



accessible and it should appeal to a diverse readership. The questions that remain unexamined simply whet the appetite for more.

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Understanding Habermas: Communicative Action and Deliberative Democracy

E.O. Eriksen and J. Weigård

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Eriksen and Weigård set themselves a monumental task: to make Habermas's social and political theory user-friendly and straightforward. As any student of Habermas will know, understanding his enormous oeuvre is no mean feat. However, they succeed in highlighting the myriad dimensions of his thought on issues as wide ranging as law, constitution making, social learning, nation states, human rights, cosmopolitanism and globalization in a clear and manageable text. What is admirable is that they achieve this goal while managing to also explore the bugbear of his critics, the problem of universality, with aplomb. In the midst of this they also achieve something, about which Habermas himself has had difficulty persuading his detractors: they show that his work, especially on democracy, has an application in the real world.

The book itself is made up of two parts. The first half (and the Introduction) is written by Weigård and deals with Habermas's action theory and social theory. This section covers his theory of communicative action, learning processes and his discourse ethics. The second half, written by Eriksen, brings us up to date with Habermas's contributions to legal and political theory with particular reference to the transformations being wrought by globalization. This section sets out the challenge to solidarity and governance posed by this new social order and shows that Habermas is not the pied piper (albeit a benevolent one) as whom he is sometimes characterized. Eriksen and Weigård place Habermas in context not merely as an idealistic liberal clinging to enlightenment and leading his disciples on a crusade to replace representation with a deliberative (and therefore utopian) alternative. Instead, his work is shown in the context of concerns for issues of citizenship and pluralism, which preoccupy a large number of social theorists and form the basis of a more normative approach to social science. In effect,



they show how Habermas has succeeded in adding emphasis to the *social* in social science.

In the first part of the book, Weigård deals with the building blocks of Habermas's thought. This section of the book presents a sensitive reading that digests Habermas's early work making it a useful companion for the Habermas reader. This part of the book represents an accessible introduction to those who are new to the work of this giant of political theory. This section is not intended as an addition to the wide-ranging literature that critically engages with Habermas's work. Instead meticulous attention is paid to unpacking Habermas's own intentions for his offerings and in no place is this clearer than the development of a number of figures to summarize Habermas's thinking (pp 32; 41; 61; 76). One figure that I found particularly useful, labelled *Discourse-theoretical properties related to a three-world perspective* (p. 76), shows how various types of discourse develop in the subjective, objective and social worlds. While, this is a table that any effective reader of Habermas could in time work out for herself, its presence as a reference point would make the task of delving into Habermas's discourse ethics for the first time far less frustrating and, potentially, far more rewarding.

The second part of the book offers a change of pace and style. Eriksen deals with Habermas's political theory culminating in his proposals for a republican Europe based on post-national principles. Here again all of the major aspects of Habermas's contribution to political theory are efficiently dealt with. A checklist of the models and theories explored here includes: the model of deliberative democracy, the sources of legal legitimacy, the discourse theory of political processes, public opinion formation and rational politics, the features of a communicatively based politics, and some of Habermas's recent work on the possibility of a world domestic policy.

The difference between Weigård and Eriksen is that Eriksen's contribution makes use of Habermas's schemas rather than simply adopting an explanatory tone. While this is achieved without sacrificing the book's usefulness for the student of Habermas's thought, it does require more from the reader. In this part of the book, Habermas's work is shown in the wider context of the world of political theory including thinkers such as Arendt, Rawls and Dahl among others. Refreshingly, Eriksen and Weigård manage to avoid the trap that the authors of other texts who might seek to add to Habermas's mythical status as a giant of social and political theory fall victim to by concentrating on his work and that of his followers.

This book is perhaps best aimed at postgraduate students who are working with issues of recognition and multiculturalism (Habermas, 1994), almost a



decade after the publication in English of *Between Facts and Norms* (Habermas, 1996). Everyone working in the social sciences in this era where normative questions regarding the validity of democracy have taken centre stage and when the problems of rationality and universality have not been resolved, would benefit from reading this book.

References

- Habermas, J. (1994) 'Struggles for recognition in the democratic constitutional state', in C. Taylor (ed.) *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Habermas, J. (1996) *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

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Untimely Politics

Samuel A. Chambers

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This is an excitingly disruptive book. It offers a substantial thesis in philosophy and then employs it productively. It is lucid, argumentative and topical. It wastes no words. Perhaps the author should challenge himself with producing an illustrated or multi-media version, but other than that, he has mastered the material.

The project of the book, signalled by 'untimely' in the title, is to displace linear or progressive concepts of either the individual or of history. While 'discursive practices always prove to be saturated by history', they 'can never be understood to move in history in a linear, cyclical or any other predictable pattern' (p. 164). The obvious genealogy is to Foucault and Nietzsche, and the scholarly and referential aspects of the book are very thoroughly and persuasively handled. The tussle in the book is whether this outlook depoliticizes thought and disarms agency, as anti-poststructuralists have claimed. The author's answer is emphatically 'no', in fact, just the opposite.

From the anti-poststructuralist viewpoint, the individual is either fixed in discourse (which 'speaks' him/her) or relativized ('anything goes'). Either way, credible concepts of human agency supposedly go out the