



The Art of the Impossible: Politics as Morality in Practice

Vaclav Havel

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There is no shortage of politicians who make a habit of shooting from the hip, but it is much rarer to find one who speaks from the heart. Václav Havel knows no other way to speak, or to write. Both as a dissident and as a playwright it was his sworn purpose for many years to combat evil with nothing but truth. As president of Czechoslovakia, and now of the Czech Republic, he has clung to that habit, refusing to turn over either his conscience or his voice to political handlers and professional speechwriters. Instead he assumes the additional burden--for him, it is a distinct pleasure--of composing all of his oratory. Audiences from New York to New Delhi, Oslo to Tokyo, have been the luckier for his decision.

This volume consists of thirty-five of these essays, written between the years 1990 and 1996, that manage to be both profoundly personal and profoundly political. Havel writes of totalitarianism, its miseries and the nonetheless difficult emergence from it.

He describes how his country and the other postcommunist countries are learning democracy from scratch and are encountering obstacles from inside and out. He marvels at the single technology-driven civilization that envelops the globe, and the challenges this presents to multicultural realities. He invokes the duty of every person alive to prevent hatred and fear from derailing history ever again. He acknowledges "the advantage it is for doing a good job as president to know that I do not belong in the position and that I can at any moment, and justifiably, be removed from it." And he reminds us that--contrary to all appearances--common sense, moderation, responsibility, good taste, feeling, instinct, and conscience are not alien to politics, but are the very key to its long-term success.

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