**Masaryk – “Suicide as a Social Mass Phenomenon of modern civilization” - handout**

Masaryk´s text from 1878, translated as “Suicide and Civilization”, whose whole title in German is *Der Selbstmord als soziale Massenerscheinung der Gegenwart*, in Czech “Sebevražda hromadným jevem společenským moderní osvěty“

Two parts: the first part deals with the core of Masaryk´s analysis of the modern suicide tendencies. (pp. 162-170); the second part proposes the Remedy for this tendency (221-231).

**The main claim:**

The modern wave of suicidal mania is a symptom of a crisis, of the shattering of the old unifying worldview, of its certainties and capacity to gain consensus.

The modern suicide tendency of the present is conditioned by the generally widespread irreligiosity.

**Masaryk then fight on three fronts.**

- against mythical religion (Pope Pius IX)

- against naturalistic conception of man as mere toy of impersonal causes

- against the “disease of individualism” (Shiller, Byron, Shelley, Leopardi)

Masaryk attributes the high rate of suicide to **the collapse of a ‘unified world view’ (164)**

**The schism between science and religious thought** is interpreted by Masaryk as schism between intellect and moral action: **„Half-education“ of the masses (164-165)**

It is best illustrated by two quotes: by Goethe “only half-fools and half-wise are dangerous” (164) and by Francis Bacon, reformulated by Masaryk “half-knowledge leads men away from God” (166).

**The failure of Enlightmentment project**

The loss of religion as the source of discontent, pessimism and boredom - *Taedium vitae*

A decrease of religiosity deregulates the social organism, makes people feel unhappy and increases social disorganization.

Modern education destroys religious perspective without offering anything similar, because science does not include an ethical component.

Suicide factors are best expressed in the modern pessimistic poetry (Romanticism, Titanism) and philosophy (Schopenhauer)

**What is the solution to the crisis proposed by Masaryk? -> Chapter VI**

It requires a transition to a novel form of genuine education where exact science enable persons to make logically perfect operation and justify their thoughts in a coherent whole

But above all, it requires a renewal of religiosity. It must provide human beings with ethical orientation, with a vision of common good worthy to be followed.

This kind of philosophy should “develop in man the capacity for harmonious and thorough cultivation of ideas and feelings, imbue them with power and energy, and give them a moral basis” (223)

**The strengths of Masaryk´s analysis**

(1) Masaryk put his ideas in more modern terms when he attributed the high rate of suicide to **the collapse of a ‘unified world view’ (164)** (a view provided in most societies by the prevailing religion).

(2) Masaryk´s method is sound and his sociological analysis is based on solid data.

**Weaknesses of Masaryk´s analysis and of his remedy**

(1) Is it true that the *lack of faith* is the origin of contemporary anarchy, dissatisfaction and leads to crisis? cf. Nietzsche´s analysis of nihilism)

(2) Reactionary claim that the main basis of morality (and normality) in a society is religion.

**Questions to be discussed:**

Is Masaryk´s analysis still valid?

Is the proposed cure of any appeal to contemporary society?