The most recent collection of Jürgen Habermas’ occasional papers – first published in German in 2008 under the title "Ach Europa" – is now available to an international public in an English translation by Ciaran Cronin. Its title "Europe – the faltering project" refers to one of the two main issues the philosopher and sociologist addresses in this volume. First, as a cosmopolitan and an advocate of "global domestic politics" (Weltinnenpolitik), Germany's most prominent public intellectual is keenly interested in the problems of European integration. This is because he perceives the EU both as a model and a key building block for a new international order beyond confrontational relations between great powers, an order that more "realist" critics would call a utopia. The second major theme is the idea of "Reason in the Public Sphere". This concept has been at the core of Habermas' theorising since the early 1960s, when he published his most famous and arguably most influential work "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere". Habermas explores these two issues in a number of essays in the second and the third part of the book.

The first part however collects three portraits of fellow intellectuals of his generation. An obituary of sorts is devoted to the philosopher Richard Rorty, the inventor of the "Linguistic Turn", whose cosmopolitanism Habermas cherished. The reprint of a lecture on the intellectual origins of Jacques Derrida's philosophy serves as a sort of obituary, too, even if it was held in the latter's presence in Paris in 2000. Their philosophical differences in the appreciation of Martin Heidegger did not prevent Habermas and Derrida from a common intellectual intervention in the European public sphere. In a well-publicised manifesto "What binds Europeans" of May 2003 they had called for a forceful and united European Common
Foreign and Security Policy in the face of George Bush. In a third piece, Habermas praises the American lawyer Ronald Dworkin as the "maverick among legal scholars" for his activism as a public intellectual in the American public sphere. The three texts on Europe are much more political than the rather scholarly pieces on the public sphere. In "The Intellectual and the European Cause" Habermas explores the opportunity structures for intellectuals in the age of the internet. He acknowledges the internet's potential for improving participation, but expects that it will be harder for intellectuals to have a broader effect, since their interventions are bound to just disappear in an unedited and de-centred web. Interestingly enough, such a claim contradicts recent empirical findings with regard to the European public sphere of the internet. Despite its apparent openness, the internet closely reproduces the structure of traditional media, with big media outlets and major political actors being at its centre. Furthermore, Habermas spells out what he expects of intellectuals: They should demonstrate "a spark of imagination in conceiving of alternatives" and nothing less than "a mistrustful sensitivity to the normative infrastructure of the polity" (p. 55). There is no doubt that Habermas himself is committed to exploring alternative ways towards a better Europe. He is acutely aware of problematic developments in European society, as he demonstrates in a thoughtful piece on the "post-secular society" and the role of "Islam in Europe". Drawing on philosophical and historical models of religious coexistence in Europe, he calls for mutual recognition, and a certain willingness to learn from one another as a basis for coexistence and societal integration of the large European Muslim communities. By contrast, Habermas' own intellectual critique of the inadequate decision making power of the European Union remains rather conventional and reflects his own left-of-centre political views. As a political intellectual his set of alternatives remains confined to the standard structures of the discourse on the EU. Habermas advocates changing the institutions for political reasons, namely, in order to achieve a strong Europe that protects the Europeans
from the negative effects of globalisation. However, stronger European institutions do not necessarily produce change in material policy. Whether a more integrated EU will actually save the European social model and uphold international law, or rather pursue a strategy of free markets and the survival of the fittest, will crucially depend on the political preferences of the elected office-holders at the time. Similarly, Habermas' "Plea for a Policy of Graduated Integration" as a solution to "European Politics at an Impasse" is hardly a groundbreaking alternative strategy. The problems of Europe "à deux vitesses" with regard to the cohesion of the European construction have been discussed since the 1970s.²

The articles in the third part "On Reason in the Public Sphere" are most interesting for the reader with a broader theoretical interest. Habermas explores the problems of the "Constitution for a World Society" and discusses the implications of recent developments on media markets for the role of "The Quality Press as the Backbone of the Political Public Sphere". In "Political Communication in Media Society" Habermas refines his own theorising with regard to the actually existing public sphere of the media, and the problems of empirical research. The essay is devoted to the recently deceased Bernhard Peters, who had pioneered the application of normative theory of deliberative democracy in empirical media research.

The final piece in the English edition is a recent interview on the "Lessons from the Financial Crisis". Even though the lessons Habermas advocates in terms of a reconsideration of neoliberal policies are by no means surprising, his critique is all the more important as governments and international institutions have so far been quite reluctant to implement more than superficial changes, such as caps on bonuses.

All considered, the volume provides an interesting overview of Habermas' views as a public intellectual and a member of a network of intellectuals. For the theoretically inclined reader, the pieces on the public sphere provide a very good summary of the most recent refinement of Habermasian thought.

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