

# THROUGH SOCIALISM TO WAR

## One experience and one roadmap

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<https://archive.is/Y39Po>

### Abstract

Undoubtedly, discovering the meaning of the world is necessary to man as an individual. This is the reason for the appearance of the great utopian ideas throughout history: Plato, Christ, Moore, Owen, Saint-Simon, Marx, and Engels. If, however, an institution or armed force stands behind such an idea, its meaning will necessarily become inverted. The idea that a classless society of justice and prosperity could be created through armed revolution and then the dictatorship of the communist avant-garde in the name of the proletariat led, on the contrary, to the creation of a NEW CLASS (Milovan Djilas, 1957, in English) and the cult of personality – which is why Yugoslavia fell apart. The new class disintegrated, each in the name of its national God, proving precisely Marx's thesis that religion is the opium of the people. It has been shown that the political economy of socialism does not exist. One cannot simply add French utopian socialism to the historical materialism of class struggle with the forcible seizure of the means of labor and by that to get the political economy of socialism. No matter how much historical materialism was science, it turned out it is science only up to capitalism. Historical materialism has come to a standstill with capitalism. It turned out that the epistemological theory of reflection is naive: human consciousness is not just a mere reflection of objective reality, so the Communist Party will tell us what is a correct reflection and what is not. Human consciousness is a co-creator of the world as we see it and as we think about it – just as the postulate  $c = \text{const}$  is true in all inertial coordinate systems because  $c = \text{const}$  is created only in interaction with a receiver. Without receivers (masses, atoms), the cosmic ether and the speed of photons are completely indeterminate, like a true completely indeterminate infinity (as Hegel would put it). No armed struggle can create a society of justice and prosperity because the contradiction between labor and capital is not the last one in society, because there is no last contradiction. Man himself is a contradiction, on the one hand as an individual, on the other as a social being. The peaceful protests of students in Serbia are only a condition for understanding this. Scientific analyses of what and how with historical materialism about capitalism have yet to be created. In this sense, the Yugoslav experience can be instructive, in this sense the collection of short stories THROUGH SOCIALISM TO WAR can be useful. Moreover, the experience of peaceful student protests is already a significant indicator of how to move forward...

**Milan D. Nešić: THROUGH SOCIALISM TO THE WAR**

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1q903jDLOCQBQt36xA5fCUWgb5td1Cff/>

Fragments from the four-volume book THROUGH SOCIALISM TO GOD, prepared for this occasion as a collection of short stories

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## FROM ONE INTERVIEW INSTEAD OF INTRODUCTION

(Radio-Belgrade, November 22, 1993)

**WRITER:** Yes, the war is not finished, yet. I have been thinking where the violence and misunderstanding come from, when nobody would think of himself as a slanderer or violent man, that's for sure. Of himself as an offended man or avenger, that's something different. **Well, where is the line between the noble human desire to survive in a dignified way, to offer his meaning and his role on one hand, and the beginning of imposition and violence, on the other hand?**

**JOURNALIST:** Really, where is it?

**WRITER:** You wouldn't believe. One gentleman in the bus showed me that, a year ago. I have never seen him again.

**JOURNALIST:** How's that?

**WRITER:** It was not so crowded as usually. Still, I have understood that quiet gentleman, who didn't want to move a step more into the crowd. He stood leaned on the door. It's not necessary to be an engineer and have some knowledge about the overloaded little electrical motor, for instance. It should be possible for everybody to hear that moaning every time when the door pointlessly starts opening.

**JOURNALIST:** O. K., but I do not see the connection.

**WRITER:** At a bus stop, one girl tries to get through and get off. The middle door. The faster the better, she arrives yet, steps down, but there is that gentleman. She does move around the holder-rod toward the only open wing of the door – but, it's over, the bus is driving again. It is really not necessary to ask if the gentleman was sorry. "I didn't know you were going to get off", he apologies sincerely. Can you imagine, his not knowing made the girl unnecessary walking. He, from his comfortable ignorance, made the situation, in which people should inform him when and who needs to step out. Or go around him. **The violence begins already here. When a man puts himself (or his idea) in the center of the happening and the world, forgetting that he cannot know about the world unless he hears it, unless he asks people.** Even one little electrical motor has its own law: if you don't hear its moaning, it brakes bit by bit. Let alone when the whole historical movement only guesses that it knows something about this world, and then it goes to make the world happy – not just promising **"America and England will be the countries of proletarians"** – but simply not asking that woman, for example, that man: what kind of happiness do they want.

**JOURNALIST:** Are you referring to the one party system?

**WRITER:** Yes, independent of the question whether the elitist theory about proletarian's dictatorship is guilty of it or not guilty, it is quite sure that **the people from this historical ambient have still to learn to be tolerant. To learn the sense that the world does not have its center**, where the only problem would be how to be the most close to the center, even on account of your colleague, your friend, easier if of someone passing nearby or, God save us, an enemy. **Every man is a center and a world for himself.** That's the point of view, which I have chosen in my passages. To show in half an hour how the people use to forget this fact, from their negligence or even exactly from some specific wish. And what irrational roads that ignoring may have (once when it founds itself) under pressure of ideology and despair.

**JOURNALIST:** Thanks.

(From **THE LITERARY AUTOBIOGRAPHY**)

## Part I

### How it began

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## A LITTLE PIECE OF PAPER

Coming home from work the same day, I noticed from a distance some sort of notice, an advertisement on the glass entrance door. I don't usually remark them in corridors and on bulletin boards. But this one seemed to grab you by the shirtsleeve. The whiteness of the paper hovered in the air from a distance, and the large letters caught the eye: REPAIRS. In addition, it was there, right of front of your nose, and a man had almost to touch the paper as he reached to push the door open. REPAIRS. One more struggling to make some dough, I thought and wanted to pass by, when it seemed that it said underneath: ... *all types of electrical devices*... Oho, a colleague of mine moonlighter! I stopped and took a step backwards. Yes: ... *electronically devices, radio sets, TV sets. Inquire... for electro engineer*... Oho, nothing less than an engineer!... *in the Fifth*... God! It's unbelievable! I let go of the door and it closed ajar once more together with the ad. Then I read word by word: *fourteenth floor, at Vasilije Simonovich's*. I stood there a while, I stood there, stared at the paper, then I suddenly was grasped with desire to tear it down and rip it to pieces. I gave the metal doorframe a hard kick. The door jumped, the ad seemed to flicker. I ran inside. I threw my briefcase on the bed, convulsively clutching the bundle of keys in my hand. Then I quickly unlocked my dresser and went through the suits and shirts hanging there. I took some money from the inside pocket of an old jacket. I counted: five, ten, fifteen, twenty. I halted. Then I quickly

took another note of five thousand. It should be enough, I thought, and put the rest of the money back. I crammed twenty-five thousand in my pocket and ran outside.

I rang twice impatiently at Pavle's door, then twice again. Inside I heard somebody slowly fumbling with the keys, unlocking the door. It opened. "Oh, it's you! Hi!" Pavle smiled at me.

"Pavle, how much do you need?" I asked pantingly.

He looked at me in wonder.

"How much money do you need to borrow?" I ask again.

Pavle laughed aloud. "Come in!" he said to me. "Do come in!"

We went into Pavle's room.

"I just got here!" Pavle said calmly, took his coat from the chair and put it into the dresser. Then he took a letter off the small table, turned it over, and said: "It's from my sister."

I was silent.

Pavle looked at me, then said matter-of-factly: "I don't need any loan, buddy. Thanks a lot, thank!" And he gave me a smile.

"I, well..."

"You saw the ad!" Pavle said again calmly, then smiled once more. "I just put them up. What can you do, it's got to be done!" and he threw up his arms. "But I don't need a thing!" he added seriously and shook his head.

"I, well... if you need any..."

"I know!" Pavle interrupted me gently. "Thanks!" he said slowly. "Sit down!"

I sat down.

Standing, he was turning the letter in his hands, then he opened it. He read it.

"My sister lives in Sarajevo. Her husband, two children and his mother, and one salary!" he said, not lifting his eyes from the letter, showing me that as host he had not forgotten my presence. "My sister's still at the university, you know?" he looked at me.

I nodded my head.

Then Pavle finished the page and opened the next one. A little piece of paper fell out and fluttered through the air. Pavle picked it up off the floor. He examined it, then read. He looked at me and silently handed it to me. It contained large, uneven, incorrectly printed letters, in pencil, saying just this:

**DEAЯ UNС┘ E Я BUY ROLLESKATES  
FOЯ MY BIRTDEY I LL B BƏ GOOD  
┘ OVE SΘ SHOOSHO**

I read it, looked at it, and could not take my eyes off that paper. It trembled in my hand. The crooked letters twinkled, and yet remained mute, dead. And no one had to see them, I knew. Not even these letters! They started to fog over. My eyes filled with tears.

"The older one. He'll be five soon," I heard Pavle's voice.

I jumped up from the chair and turned towards the window, blinking and blinking to hold back painfully the tears. E, Shooshoo, I thought, and wanted to suppress my tears.

My hand convulsively clutched the money in my pocket.

Silence.

We stayed like that for a while, in silence.

Then I slowly turned around. Pavle was standing in the same place. He was serious, with a hard expression on his face, but without the slightest movement, petrified. I anxiously awaited his next move, his next words. My eyes were wide open, I had turned completely into expectation and anxiety. Pavle remained silent a while longer, still hard, petrified, then finally uttered in a rasping voice.

“Do give me ten thousand though!” And not a line on his face moved.

I sighed with relief. I laughed. Almost wanted to yell with happiness, and quickly gave him two notes of five thousand.

Behind us, through the wide window, the huge blueness of sky was stretching without limits and without end. Way down below, in the abyss, the life teemed, people appeared, passed by each other, and then disappeared again, as inaudibly and quietly as some secrets.

(**FIRST DAYS**, from chapter XI)

## WORD AFTER WORDS

**I**t is often said, all in one breath and in a single sentence, that knowledge is light and that knowledge is power. However, so much as the claim that knowledge is light is indisputable, the other part of the saying is subject to many doubts. The entire history of knowledge and power – from Socrates and his hemlock to Bruno and his stake, up to the renegades and heretics of today, i.e. their silencing, repentance or persecution – testifies that knowledge cannot be simply equated with power. Galileo is reputed to have said defiantly before the Inquisition, or thereabout, “Eppur si muove,” and this is regarded as a victory of knowledge – we all know today that the earth is going round the sun and not vice versa. But shouldn’t this be rather viewed as a defeat of knowledge – to mumble it subsequently to one’s beard, if he mumbled it at all and unless the enthusiastic admirers of knowledge made it all up to console themselves? Yes – although misunderstandings today arise over much more elusive and inaccessible matters than the earth and the sun, and are eliminated in the same way – the never changing common fact doubtless remains: that knowledge is one thing and power another. True, power implies knowledge and counts on it, but it also counts on much more: ignorance and all kinds of illusion and confusion, every possibility of intrusion and transformation, not seldom on deception and sheer blackmail. Yes, knowledge is a man who thinks, and the power is the whole man, i.e. a man who thinks but who also engages in some other activities and who has some other wishes: to have a hearty meal, to harness as much as possible, even if he has to pound his fist on the table or, God forbid, hang the one who thinks on the nail.

Thought discovers the truth, guided by a deep human aspiration that ego that thinks through the spirit may extend beyond all limits and reach the unreachable, and probably become one with eternity, while power does or does not recognize the truth, again guided by a deep human instinct that ego that wills is, it lasts and acts first even if it has to harness the truth itself only to jump out of the necessary transience into some place else.

And so, the man who decides what will be ultimately done with what has been invented always overshadows the man who thinks. The situation has always been like that, irrespective of the fact that they are both sons of one and same human fate, both children and creators of one and only possible human history. Some know, and some use or do not use. If knowledge is used, it is then blazed abroad so that even the one who knows may benefit from it in a certain way. If not, knowledge is passed over in silence or put aside – which is still better than if it were pronounced a senseless fabrication of malicious angle and again blazed abroad as heresy. This poses before knowledge by no means only one perplexity and one trouble, by no means one moral abyss before man and his power. Many human fates were broken on that issue, whole lives bent over: should knowledge nod and change its voice, or should it lose it forever and remain hungry and pitiful? Should man see the whole truth, or all of his aspirations and all his power? Even books – as mere inventory objects in libraries, for example, closed and only bearing the year and place of printing, the number of copies printed, and the names of the publisher and the author – have become silent and patient witnesses of this tug-of-war with no beginning and no end.

In the second decade of the 20th century, a new state in the Balkans was born in struggle and formally proclaimed on the first day of December in the year of our Lord 1918. Originally named the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, it changes its name to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the year 1929, an indication that its common and united history has been painstakingly forged since the very beginning. In 1941, it was razed to the ground by the German military might and the thought subjugated by it, which, blindly stretched to the outmost limits of its one-sidedness, also threatened the whole world. Much blood was shed until early in March 1945 when a new Yugoslavia was announced modestly and vaguely as Democratic Federative Yugoslavia, to become a People's Republic already on November 29 the same year. But already in 1948, another one-sided thought appears, this time in the east, threatening to turn the newly-created Yugoslavia into something else and of second-rate importance, into a tool and lick-boot of new one-sidedness and new power. One had again to rise in defense of one's own pulse. The indigenous thought was emerging with pain and effort, overshadowed by arms and besieged with want of all kinds. People wondered in disbelief: was this what great Marx really said, was this what great Lenin really wanted? The right answers had to be found. And the right answers were announced, not only in daily papers. Human thought in its purest form rose in defense of the truth. Philosophical essays appeared in philosophical magazines as the first reasonable perception and unmasking of the eastern one-sidedness. Knowledge raised its voice against threatening power. In 1955, victory appeared on the horizon. Naturally, knowledge was not sufficient there, our man in his

entirety and all our power emerged victorious. And life went on from year to year – i.e. knowledge proved again to be knowledge and power to be power, even though ours. Much of what was thought and written as knowledge in the 1950s proved uninteresting. And so knowledge continued to germinate and grow for its own sake, while power did the same. Much of what was once written against one specific power (in the east) became, under new circumstances, a boomerang against the other power (at home) – something not only unnecessary, but also embarrassing which is better left unmentioned and pushed aside.

In the late 1970s, the book “Philosophy and Marxism” was available at any public library in Belgrade, the capital of Yugoslavia. Its author, Gajo Petrović, professor at the Zagreb Faculty of Philosophy, had also written another book, “Philosophy and Revolution”, which could be found only at major libraries which, for their part, did not always know what to do with it. Namely, if a person came and filled in a form requesting to read the book, he stood a five-to-one chance that the form would come back with “taken out” stamped on it. There was any unusual in a book being taken out, if it was really taken out. The unusual thing, however, was that this particular book was rarely taken out and that the actual chances were five to one that it was “lost” somewhere on the back shelves, i.e. that it was not where it was supposed to be. Only some uninformed librarian and his accidental persistence, or some special circumstances in this or that library could make the book accessible to an interested chance reader.

Both books had the same canvas-on-paper covers in gray and orange, and “Naprijed” of Zagreb published both.

The first book gave 1976 as the year of the impression, but its introduction said precisely, the book had actually been printed in 1965 and this was its second edition. The note in the book said that the entire contents had already appeared as contributions to various magazines and papers, as if at one time it was not only interesting to discuss these issues, but even desirable, i.e. socially useful, as the papers would put it. (Even if an occasional paragraph was a two-edged sword, well, this was permissible).

The second book gave 1973 as the year of the first impression, but its fourth page said that the text had originally been written in German and published in West Germany in 1971 – as if pressure, i.e. support from the international public (academic) opinion could decide whether or not the book should be published in Yugoslavia, where is no longer seemed desirable. True, a note in the Yugoslav edition said that the writer had already published a similar book in Yugoslavia in 1969. A limited edition of “The Possibilities of Man” had appeared and aroused little attention in the press, as if already then it had raised the question of whether it was useful or harmful. Afterwards, the book was revised and enlarged – the note did not say in what way – perhaps even in no basic and no important way, i.e. it is enough not rarely to omit the certain citation that the sense may become questionable or spiteful. If a criticism of something or somebody in socialism is being discussed, for example, and This Somebody, not to mention the very Marshal, is cited as a support and encouraging for that criticism, then it is not as the same as when he is not cited. At first case it is supposed, This Somebody is omitted from



criticism, at the other the question remains opened, i.e. suspected. However, the book was published as an original text in German in 1971. As for the German language and pressure from the world public, the first book, “Philosophy and Marxism”, also exercised some influence. It was translated into German (“Wider den autoritären Marxismus”), English (“Marx in the Midtwentieth Century”), Spanish, Czech and Japanese – said the bibliographical note not of the very translated book, which in its second edition carried no note on the writer’s other major works, but in the second book whose original was in German. The book of 1973 also had something which both the editions of 1965 and 1976 lacked – a special note saying that, as certified by this and that republican secretariat, “the book is regarded as a product under Article 36”, paragraph, item, law, “and is thus exempted from turnover tax” – as if, just in case, it was necessary to stress for this book only that the eye of the law had inspected it!

Sometime towards the end of 1985, when fog and blinding sleet almost glued the winter sky over Belgrade to housetops, a man was walking down *Vasa Čarapić* Street. He trod the gray pavement, passing by gray walls and colorful frost-covered shop windows, as cars and trolleybuses buzzed by between rows of sparse buildings. Above his head were power lines and moving trolleys, towered by rooftops. He was carrying something that resembled a large typing-size notebook bound in cheap shiny cardboard with no inscription, which could be got at any bookbinding shop. He was walking on the right-hand side of the street towards Students’ Square, but when he was opposite the *Stari grad* restaurant and *Beobank*, he turned right into *Zmaj Jovina* Street. The bare boughs of trees stuck out in the bleak sky, touching a balcony here, a facade ornament there. The man with the notebook was again walking on the right-hand side of the street. When he reached a house with a metal plate bearing the number 30 affixed on a concrete ornament just above the entrance, he pushed the heavy wrought-iron door and went in.

A middle-aged woman with brown eyes opened the heavy dark-paneled double door, of the kind that is no longer made, on the fifth floor.

They greeted each other with a curt “Hello” and a smile, the way relatives do.

“I have brought it,” he says, pointing to the bound manuscript in his hands.

They were walking down a spacious hall that one would have had trouble defining as long, wide or high.

“Ljubisha will soon go to Zagreb and take it to Gajo. Don’t worry!” she nodded reassuringly.

It was not until they came to the drawing room that one received the full impact of classical spaciousness and taste. To the right, a grand black piano, not a pianino, to the left, a sitting set, with an oblong marble plate as a coffee table. A light folding glass door opened on to another part of the drawing room, which ended in a big window with heavy lace curtains.

The man put his manuscript on the marble-top table, and leaned back in the plush armchair with an expansive feeling of hope and promising future welling up inside him.

“Yes!” repeated the hostess opposite him, “Gajo is a true expert. He will know how to edit the manuscript and how to help.”

And the man nodded with satisfaction. If there was a trace of anxiousness or caution in his satisfaction, as indeed there was, it was directed towards the manuscript on the table. Yes, the man was unaware of many things at the time, even some obvious things. Not far from the table with the bound manuscript on it, on the opposite wall near the folding door was a bookshelf made of dark carved wood. All he had to do was to lift his eyes and raise his arm unhesitatingly. Among the densely stacked books of all sizes and colors was one whose white spine bore the inscription “Petrović, Philosophie und Revolution”. On page two, just below the subtitle “Modelle für eine Marx-Interpretation mit Quellentexten”, it was modestly written: *To Ljubo from Gajo, Zagreb, 14 October 1971.* However, the man was deep in his own thoughts, he did not look around and did not see it, let alone trouble with the inscription in a foreign language.

Chapter VIII, entitled “Kritik im Sozialismus”, for example, said that a free research spirit, i.e. criticism, had yet to flourish in socialism. Unfortunately, this is rarely understood and so it is stressed that the field of politics and everything related to it should be exempt from criticism. If, according to this and similar opinions, criticism should after all be allowed in the field of politics, then it should under no circumstances touch the sphere of top politics, top comrades and top state officials, whose authority should remain sacrosanct owing to responsibility and sensitiveness of their jobs. However, the book went on, it is exactly there that criticism is badly needed and it is exactly because of that authority and responsibility that true revolutionaries do not shun criticism, but only spurious and corrupted ones, those around whom their boot-lickers have spun the theory of infallibility and sacredness of wise leadership. This is followed by an excerpt from one of Lenin’s letters, only to show that even at that time, when there was not much philosophizing because of rifles ready to fire, even then he encouraged free criticism directed even against the top leadership, as he saw it as a guarantee against possible mistakes. Finally, what the quasi-Marxist theoreticians will use as their last-ditch defense is that at least basic principles of socialism and Marxism should be out of the critics’ reach, since they, i.e. the principles, have allegedly been so carefully studied and are so infallible that they are now only studied by class enemies. However, it was also said in the book, in a living and open teaching, such as Marxism, one cannot clearly distinguish between basic and any secondary principles. The most comprehensive attempt at this so far, the Stalinist attempt, suffered a complete theoretical collapse. And so, generally speaking, can we really be sure that all the principles now held finally determined are truly infallible?

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I have never met Gajo Petrović. I have only heard about him from my mentioned relative. Naturally, I do not remember on what occasion and how I heard about him. Her husband Ljubisha and Gajo are related in the same way as she and I are related, and it probably happened that way. When I finished the essay in late 1975, she again reminded me of Gajo. He is a philosopher by profession, and not just any philosopher at that –

idealism–materialism, wrong–true – but a true philosopher, and what would I say if Ljubisha took the essay to him? He might be able to help. So, sometime in early 1976 Gajo already had the manuscript.

“I took it” reported Ljubisha, “and he said he would look at it.”

Indeed, sometime in February, Gajo telephoned his cousin in Belgrade to say that he would look at the manuscript, that he had not read it yet, but that he would do so in a month at the latest. All right, I thought, a month is not a long time and there is no need for a deadline, but this is exactly what he said, my cousin explained. And the month passed. And more time passed without a word from Gajo. Around that time, I accidentally came across the 1974 double issue of Praxis, a magazine of which Gajo was editor-in-chief. Actually, I cannot say it happened by accident, just I cannot say that it was not by accident. I was visiting a cousin of mine, actually my uncle, who is also the uncle of my earlier mentioned cousin, Vera.

“What happened to your essay?” he suddenly asked me.

“What do you mean by that?”

“Is somebody reading it?”

“I suppose Gajo is!”

“You suppose?”

“Well, nowadays it is not easy to find time and courage for some manuscripts. I don’t know Gajo.”

“He is a brave man, that Gajo.”

“How do you know that?”

“Let me show you something that he has published!”

And he brought the magazine, a thick yellow--bound volume with the plain black letters in Latin on it – Praxis – and with the same word in smaller Greek print below – π ρ α ξ ι ζ.

“All the way back from 1974. Where did you get it?”

“Vera gave it to me. Take it and have a look!”

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The first issue of Praxis was published in the early autumn of 1964.

This was the time when Yugoslav knowledge had already risked a break with any power for the sake of its own development according to the laws of thought and truth, and not because of this or that recommendation, or a guideline from here and applause from there. This was not simply Stalinism and the cult of personality, rather, deeper roots were anticipated, both on the theoretical and everyday scenes. The Bled symposium of philosophers had already been held in 1960. The doubt whether the basic question of philosophy was that of matter or spirit was already expressed loudly. If there is no church and God, as indeed there are not, who is forcing us to artificially separate the spirit from the matter and put it against the matter, when matter and spirit are the needle and the thread of the same cloth: of all that is, whatever it is. Possibility – even the slightest one, the thought itself – is imminent to matter, as the every embodied possibility is of

material nature, not only one that happens among all others which could have happened and did not, but also a new field of new possibilities. In connection with this, an abstract picture of the world is not only a subjective reflection of the otherwise objective world, but also a part of this world. It is by no means something, with which truth, such as it is, is comprehended, and something that barely influences the world and barely changes something a posteriori. Not on one occasion it is also a co-creator of truth, as man himself is the co-creator of nature, by the very fact that he exists he cannot but influence even the distribution of the gravitation potential around the earth, for example. If Janko delivers speeches and travels around, and Marko works and shares the bread he earned with Janko, than either injustice or coercion are involved, or love and gift according to merit. The truth here depends exclusively on what Marko thinks and feels about it. Naturally, Janko will not like the announced possibility that he could lose the confidence of Marko, who will start to think differently. And he would therefore say: No, the truth is objective – private property over the means of production has been abolished, etc. – and we can only comprehend it, i.e. express it subjectively. Yes, regardless of the fact that Lenin wrote, among other things, about the objective property of matter and its subjective reflection; and regardless of the fact that a vulgar materialistic sense can be detected in Engels' works too. And it is exactly due to this that it is the duty of thought to critically review the circumstances under which the classics of Marxism worked in order to unmask all later oversimplifications and deviations, the dogma and the violence, and to retain the authentic and true sense – these were the messages from the Bled symposium and the symposium in Arandjelovac in 1963.

And the editorial in the first issue of Praxis did announce a program “in the sense in which philosophy is the thought of the revolution, i.e. merciless criticism of everything existing” – it is interesting the very words originate from Marx: “die rücksichtslose Kritik alles Bestehenden” – which immediately aroused suspicion of power. Explanations were in vain that, naturally, such criticism does not mean saying no to everything, but only that everything should be the object of speculative re-examination, without prejudice and desirable conclusions made in advance – precisely because of the firm conviction that socialism is the only future for humankind. In vain!...

And like that from year to year until on 21 February 1975, *Politika*\* published on page 9 a brief and clear headline: “Praxis Stops Publication”, but the subhead was long and vague: “The communists on the magazine have decided that there are no conditions within the editorial staff to eliminate unacceptable idea-theoretical activities”. To say that „there are no conditions“ was probably just another way of saying that there are no conditions for retreat, in the same way as deciding or realizing that an activity is unacceptable does not necessarily mean agreeing that it is wrong or that it is not right. What “the communists on the magazine” really thought remained unclear. What was indeed missing here was an additional interpretation by Praxis itself. However, it stopped publication. This was the end of probably the only magazine in Yugoslavia, which, in

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\* *Politika* is the main daily newspaper publishing in Belgrade.

inviting the authors to send their contributions, added a note quite unusual for our intolerant conditions, saying that “the published articles do not necessarily reflect the views of the editorial board.”

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Naturally, I need not have known all this about Praxis to see that Gajo could not help me in any way. It was enough to look at the issue of Praxis, which my uncle gave me, the one from Vera actually, the double issue 1-2, 74. It was enough to read, for instance, “the stand of the editorial board” on some of the latest criticism of Praxis. „An enormous amount of effort and long-standing work on deepening the Marxist thought“, it said, “the work which is already gaining due recognition in the world, was degraded to the level of ‘guilt’ ”. Sometimes it really seems that our country abounds in everything, and particularly in people: if we do not export them as skilled or unskilled labor, we squander and obstruct them at home. If man is indeed our greatest value, as it is pointed out, “what purpose then is served by creating an atmosphere and situation of destroying people?”

At that time, in March 1976, I almost completed preparations for publishing the essay. I only had to find the printing house and then take a break and look on things. On 26 June, I mailed a copy of the essay to Gajo. Instead of the usual inscription, I wrote the following:

*I know,*

*Professor Gajo,*

*That for a true intellectual (which I aspire to be) there is no excuse for such a belated interest in Praxis, a genuine and truly authentic moment of history. But it can at least be understood: I needed to write such an unorthodox essay, or, more precisely, to discuss it with people who might know and those others who could do something for it, to be able to guess all the complexity and multi-meaningfulness of the situation (to which, after all, Praxis itself was perhaps the best witness).*

*I therefore take this opportunity to ask personally you the following: if possible, I would appreciate it very much to have the following issues of Praxis in my library...*

*Respectfully,*

*Signature.*

Naturally, I did not expect his reply, any reply would necessarily have to be an explanation, and silence was the easiest and wisest explanation under the circumstances. However, I did what I could.

\* \* \*

Four years after the last word was published in Praxis, when all had passed and the covers were shut, an incidental but interesting news item appeared in *Politika*. The date was 16 September, the year, consequently, 1978, and a report on page 13 headlined “Philosophy and Science” and subheaded “On the 16th international congress of philosophers in Düsseldorf”, ended as follows:

“Mihailo Marković and Gajo Petrović attended the congress. Some of our philosophers were also present, but unfortunately not as active participants. Our future attendance at this international forum should probably be better organized, so that we can be adequately represented there.”

Gajo Petrović and Mihailo Marković, both Yugoslavs in Yugoslavia, were no longer our philosophers.

(POLITICS, BREAD AND BOOKSF, from chapter VI)

## PAVLE SAID WHAT WAS ON HIS MIND

**T**hese days, in fact soon afterwards, there was a meeting in Pavle’s factory of the broader electronic group. That was a commercial director’s idea: to call the entire group to account for delay in development of tube voltmeters that were to be in production line long before. To call to account clearly and strictly, with minutes, first of all before the commercial director himself, for he is the one who signs and that way guarantees term and delivery, money, bread, and the one who was blushing because of somebody else’s carelessness and badly done job. They say those were his exact words: he is blushing. Moreover, he said he had known how to save his cheek in harder times, when fires had flashed and the knives shone – and he was going to save it now too. Beside him, Andrey was present too. He was the president of Workers’ Council, a short middle-aged man, with quick movements of his arms, sharp mimic and lively small eyes. He surveyed all present quickly, smiled shortly to Pigeon, Pigeon whispered something to him and he nodded his head, waved his hand, took a pile of papers from his briefcase and prepared his pencil: he is going to get some notes himself although an official was sitting beside him, making it at all the meeting of Workers’ Council too. Here was Boshka the Mechanic too, the leader of installation group, in his greasy blue overalls. He must have never taken it off, that’s why he was called the Mechanic, although he was a technician. Some workers in his group have nothing to do for some time now, they were planned to work on those voltmeters. So Boshka the Mechanic came to see for himself what was going on, folks, what’s trouble? He stretched his big, blackened hands, and then squeezed his cap with them. You could hear from time to time his deep voice as he waved his head in denial.

The commercial director entered the last. With his head high, he greeted everybody in his deep voice: “Hello, Comrades,” he nodded slowly and vaguely and, huge and fat as he was, walked clumsily. Then he lowered himself into the chair at the top of the table. They were all silent, waiting. Director moved in his chair, put his elbows on the table, and coughed a deep cough, long and important. Then again.

“O. K.,” he said finally. “We can begin now?” he asked and there came a hardly distinguishable yes, all were present.

Director lowered his head. He was turning over his pen, playing with it. His hands were huge, well taken-care-of. He was silent. Finally, he said again deeply “O. K.” He spread his arms and raised his head: “I must say that I feel really uneasy!” he started importantly, looking at Dragan, then at Pavle and Pigeon. “You know why we met here today. We have to account for whatever we do, to each other, to the assembly, to the society. I am blushing for quite a time now!” he shouted sharply and stared at Dragan. Then he sighed questioningly “Ah?” and transferred his look to Pigeon. Finally, he peered at Pavle. Again “Ah?”

Afterwards silence. For a time they were all silent, motionless. Only Tanja had taken out her mirror and was furtively looking at it.

Then Dragan sat back in his chair, but as he was withdrawing and shrinking, looked at director aslant, shortly, icily. “Well, it is like this” he started quietly, then raised himself and smoothed his hair. Suddenly, he continued unusually loudly: “They say we are late,” made a pause to explain quickly: “I am expecting to say something the first for I am the leader of the group.” Then he fell into silence again, uttered a “Hem!” waved his head and continued accentuating: “It’s important to stress that we are late with regard to the norm!” he raised his finger and repeated: “With regard to the norm!” and this time he stared at director.

Director did not make a wink at first, was silent for a while, then winked and waved his hand impatiently: “Exactly! Continue! Give me some reasons, reasons!”

“That’s the reason!” Dragan yelled impatiently also. Then he added quickly: he knows that you have norm for soldering condensers and installation of electronic tubes – it’s o.k. There is a whole science about the economic movements of hands, body position and height of chair, what disposition of tools. That’s how the workers are being differentiated into qualified, high qualified, more or less crafty and he doesn't know what else – but how is one to predict time for development, for a project? That’s quite an uncertain job: to boil the water on the surface, you have to hat a whole pot, nobody knows how large one, you cannot tell in advance. And it’s ridiculous to say “Hey, you, Faraday, you have hundred hours to invent a little of inducted power!”

“Let’s return to the facts! How much overtime work have you had this month in your group?” director interrupted him with an expression of impatience and boredom, such a spasm was on his face, such a waving of his hand.

Dragan gave him a quick, icy look from aside. “Well, here come the facts: Those from Nish say to you, we need tube voltmeters in two months. You say it to Raka and he writes down the norm – two months. If you cannot accomplish in the norm – work overtime!” Dragan shouted. “I don’t think we are late at all!” he snapped.

“E-e-e!” director drawled deeply throwing his head back, and then looked at Dragan silently, somehow haughtily. He sneered, bent forward and continued slowly: “I suppose Raka is one who knows, he was an engineer when you were still a baby, ha?” he peered at Dragan, demurely, unpleasantly motionless.

Dragan waved his hand: “Ha, he knows!” he laughed ironically. “Nonsense! The old man knows only that you are a director. What is he like one who knows he never counts

in the norm the time necessary for control of finalized instruments? There is no control service, and who is going to do it but us?!" Dragan was angry. He glared. "What is he like one who knows he overlooks the fact we have to run to providing service all the time? This was not bought and that was not obtained, everybody shrugs shoulders: no material, it was ordered, wait a little!" ... Dragan spoke without a pause, but now more for himself. He threw his briefcase on the table, closed it quickly. Then he got up, went to the rack, put on his coat as if he was going to leave, but sat down again. He lowered his head. As if, he saw no one any more nor heard anything. He sat constantly with his hands on his briefcase, kept silent, while the traces of anxiety disappeared from his face gradually. He became calm some own way, got somehow a faint expression of boredom. He simply was quiet, one could see he thought he was only losing his time, but in a passive way, he was submissive. There he was, waiting. Only he didn't raise his head and was quiet.

Director was quiet for a time too. He was sneezing rapidly, his head thrown back. Then hardly noticeably, he stretched his hands: "You've said quite a lot of things, and I understood nothing!" he spoke trying to look as self-confident as possible, didn't look at Dragan any more, only at the others present. His confident glance wandered around, he kept his head back and smiled, then stretched his hands again. "I do understand economics, but this, I cannot understand!" he shrugged his shoulders and looked around again, fat and tall as he was – haughtily.

Dragan never made a move. He remained submissively bored.

Even as director was still surprised stretching his hands and self-confidently surveyed all present there, there came a quiet but distinguishable voice from Pavle.

"You don't understand because you are not an engineer, you are a bluffer!" acidly, through the teeth.

Everybody was startled. Director jumped on his chair, jerked backwards and opened his mouth. He looked expressionlessly and unbelievably at Pavle, his hands on his chair. The others jerked too, turned to Pavle, looked at him in surprise, their breath kept, frozen. Only Vaske looked at Pavle and director alternately, kept winking with that eye of his and his face blackened, long with seriousness.

However, Pavle continued calmly to talk about quite different things as if nothing had been said a minute before. He spoke quietly, seriously, with a hardly noticeable smile on his face – he enjoyed himself, looked at director and enjoyed himself. Only now and then, he seemed to speak through his teeth, bitterly. He knows, it wasn't easy before the integration either, almost not to have been survived, the market, competition, problems. Who is the wise one in thing like these?!

The present people moved in their chairs as if they had sighed silently although suspense and expectation sustained in the room. However, Pavle proceeded calmly, slowly, spoke things all of them spoke before or could be speaking – and things and ideas gradually took their usual shapes, the every-day ones. They were all sitting there still, both director and Pavle, calmly, and it was all real. Director, gradually, gradually, but closed his mouth, let loose the chair, crossed his arms on his huge chest, listened. Only a shadow of ironic smile was present on his lips.



True, Pavle was saying reasonably, the integration was the only solution. And life is work, pain, uncertainty, and it lasts again, lasts constantly, as before. Evil tongues rustle that it's even worse, much worse. One thing is sure, people can sense evil, they talk, they rustle, they don't know where the injustice and trouble are coming from. Well, salaries are small, and they are not, for there are the norms and exceeds. Work and earn! And nobody understands anything, for whoever heard that someone got an exceed, how and how much money! A real mess, only evil, trouble and evil, and nobody know where they come from.

After these words, Pavle stopped, coughed curtly, then he continued unusually loudly, stressing his words: "But if someone explained to people: This director is a sold soul. He has betrayed your work. There are no other betrayers!" and he kept looking at director, enjoyed himself, his face was pale, serious.

Director jumped on his chair also this time, opened his mouth again. He swallowed air, searched for words: "What?!... Sorry!?!... I don't allow this!!"

However, Pavle kept looking at him motionless, his teeth tight, but he talked, didn't let him get his breath, find the words: "Yes, he estimates our sweat with a naked eye, as he was ordered from Nish. That's why he is a director! He has no other capabilities!"

"No!... I don't allow this!... I protest!"...

"Yes, if someone explained things to people, I doubt you would win trust on a referendum. I doubt it!" – Pavle almost shouted. "Put it in the minutes: I doubt it, I doubt it!"

Finally, Pavle fell into silence. He sighed with a deep sigh.

Director flushed in the face, veins on his neck swelled, it seemed they are going to tear the collar of his shirt apart.

"For you are a bluffer!" Pavle concluded this time quietly, again through his teeth, but calmly, his face was pale and serious.

Pavle said what was on his mind.

(FIRST DAYS, slightly shorted chapter XV)

## Part II

### The quandaries we were in

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## TEA FOR TWO

The big city lights were glittering and the sounds of the night could be heard. It was a clear spring night, cool and pleasant. Above the blooming tree-tops of the tree-lined streets, the stars were blinking peacefully and eternally as if suggesting peace and restraint. All the rest may be hard and painful but nevertheless transient. Pavle

watched them for some time, as if trying carefully to grasp their silent message and then sighted almost with relief, and waked off. He decided to return home on foot, so what if it was late.

He was thinking: Oh, Mishko, Mishko! He was obviously irritated. He even felt bad about it and was upset. It was the simple truth, the unadulterated reality, indeed a necessity but it was as if he had torn out his heart. Pavle sighed again. Oh well, it was probably because Mishko was still a child at heart. He still believed that they, Pavle and himself, had been bound by fate to fight for a happier and more dignified life for man, in which consideration and honesty would prevail over evil and injustice. As if all that it took was their good will. That this was most important of all. All the rest was treason from which man jumps like mad. You wouldn't believe the patience with which he explained to the little Gypsy beggar. How that affected human dignity, even his own by begging, how one must work, deserve in an honest and proud way, how one ought to clean streets, shine shoes because every kind of work was worthy and it is only when the dinar is wet with one's own sweat that we fully appreciate it. And the little Gypsy boy listened most attentively, hoping to receive a dinar or two. Mishko did not give him anything. He was enthusiastic about having helped with his sincere words of advice, about having cleansed his soul and ennobled him with the desire to work and that was enough. Actually, he didn't get anything from Pavle either but at least he did not lecture him, nor did he believe that he was able to help him, he least of all. True, it is unfortunate – if this were the only unfortunate thing! – but there are certain things that one must take as they are, however vile they may seem, whether we like it or not. For, if they really exist then they are a part of reality. And that is not all. There is a whole concatenation of circumstances lurking in the background, known or unknown, and this too is a reality, the various expressions of reality are there not only because someone said a kind word or showed good will however much a nice word may otherwise appear nice and an ugly one ugly. Reality is forever and its expression closely dependent on circumstances. There is nothing one can do about it. In any case, not as individuals and not with a handful of dinars. The most one is able to achieve is make that expression understood. And again only so, that man can become more easily reconciled with it.

Pavle was aware of all this although thinking about it did not make him especially happy. Still, he was unruffled. Things are as they must be if not what they should be. Despite everything, Pavle was not unhappy and his serenity could be, in a person so young, considered a virtue. It sprang from every movement he made and every word he uttered. This time too, his voice was sober and calm: "Pardon me!" Hurrying along deeply engrossed in thought he nearly knocked into a girl at the first corner. She had been standing in the shadow. She was all-alone. As he passed by, he repeated "Pardon me!" more to himself and quickened his pace... This was something life had taught him: Pavle will simply not do anything in vain. Nothing that any idea of what is noble and moral would justify. This would simply not be purposeful. Had Mishko's lecture to the small Gypsy boy been meaningful? Naturally, not! Work alone is purposeful, not just any kind of work, only that recognized by society, paid work, work which may be eaten and put on

– while nobility and morality are merely means of ensuring its respect and defense. And these means are not even enough, which is often but a miserable consolation, a consolation to dreamers and weaklings. Pavle did not regard himself a weakling... He listened... There really was the sound of clicking heels following him. The streets are empty, not a soul about. It must be that girl whom he had nearly bumped into... However, one must of course carry on with one's work and mind one's own business. That's the only right thing to do. Is not it the height of morality and nobility to see to one's own self? That is exactly what Pavle wishes to do. There is no reason to be angry or to speak harsh, strong words. He will go to Germany and try his luck. It won't be easy, Pavle knows that. It won't be bed of roses, there is no such thing anywhere. However, Pavle is a grown up man. All he is asking is that his work should be properly appreciated. His knowledge and thought, the effort he was invested, the work he enjoys. What he is in fact seeking is a more just setting for his work. Once again in the interest of Janko and Marko or in that of some Wolf and Rudolph. There ought to be enough bread for all. If there is not then without much beating about the bush and without much talk, there is not. It is inhuman, possibly cruel though honest – society simply has not need for your work, there is no money for you, at best a mere pittance. So what, Pavle will return, settle down in some godforsaken village and repair short-circuits, change fuses – if that be the demand and need of life and society. Down the drain with one's wishes, in that case! Just like that! Still, for the time being, Pavle is convinced that his knowledge and capabilities are worth something and able to generate money and therefore wants to earn well. He'll see!... He strained his ears once again. The girl he could still hear seemed very young. Pavle slowed down. He felt like seeing whether she was pretty, good looking. He stopped in front of a shop window. The girl approached and brushed him from behind in passing. She stopped:

“Sorry!” she said, hesitantly.

She was indeed very young. Both beautiful and attractive.

“That's all right!” replied Pavle.

The girl stood beside him. She was obviously in a dilemma. Then she looked down, as if she were guilty of something. Pavle was silent.

“Then, good-bye” she finally uttered and walked off.

Pavle was slightly surprised. He watched her slim white legs while she moved away. He went after her. So, he would feast his eyes on something beautiful on his way home. They walked in this fashion for some time. Then the girl once again stopped by a shop window. As he went by her, Pavle caught sight of the pinkish corner of her ear protruding beneath her blond silky hair. She seemed delicate. Pavle passed her.

“Oh, please!” she suddenly called after him.

Pavle stopped and turned around. The girl walked hurriedly in his direction.

“Um...” she began and then stopped.

Then, she asked how to get to a certain street.

What a coincidence, it was the same way he was going.

They walked together. They advanced in silence. Pavle felt that he should start a

conversation.

“Are you alone?” he inquired vaguely and slowly as if intending to pursue the subject.

“No, I’m not alone!” she interrupted quickly and gently caught him under the arm. “There, you see!” she laughed impishly. Then she went on hastily as if she wished to avoid further questions: “I’m going to see a girlfriend of mine. I don’t know the neighborhood, but I do know the name of the street and the number. Then she stopped to look at him as if to make sure that he would not ask any further questions.”

Pavle really wanted to ask her: so late? He refrained, however. Anyway, he hated poking his nose into other people’s business.

“She’s really wonderful, that friend of mine!” continued the girl. “She promised to lend me five thousand.” Then she fell silent. She glanced at him inquisitively as if expecting something. Pavle said nothing. “Well, I was thinking...” the girl went on uncertainly. She hesitated. Then she made up her mind: “If you could lend me that money, I wouldn’t have to go to my friend?” she said and stopped, letting go of his elbow as if afraid not to get it dirty. She did not look at him in the eyes. She bent her head and looked down.

All of a sudden, things became clear to Pavle. So that’s it. She is truly beautiful and attractive, one might even say exceptionally good looking. Anyone would desire her. Why should he be an exception? Well, he certainly wasn’t going to lecture her like Mishko the Gypsy boy?! Anyway, she looked clear and tidy. He gave her a careful once over. She was really clean, modestly dressed but clean nevertheless. That’s what counted. It will cost five thousand. Five, but, damn it, it was worth it. At least as much as five dinners. He needn’t go to the cinema for a month, big deal!

“If you haven’t got it on you, I’ll come along with you!” said the girl, fearing that she hadn’t been explicit enough.

I know, I know thought Pavle and stated briefly:

“I’ll give it to you!”

They went on separately one beside the other. They were silent. The deal had been made and there was no need for further conversation.

As they entered his room, Pavle first switched on the lamp on his bed-night table. Then he made up the bed and took off his clothes. In the meantime, the girl obediently slipped off her blouse and skirt and took off her shoes. She remained in her slip. They were quiet. Then Pavle lay down. The girl made a few steps towards the bed but went no further. Pavle watched her for some time. Then he got up and without a word drew her into bed. Their legs intertwined and his hands sought her body under her slip. It seemed all of a sudden that her naked thighs and breasts spilled their youth all over the white sheets. Pavle started kissing her. At first, she appeared to be embarrassed and then her cheeks became flushed, her breasts firm and her whole body stiffened and she burned with passion. Nature cannot distinguish between love and ordinary giving of oneself. Nature was roused in her and she began returning his kisses. Pavle kissed her and caressed her with his body and hips as if he had forgotten where and how he had found

her.

In the morning, Pavle woke up before her. The girl had spent a restless night and only fell asleep at dawn. Pavle cautiously got out of bed so as not to wake her. He was in the habit of drinking tea on Saturday and Sunday mornings when he didn't have to go to work. He was thinking. Well, he would make tea for two. Then he glanced round the room. Her clothes and underwear were strewn all over the place. Pavle began to pick them up carefully. In fact, he had spent a night with her. One might even say a pleasant night.

At that moment, the girl sighed deeply and opened her eyes. She slowly raised herself from the bed and stared at him. Pavle had been putting her bra on the chair when he noticed her looking at him. He went to the bed with the intention of kissing her good morning. The girl moved away from him without removing her eyes from his face.

“Silly, I only wanted to kiss you” said Pavle cupping her chin with his hands.

She tore herself away from him and all of a sudden started screaming: “Go away! I'm a virgin. I'm a virgin!” She was out of her mind. Her eyes were flashing with hatred and despair. Her face was contorted with pain. She was waving her arms and shaking her head wildly. As if she were afraid. Her hair was in a mess. She leaped out of bed, and seized the pot of boiling water from the stove: “Don't come near me! Don't come near me, I'm a virgin!” she hid in the corner of the room. She was quite naked underneath her slip. She seemed to be unaware of it. She was breathing more and more quickly. Then she stopped for a second as if to muster enough courage and shouted out shrilly and in desperation, for the last time: “I'm a virgin,” and collapsed on to the floor. The pot of boiling water spilled next to her. She didn't even feel the boiling water. She was sobbing. Her shoulders were shaking as if they were going to fall apart. She bowed her head and was moaning and moaning.

Pavle was first amazed and confused. He stood motionlessly, while his eyebrows were moving up and down. His face relaxed and his heart went out for her. He paced up and down the room slowly. The poor thing, in her present state she certainly would not take the miserable five thousand. The most that Pavle could do was to wait for her to calm down. She would gradually calm down. She had to be left alone, that was all. There was no use crying over spilt milk, what happened, happened, there was no changing things now. She must pull herself together and she will pull herself together. Then he would give her the money.

When she was about to leave, Pavle stuffed eighteen thousand into her hand: all the money he had at the moment. The girl didn't even bother to count the money. She only looked at Pavle painfully for a long time.

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Still today, Pavle wondered why he had given her all that money. To help her, he knew he was unable to do that. To appear noble and generous? But all that is only nonsense. And after all, he hadn't said a word about honesty and integrity.

Yet, he had given her all his money. He didn't regret that. Despite this, there was

something that worried him for some time but even that had passed. Pavle had known it would.

(FIRST DAYS, chapter XIV)

## THE WAITING

So, finally it came, September, a Monday, the twelfth, I remember that well. No, nothing specific happened, let alone something special or final – except that was the day I received that little piece of paper. A small note, eight by twelve centimeters, no longer, without a single word on it. Just up at the top, on the left side, there was a six-digit number, blue ink on white paper: six, eight, two, dash, et cetera. I took back my identity card at the desk, pushed the glass door and went out. I look around, absorbed in thought and then sighed deeply. Then I crumpled up the paper and threw it away. I'd had that phone number written at home for a long time. Even so, half an hour ago I still thought that it was better to contact people in person, to see them, explain things. I looked at my watch. Yes, not even half an hour since I walked up those narrow zigzagging stairs with the smooth black railing like ebony under my hand and the dark orange carpeting under my foot. The second floor isn't far, I almost knew the hallway and the position of door number fourteen by heart.

"It's still not ready," said the clerk, barely lifting his head from the paper in front of him.

A woman, sitting at a side desk right next to him, didn't turn around. She continued to eat something from an unwrapped piece of paper. Expect for that unwrapped paper and several documents, neither desk had much of anything on it. There was a telephone on each one and the desks were smoothly polished as the only free space in this rather small room, with its large window whose plastic blinds were half-closed. In front and behind, left and right, all the way to the door and right next to the window, even on the floor, were stacks and stacks of notebooks and cardboard boxes, record books, bookkeeping journals, catalogues, laws, material.

"I said, the commission hasn't yet," the clerk raised his head once more without putting down the document in his hand.

"Excuse me for asking," I cautiously began, "it's taking quite a bit of time. As though there are some problems?"

Or maybe not, it passed through my head, since he didn't answer.

"But then again," I continued bravely, "it's not trash or anything political, it can be seen at first glance. In any case, I grew up after the war, a child of socialism, as they say," I smiled.

However, he remained silent and I perceived that silence could mean a lot more that has nothing in common with approval and encouragement.

“Well, I was wondering, is there any possibility of an appeal, complaint, how is it done and to whom?”

He raised an eyebrow.

“When opinions are divided, about a book for example, what happens legally?” I finally asked.

“Legally?” he raised his voice too and I unconsciously took a half step backwards. But I had nowhere to go. An entire column of catalogues and record books wobbled and almost collapsed on my head.

“Well all right then, in practical terms?” I had to acquiesce, “do you give some sort of justification for your reviews?”

“No!” he answered briefly.

“But that isn’t really fair to the publisher, to the writer. Isn’t that so?”

He was silent again, and seemed to lower his head even further into paper in his hand. I looked at him curiously, I had taken another step forward, I didn’t pay any attention to the woman. She was sitting, eating, not looking at me, not listening to me, I couldn’t expect anything from her. But now she turned around, took a small piece of paper, wrote something on it and silently pushed it across the table to me. And I unconsciously took it. However, I still expected an answer. But the clerk had nothing to say.

“Here’s the phone number,” the woman said impatiently, indicating the small piece of paper.

“What phone number?” I had to change the question. “I just wanted to ask, just wanted to know...”

But she didn’t hear me. It was obvious that she had received all the answers, she sat comfortably at that desk with that unwrapped morsel, and the guy from across the hall or who knows where who could drop by, although he didn’t have to drop by, didn’t even have to exist, one momentary case actually, unnecessary object or what – in short, he could only have disturbed her and directed her thoughts without any reason or need. The world began and the world ended there with that morsel and among those document paragraphs, all the skills and all the dear meaning, regardless of who created that world, some god or some creator, and whether or not there is room in it for every question and every little essay. The best of all possible worlds, i.e. can it be otherwise?! And what’s there to discuss!

“The telephone number,” the impatient woman repeated. “For you to ask!”

For me to ask a number, a faceless voice, to ask someone there, sometime, just to leave her alone right now, even if she is the one who will have to answer the phone, say what she feels needs to be said and then hang up.

I understood and said “Good-bye!”

“Good-bye,” they both said.

And so I went home and thought it over. Suddenly it was all clear.

**Definition:** If the subject is that specific and that determinate that feels if the

possibility of feeling exists, that thinks if the possibility of thinking exists, that eats, wants, moves, exists if there is the possibility of eating, wanting, moving, existing – and if all the rest is object,

Then one can formulate a

**Postulate:** The main contradiction in society, in this one, that one, society in general, is actually the contradiction within man himself, man as a subject and man as an object, the eternal contradiction between subject as the expression of possibility and object as the means and mediator towards that possibility, between an individual and a general simply to say, one Point and the other Infinity.

And I should not forget this either: I telephoned, of course. Somewhere around the end of September 1977 was the last time I inquired.

“As you know, we give our opinion or we don’t give it. There is no need for you to come anymore. Wait!” I heard the voice from the receiver.

Therefore, I’m waiting.

(**POLITICS, BREAD AND BOOKS**, From chapter VIII)

## IS THERE ENOUGH TIME?

**A**mong the first attempts of the awakened human mind to explain the origin and beginning of the world were the teachings that the world has originated from water or air. Ancient Greeks – who as merchants, fishermen or simply adventurers sailed as far north as the Dalmatian islands – believed that the prime source of everything existing, the first principle and primary element, was water or air. And just on our islands, one is inclined to believe this more than anywhere else in the world and on Hvar more than on any other island. When the winding asphalt road has reached its highest point, almost at the top of the island, which is higher than, for instance, Mount Avalon, the eye sees nothing but the transparent blue sky above, the dense blue sea below and a blue mist of the sky and the sea in the distance. And the vague line far away on the horizon seems as if somewhat thickened at one point: a gray blueness, the outlines of the island of Vis. And one realizes that there is no end to the blueness, that its waters splash against the most distant corners of the earth, both here and, for instance, in faraway Argentina or Australia. And when the road, bending, starts to descend, evergreen underbrush and vine, pale purple lavender and the ochre of the Dalmatian karsts increasingly offer themselves to the eye. The view of the sea vanishes for a moment, and then the sheltered island landscape of scattered houses, the road and scarce verdure becomes denser – the houses are clustered, and the road branches off and disappears among narrow streets, stone-paved passageways and steep stairs. And there, on a steep slope beside a stone wall of one house or another, an occasional fig-tree or green wooden



window shutter, one again catches a glimpse of the sea here and there. Very close to the quay, the landing place in the heart of the town even for the biggest ships, stretching parallel with it is a long narrow street, if a street zigzagging between the stone facades and balconies can be said to run parallel to anything. The street starts almost from the main square, to the side of a renaissance theatre, and, gradually climbing – not uphill but parallel to the sea – it runs all the way to the back of the modern hotel Dalmatian, and on, far behind the walls of a 15<sup>th</sup>-century Franciscan monastery.

And in that street, opposite the central section of the quay, there is a two-floor house facing the sea, squeezed between the other stone houses and facades: shutter above the shutter, as low as possible, and a wooden door with a threshold as a step on the street. Stone faded with sunshine, polished with winds, eroded with moisture and salt, as if it had nothing to say of the times past. However, between the windows the facade bears a new, smooth stone plate with an inscription saying that Ivan Vučetić (1865–1925), the inventor of dactyloscopy, was born and lived there in his youth. Groups of tourists occasionally stop outside the house, and their guides tell them a story in German, French or Italian about a young man who left for Argentina and invented a method now used by the police throughout the world: put a finger in ink and then press it on paper; it is easier to demonstrate than to explain it in a foreign language. And what the guides do not say, and what they probably do not know and what would not be interesting to foreign tourists anyway is known only to the very few of those who holiday in Hvar with their children. The house is rented, the entire first floor to children's recreational center from Belgrade. And the children come there for three weeks at a time.

On 10 July 1981, I spent a restless night, simply because of some quiet pleasure and awakened strength. I was lying in bed and listening. It is very quiet in Hvar just after midnight. A barely audible sound, just a sigh, is heard as if coming from somewhere near you, as if house upon house and the whole town are resting together and a common sleep is hovering above the little patch of land surrounded by sea. Silence, at night even the tiny breath of daily wind dies out. One can only hear the heavy, rattling breathing of an asthmatic suffer coming from somewhere in the neighborhood, but the convulsive struggle for life which seems as if taking place in this very room is strangely out of place in the deep silence. (The streets in Hvar are for pedestrians only, one could measure their width spreading the arms). A twitter of a pair of birds, merry and melodious, is also heard. A twitter after twitter, as if they did not care about the death-rattle, as if it was light-years away. Then again silence, complete, such as almost makes you believe that no sound will ever come out of it.

I lie in bed in the room whose outer wall bears the stone plate between the windows – and I think. The man who wandered about this very room one hundred years ago, what sounds and voices did he listen to above this very sea and these very waves? What rattling breathing or what distress forced him to go to a foreign land – this is past imagining. Or is it? These floorboards creaked under his feet the way they do under mine. A human step always needs space and support. Space and belief. Hope, despite all narrowness and anxiety. Otherwise, where would he find the courage for the seven-mile step?! Yes, Pavle

at least I know well, I remember well how reluctant Pal was to leave and how, when the decision was made, he kept a stiff upper lip. Indeed, what could he believe in when he was leaving his home and job, his friends and place of boyhood memories? Just a few books in a suitcase, the last memento in the language of the memories – and he set out for where his legs would carry him. And what can he believe in now, with a German wife and children whose native language is neither Serbo-Croatian nor Hungarian, but German? Yet, this is probably not so hard to imagine.

Didn't I myself, after so many years, finally set out in his footsteps? In a way I did, when I reached out for a dictionary and, in a haphazard manner, began to translate something that I feel and that lives in me into a language whose words seem to me like codes whose meaning I can only decipher with my eyes and mind. Yet I felt deeply touched. The first and only trace of what I feel and what lives in me was set out in German, the only written trace of my essay. An unimposing Klagenfurt magazine in gray and white covers, whit barely 20 pages, *Zeitschrift für Internationale Literatur*, and a small note in it: *Zur Rezension eingelangte Bücher*. But there "Essay über Gott", Nešić Milan, Belgrad 1977, is announced with equal trust and on the same footing with, for instance, Krleža, or a certain Mikes, whose verses, by necessity, are circulating only in a typewritten form. The announcement was there for all whose eyes might fall on it and who would want to look into it, and for all whose minds can still understand and who want to say so. I was deeply touched, but I was not sorry. Others call themselves patriots. I pulled myself together and suddenly I understood. Man is one and the world is one, the world here and the world there. Only such a world is the right place for man and the expression of a genuine opportunity for him – whether he sits here, there, or anywhere else. Only when he stops sitting and comes to grips with his space, only when, with a new thought and a different measure, he engulfs himself in a whole complex of views and intentions, approaches and attitudes, man will come closer to another man and thus to his full potential. He will then understand the truth about the world and about himself, feel it, start to believe in it and to like it – he will become reconciled with nature and object. And then, with or without a dinar, ruble or dollar in his pocket, many quandaries will dissolve or become less acute, many rigid answers will become unnecessary and many habits and rituals will remain as harmful prop-words only – the attainments will widen and a new strength will awaken. What an experience and what prospects!

I lie awake in the room above the sea, again experiencing this strength, calmly and with quiet satisfaction. Infinity – a part of the star-studded sky – was clearly visible through the window besides a lace curtain.

"Water, water!" the man cried out.

"Olga, bring water, quick!" another voice said.

Then only the twitter in deep silence. Again. Two invisible little birds and their twitter as if from my palm. However, this time followed by a loud sound of a flutter, and then the cooing of a pigeon, the first pigeon that day. Then again silence. The children are sleeping by my side and opposite my wife. Only contours in the dark, with heads and arms thrown back. Another twitter and another rattling sound. The echo of someone's

footsteps on the stone-paved street. The sounds of a car climbing up the road from a distance, from the hill. Again a flutter on the roof across the house, and then again cooing. Then a clinking sound of the quay, as of someone unloads wooden crates with bottles, and then the first shouting on the quay. A section of the sky was becoming pale, the sounds were not abating, the noise was growing. Somebody was starting a motor boat. A cock crowed somewhere above, and then a ship's whistle, a shrill and deep sound. The footfalls grew frequent, someone blew his nose, shouting, talking, noise. Hallo, hallo, someone was shouting in a public phone box. The town was awakening, the rattle and the twitter were no longer heard.

And so the question of the outcome and of what prevailed, the twitter or the rattle, remained unanswered. And the man, wide-awake, suddenly feels that he actually has no need for it. A day is born, life is calling.

I looked at the children: eyes closed, eyelashes do not move, still deep in sleep. I glanced at the watch: is there enough time to get up and go for a walk on tie quay before breakfast?

(POLITICS, BREAD AND BOOKS, Epilogue)

### Part III

#### Where we looked for faith and hope

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## GRANDPA JOVA'S DEATH

I couldn't have been more than seven when Grandpa Jova died. You see, he died quite ordinarily if, that is, death is an ordinary occurrence, just like any other old man could have died: his face haggard and black like earth itself; a sparse little beard, long since neither gray nor yellow, indeterminate as though the advanced age had given it a lichens appearance and it had stopped growing; eyes extinguished, sunken, watery not from a cry or suffering, but from old age itself, as though dissolved in themselves; and yet – conscious. That consciousness had to be quite unusual, special, perhaps divested of any material power and highly diminished but for that very reason sharpened and strangely calm. Funny, even a child and I barely knew the alphabet at the time could not help feeling it. How could I otherwise still remember every little detail?! And yet, at the time when I retained them I noticed nothing. A child as any other. It was only later that I started irrepressibly to think about it and found it strange that I remembered the details so well; it was only later that I discerned that it was not just “fresh child brain”. What was for breakfast or lunch that day, I do not remember. Nor do I remember who was by Grandpa's bedside: Mother, Aunt, our neighbor Dunda?! But I do remember the withered eyes, the tortured shrunken mouth, suddenly pouting as though blowing

something inaudibly upward, who knows where, and the hand, bony, thin, black, frail, which suddenly clenched convulsively for the last time. There is no doubt that in his last moment, his last breath, last quiver the old man discovered something, knew something that I, after all these years, can only surmise not even knowing if it was a message, a thought, or perhaps a sense trembling before the certainty of that enormous secret, hair-raising as indifference itself, as the final settlement with no claims and no liabilities, nothingness, serenity itself. Yes, he who was born in 1854 and belonged to the peasant generation which still believed that the Earth “is kind of plate which Lord ’olds on ’is ill’s’ finger”, he knew something at that moment, something utterly simple and yet as certain and sure as birth itself, something that all the science in the world still ignores.

Otherwise, he was my mother’s grandfather, a sturdy and tough peasant. There was no fooling around with him even in his advanced age: on a snowiest of nights he would pull himself out of his straw-bed to go to the outhouse in the yard. Trampling the snow with his bare feet. And in his youth?! Not even a bitch could wag its tail with impunity. Not a single one. To wink gust like that over her shoulder and never mind. No, sir! One moonlit night he put his shoulder to a door; the whole house shook. „Open up, I tell you, or I’ll tear this cottage down, so help me!“ – and all her maiden playfulness and laughter stuck in her throat. And he took her, our Grandmother, and headed straight to the church with her. „Up, you sleepy priest, or I’ll sin against God tonight, and we’ll have a party in good time!“ Where do you find that nowadays?!

That is how he went on until very old age, till he was ninety-two. It was only some-time near the end that he began, how shall I put it, that he started to be troublesome. For instance, Mother was about to go out, she said to me: “Son, pour some water over the beans, about half a pot, in an hour”, and Grandpa grabbed my arm: no, he’ll do it!

“Grandpa, you can’t see, your hands shake, you’ll spill it.”

“I shall do it!” insisted the old man stubbornly and his frail hand would not let go of the pot.

We even wrestled once; I a child felt I had some strength in me too. And Grandpa clenched his teeth tight, breathed quickly and wheezy and did not let the pot go even when we found ourselves on the earthen floor. The beans burned. Mother scolded me and scolded Grandpa; I didn’t say a word keeping my thoughts to myself, and neither did he keeping his thoughts to himself... God knows which! Anyway, the next time he turned even more aggressive: he won’t only add water, he’ll cook the beans himself. So the old man fussed about, potted around, stirred something with a wooden spoon – one couldn’t say whether to stir with it or support himself with it. We ate his concoction for two days and then could not any more. Then Mother began to give me secret advice: when the old man dozes off, you chop the wood, then do this and that and I’ll be back by then. Grandpa stopped meddling as if he did not see a thing. Except that he continued to tinker about with frenzied energy, like fixing himself lunch, getting the wood ready, making preserves, going around the yard, peeping, hammering at the fence, fixing. And all that in a strange fever. His foot was slow, his hand was slow, his back weak and bent and the eyes fiery. For everything else his mind was sluggish, no feeling, no interest

whatsoever but for this pottering that produced a sparkle in his eye. And the greater this feverish lust for life in him the further he was from it. And then his eyes fused out, dried up. He took to bed. It was curious how he suddenly turned quiet, not a shade of discontent, protest, spite, not a trace of all that; one would almost say that if that lightened little body had tried to raise itself, it would have done so. Even today, when I think of his last days, I almost shiver with admiration and awe: with what patience and with what calm dignity he never even tried to lift himself up or move.

And then one day, I remember the sun had already risen well above the turbid clouds, he called me and I was almost angry that he was interrupting my play:

“Milosh, Milosh!” I was not even surprised by that unexpectedly resolute voice.

I stepped into the room: “I’m here, Grandpa, what is it?”

Someone lifted up his head from the pillow. He looked at me for a long time and it seemed to me that he did not see me because of some immeasurable distance in which his empty gaze had put me. Then it seemed as though his eyes glowed for a while and soon only a contorted hand was left of Grandpa.

I remember that afterwards I was very surprised at everybody’s fuss about that hand, hither and thither they ran, before it turns cold, press here, hold there... The dead old man refused to let go. When they finally did press the palm open, there was a key in it, an ordinary key, the key to that old trunk of his, a real big one. An enormous trunk and only a few papers in it, land deeds I presume, and less than twenty ducats. Otherwise, it was empty.

There was no end to my surprise then. I stared at that key, ordinary key and even rusty here and there. I stared at the old man, his fingers still half-clenched, not knowing what to think, not knowing even what to feel until someone remembered and shouted:

“Take the child away! Heat up water! Take him away, he shouldn’t look, quicker, quicker! Water, water!”

They took me out, confused. Vague thoughts stirred in my head. I suppose...

...

How?!

...

Why?!

...

What?! What?!

(The very beginning of **ESSAY ON GOD**)

## LITTLE NATA’S BAPTISM

**Y**ou see, the questions began perhaps – if there is a beginning at all – with that, with Grandpa Jova’s death. Or perhaps just a surmise. To tell the truth, the questions did not become much clearer long after his death and their only result was

perplexity. The perplexity, I remember, swelled particularly one spring, as though with the lush growth of young leaves or from air bursting with some strange strength. More than once, I interrupted my play in the sunlight and thought of my pals; “Gosh, they’re playing and one day they’ll let out their last breath like Grandpa Jova.” Mother noticed that I was often lost in thought distraught and not eating well and took me to the doctor.

“Take off your clothes!” he told me.

I took them off.

“All, all, trousers too! And you leave the room please!”

Afterwards he called my mother back and said, I remember, one single word, a strange word, big, very important and significant: “Puberty!” and called in the next patient.

Oh yes, he also prescribed some medicines for me: vitamin C, beviplex and the like. Fortunately however, shortly afterwards we had a games class at school; we were doing the high jump: across the bar and onto the sand. And there was such one Mike the Measure, smart-Aleck, and an excellent pupil too. I cleared 120 cm; I was fleet of feet, quick, elastic: to clear the bar with “scissors” was a joke. But – he cleared it too. All the others had already quit. I went over 125 cm and he went over 125 cm. I bit my lip, summoned all my strength and breath, and hoopla! – the bar trembled but stayed high up at 130 cm. My heart leaped with pride and joy! Mike tried and the bar fell once, fell twice... Mike looked at me askance, swallowed hard and I just smiled at him, like, you know: you’re good, you’re very good but well, sorry, there’s no competing with me! And you know what happened then? Do you know? Mike the Measure ran up and – would you believe it?! – went across the bar his head first! A somersault across the bar – he made 130. And that was not all! Now he looked at me, now he smiled at me and said:

“Hundred thirty five, I’ll go first!” – and another somersault.

Then I failed to clear it once, twice. I saw red. “Oh no, you won’t, you sonuvabitch!” I screamed inaudibly and also went headfirst. We saw nothing and no one any more: we both cleared 140, both dumping our kidneys in the sand. Then the teacher patted us, sweated and panted, on the shoulder:

“Very good, boys, enough for today!”

This Mike the Measure was a real pest. I could hardly ever get an excellent mark without his saying the next day: “Teacher, please, may I try for an excellent mark?”

And then I reciprocated tit for tat.

Therefore, life swept me with it and I forgot all questions and all riddles. Completely! Until today, that is until recently, or more exactly, until one autumn before the last. In the meantime, I remembered those “How? Why?...” only once. And on that occasion, the questions were less vague and thereby more agonizing:

...

How was the world (and man in it) created?

...

Why was it created?

...

And what did it (world and man) mean?

...

But that was a long time ago, during my first leave as a student. I had come back to the village to see my folk and the snow was falling and screeching under my feet: paying tribute to my excellent grades it seemed to me. People were looking me over in some special way, like: Student! – not unpleasant at all, don't you think?!

But alas!

Our neighbour Bole, an old maid, invited us to lunch on her family saint's day. She was a devout Christian even though she swore at the top of her voice while whipping her horse on a muddy road; cursed its mother and shouted to high heaven. What else was there for her to do?! All she had was that cottage and a small plot of fallow land and was therefore forced to earn her livelihood working as a draywoman. That little horse was everything to her. She brushed it and caressed it and fed it and threw invectives at it when the bad road and inclement weather imperiled her daily bread: to overpower the storm's howls. Those who did not know her, would stop even under the heaviest shower and turn towards that shrill, raucous voice, neither male nor female, and her curses as though towards some new and unexpected natural phenomenon. All they could see was a small body bent under the raincoat and downpour and then suddenly – oh, wonders! – a swishing, irate whip as if defying the storm dragon, and invectives again to outshoot the thunders. And – oh, wonders once again! – the cart got going and only the left rear wheel rolled with difficulty and swayed screeching as though having to bear the whole burden of her misfortune. Otherwise, in her own way, she was, as I have said, a devout Christian. And I accepted the invitation to lunch so as not to offend her lonely person's pride, that human lot, helplessness and ignorance, out of pity almost.

We were all at the table and the traditional cake was there, with the candle beside it, and waited for the priest to come and say the prayer as was the custom in the village. Father Laza knew the family saints of every household and visited them even uninvited. In one hand he carried a basket in which he put eggs, bacon, poultry, whatever they had given him, and in the other a bag with his paraphernalia, that is his church's and God's trappings. Well, at long last, Father Laza turned up, his face flushed and fat, merry and cheerful. Bole crossed herself, struck a match and lit the candle. We stood up. Father Laza, all smiles, enquired after everyone's health and started to take things out of his bag: first he put the stole over his head, then took out the silver cross, incense, the prayer-book, but not the basil.

"Get me some of yours, will you, I've used up mine serving the Lord, I've none left!"

"I haven't got it, Father!" Bole said.

"What?!" The priest shuffled his feet and looked around as though he'd left the basil somewhere here.

We all stood round the table with bent heads, silent, the candle burned, the cake...The priest began to mumble something under his breath, something like "Easy does it, easy does it" and kept turning around. Then he quickly and somehow briefly, as if on the sly, crossed himself, muttered presumably "Forgive me, Lord!" and pointed

through the window at the frozen little garden, half-buried in snow:

“Get me that smeller!”

Bole started: “That weed, Father?!” and looked at him fixedly with her small eyes.

“What weed?! It’s a smeller, don’t you see? Come on, get it!”

Then something extraordinary happened, something that – even if had not come as a surprise or perhaps a comedy – shook one’s innermost self by its forceful and innocent determination, the force of true faith. Bole gave another start, seemed to shrink, for an instant her small body became even smaller and more pitiful – or was it only a misleading instant – because suddenly she thundered, heavily, like a drayman:

“Out, priest, blast your mouth!” Her toothless mouth sprayed spittle in all directions. “Get out, out! Out, you greedy swine, you want to defile my holy cake?!” Then she slammed the door behind him and meekly bent over the table, her wrinkled, black peasant face now pale, troubled and grave. “Forgive me, my Lord!” she whispered barely audibly, crossed herself and kissed the cake. She did all this without a shade of hesitation, question or doubt. As though her conduct had been decided a long time ago, even for situations like this.

And a priest, my good people, is still a priest, not only one of the village elders but also God’s servant, so to speak, the servant of that same God in whose honour Bole lit her candle. Yet, she never gave it a thought! Not for a single moment! One had to ask in admiration: what is **It**? No, not only that she was earning her livelihood with her own, peasant’s, draywoman’s hands, honestly, painstakingly as though out of spite. Nor that she accounted to no one but God whether she would, or would not, have enough bread and saw her hard life as a blessing rather than loneliness. Yes, **This** was **It** but also much more than just that. **She believed**. Therefore, she knew. She was not tormented by any questions. She was at peace, she knew what she had to do. She would know it also when her last hour came. How I envied her for that, envied that toothless, perished, semiliterate and primitive peasant, I student, excellent pupil, educated and young! I admired her too. And beside of all that, I hated her perhaps a little, I felt humiliated and ridiculous. Because, just think, I had come to that lunch out of pity! What incredible nonsense, what self-deception, what ignorance! Be it as it may, I trembled silently and every bite I took from her modest table felt in my stomach now as burning embers, divine punishment and invitation to penitence, now as a blessing and peace, Lord’s flesh and blood.

So, it was the only occasion when I remembered those questions, my helplessness and agony. In vain once again, because not only did they continue unanswered but also all those mixed feelings and impressions of that lunch added just another riddle more. Is it possible for a man of science, a man, that is, who refuses to put god at the end of a finite series of questions, a man, that is, who refuses to mark the end of his knowledge with god and thus simply substitute his ignorance for him, is it possible for such a man to have God at all?... His definitive view of the world and its purpose, a view harmonious and basically rounded off, with no further questions, qualitatively new questions? Or is he doomed to perpetual questions and restlessness, perpetual re-examinations and



agonies? And where then can he find peace and reconciliation?!

But, as I have said, all this was a long time ago.

Completely forgotten almost.

And then, that autumn came. Or rather, two springs ago my daughter was born. My heart leaped with proud joy – and nothing more. I took the hospital certificate and my identity card, bought stamps for two dinars and went to the Municipal Hall to have my child-entered in the birth register. You know the works: father's name, mother's name, date and place of birth? The female clerk types, tup, tup, tup. "What will you call her?"

"Natalya", I say, "after her mother's grandmother on the father's side. Nine sons and daughters she had, brought them all up with her own hands. Lost her husband early, she did, no help from anywhere, and yet lived to be ninety. One great-grand-child should bear her name"...

"OK, OK!" smiled the clerk for an instant. "No special columns for that. Sign here! Stamps? You'll have to have it sealed downstairs! Next!"

You see, when I married I did it without music and brass bands. The best man and I put on ties, and the bride, my wife, had her dress cleansed before the wedding. And nothing else: three official photographs by the official photographer and a bunch of flowers from our best man, a nice bunch, that's true – white gladioli with a red ribbon. His wife immediately went off on her own errands. It was Thursday, eleven o'clock, and since she'd left the office anyway, she might as well... With the best man, we went to a restaurant for lunch: not to cook on the first day, you know how difficult landladies can be. Moreover, what else could be done? We had absolutely nothing. Nothing: two beggars and that thing between them. One needed resources to acquire something, one needed effort, renunciation. That is why the registration did not look odd. Simply, we knew what we wanted. That is not so little – our God of Wedding was there even without a prayer and without a cross. After all, we are even proud of it.

But to come back to the baptism, i.e. entering my daughter in the birth register; things were different then. I did not realise it right away. All I felt was certain unease in a vague sort of way. The first autumn passed by: from an uninterested and dumb, just born undefined creature my daughter turned into a really nice baby, acquired some traits of her own, a look of her own – now I could recognise her among thousands. Sometime in winter, her cooing which could mean anything: "Wa"r, wa"r, wa"r", or "Ma quick, pee, pee", or "beary, bunny", "kaka kaka", i.e. everything and nothing, acquired the form of the first word. And just think which! Not "Mommy", not "Daddy", but "Granny". I felt a pang. It grew into anxiety. Roughly like this: marriage is one thing – people get married and unmarried all the time; this is something else, a new life, one's own blood. Come what may, a child stays after you. Not only after you, but also after your father's father and your mother's mother, the grandmother, all your known and unknown forebears, their known and unknown troubles, desires, sacrifices. Can it, then, be just like that?! A signature, a stamp, next?! But – to take the child to the church – that would be real nonsense!

Thus the autumn came, the one I started about to tell. It was Friday and on Fridays

my wife worked late hours at her school. Our Nata was tossing and crawling in her cot, “Mommy come, granny, granddad, morrow” she cooed, then hugged her teddy bear and fell asleep. And I pushed the curtains impatiently and watched the street as the dusk fell.

“Get the child ready, pack, we’re going!” I told my wife as soon as she entered the house.

“Where?”

“Your village, to Bosnia!”

And imagine! She understood. She asked no more, she said no more. Not even the most natural thing: “But I’ve got no one there now!” We started to pack, silently, solemnly almost. The baptism had already begun.

The wind met us at the foot of the cemetery, autumnal, cold but bracing with the pale morning sun on the horizon behind the wooded slope, bracing and getting to one’s bones, blindly, indifferently, making no distinction between a strong man and a frail woman or a helpless child, and yet, at the same time, stirring in one’s heart a kind of warmth, a ray of hope, future.

We pulled our scarves tighter, I clasped Nata tighter in my arms and, step by step, we ascended the dirt road towards the summit. And above us, against the crimson sky, the outlines of crosses. One beside the other, a small one side by side with a big one, the straight next to the crooked, densely packed like some unique army of veterans in repose, no one the first and no one the last, no beginning and no end. The windy sun was already high above the horizon when we reached the cemetery paths overgrown with frost-covered grass and weeds. For a long time we roamed through the weeds swaying in the wind until we found Grandma Nata’s grave among its equals. A wooden cross, almost colourless, half-rotten, its foot mossy but otherwise surprisingly straight; only the bar was tilted, cracked longitudinally here and there and the carved lettering barely legible: NA...LYA... 865... Around it, the tomb was almost flat, densely overgrown with weeds. When we approached it, silent, our heads bent and bare, the wind was still howling, crosses around us all looked alike, grass played under our feet insensitive to our step... in that all-embracing howl and turbulence – perfect indifference and peace. Nothing showed that we were there. Although like a balm and salvation rather than an insult – odd nevertheless! In the earth we were standing on, were the bones of our great-grandmother, her bones and her blood and yet – nothing. The wind did not start howling louder nor did the sun get warmer and the cross did not move. Nothing – eternal, mysterious permanence! Only Nata in my arms stirred sleepily and hugging her closer, I felt suddenly her pulse on my chest: the noise and breath of her heart, tiny but for all that faster, livelier, her blood. The new life begins and the man, while bowing to that crooked cross, suddenly feels that there is no end to the mystery, that everything is unfathomable unless it is in one’s heart – and it is there, once and forever.

You see, on our way there we tried to think what we would say over the grave to make it worthy of Grandma Nata’s anguish and struggle to bring up her offspring; endurance and sacrifice without questions and without grumble cannot but arouse profoundest respect.

Now we were there – and we said nothing.

And guess what?! That was **It**, the Right Thing. As though we had said all that there was to be said on such an occasion – and much more than that.

(The direct continuation of **ESSAY ON GOD**)

## THE HOLY TRINITY

**T**herefore, here we are at last!

Face to face with God himself, with that infinitely impartial **YES** with which everything begins in trust and joy; face to face with that unrelentingly just **NO** before which all old and young trembles in fear; that unitedly logical **BOTH YES – AND NO** in which all that is powerful and all that is weak finds finally its peace. That is our Hope, our Fear, **our God**, that trinity of the –

**THESIS: In the Universe, there is no reason for anything specific and determinate...**

**ANTITHESIS: The All-being possibility as an infinite set of all Something is the only mode in which Nothing can exist...**

**SYNTHESIS: In the Universe, there is no reason for anything specific and determinate except that the specific and determinate nonetheless must exist...**

And we cannot help feeling and doing it – faced with the cognition of the only original cradle and original cover, we stand on an equal footing with all stars in the sky, on a completely equitable footing with all the cosmos that will go on when we are gone, and our bodies mutely and of their own volition bow deeply in awe and admiration. We seem to be kissing the robe of the sun itself, we are brimming with the feeling of might and truth. And suddenly we live the thousandfold life of all those blinking stars in the black sky. We know all that they know, we remember all that they remember. At long last, we have the key. And like our Grandpa Jova in whom life faded and God was born, we hold it tightly, as our last amulet. With it we enter all mysteries of Nothing. We can grasp everything, we can understand, explain everything. We follow trustingly and unhesitatingly the age-old path of our ancestors. And in this world full of uncertainty and pain, we suddenly feel strong enough to persist. Even to swear – **to believe!** Wherever we get, there will be truth behind us. Our truth, the truth of all our forebears. The age-old truth! And we make another deep bow filled to the brim with gratitude and bliss. A thought is born in us: we shall erect a monument to Grandma Nata as straight and simple as she herself was. A chunk of granite and nothing else. It will read only: *God had no special reason for her existence – and yet she lived and gave birth. With gratitude Her Grand-Daughter Natalya.*

(From ESSAY ON GOD)

**NOTE**, February 14, 2025.

In 2010, I published this collection of short stories in English, ISBN 978-86-903845-7-0, with only two hundred copies in order to be submitted mostly to publishers who might publish the right edition.

There, next to the **ANTITHESIS**, was the following footnote:

Or symbolic-mathematics expressed:

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \int_{\infty_1 \infty_2} \cdots \int_{\infty_n} \text{all something} = \text{NOTHING},$$

That, in the subatomic level based on

quantum field theory, gives the **POSTULATE: All the infinite multitude of the so-called elementary particles, charged or uncharged, with or without mass, energy relevant or virtual etc. is only, but the only mode in which vacuum can exist.**

However, following this path, we reach complete symmetry in the universe, as shown in my article “**Entropy passage through the black hole singularity in active galaxies**” published in the *Journal of Modern and Applied Physics*, Vol 6 No 3 September 2023: And even a mutual symmetry of causality and chance, so that there is no longer any need for Kant's first mover, as shown in my article: “**Why Just One Big Bang? Chance, Causality and c<sup>2</sup>-Inertia**” published in the *International Journal of Media and Networks*, Volume 2 Issue 7/1 Jul 30, 2024.

## Part IV

### Kinds of religious and ideological interdiction

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## AUNT

**T**he story of man and his thought, of the world and truth, may begin anywhere and anytime: somewhere on the sunny square of Ancient Greece; upon the open blue sea beneath the sail of Colombo's Niña at a time when three hundred or more men for many weeks or months drift between unknown shores; or this very day when somewhere in the vast space above the clouds and above some desolate mountain range drone the inaudible engines of a jet plane – far from the crust of the earth. There are many beginnings, the real beginning is vague and indistinctive, a mere possibility. And that possibility may be implemented by this or that will, or by a blind need. The man himself initiates a beginning by the mere fact of his being or his presence, his own or of

any other singularity. Man's decision is only one possible decision, one possible choice, one peculiarity a mere disposition. For example: city B in country Y. Let us say November 6th, 1977, the day on which the sun had risen on the horizon 5 hours and 52 minutes after the moon and there remained for 10 hours less 2 minutes; while Aurora could be seen two thumbs to the left of Ear in Andromeda's chain. Although once upon a time, one had to travel the distance between the nearby town K in the chosen country Y and the said city B on a horse carriage from the early dawn well into the dark of the following night, and this quite helplessly subject to the whims of the weather, one can today, some hundred years later reach the city B from even farther town M in the country G for just over 17 hours – not with a horse carriage, of course. The express train is yet another possibility at our disposal. And if on this train crossing several frontiers there happens to be no smugglers, or the customs officer finds no need for suspicion and efficiently looks through the travel documents; if all the tracks and stations along the way enable a smooth journey and the train captain and all elements make punctuality possible, not disregarding a countless number of unpredictable details and obstacles – this our train will take exactly 17 hours, 8 minutes and 25 seconds, calculating from the moment of the very first whistle in the station of departure, i. e. station M, to the very moment of standstill in the station B, i.e. the point of our final destination.

On that given day the train had traveled exactly that long. In the usual hustle-bustle of that afternoon, among other people who were patiently waiting on the platform, there stood a man in his late thirties. He was on a very specific mission. He was examining the faces of passengers passing by, moving step by step from one window of compartment to the next. At the very far end of the long train, an elderly woman, short but pedantic, was trying to extricate herself from her burden, she was handing her property, piece by piece to the passer by on the platform expressing gratitude, while the others behind her tried to clear the passage. By the time the previously mentioned person had reached the last car and compartment, the crowd had almost dispersed. On the deserted platform, amongst a pile of bags, and suitcases stood a solitary woman, proud and somewhat hurt. Hand in hand, purse under the arm and head slightly slanted to the side as if in valiant attempt to subdue a reproachful nod. The man had suddenly approached her:

“Good afternoon, is something wrong perhaps?”

“Where is the carrier?” asked the woman. “Is there no discipline here?!”

“Oh, a carrier,” answered the man with a smile, “we shall find one!”

They shook hands and hugged as relatives should: welcome, how are things with you, at home?

The man had already known quite a lot about this relative from far away, mostly out of hear-say, and this from the common in-laws in the town B. This was actually the aunt of his wife, but having become no less than mother to a motherless child, as was already known from the stories of the aunt, to which God gave no child but wealth instead. From a far away country G every now and then a parcel with gifts did indeed arrive, mostly underwear and socks, and this was well taken care of: namely in case of an old worn out undies one needed a written permit from the distant town M in order to be able to resort

to a new pair. Also, occasionally a money order would arrive, just enough to buy a book instead of borrowing it, or to have a lunch or dinner outside – since at the time his wife was still a student. Somehow, by working on the city Fair or through the student association she managed to survive and get to her diploma. She got married and finally even put together a warm home, together with her husband, the man who came to meet the aunt at the station, and with the great help of his parents, succeeded in buying this little flat. On that occasion, the aunt even wrote a special letter, that the apartment is too expensive, and that it's a shame to squander money so easily and that they shouldn't worry, because she will deposit her money into a saving account, so that it can serve as a dowry for their daughter when she grows up. Indeed the flat was expensive, as tiny as it was, like all other one-bedroom flats, considering it was to accommodate them and their two children, although the boy was just a month old baby. They decided to show their appreciation to the aunt, and thus invited her to visit them, in spite of the scarcity of space, emphasizing that they are willing to share, and that it will be the same for all. Since her husband died, they did not want her to remain alone in that far country in the town M, with her melancholy and memories. Several months later, the aunt did arrive. First of all, she settled all her accounts in town M and reiterated all her plans. She explicitly made her plan known as well as her faith in God whose touch though invisible she clearly feels upon her hand as well as His needed guidance in these trying times. Consequently, her advice directed to them is some more respect towards God, and a reprimand that had they more faith in Him they would not have to drift from flat to flat like unwanted tenants, and that all of this would have been different had they consulted God Almighty or at least their aunt.

Yes, the man knew that aunt was peculiar. In her habits and opinions, she was rigid, in behavior and judgment exclusive. He knew that she calls her method under God's auspices – justice, while her sense of security, which she carries within during her preaching of advice and demands, she calls sensitivity and compassion. But he thought: a person with wide outlook on things, who can understand many aspects and feel them, and yet not lose his own beliefs in the process, therefore a person who has every reason to remain serene and who can patiently listen and thoroughly explain a request, a recommendation and a ready decision alike, or in other words a person of tolerance, should be probably able to share the tiny roof over the head or a place at the table with another, and also be able to normally interact in all situations. After all, each and every one of us has one's own pangs of sorrow, and we are all only human.

And indeed the beginning was not so bad. Aunt did bestow a gift for the baby as the custom would have it, and also in respect to the new flat, she gave her contribution of two thousand. That was enough money to buy a car, not a big one though and not quite new. The flat was not only small, she was saying, but also the wallpaper was put there just to stick something on, unlike the one at her place in M. They must also stick on more tiles in the bathroom, since it's no good to have it only half-done. They have many different kinds in G. Listening to this, the man simply smiled and nodded his head. Two thousand after all are TWO THOUSAND, he thought. In fact, didn't she in the presence of his wife, her

niece, ask him to accept the money, which was done in due respect to the host! And tastes are really different. This furniture, aunt continued, was bought without taste, and why did they not consult her for opinion?

And then, one evening, the man was standing by the kitchen table peeling potatoes. Good old potatoes. His wife already roasted the meat before she left for school and all that remained to be done was to prepare the potatoes, onions and cabbage. Outside the window a pitch-black night, while beneath the light-bulb in the dining room, aunt, with her finger raised, tried to explain something to the little girl. The girl patiently nodded her head, and then skipped away back to her toys. Aunt touched the crease discovered on her dress, and looked up towards the man sitting at the table:

“You are a good son-in-law, it’s just that you peel potatoes in the wrong way,” she said.

“How do you mean?”

“You are just peeling the potatoes wrongly, too much waste,” continued the woman very much convinced. It should be done quite differently, she has a special knife for it in M, and the young should be taught.

The man could not take his eyes off the woman who found it so important to tell him all this. No, she was serious, and into this story of the potato, she put all her talent and all the noble meaning of her words. The man, once again, grimaced in a rather sour way and continued with his work.

Then, at the dinner table, following each bite with a word here and a word there, the woman repeated her declaration again: “Your husband is all right, but he peels potatoes wrongly.”

The man lifted his eyes towards the woman and added: “You know how it is, aunt, with these potatoes, now that you brought it up, your starting point is one single, unspoken assumption, which is however only one of several possible assumptions, certainly not the only one.”

Now the woman stared back.

“For you, a properly peeled potato is the one with the least waste. However, look at the circumstances, the little one is still crying, just changed diapers still unwashed. Wife just about to arrive, and it’s time for breast-feeding. Still we are dining on time. And I am not speaking of the time, as the clock would have it, but look at the little girl, she is sleepy, and she too will be put to bed on time. The sink is already full. Under such circumstances, the properly peeled potatoes are the quickly peeled potatoes.”

The woman nodded her head as if to indicate that she understood and added: “All can be done if done in proper order. Otherwise, according to you, it could be done this way and that way! Eh?”

The man seemingly had nothing against that conclusion.

“Oh, no, my dear sir,” the woman shook her head, “there is only one God and there is only one truth. Think about it.”

The man went silent and sank into the deep thought. He realized. Indeed the God is one and the truth is one. And that God – could anyone ever come to a different assump-

tion – is, as one can see, always by her side, always in her own way, even when the baby with wet and full diapers cries all night – God what could it be! – that same baby which received her gifts and to whom she said with so much affection: “Come, give your granny a smile!” (Of course, the baby did not smile, and the woman remained quite rejected and humiliated. The people hopelessly tried to explain that a month old baby could not see, that even upon mother’s breast it will only smile from time to time, and this instinctively). And even that smile, if you consider the circumstances taking a specific situation as the only possibility, is not a smile because a child smiles, but a smile caused by a certain order of events, which to her, that woman, is due approval and the cause of her affection, i.e., certainty. This is the only requirement, these are the only circumstances. After all, her circumstances are her own things – her bag, her suitcase, making-up kit, six pairs of shoes for all occasions – wherever she may be, town M or town B. All her circumstances she carries along. Even the bed spread she brought with her, spare sheets, all very special – made to measure for her delicate skin, bought there and there of material such and such. For every single thing she knew the exact quality, the exact purpose, and amongst these things she felt secure, here she was the undisputed lord, the center of all the events and the entire world, or whatever, God’s very interpreter of all that ought to be done and how. Even a gram of potato fills into this world much better than the precarious smile. A gram is a gram, alms may be alms – but still these are facts. And what are to her an assumption and a word!

Yes, the man realized that this woman indeed needs no explanation, or readiness for considerate dialogue, that beautiful and useful human characteristic. All she can understand is the situation in which the last gram of potato must be imposed in order to turn her superfluous exclusiveness, that common human weakness and vice, into her strength and virtue, before which any explanation becomes just a weakness and an unnecessary vice. Yes, the man decided, this may be also that way: Indeed, there will be no need in the future, whenever the situation may arise, to convey his observations and requests to this woman in any other form other than ready facts.

And so the days went by. Since a few days ago, aunt is in her native town S, the town of her origin and her ancestors. She is there to recollect some old memories and to use the occasion, as she said, to put some important things in order. She returned to town B with an unfathomable load of luggage: Suitcases, large and small – five to be precise, not counting a few bags, bales and cardboard boxes. This time even a carrier was hard to find, a special one was needed – with a cart. And the man wondered, where on earth this woman was heading, with all these things. One way or the other the luggage ex town M had already filled the dining lounge prior to this paraphernalia. The following morning he realized that, according to this woman’s conviction this luggage was here to stay: Various rather special carpets (rather pale and dusty, perhaps slightly decayed) made by the late mother, herself a martyr and a saint. Two rather large boxes of aunt’s letters and diaries from her maiden years (tied up into three knots) which were not to be touched. Three small decorative pillows, with the special down, and not this synthetic stuff (who knows what kind of a room and furniture they decorated or how long they remained in



some remote attic in some old chest). One folding mattress (in three parts) made of real wool (stuffed who knows when, something that even wool peddler would refuse) and a special suitcase (looked-up and braced with a strap), which was also not to be touched. Then old clothes and shoes, but in true fashion, not this modern stuffs, from which they could choose and wear.

The man was sitting at the table in his room reading a newspaper, beside him the baby slept in the crib following the first morning breast feeding, the little girl was over at the neighbors with their girl trying to dress-up a doll, while through the closed kitchen door he could hear the patient voice of his wife: “Thank you, aunt, but we have all the clothes that we need. The space here is most precious, our closets are already clogged-up. Thank you.” Followed by aunt’s words of reproach: “You better keep quiet, I saw how much you have!” “As much as we can, aunt, we do not complain!” “You do not complain, but you also pay no heed to your relatives. This was not found on the street, if that is what you think! I brought this like the holy relic for you to learn, but you have no respect for your elders.” “It’s not so, aunt. I’ve already taken what was dear to me, you have seen our family album. You have seen those bed covers, have you not? I brought them, saving them from rotting away, even took them to the dry cleaners.” “From rotting away! You ought to be ashamed. All these are chosen goods, summoned with care and hard work, from a decent house, what did you think?! Every item a special sample, a full suitcase. When some day, following God’s will and mercy, I depart, all of this will remain in your hands.” “But can’t you see for yourself that there is no room.” “Once you know the proper order for this, room can be found for everything. You just have no appreciation for the painstaking efforts of the elders.” “It’s not true, aunt, we do appreciate it ever so much, we ourselves know how painful this can be. We are simply modest under modest conditions.” “You know not what drudgery is, God sees and considers all, snobbish you are, not modest. You deserve neither help nor sympathy.” This time there was no reply. “Have you nothing to tell me?” Still without reply. “Repay to me then the two thousands I gave you!”

At this moment, the man put down his newspaper and entered. His wife, bowed slightly forward, continued cutting the meat for lunch. The stalker woman stood amidst her luggage and with her chin high up anticipated a proper answer.

“You know what, aunt,” the man said. “My wife had said what she meant to, and so have you. It is obvious that we have a difference of opinion. Let us simply change the topic!”

However, the woman in spite of this suggestion expected a reply from her niece, **her** due reply from **her** niece, she only took an instant to reformulate the question: “And who is this, what has he to do with this?!”

Her niece, however, for quite a while now **was not** simply and only a niece, but also the wife and a mother. Thus, her husband added: “I happen to be, in case you have forgotten, the host in this household. While the woman you have just called a snob, her and everyone around her, happens to be a hostess in this home.”

At this moment, the stalker woman, willingly or not, suddenly turned and looked up

to the man: "Give me back that money!" she abruptly announced the verdict.

Yes, a good idea, thought the man, on this we agree. He walked over, took the money and returned. "Count!" he said. "So that we later waste no words over this subject."

The short woman only now realized that something had gone amiss, she had suddenly in full force, head to head, confronted something new and unbelievable: the conditions (circumstances) which sprang up from beyond the circle of her control (things), harder than her (them), foreboding and unfathomable like someone else's life. The woman went red in her face like a lobster, realizing that the world did not fit the mold of her own thoughts and her own hierarchy. Other needs existed as well, inescapable gestures came up out of nowhere: vastness of the world was endless and in this depth every sense of order was easily lost. Precisely through this vastness and its openness this world offered itself to her, it had within itself a space even for her way, for still another way. But the woman was angry, insulted and bitter. She built around herself a wall of things, and crouched by God's side. Along with all the money that she had, from the world she lived in, she only took its order, one single possible order of things. In return, she had the illusion that according to this worldly order she must be its first and most important subject while her money was the decisive ballast of all things. Now here is a certain moron who has the gall to throw this money back into her face. Is this possible? Isn't this the true illusion? And the woman looked over her shoulder, trying not to be conspicuous, hoping to get a glimpse of the other woman sitting at the table, but the hostess remained silent. There was work to be done. God's order was falling apart, and yet as if naught had changed, all things remained still and unmoved. The woman fidgeted and shifted her money from one hand into the other, from there into her purse and into the bag, growing still redder in her face. Then, speechless, she turned around and left the flat.

"Aunt, aunt, where are you going?" shouted the hostess through the empty hallway, and that was all.

Tomorrow two men arrived, two special carriers and took away aunt's belongings. Next week a letter followed from the town M, stating what a shame before people and a sin before God it was to throw her out of the house in such a way; was that a manner in which to treat a guest?

This parting was definite. A certain human contact was not realized. The lack of (will for) broadening consciousness and inborn fear before it were stronger than the desire for a new contact. Such desire could only be an obstacle, the illusion was much more precious, it was a way through which a privilege could be gained, a superior stance, a decisive word, such as would enable her to reach the very heart of the meaning and world. This panicky fear that things (position, illusion) already possessed could be lost was stronger than any sane need for a reunion, then an inborn need to be objective and to exceed a personal outlook on things. Single-mindedness was in this case the only defense and the only identity. A reunion between the human beings did not materialize. This falling out was inevitable. Only a certain reunion and a certain parting in the town B. The town B just a chance venue among many towns. The world was full of symbols and specifications, full of possible beginnings. Even the sun was forever rising anew and

forever and again setting down into the horizon. The world had no epicenter. Going apart becomes inevitable. Falling out is the only solution. Ah, if only such a solution were always possible!

What does it happen when such a separation is impossible, when we must continue to rotate around the axis of a single flat, a single country, on the very same planet – in the very same shadow of an A- or H-bomb, of this God or that Illusion?

(PHILOSOPHY AND BELIEF, Prelude)

## MARX AND MATHEMATICS

The story of man and his thought, of the world and truth, may begin anywhere and anytime. In any way, even. The mathematical way for instance. Even today, in the remote caves we find here and there in the world we can see on the walls mathematical inscriptions, in all probability made by pre-historic man. A few vertical lines on the wall crossed over by horizontal line, similar to some kind of addition. In much the same way as card players keep track of their score. In as far back as Ancient Greece, people used to draw, perhaps not always on papyrus or parchment but at least on sand, whole triangles, even circles and their sections, correlations. They were entirely expressed through words, for instance: the square on the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides. The idea of recording these same sentences in abbreviated form represented in itself a step forward. *The ar <math>\sphericalangle</math> eq 1/2 prod ba and hei* – meant, of course, that the area of a triangle was equal to half of the product of the base and height. It was only with Viète and finally with Descartes that the symbol  $ah/2$  was introduced which was neither at all a new number, nor an individual relationship but merely a general abbreviation for something that had already been known. This mode of abbreviation was, nevertheless, a huge condition, whole equations could be written in a concise and succinct manner ( $c^2 = a^2 + b^2$  is the simplest example of this) and operate with them further – unless this were so, differential and integral calculus would be impossible. The whole notion of the changing (of the difference) of the same dependent variable – for two different (arbitrary taken) values of the independent variable, for example – it was possible to mark simply with  $\Delta$ , reads: delta. This is no longer any determined relationship, let alone a special law, this is simply an agreed upon designation. If the interval of observation of the independent value tends towards zero under such and such circumstances and so on – the whole notion about all the circumstances – and the very difference of the dependent value naturally tends towards zero, that is the increment is infinitely small:  $d$ , once again on the basis of an agreement. For instance,  $\Delta x$  or  $db$ , the increment of a value  $x$ , or an infinitely small increment of value  $b$ , reads: delta  $x$  or differential  $b$  etc. There is no mention, not even in the most

general terms of calculus, let alone of some numerical value – this is but a language, a mathematical language instead of this or that defined, not only one-national but also long since quite inappropriate one.

Almost the whole of the 20th Century, a. d. when man first set foot on the Moon, and man himself floated in space circling around Earth, this century was marked, on the other hand, by an equally interesting not so much phenomenon but condition for every phenomenon, a general atmosphere, so to speak. As if every story about man, his thought, suffering, struggle and history just had to start with 1918, 1934 or 1941, depending on the country discussed, be it R, C or any other. Every man feels his own pain the most, naturally enough, and every human wound, sacrifice and victory deserves the greatest degree of respect, particularly when a whole nation bleeds in conflict and in war, yet it is that strange atmosphere which seemed, not only rarely and also not only in one country, to have determined the mode of the story. All contemporary human knowledge and skill would appear to have at least in embryo, at least in terms of idea and proposal, stemmed from Marx and the whole story to have been confined to Marxism. And the less one knew of what Marxism genuinely was and what its boundaries were, at least the basic theoretical, rather than ideological, features, atmosphere were to be felt with greater conviction, transcending all the frontiers which that great thinker of the 19th century set – a lawyer by education, a philosopher by doctoral thesis, economist by his works, a writer by public impact of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, had been able to imagine.

Thus, for instance, an advertisement appeared in the newspapers on March 1, 1982: here and here, and just not anywhere but at the People's University, at this and that hour, a public debate would be organized entitled: *The Topical Interest of Marx's Mathematical Manuscripts*. There is no doubt about it, Marx was a man of tremendous work ability and energy and had a wide range of occupations. Such a man, even when learning mathematics in his leisure hours or out of curiosity, would study the basic notions of differential calculus, in terms of definition and table cases, in detail, making his own notes here and there. To bring to light and comment these pupil-like notes, however, with pretensions to boot, in a situation when not even Marx in his three volumes of **CAPITAL**, more voluminous than the Bible, for instance, by 25 per cent or of **WAR AND PEACE**, by 40 per cent, applied no more than percent calculations, would indeed be a sin of sorts towards Marx and an act of violence against his thought. The whole exercise, circus, that is, lay not in the endeavor to make the manuscripts appear as a historical curiosity – in much the same way, as it would be interesting to peer into the mathematical manuscripts of a Tolstoy, for example, or Napoleon – but rather to endow them with a topical meaning.

The big hall, rows and rows of seats, near the rostrum and at the rostrum microphones. A number of extra tables were set up for the occasion, covered with green baize table covers. On them were vases with flowers. Behind them red velvet curtain drawn to the side. The blackboard cleanly erased and gleaming. New pieces of chalk.

The maths lesson could begin. And the distinguished scholars, not ordinary scholars

but those from this and that university department and institute, brimming with erudition and distinction, all economists to the last, speaking enthusiastically about Marx's contribution to mathematics. In this and that letter to Engels, Marx mentioned mathematics when pointing to some difficulties or rather possibilities. Marx added and divided, while criticizing Hegel's dialectics and the maximum transition of mathematicians to the differential; in the attempt to be as accurate as possible in his calculation, Marx wrote in a letter to Engels that one would have to take the greatest possible number of samples. And we know full well today that the integral is the infinite sum of infinitely small, and hence Marx was on the right path and so on. For, today, mathematical statistics and linear programming have indeed become integral parts of the science of economy and so on. And then the question: has anyone anything to ask?

And then a rather corpulent man somewhere from the ninth or tenth row rises with difficulty and begins also with difficulty: He is not clear about something, with all due consideration, he had done some reading himself and as far as he could gather in the whole of Marx's theory the basic notion was value, that is surplus value. Everything revolves around that since from surplus value derives profit, exploitation and so on. Therefore, it is not clear to him how this surplus value is calculated. The question was whether Marx in fact calculated surplus value and according to which method, and whether this was at all possible?

To this short and straightforward question, the reply had to be equally short and straightforward. And it was indeed a short one.

"Yes," began Doctor So and So, with his formal tie, formal suit and equally formal and solemn attitude, "Marx expressed this accurately:  $v$  plus delta  $v$ ," was his word for word answer. "Surplus value is therefore delta  $v$ ," he concluded without batting an eyelash. He did not even use his piece of chalk, this magic formula remained to float solemnly in the air.

Fatso's jaw dropped. Yet the answer was clear, indeed everything was clear. Here any further discussion ended. The professors were no longer in the mood to talk. The maths lesson was over. Applause and – good night!

Under such circumstances, however, in an atmosphere that always emerges anew as of itself and is created from nothing, real thought has difficulty in articulating itself, any attempt at critical thinking is akin to an attempt at stirring up a wind with a hat. Marxism as a totality of human thought and desire, all the way up to every-day politics and perhaps especially then, has nevertheless had the pretension of grounding itself in the most narrow manner in philosophy, even in the ontological sense. Even though this ambition appeared somewhat later and not as a major preoccupation, as seemingly a still greater need to put a full stop on that indeed purely philosophical set of problems, always discussing in the same way and without a true cognizance of the perpetual movement of matter which is eternal. This in fact clearly descriptive axioms about matter which are largely found only in Engels' manuscripts should be the substance and correct result of all human philosophical thought about nature, and when it is stated that matter is infinite everything is said. Lenin added to this the definition according to which matter is

an objective reality and thus the common sense system of philosophy was rounded off, that which is not merely a criticism of Hegel's or any other philosophy but that which should in itself be a philosophy.

This so-called dialectical materialism, in short and widely referred to as a dia-mat, constituted the philosophical-ontological basis underlying Marxism which has played an important positive role in politics and which endeavors to play it, that part, in every-day ideology. Hence it is all the more difficult for independent and true i.e. not exactly every-day thought, that which attempts to transcend every human and worldly division and boundary at least in the philosophical sense and therefore finds it increasingly hard to find its way. If matter is naturally both eternal and, of course, incapable of being created and infinite, why is it thus and what is it in fact, what does to be infinite actually mean? How is it that it exists at all and what does of its very self imply? This entire area, the true realm of philosophy about how to understand or at least how to experience those axioms concerning that (indeed) God-Matter, in fact the entire domain of philosophy, dialectical materialism leaves empty, whereas every-day Marxist ideology even negates it.

The author of these lines felt the irresistible urge and the most intimate need to penetrate this realm and to solve questions relating to matter. Seeing as how authentic works of philosophy, by philosophers who as such have withstood the trials of history, had been mainly unknown to him and seeing as how dialectical materialism would have anyway been the ultimate result of that history, a result with which, incidentally, the author was not satisfied, he embarked upon an independent adventure. Thus, almost ten years ago a novel was born, a philosophical novel admittedly, entitled **ESSAY ON GOD** or *About the relativity and symmetry relating to Grandpa Jova's Death*. While at school, the author was not interested in philosophy, the boring story about man's stupidity and the senselessness of idealism of times past, in a situation when ultimately all was solved well, not terribly interesting but nevertheless true. That is why he conceived his work as a novel: an intimate settling of accounts of that what in the minds of the wise had long since been clear and where they had already put a full stop. At long last, the writer himself was satisfied. Those six or seven axioms about matter he managed to reduce to three: about relativity, about symmetry and about their synthesis, a synthesis which however leaves certain things incomplete and poses new questions, which (is it really?) indicates (is it possible, really?) that there are no basic axioms. Yet, the writer was satisfied: he had experienced foreboding as a solution he was able to believe in like others believe in God, a foreboding as a replay to a question about How was it that the World was in no way created and for no reason and that it further means nothing but nevertheless does exist?

Then he noted with horror that nowhere in the Essay had he defined matter. The fact that he had not felt the need to define it he considered to be an unpardonable shortcoming. Later on, he opted for the definition that matter was the mainstay of possibilities, a definition that was not after all so bad to the extent that the definition of matter had at all any sense, a definition that, in a slightly different way, had been provided Bloch, for instance. It was only later that the writer of that Essay and of the

present Philosophy came to realize that no definition of matter could have any sense, that this was not at all necessary for genuine philosophy, in much the same way as the definition of idea, for that matter. Still, this does not imply that the writer would, in a renewed edition of the Essay leave out the definition of matter. No! Although some improvements might really be made, some parts and indeed a softening of style perhaps – since the author had the occasion in the meantime to acquire philosophical knowledge, had read all sorts of things from the original philosophical treasure which had accumulated throughout the years – he would nevertheless leave the definition of matter. One novel, one work of art, one philosophy, as a matter of fact, is a unique and singular act much like the moment of life which in some way goes on in the most beautiful, most perfect, most comprehensive, most authentic manner. The written character is but a written sign of all that. When that sign is finally put down, the experience comes to an end. Subsequent experience, even of the same work, is but a new artistic, a new philosophical work. Hence, subsequent corrections make only sense if they are identified with the earlier work, if it helps the latter to be more articulate. The writer would therefore leave the definition of matter but would only, in harmony with the Essay, alter it for instance with the later definition of vacuum. Thus: Matter is only, however, the only mode in which possibilities can exist. Today, taken by and large, the author does not feel it an omission that here in **PHILOSOPHY AND BELIEF** he had failed to define matter. On the contrary, he considers this a quality of the work and a quality of philosophy. Matter has however nevertheless been defined here in the epilogue. Not only for artistic and creative reasons in view of the Essay but also given the practical implications. If, indeed, one insists at every cost on idealism and materialism, on division, that is, this and precisely this division, then the writer regards himself a materialist.

Yet, under the circumstances described, in the described atmosphere, it is not always enough to be a simple materialist, it is not rare that one must at all cost be a Marxist, so as in this way to safeguard the last hope that the manuscript will be published. The writer does not consider himself in the least an “anarchy-liberal” or “counter-revolutionary”, a “revisionist” or “enemy of socialism”, but indeed a Marxist. If it is true what Lenin wrote that Marxist teachings were powerful because they were authentic – and even if this were to apply not only to the frameworks and be a criticism of the capitalism of the time but rather generally and for all times – then this work, **PHILOSOPHY AND BELIEF**, is Marxist because it is authentic. Admittedly, truth does not only have one face, and one often does not know which is the real one, but which one is real and which one is the only one is decided upon by others. The writer assures that he will value and respect any decision and any assessment about it. Every one that relates to the work and possibly a different perception of the truth of that work. Every one, except that which encroaches upon the intentions of the writer himself. Although the writer dared dispute the validity of Lenin’s definition of matter, its philosophical and not its political and educational validity, although he dared question Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach while he took the second as a motto, although he dared question the soundness of Engels’ approach to philosophy, the writer’s intentions were nevertheless and precisely because of this exclusively

intellectual, outrightly honest and extremely conscientiously reflected in his work. Although he wrote “neither capitalism nor socialism”, the writer is not against socialism. If socialism implies freedom and general progress, how could he be against freedom and progress? The writer merely pointed out that provided there was tolerance, man would not need to be bothered by (such) a capitalism nor (such) a socialism. The writer only hopes, if at all he dares express that hope, that the people who conduct in a responsible manner those responsible affairs, briefly termed politics, will grasp his indeed only theoretical thought: that politics which genuinely strive to surmount blocs and the division of the world into blocs and to make a further step towards progress of (self-managing) society, that this politics, precisely because they are based on self-management, can be nothing else but socialism, nor should they be anything else but parliamentary socialism. Not private ownership (and decision) over powerful means of production like in the West, nor political monopoly of a powerful organization like in the East. For no one has in his possession a single and ultimate truth. Every person should state his own truth. Of this, the writer is firmly convinced. In the name of that conviction, he is prepared to renounce many things contained in the lines he has written as delusions, respecting with discipline even the argument of coercion for lack of any better one.

There is one thing the writer is not however able to renounce to: that potatoes can be peeled in a different way too, that a wrongly or correctly peeled potato will depend on the circumstances, and that those circumstances are made up of all people. All people, whether they are silent or whether they believe in God or in Matter – or above all in them own selves.

(PHILOSOPHY AND BELIEF, Concluding)

## Part V

**After dreadful destruction, only love can begin from nothing, just as God, it is said, created the world out of nothing. And then there will be room for everyone, for every creed and every philosophy**

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## THE BLANK LETTER

**A**fter all, almost everybody seems to be aware that this possibility is not just a hypothesis but the only true reality. Take for example the chess player, who contends that moves actually made have no sense without the potential moves, the ones which could have been played. And so on. Yet, Mike the Measure seems to know



this best, and has known it for a long time. When somebody gets married and happily sires children on the basis of this blank, literally empty possibility, he cannot accept it in any other way but as the most immediate reality. Never mind that Mike accepts every possible reality easily and gladly, at the expense of all hypotheses, ideas, interpretations. He was 23 and about to graduate when he fell head over heels in love with a lassie, an extramural student, who studied and had a job, an independent, capable, clever creature – in a nutshell, a true mate. So Mike, hardly knowing her name, fell in love. Be that as it may, every afternoon in the college library he swotted away until closing time, until eight, studied and said nothing, never said she was studying there too. Then one day he said:

“Misho, I must!”

“Must what, Mike?”

“I must, come what may!”

This was the first time I had seen him slightly off his rocker, to my mind it was quite becoming: a vivacious, restive look, desire sparkling in his eyes. I got the impression that he could strangle me and her and himself and the whole world in a jiffy. Now or never!

“I’ll write a letter, I’ll put it in her book and to hell with it! Who does she think she is, eh?”

“Sure, Mike, sure!” I said. “And what will you write in the letter?”

“Ah, well, that’s what I was going to ask you. You were always better with words somehow. Come on, help me, be a pal, now or never!”

So I started to help him, like: *Distinguished Miss, it is my great privilege and I do not know what happy circumstances I should thank... or: Please, I beg you, do not misinterpret my clumsy suggestion... or: Watching you daily engrossed in your books, I cannot resist the feeling that happiness is possible... etc.* Mike watched, watched me sweating and wearing out the paper. Perhaps this encouraged him, because he snatched the paper, crumpled it and threw it away.

“Forget it, thanks, there’s no need!” he said resolutely.

“What d’you mean?”

“Nothing. I’ll give her a blank letter!”

“You kidding?”

“No, I was never more serious. I’ll simply write Miss So-and-So...”

“Not even the sender?”

“Not even the sender. She’ll know if she wants to know!” He was still the old Mike. “If it’s to happen, it will without a single word, and if not, I’m done for, no matter what I write!” he said clenching his jaw.

Guess what happened next. I was in the library that afternoon when Mike seized his chance and slid the letter into her book. She came back. Mike pretended he was studying, his head clasped between his hands, bent over the book, only his ears on fire. She felt there was something between the pages, felt with her finger, took out the letter, opened it, looked: a blank. Whether she was surprised or not I don’t know, but she folded it and bent again over her book. Oh, Lord! I thought, what’s going on? Wonders will never cease! I looked at Mike, then at her: both engrossed in their books, Mike’s ears still

aflame. Her ears I could not see, her hair hid them... Gosh, it was taking a long time. Everyone was studying except me, who had nothing to do with any of this but, torn by curiosity, kept on fidgeting.

At long last she stood up, took a comb out of her bag and ran it through her hair a couple of times. Then she took the letter and headed straight for Mike:

“Excuse me...”

Mike raised his head slowly and looked her straight in the eye. A moment passed.

“I’m here, I’m not running away!”

For an instant, she seemed at a loss but then continued with her questions: “This is from you?”

“It is. I don’t deny it.”

“But why a blank?”

“Because.”

They fell silent. Mike’s teeth were clenched. He changed colour.

At long last she ventured: “Don’t you have anything to write?”

Mike did not reply, did not move. All of him was in that look fixed on the strange letter she was holding in her hand, there between the two of them.

She put it silently on Mike’s desk. He darted a quick, sideways look up at her, but she continued to stand there. Then he quickly took the pencil and started to write something. She bent over him.

“Give me the pencil!” and she wrote something too.

Mike seemed to blossom. He broke out in a smile, even though he would have liked to remain serious, eyes full of a bliss he did not want her to see. He seemed to want to say something, or perhaps he did not want to say anything.

“If... I’m not...we...”

She smiled, nodded and returned to her desk. Who knew what they were thinking of then! The letter had been quite forgotten. It was left aside, already a memento, cherished, perhaps the dearest they would ever have, but now inadequate for all eternity, incapable of containing all the wishes and all the future – a tiny symbol to which they had no time to refer.

I stood up and passing by Mike’s desk, looked surreptitiously back. All that was written there was: “Will you come to the movies with me tonight?” and “Why not?”

Those were the magic words.

And so – I was their best man. Sometimes we reminisce about the letter. To this day Mike’s motto is: Without a single word, with the help of God!

(From **ESSAY ON GOD**)

## NOTHING AND ALL

**I**n that case, is not every dispute pointless as to whether the First Cause is thus or thus, whether it is God, Ether or something else? If it is not pointless, then the dispute is in fact about something else: as to whether, for example, the definitive word of tomorrow will be that of Mark or Marx – his word and my opportunity – or someone else will evaluate and take the measure of one and the other (and any one else you care to mention) – the measure theirs, and I'm in a tight spot. The dispute is as to whether I shall simply remain bewildered, without range or scope – me, and not god-the-father or someone's son – or muster the courage in time to take my own risks and live a life without bowing to someone else's quotations and dogmatic beliefs. Yes, this is an ideological, political or simply psychological dispute between believing and belief. At best, it is a dispute about some linguistic error or other, whether or not this has led to a possible logical error, about how to reduce the margin for misunderstanding to a minimum, or also a methodological dispute in the broadest sense: how to feel, comprehend and experience with man's preconditioned mind and single heart something which is unconditioned and which is All – Infinity. It then becomes comprehensible that an infinite First Cause can be nothing other than Infinity itself, that one and only, true, absolutely indeterminate **Infinity, and not just an infinite series**, some of them sharing the same connotation. Otherwise, the First Cause would be finite, i. e. by not being a result or a simple cause, it would be limited. Even as the endless warp and woof, it would still be bounded and therefore finite: just the warp and woof and not something else. To insist that the First Cause is mere Matter as such, and go on giving descriptions of it until the cows come home, is just as ridiculous as claiming it as Idea. For if Matter must not be Idea, then it is limited by Idea, as Idea is by Matter. In this case, neither matter nor idea is infinite. But if nonetheless they are, if they really are, then the dispute is only about which word is the more suitable for what is exactly felt and premised in any given scientific or historic circumstances you care to mention. A word, which itself cannot be finite, but is now Air, now Number, Fire or Spirit and which must encompass All, Infinity, is certainly not easy to find. Nevertheless, if one had to be found, found at any price, it would seem that it would be best for this absolutely **indeterminate Infinity**, this **infinite Indetermination**, simply to be called:

### **Nothing.**

Could people really ever agree on this Nothing? Could they really ever call it God or Matter?

And then again, is it worthwhile arguing over Nothing?

Nothing – that is complete indetermination and indecision, thus all,

**All-being Possibility**, in the final analysis.

Is it not better that each should extract his own fortuity, his own symbol, his own word from this inexhaustible fountainhead? Shall we not, after all, understand one another?

It was settled long ago in the face of all odds that two and two in any combination is four, and that you cannot demolish a stone wall by knocking your head against it!

\*

Therefore, if we were once not sure, if we did not really know the all-knowing interpretations of school and daily philosophical (political) explanations – we now do know. We finally know what philosophy is. We have experienced it personally, the only way possible: with our own thoughts, which creating from the nature itself do not imitate anyone or anything, however similar they may turn out, and with our own efforts, which stimulating from within do not allow any external oppresses or massages no matter where this strength or help may come from. Day by day, for years and who knows how long, we have lived here wondering and inquiring in the firmament above and amongst things and people upon earthly trails and thickets, on the banks of rivers and seas, in the rain or under dark shimmering of the stars – and finally witnessed our very own and personal experience. Just in order to keep on wondering and inquiring, surmising and suffering, being happy. Always one step closer to nature, **nature itself, nature for and of itself**. This time, we thinkers, with our own horizon. And then with the entire world. With all that which once was, once written and all that which perhaps will be.

And philosophy is just that, experience above all, continuous experience, contemplative experience of course, but from the depths of the soul and with wide-open eyes, pricked up ears. Philosophy is that way of thinking in which every corner of consciousness wakes up and every nerve in the body is encouraged to freely question and learn, to listen attentively and explore without prejudices:

### **How is it that the Universe exists?**

Philosophy is an **experience in contemplation** that endures, growing in width, penetrating to the depths and **in which the question** *how is it that the Universe exists* gradually **loses its reliance on earthly determinations and finds its undetermined answer** in the surmising, **in the premonition of** undetermined, i.e. real **Infinity**. Philosophy is the unlimited process of contemplation in which the question *how is it that the World exists* loses more and more of its cutting edge and precisely in that loss finds its real answer – widely opening space to every possibility, to undetermined Omnipotence that is, to that which is as unconditional as much as it is not. Philosophy is contemplation, which is used to get inkling and hear the whispers of that which is without beginning and without end, completely undetermined, infinite.

And when we have once grasped that about philosophy and surmised what it is concerned with, then we can even with pleasure agree that philosophy in this or that way is all that the philosophers have said or written about it.

Nothing is superfluous.

There is no full stop anywhere.

Or else it is everywhere.

(**PHILOSOPHY AND BELIEF** (From chapter VI and chapter VII))