[This chapter was sent by its author five times out of the country — by mail, just like all the others — but it never reached its destination, and the manuscript that remained in the country was lost as well.]

The author remembers that he was describing here the two years that he spent alone in the cell, first because he was convalescent, after coming out of the prison’s hospital, and second because he was too weak to participate in the work of “reeducation”† that was being conducted in prisons during those times, in view of the release of the political detainees which was requested and obtained, in principle, by U Thant, the secretary of the UN at the time.

In the beginning, the total solitude was a delight for the author. But what a curse it becomes when you realize that, by yourself, you cannot give your life a fuller content! Perhaps the spiritual techniques of the East know how to populate solitude — through the forests of India of even the prisons of Eastern Europe — but the author of these pages did not know them. He could not do much with the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola or Descartes’ *Meditations*, which he had in mind. Then,

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* See explanation about this chapter in the Romanian Publisher’s Note of this volume, p. 13.
† The “reeducation” was one of the most terrible tortures that took place in Romanian prisons. Its purpose was to change the souls of human beings, to transform them into machines that follow the precepts of the communist regime. For more information, see Virgil Ierunca, *Fenomenul Pitesti* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2011). Fr. George Calciu also speaks of it in his *Interviews, Talks, and Homilies* (Platina: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2010).
with a few straws from the mattress on the concrete bed, which was ripped in a corner, he tried to do geometry, like Pascal when he was a child, or to recover some formula, that he only knew only a little, such as vector calculation, for example. He did not succeed much, again.

At that moment, man asks for forgiveness because he exists. “Lady,” you say, “or Mother Nature, delete me from the civil list of those who exist and give forgiveness to the spermatozoid that made me possible, that it ran to take the place of another spermatozoid, which was destined to have a more worthy life than mine!”

In one of these moments, the guard opened the peephole and gave to the author of these pages the first volume from Marx’s Complete Works. He would continue to give him the others too, volume by volume.

When I came out from the hospital, even if I was alone in the cell, it was clear that something had changed in the world and that the change was toward the good. I was given paper and pencil, in the beginning in order to write my biography. (Perhaps there was something else to find out!†) I hastened to write it, but I soon saw how empty our lives are. Even if many write their memories with pleasure and with a secret vanity, it is a terrible torture to remake your life in your mind, with its lost occasions and stupidities. How interesting is one’s own life! Describing it, I suffered more than when I was beaten.

I remembered even with pleasure one of those beatings, which had been administered so that I tell “everything,” just like now—but with different means, while I unfolded a dull life of an intellectual on two hundred large sheets. I had been laid on the floor with my face down, they had placed a piece of leather on the soft parts of my back, and a sturdy guy who held a thick whip with knots in his hands was giving me two strokes at a

* Addition by the Romanian editor.
† This phrase is, of course, ironical. Noica was already heavily under investigation.
time. I don’t know how, the first one was more bearable, but the second one, which fell around the same place, was very difficult to bear. They had not given me more than eight or ten strokes, but my entire body seemed to revive and—I am almost ashamed to say it—when I returned to the cell I had a better digestion than ever.

The connection between the spirit and the body is strange. Any time I have a better idea, I experience happiness in my whole body, including the stomach. But now, when I was writing my biography, I had such indigestion! The only thing that I wrote with pleasure was the first half of the first page, somewhat provocative in a socialist regime, in which I described how I came into the world. “I was born as a protest: my mother waltzed for a night at a ball in order to lose me, but I was stubborn to come into the world. This is why, perhaps,” I added, “I am so stubborn and sometimes impertinent.” The rest of the autobiography was prose. I think this is one of the harshest punishments, to make people write their autobiographies—and this is, actually, what happened, in these parts of the world.

Going over my life, I realized then how vain European philosophy is, the only way I studied and in the spirit of which I was writing. It does not teach you anything, even if I still think that, without it, you cannot think anything in an articulated fashion in all cultures of the world, anything that would “belong” to the rational. (Goethe’s saying makes sense for anyone: “I cannot do without philosophy, and I have nothing to do with it.” Unfortunately for him, he became attached to philosophy after the death of his friend Schiller, and he was going to pay for this. European philosophy does not even teach you to meditate because it does not offer you any spiritual technique.)

With Descartes’ Meditations, which I knew well, I saw that I had no use of them from the beginning. Then I thought of Ignatius of Loyola’s Spiritual Exercises, trying, by vague memories, to do the exercises of organized imagination which he expects (seeing Christ concretely, with the sweat on his forehead, bearing his cross, etc.), but they could not take my anywhere either. They were probably good as meditation effort, just for the
fixation of imagination (*le péché de distraction,* as the French Catholics say) and to avoid letting memory, which is so tyrannical and capricious, throw before you, in your conscience, all its horrors or, I would say, its dirt. There seems to be a devil in us which, when man is alone and not busy, comes to mock all our helplessness. One or other disgusting memory refuses to withdraw in the swamp of the unconscious and, the more you want to *not* think that specific thing, the more you make it resistant, just like today’s bacteria with penicillin.

It may be that other European schools of wisdom have given more adequate spiritual techniques: Steinerism, Guénonism… But how poor did they prove to be! If I at least knew yoga. But what has always scared me in Indian thought — which gave the number zero to mathematics — is that it rather annuls than edifies. Well, an opinion, of course…

Here, in Europe, we know almost nothing of spiritual life. We will soon meet Asians, some great, some common, who know something about spirit (not only about intellect) and who, on top of it, can easily assume everything that we believe we have better than others: our mathematics, physics, and technology. Mathematics, what an anti-mystery! It is a religious mystery upside down. All cultures had their mysteries and their initiation, with symbols loaded with meaning and a good ambiguity. We are the only ones who discovered (or capitalized) the symbol emptied of meaning, the pure symbol, a mathematical sign. This play with figures and signs (later with structures) was a simple play at the beginning, as Pascal tells us, who, being invited by a mathematician of his time to meet in I don’t know what city in France, replied in this way, “Sure, happily, but we should speak of serious things, not of mathematics.”

Something happened afterwards — beyond or even before the application of mathematics to physics and technology — and this probably was the capture of the only mystery that could still operate in this profane world: the capture of *infinity.* Our mathematics were accredited and applied, beyond the Antique

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* “The sin of distraction,” in French in the original.
geometrism, only because they domesticated the infinity (with the infinitesimal calculus), and then because they cheated with it (Cantor and set theory). The ecstasy of mathematics begins only with the taming of infinity. But, you see, it is an ecstasy that is handy to all, even to the tribal people who have rings through their lips.

Still, it’s just a manner of speaking to say that mathematics is “handy to all.” When you ask him to go more slowly in his demonstrations so that you can follow him, the mathematician does not understand that you need a certain animality in order to do mathematics well: a “bossa,” as was said in phrenology, the so-called science of the spirit, or an extra-cranial protuberance, or who knows what wrinkling of the gray matter. You need something like the animality of the pianist or of the painter. The most “rational” thing of a culture requires the most irrational talent. (Woe to the people of Israel—as engineer Goldstein said—who sold this superior animality for the animality of first order. If things continue this way, I can imagine an hour when the Jews—at least those from Israel—no longer know the multiplication table well.

As for one like me, I can say that I will die with the sadness of not having been a mathematician. I am laboring now, in my solitude and with the rests of sheets of paper I still have after I finished and delivered my autobiography, to do a little mathematics by myself. Doesn’t Plato say that divinity, once alone, only geometrizes? I try as well, as a small man, to discover, or at least rediscover (like the child Pascal), a little mathematics. I know, for example, the beginning of vector calculus. I take a few straws from the mattress, because the sheets of paper are done fast, and I cannot hope that I would receive more, even if I would soon be proven wrong, and I begin working. I get stuck on the first theorems. How could Descartes get analytical geom-

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* Noica speaks here of how various cultures include a certain animality, the one of the artist. He believes that this animality is necessary for doing mathematics as well. His note about engineer Goldstein refers to what his cellmate said regarding Jewish culture on pages 81–83.
etry out of nothing (just as dans un poêle;” as he said himself, in a small room with a stove-oven, where he was quartered for the winter, like an… officer), from nothing, that is from playing with coordinate axes? I resume, because I know perfectly its beginning, but I stop again, even if I still have space to write a few recovered formulas on the margins of a few sheets of paper. I then move to the moderns’ “topology.” Maybe there’s something to try with it. I know that topology is the “science of the rubber” (or it was so until it became an abstract discipline by excellence), so a science of figures which, while twisted in any fashion, still retain some constant relations. But even now something is constantly denied to me — like a greatly coveted beautiful woman. I perfectly know that, after you have “had” mathematics, they are no longer interesting (“Who knows what one plus one is knows everything that the human spirit can know in this regard,” Descartes used to say), just like the poor women who are nothing else but beautiful. But what suffering to not be able to have them!

One day, as a blessing, I am given the first volume of the edition of Marx and Engels’s complete works through the peephole. I gather that I would be given all of them, one after the other, if I want. I soar into lecture — reading, the only form of spiritual life of the European! — and, even if the translation is made from the Russian version, where the pages with the deep ideas from the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts are missing, I am delighted. Do I really like Marx? Am I in the situation of kissing the hand that hits me? Or is it that inner poverty, my incapacity for doing geometry, meditating, and creating something out of nowhere, makes me experience even this reading as a blessing, as long as it is printed paper, so, for me, a European, about truth and life? For centuries, the printed book has said to the European man, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life”…

I feverishly read the first volume, and, from its beginning, I understand something that seems to be essential for the success of Marxism and for its lamentable ideological failure with those

* “In a stove,” in French in the original.
who are *forced* to learn it. This doctrine can only have sense for those without culture, to whom it gives a few slogans, in our case for the masses of workers in factories and only for them; or it has meaning for those who have stayed too long in culture. It’s either something too elementary or something too refined. It does not stand at the middle level. But, after victory, the doctrine is taught precisely at this middle level, and this is why it is a catastrophe in consciences. Instead of allowing people to *end* in it, they begin with it, continue with it, and remain at it, being forced to pass exams and to learn laws (listen to this: laws in philosophy!). Or, at times, believing that they understand something, they explain the dialectical contradiction in the sense that one thing can be and not be: “Here, comrade, the hat is; if I hide it behind me, it is not.” I tried to tell such a propagandist that, for the dialectical contradiction, he should rather use the saying of a French humorist, Allais, I think: “How sad it is to know that a glass half full is a glass half empty.” He replied that this is a saying for drunks, which does not match the proletarian morality.