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An Introduction to Blaga's Philosophy for Readers of Zalmoxis

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An Introduction to Blaga's Philosophy for Readers of *Zalmoxis*

In his excellent preface to the current volume, Keith Hitchins mentions, but does not describe in detail, the philosophical system created by Blaga as a compliment to and source of his drama and poetry. In her forward, Doris Plantus-Runey, the translator of *Zalmoxis*, likewise alludes to the philosophical undercurrents present in Lucian Blaga's literary works in general and in *Zalmoxis* in particular. I would like to briefly outline this philosophical system for the readers of *Zalmoxis*.¹ I desire to do so – and the translator has invited me to do so – because, while Blaga's poetry is not slave to his philosophy, it is influenced by his philosophy, and understanding the latter will facilitate understanding and appreciating the philosophical aspects of the former.²

Blaga's Intellectual Formation

Mircea Eliade, the famous anthropologist and philosopher of religion, described Blaga in his entry on Romanian philosophy in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, as “The most gifted and critical original thinker” in the history of Romanian philosophy.³ This significant endorsement alerts us to the fact that we have to do here with a thinker whose philosophy will be deep, broad, and creative.⁴

Romania lies at a crossroads of east and west. Its history is shaped by interaction with Greeks and Romans, the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, industrial Europe and Tsarist and then Soviet Russia. It also experienced waves of invaders, from the Romans and Slavs to Szeklers and Turks. These influences affected Romania in many ways, giving her a Latin tongue with a multilingual vocabulary, traditional rural values with a modern, European system of education, and a respect for cultural diversity coupled with a strong sense of history and

¹ I have described Blaga's philosophical system in much greater detail, though not exhaustively, in *The Metaphysics of Religion: Lucian Blaga and Contemporary Philosophy* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006).

² While it is true, as Hitchins points out, that there is an obvious connection between Blaga's literary works and his philosophy, it is also true that there are areas wherein the two do not closely overlap, as Blaga himself pointed out in “Schi⇒a unei autoprezentări filosofice,” *Manuscriptum* XVII no. 3 (1986), reprinted in Diaconu and Diaconu, *Dic⇒ionar de Termeni Filosofici ai lui Lucian Blaga* (Bucharest: Univers Enciclopedia, 2000), 12. In particular, there are mystical and intuitive elements in the former that Blaga deems inappropriate to the latter, and a rigorous analyticity in the latter that would be inappropriate to the former.

³ Mircea Eliade, “Rumanian Philosophy,” in Paul Edwards, editor in chief, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, Inc. and The Free Press, 1967), 233-234.

⁴ Also indicative of Blaga's depth is the fact that Blaga was nominated for a Nobel Prize in literature in 1956, and purportedly fell short of receiving the award only due to the machinations of the Communist party.

national identity. All of this can be seen in Blaga's philosophy – and in his poetry and theater, as well.

Born in a rural village in the interior of the triangle formed by the Carpathian Mountains, Blaga's intellectual development was guided by three main factors: his parents, his schools, and his Transylvanian environs. Blaga's mother, Ana (Moga) Blaga, was the daughter of a Romanian Orthodox priest from an important family in the Romanian Orthodox Church. His father, Isidor Blaga, was the son of a Romanian Orthodox village priest, and although Isidor aspired to higher education, financial exigencies resulted in his appointment to the priesthood vacated at his father's death. Isidor was, however, an avid reader of philosophy, both in Romanian and German. While it can be supposed that Isidor's example influenced his son in this area, what is known is that the son later borrowed and read the father's books.⁵ Thus from his parents Blaga received an orientation towards Romanian Orthodox categories of thought and an interest in philosophy.

Blaga's parents bestowed on him at least one other factor significant to his development as a philosopher: a high estimation of the worth of education. Blaga's parents sacrificed significantly to send their children to private schools, first a private German elementary school in a nearby town, and then a larger, respected high school in a fairly distant city. At the former Blaga acquired proficiency in German, a fact that eventually had great influence on the direction of his philosophy, and received tutelage in the currents of German philosophical and cultural thought. At the latter he studied other languages and advanced his studies of science, philosophy, and religion.⁶ He graduated in 1914 with a final thesis on Einstein's relativity and Poincaré's non-Euclidean geometry.⁷

The Transylvania of Blaga's childhood was populated by three major ethnicities: Romanians, Hungarians, and Germans. Blaga's childhood village was a Romanian village, but the nearest town had a significant German population. Blaga benefited from this both because he learned German at an early age and because he learned to see and to value cultural differences. Furthermore, when Blaga determined to pursue higher education, it was the universities in Germany that drew his attention rather than those in Bucharest or France that attracted many of his contemporaries.

⁵ Lucian Blaga, *Hronicul II cîntecul vîrstelor*, vol. 6, *Opere*, ed. Dorli Blaga (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1979), 87.

⁶ Blaga's autobiography indicates that he studied Romanian, German, Hungarian, Latin, and Greek. He may also have known Italian and French.

⁷ Blaga, *Hronicul II cîntecul vîrstelor*, 140.

Because of the onset of WWI, however, and because of the availability of a scholarship, Blaga ended up taking his undergraduate degree from the Romanian Orthodox seminary in Sibiu, an important Transylvanian city. Although the degree was officially in theology, Blaga's focus was on philosophy. According to his autobiography, his professors were very accommodating of his personal philosophical interests.⁸ Upon graduation he enrolled in the PhD program at the University of Vienna, where his studies and his dissertation were in German. The influences of Orthodox theology and German philosophy on Blaga's thinking are both pronounced, the former exemplified by his Platonic and Neo-Platonic elements, his quasi-theistic descriptions of the source of existence, and the nearly apophatic elements of his philosophy of religion, and the latter by his Leibnizian metaphysics, Neo-Kantian epistemology, and Freudian discussions of the subconscious. While the influences of Goethe and Spengler on Blaga's philosophy of culture are obvious, his unique explanation of the source and purpose of culture itself may be at least in part a reflection of his Orthodox background.⁹

Blaga's Philosophical System

Blaga's philosophy is described as a "system" because it contains a series of complimentary elements that, when combined, result in a unified whole that philosophically describes and explains all (or nearly all) of the major aspects of human experience. His system includes a metaphysics and cosmology, a detailed and original epistemology, a philosophical anthropology, a philosophy of history, a theory of aesthetics, and a philosophy of religion.¹⁰ Blaga was especially known as a pioneering thinker in the philosophy of culture, which has a prominent place in his system.

Metaphysics

⁸ Blaga, *Hronicul [I]i cîntecul vîrstelor*, 146-151.

⁹ Virgil Nemoianu argues that Romanian Orthodoxy is a main channel through which neo-Platonic philosophy influenced the entire "Romanian school of philosophy," including Blaga. Nemoianu, "Mihai TMora and the Traditions of Romanian Philosophy," 594. Furthermore, it seems likely that the mystic and Neo-Platonic elements of Romanian religious culture influenced Blaga's creativity, see Nemoianu, *A Theory of the Secondary* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 164-166.

¹⁰ Notably absent from Blaga's system is a system of ethics. Blaga had at one time intended to include a philosophical treatment of ethics, but later decided to deal with ethics via aphorisms rather than philosophical analysis. See Lucian Blaga, *Opere 8: Trilogia cunoașterii*, ed. Dorli Blaga (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1983), 58-59. What Blaga's systematic ethics might have been like is discussed by Dan Santa, "Lucian Blaga și universul gnostic" in *Eonul Blaga: Întâiul Veac*, ed. Mircea Borcila (Bucharest: Editura Albatros, 1997), 396-400.

A central feature of Blaga's metaphysics could, with oversimplification, be described as a combination of Plotinus' theory of emanation with Leibnitz' theory of monads. In a Neo-Kantian fashion, he postulates the existence of a hidden, creative force or being who is the source of all else that exists.¹¹ This "Great Anonymous" or "Anonymous Fund" (Blaga uses the terms interchangeably) created the rest of existence by emanating from itself miniscule immaterial particles ("divine differentials") that combine in a myriad of ways to form the building blocks of our world.¹² They are, however, created in such a way that it is impossible for them to ever recombine into a second being equal to the Great Anonymous. In this way the source of everything else perpetuates its own hegemony and assures the preservation of the order of existence.

In addition to this differentiated creation, Blaga suggests a second way that the Great Anonymous preserves cosmic equilibrium: "transcendent censorship."¹³ While many metaphysicians have struggled with the question "what is the nature of existence?," and many epistemologists have struggled with "what are the methods of knowledge?," relatively few have sought to answer the question "what is it that impedes our answering of these fundamental questions?" Yet the realization of the magnitude of the difficulty of these questions is one of the key insights of postmodernity, and therefore the question of the nature of this philosophical barrier must be addressed.¹⁴ Blaga takes up this issue, and suggests an answer that is both surprising and philosophically fruitful.

Blaga proposes that this type of ultimate question is difficult to answer, and in some sense unanswerable, because in addition to the ontological limit imposed by the Great Anonymous upon creation (through the means of differentiated creation) the Great Anonymous has also imposed a cognitive limit on creation. He calls this limit "transcendent censorship" because it

¹¹ Kant postulates the existence of God as a necessary prerequisite to ethics; Blaga postulates the existence of what he sometimes calls the Anonymous Fund (or Source) as a necessary prerequisite to make sense of the nature of existence as we experience it.

¹² This cosmology is discussed in greatest detail in the following books: Lucian Blaga, *Cunoașterea luciferică* (Sibiu, Romania: Tiparul Institutului de arte grafice "Dacia Traiană," 1933), *Cenzura transcendentă. Încercarea metafizică* (Bucharest, Cartea Românească, 1934), and *Diferențialele divine* (Bucharest: Fundația pentru literatură și artă "Regele Carol II," 1940).

¹³ Vasile Băncilă argues that transcendent censorship is the backbone of Blaga's metaphysics (Băncilă, *Lucian Blaga: energie românească*, 52).

¹⁴ That Blaga significantly anticipated certain aspects of Postmodernism has been argued by the Romanian philosopher Angela Botez in "The Postmodern Antirepresentationalism (Polanyi, Blaga, Rorty)," *Revue Roumaine de Philosophie et Logique* 41 (1997): 59-70.

was initiated beyond the human “spatio-temporal horizon.”¹⁵ It was instituted from the very beginning of creation, and is now an inherent aspect of the cosmos, affecting all modes of cognition.¹⁶ It is accomplished via a network of factors, including obligatory epistemic reliance on the concrete,¹⁷ the intervention of a variety of cognitive structures (including the categories of the understanding¹⁸ and cultural style¹⁹), the resulting “dissimulation of the transcendent,”²⁰ and “the illusion of adequacy.”²¹ Transcendent censorship not only prevents humans from having positive-adequate knowledge of existential mysteries; it prevents them from having “positive-adequate” knowledge of any object of cognition whatsoever. Furthermore, the reader may notice that in contrast to Kantian epistemology, wherein existence is passive in the cognitive event, according to Blaga’s theory, existence is active in preventing itself from being known.²²

According to Blaga, the result of transcendent censorship is that all human knowledge is either dissimulation²³ (in which objects of cognition are represented as being other than they really are), or negative cognition²⁴ (in which antinomian elements of a cognitive problem are reconciled through the employment of a heuristic “theory idea,” which leads to a deepened understanding of the problem without resulting in its complete elimination), or a combination of these.²⁵ This does not indicate that Blaga is a skeptic: in fact, Blaga rejects skepticism as being

¹⁵ Blaga, *Cenzura transcendentă*, 451. See also Blaga, *Cunoașterea luciferică*, 404.

¹⁶ Blaga, *Cenzura transcendentă*, 453. Transcendent censorship was enacted in the pre-cosmic stage of genesis, and is not now accomplished through direct intervention, nor is it repeated. Its results also affect animals insofar as animals are capable of cognition. Blaga, *Diferențialele divine*, 184-185.

¹⁷ Blaga, *Cenzura transcendentă*, 456.

¹⁸ In distinction from Kant, Blaga says that the categories of the understanding are subjective, and that their number is not fixed. This is one of the central theses of his PhD dissertation, and is also found in Blaga, *Cenzura transcendentă*, 511, and in greater detail in the sub-chapter “The categorical concepts – subjective or objective” in Lucian Blaga, *Știință și creație* (Sibiu, Romania: Editura “Dacia Traiană,” 1942).

¹⁹ Blaga uses the term “stylistic brakes” [frânele stilistice] to indicate the limiting effect of culture on human cognition. While culture is appreciated by humans as a thing of value (and indeed, may well be appreciated by the Great Anonymous as an aspect of creation and human creativity), it is also a limiting factor in human cognition, since all cognition takes place within a cultural milieu and is culturally conditioned. According to Blaga, a result of the stylistic brakes is that human interpretations of the world are as much an expression of style as they are mirrors of objective reality, see Blaga, *Știință și creație*, 160-161.

²⁰ The dissimulation of the transcendent is the cognizing of reality as other than it actually is, and happens in cognition as a matter of course, Blaga, *Cenzura transcendentă*, 468.

²¹ The illusion of adequacy is the mistaken belief on the part of humans that our cognition accurately grasps objects in their essence, Blaga, *Cenzura transcendentă*, 450ff; 488-9. These are also discussed in the chapter “Fenomene, cunoașteri, cordoane cenzoriale” in Lucian Blaga, *Ființa istorică* (Cluj-Napoca, Romania: Editura Dacia, 1977).

²² Blaga, *Cenzura transcendentă*, 452, 456-9.

²³ Blaga, *Cenzura transcendentă*, ch. 3. Blaga also calls this “quasi-cognition.”

²⁴ Blaga, *Cenzura transcendentă*, chapter 5. Blaga also calls this “luciferic cognition.”

²⁵ Blaga, *Cenzura transcendentă*, 516ff.

too simplistic. He allows that both subjectivism and objectivism have strengths and weaknesses,²⁶ argues that all cognition is subjective, and explains how cognition succeeds in spite of its subjective elements.²⁷ Even the “mysteries” of existence are *approachable*, although not ultimately *reachable*, through the strategy which Blaga names “luciferic cognition.”²⁸

Human existence is characterized by two modes of existence, the “paradisaic” mode, which is the normal state of life in the world, and the “luciferic” mode, which is life lived in the presence of mystery and for the purpose of “revealing” (grappling with, trying to understand) mystery.²⁹ “Mystery” is a result of the protective limits imposed on creation by the Great Anonymous (transcendent censorship and the discontinuity between creator and creation). Through these means the Great Anonymous gives to humanity its destiny and its purpose in life: its purpose is to create, its destiny is to strive (through creating) to reveal the mysteries of existence. Through this artifice humanity receives a goal, a purpose, and the unique historicity that makes humanity so culturally rich.³⁰

Humanity was created to create. In Blaga’s vision, creation is the highest moral virtue, one that is shared by the Great Anonymous and humanity. Humans were created with a creative pattern in their souls so that they would participate in and perpetuate the creative work of the Great Anonymous. Therefore individual cognition, so far from being secularized as some suggest, turns out to be intimately involved with the transcendent, and that not in spite of its relativity, but exactly because of it.³¹ The Great Anonymous designed individual cognition, with its abilities and limits, and designed it in such a way as to maximize the advantages for both humanity and all of existence. Human cognition continually brushes up against the transcendent, fails to conquer it, but is drawn to explore it, to “reveal” it, creatively.

Epistemology

²⁶ Blaga, *Cenzura transcendentă*, 507-508.

²⁷ Blaga, *Cenzura transcendentă*, 512.

²⁸ Blaga, *Cenzura transcendentă*, 502.

²⁹ Blaga, *Ființa istorică*, 491-2. This results in an “ontological mutation,” a transformation from being a mere living organism (“the paradisaic human”) to being an organism that lives “in the horizon of mystery,” with the awareness of mystery, ever provoked by this awareness to reach beyond itself, to transcend its inherent limits, and to strive to fathom the depths of the unknown. This transforms humanity into a race of beings that create culture, and sets them apart from other living beings. See Diaconu and Diaconu, *Dictionar de Termeni Filosofici ai lui Lucian Blaga*, 209-211.

³⁰ Blaga, *Ființa istorică*, 503.

³¹ Blaga, *Cenzura transcendentă*, 543.

Blaga's epistemology is very detailed, so this summary will relate merely the most salient highlights. Parallel to Blaga's metaphysical distinction between these two modes of human existence is an epistemological distinction between paradisaic and luciferic cognition.³²

Paradisaic cognition is the most common type of "understanding cognition," and represents what is often taken to be the normal approach to knowledge acquisition. Its goal is the quantitative or numerical reduction of the mysteries of existence by adding new facts to human knowledge.

Paradisaic cognition operates through the application of Neo-Kantian categories of understanding to raw unconceptualized data. It views the objects of cognition as "given," as passive in the cognitive process, being given to the subject through intuition, abstraction, and imagination.³³

Paradisaic cognition is a function of what Blaga calls the "enstatic intellect," which is the human intellect in its ordinary mode of operation.³⁴ In this mode, the intellect seeks knowledge without attempting to transcend logic.

If paradisaic cognition is the normal mode of understanding, luciferic cognition is the abnormal, the exceptional mode. Luciferic cognition is a method of deepening the understanding of phenomena that involve antinomies.³⁵ It operates through attempting to resolve paradoxes that arise in paradisaic cognition.³⁶ It views the paradisaic object as a sign of the mystery that is the actual object. This mystery is partly revealed and partly concealed through paradisaic cognition. When a latent antinomy is discovered in an object, luciferic cognition approaches the antinomy with the tools of negative cognition, attempting to lessen the unknown elements of the mystery (this is called "attenuation of the mystery"). Sometimes an unexpected result is achieved: the mystery is determined to be impenetrable ("permanentization of the mystery"), or more rarely, the mystery is found to be even more mysterious than previously understood ("intensification of the mystery").³⁷

³² Blaga, *Cenzura transcendentă*, 459. The terms "paradisaic" and "luciferic" are found in Blaga's earlier writing, while in his later writing he switched to "type I" and "type II" cognition, which, while less suggestive, are also less controversial. Paradisaic cognition works within the cognitive boundaries established by the Creator, while luciferic cognition attempts to overcome these boundaries through the reconciliation of the antinomies that often stymie paradisaic cognition.

³³ Blaga, *Cunoașterea luciferică*, 315.

³⁴ Blaga, *Cunoașterea luciferică*, 315-6, 434, 459ff.

³⁵ A helpful article on the important place of antinomies in Blaga's epistemology is Stephan Afloroaei, "Antinomii ale intelectului ecstatic" in Dumitru Ghiță, Angela Botez, and Victor Botez, *Lucian Blaga – cunoaștere* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1987).

³⁶ Blaga, *Cunoașterea luciferică*, 349.

³⁷ Blaga, *Cunoașterea luciferică*, 325, 434.

Luciferic cognition is a function of what Blaga calls the “ecstatic intellect,” which is the human intellect in its most intense mode of operation.³⁸ In this mode, the intellect seeks a fuller understanding of the cognitive object by investigating the aspects of the object that seem to transcend logic. Thus luciferic cognition is the mode of cognition wherein the most difficult problems of understanding are addressed. Concomitantly it and its subdivisions are one of the most interesting insights of Blaga’s epistemology.³⁹

Whereas paradisaic cognition views objects of cognition as “given” to the senses (or intuitions), luciferic cognition views them as partly given, but also partly *hidden*.⁴⁰ Paradisaic cognition is subject to the “illusion of adequacy” - the mistaken belief that the object is as it is perceived to be, or more precisely, the mistaken belief that paradisaic cognition is able to grasp the object as it really is. Luciferic cognition begins with the dashing of this illusion.⁴¹ It provokes an internal crisis in an object, and deepens the understanding of the object by probing possible problems associated with the object.⁴² An investigation that stops at the mere defining of an object as it is “given” overlooks a potentially large number of other facets of knowledge about the object. The benefit of luciferic cognition is that it goes beyond this stopping point of paradisaic cognition.

The question of whether it is better to adhere strictly to logic and therefore reject some part of the empirical data, or to abandon logic and embrace an antinomy, is not easily resolved. Blaga concedes that the separation of intellect and belief would amount to the “suicide of philosophy.”⁴³ Therefore the philosopher must exhaust every possible means of reconciling an antinomy and reserve the method of minus-cognition as a last resort.⁴⁴ But Blaga argues that, in order to be true to experience, the intellect must be open to the possibility of breaking from the strictures of logic when necessary. And the only mode of cognition that is capable, to some small

³⁸ The term “ecstatic” is not intended to have any connotation of ecstasy as found in Neo-Platonic mystical union. “Ecstatic” refers to the state (hence “-static”) wherein the intellect functions outside (hence “ec-”) of its norm.

³⁹ To read more on luciferic cognition, see Jones, *The Metaphysics of Religion*, 105-17.

⁴⁰ Blaga, *Cunoașterea luciferică*, 316. “Given,” in this context, implies that the senses are passive in receiving the cognitive content, as in Locke’s “simple ideas” resulting directly from experience without any mental intervention. As has already been noted, according to Blaga’s proposed metaphysic, objects of cognition *are* partly hidden, by the Great Anonymous, and for very specific reasons. The distinction between the object of paradisaic cognition and the object of luciferic cognition bears a resemblance to Kant’s phenomena-noumena distinction, but has several important differences that Blaga discusses in *Cunoașterea luciferică* (320-2).

⁴¹ Blaga, *Cenzura transcendentă*, 489-491.

⁴² Blaga, *Cunoașterea luciferică*, 319.

⁴³ Lucian Blaga, *Eonul dogmatic* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1931), 262.

⁴⁴ Blaga, *Eonul dogmatic*, 272.

degree, of stepping out of its logic-oriented self and reaching beyond itself to something external is luciferic cognition.

Blaga writes that the distinction between paradisaic and luciferic cognition is almost but not quite captured by translating them as “descriptive cognition” and “explanatory cognition.” Neither is more empirical than the other.⁴⁵ And he concludes that epistemology that fails to take into account the important difference between paradisaic and luciferic cognition will necessarily result in confusion.⁴⁶

Philosophy of Culture

Elements of Blaga’s metaphysics and epistemology, most notable his theory of human creative destiny, the accompanying doctrines of dissimulated creation and transcendent censorship, and his epistemological constructivism, hint strongly at the significant role that culture plays in Blaga’s philosophy. According to Blaga, culture is an inevitable result of the human attempt to reveal/depict/grasp the mysteries of human existence.

Many Romanian commentators have interpreted culture as holding the central place in Blaga’s system. According to Blaga, culture is the *sine qua non* of humanness.⁴⁷ It is culture more than anything else that distinguishes humanity from other forms of animal life.⁴⁸ Likewise, it is culture that distinguishes historical events from all other events that occur in time and space.⁴⁹

According to Blaga’s analysis, every cultural creation involves three essential elements: concrete material, metaphorical expression, and style (analyzable into a matrix of elements). The concrete materials of a culture are the physical, intellectual, or spiritual materials that humans utilize in their creations. These are used metaphorically to express ideas, emotions, or intuitions that transcend the material itself. And the particular way that the concrete is metaphorically used reflects the style of the user, which is the product of a number of factors called the “stylistic matrix.”

⁴⁵ Blaga, *Cunoașterea luciferică*, 434.

⁴⁶ Blaga, *Cunoașterea luciferică*, 308. Blaga asserts that his explication of the rationalizing of experience in paradisaic and luciferic cognition distinguishes his own epistemology from all other epistemologies, Blaga, *Cunoașterea luciferică*, 364.

⁴⁷ Blaga, *Ființa istorică*, 292.

⁴⁸ Blaga, *Ființa istorică*, 498.

⁴⁹ Blaga, *Ființa istorică*, 371, 497.

A very important aspect of Blaga's philosophy of culture is his analysis of the categories of the mind and how these categories relate to culture. Although the Kantian influence on this area of Blaga's thought is unmistakable, Blaga adds significantly to Kant's understanding of the categories.⁵⁰ According to Blaga, humans are equipped with not one but two sets of intellectual categories. The first of these he names "the categories of the understanding." These categories correspond fairly closely to the Kantian categories. Their role is the organization of sensory data in paradisaic cognition.⁵¹

Contrary to many scientists, who take categories such as time and space to be objective realities, Blaga agrees with Kant that the categories of the understanding are subjective. Kant's reason for drawing this conclusion is that the conceptual contents of the categories surpass the contents of experiential data, and therefore cannot themselves be a product of experience, and thus must have their source in the mind itself. Blaga writes that the climate (influenced by the Enlightenment and the growing influence of natural science) within which Kant worked prevented him from positing a supernatural source of the categories, and therefore Kant concluded that if they are a product of the mind, then they must be subjective.⁵² Nonetheless, the conclusion that subjectivity is the only alternative left after the elimination of the possibility of an experiential origin of the categories is mistaken. Blaga points out that there is another option: the categories could be the product of a supernatural source that created them as objective.

In Blaga's view, the categories are in fact the result of a supernatural source, the postulated Great Anonymous who created the cosmos.⁵³ However, Blaga is in agreement with Kant that the categories are subjective. Blaga's reason for this interpretation of the categories is quite different from Kant's, and has to do with the structure and purpose of cognition. Blaga's reason for believing the categories to be subjective is that, according to his proposed metaphysics, in order to further its purposes in creation, the Great Anonymous does not permit humans to have objective ("positive-adequate") cognition. The categories are one of the means

⁵⁰ See especially Blaga, *Trăinirea în Creație* chapters 18 ("Câteva probleme de teorie a cunoașterii" [Some problems of the theory of knowledge]) and 19 ("Două tipuri de cunoaștere" [Two types of cognition]).

⁵¹ Blaga, *Trăinirea în Creație*, 176; Lucian Blaga, *Geneza metaforei în sensul culturii* in *Opere 9: Trilogia Culturii*, ed. Dorli Blaga (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1985), 407.

⁵² Blaga, *Trăinirea în Creație*, 184–85.

⁵³ Blaga's postulation of the existence of a creator of the universe is discussed in chapter 4: "Blaga's Metaphysics," in Jones, *The Metaphysics of Religion*.

utilized to prevent this. They act as both facilitators and limits to cognition, enabling subjective knowledge but preventing objective knowledge.⁵⁴

According to Kant, the categories of the understanding are a fixed set that is necessarily possessed by all people. In other words, all people have the same immutable categories of the understanding. In reflecting on this, Blaga observes that, while the perception of space, time, and so on appears to be universal, space and time are also understood in different ways in different cultures.⁵⁵ The categories of the understanding, though subjective, are not affected by culture (and do not bear the imprint of style) because they are not human creations—they are created by the Great Anonymous.⁵⁶ He accounts for the apparent variability of the categories by proposing that humans have two sets of categories, not one: the cognitive categories of the conscious and the “abyssal” (deep) categories of the subconscious (also called the “stylistic categories”).⁵⁷ The former are invariable, but the latter are quite variable. Space and time are universal concrete horizons of the conscious. However, their “texture” is determined by the abyssal categories of each individual’s subconscious, and is therefore variable. For example, space can be conceived as being tridimensional, flat, undulatory, arched, or other ways.⁵⁸ Based on its particular set of abyssal categories, the human subconscious attributes to space and time details of structure that are similar to but more determined than the indeterminate structures of space and time in the conscious mind.⁵⁹

The abyssal categories form a “stylistic matrix” that lies at the base of all cultural creations.⁶⁰ The immense number of combinations of the stylistic categories possible within an

⁵⁴ Blaga, *Țiîn⇔/Ți Crea⇔ie*, 185–86.

⁵⁵ Lucian Blaga, *Orizont Ți Stil* (Bucharest: Funda⇔ia pentru literatură Ți artă “Regele Carol II,” 1935), 137–38.

⁵⁶ Blaga, *Geneza Metaforei Ți Sensul Culturii*, 402; *Țiîn⇔/Ți Crea⇔ie*, 199, 211.

⁵⁷ While the existence of a subconscious within the mind is generally taken for granted today, in Blaga’s day it was still a controversial issue. Blaga was a contemporary of Freud and Jung and interacts with their views on the subconscious, see *Orizont Ți Stil*, 97. Vasile Dem. Zamfirescu contrasts Blaga with Freud and Jung in his chapter “Filosofia culturii Ți psihoanaliz| la Lucian Blaga,” in *Dimensiunea Metafizic/a Operei lui Lucian Blaga*, ed. Angela Botez and A. Firu⇔| (Bucharest: Editura Țiîn⇔ifică, 1996), 271–75. Regarding the stylistic categories, see Blaga, *Țiîn⇔/Ți Crea⇔ie*, 174–76, and ch. 9 (“Doua tipuri de cunoaȚtere”); and *Geneza Metaforei Ți Sensul Culturii*, ch. 5 (“Categoriile abisale”).

⁵⁸ Blaga, *Geneza Metaforei Ți Sensul Culturii*, 413.

⁵⁹ Blaga, *Orizont Ți Stil*, 109. In the words of Vasile Musc|, with the introduction of the stylistic categories, “Blaga operates a transfer of criticism from the upper level of the consciousness, the seat of the cognitive activities the analysis of which preoccupied Kant, to the dark basement of the subconscious, the hearth of creative activity.” Vasile Musc|, “Specificul crea⇔iei culturale româneȚi în c>mpul filosofiei,” in *Lucian Blaga*, ed. GhiȚe, Botez, and Botez, 469.

⁶⁰ Blaga, *Geneza Metaforei Ți Sensul Culturii*, 409; *Țiîn⇔a Istoric|*, 498.

individual's stylistic matrix accounts for the plethora of possible and actual cultures.⁶¹ Because of this important role in forming culture, the abyssal categories are constitutive of the substance of humanity, whereas the cognitive categories merely enable the integration of objects to the conscious.⁶²

Both the cognitive and the abyssal categories are part of the plan for protecting and enhancing created existence. The cognitive categories are one way that the Great Anonymous implements "transcendent censorship," while the abyssal categories are a means of implementing "transcendent braking."⁶³ The two types of categories work together to fulfill the Creator's "principle of the conservation of mystery."⁶⁴

The stylistic matrix is a set of stylistic categories that determines the results of an individual's creative endeavors.⁶⁵ The four primary components of any stylistic matrix are the horizon of the subconscious, an axiological accent, a particular sense of destiny, and a particular formative aspiration (*nazuin ⇔ a formativ*).⁶⁶ These, together with an unnumbered quantity of secondary components, make up the stylistic matrix of the subconscious mind. Two different creative styles can be separated by as few as one of these secondary factors.⁶⁷ This explains why and how creations within a particular culture bear certain similarities and also why they are not identical.⁶⁸ Furthermore, it explains why cultural creations have a sense of fittingness and context. A judgment that a particular creation "lacks style" may be nothing more than an indication that there are subtle differences between the matrices of the creator and the critic.⁶⁹

⁶¹ Blaga, *Geneza Metaforei Îți Sensul Culturii*, 412–413.

⁶² Blaga, *Orizont Îți Stil*, 133.

⁶³ "Transcendent censorship" and "transcendent braking" are the strategies by which the Creator prevents the arising of any cognitive rivals in the universe, an occurrence that Blaga indicates would destabilize the universe. Together they serve to thwart positive-adequate cognition on the part of any created being.

⁶⁴ Blaga, *Fiin ⇔ a Istoric*, 490, 502–3; *Îți Crea ⇔ ie*, 176 (footnote).

⁶⁵ The term "stylistic field" is sometimes used as a synonym for stylistic matrix, as in Blaga, *Fiin ⇔ a Istoric*, ch. 5, "Campurile stilistice;" see also 420, 485. Liviu Antonesei's chapter "Repere pentru o filosofie a culturii," in *Lucian Blaga*, ed. Ghișe, Botez, and Botez, 399–411, is a very nice study of the importance of the "stylistic matrix" concept to Blaga's philosophy of culture and the influences of psychoanalysis, morphology, and neo-Kantianism in the development of the concept.

⁶⁶ Blaga, *Orizont Îți Stil*, 152ff., 175, 179; *Geneza Metaforei Îți Sensul Culturii*, 410.

⁶⁷ Blaga, *Îți Crea ⇔ ie*, 176–78; *Orizont Îți Stil*, 175. In some places (e.g., *Orizont Îți Stil*, 177) Blaga lists five factors, listing the spatial and temporal horizons of the subconscious separately. In other places he includes the spatial and temporal horizons under the single heading "horizon of the subconscious" (e.g., *Orizont Îți Stil*, 175). I follow this later practice in my enumeration of four factors.

⁶⁸ Blaga, *Orizont Îți Stil*, 177, 182–83; *Fiin ⇔ a Istoric*, 420–39.

⁶⁹ Blaga, *Orizont Îți Stil*, 177–8; 184–85. The chapter "Interferen ⇔ e stilistice" in *Fiin ⇔ a Istoric* discusses the different ways that stylistic matrices relate to each other.

The stylistic matrix is the inner horizon of the subconscious, and functions according to its own norms, relatively independent of the conscious mind. The stylistic matrix is responsible for the unity of attitudes, emphases, and aspirations that distinguish one culture from another and that give to a person's conscious mind the support of continuity and to a person's subconscious the connection to a collectivity.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the existence of stylistic matrices witnesses to the creative destiny given to humanity by the Creator.⁷¹

Blaga's philosophy of culture and his epistemology are closely integrated. As already pointed out, according to Blaga's analysis, there are two types of cognition: paradisaic and luciferic. The former increases knowledge quantitatively, through the numerical reduction of the mysteries of existence by adding new facts to human knowledge. It utilizes the cognitive categories. The latter increases knowledge qualitatively, through deepening the understanding of the mystery of a cognitive object. This deepening of the understanding involves creative constructs that provide interpretive explanations of the phenomena in question. Since all creative acts are affected by a stylistic matrix, these acts of luciferic cognition are as well. They operate through the application of both the cognitive and the stylistic categories.

Luciferic cognition is limited by transcendent censorship via the cognitive categories. The stylistic categories do not affect paradisaic cognition.⁷² Luciferic cognition is limited by both transcendent censorship and the stylistic categories. Therefore all knowledge acquired via luciferic cognition is conditioned by the culture ("style") of the knowing subject.⁷³ The stylistic categories function both positively and negatively in cognition, and these two functions are intrinsically related. They function as a structural medium for revelation of mystery and as a limit to this revelation ("stylistic brakes"). Thus while the abyssal categories lead humans to create, they also prevent human creativity from reaching absolute adequacy.⁷⁴

Corresponding to the two types of cognition and the two types of limits on cognition, there are two definitions of truth that spring from Blaga's philosophy of culture. In luciferic

⁷⁰ Blaga, *Orizont* *Îți Stil*, 186.

⁷¹ Blaga, *Geneza Metaforie* *Îți Sensul Culturii*, 414.

⁷² This does not imply that paradisaic cognition is not interpretive—all human knowledge of this world is interpretive, even paradisaic cognition, which interprets based on the cognitive categories. Lucian Blaga, *Experimentul* *Îți Spiritul Matematic* (Bucharest: Editura *Îtiințifică*, 1969), 657.

⁷³ Blaga, *Îtiințint* *Îți Creație*, 199, 211.

⁷⁴ Blaga, *Ființa Istorică*, 492–94.

cognition, truth consists in a relation of correspondence between an idea and reality.⁷⁵ This is what Blaga names “natural truth.” This type of truth involves the application of the cognitive categories to empirical data. Because the cognitive categories are not influenced by culture, “natural truth” is not subject to cultural influences.⁷⁶

What is judged to be true in luciferic cognition, on the other hand, is relative to one’s stylistic matrix. What is judged to be true does not depend only upon the criteria of logic and concrete intuition. It involves style, culture, and a feeling of resonance between the proposition and the cognitive subject.⁷⁷ As Blaga states, “Judgments of appreciation, which refer to ‘constructed’ truths, will vary therefore according to how the people’s stylistic matrices vary.”⁷⁸ This is because what is being judged is not simply the relation between an idea and a supposedly observable reality, but the relation between an idea that is a theoretical construct and a reality that is not directly observable. The fact that the reality is not directly observable necessitates the constructive nature of the idea. The constructive nature of the idea implicates the incorporation of culture (since all constructs are cultural constructs according to Blaga’s analysis). And the incorporation of culture implicates the employment of the stylistic categories, as much in the appreciation (or at least evaluation) of the idea as in its construction.

That luciferic cognition involves culture in its truth-judgments has implications that reach far beyond philosophy. Science, the humanities, religion – and poetry and theatre as well – are affected by the stylistic categories. Like the cognitive categories, the stylistic categories both facilitate and limit cognition. In this way the two types of categories work together to fulfill the Great Anonymous’ “principle of the conservation of mystery.”⁷⁹

Blaga’s philosophy of culture also dovetails with his metaphysics. Blaga’s metaphysical system posits the existence of a single source of all other existents. It also suggests that this source created the cosmos in such a way as to both perpetuate and preserve creation. It created

⁷⁵ “ecua↔ie între idee și realitate” (in Blaga, *Geneza Metaforei și Sensul Culturii*, 417). Blaga is well aware that this definition of truth raises a critiriological issue, but we cannot enter into that discussion here.

⁷⁶ Blaga, *Geneza Metaforei și Sensul Culturii*, 417–18. Both types of cognition attempt to reveal mystery. The former does so in a cognitive way that is subject to specific limits, and the latter does so in a cognitive-constructive way that is subject to additional limits, 447, 449ff.

⁷⁷ Blaga, *Geneza Metaforei și Sensul Culturii*, 417–18; see also *Ținuturi și Creație*, 180.

⁷⁸ Blaga, *Geneza Metaforei și Sensul Culturii*, 418.

⁷⁹ Blaga, *Ființa Istorică*, 490, 502–3; *Ținuturi și Creație*, 176 (footnote). This is the principle whereby the Great Anonymous protects and furthers creation through preventing the arising of cognitive rivals that could destabilize the cosmos. It is implemented through the strategies of transcendent censorship and transcendent braking.

humanity with specific abilities and limits that both motivate and enable humanity to approach mystery, but that also prevent humanity from eliminating mystery.⁸⁰

Blaga's philosophy of culture elaborates one of the devices that the originator of the cosmos put in place to accomplish these goals. That device is culture, understood as a collection of stylistic factors. Culture is key to perpetuating the creator's creative act, for culture is essential to human creativity. Culture is also key to preserving creation, for it prevents humanity from accurately revealing mystery through creative acts, which (according to Blaga) could endanger the cosmos by allowing a cognitive rival to the creator.⁸¹

The creator, the Great Anonymous, protects itself from the possibility of human rivalry by the stylistic limiting of human revelatory acts. It also prevents this rivalry by creating humanity in such a way that humans put a positive value on style rather than viewing style and culture as limits imposed upon humanity (Blaga calls this tactic "transcendent conversion").⁸² According to Blaga's metaphysics, culture is a positive value, since it is the expression of human creativity and genius and an extension of the creativity of the Great Anonymous itself. At the same time culture is also a necessary and useful limit upon human revelation of the mysterious. The relativity that it imposes upon all human creations has the perhaps tragic effect of isolating humanity from the absolute, but Blaga asserts that at the same time it gives humanity a dignity beyond comparison.⁸³

One of the strengths of Blaga's philosophy of culture, and in particular his view on the thwarting of the human aspiration toward the transcendent, is that it confers meaning upon the relativity of all human productions. That human creations are always of finite scope, limited duration, and mitigated success is often viewed as a human shortcoming. Blaga's philosophy of culture provides an explanation for these "shortcomings" that shows their value and removes their condemnation. Humanity's aspiration toward the transcendent is laudable, and the failure to

⁸⁰ The creator uses the cognitive categories to limit cognition and the stylistic categories to limit construction. When humanity tries to penetrate mystery, it turns to the immediate, but this way is blocked by transcendent censorship. Humanity therefore turns to creative constructs, but that way is blocked by stylistic braking. Therefore humanity never completely succeeds in penetrating mystery. In this way humanity is maintained in its permanently creative state. Blaga, *Geneza Metaforei /Ți Sensul Culturii*, 450–51.

⁸¹ Perhaps this would be a destabilizing situation because a rival might not been in accord with the creator's plan for the cosmos and might attempt to introduce a plan of its own, or perhaps because this situation would result in war between rival supreme beings. Alternatively, it may be that Blaga views this situation as perilous because of the inherent contradiction of the existence of two ultimate beings in one cosmos.

⁸² Blaga, *DiferenȚialele divine*, 179, and Lucian Blaga, *Arta /Ți Valoare*, in *Opere 10: Trilogia Valorilor*, ed. Dorli Blaga (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1987), 631–32.

⁸³ Lucian Blaga, *Aspecte Antropologice*, in *Opere 11: Trilogia Cosmologică*, ed. Dorli Blaga (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1988), 293, *FiinȚa Istorică*, 467 ("tragic and wonderful destiny"); *Geneza Metaforei /Ți Sensul Culturii*, 459.

reach this goal is a result of important factors that are necessarily beyond the human reach.⁸⁴ The creation of humanity with an insatiable desire for the transcendent is, according to Blaga's philosophy of culture, neither indicative of a shortcoming on the part of humanity, nor an act of maliciousness on the part of the Great Anonymous, but rather is an expression of the care that the Great Anonymous has for its creation.⁸⁵ It is also responsible for much of what makes humanity special: human creativity and culture.

Resources for Further Study

This brief introduction to Blaga's philosophy has of necessity passed over many significant and interesting areas that would be necessary to a complete philosophical system. Blaga's system treats many other issues, including philosophy of science, philosophy of history, philosophical anthropology, a more completely developed theory of aesthetics, and philosophy of religion. For those who read Romanian, resources for the study of Blaga's philosophy are readily available. Many of his own books of philosophy, numbering about 35 in total if we include books and collections of articles published posthumously, have been republished in recent years. Secondary literature also abounds.

However, to readers who do not know Romanian but would like to learn more about Blaga's philosophy, resources are more scarce. So far only small fragments of Blaga's philosophy have been translated into English. There are, however, a number of articles in English that discuss aspects of Blaga's philosophy. One of the earliest sources is Mircea Eliade's brief discussion of Blaga in his entry on "Rumanian Philosophy" in Macmillan's *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Somewhat more detailed is Keith Hitchins' introduction to Brenda Walker's translation of Blaga's poetry.⁸⁶ This piece is 26 pages long, and although it is not devoted exclusively to Blaga's philosophy, it provides an excellent general introduction to Blaga's thought. Mircea Flonta's entry on Blaga in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy On-Line* is more detailed and very accurate.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ This philosophy was perhaps of some comfort to Blaga himself, whose struggle to reach God or grasp the ultimate meanings of the universe is reflected in both his poetry and his philosophy, as is explained in Keith Hitchins' introduction to Brenda Walker's translation, *Complete Poetical Works of Lucian Blaga* (Iași, Romania; Oxford; and Portland, Oregon: The Center for Romanian Studies, 2001), 45-48.

⁸⁵ Blaga, *Geneza Metaforie Îți Sensul Culturii*, 452.

⁸⁶ Keith Hitchins, "Introduction," *Complete Poetical Works of Lucian Blaga*, trans. Brenda Walker, 23-48.

⁸⁷ Mircea Flonta, "Blaga, Lucian." In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy On-Line*, Taylor & Francis Group, <http://www.rep.routledge.com>.

Virgil Nemoianu has two short but insightful discussions of Blaga's philosophy. The first is contained in the article "Mihai Sora and the Traditions of Romanian Philosophy" in *Review of Metaphysics*.⁸⁸ The second is the chapter "The Dialectics of Imperfection" in Nemoianu's book *A Theory of the Secondary*.⁸⁹ The Bucharest philosopher Angela Botez has published several articles introducing Blaga's thought and comparing Blaga with better-known philosophers. These articles are "Lucian Blaga and the Complementary Spiritual Paradigm of the 20th Century,"⁹⁰ "Comparativist and Valuational Reflections on Blaga's Philosophy,"⁹¹ and "The Postmodern Antirepresentationalism (Polanyi, Blaga, Rorty),"⁹² all of which appeared in the journal *Revue Roumaine de Philosophie et Logique*. Her article "Michael Polanyi and Lucian Blaga as Philosophers of Knowledge" is available on line at <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Comp/CompBotez.htm>. Another Romanian academic, Bazil Munteanu, has published an article introducing Blaga's philosophy in the same journal, "Lucian Blaga, Metaphysician of Mystery and Philosopher of Culture."⁹³

There are also a number of web pages devoted to Blaga. The *Wikipedia* entry on Blaga is quite brief (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucian_Blaga). The *Answers.com* entry (<http://www.answers.com/topic/lucian-blaga>) is more detailed, though it misstates that Blaga's fourth philosophical trilogy "remained in the project stage." (Blaga completed this trilogy, but was not able to publish it during his lifetime. It has been published posthumously as *Trilogia cosmologică*.)⁹⁴ The British philosopher and editor Richard Allen has several pages on his website devoted to Blaga (<http://homepage.ntlworld.com/rt.allen/life.html>) and a CD with extracts from Blaga's works. The *Welcome to Romania* and *Simply Romania* web sites also have pages dedicated to Blaga (http://www.ici.ro/romania/culture/1_blaga.html; <http://www.simplyromania.com/>).

⁸⁸ Nemoianu, "Mihai Sora and the Traditions of Romanian Philosophy," 591-605.

⁸⁹ Nemoianu, *A Theory of the Secondary: Literature, Progress, and Reaction*, 153-170.

⁹⁰ Angela Botez, "Lucian Blaga and the Complementary Spiritual Paradigm of the 20th Century," *Revue Roumaine de Philosophie et Logique* 37 (1993): 51-55.

⁹¹ Angela Botez, "Comparativist and Valuational Reflections on Blaga's Philosophy," *Revue Roumaine de Philosophie et Logique* 40 (1996): 153-162.

⁹² Angela Botez, "The Postmodern Antirepresentationalism (Polanyi, Blaga, Rorty)," *Revue Roumaine de Philosophie et Logique* 41 (1997): 59-70.

⁹³ Basile Munteanu, "Lucian Blaga, Metaphysician of Mystery and Philosopher of Culture," *Revue Roumaine de Philosophie et Logique* 39 (1995): 43-46.

⁹⁴ Lucian Blaga, *Opere 11: Trilogia Cosmologică*, ed. Dorli Blaga (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1988).

As far as I know, the only book in English entirely devoted to Blaga's philosophy is my own *The Metaphysics of Religion: Lucian Blaga and Contemporary Philosophy*. My article "Culture and Interreligious Understanding According to the Romanian Philosopher Lucian Blaga" will soon appear in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*. I am also working on a translation of Blaga's last book of philosophy, *The Historical Being* (Ființa istorică).

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