

INTERVIEW

EMANCIPATION BETWEEN THE NATION AND HUMANITY

T. G. Masaryk and the Legacy
of Czech-Austrian Philosophy

Interview with Jan Svoboda,
by Joseph Grim Feinberg

For this volume of Contradictions, in the wake of the widely celebrated but less deeply reflected upon hundredth anniversary of the founding of Czechoslovakia, Joseph Grim Feinberg sits down with Jan Svoboda from the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences to discuss the work of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the philosopher and sociologist who became the first president and leading intellectual advocate of the Czechoslovak state. In 2017 Svoboda published a monograph on Masaryk's thought, Masarykův realismus a filosofie pozitivismu (Masaryk's realism and the philosophy of positivism; Prague, published by Filosofia), and in 2018 he co-edited (with Aleš Prázný) a volume of commentary on Masaryk's reflections on the so-called "Czech question": Česká otázka a dnešní doba (The Czech question and the contemporary age, published in Prague by

Filosofia; an English edition of the book is currently in preparation). Masaryk is widely referenced in Czech political discourse. For some he is viewed as an idol of modern history; for others as an empty symbol that legitimates the current social order. For many non-Czech readers, meanwhile, this foundational figure in Czech intellectual history remains virtually unknown. In this interview, Svoboda explains the central tenets of Masaryk's thought and presents a complex picture of a theorist who engaged in productive debates with the influential thinkers of his age, including Karl Marx.

The Czech Question and Panhuman Emancipation

Last year marked one hundred years since the founding the Czechoslovak Republic, and much has been said about the first president of the Czechoslovak Republic, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. For those interested in Czech history, Masaryk is best known for his political career. But was he also a significant *thinker*, someone who might have something to contribute today's philosophical debates on an international level?

I primarily view T. G. Masaryk as a thinker of national emancipation who continued in the line of his ideological predecessors and humanists – the religious reformer Jan Hus, the founder of modern pedagogy John Amos Comenius, and the founder of modern Czech historiography and eminent Czech politician František Palacký. Masaryk sought a viable way, in accordance with international intellectual trends, to integrate the Czech nation into the family of the world's advanced nations. His lifelong endeavor was advocating for the Czech nation to be as it were on the “cutting edge”: a significant social element that could help codetermine international cultural and political events. Masaryk's prewar efforts at democratizing the Austro-Hungarian imperial system consisted of attempts at modernizing and then gradually federalizing it. He provisionally referred to this as “political” realism in the 1895 book *The Czech Question*, a work that bore the telling subtitle *The Endeavors and Yearnings of the National Revival*. This then led into the founding of a modern democratic state in Central Europe – the First Czechoslovak Republic – at the end of the First World War.¹ Masaryk, who was a philosopher by profession and had worked for nearly thirty years as a professor at the Prague university, fulfilled the Platonic ideal of the philosopher and statesman like no one else at the time.

¹ As the leading representative of the Czech diplomatic resistance in exile and a staunch opponent of the war that had broken up the monarchy after the assassination in Sarajevo, Masaryk eventually organized the foreign legions fighting for an independent Czechoslovak state, and in 1918 he became the first president in the history of our country.

It is therefore no wonder that Masaryk has remained a kind of perpetual point of orientation for domestic political representation, and his name is still mentioned frequently today in the media in connection with Czech politics and the direction the country is taking. It is also not unusual to hear him mentioned in various sociological-political and historical contexts. Politicians from a variety of parties on our contemporary political spectrum affirm his acts as a founder and express more or less critical views on his incontestable contribution to the state. This is certainly justifiable within the framework of preserving and developing our domestic democratic traditions and democracy in general. In my opinion, Masaryk's legacy left to our contemporary political and cultural elites is still alive in his specific conception of humanity and democracy. This current of thought arose and developed out of the intellectual mycelium of the Bohemian Reformation, and it has the potential to contribute to the cultivation and stability of democracy as a whole. This is quite a challenge from the perspective of a small democratic state that has been functioning for thirty years², and the difficulty of rising to meet it is often criticized and misunderstood.

This became especially evident in 2018, when we commemorated the 100th anniversary of Czech, or respectively "Czechoslovak" statehood. The ideological integrity and necessary consistency – the *authenticity* that was distinctive to all of his political positions and actions – was mostly lost from the fragmentary media evaluations of Masaryk's personality. There were also simplifications and evaluations of Masaryk's services to the state even from those political opinions and positions that are utterly opposed to his, and this aroused misgivings concerning whether his legacy is merely a kind of empty formal memory and thus, in this sense, also a source of various *misinterpretations*.

What examples are there of misinterpreting him?

It has not been said enough in the necessary contexts and with the necessary emphasis that being an integral part of world politics is not a matter of course. Although Masaryk perceived Czech politics as a part of the national culture, or more precisely, as a national program, he also knew just as well that it would not be possible to engage in politics on an international level without responsible individuals whose preparation was well-rounded. In this sense, he merely declared that if the "Czech question" was a question about the sense of a Czech existence, it had to be an international question. In essence, it can be said that this is how he addressed the sense of Czech pettiness, which he saw not only in an insufficient general education in the humanities and the necessity of drawing from literary sources other than only German ones. He perceived this national provinciality and the resulting personal immaturity of individual political actors as emblematic of the political immaturity of the Czech nation.

² After the breakup of Czechoslovakia in 1992, the current Czech Republic was founded on 1 January, 1993.

It is precisely in connection with this internal lineage of political reform that Masaryk was steadfastly insisting already in the mid-1890s that above all else the Czechs must come to an agreement with the German inhabitants in their territory. He also insisted that the Czechs must effectuate their national independence autonomously: he generally spoke of “autonomy in the sense of self-government.” It is precisely in this structured endeavor to shape Czech politics in the mold of other nations that we can see the embryonic form of Masaryk’s modern ideas, which would take shape in a political configuration later, and which would give shape to his idea for a federalized Europe, or rather: *The New Europe* (the title of Masaryk’s book published in English in 1918.)

What exactly did he mean by this “self-government”? Did he think that each nation should administer its own cultural affairs, or did he have territorial autonomy in mind? In the case of the Czechs, territorial autonomy was a fairly complicated issue, since Czechs and Germans often lived in the same places...

In *The Czech Question*, Masaryk built upon the groundwork of Palacký’s constitutional program. He had essentially founded it upon an effective interlinkage of the idea of “natural” and “historical” law. Thus, besides efforts by individual nations aimed at self-determination, the other thing at stake was a special constitutional position for the Czech lands (in historical respects the “Lands of the Bohemian Crown”) within the framework of the monarchy. Like Palacký, Masaryk also speaks of the need for democratism in the sense of “rigorous” constitutionalism, which follows up on Palacký’s efforts at promoting a federal structure for the Austrian empire, in the interest of (among other goals) creating a conceptual barrier between pan-Germanism and pan-Russianism. This was primarily a political program, which concerned the need to reform Austria at that time on the basis of general democratic principles. In principle, it was a type of national independence movement that arose like a long-yearned-for possibility of integrating the Czech nation into the larger (supranational) social whole that the Austrian empire was at the time, and not just as a kind of separatist republicanism. Masaryk and Palacký both rejected every kind of revolutionary ideology, including that of the proletarian milieu that was advocating communism in their times.

Let’s return later to Masaryk’s perspective on revolution, but meanwhile, concerning the so-called Czech question...

In Masaryk’s thinking, it is precisely in this area of nonviolent political reform that the Czech question and thus even Czech politics should become a kind of “living” part of modern, civilized world politics. In order for politics to be trustworthy and generally respected it mustn’t lose the ability to relate functionally to its holistic context – it has to effectively address world politics through its ideas or original style, and that means helping to co-create the political reality along with other nations. This is always a *con-*

ditio sine qua non for Masaryk. And for a Czech politician who is “fully formed,” this then means that he has to be aware of both his belonging to a broader international tradition as well as the creative specifics of his national tradition in order to be comprehensible to the political world.

So he wanted the Czechs to open up to the world. But does this also mean that the world should look for inspiration from the Czechs? What “Czech specificity” did Masaryk think might contribute to the advancement of the whole world?

For Masaryk the question that should place our nation before some kind of imaginary gate to the tilyard of the world events of the time was: What is “Czech” *humanity*? Masaryk finds this most distinctive national ideal by harking back to his ideological predecessors in the Bohemian Reformation. And the premier exponent of this was the Czech religious reformer and proponent of John Wycliffe’s Realism, Jan Hus.³ From the subsequent Hussite revolution and during the 15th century, the main religious grouping to arise in Bohemia and Moravia was the Utraquists or Calixtinists.⁴ And then there were the Czech Brethren,⁵ a more radical movement of adherents to the ideas of Petr Chelčický, who professed nonviolence, equality and a strict return to the Gospels; they refused the notion of a church connected with warfare and worldly power and believed in the leadership of independent, spiritually conscious and educated elites – which they called the “hidden” church. The last bishop of this Unity of Brethren (the post-White Mountain religious exile John Amos Comenius) also followed up on these irenic endeavors, and they were then applied to the formation of modern Czech politics by Palacký and Masaryk.

Masaryk perceived Hussitism, and by extension the Bohemian Reformation, as a period when Czechs really stepped outside of their own shadow and for nearly two

³ After preaching against the corruption of the Church, Jan Hus (1369–1415), erstwhile rector of the Prague University, was condemned for heresy and burned at the stake at the Council of Constance. After his death, followers of Hus rebelled and dominated the Czech religious and political landscape for two centuries, during which numerous social and political visions competed under the Hussite banner. In 1620, the Hussite forces were defeated at the Battle of White Mountain (*bitva na Bílé hoře*), and Roman Catholicism was forcibly imposed on the population. This defeat looms large in Czech national narratives to this day.

⁴ From: *sub utraque specie*, or “in both kinds,” which mean that the Eucharist – the body and blood of Christ – were consumed in the form of the host and a symbolic sip of mass wine from a chalice, not only by priests but by each believer in this religious group.

⁵ The Unity of Brethren was already a well-organized religious community at the turn of the 16th century in Bohemia and Moravia. However, once re-Catholicization efforts were launched, members of the Unity were persecuted and exiled from the land. In emigration they gradually transformed into the religious fellowship known in Europe and America under the name of the Moravian Brethren. In Bohemia small groups of them survived in secrecy even up to the passing of the Edict of Tolerance in the 18th century.

centuries became a driving force of world history during that era. Even despite the ubiquitous power and material interests that were an integral part of this process, Masaryk believed that it was still an exceptional era when, more than a century before Luther's reformation, the truth of the authority of "conscience" was victorious over the dogma and obscurantism of the church authorities of the time, and Czechs could breathe entirely freely and take responsibility for the progress of things in their own hands – and religiously and politically emancipate themselves.

The extent to which it is possible to take this idea, which is conceived of as timeless, and authentically carry it over into our own era, has long been the subject of diverging conceptions and controversy. It is certain, however, that at that time there was not a formation of the Czech nation taking place in the modern sense of the term, but rather that the attempt to create a specific environment for religious plurality became a foretoken of a culturally and politically democratic society. Masaryk was well aware of this. This is why he understands humanity as a path – literally a teleocline (that is, a goal-oriented process) – and not at all as a complete givenness. He conceives of achieving it as an ideal kind of systematic and perpetual task, which can be gradually accomplished only so long as we develop the necessary efforts to distinguish and resolve the forms that are particular to the given time period. And it is only in this fundamental functional tension between the ideal and the experiencing of its individual manifestations that Masaryk's humanity can represent one of the highest moral ideas, based upon what human beings in their relationship to others, despite their differences, truly adequately answer to.

Because, therefore, Masaryk's conception of the import of Czech history ideologically emerges from the freethinking tradition of Hussitism and from the ongoing Bohemian Reformation – from its particular mature emphasis on humanity and individual conscience – it foregrounded religious spirituality as the most distinctive existential aspect of our specific Czech tradition of reformation. As a result, democracy for Masaryk literally meant a form of piety that was "systematically" practiced. And for him, humanity and democracy are a question of "conscience," as he often commented.

Between Scholarship and Faith

It sounds somewhat surprising that the most distinctive constitutive aspect of the most atheist nation in Europe – as Czechs today proudly claim to be – is religious spirituality. Is there really a continuity between the religious conception of the Bohemian Reformation and the core of Czech thinking at the end of the 19th century – and Czech thought today?

The word "atheism" or "godlessness" already in principle etymologically expresses a kind of, shall we say, preemptive negativism. Masaryk opposed this through positive

thinking, however not only within the framework of systematic positivism in Comte's sense. It is precisely in this that he transcended Comte as a modern religious thinker. Masaryk was very deeply aware that the modern critical and rationally thinking individual does not want to blindly believe in dogmas and traditions. On the other hand, however, he was also aware that without developing their inner emotional life, modern human beings will never be whole. His lifelong endeavor was therefore to attempt to open up suitable possibilities so that people could renew their lost relationship with transcendence. Masaryk was convinced that precisely this existential relationship is the true guarantee of moral behavior and of any humanistically oriented ethics. In his own words, this existential need was to discover "grounds on which one can stand firmly and sleep soundly." And in my opinion this is apt even in our consumer society, in which alongside fleeting desires for ephemeral experiences there also arise various alternative religious and spiritual currents. These have already rooted themselves firmly in our culture and, as part of a global culture, help give shape to ours. And if the true foundation of modern positive politics is to be religiously oriented humanity as a guarantee of political morality, according to Masaryk we need a new religion that will lean upon positive science and rational scientism as such. Even though Masaryk's religious basis was ideologically connected with the Christian Reformation, it remains an open question today as to whether some kind of future religious syncretism will bring about this longed-for moral-political foundation and enable responsible approaches to solving urgent and deepening global problems such as worldwide poverty (in the present associated with wars and migration crises), the intensive pollution of our planet, and decreasing supplies of drinking water.

At the same time, it is necessary to be aware that this emphasis on the individual's "conscience" and on spirituality-as-practice has its fundamental grounding in Masaryk's advocacy of the urgency of performing everyday "small work"⁶ (*drobná práce*). His conception of democracy then manifests itself as a conception that is very difficult to work with at a practical level, and which is therefore a good deal less intellectual than what is usually unilaterally attributed to it from a purely theoretical-cognitive perspective. The emphasis he placed on performing consistent, practical activities was also the reason why his arguments continued to improve and were quite strong when he entered into real politics, and it also provided the support for his intrepid and relentless criticisms of the current political and cultural conditions. In religious spirituality he thus sought a necessary cement that would bring this essential moral integrity and consistency to life and thus also to politics. It is necessary, however, to mention that Masaryk's unconven-

⁶ Masaryk's concept of "small work" (*drobná práce*) requires some explanation. These are not grand, newsworthy actions intended to enhance an individual's reputation but regular, repeated efforts at self-education and self-improvement on an individual and community level that everyone should engage in continually. Taken together, they should have the effect of raising the nation and preparing it for eventual independence.

tional belief in the need for spirituality, in which he called for new and fresh religions, leads to so-called *anthropism* or *anthropologism*. This specific anthropological turn can then be understood as a necessary forerunner of a new era of humanity. And by this he also meant new possibilities for the person-citizen, which he saw as inevitably requiring an overcoming of the old, nonfunctional theocracy (and aristocracy) with *democracy*.

So was Masaryk's "anthropologism" a kind of humanistic stance that (by contrast with Feuerbach) sought to maintain religion, rather than substituting the divine with the purely human?

The most important thing is that Masaryk freed himself in order to enter into a more objective view on religion. Anthropologism should be a philosophical and scientific testimony of man: the individual who is the true and final goal of scholarly research and – for science – the measure of all things. However, at the same time, the individual stands in a permanent dialogic challenge to transcendence, and he consciously participates in this through his opinions. He engages with transcendence in a continually evolving existential relationship, and this thereby becomes a necessary (historical) premise as well as a guarantee of a positive future. Masaryk thus already irreversibly entrusted the responsibility for the meaning of history to the morally conscientious and responsible individual, who has not only the facility of "consciousness" but also the essential integrity of his "conscience." It is thus obvious that Masaryk had further concretized his opinion on religion – he had specifically theorized its function with regard to the needs of the future democratic state.

At the same time, this permanent relationship to transcendence represents a kind of basal spiritual constant, without which Masaryk's thinking cannot be grasped holistically. He therefore rejected Feuerbach's criticism of religion, or more precisely his programmatic atheism. Still, he did not deny that there was a certain excitement about Feuerbach's criticism in that period, and he took it as a positive counterbalance to German idealism and romanticism, whose materialist philosophy Masaryk perceived as a kind of ideological shortcut that cannot truly solve the existential needs of modern people. From the beginning, Masaryk believed that modern people who were educated and had critical thinking habits would find themselves in a deep existential crisis, which is caused by their loss of faith in transcendence. Or he sometimes also described it as Providence: that which "transcends" the modern individual and provides a guarantee of a universal meaning of life. Masaryk believed modern man should create his own religious experience, free of all handed-down, dogmatic restrictions. And despite his modern skepticism, he must renew his lost relationship with transcendence and become aware of his finitude. Masaryk, like a typical thinker of this crisis, is essentially concerned with bridging two separately perceived areas that the human being applies

as a conscious subject in order to apprehend reality: the spheres of *science* and *faith*. It is precisely these realities that cannot be neglected, if we are to speak about Masaryk's emancipation program, and the question thus remains as to whether it is possible, in this modernizing spirit, also to update them for the present day.

Masaryk as an Austrian Philosopher

In this combination of scientism with religion, reformism with cautious monarchism, is it possible to glimpse something specific in the Austrian context from which Masaryk emerged?

To begin with, it is necessary to say that Masaryk emerged from the intellectual environment of Vienna in the 1870s where he had studied and worked, and which significantly inspired him in his literary creations. He then further developed his ideas at the newly founded Czech branch of Charles-Ferdinand University in Prague, which means starting in 1882. His Viennese period was not brief: it lasted twelve whole years. Vienna was literally the center of the monarchy, there was an international atmosphere there, and – above all – the government there was markedly liberal. At the University of Vienna, which Masaryk was attending at that time and where he later worked, there were other significant philosophical thinkers. For example, there was Franz Brentano, and there was Robert Zimmermann, a Prague-German pupil of Bernard Bolzano and Franz Exner, known as the systematizer of the esthetic thinking of Johann Friedrich Herbart, who was very influential in the monarchy at that time. There was also Theodor Gomperz, a Jewish scholar from Brno who later became known to the philosophical public not only for his significant three-volume work *Griechische Denker* (Greek Thinkers), but also – and this is no less important for us – as a translator of the works of John Stuart Mill and a promoter of positivism. Masaryk was in close collegial relations as well as being personal friends with all of these significant personalities of that era.

It can be generally stated that in the spirit of his rational conception of religion, Brentano, and Herbart too in his way, identified with theism in the sense, expressed by Herbart, that faith “completes” (*ergänzt*) knowledge. Faith only establishes “personal” certainty for these thinkers, but not the apprehension of objective reality. This is why there was also a distinctive modernist emphasis on science and scientism. Masaryk also finds this tension between faith and science in Plato – a philosopher with whom he engaged for the entire period of his studies in Vienna. Using the example of Plato as well as of Comte, it became very clear to him that it would not be possible to think through the ideal state without religion (and as Masaryk intended, the religiously oriented individual towards the state).

With this narrowly qualitative prescription for the relationship of the individual to the state, in which the individual's moral consciousness is guaranteed by religious faith in timeless ethical principles or norms, he actually opens up a fundamental question: What role did the tension between subject and object play in Masaryk's thinking? And how did this special "synergy" (Masaryk's expression) look through the prism of scientific or scholarly disciplines of psychology and sociology? This "synergy," which can moreover be considered a functional underpinning of all of Masaryk's philosophical conceptions, arises as a necessary relationship between the experiencing subject and that which immediately pertains to him: it is what he, as an active social subject, reflectively grasps. And this fundamental relationality may connect the subject with any kind of ideal single entity within our objective order of things, ranging from simple sensory qualities and their logic, through social-historical givenness, and ending with the creation of new and more effective institutions. Masaryk then generally conceives of this concurrence of things as an activity of humanity that connects the present moment with eternity. In the spirit of this rationalist theism he wanted to push people beyond passivity, and he sought a suprapersonal meaning for human work. Masaryk perceived life, which is embodied in countless forms and is determined *in concreto* through them, as an organized creative process in which human beings naturally also participate, and in their specific evolutionary position they are the perpetual partners of God in this unfolding creativity.

The scholars in Vienna were very deeply interested in the psychological method and scientific methods in general in this period. Brentano had elaborated a distinctive conception of psychology that incorporated a certain regard for the utilitarian philosophy of John Stuart Mill and his theory of judgment. These thinkers were cultivating this form of philosophy when they said, "from an empirical point of view"; this means that they were always working on the basis of experience and even clinging to it, as Masaryk's teacher Franz Brentano demonstrates with his psychology. Even the Herbartians, the foremost current of Austrian philosophical thought, had been doing this in their own way at the time. And it was also sociology that assisted Masaryk in tackling the stimulus for the contemplation of its most essential meaning; an interpretation of Plato's sociology had actually provided Masaryk with the distinctive ideological manner in which to defend his patriotism ("Plato as a Patriot," 1877). He drew modern sociological inspirations in this period directly from A. Comte, and also from J. S. Mill, H. T. Buckle, and A. Bain, as well as others.

Herbartianism has already been mentioned several times. I think many people will be unfamiliar with this school, much less with the fact that it actually represented a leading philosophical approach in the monarchy at that time...

Herbartianism is the name for a philosophical school or current from the second half of the 19th century, which followed the teaching of Johann Friedrich Herbart. Howev-

er, it was not only about philosophy: Herbart and his adherents engaged with a wide spectrum of what are today independent academic disciplines, from logic to linguistics, though they were primarily interested in pedagogy, psychology, and esthetics. In essence, they rejected models of abrupt leaps, because they conceived of society and its development in a broader historical context of development. They preferred models that illustrated developmental continuity and applied an emphasis on science and the scientific method that was required in that period, and this placed them in deliberate opposition to classic German dialectical idealism. Another of the leading Viennese pedagogues who undeniably had an influence upon Masaryk was a Herbartian – Robert Zimmermann. In this context, it is necessary to recall that Herbartianism, not only here but also naturally in all of Austria, “stood in” for in positivism – because it emerged from the hard sciences. Johann Friedrich Herbart himself had a sound general education in these disciplines. The need for positivism and an empirical approach was great at the time in multicultural Austria, and I think there were good reasons for this. For this ethnically diverse and aware social system it was necessary to find an appropriate way to think; or to impose an imaginary ideological framework that would be capable of reacting pragmatically to the social problems of the time. In a scientific-objective spirit it would then be possible to pursue unity and identify specific and a generally intelligible solution to problems. It is therefore no coincidence that Herbart and also Masaryk characterize their philosophical method as realism: Masaryk then also termed his practical life and political outlook this way.

Although German was spoken in Vienna as well as in Berlin, the intellectual mycelium in Austria was quite different in that period from that in Germany, and thus it also developed along different ideological lines. Masaryk’s *Suicide* (1881; originally produced as his *Habilitationschrift* in Vienna) was written in this empirical-positivist spirit. It emerged from strictly empirically founded statistics of pertinent phenomena, from which Masaryk only then deduced that an increase in the suicide rate indicates a crisis of modern man. He argued that philosophy, by turning toward the empirical establishment of reality, should become more pragmatic and more tethered to reality. It should not be scholastic, but rather constructed from experience, and it needs to free itself from tendencies toward any speculative flights of fancy. This principle then implies a trenchant criticism of Immanuel Kant for his apriorism, insufficient sense for psychology, etc., which was raised not only by Franz Brentano but also by Robert Zimmermann (and Bernard Bolzano, previously) as well as Masaryk. In the 1860s and 1870s a return to Kant had been proclaimed very strenuously and with some degree of success in Germany.

In essence, what was at stake was that philosophy should fulfill its function for the sciences. It offered the necessary ideological framework in the area of subject matter as well as methods for the individual scientific disciplines, and allowed them to draw from empirical reality and produce general findings. Masaryk’s contemporaries, including Czech Herbartians such as Josef Durdík, were also expending efforts in this area. These

thinkers were building upon a firm foundation: the positivist intellectual trend had been established in France primarily by Auguste Comte, and in connection with the utilitarian tradition it was further elaborated in England, primarily by John Stuart Mill and then through Darwinism, by Herbert Spencer, etc., and Masaryk was well aware of all of this. He additionally grasped that the new and specific conditions for cultivating this type of thinking had already been created to a significant extent during the time of his activity in Vienna. And he was directly and personally confronted with this specific reality. We thus can state: from this perspective our modern Czech intellectual tradition truly has different ideological foundations than the classical, idealist German tradition, even though, I would say, this is something that is not sufficiently emphasized and the two are quite often interchanged. Masaryk's manner of thinking, the positions taken by his most prominent teachers, and also the character of the intellectual atmosphere in Vienna at that time, indicate that the cultural-political situation there was truly distinct and it required a different intellectual approach to reality.

If Masaryk was closely connected with this multiethnic Austrian context, why did he eventually distance himself from it and even become the so-called father of Czech independence? Didn't this mean cutting himself off from his own intellectual home?

That an independent democratic state was founded does not mean, in my opinion, that he cut himself off from his intellectual home, as you justifiably suggest. And anyway within the broader – today we would say “global” – context that the monarchy was an integral part of, that wouldn't have even been possible. Masaryk had become increasingly aware precisely in this international Viennese environment that the modern human being was already irresistibly drawn into the evolutionary process of world civilization. There was the peril of becoming a mere puppet in the power games of modernizing changes and of often unforeseeable civilizational reversals. If this is to be prevented – Masaryk surmised – modern individuals must find necessary spiritual and social support in a functioning, advanced society. This had to be a society they knew intimately and in which they were aware, either more or less responsibly, of their own essential part in – and to put a finer point on it, this especially applies if the individual is a member of a numerically small ethnic group. Masaryk had already thought these questions through very intensively in his early period.

Masaryk's starting assumption was to reckon with this global civilization pressure in order, as it were, to succeed in a “positive” intellectual manner also as a thinker in Austrian intellectual circles – to be, one could say “at the cutting edge” there. Entering the Czech environment from international Vienna provided him with an important broader perspective, and by this I mean a necessary measure of critical thinking that allowed him to recognize and sidestep stereotypes entrenched in certain local societies.

Transcendence and Experience

What did Masaryk himself contribute to this tradition? What was theoretically new in his approach?

Essentially, we can say that the pivotal step for understanding Masaryk's entire political-philosophical concept is in his conception of ethics. In the book *Fundamentals of Concrete Logic*⁷ (1885) he still categorizes ethics among the practical sciences. It is, however, indicative that at the threshold of the new century he proclaimed ethics to be the "core" of his philosophy and his "scientific" metaphysics.

From a philosophical point of view, it is interesting that for Masaryk, metaphysics as a generalized perspective on the world requires two essential tasks. On the one hand, it should create a functional framework for all the sciences – including those that are still to emerge as specific disciplines in the future or that will be attached to those that are close to them – and on the other hand, metaphysics is significantly built into Masaryk's concept of psychology. However, for Masaryk psychology is not just a narrowly specialized discipline, but rather acknowledges the metaphysical dimension of thought in connection with the concept of ethics and, as a necessary gnoseological corollary, of religion.

In this case, is it really possible to call it psychology? Doesn't psychology begin where metaphysically grounded ethics end?

Similar to Brentano, Masaryk derives his metaphysically grounded ethics from their functional, transcendent principle. Every rational social consensus must be, in its essence, in conformity with this most distinctive personal principle, and therefore Masaryk's ethics cannot be separated from the naturalness of religious experience. Religious experience in essence means achieving the highest practical accomplishment, and it is precisely its special, effective processualism that systematically lends to ethics its qualitative character – its *meaningfulness*. And only then, against a background of achieving these highest practical accomplishments, can ethics be integrated into the framework of psychological issues. Simultaneously, another feature of Brentano's original conception emerges: its subjectively engaged side, or an emphasis that prioritizes moralized decision-making and action.

This was also the reason why Masaryk placed psychology ahead of sociology in his general spectrum of the sciences, and here, in *Concrete Logic*, he considers it to be the "fundamental" science. He considered consciousness to be a phenomenon sui generis,

⁷ Simplified to *Concrete Logic* in further references.

and he clearly states that consciousness is “certain in itself” to us, or, as he further construes – it is the “one and only” science that affords “absolute knowledge” to humanity. Metaphysics as a *scientia generalis*, which should be set ahead of all the other sciences, then represents for science – and primarily for psychology – a perpetually renewing challenge. As the ultimate framework for all the sciences, at the same time it can be perceived as a kind of imaginary functional repository or “receptacle” which not only transforms them quantitatively apace with their evolution, but also *qualitatively* in connection with psychology, and thus also remains open to the “real” subject.

It is precisely in the context of orienting the practical sciences towards specific singularities that Masaryk speaks about the lower and higher purposes; thus he addresses the teleological approach to “things themselves” or, as he sometimes also says, to the “personalities” of things (for the subject). Through his opening up of this field of action we arrive at a reflective grasping of singular entities by means of these higher and lower purposes. Masaryk has gradually brought us to a sphere in which singular entities are “consciously” lent their (teleological) meaning and therefore “for the subject” they exist purely for a purpose; that is, they bring us to the sphere of our *existence*.

Against the background of all of these above-outlined realities, however, it becomes evident that Masaryk was not exclusively concerned with connecting abstract thinking with the world of the concrete sciences. As has been said before, Masaryk was interested in the fundamental convergence of two specific areas of our reality: the sphere of the “fallibility” of *science* and the “certainty” of *faith*, and in their relational *synergy*.

Critique of Turn-of-the-Century Marxism

Masaryk, however, connected not only different types of science and knowledge but also thought in general with social practice. As has been mentioned, Masaryk criticized the conditions of his times. But he is also known as a critic of another social critic: Karl Marx. Can you familiarize us with the content of his criticism of Marx?

Yes, this is a justified remark. It can even be claimed that Masaryk’s criticism of the social conditions was uncompromising in its intensity, as well as in its selective sensitivity for tackling contemporary issues and the needs of the time: for Masaryk, this represented the innermost existential vocation. And it is precisely this unshakeable faith in humanity and in critical scientism from which his entire behavior and all of his actions arose, and it is also in fact the cornerstone of Masaryk’s criticism of Karl Marx and Marxism as a whole. It is precisely in this distinctive critical-dialogical emancipatory spirit that he then stacks Marx’s basic theses up against his relevant religiously motivated philosophical conception. We discover not infrequently that Masaryk was

one of the first European academic philosophers who had attempted to deal critically with Marx's teachings so extensively (over nearly 800 pages of text), and not only philosophically but also from a sociological perspective.

So Masaryk was trying to come to terms with Marx's criticism of religion?

Masaryk wanted, against the background of his philosophical-religious transcriptions, to bring in his specific idea of a humanitarian religion for a modern, secularizing person. This is borne out not only by the thematic focus of his lectures on practical philosophy that he regularly delivered for many years, but also primarily by his study *Modern Man and Religion* (1896–1898) – which is moreover judged by younger authors as the “most Masarykesque” text – and the treatise *On the Struggle for Religion* (1904). It is also quite evident in his disapprovingly critical stance towards a specific type of materialist Marxist dialectical philosophy in *The Social Question* (1898).⁸ In essence, the strongest reproach Masaryk had for Marxism back then was that Marx does not truly appreciate the active role of the subject in the process of striving towards knowledge. This essential reproach is connected with Masaryk's faith (or reflected conviction) in some kind of, let us say, processual teleology of humanity and in this “goal orientation” (*cílesměrnost*) of the world and life, which enables the experiencing subject to penetrate to the very sense and value of individual things; that is, to the lower and higher purposes. And with it, also to “spiritualize,” as it were, this reality in this creative and socially oriented manner, as we have already partially indicated above. This “meaningful” determination of value, or rather conscious acknowledgement of its utility and appropriateness, always thus in essence assumes a reflective function of the individual subject – as Masaryk says his “acknowledging judgment,” and consequently this is not only about a kind of mere “depersonalized” objective value. It is precisely in this “non-depersonalized” original sense, which is always inherently connected with the subjective operation of the “judging” individual, that Masaryk considers Marx's “teaching” that “only labor creates value” to be “evidently” wrong.

Might this not rather testify to a misunderstanding of Marx's concept of “value,” which is an economic concept? This isn't Marx's explanation of cultural or spiritual “values” in a more general sense...

Perhaps. Nevertheless, it is necessary to keep in mind that on Masaryk's part this is a philosophical and sociological criticism. In nearly one hundred pages of text he grapples with this issue in a fair amount of detail. He emphasizes that Marx “avoids” the

⁸ The German edition was issued immediately the following year (1899); English (abridged), translated by E. V. Kohák in 1972.

category of utility and value judgments. Masaryk considers utility to be an economic category in its own essence, as a subjective and ethical category, for the “useful” is primarily derived from our needs, wishes, and desires, from the reality that we more or less consciously aspire to. In any case, we have a well-founded case for arguing that Masaryk was influenced not only by Brentano’s theory of judgment, but also to a certain extent by the methodological subjectivism of the Austrian (economic) school, whose activity had already gained prominence by the beginning of the 1870s.⁹

We have already briefly spoken about how Masaryk’s religiously founded ethics gradually became the quintessence of his philosophy, or more precisely of his “scientific” metaphysics, and in light of its highest practical functions it also became the noetic fundament of psychology. The essential consequence of this, however, is that Masaryk understands social equality between citizens as primarily spiritual, and it is only from the model of a primordial timeless level that this credo of equally morally conscious and thus free individual human souls can emerge. Here we find the true root of Masaryk’s universalism and at the same time also the answer to why he in principle refuses to accept each partial (or “precocious”) ideology, which prioritizes a collective consciousness and does not sufficiently emphasize the consciousness and conscience of the individual, whether this is in the matter of faith in progress which was inspired by positivism in his time, or the Marxism that came later.

Masaryk understood the social collective as “partial,” but he perceived the individual as the “whole”?

One could say that, but with a certain qualification: Masaryk always laid his principal emphasis on the specifics of the national character, but this does not prevent him from perceiving society in general as an aggregate of free and responsible individuals. Man is thus the “measure of all things,” but it is only through his humanity, whose character has been developed through specific historic factors determining national specificity, that the individual arrives at the social question (or to the need for “socialism” generally), and then to the fundamental problem of how to solve mankind’s real poverty.

⁹ The publication of Carl Menger’s book *Principles of Economics* (1871) gave rise to the Austrian school of economics. The basic methodological proposition of this school states that gaining insight into economic phenomena and understanding them is only possible if we take them as the results of the behavior of individuals. The methodological subjectivism of the followers of the first generation of this psychologically oriented economic school (Eugen Böhm-Bawerk, Friedrich Wieser) ensues from this principle. For the Austrian school, only the behavior of individuals is based in reason and is directed towards its own purposes: society and social classes are considered abstractions, so every economic collectivity and its development is understood as the outcome of individuals’ behavior, and they see the true calling of economics in the analysis of principles of individual behavior. They do not deny the existence of objective laws, but they still consider them to be the outcome of spontaneous, subjective activities of freely transacting subjects and not at all as the effects of objective economic laws.

Therefore, for Masaryk, this was always a complex problem: in addition to the material aspect it also has a spiritual one. Within the problem of the individual and society it is not possible to find a definitive and objective solution according to externally defined instructions which are prescribed by one ideological doctrine or another.

Isn't this a somewhat surprising position for a sociologist (or a sociologizing philosopher) – to reject the historical-social construction of moral and spiritual principles?

In the sense of classical objectivist positivism that is certainly a justified objection. However, not from Masaryk's point of view: we can say that his positive perception of reality is played by psychology, which he shows us in his system for classifying the sciences. It is precisely this kind of "subjectivization" of Masaryk's entire scientific system that necessarily underlies his conception of the specificity of the national character, and this is also the reason why he considers his transcendental appeal to subjective responsibility "to remedy human affairs," so to speak. Enacted through his "small work," it becomes a cure for every type of objectivist "utopianism" (Comte's finalism not excepted).

This critical method for gradually and judiciously uncovering the concrete problem that can be found "under the aspect of eternity" (*sub specie aeternitatis*) also encompasses Masaryk's concept of faith in human labor. If this spiritually grounded faith in the ideal of humanity is derived from sincere and unselfish love for others within the capacity of a normative sanction, it is also precisely this religious-spiritual level that is the original timeless source of meaning and value in Masaryk's conception of perpetual (small) human works, and it is thus also the source of the creative social acts performed on behalf our neighbors. He is thus concerned with a kind of timelessly grounded grasping of the meaning and value of human labor, of a kind of "life" attitude that lies in the free but also everlasting acceptance of the responsibility of the individual for this characteristically human creative phenomenon.

It thus gradually becomes clear that Masaryk considered Marx's narrowly sociologically conceived (monocausal) method, or more specifically his theory of bases and superstructures, which interprets the world of human beings purely as a "reflex" or "indicator" of their economic conditions (Masaryk's expressions) from his own specific intellectual perspective, to be noetic but also as psychologically insufficient. Ethical, esthetic, and scientific categories are just as real to him as the facts of objective reality – like "bread and water." Moreover, according to Masaryk, the class struggle does not correspond to real historical, cultural, religious or even real political "efforts and yearnings" of individual nations: as a consequence he prefers reform over revolution. In this, he resembles Bernstein and also Engels at the end of his life. Although Masaryk assumed that countries affected by Protestantism would be inclined towards revolutions to a certain small extent, he realized at the same time that it was the American Declaration of Independence that regarded revolution as a "natural right." Here also it is necessary to catch sight of certain intellectual connotations with his later concep-

tion that he referred to as *World Revolution* (this was the Czech title of an eponymous book published in 1925: *Světová revoluce* – the English title was *The Making of a State*). Notwithstanding this, Masaryk was well aware that state and political independence could not be achieved without a strict emphasis on the necessity of advancing human rights – to their essentially humanistic ideological necessity that precedes every legislative codification. This emphasis on human rights, which must be grasped within the necessary social, and by extension also economic and social contexts, is what Masaryk believes neither Marx nor Engels fully appreciated. And it is this which blunts the point of any possible accusation that Masaryk's conception stems from a kind of a priori naiveté or moralistic sentimentalism, and enables us to classify Masaryk among the first pioneers of human rights, primarily in this social field.

From these formulations it's clear that Masaryk criticized a type of Marxism that is entirely different from many of the Marxisms we know today...

Masaryk's criticism of Marx is a criticism from the end of the 1890s: it did not address some of Marx's early works such as *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (Paris, 1844) or *Fundamentals of Political Economy Criticism* (London, 1857–58), which were published long after Masaryk's *The Social Question*. Furthermore, the selection of secondary literature was very limited in comparison with what we have today, and in many essential regards, as well as in ideological finesse, the criticisms were underdeveloped. Masaryk nevertheless greatly valued Marx's creative approach to the social question and appreciated the necessary positive attention that he paid to the influence of economic conditions on the formation of human life and to the inhumanity and indignity of poverty. In this regard he considers Marxism (or "socialism") to be one of the pressing "humanitarian ideals" of his time. However, he rejects the opinion that ethics only arise solely from the potentials and needs of a certain class of people. Masaryk referred to such ethics, whether we call them bourgeois or proletarian, as "amoralism," because for him they are always insufficiently essentially substantiated and thus inconsistent. In Masaryk's view, such ethics in their own essence are literally "amoral" (*unsittlich*) – since Marxism ideologically derives them from the material needs of the awakening "Fourth Estate," which is what he terms the industrial proletariat (probably under the influence of positivism). This struggle for emancipation, which Masaryk perceived as one of the endeavors of the period associated with other necessary humanizing drives in society, was something he did not wish to resolve by means of a radical break or a revolution, but through reforms. Masaryk, in essence, preferred a kind of deep, holistic effort aimed at enhancing expertise and competency based on the scientific principle and scientism as a program, the goal of which was to continue developing all the historically positive trends, including the positive potential connected with natural human habituality. Masaryk's sense of equality was primarily of a spiritual nature. He derived it from his awareness of the higher morality founded in the practice of loving one's

neighbor, and based it on a general sympathy and tolerance that essentially determined the aim of each of Masaryk's scientific activities. He thus understood spiritual equality in the sense of an existential relationship of the individual with transcendence, and this personal rapprochement was the necessary precondition that catalyzed an original awareness of equality, or more precisely, a permanent awareness of it. His essential starting point was the living existential experience of transcendence, which precedes every theory. To all intents and purposes, Masaryk critically rejected all claims that lacked this transcendent emotional grounding.

Masaryk and World Revolution

So did Masaryk not embrace the intellectual current of radical reform that proclaimed social equality from a spiritual position? I'm thinking, for example, of the ideal of the communism of the first Christians, which later Christian revolutionaries tried to emulate.

Masaryk himself advocated the position that the division of labor that points to a certain natural social inequality – this natural and necessary cooperation of occupations. He therefore preferred equal access to opportunities of labor so that individuals could freely acquire an education and develop in their professions – so to say, to *increase their blessings*. In a similar socializing spirit, this necessary emancipatory process had also been thought through (and also predicted) by some of the other positivist-oriented thinkers in Europe, in both of the Americas, and in Asia. And generally successfully! As a result there arose, for example, various positivist associations for workers towards the end of the 19th century, and some of the positivist movements had a notable influence in activism against slavery. Masaryk himself, moreover, along with the leading social democratic personality of the day, Josef Steiner, founded the Workers' Academy (*Dělnická akademie*) in 1896, which is actually the oldest think tank in Bohemia. But still, the idea of a kind of high priest of the cult of humanity, which is what Auguste Comte had become in the period of what was called his second career, was foreign to Masaryk. He strictly rejected all tendencies that had a whiff of absolute power. For him, this was about an emancipatory struggle in the sense of the democratization of the present society. Until the outbreak of the First World War this essentially meant working towards the gradual democratization of the Austrian Federation. He viewed tackling social problems in a whole range of gradual social reforms hand in hand with positive education and moral training for the working class. His reform efforts thus were not aimed towards the idea of breaking apart or even abolishing the state, nor even primarily to a change in the relations between classes on the basis of property ownership. In spite of this, Masaryk considered labor a mere means to the ethical fulfillment of his goals: the question of "How to work?" (*How to Work* was the title of a collection of Masaryk's lectures from

1898),¹⁰ which becomes the “question of all questions.” His realism thus did not arise out of the idea that labor only transforms the empirical world. Conscientious work is first and foremost a spiritual endeavor – the means to achieve an inner transformation for a human person which is ultimately understood, as Masaryk says, as his “final” purpose, namely the perpetual accomplishment of the ideals of humanity.

This divine or spiritual dimension of Masaryk’s thinking, from which his normative ethics in principle arose, then had its necessary consequences on a philosophical level. Although Masaryk was already interested in Marx during his sojourn in Vienna, he only subjects the actual philosophical and sociological “foundations” of Marxism to rigorous critique in *The Social Question (Otázce sociální)*. In some manner, Masaryk had already traditionally rejected Hegel’s dialectics. In this he took after Bolzano as well as Brentano. By contrast with the scientific approach and scientism as such, he considered dialectics to be a kind of unjustified ideological substructure or heuristic fiction: a “secret junk of idealist scholasticism,” as he said. And from the position of Marxism, it was additionally entirely baseless, because from a noetic perspective it actually becomes a dialectics that one could say is literally “upside down.” Why? He was primarily of the opinion that Marx wanted to apply Hegel’s dialectics to his materialist-objectivist method and to do so without reference to any kind of, let us say, asubjective (or in the Kantian sense, transcendental) reality in which every dialectic must be somehow founded a priori. This, Masaryk says, is something Marx owes to German idealism, and thus a materialist dialectic is a “*conradictio in adiecto*.”¹¹

This Marxism from the end of the 19th century was often later criticized for its “positivism”...

In order for us to fully appreciate the meaning of Masaryk’s statement that Marx’s materialism is actually positivism, or in fact “ultrapositivism” (as he also straightforwardly claims in *The Social Question*), it is thus necessary to posit the “critically” oriented question of whether the motive forces of history are truly independent of purely human, or psychological awareness, as classical positivism claims. If we are therefore basing our position on the idea that human actions are free, it becomes possible from the perspective of their directedness towards a particular goal to claim (with justification) that it is only generally possible to arrive at recognition in the act of transforming the world in the sense of the permanent relationship between subject and object. This naturally also has its noetic consequences. Masaryk always in essence starts from the first-hand “real” experiences of the subject who is personally experiencing them, and

¹⁰ Published in English in *The Ideals of Humanity and How to Work (Lectures Delivered in 1898 at the University of Prague)*, trans. W. Preston Warren, Marie J. Kohn-Holeček, H. N. Kennedy (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1938).

¹¹ A contradiction between parts of an argument.

these are thus consciously made present as a certain quality in the subject's life. This quality of life is significant for our existence precisely because it is the foundation and the starting point of our most distinctive orientation towards life: it lends meaning and value to our existence (that is, it is literally a "meaning-full" existence). Therefore, the active space of Masaryk's realistic conception of a natural dynamic of reality, and thus the "lived" world – the world of our "immediately perceived" life – is not a world without a subject. It always anticipates in advance the existence of a concrete active individual who substantially experiences the diversity of objective givennesses of the extrinsic world – he is a kind of beacon for his surroundings, which engage with the light he emits in a functional kind of relationship. On the one hand, this means that the individual always identifies more or less intensively with his surroundings, and on the other that at the same time, in a given situation, he becomes this (general) quality, through which he is identified as a (concrete) subject, and is comprehensible to the world.

The experiencing subject and experiencing as such cannot therefore be abstractly decoupled from Masaryk's realism in these schematic contexts. And this reality, in my opinion, is the true starting point for an understanding of Masaryk's criticism of positivism as such, and also for what Masaryk considered Marx's materialist positivism. Masaryk also reproaches Marx, among other things, for an insufficient sense of the "fullness of life," stating that "he wants nothing to do with feelings," that his materialism is "humanity without love" and is accordingly "amoralism."

As is thus demonstrated, a kind of synthesis of Masaryk, or rather of Masaryk's realism with Marx is not practicable without this primary emphasis, whose starting point is the free and responsible, and thus functioning moral subject. Every deviation from this essential starting point is irreconcilable with the life philosophy expressed in Masaryk's realism. Even when, from a sociological perspective, Masaryk does not dispute Marxism's positive motivation and emancipatory life potential, in essence he takes Marxism as a phenomenon of crisis. This, in my view, is the crux of Masaryk's critical argumentation against Marxism, as well as of the positive criticism of its later forms, such as the "Austromarxism" that was theoretically promulgated here by Bohumír Šmeral. Moreover, Masaryk reminds us in *The Making of a State* that Šmeral himself, at a meeting of the International in 1917 in Stockholm, admitted that the vast majority of laborers would support an independent Czech state within the Austro-Hungarian framework, and that the proletariat was therefore not only concerned with cultural autonomy in the sense the Austromarxists wanted. And it is of some interest in this context to bring to mind that Marx himself had in fact in some ways critically anticipated the development of specific types of states, leading to further possible ethnic independence movements in the Monarchy, which was manifested in his negative evaluation of the historical developments in Bohemia in 1848. Furthermore, it can be stated that Marx, from his universalizing view of history, considered these only somewhat particular tendencies to be counterrevolutionary. That was also the reason why he therefore did not see Bohemia in a very positive light and, along with Engels,

criticized the counterrevolutionism as well as pan-Slavism¹² in the positions of the Austrian Slavs. Masaryk generally addresses and evaluates Marx's positions towards the Slavic nations in *The Making of a State*.

But Masaryk evidently had no less trouble than Marx in solving the tension between ethnic and pan-human emancipation. When Czechoslovakia was established, Masaryk conceived of it as a multiethnic state that was to cultivate cultural diversity and to provide equal rights to all of its citizens. At the same time, though, Czechoslovakia was the state of *Czechs* and *Slovaks*, and therefore on a symbolic level it was not the state of the other ethnic groups that were living within its territory. Even many Slovak were eventually unconvinced that they were considered fully equal citizens.

Yes, there really was this discrepancy that you mention. However, Masaryk's democratic conceptions were not to blame for it. The meaning of Masaryk's concept of the philosophy of history was not only the emancipation of the Czech and Slovak nations. It was always intended as the emancipation of the human being – qua citizen – in the modern sense.

But the state he founded wasn't called "Humania," after all, but Czechoslovakia, in which nearly one third of the citizens were neither Czechs nor Slovaks. Isn't this a contradiction even within Masaryk's concept of emancipation? Can a person be fully emancipated when she finds herself in the situation of being designated as a member of a minority group in a state that belongs to other people?

The ideal often deviates from reality. Masaryk's philosophy of Czech history is therefore a conception because it is, in my view, primarily paradigmatic, in the way that the Bohemian Reformation had been for the later German Reformation. Masaryk was concerned with ideas, with "labor for an idea" (*práce pro myšlenku*), as he said – with its gradual and general acceptance. This is already the essential lot of philosophers, precisely this idealization and practical variability. Although his image changed during the course of historical developments, Masaryk continued to believe firmly in his ideal, and in this gradual reformist or revolutionary-reformist democratizing renewal. He

¹² The Prague Slavic Congress took place between 2–12 June in 1848, with František Palacký as its president. Besides the moderate "Austroslavists," who counted Palacký among their members, there was also a faction of "radical democrats," who advocated a greater degree of independence for the Czech lands from Austria. Another attendee at the conference was Mikhail Alexandrovich Bakunin. Even despite the disunity in the positions of the various nations, the Congress adopted the Manifesto of the Slavic Congress to the European Nations, in which it declared as its main ideal the right to national self-determination.

was also convinced that this ideal can be superordinated above particular nationalistic interests, and that it is thus practically possible to gradually achieve this ideal within a functioning democratic state, which he, in essence, considered to be a kind of medium for humanism, with all of these positive attributes that you mentioned.

Masaryk's Legacy

Despite the fact that Masaryk's thinking was a far cry from Marxism, Masaryk has been acknowledged by some Marxists, including, if I'm not mistaken, Bohumír Šmeral, the first leader of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, as well as future Communist minister of culture and education Zdeněk Nejedlý. Other thinkers, meanwhile, such as J. L. Fischer, have found inspiration in Masaryk for conceptualizing positions of the non-Marxist left. What do you consider valuable and what do you see as perhaps inconsistent in what emerged from these (more or less faithful) interpretations of Masaryk?

Yes, already as a law student Šmeral had directly supported Masaryk's courageous, critical stance in the period of the Hilsner affair.¹³ He published his opinion in the student magazine supporting Masaryk's position, and they maintained their correspondence even when Masaryk became president. It was the same with Nejedlý. Even though Nejedlý originally had a background in Jaroslav Goll's positivist historicism, in some ways he ever more conspicuously inclined towards a certain type philosophizing history, taking after Masaryk's model. However, Nejedlý perceived the meaning of Czech history (if we take a look back at his student years) as a national-revivalist struggle, and not essentially as a religious-emancipatory endeavor. After the First World War he entirely parted ways with non-engaged objectivist positivism (by way of "liberalism" – see the essay "The End of Liberalism in Historiography," 1921), and then oriented his concept of the nation, as we know, more in the spirit of a kind of national socialism. We can also note a swing towards national traditions in Stalin, and the question arises as to whether, and in what sense we can really consider Nejedlý to be a Marxist. Despite the fact that

¹³ The Hilsner affair (Hilsneriáda) is the name given to a court case involving Leopold Hilsner, a Jewish Bohemian who was accused in 1899 of murdering the nineteen-year-old Catholic Anežka Hružová. Masaryk took an active role during the ensuing society-wide discussion of this affair and the baseless assumption that it had been a ritual murder, and he courageously and vigorously spoke out in public against this "blood libel." The reactions to Masaryk's engagement in this affair were vicious anti-Semitic attacks in the press and from students. The Hilsner affair is considered the most egregious manifestation of anti-Semitism in the Czech lands in the 19th century, and has been compared with the Dreyfus affair at the end of the 19th century in France's Third Republic.

he was a leftist intellectual, he only entered the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia after his emigration to the Soviet Union in 1939.

In the case of J. L. Fischer, it cannot be overlooked that we can consider his structural philosophy a certain alternative or original ideological attempt at supplementing Marxism in the sense of the criticism of what was then the predominant form of the capitalist order and bourgeois democracy as such. Despite Fischer's overt sympathies with the Russian Bolshevik revolution and his defense of the Soviet social model, he still did not intellectually identify with Marxist, or rather with Marxist-Leninist thinking. Even though it can be said that Fischer's structuralism in essence represents a kind of specific model of a socialist system, it is based upon the principles of structural democracy, and thus accordingly is based upon the free and harmoniously developed individual.

J. L. Fischer dealt with Masaryk comprehensively and thought critically about him for his entire life, as we can find in the third volume of his *Výbor z díla* (Anthology of Works, 2013). Just like Masaryk, he was primarily an uncompromising critic of his period and the distinctive forms of its democratic tendencies. At the end of the 19th century and the end of the 1920s, of course, democracy was manifesting various crises in its developmentally historical phases, each of which required its own critical emphasis. But in what way did Fischer then closely tie himself to Masaryk's thinking? In essence, we can say that besides Masaryk's activist conception of "small works," which Fisher initially found in its early stage in revolutionarily conceived and volunteerist pragmatism (which is moreover actually similar to what Karel Čapek had called for), Masaryk as well as Fischer can be primarily considered to be thinkers of "crises." Both of these Czech thinkers objectively drew upon scientifically backed and sociologically founded arguments, but their essential philosophical grounding was nonetheless diametrically opposite. Fischer identified the crisis that he described at the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s as a structural one, or more specifically as a crisis of the functioning of contemporary democratic structures, and not as a crisis of the modern and emotionally unrooted individual human being. He therefore did not seek a cure for this malaise in an individualist "anthropologism" in Masaryk's sense, but rather in a general philosophical-sociological analysis of the dysfunctions in democratic structures that were sliding towards "pathology," and ultimately also in the search for structural possibilities for systemic revitalization. In this fundamental structural and scientific regard (which does not exclude the prediction of potentially negative social phenomena) it already becomes impossible to speak about national emancipation: it is really the emancipation of a state system, whose universalist character cannot be denied. These universal and dynamically fluctuating original structures then represent the longed-for (asubjective) functional framework for the intelligibility of the possibilities contained in our (subjective) orientations.

However, the revelation of the functionality of these essential dynamic structures was preceded by an intensive creative period when Fischer, as a young and left-oriented intellectual, was still coming to terms with the negative experiences from the First

World War. This had ruined the world of the new generation of young intellectuals, and it was beyond the powers of the dominant objectivist positivism (whose leading light in the Czech lands was František Krejčí, who had also been a mentor for J. L. Fischer among others) to offer a positivist solution. It was precisely in the last years of the war and the first peacetime years that Fischer started to find a solution to the contemporary dismal social situation in a revolutionary interpretation of pragmatism. In it, he saw a necessary and fresh creative energy that had the power to change the world and remold it in its own image and, as a representative of the non-Marxist left, it is precisely in this philosophical trend that he sought the possibility of practically fulfilling his volunteerist longing for taking action. Additionally, Fischer was convinced that, by contrast with the abstract conception of truth and the excesses of intellectualism, his requirement for strict empiricism would lend the concept of humanism a new, practical, and humane character. This thus opened up for Fischer his desired opportunity to think through questions of the subject and subjectivity anew, as well as other issues such as human rights. He could become the kind of active co-creator who would change the reality of values in his own time. The result of his initial painstaking philosophical work is essentially a transition from volunteerist pragmatism to structuralist philosophy. It is perhaps also necessary to add that Fischer, just like Masaryk, had attentively studied Auguste Comte, and certainly with good reason. He was one of the leading Czech thinkers who was able not only to critically think about Masaryk, but also in an original, modern spirit to take his thoughts to their logical conclusions. It is precisely in Fischer that Emanuel Rádl's¹⁴ challenge is confirmed for the future philosophical generation: "as a pioneer, Masaryk blazed only the main trails, while the responsibility for the details has been left to others: for this is the method of pioneers."¹⁵

What did Rádl mean by this? Which trails did Masaryk blaze? And on which paths is it still necessary to set out today? Isn't there also a danger that people might take Masaryk as an affirmative symbol rather than as a source for critical approaches to our times?

Rádl openly exhorts us to make selections from Masaryk's commentaries and to present the philosophical core of his thinking to others. He considers Masaryk's so-called "realism" an "attempt at radically new foundations for modern thinking."¹⁶ He is aware that with too much solitude in the world, the individual succumbs to passions and

¹⁴ Emanuel Rádl, a biologist and philosopher, was one of the leading Czech public intellectuals in the early twentieth century and, especially, in the interwar period.

¹⁵ Emanuel Rádl, "T. G. Masaryk," in: Will Durant, *Od Platóna k dnešku. Vývoj filosofie v jejích velkých představitelích*, trans. V. J. Hauner and H. Sýkora, reviewed and annotated by Emanuel Rádl (Prague: Sfinx Bohumila Jandy, 1937), p. 434f. The English original of Durant's book *The Story of Philosophy* does not contain this entry on Masaryk.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 458.

aggression, and when the alienated and abandoned human being is forced to make decisions, these blind forces lead him to identify with an ideological doctrine that is revealed as a “surrogate for objective certainty.”¹⁷ In the spirit of Masaryk, he therefore calls on us always to personally experience each of our choices – that is, these things that we speak or write about. The fundamental ethical consequence that follows from this purely personal and synthesizing embrace of reality, according to Rádl, precedes every arbitrary whim, and in its manner prefers the moral continuity of the individual, thus in Masaryk’s language to consciously choose good.

Rádl does not identify Masaryk’s realism either with an objectively oriented positivism, or with idealism, for which the world is a merely subjective idea. In this, along with his specific conception of synergism, Masaryk is strikingly similar to Husserl, who in connection with his own philosophical conception engaged in substantial contemplation and characterization of the crisis of the single-sided focus of European sciences, as well as of transcendental phenomenology. This, in Husserl’s words, must not turn away from its “teleological function” if it is to be (in connection with the idea of “normative leading”) an expression of, to summarize: “the philosophical idea of European humanity” in the capacity of a “higher” humanity and its “teleological-historical” meaning.¹⁸ He thus leads us to critical consideration of Husserl’s proposition, already pronounced in his *Ideas I*, that phenomenologists themselves are “the genuine positivists.”¹⁹ As for the rest, Edmund Husserl himself considered Masaryk to be his “mentor and friend.” Masaryk had become acquainted with Husserl back when he was a student of mathematics and astronomy during his year-long stay in Leipzig (1876–1877). He discovered in him a talented philosopher, and pointed Husserl out to his Viennese teacher Franz Brentano; later Husserl became Brentano’s pupil, as is well known. Masaryk even awakened an interest in Husserl in the New Testament, and Husserl later converted to Protestantism. Husserl was a native of Prostějov, thus from the same region as Masaryk, which also made him feel closer.

A year after Masaryk’s death Husserl’s pupil, the leading Czech philosopher Jan Patočka wrote: “Masaryk should be a lifelong problem for every thinking Czech.” To what degree does this symbolic challenge retain its philosophical validity? Surely today it is not the case that one should narrowly focus on Czech philosophy and fail to see

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 459.

¹⁸ Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*. trans. Dawid Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970). The text quoted here is from a preface not included in the English edition. Czech edition: *Krise evropských věd a transcendentální fenomenologie*, trans. Oldřich Kuba (Prague: Academia, 1972), p. 13f.

¹⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. F. Kersten (The Hague/Boston/London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982), p. 39.

the forest for the trees. One effective path to take is to conjecture about what Masaryk would have thought in the broader thematic contexts of international intellectual trends. Masaryk showed us the way in this regard. Not only did he always critically distinguish himself from others in his scholarly work, but he also took positive inspiration from the so-called *Ideals of Humanity* (the title of a book published in 1901)²⁰ of his time. He himself also endeavored towards the incorporation of Czech thinking into the broader context of the development of European philosophy. It is in the German version of *Concrete logic* where he introduces the pansophic teaching of John Amos Comenius, whom he compares with Auguste Comte for his conception of “logic,” which essentially reveals a parallel between the gradational ordering of the world and the graduated attainment of knowledge about it, identifying Comenius as Comte’s direct predecessor.²¹ By contrast with earlier literary endeavors at pinning Comenius down as a thinker and pedagogue, it is only against the background of Masaryk’s positive concept of the classification and ordering of the sciences that Masaryk convincingly appreciates Comenius as a philosopher.

Nevertheless, the danger of some kind of ideological emptying and reduction of Masaryk’s lifelong creative and intellectual oeuvre to a mere national-patriotic symbol, as you correctly admonish, is not only a potential risk, but I would judge that it has already become a reality. This affects not only the cultural-political sphere: the more general lack of interest in Masaryk as a philosopher can be found primarily in the upcoming younger generations of Czech thinkers. By contrast, in the past Masaryk was actively discussed by critics, not only in the period before the First World War but most of all in the interwar period and also in the first three years after the end of the Second World War, and his work was carefully and positively studied from a variety of ideological positions from the domestic as well as the international philosophical-intellectual spectrum. We can note a kind of revival of interest in Masaryk in the 1960s, primarily via the reformist Marxist philosopher Milan Machovec. The general public intellectual interest officially reawakened after 1989. However, at that time it was necessary in all areas to intellectually catch up with the West, which had been continually developing, while at the same time not passing over the unique specificity of the native philosophical tradition. Part of this specificity of Czech thinking is in its insight into this peculiar “reform” and then “revolutionary-reform” nature of our domestic emancipatory tradition, whether this typical historical approach is religiously motivated or

²⁰ Published in English in Masaryk, *The Ideals of Humanity and How to Work: Lectures Delivered in 1898 at the University of Prague* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1938).

²¹ Tomáš G. Masaryk, “Pokus o konkrétní logiku” [Attempt at a concrete logic], in *Spisy T. G. Masaryka (Writings of T.G. Masaryk)* Vol. 3, ed. J. Srovnal, (Prague: Masaryk Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences, 2001), pp. 59–62. This is a Czech translation of the revised and expanded German version of *Concrete Logic*. It was translated into Czech by Karel Berka and Jindřich Srovnal.

Interview with Jan Svoboda

purely secular. In this I see one of the main challenges that Masaryk left as a legacy to modern Czech thought today: to find suitable ways to draw positively from this national tradition, and to continue to effectively cultivate and develop it within the necessary historical context.