

T. G. Masaryk: Juvenilia. Studies and Articles 1876-1881

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Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk's *Juvenilia* form the sixteenth volume of his *Collected Writings*, whose publication the T. G. Masaryk Institute begins with this collection. As we learn from Jiří Brabec's article „Eighty Years of Vain Attempts at Publishing Masaryk's Collected Writings“ [*Masarykův sborník* 8 (1993)], this will be the third, fourth or fifth attempt, depending on what we consider as comprising the Writings. It is the fourth well-conceived attempt and the third in the post-war era, the others taking place in 1945, 1968 and 1992. Once again it has been decided to publish the „complete“ Masaryk, but in two parallel printings, the larger one (seventeen volumes) presenting the basic Masaryk and the smaller being composed of collections of the minor works. Volumes 12-14 (*Russia and Europe*, including the manuscript third volume), volume 18 (*From the Beginnings of Atheneum*), volumes 31-33 (*Speeches from the War*) and volume 36 (*The Paths of Democracy*) are already prepared for publication. It is certainly true that sociologists are waiting more for Masaryk's other writings, such as *Modern Man and Religion*, *A Handbook of Sociology* and above all for *Suicide*, but since we have already waited one hundred years, waiting yet another year is of no great significance... But what if it is?

Today Masaryk the sociologist finds himself in a different context, and the era itself demands (if Masaryk is to continue to be considered a relevant personality) and makes possible (if he is to be better understood) another, substantially different reading of him. Finally someone has had the courage to say this aloud! František Kautman in a review of Masaryk's *Juvenilia* writes the following: „independent of the personage of the author, his thoughts sound very modern -- or, more exactly, post-modern.“ [*Literární noviny* 1993, number 51-2] Similarly, Eva Hartmann argues, in a different connection, that Masaryk was not the only one to analyse the European world and its crisis at the turn of the century,

and therefore „would it not serve to judge him in the context of his times, in no way isolated like some kind of pure, rare phenomenon?“ [*Old-New Meditations on TGM.* *Tvar* (1993) number 11.] This particularly struck me when I read Masaryk's juvenilia, *Modern Man and Religion* and Václav Černý's comments on these writings. It is necessary to read Masaryk in the same way Simmel is read today (perhaps by Frisby), or Durkheim (perhaps by Mestrovič) or Weber (perhaps by Krasnodebskij) -- as a thinker of whom it is said, „the *fin de siècle* tore apart his beliefs and marked him indelibly. It determined his entire life's thought in that it provoked him against himself in a life or death struggle.“ [J. L. Fischer „Duše umdlené a bojovné.“ *Masarykův sborník* 4 (1930). 177.]

Today we know that the crisis, whose thinker -- as Zdeněk Nejedlý keenly underlined -- Masaryk was, was the beginning of the same crisis that we are living through today in undeniably even more dramatic forms than Masaryk and his contemporaries, and which we reflect upon in vague, although generally useful, terms. The feud between scientism and interpretism, the yearning for exactitude and the awareness of its elusiveness, the need for a unified view of the world and the suspicion of its impossibility, but also the tension between visible and even measurable progress and the foreboding of an apocalyptic end -- all of these are observable in Masaryk's first works. The editors correctly argue that this volume is not really juvenilia in the true sense of the word, because the published texts are the result of the work and efforts of a man of around thirty years of age (the same as the Marx of the *Manifesto*). However, what makes them *de facto* juvenilia are two circumstances concerning their origin: 1) Masaryk wrote them in Vienna, therefore outside the Czech social context, and 2) he wrote them in a bitter struggle with the Czech language. Czech was not Masaryk's mother tongue, as he grew up in the linguistic context of southern Moravia-Slovakia, and was educated in a German environment and studied other languages intensively. The Czech of his juvenilia is a mix of consciously learned literary Czech, general Slavicisms,

Russian and Polish allusions and contemporary (but less frequently used) Germanisms. We should not forget this moment: Masaryk's *rhetoric*, which we know so well from his later writings, his apodictions, his distaste for long and complex sentences -- these are all frequently not the result of some plan, but simply a definite, specific linguistic disposition.

From a „Masarykological“ viewpoint, almost everything essential has been said about his juvenilia, not least thanks to the polemic between J. L. Fischer and Zdeněk Nejedlý in 1932. At the time of the publication of the first two volumes of Nejedlý's biography of Masaryk, for example, J. L. Fischer argued convincingly enough that in the era in which Masaryk wrote his juvenilia (namely the study *Plato as a Patriot*), he had still not read Comte authentically, that Brentano's formative influence on Masaryk was substantially greater than the assumed influence of Comte, that „Masaryk's Plato is non-Platonist through and through,“ etc. [cf. Fischer, J. L. „Přehled masarykovské literatury jubilejní.“ *Sociologická revue* 3.1-2. 67ff.]

The fundamental question that strikes the reader when perusing Masaryk's *Juvenilia* today is predictable and entirely justified: Is there any reason to read them today? As a document of its times, as evidence of Masaryk's intellectual maturity, as a contribution to the creation of a Czech national sociological school, the answer is clear: absolutely. As Popper-esque „objectivised knowledge“ [*World 3*], meaning as a collection of texts at the level of an anthology from the young Weber or Durkheim (not even to speak about Marx), as instruction in sociology itself, however, it should only be read with broad-mindedness and from a bird's eye perspective. Not even from this point of view would strict rigidity be fully in order, however. For example, Masaryk's *Plato as a Patriot* is certainly a dated work, but Masaryk's struggle to achieve a sense of proportion between what is indisputably acceptable in Plato and what is questionable discussion (what Popper ultimately identified as elements of totalitarianism -- and Masaryk

knew about them!), definitely bears witness to the perceptiveness of Masaryk's thought. Even the most negligible thought is prototypically Masaryk: „Without a science of morals there can be no sociology!“ In all the juvenilia Masaryk introduces sociology into the public consciousness, Comtean sociology -- „the science of the social being and life of nations, humanity“ -- whose calling is to be an exact science that makes it possible for us „to put our arrangements for the future and the present into effect.“ It is to Masaryk's eternal credit that sociology quickly became an organic part of our cultural and even our political life, and it is only to be deplored that the interest on Masaryk's investment was not paid - not by far.

Fundamentally more serious (in terms of subject matter) than *Plato as a Patriot* are Masaryk's reflections contained in the study *On Progress, Development and Culture* (by culture Masaryk means civilisation), in which at least two still relevant theses are formed. The first concerns the relativity of progress: Masaryk does not deny progress, but seeks its criteria in and for various areas of social life and arrives at the conclusion that the development of culture is in fact incongruent, such that every generalising statement about progress is problematic. The second thesis ties the idea of progress to the notion of the growth of human needs („all progress is nothing more than the awakening of new needs and the desire to satisfy these needs“), which is an idea that we know well from Marx, and as his central idea no less (in passing -- Masaryk's first reference to Marx was made as early as 1877). Masaryk, however, is not satisfied with the claim that „every satisfied need cries out a new need“ (Marx), but, on the contrary, shows how the impossibility of satisfying some needs immediately to the necessary and desired extent leads „to a universalised distaste for life.“ This is based on „hollow and immoral needs, which cannot be fulfilled.“ From this it is only a short step to Masaryk's obsessive theme: suicide -- „reason does not suffice for culture,“ etc. Masaryk closes his reflections, in which we sense undertones expressively Durkheimian, by arguing that we know that

there is progress (in Masaryk's aphoristic formulation, filled with multiple meanings, progress is „the slipping away of evil from the world.“) but we don't know its laws. Here, Masaryk points to and anticipates something that will only later develop in the systematic criticism of modern civilisation -- and obviously not only in his work.

Masaryk's conception of social atomisation is of general sociological interest („society is a collection of the same forces, the combination of people is not chemical but, we could say, physical: we are never allowed to lose sight of the individual and to enter into a pure abstraction of society; for a certain person suffers, not, however, abstract society.“) Masaryk worked with Comte's law of consensus, which became the *Leitmotiv* of Emanuel Chalupný's life work. The idea of progress in Masaryk was only worked out in outline in Karel Galla's work (which is still rigorous today), and the thought of the reduction of needs as a *sine qua non* has lived on this planet and has been a common theme since the 1960s. In the theme of the survival or destruction of human civilisation is Masaryk identifies two aspects: in the aspect imported from Darwin's theories (some higher species that Masaryk called *superanthropos*, which already coexists with us, although we still know nothing about it, and will force us out according to the law of survival of the fittest), and a more general evolutionary aspect („beings bound to the Earth, we depend to a high degree on fate, which fills itself with this planet. Science tells us that the Earth travels for itself,“ etc.) In this connection, Masaryk also exposes the problem of moral relativism (in a dated and, on its merits, somewhat comical polemic with Funck about the future of Pan-Slavism) again in a context that could and should have something to say to us: „Funck does not differentiate moral good from material good, he doesn't differentiate national economy from sociology appropriately, which to him (as we already know) is social morality; his moral science is therefore similar to a balance sheet with „income“ and „expense“ columns. Whereas material goods commonly have relative values, as means to a certain end, moral good

has an unconditional value, a value in and of itself... Funck calls for our era to deny itself many needs, to do its best to work and to simplify its exorbitant needs. But what is frivolous or vain?“ So, then, again *nil novum sub sole*?

I will disregard the wholly dated Masaryk texts (but, then again, what isn't somehow paradoxically „timeless“?) How much attention does Masaryk devote to the problem of *Hypnotism or Animal Magnetism*? After all, don't we also, live in a time of parapsychology, alternative science, the occult and uncontrollable Eastern meditation techniques? This is a list in which the absence of „animal magnetism“ is merely an oversight.

In brief, we find in Masaryk's juvenilia the majority of his later „great themes“ *in nuce*: the theme of suicide, the relationships between sociology and politics, economics and morality, the individual and society, the social uniformity given by law and free will, the classification of sciences and, obviously, the whole internal feud of the Comtean tradition of sociology as a „positive science“ with the philosophically, and evidently correctly, understood diagnosis of the era (which was by means of exact sociology only graspable with difficulty). Nejedlý is certainly right, and is supported in this by J. L. Fischer, when he states that „the formulation here is often incomplete, even naive, and neither is the argumentation the most direct.“ [J. L. Fischer, op. cit.] In the main, the tone of Masaryk's juvenilia supports Patočka's thesis that „the entire scientific thinker's field, modern sociology, grew largely as a reflex to the danger, even to the perceived pathological character, of the earlier development of industrial civilisation.“ [Patočka, Jan. *Kaciřské eseje*. Praha: 1990]

One final note: already in the juvenilia we meet what we will continually see in Masaryk -- the build-up to conceptions, the form, the undertones, the unfinished ideas. Not even in the juvenilia does he give us any answers to the ranks of explicitly formulated questions, because the promised successor volumes simply never came to be. So it was with *The Handbook of Sociology*, with *Russia and Europe*, and with the *Concrete Logic*. In