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CONSIDERATIONS ON SOME HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN LUCIAN BLAGA'S METAPHYSICS

Abstract: The Romanian thinker Lucian Blaga, poet, playwright, and philosopher, created works in all of these fields that were penetrated and united by the same brilliant spirit, reflecting an admirable desire of reaching a philosophical consciousness. Firstly, this article deals with the so-called "historical issues" of this metaphysics. During his formative years he set about to create a philosophical system that aimed at dealing with the problems of transcendence. Blaga's criticism of some of the most famous and influential philosophical positions, such as critical philosophy, positivism, and phenomenology is explored. Secondly, this article attempts to continue the debate on the actual interpretations of Blaga's metaphysics, especially his insight into "contemporary issues" such as inter-religious dialogue and American Pragmatism. Blaga's philosophical works have scarcely been discovered by readers out side Romania and it is the purpose of this paper to show Blaga's relevancy to broader philosophical arguments.

1. The Specific of Blaga's Metaphysics

Lucian Blaga (1895-1961) has held over time a unique position within Romanian culture. He has created a monumental philosophical system, after the opinions of many of our scholars, and this system is regarded as the most imposing and original one in the history of our nation. Furthermore, he was a very gifted artist, whose modern, abstract, and profound poetry considerably influenced the cultural sensibility of posterity. Lastly, as a playwright, Blaga completed a very complex spiritual universe that operated at the highest level possible for its time. In the last part of the 20th century, especially over the last two decades, his works have been, arguably, the most discussed within Romanian culture. Furthermore, these works, as well as his personality, have in recent years also begun to impress foreign specialists.

Blaga's metaphysics remains most commented on in Romania (more than 9,000 pages were published on this during last decade alone in the volumes containing the papers presented at the International Lucian Blaga Festival). Nonetheless, there remain many problems to discuss in order to make clearer the sources of inspiration of this metaphysics as well as its position for contemporary philosophy.

To speak about Blaga as philosopher means to take into account his personality as a whole. In this respect, another important philosopher, C.

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Noica, has written that “We do not know, even beyond the borders of Romanian culture, of a modern creator who would be equally great in three creative fields: poetry, drama, and philosophy.”¹ After more than 110 years from his birth, we are still trying to deal with the huge cultural inheritance he has left to us. From the philosophic point of view, this is centered on the idea of *philosophical consciousness*, within the option for philosophy as a system. Blaga's 1959 *Despre conștiința filosofică* (Concerning Philosophical Consciousness) provides the central features of his metaphysical system. The thinker expresses his *credo* concerning the meanings of philosophy, its specific fulfilment through *metaphysics as a system*, and its relationship with other expressions of the human culture (science, religion, morals and art). A distinguished interpreter of Blaga's philosophy – Dr. Mircea Flonta – has written that “Lucian Blaga's work exemplarily illustrates the élan and enthusiasm of the system's creator, even beyond the borders of Romanian philosophy. Through its particularity, Blaga's philosophy offers both a basis and a standard of assessment for other systematic philosophical constructions within the space of our culture.”²

The triple demarcation between philosophy and philosophical consciousness, philosophy and metaphysics, philosopher and metaphysician appears to be particularly significant and actual for the way Blaga understood the structure and the meaning of philosophical consciousness. In the way he understands *philosophical consciousness*, Blaga proposes a *meta-philosophy* that is broadly open to *metaphysics*. He identifies the meaning of philosophy with its creative function in metaphysics, since the metaphysician is the author or creator of a world. Each of these “worlds” is the outcome and expression of a cultural epoch, of a community, and of the unique spiritual individuality of the philosopher's personality. Despite the fact that they are intimately linked to the historical moment of their elaboration, this does not diminish their value. Because of the human desire to grasp the mysteries of existence, the knowledge contained by these “worlds” does not forbid, but on the contrary, urges the creation of new ones.

Obviously, this view of metaphysics as the fulfillment or coronation of philosophy in a “closed” spiritual world aiming at interior perfection and harmony finds itself under the influence of German romanticism and historicism, especially that of W. Dilthey, not to mention the works of O. Spengler. At this point, Blaga clearly indicates the primordial meaning of philosophy: “In metaphysical creation we see therefore not only the coronation of philosophical thinking ... The metaphysician is the author of a world. A philosopher who is not continually the author of a world suspends his vocation; he could be anybody, sometimes even a thinker of genius, but remains a follower of the unfulfilment. A metaphysician's world is in the first place a world of his own ...”³

Thus, philosophy (understood as *metaphysics*) is not a discovery, but a view of the world (*Weltanschauung*), an act of creation or invention belonging to particular historical beings living in a given cultural space and time. Metaphysical “constructs” are similar to works of art: self-consistent and closed universes, each one reflecting the personality of its creator.

What in *Cenzura transcendentă* (Transcendent Censorship) Blaga calls the “metaphysical theory of knowledge” could be seen as an argument for the impossibility of metaphysics as a science (i.e. as knowledge of objective value and universal validity). Or, as Dilthey has said, philosophy is not – and cannot be – science, but a view of the world (*Weltanschauung*), dependent on historical forms of life and strong creative individualities.⁴ All metaphysical systems elaborated throughout history have the antinomic tendency to offer us at once what is beyond knowledge, as well as to claim to be objective and universally valid knowledge. In Dilthey's view, metaphysics as science would be a pointless enterprise. In fact, we have an eloquent “empirical” proof: in history, no metaphysic has been able to impose itself once and for all; no metaphysic is able to do so, i.e. to be *science*.

For both Dilthey and Blaga, artistic creation remains at the level of feeling and intuition, in a zone of creative imagination of symbols and metaphors, analogies and suggestions of existential uncertainties. The language of expressing communication with the divine is spiritually sensitive, different from the conceptual one. Philosophy realizes a perpetual enrichment of experience beyond the limits of ordinary knowledge. In contrast to philosophy, religion is subjective, particularized through determinant emotions and the orientation toward the transcendent. Different from poetry or religion, metaphysics *believes* it is possible to find definite answers to the great questions of manhood through a valid universal knowledge. Thus, it has the intention of disclosing the unity and the ultimate meaning of existence, in order to solve the mystery of life and world.

Thus, metaphysical systems appear to be merely personal attempts of philosophers to represent existence as a whole in its principle; these perspectives will inevitably be limited and centered within the personality of one metaphysician or another, having a certain life experience and cultural atmosphere, within historical and local co-ordinates. Far from being the “last word” of philosophical thinking, each and every metaphysics aims in fact beyond what can be said through concepts.

Among all the forerunners of the *Lebensphilosophie* (Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Bergson), as well as its key personalities, Dilthey seems to be the closest to Blaga, if we have in sight the concept of “philosophy” itself, the human being as well as the cultural system. As much as Dilthey, Blaga does not give up the attempt of discovering valid elements within the *relativity* of metaphysics. They both oppose themselves to Kant's

metaphysical criticism by the idea that concepts must be acquired through experience (i.e. within the historical existence of the individuals).

According to Flonta, in his main ideas on *historical relativism*, Blaga questions a metaphysical system's capability of gaining general validity.⁵ He debates with empiricism and radical positivism on the problem of the cultural-spiritual meaning of metaphysics; in fact, by rejecting "*scientific metaphysics*," Blaga makes a substantial effort at legitimating metaphysics' right to exist on another basis. Here, unlike Dilthey, whose conviction about the relativity of the metaphysical enterprise relied on the presupposition of the impossibility of containing the idea of existence as totality in concepts originating within a historical culture and on the spiritual elements of a creative personality, Blaga founds his arguments on systemic reasons, in as much as metaphysics (ontology) would appear as a consequence of a theory of knowledge.⁶

Why, then, cannot *scientific metaphysics* succeed? Blaga develops a very peculiar and long ranging metaphysical explanation, starting with a high-level hypothesis on the nature of existence: the concept of the "*Great Anonymous*" with its "*transcendent censorship*." The "*Great Anonymous*" denotes an entity placed in the core or "center of transcendence." (Blaga stated that this is just one possible name, and that one could easily find others; what is essential is to not interpret it in an anthropological manner, by assigning attributes to it). The Great Anonymous represents the "central existential mystery," defending forever "the derived mysteries" from human knowledge (i.e. it is self-imposed, absolute, and eternal mystery).

In this respects, the Great Anonymous constitutes a barrier between man and mysteries – the so-called "*transcendent censorship*," the metaphysical axis of knowledge, conceived as a "safety net" or "firewall" (to use the language of informatics) between the human being as subject and mysteries of the world as objects of knowledge.⁷ Due to this special kind of censorship, all human efforts revealing mysteries and obtaining a "fully adequated knowledge" (i.e. the striving of all metaphysical systems in history) are in vain. The mysteries are never "revealed", but only "*dissimulated*" by transcendent censorship, so people are never aware of this complicated, somehow super-natural process. In other words, there is possible, in principle, *this* or *that* knowledge, but it is never possible for one to have *the* knowledge as knowledge of the known object itself.

Blaga states that: "There are no adequated revelations. For this conception, 'revelation' is a purely theoretical concept. In fact, no existential mystery crosses the threshold of knowledge remaining what it is. The threshold of knowledge is enchanted and transforms every guest who crosses it. In reality, there are only dissimulative revelations. An existential mystery, which discovers or reveals itself as such to the individuated knowledge, is *dissimulated* by the very structure that has been shaped to individuated knowledge according to the intentions inherent to

transcendent censorship... The showing or revealing of an existential mystery, when it happens, is always a *censored revelation*, censored by the very structure of the cognitive machine meant to receive the existential mystery.”⁸

Blaga does not bring logical arguments to the defense of his position, according to the tradition of classical metaphysics, since his attempt was a different one. As for the reasons for believing in the finality of this structure of existence, there is no ready-made “solution;” rather one must seriously consider the meaning of an entity (e.g. Great Anonymous, which could have other names) playing the role of the cognitive and ontological center of existence. About the Great Anonymous Blaga deliberately chooses to speak in a mythical manner. The way that Blaga sees the issue of metaphysics seems to suggest that his theory is not a *foundation* of the nature of the metaphysical enterprise; rather it is a *perspective*. However, this does not entail that Blaga considered his philosophy as not needing justification; from a pragmatist point of view, it is justified through its heuristic ability. And, what finally speaks for this theory is its capacity to be harmonized with irreducible particular value options.⁹

In Blaga's metaphysics, human beings, values, religion, stylistic matrices, etc., all depend in some way on “divine” transcendence. Sometimes his system has been described as idealist, elaborated under a speculative-theological methodology. It is possible that, for both Blaga and Dilthey, God would be an unconditional value in the flux of being and becoming, of universal settings and meanings.¹⁰

2. Blaga's Metaphysics – Historical Issues

According to this option, Blaga analyzes many of the great philosophical theories and paradigms in history, especially those belonging to the 18th, 19th, and the first half of the 20th centuries. In fact, he puts almost all of the history of philosophy under the mark of ages of “inflation” and “deflation” regarding specific problems. The first situation occurred in the Middle Ages, when philosophical problems were exaggeratedly increased and debated by various authors; thus, those problems eventually lost touch with empirical reality (facts). The second occurrence is the preferred case Blaga deals with: i.e. an excessive reduction of philosophical problems – an attitude specific to modern and contemporary philosophy in some apparently very different currents or systems such as *critical philosophy*, *positivism* (including *logical empiricism*), and *phenomenology*. These are criticized one by one in all the points that he considers to be inconsistent.

Therefore, Kant's *critical philosophy* is the first to draw Blaga's attention. The philosopher of Königsberg believed himself to have demonstrated once and for all the impossibility of *metaphysics as science* – at least as it was understood by his forerunners, the philosophers of “pure

reason.” However, as Blaga claimed, Kant has remained the prisoner of an undeclared metaphysics. Obviously, critical philosophy has the merit of having formulated an explanation of the possibility of Newtonian science as well as performing the most devastating examination of classical metaphysics. Nevertheless, it does not succeed in providing the promised arguments necessary for a future metaphysics. For instance, in the problem of Kantian antinomies, Blaga builds three counter-arguments:

1) Metaphysical thinking does not always and inevitably lead to antinomies;

2) Even if it did, the outcomes of this sort of thinking would not be vitiated, because it remains possible that the antinomic content may be of positive cognitive use;

3) To accept the impermanence of metaphysical conceptions does not necessarily entail giving up this kind of spiritual creation, which is structurally rooted in human beings.¹¹

Blaga's ontological distinction between human existence in the practical-empirical world with the scope of self preservation and existence in the horizon of mystery and for its revelation has as a result two types of knowledge (“*paradisaic*” and “*luciferic*”). Kant's epistemology, with a *priori* intuition, categories, and principles belongs to the first horizon. The second contains the theoretical creations that aim at the *transcendent*; these are orientated and modelled through *stylistic categories* and a *stylistic matrix* of local and historic-ethnic characteristics as well as actuated by what Blaga calls “*luciferic knowledge*.” Besides Kant's categories, the stylistic categories shape science, as is shown by its historical modes. Since “knowledge of objective and universal value is possible only within the horizon of existence with the view toward self preservation and perpetuation of human kind. On the contrary, ‘high’ knowledge, which overtakes experience's borders, is oriented by forces and trends that are centered in the depth of the subconscious. This will be, inevitably, a subjective knowledge and will have a relative value... An ontological distinction between the two horizons of existence sustains the epistemological distinction between the two kinds of knowledge. Epistemology does not found, but legitimates the metaphysical engagement.”¹²

Another major philosophical theory that Blaga criticizes is *positivism*. From A. Comte until E. Mach and Blaga's contemporaries in logical positivism (i.e. the “neo-Positivism” of the Vienna Circle), this trend has shown itself as an explicitly anti-metaphysical tendency, an even more radical one than that found in Kant. For instance, logical positivism identifies as the object of scientific knowledge the description of facts, ignoring the subtle dialectic between the given and the “constructive” elements of knowledge. Thus Blaga sees favorable conditions for beginning a decisive battle against the extremism of pure positivism, particularly concerning logical empiricism's claim to found scientific propositions on

sense-data as well as the assumption that the role of philosophy is limited to clarifying the problems of scientific language. Blaga becomes ironic and perhaps sarcastic when he speaks about the claim of neo-positivism to “overtake” metaphysics – Carnap used the term “*Überwindung*”, translated into English by “*elimination*” – in the aim of reaching the “scientific conception about the world”; thus, the Romanian philosopher invokes the image of Don Quijote as a modern “positivist” knight who shatters his spears upon metaphysics. In the positivist vision, philosophy is relegated to a role similar to what it had in the Middle-Ages: then, it was the servant of theology; now, it will be the servant of science.

Blaga's irony captures the initial exaggerations of logical empiricism, which couldn't be sustained in their original form even by those authors themselves. On the other hand, even if one did accept the conclusion that traditional metaphysical problems have become obsolete today, this would not entail that it is compulsory to forever treat them in the same traditional manner. According to the general idea of what Blaga has written, new metaphysical systems or theories do not make ancient ones useless, since each and every one of them is a “world in itself,” somehow autonomous of all others.

In fact, Blaga stressed precisely the “constructive” character of theoretical knowledge, which was very different from the way his philosophical contemporaries, dominated by the positivist view of scientific knowledge, have seen the history and philosophy of science. Science is irreducible to the scheme *facts-explanations*, because the researchers' *scientific ideal of explanation* plays the very important part of *imperative* or *standard* of theoretical explanation. Furthermore, as if he had anticipated the historical-critical paradigm in philosophy of science, Blaga asserted that even observing and interpreting facts is a process strongly influenced by the stylistic co-ordinates of thinking. By only strictly logical means, very often invoked by especially “positivist” scientists, one would never reach the creative act of thinking (i.e. hypothesis, theories, explanations etc.); on the contrary, it would be like a tautological endless cycle. From this point of view, neo-positivism could not have been anything other than the “act whereby philosophy commits suicide” as the result of “fully drying the spirit out of cultural creations.”¹³

Finally, *phenomenology* could not escape a strong critique; Blaga calls it “phenomenologism”, under this name being included both E. Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and M. Heidegger's existential phenomenology. The Romanian philosopher associates phenomenology and neo-positivism, according to the criterion of “one-dimensionality,” as the outcome of ignoring the duality of knowledge.

From its inception, the phenomenological process – the definition of phenomena in terms of contents of the acts of “pure” consciousness – draws Blaga's critique, even though he recognizes some of its merits. Within phenomenology, an unprecedented high lucidity of consciousness

is attained, however, at the cost of a high 'deflation' of philosophical problems. It is as if these problems are "exterminated." Like positivism or logical empiricism, phenomenology identifies through phenomenological reduction a large number of false problems in the history of philosophy. Here Blaga's main idea is that if a phenomenon receives only one "phenomenological diagnosis," it could, on the contrary, entail more or many "constructive" comments. His verdict will be, therefore, a predictable one: "phenomenologism with its anti-constructive spirit does not appear to us at all to be the beginning of a great philosophical movement – as so many people believe. It is rather an end, a conclusion for philosophy up to today. It is a *Sackgasse*, a blind alley that may show landscapes worthy to be seen, but it is not a *road*."¹⁴

In contrast, the road that Blaga chose was a very different one: metaphysics as a system based on creative thinking. In his view, critical dialogue with other major philosophies is a necessary "clearing of the ground" that allows subsequent planting of seeds for a future harvest. The metaphysics of knowledge that Blaga outlined has as a principal pillar the duality *paradisaic-luciferic*, the latter being almost always in the history of philosophy unrecognized and reduced to the former. This has been the common error of critical philosophy, positivism, and phenomenology: to consider knowledge as a unidirectional, linear process. On the contrary, Blaga writes about two kinds of knowledge, very opposite by nature; where luciferic knowledge "invades" paradisaic knowledge, there arises *something new*.¹⁵

3. Blaga's Metaphysics – Contemporary Issues

3.1. Epistemology and Philosophy of Religion

In Lucian Blaga's metaphysics of knowledge, the relationship as well as the difference between paradisaic and luciferic knowledge is essential. *Paradisaic* is the kind of knowledge in which the subject moves unidirectional, from one problem to another, finding solutions to them one by one, all on the same basis. Here, there is no possibility of any "dramatic" breakthrough, nothing like a discovery of a new way of knowledge, whose consequences would lead to reconsidering the former way of knowing. Paradisaic knowledge is characteristic of classical science, subsequently to classical pre-critical metaphysics and critical philosophy. In contrast, *luciferic* knowledge surfaces each time that something paradoxical occurs in science or metaphysics, a problem that is insoluble with the usual or standard means of thinking. In this situation the human mind can no longer operate using traditional methods, so it has to find something new. Blaga's metaphysics is a plea for the importance of luciferic knowledge as a possible way to account for the contradictions that arose in paradisaic knowledge in the first decades of the 20th century, for example, the paradoxes of quantum mechanics.

A comparison with T. Kuhn's theory of paradigms has been made by Dr. Angela Botez: *paradisaic knowledge is in some way similar to the growth of knowledge within a constituted paradigm, while luciferic knowledge corresponds to the occurrence of an anomaly which increases until it breaks out of the shell of the old paradigm, giving birth to a new one.*¹⁶ If *paradisaic knowledge realizes an "uninterrupted non-historical progress,"*¹⁷ then *luciferic knowledge has its rhythm and adventures.* At last, Blaga's attitude is also understandable because his metaphysical system has its own history and "adventures," in the search for the "true philosophical consciousness" – the untouchable ideal towards which every spiritually gifted human being aims.

In spite of his outstanding philosophical and cultural achievements, Blaga is still little known outside of Romania, and what needs to be done is to pursue the difficult task of translating and commenting on his philosophical works in international languages, English being the first priority. An American interpreter of Blaga's philosophy puts the problem this way: "It seems evident that Romania has the obligation to make this striking philosopher available to the rest of the world: for the sake of the understanding and appreciation of differences, for the sake of inter-ideological communication, and for the sake of the other philosophical insights that the world will find in his work."¹⁸ We believe that, from the point of view of making Blaga's thoughts known abroad, it is of utmost importance to come back to his theoretical sources as well, in order to make clear to the foreign reader some "fresh insights" which the philosophy of Blaga could bring to contemporary philosophical issues.

According to M. S. Jones, such contributions – especially concerning the problem of inter-religious understanding – could be found, for instance, in Blaga's philosophy of culture¹⁹ and in his philosophy of religion, which "should be seen as a corollary of his metaphysics and philosophy of culture."²⁰ Due to the fact that Blaga conceives of knowledge as belonging of two types (type I – *paradisaic* and type II – *luciferic*), it is possible to analyze religion – as well as other ideological systems – from this point of view. "Religious beliefs of the type I sort involve truth-claims of a correspondence nature that can be easily communicated and are relatively easy to verify or falsify [i.e. simple claims or "natural" truth, easy to understand and test – n.ns.]... Religious beliefs of the type II sort involve creative constructs that provide theoretical explanations of the issues relevant to the particular belief system."²¹ But, when one wants to understand and dialogue with adherents of another religion, the challenge shows itself most intensely at the moment of dealing with type II beliefs: "... religious beliefs of the type II sort involve truth-claims that are constructivist, claims that involve judgments of appreciation in addition to judgments of correspondence. Sometimes these beliefs cannot be easily communicated and are difficult or impossible to verify or falsify."²²

For Blaga, *relativity* is specific to all human beliefs, and therefore to all religions. Furthermore, none of them has supremacy over the others. This makes inter-religious dialogue both possible and necessary; on our interpretation, this is a particular case of cross-cultural communication. As to its status, "Religion needs neither objectivity nor apodicticity to be legitimate. According to Blaga, religion is legitimated by two other considerations: 1. Its status as a cultural creation, an attempt at revelation of mystery in accord with human destiny; and 2. Its status as a manifestation of the human tendency to self-summation and self-surpassing in correlation with the ultimate mysteries of existence. Perhaps it could be stated that, according to Blaga, religion is not validated by its grasp of the transcendent but rather by its reach for it."²³ Morality and openness are necessary conditions for the successful dialogue between religions; however, these were not aims of Blaga's metaphysics.

We must mention that, in our times, inter-religious dialogue has become a problem which, during Blaga's time, had a very different importance and scale, both in theory and in practice. Therefore, Blaga did not address it directly as such within his philosophical system; now, one has to conjecture the most likely interpretation of this problem for present-day debates, according to the implications of Blaga's metaphysics.

It has been stressed that, recognizing the existence of debate within contemporary philosophy on whether or not inter-religious understanding is possible, "Inter-religious dialogue has become a very important theater of religious and philosophical reflection. However, frustration is a common experience in inter-religious dialogue. This has led to a dialogue about dialogue."²⁴ This is something that, in the Blagian spirit (which often means *meta-philosophy*), relates to *meta-reflexivity*. Regardless of whether the dialogue between religions will succeed or fail, in either case one can philosophize about it and assess it using some of the presuppositions assumed by the Romanian thinker. Meta-reflexivity could sometimes be the needed means of escape from such a stalemate, each "camp" being committed to reflect upon and understand the arguments of other side. We must, however, point out that one does not need to share, in all their depth, *all* of his presuppositions; for instance, in order to account for the fact that cultural factors ultimately make possible inter-religious understanding, there is no need to share the view that the *Great Anonymous* is protecting itself from possible "unraveling" through adequate human revelation of mysteries. Nor is it required that one completely agree with the idea of "stylistic braking" as a method employed by the *Great Anonymous* for preserving both its hegemony and the order of creation.

Following a N. Chomsky's suggestion concerning the reducibility of belief systems, Jones drafts an entailment of Blaga's metaphysics on inter-religious dialogue: the existence of "environmental commonalities" allow "some areas of overlap"²⁵ between stylistic matrices, thus the dialogue between cultures (including religions) becomes possible: "The question of

whether it is really possible to overcome cultural barriers and have effective cross-cultural communication is not a new one. Many have argued that cross-cultural communication is doomed to produce misunderstanding. Blaga takes it as evident that this is not always the case. He argues that any overlapping elements of two different stylistic matrices facilitate communication between the matrices. He states that points in common can be sufficient not only for communication between the two, but also make possible the influencing of one culture by another and the 'contaminating' of one culture by another."²⁶ From the position of epistemology and philosophy of science, this would ensure a degree of redundancy high enough to enable both sides to negotiate with each other. And, since they communicate, they come to influence each other, too.

But, given the differences between cultures, the specifics of different belief systems should also be and are preserved. This is an ingenious and relevant conclusion for the practice of inter-religious dialogue.²⁷ However, even if at the theoretical level this seems to be an undeniable truth, it does not seem so easy to implement in everyday-life. Who can guarantee that those who want to communicate from one religious belief to another (and perhaps find themselves in difficulty) would be willing to study and share L. Blaga's philosophy of culture/ religion? It seems to us that it would be almost impossible for those who desire peace and understanding among religions to equally value differences and commonalities. This remains an option (which does not necessarily lead to misunderstandings) that cannot be decided merely by studying Blaga's metaphysics.

3.2. Blaga and American Pragmatism

But there are other much discussed features of Blaga's metaphysics. The amount and size of the contributions brought by Blaga's metaphysics to our contemporary philosophical debates is a wide-open question. In recent years, among the younger generation of Romanian researchers in philosophy, as well as among foreign professors and interpreters of Blaga's philosophical creation, there seems to be a growing tendency to read his system from the pragmatist point of view. The historical and cultural reasons for this may be the strong influence of Anglo-Saxon philosophy all over the world, and particularly on Romanian scholars after 1989. The inherent philosophical reason of it could be located in the fact that no serious comparative analysis between Blaga's metaphysics and Pragmatism has been yet performed. This is what Michael S. Jones has begun to do through a recently published article: "... one very American aspect of Blaga's philosophy seems to have escaped notice by most of his Romanian columnists. This aspect is his epistemological Pragmatism. It is the thesis of this article that Blaga's philosophy contains all of the elements necessary for him to be considered a pragmatist in the American sense of the term."²⁸

Jones pleads for the pragmatist way of interpreting Blaga's metaphysics, having in sight the Romanian philosopher's presupposition that philosophical and theoretical systems are justified by their fruitfulness. Furthermore, "Blaga seems to be aware of the circularity of proposing correspondence as both the definition of truth and the criterion of truthfulness. He appears to avoid this by proposing that the criterion according to which a proposition should be accepted as corresponding to reality and therefore as true is how effective the proposition is when put into practice. This is remarkably like the criterion of truthfulness advocated by American Pragmatists."²⁹ This interpretation stands on several additional assumptions, which could be detailed shortly as following:

a) Pragmatism is a school of thought particularly directed towards the theory of cognition;

b) Pragmatism has a "negative" element, since it goes against the current of epistemological objectivism which pursued the goal of apodictic certainty and sought objective criteria of truth; it argues for a more "modest" epistemology, keeping with human nature and the situation in which one finds him/herself;

c) Pragmatism has a "positive" element, a *de facto* criterion of truthfulness; instead of maintaining *correspondence* as a criterion of truthfulness, Pragmatism proposes as a more reliable candidate either *coherence* or a *combination of correspondence and coherence* and sometimes even the speaker's *belief* regarding the proposition;

d) Blaga's philosophy seems to be very far from Pragmatism, but metaphysics is not an insurmountable obstacle – there have been pragmatists embracing metaphysics, such as Peirce, with his "psycho-physical monism" or other pragmatists who have chosen *metaphysical realism*;

e) Blaga's epistemology has a similar "negative" element; it is his epistemological thesis of the impossibility of human "positive-adequate" cognition (i.e. the theory of the Great Anonymous, transcendent censorship, and the forms of "luciferic cognition"), as well as his *constructivism*;

f) Blaga's epistemology has a similar "positive" element, since he sees coherence and correspondence as complementary elements of a criterion of truthfulness; his epistemological position would be very near to that of Pragmatism, since Blaga envisages for the criterion of truth the effectiveness of a certain proposition when put into practice as a criterion of the truth;

g) Therefore, Blaga could be considered a Pragmatist, or at least a strong argument for his would-be pragmatist epistemology has hereby been brought.

We accept the argument that classical American Pragmatism has a correspondence theory of truth as well as a pragmatic criterion of

verification: this kind of Pragmatism is, in the first place, an epistemological theory that does not contradict the spirit of Blaga's epistemology. Of course, here one could mention, besides the criteria hold by Blaga as a sign of excellence in metaphysics (*internal coherence* and *correspondence with facts of the empirical world*), a condition of the third kind: *the consequences entailed by a metaphysical system*. While discussing Blaga's conception of scientific theory (for instance, Einstein's theory of relativity), Jones puts in bold relief the fact that, with regard to a criterion of truth, the Romanian philosopher has in sight the point of a theory that "works."³⁰

But what has Blaga stated about (American) Pragmatism? He wrote plainly on this subject at least once in his philosophical works, so one must pay attention to these reflections. Apparently he is not at all in agreement with Pragmatism.³¹ On the contrary, he has criticized it heavily, as he did with other famous philosophies that emerged during the history of thought.³² How could one, then, restore the consistency with the pragmatist interpretation? A possible answer might be that his own emphatic critique of American Pragmatism stems from sharing a widespread belief that Pragmatism disavows truth or denies the correspondence theory of truth. And it might be that, in fact, he was not criticizing the core of classical Pragmatism, but rather some exaggerations made at Pragmatism's expense, going along with the overrated rationalism of the time. By reading Blaga's philosophical works it is very difficult if not impossible to grasp which Pragmatist thinker he had in mind; he neither gives us names of Pragmatist philosophers (such as Peirce, James, or Dewey) nor quotes their books.

When Blaga speaks about Pragmatism he is not referring to the epistemological context of a theory of truth, but making comments on the efficiency or the utility of science. People, he says, like to speak about the efficiency of science, sometimes even to praise or worship it; thus, philosophy is disadvantaged, because it has – or it appears to have – little practical outcome. He sees a certain philosophy which overrates precisely science's practical function: American Pragmatism. Let us hear Blaga's words again: "This exaggeration, emphasizing a single aspect, returns to a mutilation of the meaning that science preserves for itself. Pragmatism's one-sidedness must be exposed... American Pragmatism would define the 'truth' of scientific judgments according to their pragmatic success as such. By the pragmatist conception, a scientific theory is 'true,' not for an alleged adequate relationship with reality, but for its virtues in relationship with human action in the given world. A judgment is proper not in itself, but for the services that it is able to bring to human action, transformed into a referential center of existence."³³

Secondly, Blaga does not deny that science has a pragmatic function, but this function cannot entail the dislocation of science's essence to consequences. He only wants to bring an argument against what he

believes to be a misinterpretation of science, especially of technology. For Blaga, Pragmatism is rather an exaggeration of a particular aspect of science and he excludes any reconciliation of his philosophy to Pragmatism. Let us remember the above-mentioned ontological distinction that Blaga has drawn between those two types of existence and their corresponding two types of knowledge (“*paradisaic*” and “*luciferic*”). Within this original demarcation, the technological applications of science find themselves in the first horizon or type (“*paradisaic*” – that of human existence in the practical-empirical world with the aim of auto-conservation).³⁴

When dealing with Pragmatism, he also comments on the frequent invocation of metaphysics having “no practical utility.” It appears that metaphysics is merely a “free play” of the intellect and this is what some people (the “utilitarians”) are taking for granted. The Romanian philosopher rejects such an idea; it is an assumption advanced from a point of view that it is not in accord with the human spirit: “Metaphysics would really be a simple ‘free play’ if the human being were living only in the horizon of the concrete world, at the distance of senses and with the scope of self-preservation. But, to define a human being this way imposes a constraint on the exodus on all fours from pre-history. The real situation does not allow such a reduction, because of the human situatedness in another horizon, the horizon of mystery. Man feels an irrepressible need to revealing mystery by inventions of all kind; by metaphysical inventions, among others. The horizon of mystery belongs to the structure – sometimes more clear, sometimes more obscure, but fundamental – of human consciousness. The thirst to reveal mysteries through metaphysical inventions is a needful corollary of this human structure. We reject the epithet of ‘free play,’ with which some spectators, rejected by the spirit, characterize metaphysical preoccupations. In the view for which we are pleading, metaphysical preoccupations appear rather as symptoms of a tragic seriousness, inherent in humanity.”³⁵

In fact, Blaga followed his own way, which is that of metaphysics as a system based on creative thinking. His critical arguments are pointed not only in the direction of Pragmatism, but toward many philosophies from ancient and modern times. On each occasion, he assesses a certain philosophy having in mind the pattern of his metaphysics (the two types of existence and knowledge). What he prefers to criticize is modern and contemporary philosophy, in the particular hypostasis of “deflation” (i.e. the reduction of philosophical problems). On the contrary, for Blaga, the mystery is something unavoidable and essential to a particular type of existence and knowledge/cognition: it is neither a limit of the theoretical act of knowledge nor a “thing in itself,” but a source and an incentive of the human being in search of its revelation.³⁶

Despite what Blaga expressly wrote about Pragmatism, his philosophical works contain chapters and paragraphs particularly

significant for the Pragmatist interpretation. For instance, in *Cenzura transcendentă* (*Transcendent Censorship*) he introduces the concept of the "Great Anonymous," saying that this is a metaphysical perspective/outlook, a mere *standpoint*, which does not need an absolute logical justification. One can test the resilience of this standpoint by the results that it produces. In *Despre conștiința filosofică* (*Concerning Philosophical Consciousness*), when dealing with methodological problems, Blaga writes that, at his very beginning, a philosopher can only roughly justify the method he uses. A method legitimates itself rather *de facto*, after it is "put to work"; through its capacity of organizing the knowledge-data and *building a world*.³⁷

We have the conviction that Blaga could be read and understood from the Pragmatist point of view according to these aspects of his metaphysics. What is relevant is that Blaga can be better understood as his system is subject to an opened discussion in the future – no matter what current or paradigm one embraces – in order to make contributions relative to contemporary philosophical debates. In this respect, Blaga's philosophical writings remain of continual interest.

6. Conclusions

Blaga's metaphysics finds itself at the core of contemporary philosophical and cultural debates in Romania as well as abroad. Taking into account its vast horizon means that one becomes aware of how this philosophy achieves coherence and consistence: through a set of systematic ideas related to the entire history of philosophy, introduced with every chapter of its books. For Blaga, the fulfillment of philosophy cannot be anywhere else than inside *the system*, therefore we have described its distinctness. But even an original metaphysics cannot avoid reference to the previous ones, and in philosophy the past is never negligible. It has been shown that Blaga, spiritually molded in the atmosphere of German *Lebensphilosophie* (particularly W. Dilthey), nurtured the view of metaphysics as philosophy's coronation in a spiritual world that aims at interior perfection and harmony. Thus appears the interest in the place and importance of historical issues in Blaga's metaphysics, especially in Kant's transcendentalism, neo-positivism, and Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, all of which are criticized on the common ground of their spiritual "deflation" or "barrenness."

Other prominent features relevant to contemporary discussions of Blaga's metaphysics are its implications for inter-religious dialogue, American Pragmatism, and epistemology. For Blaga's metaphysics, the distinction between the two kinds of existence and knowledge (paradisaic and luciferic) is crucial in order to understand the essential of his philosophy. His philosophy of religion, intertwined with philosophy of culture, allows the inference of some unexpected original solutions to the

great problems of inter-religious dialogue. As to the Pragmatist interpretation of his philosophy, we can say that it is one of the most hopeful at the present moment, according to his presupposition that philosophical and theoretical systems are justified by their fruitfulness.

Thus, there are solid reasons to believe that Blaga's metaphysics requires contemporary reinterpretation because of its outstanding originality and creativity as a system as well as through its exceptional conceptual architecture. Lucian Blaga proposes to us not only a model for philosophy, but also a model for culture. For him, metaphysics is not just an end in itself, but on the contrary, is a means of sustaining every kind of spiritual activity and all of them at once. He believed that the human destiny is to create spiritual goods and cultures as a way of fulfilling the eternal desire of revealing existential mysteries.

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Vidam, Teodor. *Lucian Blaga și filosofia europeană a secolului XX*. Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2005.

Notes:

1. Constantin Noica, "Filosofia lui Blaga în lumina veacului," in *Cunoaștere și acțiune. Profiluri de gânditori români* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1986), 290.
2. See Mircea Flonta, *Cum recunoaștem Pasărea Minervei. Reflecții asupra percepției filosofiei în cultura românească* (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1998), 35.
3. Lucian Blaga, *Despre conștiința filosofică* (Timișoara: Editura Facla, 1974), 20.
4. See, for instance, his *Das Wesen der Philosophie und Weltanschauungslehre*.
5. M. Flonta, *Cum recunoaștem Pasărea Minervei. Reflecții asupra percepției filosofiei în cultura românească*, 48-9.
6. The most specific statement of this is in his *Trilogia cunoașterii* (*The Trilogy of Knowledge*), the third part, *Cenzura transcendentă* (*Transcendent Censorship*).
7. Florica Diaconu and Marin Diaconu, *Dicționar de termeni filosofici ai lui Lucian Blaga* (Bucharest: Univers Enciclopedic, 2000), 63, 166.
8. Lucian Blaga, *Cenzura transcendentă* (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 2003), 34, 35.
9. Mircea Flonta, *Cum recunoaștem Pasărea Minervei. Reflecții asupra percepției filosofiei în cultura românească*, 55, 56.
10. See Teodor Vidam, "Lucian Blaga și filosofia vieții," in *Meridian Blaga* 6, II, *Filosofie*, ed. Societatea culturală "Lucian Blaga" din Cluj-Napoca (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2006), 246-57.
11. Lucian Blaga, *Despre conștiința filosofică*, 34-35.
12. Mircea Flonta, *Cum recunoaștem Pasărea Minervei*, 215.
13. Lucian Blaga, *Despre conștiința filosofică*, 37, 38.
14. Lucian Blaga, *Cunoașterea luciferică* (Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 2003), 104.
15. Lucian Blaga, *Cunoașterea luciferică*, 226.
16. See Angela Botez, "Comparativist and Valuational Reflections on Blaga's Philosophy," *Revue Roumaine de Philosophie et Logique* 40 (1996): 153-62.
17. Lucian Blaga, *Cunoașterea luciferică*, 227-228.
18. See Michael S. Jones, "A Philosophy of Culture Approach to Inter-religious Understanding," in *Meridian Blaga* 6, II, *Filosofie*, ed. Societatea

culturală "Lucian Blaga" din Cluj-Napoca (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2006): 156.

19. Michael S. Jones, "A Philosophy of Culture Approach to Inter-religious Understanding," 149-156.

20. See Michael S. Jones, "Culture as Religion and Religion as Culture in the Philosophy of Lucian Blaga," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, no. 15 (2006): 75. <http://www.jsri.ro>.

21. Michael S. Jones, "A Philosophy of Culture Approach to Inter-religious Understanding," 150-151.

22. Michael S. Jones, "A Philosophy of Culture Approach to Inter-religious Understanding," 151.

23. See Michael S. Jones, "Culture as Religion and Religion as Culture in the Philosophy of Lucian Blaga," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, no. 15 (2006): 79-80. <http://www.jsri.ro>.

24. Michael S. Jones, "A Philosophy of Culture Approach to Inter-religious Understanding," 145.

25. Michael S. Jones, "A Philosophy of Culture Approach to Inter-religious Understanding," 153.

26. Michael S. Jones, "Culture as Religion and Religion as Culture in the Philosophy of Lucian Blaga," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* no. 15 (2006): 74. <http://www.jsri.ro>.

27. Michael S. Jones, "A Philosophy of Culture Approach to Inter-religious Understanding," 155: "... according to Blaga's philosophy, both the differences and the commonalties between belief systems are significant. Neither seems more significant than the other within Blaga's system. The commonalties are effective in providing a basis of inter-religious communication, but they neither eliminate nor depreciate the differences between belief systems. Differences should be respected and appreciated as cultural productions. We should strive honestly to understand them, realizing that our evaluative beliefs are also culturally conditioned products of stylistic matrices." But, once again, how can we convince everybody engaged in inter-religious dialogue to learn and share Blaga's metaphysical standpoint?

28. See Michael S. Jones, "Lucian Blaga: An American Pragmatist in Europe," in *Meridian Blaga* 5, II, *Filosofie*, ed. Societatea culturală "Lucian Blaga" din Cluj-Napoca (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2005), 268.

29. Michael S. Jones, "Lucian Blaga: An American Pragmatist in Europe," 280.

30. Michael S. Jones, "Lucian Blaga: An American Pragmatist in Europe," 281: "There may be times when science proceeds via the gradual accumulation and analysis of data, and when one scientific theory overturns a previously accepted one by means of this process. However, it is very often the case that scientific data is open to more than one very plausible interpretation. In the latter case, a criterion other than correspondence is needed to determine which theory is most valid. In such a situation a scientific theory is not accepted as true because it corresponds to reality and rival theories do not; that would be question-begging. In this situation a theory is accepted as true because it is seen that it works."

31. Lucian Blaga, *Despre conștiința filosofică*, 143-151.

32. See above.

33. Lucian Blaga, *Despre conștiința filosofică*, 144.

34. Lucian Blaga, *Despre conștiința filosofică*, 93: "...scientist philosophies would themselves discover their total lack of dimension. When comparing them with the dimensional wholeness that puts in relief the great philosophies, the philosophical conceptions of 'scientist' orientation prove most often to be flat."

35. Lucian Blaga, *Despre conștiința filosofică*, 146.

36. See Teodor Vidam, *Lucian Blaga și filosofia europeană a secolului XX* (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2005), 31.

37. See Blaga, *Cenzura transcendentă*, the chapters „Cenzura transcendentă” and “Revelații disimulatoare”; *Despre conștiința filosofică*, the chapter “Filosofie și metodă”. Also, Michael S. Jones, *The Metaphysics of Religion: Lucian Blaga and Contemporary Philosophy* (Madison/Teaneck: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006), 62-4.