

## LUCIAN BLAGA AND HIS PHILOSOPHY

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**Abstract.** The intellectual *ecstasis* of the aspiration to synthesis was the only one able to create the matrix of a new metaphysics, adapted to the spirit of a new aeon, Blaga tried out the power of the antinomic method in the very elaboration of his work. Thus, Blaga's system is build up around dual and complementary concepts such as consciousness and unconsciousness, enstatic and ecstatic intellect, Kantian and abyssal categories duplicates, Luciferian and paradisiac types of knowledge, anabasic and cabasic, etc. The so-called dogmatic method - the method of 'transfigured antinomy - the complementary duality, in fact-realises the shift in orientation from plus-knowledge to minus-knowledge, by applying the antinomic perspective to the dichotomy known-unknown. On this ground, it can be explained why the unknown as a whole is not decreased by the deduction of the known; on the contrary, it actually increases by being put into words, opening itself to new logical potentials.

**Keywords:** Lucian Blaga, philosophy, stylistic matrix, Luciferian knowledge, Paradisiac knowledge

Lucian Blaga is one of the most prominent persons in the history of Romanian culture. A great poet and philosopher, his works had a decisive influence on the Romanian poetry of the 20th century and on the self-definition of the Romanian national consciousness, and represented a major contribution to the foundation of the metaphysics of knowledge, of the categorical philosophy of the unconscious and of the philosophy of cultural styles.

Lucian Blaga was born in Transylvania, on May 9th 1895. He was the ninth child of the parish priest (Romanian Orthodox Church) of Lancram, a village situated near Alba Iulia in Transylvania, at that time part of the Kingdom of Hungary within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He attended high school and the School of Theology in Transylvania. Then he went to Vienna, where he attended the courses of the Faculty of Philosophy, getting his Ph.D. degree with a thesis on *Kultur und Erkenntnis (Culture and Knowledge)*. At the age of 15, he published his first poems in the literary review *Tribuna* and at the age of 19, he published his first philosophical essay *Notes on Intuition with Bergson* in Review *Românul* in Arad. In 1919 he published his first volume of poetry, *Poems of the Light* and a volume of aphorismes *Stones for my Temple*. In 1924 his first book of philosophy *The Philosophy of Style* was published. It was the beginning of a prolific career,

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which produced many volumes of poetry and philosophical works. The latter would finally constitute the four trilogies (*Trilogy of Cognition, Trilogy of Culture, Trilogy of Values, Cosmological Trilogy*), which define his philosophical system, articulated on central categories such as mystery, style and culture. His work also includes plays, a novel, essays, memoirs and aphorisms. Between 1924 and 1939 he was a press attaché, cultural counsellor and minister plenipotentiary in six European capitals. From 1939 to 1947 he was highly appreciated as the Professor of Philosophy of Culture at the University of Cluj. Elected a member of the Romanian Academy, Blaga delivered in the presence of King Carol II of Romania one of the most consistent and expressive reception speeches, *Eulogy to the Romanian Village*, a fundamental text for anyone who wants to understand the special character of the Romanian people. The response was given by another philosopher, Ion Petrovici.

Blaga was a brilliant translator of Goethe and Lessing. He spent the last years of his life as a mere librarian and researcher because of the communist regime. He died in 1961 at Cluj.

Blaga's philosophy is frequently reprinted, and commented abroad as well in Romania. After the Italian version of his book, *Horizon and Style (Orizzonte e stile)* was published in 1946, L'Age de l'homme, Publishing House, edited *L'Eon dogmatique* (1988); then Librairie du savoir (Paris) published *L'Éloge du village roumain* (1989), *L'être historique* (1990) and *Les différentiels divines* (1990). Other studies included in the *Trilogies* were translated and published in French by a team from the Sorbonne. As time goes by, Blaga's work proves to be an endless source of meanings and significations in the confrontation with new trends in thinking and new artistic models. Bear witness to that the unsettled controversies, the multitude of approaches and interpretations it gives occasion to by its vivid strength, the sign of the great spiritual creations, which defy centuries and paradigms by the very fact that they remain open to rational and sensible understanding, that, in spite of accumulations of data in knowledge, they preserve their ideative challenge, their ability to incite the mind to search for new solutions of the central mystery of our Being. Around thirty monographies and numerous studies on Lucian Blaga's works were edited in Romania.

The critical bibliography of Blaga's works also includes titles published outside Romania like: *Profili di estetica europea: Lucian Blaga*, Gaston Bachelard, Carl Gustav Jung, Casa editrice Oreste Bayes, Rome, 1971, *Contributions à l'histoire de la versification roumaine: La prosodie de Lucian Blaga*, Akademiai Kiado, Budapest, 1972. Beginning in 1932, twenty-three foreign encyclopaedias and lexicons have mentioned his work. The *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (ed. Edwards, 1962) underlines the originality and harmonious architecture of his philosophical system in the article on Romanian (Rumanian) philosophy.

“The most gifted and original thinker has been Lucian Blaga, the only Rumanian philosopher to have completed an extremely complex system, including a highly personal metaphysics, a new theory of knowledge, and a detailed morphology of culture. In this ambitious construction Blaga utilised myths, symbols, and ideas from popular Rumanian traditions, both religious and secular. For the first time, the autochthonous heritage of Rumania found philosophical expression”<sup>1</sup>.

Antonio Banfi dedicates to Blaga a whole chapter in his book *Filosofia dell'Arte* (Editori Riuniti, Rome) and names him 'one of the most vivid and original contemporary philosophers'. A society for the philosophy of style was created at the Sorbonne, bearing Blaga's name. Far from Blaga's becoming dated, his conceptions become more and more topical as time goes by.

Blaga was a brilliant translator of Goethe (*Faustus*) and Lessing. He spent the last years of his life as a mere librarian because of the communist regime. Nominated for the Nobel Prize 1956 on the proposal of Bazil Munteanu (France) and Rosa del Conte (Italy), he was on the point of getting the award when the communist government in Bucharest sent emissaries to Sweden to protest against his nomination with false political allegations.

The place of Lucian Blaga's works within the context of philosophical thinking between the wars in Romania is a singular one, which partly explains their more or less sinuous 'destiny' after the author's death. His posterity recorded the most various and antagonistic attitudes toward his work, even extreme ones occasionally, from apology to a negation. The diversity of the comments represents in itself a proof of the complexity and the far-reaching implications of his work. Obviously, the critical and thorough analysis of his works is far from being completed. New facets of the text unveil themselves for the observant reader all the time. Honest and unprejudiced exegeses, dedicated to the thorough examination of the intrinsic philosophical value of his works, reveals the specificity of his system and method, as well as the central concepts of his thinking: mystery, style, transfigured antinomy, the Great Anonym, the categories of unconsciousness.

A comparative analysis of Blaga's ideas within the context of modern orientations in thinking would define his position as kindred to and yet different from those of Kant, Goethe, Nietzsche, Spengler, Husserl, Berdiaev, Cassirer, Freud, Jung and Heidegger. His modern openings toward dual, polarised philosophy, and towards complementarity, define his conceptions as a special form of rationalism-ecstatic rationalism. Together with other Romanians - Vasile Conta, Mircea Florian, Stephane Lupasco, D. D. Rosca, Constantin Noica - Blaga outlines a

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Edwards (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Collier – Mac Millan Ltd. London.

certain type of discourse specific to Romanian philosophy between the wars, which gave new meanings to metaphysics, unconsciousness and relativity.

In Blaga's opinion the supreme spiritual value is metaphysics: 'In metaphysical creation we can see the very crowning of philosophical thinking', he writes.

We shall spare no effort in pleading in favour of such an appreciation. The metaphysician is the author of a world. Any philosopher who does not aim at becoming the author of a world simply betrays his own vocation; he may sometimes be a really brilliant thinker, still he would remain an advocate of unfulfilment... It is true that a metaphysical vision is never final; that is, no success makes useless a new attempt. A metaphysical vision represents an historical moment, meaning that in a way its fragility is inherent in its very conditions and structure... We have to get accustomed to approaching metaphysical conceptions from a different point of view than that of regret for their perishability. We are then able to grasp that particular sensitivity of weighing a metaphysical vision according to its depth and inner harmony. We repeat: whenever we have to judge some metaphysical conception we are asked to use an immanent critique. Under such flashes of light, the transitoriness with which each metaphysical conception is stigmatised grows into a fatality which is inherent in even the most evident achievements of the human mind<sup>1</sup>.

'Contrary to classic systems, this system I am working on', Blaga explains, 'has a symphonic character; it is not the system of a single idea, nor of a single formula; it is structured just like a many-steepled church. This system contains numerous intertwined main leitmotifs, that reiterate from one study to another and a rhythmically alternating succession. Eventually, all studies overflow as a metaphysical vision of the whole of existence; the last volume of each of the trilogies attempts to be a crowning of the others and a metaphysical turning to account of the problems discussed'.

For Blaga, metaphysics is something different from science, from philosophy with scientific aspects. 'Metaphysics is always a jump into the uncontrollable, a creation of imagination... experience plays here only the role of a veto when metaphysics contradicts it, but experience is not asked to check and positively control metaphysical conceptions'.

"In the *Transcendental Censure*, Blaga admits that "an absolute metaphysical principle" exists as well as an individuated cognition, their relationship being perceived as a relationship between productive existence

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<sup>1</sup> Lucian Blaga, *Trilogia cunoasterii*, (Trilogy of Cognition). Ed. Minerva, Bucharest, 1983, pp. 74-75.

and a produced existence, that is between the creator and the created, between an X that determines and a determined result. According to Blaga, the absolute metaphysical principle is what metaphysics has always taken to be substance, the absolute ego, the immanent reason, the unconscious, the consciousness etc., that is all that he calls "the Great Anonymous". He is not interested in finding out whether the Great Anonymous is immanent or transcendent as related to existence, but in learning that the Great Anonymous is characterized by the central place taken in the system of existence. The thesis on the relationship between the Great Anonymous and personal cognition is thus formulated by the Romanian thinker: "For reasons that pertain to existential balance, the great Anonymous defends himself and all the mysteries deriving hence, from aspirations of any individual cognition, creating between these and the existential mysteries a network of insulating factors. The insulating network placed between the existential mysteries and individuated cognition appears as censure"<sup>1</sup>.

The potentiality of dual thinking has been realised and represents a topical subject of debate at present, but an exegesis such as the one Blaga devoted to it in *The Dogmatic Aeon* and in his entire work, has not been reiterated so far, at least not to our knowledge. Establishing his roots in ancient modalities of reflection, whether philosophical, religious or mystical and following its manifestations in the history of culture, the Romanian philosopher proved that dual, antinomic thinking is specific to man and becomes manifest in times of aeonic renewal, characterised by major shifts in spiritual paradigms. As a main feature of such periods of transition, Hellenism and the 20th century share it, as well as the aspiration to synthesis, the dovetailing of oriental and western thinking, the triumph of 'configuration' in science, the search for deep meanings of existence in myths and symbols, in new philosophical constructions and significations (the relativity of orientations in philosophy, the interest in the philosophy of history, the inauguration of a new ontology). Convinced that this way of intellectual *ecstasis* was the only one able to create the matrix of a new metaphysics, adapted to the spirit of a new aeon, Blaga tried out the power of the antinomic method in the very elaboration of his work. Thus, Blaga's system is build up around dual and complementary concepts such as consciousness and unconsciousness, enstatic and ecstatic intellect, Kantian and abyssal categories duplicates, Luciferian and paradisiac types of knowledge, anabasic and cabasic etc. The so-called dogmatic method - the method of 'transfigured antinomy - the complementary duality, in fact-realises the shift in orientation from plus-knowledge to minus-knowledge, by applying the antinomic perspective to the dichotomy known- unknown. On this

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<sup>1</sup> Vintila Horia, *Preface to a Renewal* (Foreword to the Aeon Dogniatique), French transl. L'Age de l'homme. Publ. House, Paris. 1986.

ground, it can be explained why the unknown as a whole is not decreased by the deduction of the known; on the contrary, it actually increases by being put into words, opening itself to new logical potentials. Antinomy, Blaga states, will bring forth the future cultural coherence, where science will open new mysteries 'by Luciferian knowledge', entering a new stylistic field, characterised by new orientations, horizons and values (of a systemic, contextualist, complementary type, we should add).

Within the contemporary intellectual contexts, when renowned scientists and philosophers (R. Thorn, E. Laszlo, I. Prigogine, M. Bunge, S. Lupasco, etc.) manifest interest in a new philosophy of nature, in an ontology of the human (psyche, social, moral), Blaga's metaphysics, as an ontological theory of culture, opens a surprisingly prolific philosophical horizon. The Archimedean point of his thinking lies in his conception of the categorical structure of the unconsciousness and of the stylistic matrix, the way stylistic categories function in the process of creation being the link among the philosophies of knowledge, culture and values, while his metaphysical construction represents the final fulfilment, in the horizon of mystery, of all his indisputably original philosophical approaches

However, in company with important contemporary names in philosophy of science (Koyre, Collingwood, Kuhn, Prigogine, Polanyi, Rorty, Chomsky, Thorn etc.), Blaga's contributions are both essential and actual, as he investigated the cognitive dimensions of science in an ontological, cultural, historical and axiological context and realised the interdisciplinary integration of philosophy of science, on the one hand, and theory of knowledge, the philosophy of culture and axiology, on the other. Like recent theories of the 'innate' in knowledge and of the 'historical entities' in the field of the dynamics of science, of the disciplinary matrices and contexts of the anthropology of epistemological outlooks, Blaga introduced many original and interesting ideas such as: the stylistic and cultural approach to science, the theory of categorical doubles, of the over-method and of minus-knowledge, of differences and connections between science and philosophy etc., ideas which became even more relevant within the context of the dispute with the adepts of neo-positivism and the adepts of phenomenology. Like R.T. Allen notes for example:

From comparativist analysis between Polanyi and Blaga result that they were both interested in the deep structures of the mind and its knowledge, structures of which, they both emphasised, we are not normally aware yet which guide our proximate knowledge and action. Both of them were thus radically opposed to those Empiricist theories which, in Locke's words, regard the mind as a 'blank tablet' passively receiving 'impressions', and to Positivist philosophies which deny the very existence of frameworks of thought and interpretation of experience. Equally, and unlike Kant, they had

a sense of the historical and developing character of those structures and frameworks, yet, unlike many post-modern thinkers, they also emphasised our commitment to truth and to revealing the real world that is independent of our knowing. These are the lines that any genuine philosophy must take. In particular, they both recognised that reality transcends our cognitive abilities and that it cannot be confined within any formulae. Blaga regards mystery as an essential and distinctive feature of man and human awareness, a permanent background to all our knowledge. He criticises theories of cognition, and especially of science, which reduce all knowledge to what he calls Type 1 (or 'paradisiac') knowledge, in which certain categories, not varying greatly across history, are applied fairly straight-forwardly in perception and action. In contrast, science also requires Type 2 (or 'Luciferian') knowledge which applies deeper categories, relating to man's distinctive existence within a horizon of mystery and revealing those mysteries. These categories are much less fixed and general, and themselves guided by yet deeper, 'abyssal', categories which form a 'stylistic field. Blaga rejects the Positivist characterisation of such categories, e.g. teleology in biology, as 'useful fictions', and stresses that they function to reveal mysteries. Polanyi likewise emphasises the roles of intellectual frameworks and the activity of the knower in the formation of our knowledge, and also is aware of their variability while insisting that we aim at truth 'with universal intent', although we can never quite get there, a point that Blaga also makes. Polanyi again criticised the 'pseudo-substitutions offered for the notion of truth ('economy', 'simplicity', Kant's 'regulative ideas') which tacitly trade on the notion of truth which they supposed to replace. He also maintained that reality outruns our attempts to know it and that it cannot be confined within our formula<sup>1</sup>.

In order to seize the entire novelty of Blaga's vision, the analysis of his sources (the morphology of culture, the philosophy of life, psycho-analysis) is relevant, as well as the comparative approach in connection with structuralism (Lévy-Bruhl, Foucault), existentialism (Heidegger, Jaspers) or with postmodernism (Polanyi, Rorty).

As CO. Schrag mentions "Lucian Blaga was able to marshal conceptual and spiritual resources for addressing the philosophical situation of our time. It were as though Blaga anticipated the intersection/confrontation of the modernist and postmodernist cultures at our own fin-de-siecle. And it is his notion of "transfigured antinomy" that we find to be of particular pertinence for addressing the issues at hand.

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<sup>1</sup> Lucian Blaga, *Trilogia cunoasterii (Trilogy of Knowledge)*, Edit. Minerva, Bucharest, 1983, p. 643.

The dynamic of a transfigured antinomy is such that the differences at issue retain their integrity whilest being transfigured in Such a manner as to be comprehended through a complementarity of perspectives, articulated via a new logic of opposition. Now it was the genius of Blaga to discern the applicability of the dynamics of transfigured antinomies not only across the specialized areas of the physical sciences, but also with the developing fields of micro and macro biology, as well as within the wider cultural existence of the human species. That which strikes us as being of particular moment in Blaga's understanding and use of the notion of transfigured antinomy is its relevance for addressing the modernity versus postmodernity problematic of our time. On the one hand we are presented with a logic of identity, with its claims for a unity of knowledge, a totality of explanation, and a universal commensurability; and on the other hand we encounter the partisans of difference, plurality, heterogeneity, incommensurability, and historical particularity. The modernist would have us keep the vision of a universal logos wherewith to secure the stable contents of knowledge; the postmodernist, positioned against the logocentrism of modernity, would have us scatter the universal logos to the wind and make do with the heterogeneity of language games and the relativity of historically-specific beliefs and practices. With our notion of transversal rationality *cum* communication we are position to split the difference between the universal logos of modernity and the anti-logos of postmodernity, utilizing the resources of an expanded reason that is able to extend across the differences of beliefs and perspectives, converging with them without achieving coincidence at a point of identity. And it is with a measure of philosophical excitement that we have found a family resemblance of our notion of transversal rationality in Lucian Blaga's notion of transfigured antinomy<sup>1</sup>.

To re-think the human world from the perspective of the man-nature- culture triad, as Blaga does in his *Trilogy of Knowledge*, means to create new philosophical discipline-noology-concerned with the uniqueness of the human, with the ontological meaning of culture and of metaphor, with the structure of the noosphere (the layer of ideas that surrounds the earth). No less important is Blaga's critical analysis of biologist theories (Gehlen, Alsberg), which marks him off from Bergson, Freud, Nietzsche, and Cassirer.

Equally noteworthy are his visions of the philosophy of art (the law of nontransponsibility, polar and vector values) and of religion as a form of culture. Conceived as an ontological mutation, culture is the standpoint of the building and architecture of Blaga's system. Man exists as a creative subject in the universe

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<sup>1</sup> CO. Schrag, *Philosophy at the End of the XX<sup>th</sup> Century with Note on Blaga* in Romanian Review nr. 1/1996.



through culture alone, he became a constituent part of his being. Therefore philosophy, as both knowledge and metaphysical construction, science, as cognitive act and cultural creation, noology as investigation of the uniqueness of the human and the genesis of the metaphor, they all lead, through the stylistic matrix, to man as being in the centre of cultural values, which, in their turn, are constituent parts of each spiritual aeon.

The influence of Neo-Kantism, of Hegel, of Goethe, of the philosophy of life and of the morphology of culture on Blaga, as well as the originality of his thinking, can be traced in philosophy but also in his literary work. Neither his poetry, a lyrical expression of the ontological mutation within an inner tension due to the relationship between man and Cosmos, nor his plays, which project human drama on the level of the universal Whole and reveal the passage from appearance to essence, from the momentary to the transcendent, can be grasped without taking into account his spiritual biography, and his philosophical vision.

As did Brancusi<sup>1</sup>,Tuculescu, Ion Barbu and other Romanian artists close to the vision of the mioritic space, Blaga retraces the origins of creation in search for the stylistic matrices, for the primordial patterns, for the layer of genesis, a universal vision of the organic in an endless dissemination of variants around some imagistic centres, some cardinal ideas. Through his entire work, Blaga valued the creative genius of the Romanian people and sustained the self-consciousness and dignity of Romanian culture its specificity among other European cultures and emphasised its values in their entire complexity and continuity. Early as 1936, he was writing:

The close and tenacious examination of our folk culture led us to the gratifying certitude of the existence of a Romanian stylistic matrix. Its latencies barely perceived justify the conclusion that we have a high cultural potential. All we can say, without fear of being contradicted by further evolutions, is that we are the bearers of huge possibilities. All we can state, without violating lucidity, is that we trust we have been assigned to enlighten, with our flower to come, a corner of the Earth. All we can hope, without making ourselves prey to illusions, is the pride of some historic spiritual initiatives that would flow, from time to time, like sparks over the heads of other peoples<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Edgar Papu, *Blaga-Brancusi Galaxy*, Romanian Review 5/1985.

<sup>2</sup> Lucian Blaga, *Triogia Culturii (Trilogy of Culture)* Ed. Minerva, Bucharest, 1985, p. 331.

