

On Habermas's Constitutional Patriotism

Chiun-Tseng Lee

Abstract

In contrast to the conventional national sense of identity, Habermas proposes “patriotism of the constitution” as the only beneficial basis for a collective identity. However, there is deep doubt whether the radically universalistic option or inspiration of a constitutional patriotism can provide an identity-shaping force which has not only moral legitimacy, but also historical plausibility. This paper shows that for Habermas, patriotic loyalty to the principles of the constitution, which have a universalist content, requires a historical self-understanding of the nation that can support a liberal political culture. Further, such a constitutional patriotism is based on Habermas's idea of legal persons. He thinks that legal persons should not be imagined as individual atoms; each person must be respected both as an individual and in the context of the cultural life-world. After exploring Habermas's constitutional patriotism, this paper criticizes it for neglecting the world of passion implicit in collective identity and tries to provide some cures.

Key Words: national identity, constitutional patriotism, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor