

BOOK REVIEWS

***Europe: the Faltering Project.* By Jürgen Habermas. (Cambridge, UK:: Polity Press, 2009). 231 pp. Paperback, ISBN 978-0-7456-4649-7.**

THIS BOOK CONSISTS of three distinctive parts: I. Portrait; II. Europe, the Faltering Project; III. On Reason in the Public Sphere. The Europe project, as well as the project for a constitutionalized world society project, might be faltering, but Habermas' intellectual experiment and endeavor is not. His critical approach to the faltering Europe project reveals him as both a critical thinker and staunch defender of the project.

The book has an unusual structure. Part I of the book - under the rubric "Portraits" - consists of Habermas' account of his intellectual interactions with three illustrious philosophers of our time: Richard Rorty, Jacques Derrida, and Ronald Dworkin. These accounts give us a titillating glimpse of Habermas, a staunch defender of the 'Europe project' which he conceives to be faltering today. Rorty came close to be the other mirror of Habermas as a philosopher, a writer, and a cosmopolitan European. In Habermas' eyes, as a philosopher, Rorty was sophisticated (p.13). As a writer, Rorty "came closest to the spirit of poetry" among those "philosophers rare who can write flawless scholarly prose"(p.14). As a leftist and cosmopolitan patriot, Rorty was "an old-fashioned sort of left intellectual, who believes in education and social reform." (p.14).

In comparison, the postmodernist Derrida is the intellectual foe of Habermas. No wonder, the account of Derrida becomes a narrative of the intellectual differences between Derrida and Habermas in how to answer the ethical question, "How one ought to live one's life?" For Habermas, the focal question is: "At what point exactly does Derrida's thought part ways with that of Heidegger?" Habermas does not forgive Derrida's anti-normative approach to the ethical life. Also, in Habermas' eyes, Derrida tends to "answer the basic ethical question from the perspective of a self-reflective relation of the ego towards an other, who expresses himself in the voice of a second person."(p.34).

In Habermas' eyes, Dworkin "is a maverick both among legal scholars and among philosophers."(p.37). Dworkin thus becomes the mediation for Habermas to introduce the question, "Can the law be construed as a morally neutral set of norms?"(39). Both Dworkin and Habermas understand that law and justice are not identical. But both are interested in the question, "May the judge in the robbers completely ignore the internal relation between law and justice?"(p.38). Dworkin thus becomes Habermas' voice of criticism of legal positivism in the legal theories of H.L.A.Hart and that of others. Noteworthy, Habermas is the author of *Between Fact and Norm*, a philosophical treatise of law. Of course, Habermas' view on law and justice, which he reveals in his account of Dworkin, will be an important ingredient of his defense of the Europe project.

Part III of the book under the rubric "On reason in the public sphere" deals with three issues: the constitutionalization of international law and its legitimacy problem,

BOOK REVIEWS

quality press as the backbone of the political public sphere, and the epistemic dimension of democracy. According to Habermas, the last issue is particularly close to his heart (p.vii). It is about "structuring influence that a normative theory of the public sphere can have on the design of empirical research."(ibid). For Habermas, "normative theorizing and empirical research go hand in hand in Aristotle's *Politics*. Today, political theories in the social contract tradition express an abstract 'ought' which clashes with sobering facts in our increasingly complex societies."(p.138).

For Habermas, separating normative theorizing and empirical research, two traditions of present democracy, are flawed. The liberal tradition focuses on "the legal institutionalization of human rights, and in particular of the negative rights'."(p.141). The republican tradition focuses renewing the concepts of citizenship and collective solidarity. The liberal concept does not see that democracy has a normative dimension. The republican tradition has an incorrect concept of the normative dimension, and has to appeal to nationalism in the end (p.142). Habermas offers the deliberate model as the alternative to both the liberal model and the republican model. "The deliberate model is more concerned with the reasonableness of discourses and negotiations than with the fair aggregation of the motives and success-oriented individuals or with the authentic character of the common will of a nation."(p.144). In it, "the procedures and communicative presuppositions of the formation of democratic opinion and will serve as the most important sluices for the discursive rationalization of the decisions of the government and of the administration."(ibid). The strength of the deliberate model lies in its emphasis on the truth-tracking potential of political deliberation and on the epistemic dimension of modern democracy.

The second part of the book, which has the same title as the book "Europe, the Faltering Project", is not a case study, but a philosophical reflection of the challenges and tasks facing European unification. It focuses on three issues: the role of intellectual in the European cause, the issue of Islam in Europe, and a policy of graduated European integration.

As Habermas sees it, Islam presents a challenge of full range to the Europe Project. To start with, the rapid, astonishing development of Islam in Europe raises again the normative issue of how European citizens should understand themselves. All European societies face this question, "How should we understand ourselves as members of a post-secular society, and what must we expect from one another if we want to ensure that social relations in firmly entrenched nation-states remain civil in spite of the growth of cultural and religious pluralism?"(p.65). The presence of Islam in Europe calls for re-examination of the concept of basic religious rights. It also presses hard the issue of religious toleration: What are the nature, content, requirement, scope, limits, and dangers of religious toleration? It inflames the cultural struggle between radical multiculturalism and militant secularism to define Europe. In such a context, Habermas is "primarily concerned with the image of an inclusive civil society in which equal citizenship and cultural difference complement each other."(p.69).

If one expects Habermas to provide a silver-bullet for the urgent problem and great challenge that Islam brings to the Europe project, one will be disappointed. When all is said and done, it is not clear what the solution to the problem is. For

BOOK REVIEWS

example, how should one respond to the proposal that some parts of the Sharia family law should be adopted for local Muslim populations in some areas in Europe? How should Europe be faithful to the principle of separation of church and state? Habermas does indicate that with regard to the challenge of Islam, religious toleration is going to be a pacemaker of the Europe project. That being said, it is not clear what Europe should do beyond the idea of having respect for basic religious freedom. Habermas puts a lot of eggs into the basket of wish that all European citizens, religious or secular alike, can be united with a new epistemic attitude, the willingness to search for truth as the common ground. However, the European reality might well dash such a wish. The essence of the issue of Islam for Europeans can be summed up in the question, "How should Europe respond to the movement to define Europe culturally in terms of Islam?" The principle of religious toleration is part of the spirit of our time. Yet, religious toleration itself can be a double-edged sword.

With regard to the Europe project itself, Habermas acknowledges that it is faltering. In spite of this, he advocates a policy of graduated European integration. On this point, Habermas' approach is more one of a sociologist and public intellectual than a philosopher. When all is said and done, Habermas still does not directly face such crucial questions: What is the European identity? How to define European identity amid a diversity of European cultures and challenges of non-European cultures? What to do with multiculturalism? Here, we find no easy exit. Habermas clearly believes that intellectuals including philosophers have a prominent role to play in the European cause. He believes that intellectuals will contribute more as public intellectuals to the cause, not as part of the academic elite. Perhaps, Habermas should have used the Europe cause as the pretext to define what public intellectuals ought to be, e.g., their responsibility, their task, and the like.

In sum, *Europe: the Faltering Project* is a thought-provoking and insightful read. Habermas' elucidation of details serve to illuminate and reveal the depth of his insights.

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