



# Postnational Identity: Critical Theory and Existential Philosophy in Habermas, Kierkegaard, and Havel

*Martin Beck Matustik*

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The Second Edition, new Preface 2013. Contradictory interpretations have been applied to history-making events that led to the end of the Cold War: Václav Havel, using Kierkegaardian terms, called the demise of totalitarianism in East-Central Europe an "existential revolution" (i.e. an awakening of human responsibility, spirit, and reason), while others hailed it as a victory for the "New World Order." Regardless of one's point of view, however, it is clear that the global landscape has been dramatically altered. Where once the competition between capitalism and communism provided a basis for establishing political- and self-identity, today the destructive forces of nationalist identity and religious and secular fundamentalism are filling the void. Offering the most extensive examination of Habermas's and Kierkegaard's critiques of nationalist identity available, *Postnational Identity* dramatically confronts the traditional view of existential philosophy as antisocial and uncritical. This book shows how Kierkegaardian theory and practice of radically honest communication allows us to rethink the existential in terms of Habermas's communicative action, and vice versa. As the author explains, the foundations of his work in the critical theory and existential philosophy, brought together in this book, engender two forms of suspicion of the present age. The critical theorist, such as Jürgen Habermas, unmask the forms in which social and cultural life become systematically distorted by the imperatives of political power and economic gain. The existential critic, like Søren Kierkegaard and Václav Havel, is suspicious of the various ways in which individuals deceive themselves or other people. This study aims to integrate Kierkegaard's and Havel's existential critique of motives informing human identity formation with Habermas's critique of the colonialization of fragmented, anomic modern life by systems of power and money... The author's argument is that existential critique and social critique complement each other and overcome their respective limitations. One of the first works to treat seriously the existential thought of Havel, the book will hold enormous appeal for students and professionals involved in existential philosophy, critical theory, philosophy, and, more generally, political science, literary theory, communications, and cultural studies.

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