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SPIRITUAL CRISIS OF EUROPEAN HUMANITY IN HUSSERL AND MASARYK

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From a philosophical standpoint the topic of this paper might well seem either superficial or foolhearty. What is the point, we might well ask, of comparing two thinkers who are so entirely different from each other, who, in spite of a common academic background, set out from wholly different problems, follow entirely different philosophical goals and make use of wholly different methods? Can this article help being an arbitrary comparison that can lead to a coherent result only by constructive violence? The reader is sure to ask such questions and, admittedly, they bothered me as well when the idea of the article came to me. Can comparing thinkers who stand in no historical causal sequence have any real philosophical significance? Philosophical significance, after all, is what it is all about. We can justify a philosophical experiment such as this only if an analysis of two trains of thought sheds light on a philosophical problem. The starting point of such an analysis must be some common problem which is perceived and worked over from different standpoints about whose justification we inquire and whose results interest us. Thus we would see the significance of drawing philosophical parallels, that it teaches us to see problems from different standpoints, to avoid a narrow dogmatism, to grasp different personal moods from within and to follow the reasoning of different philosophical approaches.

We might then ask whether this requirement is satisfied in this case. Masaryk's thought deals primarily with society and with the human individual who lives and decides within it. By contrast, Husserl is primarily a logician and a metaphysician animated by an almost paradoxical fusion of the passion for the most fundamental, most general conception and for the finest details, and who turns to most varied aspects of existence with the same interest. Masaryk is in the first place a civilizer and an organizer; Husserl is the last great

contemplator in the West European metaphysical tradition. What do they have in common? Can they have any problem in common at all, never mind a central problem? Only a more detailed analysis will enable us to answer that.

A good starting point might be the fact that both Husserl's and Masaryk's philosophical activity is marked by a conviction that European humanity is passing through a protracted spiritual crisis whose roots must be sought deep in the past, at the very beginnings of modern thought. Here we really have a thesis that the two thinkers share. If, however, it is to serve as a real starting point of our work, we need to show two things — first, that Masaryk and Husserl intend by "spiritual crisis" the same reality, in spite of the individual divergences in the way each understands it, and, secondly, that for both the question of spiritual crisis is continuous with the central problems of their philosophizing.

With respect to the first question, we need first of all explain the way the two thinkers conceive of the spiritual crisis. To Masaryk it appears from the start as a "mass social phenomenon of modern civilization." The symptom of the crisis is to him the modern tendency to suicide. "The mass phenomenon of suicide thus appears to me as a historical process, as something for which a society is collectively responsible..." (Masaryk, *Sebevražda* (Prague, 1892), p. 137.) Masaryk here captures the crisis in its explosive consequences, in the break-up of life itself, and his effort focuses on this massive criterion of individual and social well-being. This symptom, to be sure, is only the starting point of a diagnosis — in his work, Masaryk liked to use medical analogies — and the actual reason, Masaryk thinks, cannot be discovered by a purely objective analysis of the components of the present state of the society, but only by an analysis of the overall state of inner, spiritual life which manifests itself in the condition of the society and which conditions for instance political and economic conditions (*ibid.*, p. 248). Masaryk accepted Comte's principle of the philosophy of history. Thus we encounter here Comte's conception of ideas, specific convictions, as the chief and decisive forces of historical and social processes. Masaryk's sociology and philosophy are always primarily an analysis of the possible and actual impact of ideas and convictions on individuals and on society. It has been stressed more than once that Comte influenced Masaryk deeply, but did this influence follow

purely intellectual paths — or was Masaryk led to Comte by the idea of a social crisis? Comte, after all, is the philosopher of that crisis.

Comte explains the current spiritual crisis as a result of the transition to a positive stage. Masaryk agrees with him insofar as he sees the problem as a conflict of a traditional, religious, and of a new, a-religious viewpoint. It is certainly a way in which we can, roughly, characterize the spiritual process witnessed by the last three centuries, at least with respect to its purely factual side. What it means philosophically is not yet decided thereby, and, in offering this formulation, Masaryk surely did not intend it purely philosophically, but historically and sociologically. What is important for our problem is that Masaryk, by rejecting Comte's view of religion and its relation to philosophy and science, preserves a free perspective on Comte's natural scientific dogmatism, distancing himself from the rationalism in which Comte was a conscious successor of Descartes and Bacon. This rationalism is indeed a problem common to Masaryk and Husserl.

Husserl, too, faces the phenomenon of crisis from the very beginnings of his philosophical activity, though at first sight in a wholly different sense: the crisis, that is, uncertainty, unclarity, affects the most rigorous of the sciences with whose foundations he had begun to concern himself. The difficulties he encounters force him to set aside problems on which he had worked for years in order to enter a broader arena (see the "Preface" of *Logische Untersuchungen*!). This leads to Logical Investigations, and first of all to "Prolegomenon to Pure Logic." It would be superfluous to explain here the nature of the difficulties he encounters. We do need to note, though, that the opponent against whom the polemics with psychologism are aimed is the very objectivistic metaphysics which is the foundation of Comte's attempt which Masaryk encountered from the start of his scholarly career. For Masaryk, the disruption of life is the symptom of the crisis, the diagnostical means is an analysis of moral statistics; Husserl sees the crisis in lack of clarity in the foundation of the sciences and his critique is already an attempt at its systematic rebuilding. What is it that Husserl's revision clears away? Nothing other than that hypostatized system of modern science, build up on a natural scientific methodology, that system which positivist thought considers the true reality itself and which it

then sees in a radical contradiction with both purely naive and traditionally religious thought.

It would take us too far afield if we tried to track down the inner consistency of the entire process which led Husserl from the foundations of mathematics to his own philosophical synopsis, to the fundamental attempt at uncovering a new common level from which we can overview the totality of what is in a way other than that of the modern rationalistic objectivism that we have encountered in Comte, a level on which this synopsis is freed of those painful ambiguities that constitute the inner difficulties of positivism. Husserl reaches this level in the process of reduction which is not some kind of a logical conclusion, a logically constructed solution of the problem posed, but rather a living, active process into which the subject must, so to speak, grow in order to realize its full philosophical scope. We need to pass through the process of reduction in order to recognize its universality and fruitfulness; otherwise the idea of a reduction sinks into a mere abstract schema of a bad subjectivism. What, though, is really important for us is the outcome we could formulate as follows. Husserl becomes convinced that there is only one radical way out of the ambiguities he encountered at the start of his career, and that is subjective. A consistent philosophy free of ambiguities is, for Husserl, a consistent subjectivism. Here Husserl thinks he stands at the very source of the spiritual crisis; he is deeply convinced that with the resolution of the theoretical question of a unitary foundation of philosophy and science we have achieved what was most important for the resolution of the crisis. For the idea of science, of theory, is, according to Husserl, virtually the guiding idea of European humanity, that in the name of which Europe has lived culturally and politically for more than two millennia, that which gives to the European the content and meaning of his existence and is capable of continuing to do so as soon as we have set aside the internal difficulties of the present situation in the sciences, continuing to inspire the European and to continue making him the leader of all humankind. In short, Husserl's solution to the crisis is a rebirth of Europe out of the spirit of radical theory. This rebirth, then, is possible only because the course of history is governed by leading ideas which ultimately articulate this stream of events, and that the idea of knowing, of *theoria* free of all prejudgement, is such an

all-embracing leading idea whose bearer, European humanity, is called, thanks to this idea, not only to become the master of the earth and of the world, but also to determine and interpret all its ideals. The European spirit is the great rationalizer of all ideals, all are placed in a new light thanks to the idea of an autonomous and unprejudged theory that brings clarity and continuity to all the orders of life. Reading Husserl's characterization of the European spirit we cannot fail to recall Max Weber and his attempt at an overall characterization of the European drive to rationalization as he presents it in his famous prefatory remark to essays in the sociology of religion. This rationalizing impulse, Husserl goes on, naturally does not stop short of religion; there is a special affinity between European rationalism and monotheism, and in the course of history we do witness attempts at ever new assimilation of both principles, of religion and philosophy. "In the general process of idealization stemming from philosophy, God becomes virtually logicised, even becoming the bearer of the absolute *logos*." Already in the fact that the Christian churches invoke *faith* as a special kind of evidence appears to Husserl as a result of this logicisation. The pre-Christian gods, that is, present themselves naively, unproblematically, without any argumentation, as real components of what surrounds us. Only with the rise and impact of philosophy, according to Husserl, did the problem of faith in the Christian sense become possible. Thus the philosophical, conceptual development is, according to Husserl, also that which directs religious development itself, what religious development must always keenly feel within it. Here we reach the second point common to Husserl and Masaryk in their conception of crisis. They do not agree only in regarding the positivist hypostatization of natural scientific methodology as a symptom of acute crisis, but also in attributing modern irreligiosity to modern thought, modern philosophy, and in regarding this irreligiosity as a symptom of a state of crisis. Masaryk supports this with his analysis of the tendency to suicide, Husserl with his conception of religion as a metaphoric grasp of the ultimate metaphysical secrets, in Hegel's terms, *Wahrheit im Elemente der Vorstellung*. The decline of religion in general consciousness then goes hand in hand with the decline of awareness of the ultimate tasks and possibilities of philosophy.

Yet, though we have determined these two agreements between

Husserl and Masaryk, we have not yet reached what constitutes the very deep unity of their perception of the problem of crisis. For while Masaryk and Husserl agree that irreligiosity is a symptom of crisis, their views of what constitutes the essence of religion diverge widely. Husserl has published no unambiguous statement in this respect, but his perception of this phenomenon is, to use a cliché, a pale intellectualism, even though Husserl does admit the independent evidence of faith. Religion remains for him an entirely emotional and conceptually inadequate travesty of deep philosophic motifs. In the last instance the philosopher has something more, something better than religion. Though I am not sure whether Husserl would wholly agree with this, I do know that Husserl's conception of religion is that of a form of effective idealism, and my words are only a result of this conception. By contrast, in Masaryk's thought--and here we are launching on a deeper reflection about his philosophical motifs--the question of religion is an object of unusually thorough, devoted labor. For Masaryk, religion is primarily a feeling of trust and love in a dedication to the world and to one's task. Masaryk states this in the same section of *Suicide* in which he also speaks of the need to be done with modern half-heartedness, that is, with crisis, by being done with irreligiosity (*ibid.*, p. 249): "we have to become interested in the external world and society, we have to learn devotion: what we lack is a genuine and noble love." Elsewhere he stresses that feeling is the most important aspect of religion. He does also say in one passage (*Konkrétní logika*, p. 172) that there is a healthy sense in the teaching that religion is something like a "metaphysics of the people," but hard upon that he agrees with Schleiermacher's assertion that piety is neither a knowing nor an acting but rather a feeling (*ibid.*, p. 170) that can equally well accompany theological or philosophical views. Or again, in the last volume of Karel Čapek's *Hovory s T.G.M.* (III,86): "Religion is something practical, living in a deep sense. It is not sufficiently defined in its dogmas, its liturgies or its history, but by understanding its essence which is an awareness of human dependence on the divine, on God. ... Religion is a trust and a hope, the stance of hope is the essence of religion. ... It is not only a matter of understanding the meaning of life as a whole, it is simultaneously a mood flowing from this understanding of life and the world. ... Religion, piety is strictly a human affair: God is not religious. ..."

Or again: "my faith orients to Jesus, to love of neighbor, effective love, reverence for God. Religion is a matter of a hope that overcomes fear, especially fear of death, driving ever higher and higher, sustaining a desire for knowledge and wisdom, it is free of fearfulness" (*ibid.*, p. 98). In short, for Masaryk religion is the support of an active life lived in a positive relation to all that is. Wherein, though, is the positivity of this relation grounded? Here Masaryk answers unambiguously: in religious objectivism, in the conviction that an all knowing and all powerful God, the creator of the world, cares about us. "Religion, essentially authoritarian, is objectivistic. Theism opposes an excessive religious subjectivism" (*ibid.*, p. 84). In short, in Masaryk's conception of religion we need to distinguish an objective and a subjective component. The subjective component is the optimistic trust which bears up the believer in his doing, the objective aspect is the theological view of the essence of God and the world, of God who greatly transcends this world as an independent intelligence and an absolute power. Now I believe that a thinker like Husserl might perhaps accept this subjective component but simply cannot accept the theological conception that Masaryk puts forward. And yet the two seem at first so intimately linked that it would be difficult to draw a sharp line between them. Objectivistic theism and Masarykian trust, the resoluteness of faith, appear to be strictly correlated. Yet it is enough to take a look at a thinker who always loyally proclaimed himself Masaryk's pupil, Emanuel Rádl, to see how he separated the objective theological and the subjective impulsive component. For Rádl, faith is pure trust in the command which is addressed to us and which we experience as divine--even though Rádl rejects traditional theological conceptions to such an extent that he will not even use ordinary expressions like "God is, God exists." God, for Rádl, certainly does not have the objective mode of existing that Masaryk definitely presupposes. And so in Rádl's case we can see the two components of Masaryk's religion separated. That these components are held together by Masaryk's personality, not by any objectively binding philosophical conception, is the reason why, in spite of everything, we can designate Masaryk's philosophy as a philosophy of a crisis which it does not definitively overcome.

We have seen, that is, that, for Masaryk, the symptom of crisis is the tendency to suicide; it is the analysis of this tendency that leads

him to a deeper symptom, irreligiosity--here, too, he is in agreement with Husserl. And what brings about this irreligiosity? Nothing other than modern scepticism, which in turn stems from subjectivism. Scepticism follows from the difficulties in reaching an objective world once philosophy shifted to a subjectivistic ground. Modern subjectivism is therefore the root of the spiritual crisis. Both Masaryk and Husserl assert that. For Husserl, too, modern scepticism is an outcome of the subjective standpoint that philosophy assumed and now does not know what to do with it; it does not know how to resolve the question of how it is that all that is is for a subject and yet the subject is merely a part of all that is. Not knowing which way to turn, philosophy takes refuge in the idea of understanding man as a part of nature, naturally of nature conceived in a modern manner, that is, *more geometrico* — and so arrives also at the conception of a geometric man who has lost the freedom of truth, who no longer lives among things as they actually are but among only his own subjective processes from which no bridge leads to authentic reality. Being at a loss as to what to do with the modern discovery of the subject is for Husserl and Masaryk alike the ultimate presupposition of a spiritual crisis which is then in fact born of a bad subjectivism, such as Hume's, a subjectivism with a naturalistic foundation which is the starting point of positivism. This is the point at which Husserl and Masaryk are most intimately linked, here they are in a full agreement brought about, to be sure, also by their shared starting point in Brentano and in the study of English empiricism.

And so both our thinkers are led to the father of modern subjectivism, Descartes. It is at this point, which represents one of the richest foci of the history of ideas, that their efforts diverge. Descartes' philosophy holds within itself such complexes of questions and such masses of conceptual motives that often only artificial constructions or force hold them together. It is a labyrinth in which only the highest philosophical effort can find Ariadne's thread. The path through Descartes leads either to a radical subjectivism or to a traditional objectivistic view of the world rooted in Greek metaphysics and articulated notably by Christian theology. In approaching Descartes, Husserl does not draw back from the idea of a radical subjectivism which proves to be something entirely different than the bad Humean subjectification: Husserl

resolves the problem of subjectivism by distinguishing the transcendental and the empirical subject, renewing transcendental philosophy by a rigorous application of the process of reduction. By contrast Masaryk appears to be almost wholly unaware of any possibility of a positive significance of subjectivism. He criticizes Kant's transcendental philosophy indignantly with Humean arguments and, in the end, is content, with respect to the relation of the subject and the object, with a dualism rather reminiscent of the Cartesian. Masaryk's "moderate rationalism" goes together with his spiritualism in his doctrine of the soul. Man, for Masaryk, "is not a blind tool of natural forces, we are not fully and exclusively dependent on the external world. As against the external world there stands our consciousness as a psychic whole apperceiving the external world consistently with its own laws. ... We and the external world are equally autonomous" (*Suicide*, p. 253). Yet Masaryk does not provide an answer to the question of what these laws are, of what kind, and most important, how it enables man to understand reality. Whenever he approaches this substantive philosophical question, Masaryk, though so serious and penetrating a thinker, seems to run out of breath; often it even seems as if for him the relation subject-object were identical with that of man-his surroundings (so for inst. *Moderní člověk a náboženství*, p. 242.) What is the reason for this peculiar withdrawal before the philosophical problem of the subject? We need to pose this question because it is really striking how idiosyncratic Masaryk's view of subjectivism, especially of Kant, really is. Masaryk's objections to Kant culminate in the claim that Kant did not overcome Hume either in the critique of pure or of practical reason. We find in his writings familiar references to discrepancies in the critique as well as the claim that Kant actually only extended Hume's doctrine of mathematics to all knowledge, but no fundamental coming to terms with the very idea of a critique, with the very idea of a subjectively oriented metaphysics. To Masaryk, Kant is a sceptic. "Descartes", he writes in this context, "confused us modern philosophers thoroughly with his *cogito ergo sum*; for all his thinking, Kant no longer knows his way around thinking (*ibid*, p. 100)." Such marginal comments, to be sure, are no critique, and nowhere in Masaryk do we find a critique of the idea and the possibility of a subjectively grounded philosophy that would testify that Masaryk took it seriously. Is that not

something worth thinking about? Is it not remarkable in particular in a philosopher who reflected again and again, most seriously, about the nature of *modern* philosophy and who came up against subjectivism specifically as the ultimate source of the spiritual crisis? Masaryk's entire argumentation against subjectivism shows that he does not take it seriously, that he looks at it, so to speak, from without, from the standpoint of *sensus communis*. Subjectivism, he claims, cannot account for the "appearance of objectivity of the world." Actually, it is objectivism that cannot plausibly do this, as Schelling once nicely put it: from the standpoint of objectivism, he says, we can understand how an object can affect a subject, but we cannot understand how the subject can be aware of it. Arguments against Kant's apriorism already leave aside the most fundamental problem; arguments against inconsistencies in Kant's concept of the affect can lead only to a still deeper subjectivism. In short, I believe that on the basis of accessible materials we can say that Masaryk never intellectually overcame Kant and the problem of philosophical subjectivism.

Then how did Masaryk avoid subjectivism? In part, there was the conviction of the time that modern subjectivism, represented by German idealist philosophy, had run its course, as Masaryk puts it. German idealism and its failure would thus represent something of a negative test of subjectivism. It was particularly Brentano who influenced Masaryk in this sense, even though this view was commonly held in the 1880s. Yet Masaryk had always been able to emancipate himself to an impressive extent from the intellectual influence of his context. Could there be another influence? Here I would like to propose a hypothesis which might be thought worthy of consideration — that Masaryk is here affected by religious motivation.

Masaryk's religion is the central axis of this thought. It sets the mood of his entire life. From the earliest, religious feeling plays the role of the moving spirit of his life. Only through this relation does Masaryk understand the meaning of the world and learns to love it, in particular its people. Radical subjectivism makes him draw back as blasphemy because it virtually superordinates the subject to God. That is the reason why he considered even Kant, who, after all, built a philosophy of a finite subject, a titan and his philosophical effort as a striving for a deification of man. "Therein Kant and Goethe

equally represent their century, a century of the great revolution that sought to place humankind on a new foundation and on the throne of the Almighty (*ibid.*, 112)." In the text in which we noted so many petty invectives against Kant the criticism of Kant culminates in the accusation of titanism, a rebel against God who wants to make man at least into a demigod. Is it not remarkable that *philosophical* claim is here being answered by a reference to the merely human hybris it contains? That a theoretical, *that is, an unavoidable* question is here being measured by a religious and a moral standard?

Masaryk could not succeed in proving that subjectivism is a scepticism. Since Husserl's time, we know that modern scepticism is brought about precisely by the bad naturalistic subjectivism, that is, by the mixing of subjectivism with the methodological objectivism of modern natural science. Subjectivism of itself is no more sceptical than objectivism. It is only more critical. It is, however, quite understandable that it offends traditional religious consciousness. That, I believe, is also the case with Masaryk. For anyone who reads for instance the relevant sections of *Conversations with T.G.M.* cannot fail to note to what powerful extent Masaryk lived in a religiously traditional atmosphere, not only with respect to Christian piety but also in his views. Masaryk takes entire complexes of theological doctrines over into his credo. We encounter the teaching of Divine perfection, the conflict of Providence and human freedom, cosmological and teleological arguments, in short, with weaponry of an outright scholastic arsenal.

Thus it might also be possible to assume that Masaryk's objectivism, too, is religiously rooted, in a traditional conception of the relation of man and God, and that Masaryk does not notice the positive possibilities of subjectivism because he rejects them on religious grounds. By contrast, Husserl from the very beginning follows a purely theoretical path, that of analysis and reflection, without regard for practical questions, striving solely for clarity and precision of philosophical results, and arrives at a renewal of the Cartesian cogito which he endows with a new, universal meaning. Precisely Masaryk's weakness is Husserl's strength and vice versa. The pale intellectualism of Husserl's conception of religious faith would be unthinkable in Masaryk, but in Husserl it does not stand in the way of philosophical consistency. A man of action as

Masaryk expresses himself in his active conception of faith; the man of uncompromising intellectual consistency, as Husserl, might find it interferes with his work. Perhaps, paraphrasing one of Masaryk's well known sayings, we might say that the German is weak in his strength, the Czech strong in his weakness.

In opposition to this reading we could quote, *inter alia*, F.X. Šalda, who recently stated that, after reading Čapek's *Conversations with T.G.M.*, he came to the conclusion that Masaryk is not a religious man in the innermost sense of the word, one who longs for God before all else. I would respond by noting, with Max Weber, that there are two kinds of religiosity — that in which man feels himself God's vessel and that in which he senses himself an instrument of God's will. Masaryk definitely belongs to the latter category. Were Šalda's objection valid, we would have to exclude Calvin and the puritans from the category of religious life.

The theology which Masaryk offers in his twenty four theses in the third volume of Čapek's *Conversations with T.G.M.* appears to me philosophically unacceptable. The objectivistic conception of God, even as a scientific hypothesis and no longer as a metaphysical starting point, as in scholasticism, is untenable. It is vulnerable precisely to all of Kant's arguments. Philosophical subjectivism excludes such a conception of God from its very beginnings. God cannot be a reality in the world, linked with the things of this world in a causal nexus, a first cause that can be read off from natural processes. The deeply serious problem, though, which precisely Masaryk's philosophy poses for us, is that of faith. It surely cannot be understood as we have seen in Husserl; religious faith cannot be simply a popular metaphysics. Faith in the sense of absolute trust is not a theoretical standpoint, but far more a practical one, a matter of a personal decision which does not follow from theories or rest on arguments, but rather leads to them and explicates itself in specific views of the world whole. Masaryk stressed unceasingly that faith must be critical. However, was not such a critical posture needed precisely to free ourselves of a false theological rationalism and to place the problem of faith in a vigorously subjective standpoint? Husserl's philosophy, as it stands today, has not got around to answering these most personal, most pressing problems of human existence, though it can perhaps serve as the ground on which such answers can be built. Thus perhaps some readers will agree with the

formula in which I would sum up these reflections: the problem which flows from the confrontation of Husserl's philosophy with Masaryk's is one of personal faith in the context of radical subjectivism. I believe further that without addressing this question we cannot resolve the problem of the spiritual crisis. We cannot depend on the teleological idea of European culture; rather, we need to engage ourselves actively in realizing those ideal goods about which we have convinced ourselves that we can live only with them and for them. A determined faith, though, demands an enthusiasm drawn from the great examples of both active and theoretical life, an enthusiasm that we derive from the devotion of those whom we see working and serving the way Masaryk and Husserl do.

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On Masaryk

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