



The Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidence from Patočka to Havel (Pitt Russian East European)

By Aviezer Tucker

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The Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidence from Patočka to Havel (Pitt Russian East European) By Aviezer Tucker

A critical study of the philosophy and political practice of the Czech dissident movement Charter 77. Aviezer Tucker examines how the political philosophy of Jan Patočka (1907–1977), founder of Charter 77, influenced the thinking and political leadership of Vaclav Havel as dissident and president.

Presents the first serious treatment of Havel as philosopher and Patočka as a political thinker. Through the Charter 77 dissident movement in Czechoslovakia, opponents of communism based their civil struggle for human rights on philosophic foundations, and members of the Charter 77 later led the Velvet Revolution. After Patočka's self-sacrifice in 1977, Vaclav Havel emerged a strong philosophical and political force, and he continued to apply Patočka's philosophy in order to understand the human condition under late communism and the meaning of dissidence. However, the political/philosophical orientation of the Charter 77 movement failed to provide President Havel with an adequate basis for comprehending and responding to the extraordinary political and economic problems of the postcommunist period.

In his discussion of Havel's presidency and the eventual corruption of the Velvet Revolution, Tucker demonstrates that the weaknesses in Charter 77 member's understanding of modernity, which did not matter while they were dissidents, seriously harmed their ability to function in a modern democratic system. Within this context, Tucker also examines Havel's recent attempt to topple the democratic but corrupt government in 1997–1998. The Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidence from Patočka to Havel will be of interest to students of philosophy and politics, scholars and students of Slavic studies, and historians, as well as anyone fascinated by the nature of dissidence.

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Presents the first serious treatment of Havel as philosopher and Patocka as a political thinker. Through the Charter 77 dissident movement in Czechoslovakia, opponents of communism based their civil struggle for human rights on philosophic foundations, and members of the Charter 77 later led the Velvet Revolution. After Patocka's self-sacrifice in 1977, Vaclav Havel emerged a strong philosophical and political force, and he continued to apply Patocka's philosophy in order to understand the human condition under late communism and the meaning of dissidence. However, the political/philosophical orientation of the Charter 77 movement failed to provide President Havel with an adequate basis for comprehending and responding to the extraordinary political and economic problems of the postcommunist period.

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By Aviezer Tucker Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #2096304 in eBooks
- Published on: 2000-08-15
- Released on: 2000-08-15
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

Review

"The Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidence from Patocka to Havel is a very interesting, rich discussion of the effort to apply philosophical insights to real politics, a retrospective study of that effort, and a deep meditation on the meaning of intellectual responsibility in our time. Tucker writes clearly and obviously knows his subject well. This is first-rate stuff." -- *Thomas Rockmore, Duquesne University*

... very well argued, incisively written, and based on extremely wide reading. The subject matter is one of the greatest importance. -- *Jon Elster, Columbia University*

...remarkable and complex... philosophical significance and deserves to be better known... An impressively argued work, informative and rewarding. -- *Peter Caws, George Washington University*

From the Author

"*The Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidence from Patocka to Havel* is a very interesting, rich discussion of the effort to apply philosophical insights to real politics, a retrospective study of that effort, and a deep meditation on the meaning of intellectual responsibility in our time. Tucker writes clearly and obviously knows his subject well. This is first-rate stuff."--Tom Rockmore, Duquesne University"*The Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidence from Patocka to Havel* is a unique and pathbreaking work. It is very well argued, incisively written, and based on extremely wide reading. The subject matter is one of the greatest importance. Moreover, the theses defended in the work are both original and persuasive. Dr. Tucker unites a sympathetic knowledge of the phenomenological tradition with a sophisticated understanding of modern politics in general and of Czechoslovak and Czech politics in particular. He has a relentlessly commonsensical attitude towards the grand political claims that are often made in the Heideggerian tradition, yet does not dismiss Heideggerian philosophy or phenomenology as meaningless. For me, one of the great revelations of reading Dr. Tucker's book was that he enabled me to see intellectual qualities in Heidegger that had previously escaped me. Being able to write on Heidegger without jargon or obscurantism is a rare feat indeed. Equally rare is Dr. Tucker's ability to straddle political philosophy, political theory, and analysis of political events."--Jon Elster, Columbia University

"In this remarkable and complex case study of the relations between philosophy and politics, Aviezer Tucker examines the concept of dissidence and its role in the emergence of the post-Soviet Czech Republic. The Czech experience is of prime philosophical significance and deserves to be better known. Not only have two Czech presidents, Tomas Masaryk and Václav Havel, been serious philosophers in their own right, but the pivotal work of the Socratic Jan Patocka animated the challenge of the Charter 77 group and gave it phenomenological grounding and rationale as 'life in truth' . . . An impressively argued work, informative and rewarding."--Peter Caws, George Washington University

"At least two books for the price of only one lurk within this volume's covers. There is, on the one hand, an introduction to the philosophical thought of Jan Patocka, with its roots in Husserl, Heidegger, Plato, and some of the other usual philosophical suspects. On the other hand, there is an informed analysis of the underlying thought and some of the principal political moments of the so-called Velvet Revolution and its aftermath . . . eminently useful in doing philosophy's job of understanding the world in which we live, as farcical and devoid of the Patockan spirit of sacrifice as this globalized world may now have become on both sides of the former 'Iron Curtain'." William L. McBride, Purdue, *Ethics*, July 2002

". . . insightful, well-written, authoritative, and informative."Michael S. Cummings, *Utopian Studies* 13, no. 1, 247-50 2002

"This is a valuable work, well worth reading. "James Satterwhite, American Historical Review, February 2002

"It is rare to find a book which examines the philosophical foundations of communist-era dissident movements in any of the former Soviet-bloc countries. This book . . . is therefore a welcome addition. . . .a stimulating read even for those who do not count themselves as philosophers."--Vit Novotny, Europe-Asia Studies

"This is an important book . . . will be of interest to . . . all readers who seriously contemplate the challenge of 'living in truth' while participating in institutional politics, even at less lofty levels than the presidency." -- Yvonne Howell, Slavic and East European Journal, Spring 2002

"Impressively covers many disciplines . . . Impressively far-reaching in scope . . . Tucker deserves commendation for delivering such an insightful and stimulating work."--Rick Fawn, Slavic Review, Fall 2003

About the Author

Aviezer Tucker is editor of the East European Constitutional Review at New York University. During the 1998-1999 academic year, Tucker was a Mellon postdoctoral research fellow at the Department of Political Science at Columbia University. Previously he taught in the department of Politics and European Studies at Palacky University in the Czech Republic.

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