

and positive work of detail. In my view, parties ought not to be allowed a long period for mere electoral agitation. The general election should follow upon the end of a Parliament as soon as the technical arrangements can be made.

Source

From *The Making of a State*, New York, 1969, pp. 371–2, 375–85, 390–94, 410–12, 419–20.

21 Thought and Life

This text was selected from the third part of Hovory s T. G. Masarykem (Conversations with T. G. Masaryk). The work, Masaryk's most personal book, was not written by Masaryk directly, but was the result of a fortunate idea of the writer Karel Čapek. Discussing with Masaryk, Čapek took notes which Masaryk sometimes reread and supplemented with his own comments. The book is a refreshingly readable self-portrait, the third part being specifically devoted to Masaryk's thinking. The first two parts of Hovory s T. G. Masarykem were published in 1928–29, the third part appeared in 1935. An English translation of the first two parts, entitled President Masaryk Tells His Story, was published in 1935, and was reprinted in 1971. A translation of the third part, under the title Masaryk on Thought and Life, appeared in 1938, and was reprinted in 1971. The selections are taken from the chapters Epistemology – the Theory of Knowledge, Metaphysics, and Religion.

ON KNOWLEDGE

You enquire of my philosophy, my epistemology, and metaphysics – yes, in their literal sense I have not worked them out systematically, only now and again have I written this or that; I have formulated them *pro foro interno*, that, of course, is understood. Every man has his own philosophy, or if you like, his own metaphysics. Let me explain to you first: I have never pretended to be a philosopher, not to say a metaphysician.

And so speaks a professor of philosophy!

True! I used to teach the history of philosophy, the philosophy of history, I taught sociology; yes, in them I did bring in my philosophy, my metaphysics, but I did not lecture, or write of it as a whole. Psychology, ethics, the philosophy of law, philosophy of history, sociology, and so on, are often included in philosophy, but that is an erroneous system for classifying the sciences. These are all specialised, independent sciences. Of course, every specialised

science has its own philosophical foundations, its close relation to philosophy. Of real philosophical sciences there are only two: logic, including epistemology, and metaphysics. Philosophy – with this word one conceives on the one hand some sort of wisdom, some deeper understanding and knowledge, and on the other a general conception of the world and of life. For me philosophy, I mean scientific philosophy, is an attempt to achieve a general conception of the world, inclusive of the mind; it should be the sum total of all knowledge, the synthesis of all sciences – but can anyone today comprehend all the sciences, developed into such specialisations? Well, it is impossible even if one were ever so learned. That is the grave problem: what is, what can philosophy be, or metaphysics, beside the specialised sciences.

And there is the problem whether philosophy and metaphysics are a science.

Not that! Philosophy, and, therefore, metaphysics too, cannot be anything else but scientific, they must never, on any account, be in conflict with scientific knowledge. If I call it a problem, I mean by that a task; that task is clear, but to solve it is difficult; in it the last word will never be said, just as the last word will never be said in human knowledge.

But to give you an answer: my philosophy, my epistemology, and metaphysics are implicit in my literary works; they are also bound up with my actions and the way in which I have acted.

PROBLEMS OF KNOWLEDGE

In a naive epistemological state man imagines that through his senses he perceives things as they really are, that things are simply mirrored in us. Later on, with better observation, he discovers that our senses are bound to make mistakes, that our senses and mind do not depict things quite exactly; and by further and better observation of himself, he becomes aware that in perceiving the subject is not merely passive, merely receptive, but that he works actively on the images that he receives from outside. For instance: beyond us, 'outside' are not general concepts, but individual, and concrete things; and yet without general concepts we cannot think, or obtain knowledge. In the evolution of philosophy this led to the idea that the ego, spirit, consciousness, subject is not a mirror but something active, something that more or less creates of itself our items of knowledge. Our

knowledge at any rate is partly subjective, it is the work of our minds. Or to use the slang of the philosophers, to the old, original objectivism, epistemological subjectivism became added. Hence arise those conflicts between different epistemological theories: either they are more or less objective, realistic – our knowledge being caused and conditioned by things external to us, by objects, by objective reality; or subjective, idealistic, as one says – all knowledge being the product of our minds.

You know that the decisive turn to this subjectivism and idealism was given by Kant, and by the philosophers after Kant. What Copernicus achieved in astronomy Kant did in epistemology: knowledge does not conform to the objects, but the objects conform to our knowledge; what we take to be the external world, reality, is the product of our subjectivity. It is only a step in time from subjectivism to solipsism: Only myself, *solus ipse*, I alone am the creator of the world, the world is my idea. Kant and the German idealists overtrumped the superman and created the supercreator. Funny, how the human mind can be so conceited. Extreme subjectivism, I should say, is betrayal by the philosophers, betrayal by educated men as a whole.

From this I see that you profess epistemological realism, objectivism.

Yes. How otherwise? A man who desires to act, to act in a practical way, and with responsibility, cannot be a subjectivist. I acknowledge the subjective world. Things external to us that we try to comprehend are approximately such as they appear to our experience.

RATIONALISM

It was Plato who combined epistemological mysticism with rationalism, that is with radical rationalism, and after him came others. According to Plato the senses do not apprehend, only reason does that; not experience but general concepts constitute real knowledge. But whereabouts in us, creatures of the senses, Plato enquires, have the general concepts arisen? Plato was a weak psychologist, and, therefore, he had only this one answer: Abstract concepts, abstract knowledge, are nothing but the remembrance, anamnesis of ideas which the soul in its pre-corporal life perceived in the realm of eternal ideas, that is, in metaphysical reality. Material, concrete

things only remind us of those eternal ideas which our soul beheld before we were born as human beings. In Plato we have a nice example of what we have already been speaking about: first the priority of abstract thought; then the beginnings of criticism – he takes exception to the unreliability of the senses; mythology – he anthropomorphises concepts into some sort of higher entities, ideas; at last also turning back to the subject – he enquires where in us the concepts arise. Plato was the true father of philosophy; that is the reason why he had such an influence on philosophy – and still has. After him the Neo-Platonist Plotinus gathered together and embodied these ideas in the eternal Nus, the cosmic reason, from which our spirit ‘emanates’, is enlightened by it, and filled with knowledge. Saint Augustine followed Plotinus, but in Nus he understood God; Plato’s ideas become divine thoughts, our understanding is the divine enlightenment. An interesting connection between rationalism and the epistemology of revelation.

Aristotle, the industrious disciple of Plato, was scientifically more critical, he also sought for a more empirical psychology. He brought Plato’s ideas from the supernatural realm of ideas down to earth, and put them into concrete things; ideas are the substance or kernel of things. Knowledge springs from the empirical, from concrete perception, but reason stimulated by the senses penetrates to the substance of entity. You can see how Aristotle struggled with Plato’s myth; his semi-mythical philosophy and epistemology were taken over by the Medieval Church; Thomas Aquinas is an Aristotelian, Augustine is a Platonist.

The new philosophy – Descartes, Herbert of Cherbury, Leibniz, and others – found a secure foundation for our knowledge in innate ideas. Our fundamental conceptions of God, morality, and so on, do not come from our sense-experience, or from the activities of reason, but they are inborn in us, and this endows them with a higher and indubitable validity. But: why should innate ideas have such an absolute validity, where would they obtain it? And how, by what criterion shall we distinguish them from those that are not inborn? Critical consciousness finds with Locke that there are no innate ideas. After all: what else are innate ideas but ideas put into us by God? It is only a revival of the theory of revelation: rationalism saves itself through superreason, superrationalism.

After Descartes, Locke, Leibniz, after the sceptic Hume, comes the rationalist Kant with the thesis of a priori objects of knowledge which do not come from experience but from pure reason. You

know how Kant produced a whole system out of such concepts of pure reason: the a priori forms of knowledge – time and space, the categories, or the most general concepts, like the notion of quantity, and causality, then the a priori ideas – soul, world, God, and for ethics the categorical imperative. An a priori concept one can recognise, he says because it is inevitable and general, whereas experience, sense, and ordinary reflection, ‘discursive,’ not ‘intuitive’, only provide accidental and particular concepts. A priori concepts are not innate, they are the ‘acts’ of pure thought; they do not come from ourselves, they are notions begotten by pure reason without fertilisation by experience, in fact something like an immaculate conception of spotless, unalloyed, pure reason – again a revelation, but a blind one.

One cannot accept Kant’s priorism. Already, if you please, that Kant makes a difference between ‘Verstand’, and ‘Vernunft’, and that this Vernunft is higher than Verstand; this is what the German language led him to. A Czech, and others besides, who have only one reason would not arrive at this epistemological dualism. It is one of Kant’s great weaknesses that he did not produce a safe criterion for a priori concepts; he says that they are necessary, and universal: a very unreliable and uncertain criterion, for we draw many universal judgements also from experience, and that necessity is equally unreliable. When I am dealing with fundamental arithmetical and geometrical concepts, then I see the rightness and necessity of every mathematical theorem from the concepts themselves; mathematics, therefore, beginning with Pythagoras and Plato down to Kant and later, has been the model for certain knowledge, and the standard for the certainty of the other sciences. Kant also stuck to the model and, in fact, to the mathematical superstition; by his a prioriism, after this model, he tried to make natural sciences, and metaphysics, also certain besides mathematics. That was a mistake; after all, it is obvious that mathematical concepts are quite different from those of the natural sciences, and of metaphysics; the certainty of the natural sciences is different, being based more on experience than mathematical certainty.

But Kant’s epistemology has yet another fatal weakness. For it makes a distinction between the thing in itself and the ‘world of appearances’, but where does such a difference arise? It can, in the extreme case, mean that man does not apprehend the real kernel, the real and inner substance of things, that he apprehends things only in part, approximately. There is sense in that, and it has been

accepted from the very beginnings of more exact thought. But from the contrast between what appears to us, and the things as they really are, Kant created a sharp dualism: categories, and concepts a priori in general, particularly the category of causality, are valid only for phenomena, not for the things in themselves – how then does Kant know that there are any things in themselves, when the causal law is not valid for them, but only for phenomena? The thing in itself then cannot act on the subject if the law of causality is only valid for phenomena!

There would still be plenty of objections to Kant's a priorism; in addition to others there is also the one that objects of knowledge stated by Kant to be a priori can quite well be explained by experience, for instance, the intuitive forms of space and time, similarly, categories and ideas, like the idea of God, and some others.

Kant is the typical representative of a period of transition, of the transition from mythical revelation to critical, scientific empiricism. He sat on two stools – a theological and a philosophical one, – and by this very half-heartedness he achieved his reputation. He avoided extreme and non-sensical subjectivism – solipsism – by his metaphysical trick of 'the thing in itself'. Kant's followers, and German philosophy as a whole, did come to that extreme subjectivism; Fichte replaces Kant's 'half-heartedness' by 'absolute idealism', that is by solipsism, Schelling, directly and expressly, returns to myth, Schopenhauer made the world the work of our will and of our ideas. Instead of 'absolute' idealism Hegel put his 'objective' idealism – again another play with words; the absolute subject was re-christened the 'objective spirit' – the deuce like the devil.

All Kant's a priorism is phantasy, myth; that dualism of pure and impure reason is the old dualism of reason and the senses based on the wrong psychological analysis of the process of perception. This contradiction between reason and the senses has been hanging over from the Greeks through the Middle Ages up to the present time. There is reason, and there are the senses, but they are not in conflict. I ask you, why should pure reason give better and more certain knowledge than impure reason which is connected with the senses, and which forms our experience?

EPISTEMOLOGICAL SCEPTICISM

In opposition to all the theories concerning nonempirical, super-empirical, and therefore certain knowledge, Hume brought forward his scepticism; in so doing he placed the human mind radically back within the limitations of uncertain experience. It is a healthy scepticism, but scepticism all the same; and here it is to Kant's credit that against scepticism he brought forward criticism. Not scepticism, but criticism; not to doubt but to ascertain exactly, patiently, critically.

Hume concentrated his scepticism on the problem of causality; the concept of causality for him is an empirical one, altogether all our perceptions, except the mathematical ones, come from experience, they are, therefore, inexact, and uncertain; for that reason the metaphysical and theological views concerning God, and similar beings, are erroneous because they transgress experience. The causal concept is not one of reason, it is established by mere habit: man sees the sun rise in the morning, he gets used to it, and therefore expects it also to rise tomorrow. Hume asserts that the concept of cause and effect has its origin only in the association of ideas, thus in the common experience that after A comes B. So for Hume the whole of natural science is based on the blind concept of causality, it has no logical justification, it only rests on usage, on the psychological, not logical association of cause with effect. Certain knowledge only mathematics provides.

Against Hume's scepticism which rejected all knowledge as being uncertain except that of mathematics, which rejected not only metaphysics – not to speak of theology – but also empirical knowledge, appertaining to natural sciences – against this scepticism Kant brought forward his system of a priori concepts. By this a priorism he tried to guarantee the certainty of the findings of natural science, but also those of metaphysics, ethics and religion. He followed Hume in the idea that empirical knowledge is unreliable; in that way he hit upon the idea that the foundations of knowledge, that the fundamental concepts are supra-empirical, a priori, that causality, time, space, and what not are a priori – so that by those a priori concepts he might prop up empirical knowledge! Vain labour: that a priorism was a failure, it was a phantasy that took its revenge on its originator. Kant himself said that he 'had to abolish knowledge to make room for faith'. In the same way Comte developing Hume's positivism came eventually to fetishism. That is the fate of scepticism: that at last it tries to escape from itself – by plunging into phantasy.

Scepticism is possible in theory; but is consistent scepticism possible in practice?

Hardly – in so far as we are not mere onlookers, and critics of life. A sceptic in practice simply behaves like non-sceptics. There is no sceptical action, there is only sceptical thought. And what refers to epistemological scepticism – the fact that our concepts in natural sciences and in philosophy are only more or less probable – is no reason for scepticism. It is understood, empiricism, the experience of the senses is inaccurate, and unreliable, but it is controlled and developed by reason, even by exact mathematical reason as you see in modern natural science which is always becoming more and more applied mathematics.

It is important that Hume with his scepticism acknowledged the moral liability because its foundation, sympathy, humanity is sanctioned by itself; to love one's neighbour, and because of that to help him as far as possible, that needs no proof that it is right – the sanction of sympathy is given by itself. That is right, and it is the more important that this doctrine comes from a sceptic. My first university lecture in Prague was on Hume's scepticism; in it already then I gave expression to my anti-sceptical programme. But for myself I can say: Hume was particularly important for me, he corrected what was of a Platonist in me; I should say the same for Marx's materialism.

CONCLUSIONS: CONCRETISM

This already is characteristic of your own view.

Yes. Concretism in one word, is the opposite to scepticism; it recognises not only reason but also the senses, the feelings, and the will, taken altogether, the whole experience of our consciousness; sticking to experience it rejects all non-empirical, contra-empirical, supra-empirical theories.

And so to a great extent: James's radical empiricism.

But without exceptional experiences. Scientific thought manages without them, except to examine them critically. Concretism above all is critical: it subjects experience to reason.

Concretism does not set senses and reason in opposition, it does not oppose reason to the other spiritual activities, it accepts man in his entirety; it acknowledges the substance and the value of all

spiritual capacities and activities, it tries to find a rule for a full and harmonious life.

Concretism recognises individualities in nature, in society, and in the whole world, and these it strives to know; it is fully aware that it obtains knowledge of particulars by abstract concepts.

For scientific interpretation concretism has this chief rule: to grasp things and explain them of themselves, not by the analogical method of myth. As far as is possible it replaces myth by critical, scientific knowledge. It strives for lucidity and exactness, it knows what it does know, and what it does not.

In addition to mathematical concepts it recognizes as well the concepts of natural science, of psychology, history, and of all other sciences as a whole. And the sciences – they are the experiences and reason of many individuals and of all ages. I verify my experiences and my reasoning by the reason and experience of others – other men also have reason and experience. All the time to bring to consciousness what we know, and what we don't know! Criticism, sir, must also be self-criticism. If we desire to achieve certainty for our knowledge there is only one way: scientific honesty, patience, and clarity; and then to offer one's concepts to the future generations for criticism and improvement. In all this concretism finds sufficient guarantees of truth.

Clear thinking is painful – the loss of myth is painful, often to understand new things is painful; there is also an epistemological xenophobia – I deduce not only from xenos, stranger, but also from to xenon, a strange and unknown thing; in thinking man is also a person of habit. Real wisdom, real knowledge is eternally young, eternally on the move, and new – then experience also is eternally new for us: 'herrlich wie am ersten Tag', I should say with Goethe.

THE SOUL AND THE WORLD

True, I cannot say what the soul is like and what it is; I ascribe spiritual activities to the soul and partly also to the body, the brain, the senses; but how the soul and the body act on each other, that I don't know – after all, no explanation, whether it be materialism or psychological parallelism can explain that satisfactorily. And what will it be like, what will life be like after death – that I know still less. I don't know how to believe that after death we shall pass into some divine primary substance as monism, pantheism teach: I want

to be myself also after death, I don't want to dissolve into some metaphysical jelly; I am a metaphysical individualist if you like to call me that. Perhaps after death we shall be given fuller and more complete knowledge, also knowledge of God; it may be that life after death is an asymptote approaching to God: always and always nearer, eternally nearer – well yes, this also is a continuation of life upon earth, because God is the chief and foremost object of our thinking, knowing and striving. God and the soul. One is connected with the other. The Soul and God, that is the dual problem of our thinking, and striving – I should say, the true task of life.

You talk like a pure spiritualist; and yet all your life you have been taking on other tasks, actual, practical, real ones – it is not for nothing that they called you a realist.

Of course, sir; but even in the actual and material, a spiritual and eternal process is taking place. Only today I found in my papers the oriental aphorism: 'A man should act as if everything mattered, but in his inner self a small Buddha sits for whom nothing matters.' Nothing – that is expressed and felt in the oriental way; in our way it would be; for whom behind all that is temporal, and material, what is eternal and spiritual matters. Faith in the spiritual, the accent on the spiritual, does not mean that we ought to, and are allowed to disregard matter and the body. After all in a philosophical sense, we do not know what the substance of matter is. It is given us like the soul, it is given to us only by way of the soul, through our perception and thinking: what right have we got to undervalue it? All knowledge of matter is only the expansion of our spiritual activities; soul and matter are not in opposition to each other. The soul, body, and matter, all reality is given to us for our knowledge, and development; our souls and our material surroundings we ought to develop to greater perfection. The idea that matter is something lower and less pure than the spirit is wrong. In this Plato went wrong, and after him the theologians and philosophers because with contempt they turned away from matter, nature, and the world.

And yet you call yourself a Platonist.

Yes. But that does not mean that I accept all Plato's views. I am a Platonist in so far as I seek ideas in the cosmos, that in what is transitory I seek what is enduring, and eternal. I cannot be interested solely in movement, but in *what* is moving, *what* is changing. In natural development I seek purpose and order, sense in historical progress; I enquire for what purpose it all happened, and where it is leading to. Against Darwinism, against one-sided evolutionism,

and historicism, I accentuate the static side: that, that is permanent and eternal. Not simply the *panta rhei* of Heraclitus, not simply continual change, but the substance of the things that change; in addition to dynamics, and with it statics, the great architecture of all being. In man, therefore, I also seek that which endures: his immortal soul.

THE RELIGION OF JESUS

I have noticed one: whenever you mention your own faith you quote Christ and the Apostles.

Yes. Jesus – I usually do not say Christ – for me he is the example and teacher of religiousness; he teaches that love towards a kind God, love of one's neighbour and even of one's enemy, and thus a pure, unstained humanity, is the substance of religion. Religiousness and morality for Jesus are the chief elements of religion. Notice that in the Gospels – in comparison with the Old Testament, or with Greek mythology – there is almost no mythology, almost no cosmology, and eschatology, almost no history; there you do not find detailed regulations concerning cult and ritual; nor ecclesiastical organisation. Jesus gives almost nothing but moral instructions, he turns continually to practical questions as he is forced by the life around him; he manifests himself in his love towards his neighbour by effective help in spiritual and physical misery. Just look again into the Gospels: how discreet are Jesus' theological prescriptions, and his references to the transcendental! God is father to him, to Him he is in an intimate personal relation, but he does not speak of this relation much, he lives it, and he does not lay down any system of theology. Jesus was a living example; he did not preach love merely with words, but he continually put it into practice, he associated with the poor, and lowly, he sought out the sinners, and those morally outcast, he healed the sick, filled the hungry, he warned the rich. Such a living faith spreads more by example than with words, like a fire, like an infection. Jesus gave no proof of his religion, speaking always as one that had authority; he entered into no theological disputes, but he confuted the Scribes and Pharisees by pointing to the falseness of their religiousness and morality. He showed that real religion, real religiousness permeates the whole of life, even the daily one, the ordinary one, and it permeates it always, at every moment; most people are satisfied with Sabbath-day religion, with

an ostentatious, and hardly sincere religion – only in exceptional circumstances, especially when things are looking bad, do they remember the Good Lord, and cry for help and expect signs and miracles. But eternal life will not be only after death, and in the other world – we live in eternity already now, and always. Of course, people do not like to be aware of that, they put eternity a long way from them; they keep it in reserve for the time after death. Religion can be experienced not only in church, but also in the factory, in the field, in the cowshed, and in the drawing-room, in sadness, and in joy. That is Jesus' example.

Source

From *Masaryk on Thought of Life: Conversations with Karel Čapek*, Freeport, NY, 1971, pp. 9–11, 35–7, 45–57, 70–2, 94–6.

Selected Biographical Glossary

Aksakov, Konstantin Sergeevich (1817–60), Russian essayist and critic. At first a Hegelian, he became a leading champion of Slavophile ideas.

Amiel, Henri Frédéric (1821–81), French writer; professor in Geneva. Noted among his contemplative and pessimistic writings are the posthumously published diaries, *Fragments d'un journal intime*.

Annenkov, Pavel Vasilevich (1812–87), Russian literary critic; member of Belinsky's circle, publisher of Pushkin's writings.

Baader, Franz Xaver von (1765–1841), German Catholic philosopher and theologian. His romantic mysticism strongly influenced Schelling.

Ballanche, Pierre-Simon (1786–1855), French philosopher; believer in progress by evolution, later disillusioned. A melancholy and deeply religious thinker, he wrote in a brilliant style, but his ideas were often marred by an obscure mystic symbolism.

Batiushkov, Konstantin Nikolaevich (1787–1855), Russian poet. A precursor of Pushkin, he improved Russian literary language. He participated in the war against Napoleon. In 1821 he became insane.

Belinsky, Vissarion Grigorevich (1811–48), Russian critic, journalist, and philosopher. He lived and worked in a circle of friends which included Goncharov, Dostoevsky, Bakunin, Herzen, Nekrasov and Turgenev. Influenced by Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, he moved to a left Hegelian position, and then to French socialism. In his writings, published mainly in the liberal journal *Otechestvennyia zapiski* (*Notes of the Fatherland*), he emphasised the social purpose of literature. His influence on Russian literary criticism is felt to this day.

Beneke, Friedrich Eduard (1798–1854), German philosopher; opponent of Hegel. He was one of the founders of modern empirical psychology in which he saw the real base of philosophy.

Blahoslav, Jan (1523–71), Czech humanist. An outstanding writer, he became bishop of the Unity of the Bohemian Brethren and contributed eight volumes to their history. His translation of the New Testament into the vernacular was incorporated into the great Czech Bible *Kralická Bible*.

Block, Maurice (1816–99), French economist and statistician; author of many works popularising political and social economics.