le don* (1925) Mauss responded to the positions of his contemporaries, Malinowski and Georges Davy in ethnography and sociology of law and institutions, respectively. See B. MALINOWSKI, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (London 1922); G. DAVY, *La foi jurée* (Paris 1922).

⁹ B. MANDEVILLE, *The Fable of the Bees* (London 1705).

exchange¹⁰. In that sense, we could say that the Venice in Shakespeare's *Merchant* is the forerunner of the coming Europe. Antonio, Shylock, and Portia—the merchant, the usurer, and the landowner, respectively—dramatize the perceptions of a society abandoning the ethico-theological prohibitions of the past. Shylock's unholy capitalism is but an embryonic form of market economy in transition.

Drawing from these preliminary remarks, the following two sections offer two parallel reflections upon the contemporary European predicament through the concept of the gift. In the first section, Akrivoulis focuses on the existing critique drawing from 'moral economy' theories, according to which the European project has abandoned its own idealized 'gift economy', that is, its founding principles of solidarity and equality, in favor of an immoral market economy. The paper argues that this critique still ignores a series of conceptual mutations pursuant to the idea of the gift that may allow an alternative reading of the contemporary European predicament. In the second section, Kentrotis offers an alternative narrative of the historical development of European integration, through four successive stories marked by distinct arrangements in the virtuous-circle relation between the gift and the expectation of a gift in return, read as *doron-antidoron*.

The Morality of Market Economy

Mostly drawing from Karl Polanyi's pioneering work¹¹, moral economy¹² theorists differentiate between market and pre-market societies suggesting that the latter constitute moral, gift economies, to the extent that economic behavior in them is embedded in non-economic social relations and moral values. In this 'moral' society, the social ideals of justice, philanthropy, and subsistence escape market rationality¹³. Quoting the ethnologist Franz Steiner, Habermas notes respectively: "In the nonmonetarized economic activities of archaic societies, the mechanism of exchange has so little detached itself from normative contexts that a clear separation between economic and noneconomic values is hardly possible."¹⁴ Market economy, to the contrary, is considered as being fully detached from these social rules. With the transition to market economy, the market becomes an autonomous and self-regulated entity. Exchange does not depend anymore on the subject's social positioning; commodity prices are no longer fixed according to the community's sense of justice. What happens, however, when with the transition to market economy, the market starts recreating

¹⁰ J.G. CARRIER, *Gifts & Commodities* (London 1995); L. ZIONKOWSKI / C. KLEKAR (eds.), *The Culture of the Gift in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York 2009).

¹¹ K. POLANYI, *The Great Transformation*, 2nd ed. (Boston 2001).

¹² Although attributed to E.P. Thompson, the term was first coined much earlier by Ralph Barton Perry. See E.P. THOMPSON, The moral economy of the English crowd in the eighteenth century (1971) 50 *PAST PRESENT* 76-136; R.B. PERRY, *The Moral Economy* (New York 1909). See also N. GÖTZ, Moral economy (2015) 11 *J GLOBAL ETHICS* 147-62.

¹³ See M.M. AUSTIN / P. VIDAL-NAQUET, *Economic and Social History of Ancient Greece* (London 1977); R.H. BATES / A.F. CURRY, Community versus market (1992) 86 *AM POLIT SCI REV* 457-63; G.S. BECKER, *The Economic Approach to Human Behaviour* (Chicago 1976); W.J. BOOTH, *Households* (Ithaca 1993); W.J. BOOTH, A note on the idea of the moral economy (1993) 87 *AM POLIT SCI REV* 943-48; W.J. BOOTH, Household and market (1994) 56 *REV POLIT* 207-35; G. DALTON, Economic theory and primitive society (1961) 63 *AM ANTHROPOL* 1-25; E.E. EVANS-PRITCHARD, *The Nuer* (Oxford 1940); M. GRANOVETTER, Economic action and social structure (1985) 91 *AM J SOCIOL* 481-510; G.A. GUNDERSON, Economic behaviour in the ancient world in: R.L. RANSOM / R. SUTCH / G.W. WALTON (eds.), *Explorations in the New Economic History* (New York 1982), 236-37; M. HECHTER, Karl Polanyi's social theory (1981) 10 *POLIT SOC* 399-430; T.K. HOPKINS, Sociology and the substantive view of the economy in: K. POLANYI / C.M. ARENSBERG / H.W. PEARSON (eds.), *Trade and Market in the Early Empires* (Glencoe 1957) 270-306; K. POLANYI, The economy as instituted process in: *ibid.*, 243-70; D.C. NORTH, Markets and other allocation systems in history (1977) 6 *J EUR ECON HIST* 703-16; K. POLANYI, *Primitive, Archaic, and Modern Economies* (Garden City 1968); S.L. POPKIN, *The Rational Peasant* (Berkeley 1979); M. SAHLINS, *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago 1972); J.C. SCOTT, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (New Haven 1976); A. SEN, *On Ethics and Economics* (Oxford 1987); A. SEN, Rational fools (1977) 6 *PHILOS PUBLIC AFF* 317-44; R.M. TITMUSS, *The Gift Relationship* (London 1970).

¹⁴ J. HABERMAS, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2 (Boston 1987), 163.

society to its own image, as a series of relations and conditions become commodified and are offered for sale, and decisions are founded upon economic rationality rather than community ethics? According to Polanyi, “instead of economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system.”¹⁵

We agree with at least two core arguments implicit in Polanyi’s thesis: *a)* Economic activity is indeed limited by non-economic institutions as well, to the extent that economy is embedded in society and culture. Economic activities and relations are not self-existent and independent, and they cannot be studied as such. To the contrary, they are themselves embedded in a wider net of practices and discourses which are always already historically and culturally specific. *b)* Indeed, in market economies the above relation of embeddedness is reversed, since social relations are embedded in an organized net of discourses and practices implicit in market economy.

Theories of moral economy question the economistic reductionism that explains all human behavior in terms of economic rationalism¹⁶. For moral economy theorists, individualism, the calculating spirit, and the emphasis on materialism that all characterize economism, are only met in self-existent, non-embedded market economies. In simple terms, the theoretical epicenter of the moral economy approach is the defining differentiation between embedded economy and non-embedded or autonomous market¹⁷. Here lies the core of our objection: If we fully accept the market autonomy thesis, we are led to the paradoxical conclusion that market societies are not ethical societies at all, not even for their own members themselves. This conclusion is particularly problematic.

First, it is evident that even market societies emphatically preserve concrete moral values, such as individual autonomy, democratic freedom, promise-keeping, or the *pacta sunt servanda* principle¹⁸. Market societies organize a new overall ethical system around a particular hierarchy of rights and moral values. At least in the context of Western liberal democracy, this system is mainly centered on democratic representation (instead of direct political participation), the institutional recognition of economic equality (meant and functioning in practice as equality of opportunities, a synonym to ‘healthy competition’) and individual rights (instead of collective ones). Even more crucially, the moral values that characterized pre-market, ‘gift’ economies are not abandoned with the transition to market economy. They endure, yet noematically and ethically transformed pursuant to the functions of market economy. Even the very concept of the gift that has been essentially associated with these pre-market (‘gift’) economies still persists yet fully subdued to the dictates of neoliberal capitalism.

The above paradoxical conclusion therefore eventually limits the width and depth of critique to the consequences of social transition to market economy. For example, the emphasis of critique on the ‘immoral’ functions of market economy in the post-democratic¹⁹ EU prevents us from recognizing that the basic principles and values of market economy have themselves become the organizing moral basis of contemporary European society. In other words, the problem is neither that the EU has abandoned its own ‘economy of the gift’, an originally envisioned, much-aspired-to, yet never realized moral economy founded on the principles of solidarity and equality, nor that in the balance of interests those values have retreated in favor of others that better coincide with and serve market economy (*e.g.* the

¹⁵ POLANYI, *op. cit. supra* note 11, 60.

¹⁶ See, for example, G.S. BECKER, *A Treatise on the Family* (Cambridge 1981); F.L. BLOCK / M.R. SOMERS, *Beyond the economistic fallacy in: T. SKOCPOL (ed.), Vision and Method in Historical Sociology* (Cambridge 1984), 47-84.

¹⁷ W.J. BOOTH, *On the idea of the moral economy* (1994) 88 *AM POLIT SCI REV* 653.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 661.

¹⁹ C. CROUCH, *Post-democracy. The challenge for Europe* (2013) 1 *QUERIES* 36-43; C. CROUCH, *Post-democracy* (Cambridge 2004); C. MOUFFE, *On the Political* (London 2005); J. RANCIÈRE, *Disagreement* (Minneapolis 1999); J. RANCIÈRE, *Hatred of Democracy* (London 2006); C. HAY, *Why We Hate Politics* (Cambridge 2007); C. LEFORT, *The Political Forms of Modern Society* (Cambridge 1986). Unlike this theoretical tradition which sees the causes of the democratic legitimacy problems in neoliberal capitalism undermining democracy from within, Jürgen Habermas traces these problems in economic crises. J. HABERMAS, *Europe’s post-democratic era*, *The Guardian*, 10 Nov. 2011; J. HABERMAS, *The crisis of the European Union in the light of a constitutionalization of International Law* (2012) 23 *EUR J INT LAW* 335-48.

welfare state in favor of economic development, solidarity in favor of economic security and the national interests of member states, etc.)²⁰. The key problem is that all those values now associated with the EU—even those that the theories of moral economy would have recognized as ‘moral’—are now conceptualized in a manner less political than economic and, especially, in a way pursuant to a particular economic system, that is, neoliberal capitalism.

Evidently, this process is neither recent nor primarily or exclusively European. Even those European values that the theory of moral economy identifies with gift economy, have been historically and culturally conceptualized in ways that are so diverse that they have even been in times mutually exclusive. The role of the dominant practices and discourses organizing this reconceptualization process is decisive here. For example, the concept of solidarity in Western Europe²¹ has been ideologically organized through both a socialist/communist and a religious/Christian discourse, leading to different, occasionally complementary, yet mutually exclusive conceptual variants (social-democrat, Christian-democrat, Marxist/ Leninist)²². The process becomes even more intricate at the intersection with other practices, discourses, and historical mutations, such as the development of class relations, consumerism, individualism, the transformations of the welfare state, the role of political parties and social movements, etc.

The overall picture of course is even more complicated. How could contemporary European policies or legal instruments presented as expressions of a spirit of European solidarity or equality, ever be free from all those elements that define the spirit of economism? What is the political impact of this misappropriation? The symbolic mutations of economic relations and predispositions into ones of solidarity and equality, in other words, the verbal and practical euphemism of the economic-material dimension, produces as well as ratifies (to the benefit of those who embrace it) a capital of recognition, knowledge, and appropriation of all those categories, through which subjects (and especially dominant groups) have come to conceptualize the world. It is evident that in a capitalistic context of inequality, the above symbolic dominance that helps reconceptualize the economic dimension of exchange, serves as the social foundation of its collective misappropriation. It both conceals and legitimizes the unequal terms on which this dominance is practiced, that is, the same material and symbolic relations of domination and subordination, upon which it is founded.

The distortion of the material dimensions of the practices and predispositions of solidarity does not only conceal their calculating/utilitarian dimension. It also determines and reinforces the symbolic dimension of the means chosen to serve these calculating and self-interested predispositions. In other words, our point is not merely that the ones who most profit from the current European predicament conceal its subjugation to the dictates of market economy. We argue that the disclosure of the underlying calculating spirit and of the material dimensions of such practices and strategies, would undermine the position of those dominant groups or subjects in the social negotiation of the material and symbolic capital of the Union itself. Such a prospect would not only strengthen the strategies of exclusion and xenophobia that are already rising around Europe, but also weaken all those symbolic-ideological elements that have allowed for the creation of the Union itself. It is equally evident that such a prospect would essentially condemn to failure any attempt of further integration.

To put it in Pierre Bourdieu’s terms, the duality of the objective truth of the calculating spirit implicit in market-economy relations and relations of exploitation, on the one hand, and the subjectively lived meaning of generosity and solidarity, on the other, constitutes the

²⁰ J.A. CAPORASO / S. TARROW, Polanyi in Brussels (2009) 63 *INTORGAN* 593-620; J. BECKERT, The great transformation of embeddedness in: C. HANN / K. HART (eds.), *Market and Society* (Cambridge 2009), 38-55; E. CHRISTODOULIDIS, Europe’s donors and its supplicants in: J. VAN DER WALT / J. ELLSWORTH (eds.), *Constitutional Sovereignty and Social Solidarity in Europe* (Baden-Baden 2015), 241-66; J. VAN DER WALT, *Timeo Danais dona ferre* and the constitution that Europeans may one day have given themselves in: *ibid.*, 267-308; J.E. FOSSUM / A.J. MENÉNDEZ, *The Constitution’s Gift* (Lanham 2011).

²¹ See S. STJERNØ, *Solidarity in Europe* (Cambridge 2005); P. BERAMENDI, Inequality and the territorial fragmentation of solidarity (2007) 61 *INT ORGAN* 783-820.

²² For a discussion on solidarity and the gift, see A. KOMTER, *Social Solidarity and the Gift* (Cambridge 2005).

fundamental condition of EU's symbolic economy. In this symbolic economy, the indeterminism of the economic value renders intersubjective practices and discourses always ambivalent. While economic interest is preserved, calculations remain implicit or denied, in a manner that allows securing the economic functions of the powerful member states, dominant groups, elites, and subjects. The ambivalence in our case stems, that is, from the duality between *a*) the objective truth of the material dimension of European practices and strategies of proclaimed solidarity (*i.e.* 'Support Frameworks') aiming at development and the increase of business profit, and *b*) the subjectively lived meaning of integration, solidarity, and equality²³.

The material interest served by these practices and strategies remains active. Its underwriting calculating spirit however is concealed. The result is of course the same: all those values compatible with the so-called 'gift economy' are retained²⁴. Yet, they do not merely function as symbolic vehicles that help sustain and increase the material capital. They further keep on transfiguring the ventures of EU's symbolic and material capital, determining the actions and dispositions of its subjects. Due to the subjects' own embeddedness in the practices and discourses of market economy, questioning the conceptualization and political functions of those values becomes extremely difficult, almost impossible before the expectations born from these values are finally betrayed.

The moral remapping of the European economic and political practices and discourses, therefore, does not only explain the naturalization of the neoliberal organization of social and political life in the EU, but also allows for the radical contestation of this predicament. In other words, a deeper critique of the current European predicament could not be founded in a—not so convincing—axiological evaluation and moral comparison between two European societies organized as gift and market economies, respectively. To the contrary, the effective de-naturalization of the neoliberal predicament in Europe presupposes understanding those conceptual mutations and transfigurations of practices and discourses that have marked the consolidation of this predicament.

What is the practical implication of this argument? Put simply, the crucial question is not whether market economy can "be transformed from an immoral space into a *moral* space"²⁵, or whether the European Union can return to its own (imagined) 'economy of the gift' reinstating its founding principles of solidarity and equality. The predicament is far more implicate to be resolved by the mere introduction of new principles, laws, and regulations, or the return to an idealized past that never was. Both market economy and the European Union (as a market society) already enjoy their own 'morality' organized around an ethical system pursuant to the discourses and practices of neoliberal capitalism. It is through this 'morality'—an ethical system that albeit historically and culturally specific, makes a claim to universality—that all these aspired ideals associated with 'gift economy' have been reconceptualized and still persist as both a tragedy and a farce.

The European *doron* and the Expectation of *anti-doron*

The postwar European plan was developed around a great idea: the prevalence of European peace in a 'virtuous circle' leading to a closer pan-European interdependence of societies and economies through common institutions and market services. Its basic accomplishment was the 'miracle' of transforming deadly enemy neighbors into allies and partners, who could cooperate within a context of liberties still unknown outside of Europe, contributing at the same time to the so-called domestication of capitalism by the welfare state²⁶. In its development, however, this plan appears to have consigned the ideals of solidarity and interdependence in the dustbin of common European history. Especially in the second decade of the 21st century, the plan now aims at creating a new 'virtuous circle' of expectations and

²³ P. BOURDIEU, *Practical Reason* (Cambridge 1998), 10-3, 78-9, 88-91; P. BOURDIEU / L.J.D. WACQUANT, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge 1992), 127; P. BOURDIEU, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge 1991), 49-125; P. BOURDIEU, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge 1977), 140-43.

²⁴ See A. OFFER, *Between the gift and the market* (1997) 50 *ECON HIST REV* 450-76.

²⁵ N.B. DAVIS, *If war can have ethics, Wall Street can, too* *The New York Times*, 3 Oct. 2016.

²⁶ U. BECK, *Das deutsche Europa* (Berlin 2012), 53.

returns within a new spirit of competition and perpetual gains introduced by companies and corporations, and agreeably adopted by states. This second section ponders on the historical course of these virtuous circles of promises and expectations through four stories that demonstrate the relation between *doron* (gift) and *anti-doron* (gift in return)²⁷ for states, European institutions, peoples, and citizens.

Within a close circle of winners and losers of the Second World War, the ambitious supranational project of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was initiated as a makeweight to war and poverty, while retaining an Adamic purity in a modern guise. Through the ECSC, the newly formed Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was legitimized on the international political stage. The wider German issue now obtained a new dimension, that is, how it is possible for a newly created state to function in a legitimate manner both domestically and internationally²⁸. The same plan that was followed for the 'in vitro' creation of FRG, was also followed in the case of the ECSC that also lacked any prior legitimacy. The ECSC was also based on the wilful consent of those involved, creating a non-state space where all aspects of economic freedom could unfold, thus leading to the multifaceted development of participant countries and, by extension, of their citizens.

In the case of FRG, on the one hand, economy functioned as the generator of legitimacy for state politics, transforming the sway of the young Republic into a 'special economic zone' under allied control. In the case of the ECSC, on the other, economy functioned as a state supplement, an 'offshore' state activity beyond its own structure, thus creating a space of economic freedom surrounded by states, yet supervised by them. In both cases, the reversal is evident: instead of the state supervising the economy, slowly but gradually the state came to be supervised by the economy.

In this first *doron-antidoron* virtuous circle reinforced by the 'FRG-legitimacy' and 'ECSC-economic development' nexus, direct financial gains were soon recorded for all parties involved, also allowing for prospective political gains at the level of European integration. The commercial archetype of the ECSC was soon transformed into its more advanced economic replica, the EEC. The ECSC gradually abandoned the traits of the 'merchant' and was soon transformed into the EEC-'manufacturer', thus putting the Europeanists' political games to an end. Both politicians and businessmen started cashing out the added value of those supranational experiments, while the peoples of Europe were satisfied with the mere promise of their surplus value, and tamed by the abundance of goods and rights provided in the consumerist postwar democracy.

In the 1960s, a decade critical for the EEC, European integration surrendered to economy, which in turn started to closely and carefully observe the state, exploiting its structures and the surplus value of the rising Gaullist idea of *l'Europe des patries*. Moreover, in the outer courtyard of the then EEC, FRG was rebaptized in international legitimacy with the unexpected *Kniefall von Warschau* (Warsaw Genuflection) by the then German Chancellor Willy Brandt in front of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising monument on December 7, 1970:

Already in the 1970s, as well as later, I was asked why I did not pursue signing a treaty with Poland, which has suffered unspeakable ill-treatment, before signing the treaty with the Soviet Union. ... I admit however that the Poles, people and leadership, would have preferred that our official declaration of the Oder-Neisse line had first taken place in Warsaw. As a 'gift' by the Russians it seemed to them to

²⁷ In the context of the present analysis, the relation between gift (*doron*) and gift in return (*anti-doron*) aims to describe the context of reciprocity, both as fact and as expectation. In that sense, the *antidoron* in the relationship should not be conflated with the theological conceptualization of the term, which symbolizes the utmost offer, the ideal gift, without absolutely any *quid pro quo* expectation, and which is philosophically discussed as a synonym for forgiveness. See respectively P. RICOEUR, Reflections on a new ethos for Europe (1995) 21 *PHILOSOCRIT* 3-13; P. RICOEUR, Sanction, rehabilitation, pardon in: *The Just* (Chicago 2000), 133-45; J.-D. CAUSSE, *L'instant d'un geste* (Genève 2004); J. DERRIDA / J.-L. MARION, On the Gift in: J.D. CAPUTO / M.J. SCANLON (eds.), *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* (Bloomington 1999), 54-78; J.W. ALVIS, *Marion and Derrida on the Gift and Desire* (Dordrecht 2016); A.D. SCHRIFT (ed.), *The Logic of the Gift* (London 1997).

²⁸ M. FOUCAULT, Leçon du 7 février 1979 in: *Naissance de la biopolitique* (Paris 2004), 105-33; W.E. PATERSON, Beyond semi-sovereignty (1996) *GER POLIT* 167-84.

be only half-worthy.²⁹

Brandt's genuflection marked the beginning of *Ostpolitik* for FRG and later for the whole of Europe. At the same period, another genuflection took place at the 'Monument of the Common Market' with the introduction of the Four Freedoms. The Rome Treaties establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) provided for the establishment and evolution of an 'internal market' which would be founded on the free movement of goods, persons, services, and capital.

Ostpolitik in conjunction with the Four Freedoms formed the second *doron-antidoron* virtuous circle implicitly functioning as the 'sponsors' of the German and the European plans for their adaptation to the then new 'professional' givens of Cold War politics. This is the era when the historical phrase '*Ich bin ein Berliner*' was no longer merely reflecting the German predicament, but expanded its symbolism to a similar predicament at the community level of the ECSC and the EEC. As new European 'Berliners' struggling between isolation and self-complacency, the new European institutions within the walled environment set by states and international organizations, started strengthening the vision of a European citizen that enjoys democratic governance, constant economic development, and the prospect of supranational integration.

The gradual integration of the common market led to the institution of a common European currency, offering to the European Union the opportunity to increase and expand its influence around the world, reinstating however from the backdoor a particular self-complacency to the emancipated German and European 'Berliners'. The temporary euphoria seemed to strengthen even more European integration, but at the same time fired a 'lost treasure hunt' for states and business elites. The plan of EU's economic integration and currency union sought something more than a successful balance of interests for the Franco-German axis that monopolized its home affairs during the Cold War. The economic conceptualization of EU governance formulated the third *doron-antidoron* virtuous circle as a result of the violent 'meeting', on the one hand, of the dominant hegemonic context of international politics with the unequal configurations of power, and on the other hand, of the internal European tug of war for securing a better national standing in the global economic competition through the surplus value of the European Union³⁰.

The failure of the economico-political elite of the European Union to pursue any functional structural reforms through the Constitutional Treaty was counterbalanced by the Lisbon Treaty, as an attempt to concentrate a higher volume of democratization, transparency, and amplified effectiveness in the context of a balanced bureaucratic functionality among the central organs of the EU and its member states. In the course of this coordination, the role of nation-states started to grow to the expense of the European factor in the management of particular issues. The postwar divided German nation-state was not the exception: either Germany would have to adapt itself to the regularities of others, or the others would have to give way to the regularities of the Germans. In this particular 'war' of coincidences, the new *doron-antidoron* virtuous circle was formulated through the replacement of the collective egocentricity of the victors of the Second World War, which was overridden by the common European prospect for a better future, with the isolated egocentricity of national self-interest leading to the repetition of a vicious circle of unchecked power³¹.

In the ongoing supranational experiment of yesterday's EEC and today's EU, the gifts exchanged among states, elites, and citizens are still a mixture of visions, promises, and

²⁹ E. BAHR, *Das musst du erzählen* (Berlin 2013), 52.

³⁰ See J. HABERMAS, *Zur Verfassung Europas* (Berlin 2011), 120-29.

³¹ H.M. ENZENSBERGER, *Sanftes Monster Brüssel* (Berlin 2011), 50ff. Enzensberger's critique of the European predicament draws from Hannah Arendt's remarks upon her being awarded Denmark's Sonning prize in 1975, suggesting that similar to nation-states the EU is also facing "the pressure of the threatening transformation of all government ... into bureaucracies, the rule of neither law nor men but of anonymous offices or computers whose entirely depersonalized domination may turn out to be a greater threat to freedom and to that minimum of civility, without which no communal life is conceivable, than the most outrageous arbitrariness of past tyrannies has ever been." H. ARENDT, *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York 2003), 4.

motives addressed to all gift-recipients involved. In the first three stories, with the transition each time to the following story, the vision gradually faded away and the promises grew bigger, whereas the motive remained attractive. This peculiar colonization of European space in the first stories full of institutions and policies promoting economic prosperity and the welfare state, following the march of the neoliberal spirit through the economic crisis, became now reminiscent of past colonialism, when the gifts that the natives were made to exchange with the Europeans no longer had the value they were taught they had.

Economy stars in all these four stories. In the first three, everyone seems to be the winner since the contours of the march of economy are clearly delineated. In the fourth story, however, those involved in the vision of European integration seem to sell off what they had already inherited in the previous stories. States, European institutions, peoples, and citizens all appear to function as sole proprietors and customers in the ruthless economic competition of unfettered capitalism³². Whereas in the first story, European integration as a prospect entered the everydayness of states and citizens with a 'visa' and the traits of a merchant, in the next two stories, this entry visa was no longer necessary. At this stage, European integration has been already travelling visa-free all around Europe and the world. In the fourth story, nothing is self-explanatory anymore, and nothing is offered as a free gift. Everything seems to operate on time-charges calculated according to the capacity to consume the European integration through constantly proving that the functions of both states and institutions (and individuals) are totally customized according to a virtuous circle of evaluation.

European integration started offering useful gifts, which were later transformed into utilitarian (utilitarian Treaties, *utilitaristische Verträge*), so that today they turned into priceless gold for the selected few (markets). The idea of solidarity as a fundamental distinguishing feature of the European plan compared to past international politics, has been transformed into a 'scapegoat', or an 'institutional garbage' that is constantly well hidden, as if the Europeans are playing anew the hidden treasure hunt, this time searching for the lost vision of Europe. The march of European integration from one story to another is not recorded simply as a unilateral relation between *doron* and *antidoron*, but mostly as the sole and evident choice between gratuity-charity for the plenty and profit-making for the few. Unlike what is commonly thought, the European 'gift economy' has never been abandoned. Paradoxically, it has been always an economy of exchange delineated by the contours of the historical development of European integration *and* neoliberal capitalism.

Conclusion

This paper brought together two parallel reflections on the contemporary European predicament. Although focusing on two distinct aspects of this predicament, they are brought together by the concept of the gift as the common basis of critical reflection. Distancing itself from the idealization of the gift as pure or free gift, as well as from its rather oversimplified reading as a symbol of 'moral' arrangements, the paper read the gift as a political concept always already embedded in historically and culturally specific practices and discourses of reciprocity and exchange. In this context, the paper attempted a rethinking both of the historical development of European integration and of the critique already exercised on its current predicament.

In the first section, the paper suggested that the critique to the European post-democracy and its neoliberal (hence 'immoral') market economy drawing from moral economy theories remains problematic, at least insofar as the emphasis is placed on the 'immoral' character of market economy that imbues the conduct of European politics, calling for a return to Europe's own 'economy of the gift', to the foundational European principles of solidarity and equality that have been long abandoned. Readers of EU history and politics may simply (and correctly) object here that these principles have always been absent from the European project, at least in this idealized and politicized form. Yet, beyond this objection and against the above critique, the paper argued that market economy has never been free from its own ethical system currently delineated by the contours of neoliberal capitalism.

³² HABERMAS, *op. cit. supra* note 30, 48-81.

Albeit historically and culturally specific, this well-established system makes a claim to universality as the uncontested morality and rationality organizing all aspects of social and political life. As a corollary, any attempt to reinstate or empower these foundational principles through a set of European regulatory or legislative mechanisms remains equally problematic, as long as these principles remain meaningful and practically attainable by way through the practices and discourses of neoliberal capitalism.

In the second section, the paper presented the historical process of European integration as a series of subsequent virtuous circles of promises, expectations, and returns through four stories that demonstrate the relation between *doron* (gift) and *anti-doron* (gift in return) for European institutions, states, peoples, and citizens. In this constant gift-exchange practice, we monitor not only the historical development of European integration from the EEC to the EU, but also and most crucially how the exchange of visions, promises, and motives addressed to all gift-recipients involved, eventually brought us to the current state of (European) affairs. In the first three stories, the common European vision has been gradually giving way to highly motivated promises. These first three stories of the virtuous circle between *doron* and *antidoron* demonstrate the gradual rise of the neoliberal spirit along with a shared (common European) sense of euphoria and hope. In the fourth story however, with the Lisbon Treaty as the turning point, the *doron-antidoron* virtuous circle is marked not only by the dominance of neoliberal capitalism, but also and quite worryingly by the isolated egocentricity of member states.

The history of political thought needed states of nature, social contracts, founding myths, and Gardens of Eden to reconsider not only the starting point of politics, but also (and especially) its ends; not only where politics used to be or where it currently is, but also where it should be. Either in the context of gift economy or in its dialectical relation with *antidoron* within a system of exchange, the concept of the gift has been discussed here as opening up a thinking space outside the one delineated by the current European predicament, in order to rethink the course so far followed by the European Union (along with the term), where it is heading at, and perhaps where it could or should have been. For as our sympathetic yet tragic Shylock keeps alerting us against: “There is some ill a-brewing towards my rest, / For I did dream of money-bags to-night.”³³

³³ SHAKESPEARE, *op. cit. supra* note 2, 29 (2.5.17–8).