



Eurozine News Item

Theory and practice: Habermas at eighty



Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik celebrates **Jürgen Habermas'** eightieth birthday on 18 June with an issue dedicated to the influential social philosopher. Friends, colleagues and combatants have contributed texts, paying tribute not only to an exceptional academic, but also to an exceedingly open-minded and inquisitive interlocutor.

Seyla Benhabib, who was a student of Habermas in the late 1970s, characterizes Habermas as "*the* relevant contemporary protagonist in the tradition of cosmopolitanism". In her [article](#) (in German), she writes:

To me "cosmopolitanism" means to acknowledge that people are moral persons who have the right to be protected by law, on the basis of the rights owing to them not as citizens or as members of an ethnic group, but simply as human beings. Moreover, cosmopolitanism means that borders between countries are increasingly penetrable in the twenty-first century, and that justice within these borders and justice beyond these borders are interconnected, even if tensions between them can and will arise. With Jürgen Habermas, this position of human rights and cosmopolitanism produced from the very beginning the will to "include the Other", regardless of national origin.

Cosmopolitanism seems incompatible with democracy, since in democracy the constitution derives its legitimacy from the collective will of a political community — be it a state or a confederation. Referring to Kant's concept of *Weltbürgerrecht*, or cosmopolitan law, Benhabib argues the contrary: agreements like the UN Declaration of Human Rights are elements of an evolving global civil society. This necessitates a discussion of "democracy in times of legal cosmopolitanism" — especially in the light of contemporary migration.

Read also: [Axel Honneth, "The sublimation of the Marxist legacy" \(de\)](#); [Oskar Negt, "Theory and practice. Jürgen Habermas on his eightieth birthday" \(de\)](#).

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