

Habermas, J. (2015). *The Lure of Technocracy* (Original title: *Im Sog der Technokratie*; trans. from German C. Cronin). Cambridge – Malden: Polity Press, pp. XI + 176.

The volume under review here, certainly can be perceived as a continuation of Jürgen Habermas' earlier works on the European integration and subjects correlated with it (e.g. collected in *Europe the Faltering Project* and *The Crisis of the European Union. A Response*; both books were translated from German by Ciaran Cronin and published by Polity Press in 2009 and 2012 respectively; see present author's review of the second one in *Horyzonty Polityki*, Vol. 5, No. 13, 2014, p. 157-159). *The Lure of Technocracy* is a collection of diverse texts, divided into three parts. The first one, which might be described as theoretical, is composed of three academic contributions, discussing mainly the European Union and its contemporary problems. In the following part, a reader can find four less formal texts (an interview, a speech, a contribution to the discussion and a review essay), generally touching upon the same broad subject. The final part, which discusses the relationship between Jews and Germans, is seemingly detached from two earlier parts. However, upon closer examination, it can also be rather easily fitted into Habermas' concerns regarding the European Union. In sum, all the texts collected in the reviewed volume could be classified as 'theoretically informed interventions'. The latter part of that category's name refers to the fact that all of them were written during the ongoing and multifaceted crisis of the EU (it is important to note, that the book was published in February 2015; that is, long before, for example, the zenith of the refugee crisis or the United Kingdom European Union membership referendum). The former, on the other hand, indicates that the texts also aim at a not exclusively academic audience (especially in parts two and three), in that they are not only anchored in the author's theoretical considerations, but they explain their intricacies in a more accessible way too. In the light of Habermas' own words expressed in the reviewed volume (p. 65), he would probably agree with the above proposed classification.

In the first text (in the opinion of the present reviewer it should be perceived as the spinal cord of the whole volume; the ensuing chapters in part one and two of the book, although it is perfectly possible to read them independently, tend to elaborate upon the arguments put forward in the first), after describing the pitfalls of the 'executive federalism' (that concept is closely related with 'technocracy' mentioned in the book's title; see especially pp. 11-13), which was supposed to resolve the banking and sovereign debt crisis in the eurozone, Habermas proposes an alternative model of further European integration. It consists of three constitutive steps, which are: the establishment of a political union comprising of the eurozone states; the broadening of such a union's competences (they should cover not only the fields of fiscal, budgetary or economic policies, but also – and crucially – the field of social policy. Needless to say, such a move would surely and decisively tilt the sovereignty balance towards the European level; it is not Habermas' intention, however, to make nation-states irrelevant as a consequence); the 'dethronement' of the European Council (as Habermas puts it on p. 32 when referring to austerity measures, "The [European – S.B.] Council imposes conditions on national governments that amount to treating the citizens of democratic polities like minors."), which in turn would open the way for the European Parliament to play the role of a co-legislator with the Council. According to the author, that element would to a large extent eliminate the current EU's democratic deficit. Obviously, that plan provokes one to ask an important question: is it feasible? In Habermas' view, the two most important requirements necessary in order to turn that vision into reality are a shift in Germany's perception of its role in Europe (its renewed and simultaneously reassessed leadership should stem first of all from the comprehension of the fact that the role of even the biggest European nation-states is rapidly decreasing on the global stage) and the europeanization of solidarity (according to Habermas, the excesses of capitalism of the age of dense globalization cannot be restrained by nation-states; hence the achievements of various European welfare-state models cannot be preserved by weakened solidarity-inspired institutions, conceived to operate exclusively at that level).

In the two following texts the concept of 'transnational democracy' is further explored. It is here, where Habermas explains why the

model proposed by him must differ from a classic federation: the attachment of various European peoples to their nation-states runs very deep and is justified by their usually long and successful existence. It is rather improbable then, to convince Europeans in the foreseeable future that such nation-states should be dissolved in a wider federation. At the same time, however, because of globalization “(...) all states are finding themselves forced to cooperate” (p. 55). As a result, the only realistic solution is a creation of a new kind of transnational polity, based upon ‘divided popular sovereignty’ (p. 58), enabling the sovereign to be active on two levels, i.e. the national (the old one) and the transnational (the new one). Such a maneuver would simultaneously (a) preserve the achievements and role of the nation-states (e.g. stemming from its possession of the monopoly over the legitimate use of coercive force), (b) legitimize and democratize supranational decision-making processes and (c) empower thus established institutions vis-à-vis hitherto unrestrained market forces.

The second part of the volume, besides commenting on the ideas summarized in the preceding paragraphs, above all constitutes an important wake up call for the traditional political actors. Habermas, probably to a certain extent counterintuitively (especially in the light of Brexit or the recent election of Donald Trump), still ascribes important role to political parties, trade unions and mainstream political media. In his opinion, in the times of crisis, all three should work towards ever-closer European integration, the creation of a genuine European public sphere and European solidarity unrestricted by national borders.

As it was already stated in the opening paragraph, at first sight the final part of the book impresses as somewhat detached from the earlier ones, which are tightly focused upon the problems of Europe. Nevertheless, if one approaches it through the prism of European integration, then it can also provoke interesting questions related with that subject. Habermas’ assessment of the role played by returning Jewish philosophers and sociologists in post-Second World War Germany can easily inspire, for example, a discussion on the merits of migrations. In turn, Martin Buber’s philosophy of dialogue is certainly capable of influencing the nascent European public sphere and subsequently redirecting it from the cacophony of national perspectives, towards a conversation in which “(...) those involved do

not spy or eavesdrop on each other like objects, but instead open themselves up for one another, they encounter each other on the social forum disclosed by dialogue and, as contemporaries, become narratively involved in each other's stories." (p. 125). Finally, the figure of Heinrich Heine also nowadays can function as a symbol emphasizing the importance of struggles for recognition and emancipation transgressing national, religious and ethnic borders.

In the current pessimistic post-Brexit mood, the future of the EU seems to be more uncertain than ever. Obviously, Habermas is fully conscious that what he is offering runs against current political sentiment in Europe. On the other hand, he clearly understands the responsibility of a public intellectual and the importance of his/her voice. On p. 64 he declares: "For me, the cynical defeatism of the so-called realist who fails to realize that the most pessimistic diagnosis does not excuse us from trying to do better is something like a structural opponent." He has been struggling with that structural opponent for quite a long time now. It is hard to resist the impression that a sort of a showdown with regard to the EU's future is fast approaching. In spite of the surrounding gloom, after reading another one of Habermas' coherent, inspiring and perseverant meditations on that future, one wants to believe, that his ideas do have a chance of eventually prevailing.

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