

A CZECH THINKER IN TERMS OF CRISIS

Emanuel Rádl (1873-1942)

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This contribution, an expanded version of a lecture, deals with the public life of the Czech biologist, philosopher, and theorist on the emergence of nations, Emanuel Rádl, and with his interpretation of history. In many ways, Rádl was influenced by T. G. Masaryk, and in certain respects he continued the latter's intellectual work. During the crisis-laden interwar period, Rádl attacked both neo-romantic irrationalism and the naturalist neglecting of the intellectual sphere by subsuming it under natural history. Rádl's anti-positivist understanding of philosophy was determined by an ethos of responsibility. Consequently, according to him reason must prove itself in any given situation, not act as an exponent of a certain logic of development, a community of nationally-determined interests or a closed system of values. Just like nation was an open project, an "offer to join and contribute," so was history not a quasi-natural process approaching a predetermined goal, but a legacy to be acquired by means of dialogue and "elective affinity." Rádl's efforts in favor of a non-nationalist Czechoslovakia, of the primacy of primordial truth vis-à-vis whatever personal experience and custom there may be, and of a concept of nation as "plebiscite on a daily basis" merit to be recalled by all of us. Moreover, Rádl anticipated findings of today's "cultural turn," as well as the theory of "imagined communities."