Our age of crisis has taken many more forms than just the widespread rejection of Enlightenment ideals. Possibly, its most visible contemporary manifestations are: (a) the devastation of the planet's "ecological equilibrium" (25); (b) the consistent anthropological impoverishment and individualistic atomisation of human societies (e.g. "social conflicts" read as individual "psychic problems" [26]; "anomie" [31]; "confusion between... [individual] success and... [collective] understanding" [32]); and (c) the undiminished international instability (e.g. religion's "self-destructive forms" [63]; "Western military interventions in various areas of the planet" [77]).

Patiently and laboriously, Habermas has addressed in his complex oeuvre all of the aforementioned forms of crisis of our age. It is Giacomantonio's task to survey Habermas' accounts in this slender book (99 pages).

Specifically, Giacomantonio praises the erudite, articulate and abstract "theoretical wealth" of leading German sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929) as a rare exception to current scholarly and scientific trends (78). Avoiding academic partisanships and specialist parochialisms, Habermas is said to have scrutinised and engaged with an "ample spectrum of stances" in the attempt to provide a reasoned, synthetic as well as analytical understanding of the enduring age of crisis (77). Swimming against the current, Habermas believes the Enlightenment project—modernity itself—to have to be brought to completion, not discarded.

Habermas' first major intellectual accomplishments are claimed to be his 1960s and 1970s studies in the economic and administrative structures of late-modern Western industrial societies. Then, Habermas focused primarily upon the legitimisation of such structures via political procedures of mass participation, as well as upon the growing class fluidity, which Giacomantonio describes as the "dissolution" and "fragmentation" of traditional class consciousness and discourses (25).

According to Habermas, the post-war decades had seen capitalist societies benefiting from large-scale entrepreneurial pursuits, under the cooperative scrutiny and sophisticated direction of the State, which allowed these pursuits to serve vastly accepted inclusive social aims (e.g. "urban and regional planning", "research and development", "unemployment benefits", "public welfare"; 25). These aims facilitated the legitimisation of the pursuits

themselves, as well as the State's own authority. Then, this virtuous circularity ended. For Habermas, the 1970s mark the beginning of the age of crisis.

The 1970s "late" or "mature" capitalism (23) continued to display massive State intervention in the economy. Yet, an increasing outgrowth of private interests started to escape from State control, leading to "systemic" failures (24) and to a generalised loss of faith in the State. This reduction of legitimacy was indicated by declining political participation, which was due too to the opacity of class consciousness in now tertiary-dominated economies. A variety of rescue plans were implemented by national governments, often via ever-increasing State intervention and techno-scientific legitimisation thereof. Regularly, these plans proved of little success, at least as the previous inclusive social aims were concerned.

Rather, the recurring reliance upon science and technology as grounds for political action induced considerable "de-politicisation" (28) of collective life and institutional decision-making. Within this novel frame of reference, whereby political issues were turned into "technical problems"(28), the public opinion was morphed into a passive spectator or sheer recipient of the diktats of a self-enclosed—and often self-serving—"expert" bureaucracy. In any case, the vastly accepted inclusive social aims of the post-war decades started to wane, becoming a more and more remote memory of better, foregone times.

It is Habermas' opinion that the highly educated "expert" bureaucrats of recent decades have failed consistently to perceive the unavoidable connection between factual scientific investigation and value-driven technical application. To counter this phenomenon, Habermas has recommended the establishment of a more open critical exchange amongst experts and between experts and the public at large. In this perspective, communication should serve as an antidote to the former's intellectual insularity and to the latter's political disaffection.

Concerned with the de-politicisation of socio-political phenomena and populations of democratic countries, Habermas began to explore the socio-political relevance of "communication and linguistic dimensions" that were to become the hallmark of his later intellectual production (31). Indeed, the 1980s witnessed a vast output of studies by Habermas on the deeper structures of anthropological impoverishment and atomisation in

modern nations. In them, Habermas came to conceive of "society" as comprising: (a) the "system" of professional, formal networks of "strategic behaviour"; and (b) the personal, informal "life-world" of existentially meaningful behaviour ("*Lebenswelt*"; 31). On the one hand, human activity was being described by Habermas as the "success" or "influence" of the competitive individual; whilst on the other stood the truly life-defining, cooperative linguistic ("communicative") praxes seeking mutual "understanding" and engendering shared "identities" (32).

Initiating the age of crisis, the former dimension had been invading the latter by using communication instrumentally, i.e. the shared linguistic means for genuine self-expression and social cohesion were turned into sheer means of self-maximisation. To respond to this invasion, Habermas has recommended the overcoming of national barriers and the creation of a "cosmopolitan... deliberative democracy" centred upon ethical and normative issues and aims (35). Roughly speaking, more conversation about justice, the common good and the like–as already anticipated in his reflections on science and technology of the 1970s–would mean more democracy; more democracy would mean more legitimacy; more legitimacy more effective laws; and more effective laws more social and socially acceptable results. All of this, however, should be taking place on a global scale.

Habermas' reflections on democracy became even more relevant in the 1990s. Then, in the face of an even faster-paced post-Cold-War economic and cultural globalisation, it was the very cradle of modern democracy that was to experience its deepest crisis, i.e. the nation State as such. Apart from intensifying the problems that Habermas had already tackled in the 1970s and 1980s, fin-de-siècle globalisation further deprived States of the crucial means of control over the "economic dimension" (40). In particular, free capital trade robbed the State of those vital "fiscal" resources that were needed for its administrative functions (44). Weaker States became even less credible to the populations, whose interests they were still expected to serve. The legitimacy of their power and even their own raison d'être became shakier. In the process, the vastly accepted inclusive social aims of the post-war decadeswere even openly rejected by leading parties and statesmen, who engaged actively in the persistent reduction of the public sphere. Deprived of the State's support, larger and larger sectors of the population found themselves poorer, marginalised, and more vulnerable.

In the final decade of the 20th century, Habermas stressed further his commitment to a "cosmopolitan" solution of the ongoing crisis (43). In his view, a global economy needs a global deliberative democracy. This is not the same thing as to say that the world needs a world State. Rather, the world needs actual world politics and actual world policies. International organisations are already in place (e.g. the "United Nations", the "World Trade Organisation", the "International Monetary Fund" [46]). What is missing is the democratic appropriation of those institutions as positive means for global governance.

Interestingly, the "European Union" has been described by Habermas as an example of existing trans-national coordination and a possible force for progress, which he understands as the generation of a new political community reflecting truly democratic values and substantial ethico-political aims, such as solidarity and social inclusion (45). As an opposite model of global governance, Habermas has often highlighted the "hegemonic unilateralism" of the United States of America, which has accompanied throughout an economic globalisation capable of producing a "more unjust... more insecure" world and a threat to our "survival" as a species (48).

In particular, Habermas has stressed of late the centrality of the rule of law for the proper functioning of any complex social arrangement. As opposed to the brutal force exemplified by military intervention, a binding legal framework springing from democratic deliberation would constitute in his view a powerful means to a noble, desirable end: "to include the other without assimilating him" (50).

As further explained and substantiated in Habermas' works of the 2000s, democracy should be thought of as much more than just a set of public institutions and formal procedures, for it is also an array of informal social praxes and individual forms of conduct. Within his deliberative and cosmopolitan model of democratic rule, Habermas has ended up combining the "liberty of the ancients" with the "liberty of the moderns" (51). In other words, both republican active participation and liberal individual-rights-protecting public guarantees are embraced as important components of actual democracy. Societies need both enduring compromises amongst rights-endowed self-interested individuals and the formation and expression of collective will via societal "self-clarification" (37).

Habermas resolves in an analogous manner the tension between liberals and

Francesco Giacomantonio, Introduzione al pensiero politico di
Habermas. Il dialogo della ragione dilagante (Milano-Udine:
Mimesis, 2010) | 5

communitarians on the much-debated issues of multiculturalism (51-6) and religious tolerance (61-8). Both universal, trans-cultural principles and cultural rights are said to be important for the socially inclusive survival of democratic States in a more and more inter-connected international reality. Disagreements and problems are bound to arise; still, what matters most is to have enough institutional and conceptual resources as to be able to tackle such disagreements and problems without falling into either coercion or social disintegration, which destroy genuine social cohesion and solidarity (54-6).

This, albeit sketchy, is the overview of Habermas' intellectual production that Francesco Giacomantonio offers in his new book. It is indeed a clear and effective account of Habermas' nearly unique oeuvre, as the author of the *Introduction to the Political Thought of Habermas* cites Touraine and Castoriadis as the only other equally daring grand theorists of recent times (80). The book comprises six chapters, an introduction, some final considerations and an appendix by another author. The presentation waves between a thematic subdivision and a chronological organisation of the material. Either way, the book addresses all the essential aspects of Habermas' vast production. By this feat alone, it deserves much praise.

If any criticism is to be passed on it, then it must be pointed out that the book could be even more slender: the appendix by Angelo Chielli is redundant and unnecessary (83-90); whilst the 6th chapter, which deals with Habermas' relevance to contemporary academic pursuits (69-75), could have been reduced to, and included with, the author's final considerations (77-81). Also, the book would benefit from an analytical index of cited topics and authors.