# Chronology of Masaryk's Life and Work

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| 1850 | Tomáš Masaryk born at Hodonín in south-east Moravia on 7 March, the son of a coachman and a cook. |
| 1864–65 | Apprenticed to a blacksmith. |
| 1865–72 | Studies at gymnasia in Brno and Vienna. |
| 1872–76 | Studies at Vienna University, graduates with the thesis 'The Nature of the Soul According to Plato'. |
| 1876–77 | A private tutor in Leipzig where he meets the American Charlotte Garrigue. |
| 1878 | First journey to America, marries Charlotte Garrigue in New York on 15 March. |
| 1879 | His second thesis (habilitation thesis), 'Suicide as a Social Mass Phenomenon', is accepted; it allows him to teach as an unsalaried *Privatdozent* at Vienna University. |
| 1881 | Publishes in book form the revised German version of his thesis on suicide. |
| 1882 | Appointed *Professor Extraordinarius* of philosophy at the new Czech University in Prague; is not nominated full professor until January 1897. |
| 1883 | Establishes the monthly *Athenaeum*, a magazine devoted to critical examination of Czech culture and science. |
| 1885 | Publishes the Czech version of his philosophical work *The Foundations of Concrete Logic*; an enlarged German version is published in 1887. |
| 1886–88 | Famous manuscripts considered by many patriots as valuable testimonies of medieval Czech culture are exposed as forgeries by scholars grouped around the *Athenaeum*; Masaryk plays an important part in this campaign. |
| 1887 | Journey to Russia, discussions with Tolstoy; further meetings with Tolstoy in 1889 and 1910; rejects Tolstoy's doctrine of non-resistance to evil. |
| 1891 | Elected to the Vienna parliament as a deputy of the Young Czech Party which he had joined as a member |





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| | of the 'Realist' group. |
| 1893 | Resigns his seat in the parliament, dissatisfied with the empty radicalism of the Young Czechs and frustrated by inner-party squabbles. |
| 1895–98 | Years of intensive writing devoted mainly to Czech problems; Masaryk defines his views on the meaning of Czech history and elaborates a Czech political programme; presents himself as a political thinker whose opinions have a firm moral and religious foundation; publishes *The Czech Question* (1895), *Our Present Crisis* (1895), *Jan Hus* (1896), *Karel Havlíček* (1896), *The Social Question* (1898). |
| 1899–1900 | The trial of Leopold Hilsner, a Jew accused of the murder of two Christian girls, triggers widespread manifestations of anti-Semitism; Masaryk campaigns against racial prejudice, especially against the superstition of Jewish ritual murders. |
| 1900 | Together with some of his 'Realist' supporters, Masaryk establishes a new political party, The Czech People's (Realist) Party, later renamed the Progressive Party; it remains a marginal group in Czech political life. |
| 1902 | Second journey to America; lectures at Chicago University about Czech literature and history and general Slavic questions. |
| 1907 | Re-enters the Vienna parliament as a deputy of the Realist Party, elected with the support of the Social Democrats; remains in the parliament for two consecutive election periods until the outbreak of the First World War. |
| | Third journey to America; speaks about religion in Austria at the Congress of Religious Liberals in Boston; visits Czech immigrants in many American cities. |
| 1907–08 | Demands freedom of science in a parliamentary action; defends the Austrian professor Ludwig Wahrmund, persecuted for a lecture about contradictions between the church doctrine and science. |
| 1909–11 | In connection with the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina Masaryk sharply criticises Austria's foreign policy, especially the alliance with Germany; defends the South Slavs accused of high treason in a trial at Agram; testifies against the historian Heinrich Friedjung who used |

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| | forged documents in his accusations against the Austrian Slavs. |
| 1913 | Publishes in German the first two volumes of his major work *Russland und Europa* (translated as *The Spirit of Russia*); third volume is published in English translation in 1967. |
| 1914–18 | First World War. |
| 1914–17 | Masaryk decides to join Allied Powers in their fight against Austria-Hungary and Germany; visits Italy, Switzerland, France and England; establishes the Czechoslovak National Council in Paris with Edvard Beneš and Milan R. Štefánik; Czechoslovak military units are formed in Russia and France. |
| 1917–18 | Masaryk travels to Russia; consolidates the Czechoslovak Army after the Bolshevik Revolution, declares it a part of the Czechoslovak Army in France and reaches agreement about its departure from Russian territory. |
| 1918 | Masaryk arrives in the United States; the Czechoslovak National Council is recognised by France and England as the *de facto* government of Czechoslovakia; Masaryk gains the same recognition for his movement by the American government; Czechoslovak soldiers fight in France and Italy against the Central Powers; in Russia the Czechoslovak Legion, involved in conflict with the Bolsheviks, is instructed by the Allies to stay in Siberia and temporarily controls the entire Siberian Railway (the last Czechoslovak soldiers return home in 1920); in Prague the revolutionary National Assembly elects Masaryk the first President of Czechoslovakia. |
| | Publishes *The New Europe*, an outline of the post-war European reconstruction. |
| 1920 | Elected President according to the new Czechoslovak constitution; re-elected in 1927 and 1934. |
| 1925 | Publishes his memoirs and political-historical observations *Světová revoluce* (*The World Revolution*), translated into English as *The Making of a State*. |
| 1928 | Publication of the first volume of *Hovory s T. G. Masarykem (President Masaryk Tells His Story*), an autobiography and philosophical profile in form of Masaryk's discussions with the writer Karel Čapek. |
| 1935 | Resigns the post of President for reasons of health. |
| 1937 | Dies at Lány in central Bohemia on 14 September. |

# 1 Introduction

Thomas G. Masaryk who lived during the years 1850–1937 and headed Czechoslovakia as its first president for the period of 1918–35, was a man of many vocations and achievements. He was a philosopher, sociologist, teacher, journalist, politician, educator of a nation, leader of a revolutionary movement, commander of armies, and statesman. He was also, as these selections will show, a remarkable writer.

His long and rich life was inevitably full of unexpected twists, contradictions, and controversies. As a public figure Masaryk was accepted and rejected, respected and ridiculed, adored by his followers and hated by his enemies. When he died millions of citizens were gripped by the feeling of a tragic loss, and the best poets of the country composed unforgettable elegies. Yet when he was born, a son of poor peasants, no one could have predicted his magnificent career.

All could have been otherwise. At the age of fourteen he was apprenticed to a blacksmith. (Much later, in Russia, Tolstoy looked at his hands and asked him whether he had been a workman.) As a student he had to seek subsistence from prominent families by tutoring their children. As a young doctor of philosophy and unsalaried *Privatdozent* at the University of Vienna he earned his living by private tutoring and was partly supported by his American father-in-law. His situation improved after he had been appointed professor-extraordinary in philosophy at the re-opened Czech part of Charles University in Prague. He soon developed a wide range of activities as a Czech scholar, publicist and, finally, politician, serving nine years as a deputy of the *Reichsrat* in Vienna. Breaking with Austria-Hungary in the First World War, he embarked on a risky career as a revolutionary leader and succeeded beyond imagination. He was the main creator of the Republic of Czechoslovakia and became its first president. At the end of his life he was the first man of his nation and today, more than fifty years after his death, he remains the outstanding figure of modern Czech history.

Masaryk's complex work has been subject to simplifications, even legends. In the period of the first Czechoslovak Republic, 1918–1938, Masaryk was exalted as a hero, a nation-builder, a kind father of his people. In the 1950s the simplified picture was turned upside down

and the outer world, on the whole, will appear contingent on the will. Where freedom exists, a true, complementary, responsibility also exists; but it exists only with determinism. We have power over our inner dispositions which the will determines; we are masters of our future; we may counsel ourselves to reflect upon the freedom of choice we possess. We have freedom; through the good becoming defined as good, the good can be cherished by us and we can attain the exalted state of freedom of moral perfection.

**Source**

From *Suicide and the Meaning of Civilisation*, Chicago, 1970, pp. 64–8, 84–6, 153–5, 162–6, 221–31.

# 4 Pascal and his Dilemma

*These are the closing parts of the essay* 'Blaise Pascal, jeho život a filosofie' ('Blaise Pascal, His Life and Philosophy'), *published in 1883. The essay was originally presented as a lecture in the Jungmann Society in Prague in October 1882. It marks the beginnings of Masaryk's activities as a professor at the new Czech University. The subject of his first university lecture in Prague (in September 1882) was Hume's scepticism. The search for a synthesis of Hume's and Pascal's ideas, with their polarity of scepticism and faith, has long fascinated Masaryk. He also tried, by focusing on an English and a French philosopher, to challenge the monopoly of German philosophy in Czech thinking.*

The most remarkable thing about Pascal is his scepticism. It derives, I believe, from his mistrust of religious truths, which eventually seems to have led to a mistrust of reason as well. And yet somewhere deep within him lay the conviction that only reason can judge all knowledge and cognition. He mistrusts the Christian religion as much as he does philosophy. 'If we were to stand by only what is certain, we should have no need to stand by religion, which is uncertain. Yet what do we not undertake in uncertainty? Sea voyages! Wars! . . . It may be uncertain whether religion is true, but who dares state with any degree of certainty that it is not?' Pascal is a strange apologist: he tries to prove revealed truth to himself! He also exhibits a phenomenon quite common nowadays: a desire for the firm faith of one's fathers. But desire is not enough.

As for his religious and moral teachings, it must be said that he failed not only to satisfy the requirements of our modern era but even to accomplish the goal he set for himself. And the reason he did not prove the validity of his basic religious doctrine, theism, as he had wished, with logic, was less perhaps that he was ailing than that he was unable to systematise his thoughts on the subject. A rigorous mathematician and logician who called for clarity and verifiability in everything, he soon realised that in this instance he could

not satisfy his logical prerequisites, indeed that attempting to prove *revealed* theism with mathematical precision was a *contradictio in adjecto*. And so we find Pascal's exalted spirit constantly bouncing back and forth between the demands of logic and respect for tradition, between scientific critique and faith in authority. We keep waiting for him to decide in favor of reason, but in vain. The soul yearning for truth cannot extricate itself from its temporal chains; the spirit, though powerful, writhes under the burden of its task; and Pascal, despondent, writes in his own blood that he would be better off as an animal, insensate, unconscious, indifferent . . .

Some are despondent enough to end their lives in suicide; Pascal flung himself into revealed religion. What poison is to them prayer was to him. That is why he convinces us by feeling rather than by the mind. 'The heart has its reasons of which the mind knows nothing', he says and still wishes to give the mind its due: the 'thinking reed' wants to know. And so we understand him when he makes his famous wager concerning the existence of God: Anyone who believes in God can, if he is right, gain eternal joy; if he is not he loses nothing. The atheist gains nothing if he is right; if he is not he is condemned to eternal grief.

Pascal's duality has had a most curious effect: no work has the power of his *Pensées* (*Thoughts*) to speak so directly to the soul, to shake a person out of his lethargy and teach him if not to know, then at least to sense the mystery of life. And few writers have found so apt an expression for their ideas: Pascal's words go straight to the heart. He succeeded in his desire to do away with indifferentism, but he also succeeded in proving theism to those aware that it could not be demonstrated with mathematical precision but only with a greater or lesser degree of probability, that it was not a science but a hypothesis like any other; he succeeded in proving theism if the arguments exemplified in the lives of men like Plato and Christ are sufficient to do so.

The assessment of human life we find in Pascal tallies quite well with his scepticism. Pascal is not actually a pessimist, though he portrays the vacuity of human existence more harshly perhaps than even Schopenhauer. But proclaiming human existence vacuous is not what makes one a pessimist; it is the conclusions one draws. Pascal is a theist, and even if, like the Gospel, theism sets no great store by human life, theism is never pessimism. We must recognise, moreover, that Pascal painted the world darker than it really is and that he was a bit hasty in his abuse. The reasons for this flaw are



clearly of a personal, psychological nature and go a long way to explain his scepticism. Constant physical ailments and the solitary monastic life largely determined his spiritual state. He was also greatly influenced, I believe, by the Jansenists and especially Jansen's doctrine of mercy, that oddest of Christian fatalisms. What upset him was not so much determinism – though there are historical and psychological reasons why people convinced of absolute determinism tend to be more sombre and austere than indeterminists – as a belief in predetermination, a doctrine linked historically but not logically to determinism. Just as Calvin and adherents of the Reformation in general derived their strict morality from the doctrine, often even attempting to suppress human spontaneity, so Pascal grew disgusted with the world, especially since his sensitive spirit educed the lessons of predetermination in a more consequent, merciless fashion than the more – how shall I put it? – lackadaisically inclined. One thing is certain: the doctrine of predetermination, if taken to its logical conclusion, is a gruesome whirlpool that catches up human feelings relentlessly and casts them off into unconsolable gloom.

If Pascal's analyses of life are not entirely correct, his *Pensées* are genuine pearls of concrete psychology, invaluable contributions to the understanding of human nature.

Pascal's main fault, as I see it, lies in his ahistoricity. His mathematical spirit seems to have concentrated on the static and showed little or no sense for the kinetic. As a result, he kept seeking an absolute and failed to understand how mankind develops, whereas we realise – after two hundred years of effort, to be sure – that our faculties are better served by relative concepts and that we must examine many of the riddles of existence from various frames of reference. Logic is not enough; we need psychology and history as well. Pascal did not recognise the relative legitimacy of human institutions (particularly the medieval social system) and hence did not know how to respond to the Church and to authority as a whole. In this respect he was a man of his times; in other words, his fault is the fault of mankind. And although his strong spirit eventually came to recognise the gradual development of mankind and he was one of the first to proclaim the new idea of progress, it was an idea that remained outside the system of his teachings and therefore of little use to him.

Pascal's scepticism has exerted a great influence on posterity, but its influence is greatest on the negative school of the eighteenth-century French encyclopedists. The basic tenet of his scepticism –

that habit, not reason, rules mankind – comes from Montaigne. Both Pascal and Montaigne turned their scepticism against the social order, and both based it not so much on logical conclusions as on feelings unsettled by the upheavals of the times.

But the first philosopher to shift the principle to a purely theoretical plane was Hume in his investigation of the concept of causality. I find Pascal's influence on Hume self-evident. Like Pascal, Hume recognised the philosophical significance of mathematics: mathematics was the sole certain form of knowledge, all other forms being supported merely by habit. The main step forward from the seventeenth-century French Catholic sceptic to the eighteenth-century Scottish Protestant sceptic was that the latter never attempted to achieve a categorical belief in the revelation. Hume's importance for modern philosophy is too well known for me to go into detail concerning the historical background of Pascal's influence.

As I have already discussed Pascal's contribution to ethics, I shall merely add here that the ideas scattered throughout the *Pensées* also had an effect on Hume. Accordingly, Pascal's influence has touched our times in the field of ethics as well: Comte, the most important philosopher of our age, grounded his sociology on Hume's ethics. Hume clearly learned from Pascal to consider reason subordinate to will, and taking that doctrine to its logical conclusions he constructed a truly practical philosophy based on a thorough knowledge of human nature, much of which he acquired with Pascal's help.

Pascal's influence on modern pessimism is also considerable. I have pointed out that Pascal himself was no pessimist, but anyone who knows the literature of pessimism knows that the *Pensées* has directly reinforced the pessimist movement: a whole class of readers has combed it for titillating bits of pessimist thought. Pascal's influence on Schopenhauer is both indirect (through Hume and Voltaire) and direct.

In logic Pascal agrees basically with Descartes, who was indeed so influential on him that we can form a valid overall assessment of Pascal's philosophy only by keeping Descartes' before us at all times. According to the natural law of human development, the seventeenth century was an age in which mathematics and physics provided the basis for a scientific view of the world. Therefore Descartes' philosophy reigned supreme. It is clear, however, that a philosophy cannot be satisfactory if built up entirely from a narrow field of specialisation: a scientific world-view – unified and philosophical – can be constructed only if all the sciences are taken into account. Mathematics, mechanics, astronomy, and parts of physics grew into scientific fields in Pascal's day, while others – fields like psychology and sociology – remained enmeshed in medieval methods. The modern and medieval sciences obviously clashed, and even the most modern were, again quite obviously, fragmented and disunified. Or, to use more common terminology, philosophy at the time had to be a compromise between science and theology, which latter meant, to all intents and purposes, the relevant Churches and religions. Descartes knew this, but it did not bother him; he was perfectly content with mathematics and physics. Pascal, however, feeling as he did that the abstract sciences did not wholly satisfy man, was more concerned. He sensed that the scientific method used by mathematics and the natural sciences could serve as a foundation for a unified world-view, and much as he tried to formulate such a world-view he failed. His scepticism in the area of non-mathematical knowledge is related to this failure: the *Pensées* is an anti-Cartesian document and an attempt to construct a more complete philosophy.



Now that I have come to the end of my discussion of Pascal's philosophy, I should like to say a few words about the lessons his life and thought can have for us. The brilliance of Pascal's mind is conceded even by his enemies, but many condemn his excessive moral austerity, his asceticism, his fervour and lack of philosophical reserve. Doubtless their censure is justified in part, but a life of such austerity must engage our respect and make us wonder whether a bit of puritanism along Czech Brotherhood lines would not stand us in better stead than the moral laxity so popular nowadays. Pascal is an admirable example of how strong an unbending will can make a person. When a man who has been ailing from the age of eighteen ignores his infirmities, patiently endures his poverty, works every moment he can, thinking only of others, taking the medicine from his lips to give to the poor, are we to condemn him as immoral for ignoring his health? Can we shrug our shoulders indulgently and say he wore sackcloth out of blindness? So strong a spirit lies beyond the usual categories of praise and blame, and his philosophy does not lend itself to puerile cogitations. Pascal's zeal is not unbearable, or at least it does not seem so to me, though I will allow that one can think and write about such matters more coolly than he did.

It was Coleridge, if I am not mistaken, who said that some people are naturally Platonists, others Aristotelians. Of course the lines are particularly clearly drawn in the history of philosophy: the Platonists are more like poets, the Aristotelians more like scientists. But

opposites seem to complement each other, and just as Aristotle once joined Plato, Mill has now joined Comte, and Hume – more or less – Pascal. Whom shall we, can we love more: Plato or Aristotle, Pascal or Hume?

Whenever I ask myself this question, I give a different answer. Life is such that there are times when one's blood runs hot and one looks for calm in the heavenly spheres and times when one is content with one's daily routine here below. Perhaps a philosophy half Pascalian and half Humean in spirit would establish a spiritual ambience capable of accommodating both feeling and reason.

**Source**

Translated by Peter Kussi from *Blaise Pascal, jeho život a filosofie*, Prague, 1883, pp. 30–7.

# 5 Language and Human Spirit

*This text is a translation of the sub-chapter* 'Sprachforschung' ('Linguistics') *from Masaryk's major philosophical work* Versuch einer concreten Logik. *The work was first published in Czech in 1885 as* Základové konkrétné logiky (The Foundations of Concrete Logic). *In 1887 the enlarged text of the book was translated into German by Hubert Gordon Schauer under Masaryk's supervision and published in Vienna. A reprint of the German edition appeared in 1970. Masaryk's views on linguistics, quoted here, can be considered pioneering. Masaryk professes the astonishingly modern opinion that linguistics is an independent discipline and has to be studied not only historically, but also* statically, *and criticises the linguists of his time for their exclusive interest in the origins and evolution of language, instead of general grammar.*

Language, the means of expressing our strivings, feelings and thoughts, and at the same time the most suitable means for mutual communication, is subject of a special, independent science, namely linguistics.

Language is thus in itself an object of scientific observation, and yet for us speaking individuals its significance lies more as a means of expressing the inner life and development of human beings and nations. However, in so far as the sciences dealing with the inner life of the mind and historical development constitute the fundamental intellectual disciplines, linguistics would seem to be to a considerable extent subordinate to these older sciences. In any event, linguistics is based on sciences which illuminate the individual factors concerned with language formation: namely, physiology, which explains sound; psychology, which sheds light on the human faculty of forming speech and fixing its forms; and finally, sociology, which clarifies the general laws whereby languages arise, develop and decay.

But language is after all not only a practical means of communi-