

CULTURE AND CREATIVENESS – PERMANENT HIGHLIGHTS OF ROMANIAN PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract. *Going through the studies and books of Romanian Philosophers the reader will be in a position to realize the important place held by culture and creativeness in Romanian philosophical thinking, over close to 300 years since Dimitrie (Demetrius) Cantemir (1673–1723)–to the XXth significant names in Romanian philosophy. The explanation for such continuity may come from various angles: historical, psychological, linked to spiritual geography. These categories of motivations are not separated by rigid frontiers but interpenetrate; moreover, we can even consider them complementary to each other.*

Keywords: *Romanian culture, spiritual creation, stylistic matrix of philosophy.*

It is quite natural for us to try and find the possible historical foundation of the preference of Romanian thinkers for meditation on culture and creation in the origin of the spirituality of Romanians who have lived for thousands of years in the space North of the Danube and clustered around the Carpathians. Descending from three great cultures of the ancient times–Thracian, Roman and Hellenic, the last one with its Byzantine extensions–blended in an original synthesis which is the source for well-outlined identity, it was but natural for Romanian philosophical thinking to be sensitive to culture and creation through the very nobleness of its spiritual matrix. This matrix was not only a matter of spiritual confluence, an allogenic transfer of culture into the geographical space where the Romanian people was formed, but also the result of the merging of the Romans into the Dacians along several centuries as well as from the much more confined though longer presence of the Greeks in the cities on Pontus Euxinus (the Black Sea) and at the mouth of the Danube. Therefore the blending of races had a share in the act of cultural assimilation, making it more organic as against the situation of other peoples who added to their initial spiritual stock the language and learning of the cultural metropolises situated at great geographical distances and, more often than not, diametrically opposed to their own features. Hellenic culture, in its turn was far from alien to the influence of the neighbouring Thracians, partners in intense material and spiritual exchanges, very much as Roman culture was of Greek filiation in its fundamental coordinates. This is what protected the birth of Romanian culture from the clash of essential discordances; as early as its primordial phase it benefited by the association of several great cultures in the

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Mediterranean area into a harmonious synthesis. This is what also lent Romanian culture the vigour with which for the next thousand years it faced the waves of migrations and then Turkish suzerainty for another five hundred years, without losing its Dacian-Latin stock. A people can hardly resist the pressure of invasions for nearly two thousand years unless it has a vigorous cultural identity. The "miracle" appears all the more surprising as many of the values of civilization created during the inter-war respites (when a princely academy was set up in Jassy, printing houses were imported shortly after Gutenberg's invention, the original architecture of palaces under Brancoveanu's reign at the turn of the 18th century, very rich culture in the monasteries) were destroyed by invaders, the Orthodox religion cultivated writing in Slavonic while oral culture alone perpetuated the Daco-Roman spiritual heritage that maintained alive and dominant the sentiment of belonging to the great ancient cultures of South Europe.

Very much as in biological heredity, it seems that inheritance is decisive in a people's spiritual physiognomy, its primordial myths being a sort of "genes" that engender the matrix in which its entire culture subsequently develops. "A people's period of formation", Athanase Joja (1904–1972) noted, "is particularly important for characterizing its moral physiognomy, but this does not mean that, once constituted, it will remain *ne varietur*. On the contrary, once constituted, this moral physiognomy becomes more explicit with the lapse of time, it develops its virtualities, it grows richer, and it expands or declines, in keeping with the historical circumstances, in which the respective people are involved. Folklore, art, literature and philosophy will normally reflect this moral physiognomy." (1)

Romanian folk art, "classical in its nature" as Lucian Blaga (1895–1961) saw-it (illustrating his statement through the sense for measure, the refined taste, the flight from abstraction, from the canon, "the unfettered spirit" breathing upon the whole structure and marking it resemble a "Euclid figure throbbing with life," the great diversity of expression subordinated to ample stylistic unity) preserves in Romanian culture a noble spirit which philosophy has assimilated into the paradigm of its beginning and developing. The very protophilosophy that characterizes Romanian folklore tackles major questions, those connected with creation, for instance, evincing highly ethical and tragically wise attitudes (if. "The Ballad of Masterbuilder Manole", other myths and legends).¹ On such grounds, it was but natural that Romanian philosophy is attracted to all themes of culture and creation, distinctive activities of man who, breaking away from nature, has built a second nature, with the pride of the Maker who produces a new reality. Cultural existence, typical of man, must necessarily preoccupy his meditation, at a certain level of spiritual maturity. We mean that in the normal order of philosophic, constant ion, the philosophy of culture assumes shape after existential questions have been asked, therefore after ontology and gnoseology, in

the process of general philosophy growing ever more complex, of a ramification of subjacent disciplines. The proclivity of Romanian philosophy to culture and creativeness appears however in the ontological and gnoseological sphere itself—and that is why it must be more than a mere "obsession with the origins."

At first sight the psychological explanation seems to contradict the above-mentioned historical one. From this new angle, the persistence of the theme of culture and creativeness in Romanian philosophy could appear to us as a reflection of unfulfilment. Being deprived of lay schools and cultural establishments, of lasting works of art (which were not absent in the short period between wars and invasions, but were rather soon annihilated—Romanians used to manifest an undisguised attraction *to lofty* culture and spiritual creation, domains for which they boasted an "inherent" vocation through the *classical spirituality* they had inherited. The awareness of the need for public education, for printing houses and libraries, for *theatres and* academies, was acute as early as the 11th and 18th centuries, but the major fulfilments along this line were brought about on a national plane by the 19th century, characterized by Mircea Eliade (b. 1907) as a "Renaissance after the Renaissance." At that time the Romanians' Latinity was established as a result of a sort of intellectual plebiscite in favour of their belonging to the culture of Latinized Western Europe. Although it appears to us as less consistent than the historical explanation of the origins of the Romanian spirituality, nevertheless we do believe that the psychological motivation is worth investigating as a paradoxically complementary factor. The sense of unfulfilment grew on the soil of an ancient civilization, it expressed not the thirst of a people just emerging out of barbarity but of a people hampered by the vicissitudes of history in its millennium old evolution. This people very well knew the value of culture as the factor that had preserved their ethnical identity, through the storms of limes unpropitious for development, the factor that, in its higher form was to open for them new and more modern roads of progress.

Last but not least, the third motivation which we offer consists in Romanian culture being part of a certain spiritual space. "The Romanian meridian" – like that of other cultures in South-East Europe – lies in the area of contact between the Socrati-type thinking of the West and the sensitiveness of great Oriental cultures. This imaginary meridian does not follow strictly geographical lines; it symbolizes an extremely ancient and strong welding which must have occurred as early as the time when the Dacian myths were created, when Zalmoxis (Zamolxe), the founder of the (Jeto-Dacians' religion and presumably Pythagoras' favourite disciple as a young man lived and taught, when Darius brought to the Balkan peninsula not only his army but also Persian wisdom, when the Thracian Alexander the Great reached the gates of India accompanied by his generals but also by his scholarly counsellors. It was then developed by the periods of contact with the peoples who, migrating from Asia and crossing the

territory of ancient Dacia, left some trace or another of their Oriental mind. It was further amplified by the long cultural links with the Slavs also coming from the East, as well as with the Islamic world. *Saordbearer* Nicolae Milescu (1636–1708) was probably the first thorough-going explorer of Chinese culture in its own home, the erudite prince Dimitrie (Demetrius) Cantemir (1673–1723) wrote the most scholarly history of the Ottoman Empire, at least for his own time, Mircea Eliade (b. 1907) is one of the few European experts in ancient Indian culture. Many such arches could be mentioned, and they illustrate the open, permeable nature, of Romanian spirituality, in fact its capacity for absorption, manifested as against alien cultural factors; it is germane to the tolerant, humanistic spirit, included in the moral physiognomy of the Romanian people, who have lived in good neighbourhood and understanding with many races.

The equilibrium between the rational and the sensitive, the balanced spirit, is the most typical feature of the Romanian ethical and cultural physiognomy, which we find faithfully reflected also in the spirit of our national philosophy. It towers in an Olympian fashion over the entire system of features defining Romanian spirituality, not a few of which could be grouped in dialectic pairs: realism-imagination (especially symbolistic); balance-recklessness: melancholy-humour and vivacity; a deep national feeling opening towards the universal; tradition-modernity; a largely tolerant spirit: a lay spirit ("paganism" infiltrated into the Orthodox religion); a vivid feeling for Nature; love of picturesqueness, etc.

Therefore the Romanian cultural context offers an explanation for the continuous emphasis on the theme of creativeness in the philosophy of culture. Not being-attached to a definite school of thinking, to a massive cultural model (within which the government of great values offers the satisfaction of solid erudition yet censures innovation), living at the crossroads of different spiritual worlds, Romanians—given their receptiveness - have acquired a prodigious capacity for creation in all works of the spirit, including the philosophical meditation on this capacity. In the last hundred years, thinkers have produced definitely original and profound philosophical systems,, in which it is not at all fortuitous that man is permanently present as a creative factor; the theory of universal undulation and the theory of fatalism propounded by Vasile-Conta (1845 – 1882) placed the problems of determinism and evolution in psychosocial terms; the energy personalism of Constantin Radulescu-Motru (1868–1957) made human personality an onto-psychological entity; the theory of knowledge and of the datum, elaborated by Mircea Florian (1888–1960) professed ontological realism of a type which never ignores the "ego". In the total philosophical system conceived by Lucian Blaga (1895–1961) his trilogies are articulated around the concept of creative mystery and destiny.

Besides the philosophers introduced into the present issue of our review, valuable contributions on the same theme have also been offered by Ioan Heliade Radulescu, known as Eliade (1802–1872 - culture and education), Nicolae Balcescu (1819–1852 - man's revolutionary role), Simion Barnutiu (1808–1864 - the culture of freedom), Gheorghe Baritiu (1812–1893 - culture as national enlightenment), Spiru Haret (1851–1912 - social' mechanics), Dimitrie Gusti (1880–1955 - rural sociology), Nicolae Bagdasar (1861–1971 - problems of European culture), Ioan Petrovici (1882–1972 - the philosophy of culture about traditions and values), Dimitrie Draghiceseu (1875–1945 - the conception on the creative ideal), Matila Ghyka (1881–1965 - the philosophy of numbers), Constantin Noica (b. 1909 - the theory of being) and others.

Having exhausted the three possible explanations for the predominance of culture and creativeness in Romanian philosophical meditation, it is perhaps meet and proper to ask the question whether one can speak about the national specificity of the philosophy of culture. It is usually stated that ideas have no homeland, that they belong to the entire humanity, to the universe as a whole. But philosophical works are individualized much well than the scientific ones. If this additional increase is not so obvious in the sphere of ideas, at least it is indisputable in the style of a philosophical work which - in the case of Romanian philosophy - is not alien to that "unfettered spirit" which Blaga mentioned on composing the picture of our national spirituality. But the expressiveness of philosophical works is far from remaining the only depository of the national specific character. Is it possible for the philosophy of a nation to remain alien from the attitude towards destiny as evinced by the thinking of the people in whose bosom that kind of philosophy has arisen? Is Chinese philosophy or Indian philosophy deprived of some distinctive mark—national or "regional"—as against European philosophy? Is Voltarianism not preeminently French or pragmatism typically American?

The characteristic features of the Romanian people's moral physiognomy are harmoniously distributed in the products of the Romanian mind: "Whatever is Romanian in the philosophy which we dream of," C. Radulescu-Motru pointed out, "is therefore not the kind of knowledge upon which it is reflected for this knowledge is offered by science generally—but the private attitude of the person who reflects them. It is not stones that make the style of a building but the innermost creativity of the man who builds it."(2)

In philosophy, the reflection of this set of features (lucid optimism, sceptical enthusiasm, ironical seriousness, beliefs without fanaticism, the laity of religion, the balance between thinking and sensibility) occurs with a certain kind of filtration, selection and expression of a personal nature, differing from one author to another and so some of them appear better outlined, others not so well. In D. D. Rosca's fundamental work *Tragic Existence*, the essence of his

meditation, the optimistic-tragic, as part of a kind of philosophy handled rationally, with utmost lucidity and moderation, forms a cornerstone of our spirituality. In front of the cold, indifferent universe, man unfolds his singular existence, understanding his condition, though surpassing it through the courage of conscious, heuristic assumption of some kind of cultural existence that offers him another world, a world of his own, one which, though ephemeral, is spiritually ennobled through the very creativeness of the human destiny.

Symbolistic sensitive concreteness is strongly present in Romanian thinking, demonstrating the philosophers' ability to express, to clarify the universal, to go deeper into it through the particular, not so much in the manner of scientific demonstration as in a mythopoetical form which we could consider of Oriental origin, though Europeanized. Ever since the poet Mihai Eminescu (1850–1889) the sensitive concreteness expresses the intelligible universal (cf. the archaean or vital principle as a sort of intelligence of the instance and "he who can watch the fleece ignoring the spinning," as a characterization of the philosophical spirit); in the writings of Lucian Blaga (1895–1961) and D. D. Rosea (b. 1895), the approach is fundamental to understanding their work. The circumstance may also be linked to the fact that many Romanian philosophers of culture have also been poets, musicians, critics or promoters of the arts (Cantemir, Eminescu, Maiorescu, Blaga, Eliade, Vianu and so on).

In the case of Romanian philosophers, symbolistic sensitive concreteness is no needy relative of philosophical abstraction or the token of a low spiritual level; its intrusion into the realm of the most general categorical thinking attests the highest intellectual refinement. The Eastern know how to use it with discretion, loading it with manifold and inexhaustible significations in their philosophy which unfolds like a tale, but which conceals a whole magma of meanings. Melted together with Descartes' or Kant's intelligible, it lends to the Romanians' philosophical meditation on creation and culture the power not to offend the "archaean" through rendering it unilateral or on the contrary through extending it in a manner offensive to a balanced spirit. The affinity perceptible in the case of most Romanian philosophers with Kantian ideas we believe, the sign of our thirst for measure and rationality.

Easily perceptible in the studies published here is the leit-motive of a kind of philosophy which has always upheld the rational against the irrational, but it was a kind of rational imbued with the sap of intelligence and emotionless, a kind of rationalism in perfect balance with morality. And creation often placed at the centre of meditation reveals itself as integrative outlook which integrates values into gnoseology. From the early 16th century advice of the Wallachian gospodar Neagoie Basarab to his son, down in tin current forecasts on spirituality and culture, the Romanians' philosophical ideal has remained that of keeping the balance "between the mind, wealth and good name". Placing personality, man, at

the centre of philosophical preoccupations has facilitated the preservation of consistency in upholding the rationalistic-humanistic-lay standpoint typical of Romanian thinkers since Nicolaus Olahus (1493–1568) down to our own times. The same motive has probably brought us also the achievements in branches of philosophy directly linked to the socio-psycho-cultural aspects of reality in the philosophy of history, of psychology, of culture, of values. Militancy and devotion to the Romanian nation, deep-going patriotism, and cultural activism have made our great thinkers manifest predilection for the theoretical areas with immediate applications in the cultural practice of their epoch and country.

Being concerned in serving their people, Romanian thinkers have never broken away from the context of European philosophy, from the universality of human ideals. They have always known how to receive and to assimilate grandiose spiritual values, while never feeling shy to convey their intelligence to the world's treasure-store of ideas. They used to be topical and they are still topical, because creation and culture, perennial themes of their philosophic interrogations now penetrate the field of investigation with even greater force. The 20th century has focused attention on approaches to the philosophy of culture to creativeness,—has grasped the systematic nature of culture and the need for studying all its forms in the process of their development.

Modern investigations on culture demonstrate that a certain civilization appears as a moment of balance, of creation, in the simultaneous tumult of destruction and construction of styles. These moments are characterized by a certain technical, logical, moral and aesthetic order. It is all the better defined if it strikes one through a rather imposing, vivid, coherent and lasting style. It seems that the moments of cultural equilibrium succeed each other because of the permanent disturbances of the so-called socio-cultural genetic codes, disturbances brought about by innovations, borrowings, assimilations. Cultural reconstruction is permanent; it takes place by parts as well as globally. Between two limits of maximum and minimum stability of this process one may note the existence of cultural paradigms. Within this context of problems, facing topical realities, the achievements of the philosophy of culture in Romania are not only of historical value, they rank with the best in the field today.

By building a philosophical system which turns the man that creates culture into a specific ontological entity and the style of culture into a notion of general methodological value, Lucian Blaga made his mark among highly modern philosophers of culture. His work opened new horizons for emphasizing paradigmatic cultural units, for detecting the availabilities and the creative potential specific to certain spatial areas and temporal epochs.

These are theories and ideas in Romanian philosophy on whose basis one can better understand the permanent tendency to treat artistic, scientific, philosophic and technical creation as self-sufficient, a self-sufficiency which is

necessary if it should be able to overcome by its own token—and at the suitable moment—the paradigm of a certain superannuated culture and civilization, superposed upon one's own order and which in itself requires innovation (cf. Titu Maiorescu, Tudor Vianu, Mihai Ralea, etc.). There are, moreover, elements of a kind of systematic thinking which regards scientific creation, very much like artistic, philosophical and material creation, as modalities for producing cultural subsystems each of which does not exhaust the cultural intentionality of an epoch, though it contributes through its specific nature to the emergence and finalization of a certain cultural system (cf. Dobrogeanu-Gherea, C. Radulescu-Motru, Petre Andrei, D. D. Rosca, Mihai Ralea).

From the perspective of some Romanian thinkers one can infer the outlook of a history of culture as a history of continuous creation. The human sublime appears in man's capacity repeatedly to reach and to break the equilibrium between what he has and what he wishes to have, through the creativeness which manifests itself in seeking a new harmony produced around him through the spirit, through an imaginary world which gradually turns into his genuine reality and his reason for action.

A systemic conception like that upheld by D. D. Rosca reveals to us the three great forms of existence which we know - the inorganic, the biological and the spiritual—in close interaction. "Considered in such a perspective, culture is grounded in the laws of nature. It is the latter's natural extension. And it is necessary as such. Which means that it had to be created at certain moments of infinite time and in certain sections of infinite space."⁽³⁾ It was born in order to serve man's ideal to master the world, on whose basis also emerged the idea of integral knowledge and the myth of integral rationality. Necessary results of the European type of culture, they bring about the current automation of the scientific spirit, explainable yet without a real foundation. The positivistic style of science has extended to the entire European culture, validating the existence of cultural systems with detectable specificity, finely and accurately grasped by Blaga, by Radulescu-Motru, by Vianu. It is demonstrated that while Asian subjectivism expresses the inner world through the outer world - characteristic of religion as well as of science, arts, philosophy, ethics and politics, in much the same way European objectivism which describes an outer world admitted, reflected and controlled by man's inner world, has generated a genuine scientist culture. The contemporary means for communication have brought science and the arts out of the limits of a group of initiates, which has led to freeing the former from the rules and conventions accepted so far, to accelerating and amplifying their rates of development, thus imposing a new strategy in which, whatever the scientific, aesthetic or political message, the problem that arises is that of knowing the value of this message-while this is only possible through referring it to the efficiency of human action. One may therefore note that after repeated attempts at

autonomization, nowadays cultural systems display the syncretism of forms out of which they are made up.

If we admit that certain cultural paradigms bring to the fore a certain style of creation, a certain type of creative personality - being therefore favoured by a certain matrix of human spirituality, then it is not by mere chance that a few personalities of Romanian spirituality have had their say in the contemporary assertion of the systemic approach. The equilibrium between passion and reason, between the logical and the historical spirit, between the appetite for cognition and that for values, this type of balance characterizing Brancusi in sculpture, Enesco in music, Odobleja in science, Blaga in philosophy and poetry has favoured it. Like visionaries, all our great philosophers of culture have displayed a kind of thinking that in one way or another promoted a system: Maiorescu (1840–1917) when he demonstrated that the cultural phenomenon has (the same objective existence as the natural one, that the general human ideal includes the cultural ideal of all peoples and that only striking the right balance between scientism and romanticism can lead to the foundation of genuine culture; Dobrogeanu-Gherea (1855–1920) when pointing out that values only live in interdependence; Petre Andrei (1891–1940) when grasping the fact that any judgment or scientific concept presupposes the idea of value; Athanasie Joja (1904–1972) when dialectically explaining the unity between logos and ethos, and so on.

All these Romanian contributions become arguments in the field of the philosophy of culture in favour of the encouraging conclusion reached by Lucian Blaga: "The hardly suspected latencies of the Romanian stylistic matrix justify our assertion that we possess a high cultural potential. What we can know without fear of being contradicted or invalidated, is that we are the wealthy bearers of exceptional possibilities. What we can believe without infringing upon lucidity is that it is our mission to enlighten a corner of the earth with our flower of tomorrow. What we can hope without indulging in illusions is the pride of historical spiritual initiatives which occasionally may flash as a spark on the tops of other peoples' heads."(4)

NOTES

- (1) Athanase Joja, *Filosofie și cultură* (Philosophy and Culture), Minerva Publishers, Bucharest, 1978, page 188.
 - (2) C. Radulescu-Motru, *Personalismul energetic* (Energy Personalism), Casa Scoalelor Publishers, Bucharest, 1927, page 10.
 - (3) D. D. Rosca, *Existența tragică* (Tragic Existence), Bucharest, 1934, page 73.
 - (4) Lucian Blaga, *Trilogia culturii* (The Trilogy of Culture), Bucharest, 1944, page 334.
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