

A METAPHYSICAL MODEL: LUCIAN BLAGA

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Lucian Blaga is one of the most important Romanian philosophers of this century. His way of thinking bears the distinctive feature of metaphysical thinking. The purpose of this study is twofold: on the one hand, it aims to indicate Blaga’s place in the history of philosophy in general and in the history of contemporary philosophy in particular; on the other hand it proposes to emphasise the profoundness and currency of his conception.

The philosophy of Lucian Blaga is, as we have already mentioned, a metaphysical one. But metaphysics is still at its beginnings (see Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*) and largely continues to be in our lifetime too - in spite of modern and contemporary restrictions - an onto-theology, an onto-theological discourse. The subject of examination in ontology is the being, constituted in the last resort as the “ideal” form, the suprasensible basis or (inner) essence of sensible objects. The subject of examination in theology is the being which transcends sensible objects, or, rather, the “compounds” (for all sensible objects have, from a strictly metaphysical point of view, a suprasensible essence) and is separated from them but which, in its capacity as a principle, makes them possible. Some metaphysicians put the stress on theology without disregarding ontology (this is the case of some religious philosophers’ metaphysics); some stress ontology without expelling theology from their field of reflection and, finally, there are others who aren’t interested at all or almost not at all in (philosophical) theology - Husserl’s metaphysics of the transcendental subjectivity for example, or the metaphysics of the *Dasein* (also called fundamental ontology), elaborated by Heidegger.

Where is Blaga’s place in such a typological configuration ? Though not a religious philosopher in the proper sense of the word, Blaga is mainly interested in theology, but without neglecting the central themes of ontology. The concept of the transcendent being, of the transcendent itself is the basic concept of his metaphysics as is clear especially from

Eonul dogmatic (The Dogmatic Eon) and *Censura transcendentă (Transcendent Censorship)*. How does Blaga define the transcendent? The transcendent is, the Romanian thinker asserts at the beginning, that which goes beyond the human, that which goes beyond the domain of man's concrete experience as well as beyond the domain of his logical - abstract thinking and becomes a mystery, a secret for him. But the transcendent being does not only exceed the human being, but also the created being in general. It is the mysterious creator of all beings, "the original initiator of existence" [*Censura transcendentă*, in *Trilogia cunoașterii (The Trilogy of Knowledge)*, Fundația regală pentru literatură și artă, 1943, p. 445]. It is true that Blaga avoids calling the transcendent being God, as metaphysical theology proceeds as a rule, but it is equally true that he endows this being with the role of creator of beings which is specific pre-eminently to the God-Being and, at a certain moment (in *Censura transcendentă*), he gives him a name (the Great Anonymous) which reminds us of the "name" given to God by the great Christian thinker Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite.

But what is the nature itself of the transcendent being? Its "nature", as the Romanian thinker says, coincides with the antinomy itself, with the contradictory itself (see *Eonul dogmatic*). The Supreme Being would be a synthesis of opposite elements or of divergent energies. Thus the Great Anonymous differs from the transcendent being as it is understood by the Neoplatonic philosophical tradition. For Plotinus (influenced, as we know, by Plato's conception of the Supreme Good and of the One) as well as for the philosophers influenced by him, the transcendent being (God, to use an equivalent term) is an undifferentiated and undefined being, it is simply the One, it is the One in its absolute simplicity. But Blaga's conception differs also from the conception specific to Christian philosophy. According to Christian philosophers, God is neither the one, nor the multiple, nor is he the antinomy between them (see in this respect the treatise *About Divine Names*, XIII, 3, by Dionysius the Pseudo - Areopagite), but he is their surpassing, and the surpassing of the antinomy established between them in and through the Trinity: the number three "gathers", "contains", totals the one and the multiple and thus it is realised as perfection, as the completion (about the perfection of number three and of the Holy Trinity - see especially the writings of

Gregory of Nazianzus). On the other hand, for Blaga, as we have already pointed out, the transcendent is characterised by the constant antinomic tension between its constituent terms. This principle - which might be called a theological principle - “descends” to the level of the created; it penetrates its field of existence and it imprints its distinctive mark, that is, its antinomic essence, inducing the appearance of some ontological equivalents, of some forms of being resembling it, for example, the continuous - discontinuous antinomy in the field of physics (microphysics to be more precise). We might say that this idea which is however not very clearly presented, reflects the implicit tendency of the metaphysician on the subordination of ontology to theology.

The Blagian transcendent represents therefore the being that goes beyond human being and his world but which, nevertheless, founds them through an act of creation.

There appears, however, another - different - acceptance of the concept of transcendent in contemporary metaphysics. According to this, the transcendent being is not identical with the Supreme Being, which is beyond the human sphere, but it differs from it and it begins to signify man’s original energies and his structures of profundity, which act through themselves in a transcendental manner. Nevertheless, what proves to be most important in such a conception is not the analysis of the transcendent in itself, but the study of its “how”, that is, of the way in which it exists, of its transcendent being in its act of self - transcending or, in other words, the study of the transcendence through which it founds itself and it phenomenologizes itself.

Transcendence would therefore be man’s specific mode of being. But it would not be a mere mode of being but the mode of being which is fundamental in the totality of man’s modes of being, which depend exclusively on him and which have him and only him as the source of their being. We could say that such a transcendence develops in immanence or, in other words, that the surpassing takes place in the “interior” of its being, which reunites modalities of being that do not result from any external action.

Such an understanding of the transcendent and of transcendence comes from the first period of Heidegger’s thought (the period of the

fundamental ontology or of the metaphysics of the Dasein as he calls it in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*). The term “transcendence”, the most important one, has two main meanings with Heidegger. It refers first to the Dasein’s mode of being, through which this originally surpasses itself as a self virtually isolated towards itself as the fact-of-being-in-the-world or, to use an analogous expression, through which this makes in its self towards that something that is not identical with the essence of its self and which is the world, but which it configures in its self as totality which is significant for itself. The second meaning of the term refers to the concept of temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*). Temporality is the being itself of the Dasein or its original basis that makes possible the Dasein’s being as care (*Sorge*) in the complete structural unity of its components (existence, factuality, decay). Or, in other words, temporality is the condition of the Dasein’s possibility of establishing its being as care. Temporality that makes possible something is by its nature a transcendental temporality that comes out of its self, it is an “ekstatic” temporality, as Heidegger calls it. This is therefore the main feature of temporality (that is, of time specific to human being): transcendence. Rising “ekstatically” from its self, temporality creates a kind of temporal horizon that reveals to us the fact that the Dasein “is” always with a purpose. But temporality is not transcendent only because it comes out of its self in order to assert itself as an original condition of the Dasein’s establishing itself as care, but also because it comes out of its self “in itself” (*Sein und Zeit*, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1935, p. 329), therefore engendering an “ekstatic” unity of temporal modalities, a structural totality in which its dimensions - past, present, future - interpenetrate until they finish in a synthesis which is the “having been - presentifying - future” (*gewesende - gegenwärtigende - Zukunft*) and, similarly, forming a unity of “ekstatic” units in which every “ekstasy” contains the other two in the “temporalization” through which, in a relative manner of course, they are individualized. Such an understanding of time as temporality, an “ekstatic” temporality opposes that which he calls the vulgar understanding of time. The original character of human time, namely, its “ekstatic” being, its coming out of itself, its “transcendent” being, remains hidden in the latter. The vulgar understanding of time defines it as a succession, subsistent and closed in its

self by subsistent “nows”, by “presents” confined to their presentness and incapable through themselves to relate to anything else than their “presentness”. Neither the present nor the future can get really independent determinations in such an interpretation, as the former is only a kind of receptacle of past “nows”, whereas the latter is a kind of empty space in which the yet unconstituted “nows” would come into being. The vulgar, common, usual interpretation of time will be reduced, in Heidegger’s opinion, to an overbidding of the present and, on top of that, of an “unekstatic” present.

Husserl’s concept of transcendence is equally interesting. In his vision, transcendence can be called the philosophical modality of self - formation of the ego in its capacity of transcendental ego or transcendental subjectivity. It starts as being the same thing as the process of transcendental reduction by which the purely philosophical ego puts in brackets the “objective world”, as well as all actions, processes and attitudes related to the faith in the natural existence of the world (including those belonging to our psychic ego), in order to transform them into “phenomena”, i.e. objects for the conscience, intentional objects, ideal intentional objects. In the second phase of this transcendental process, following the surpassing of the empirical existence of the ego, the ego deepens into itself even more in order to “perceive itself” through an “eidetic intuition” in its capacity of ego cogito, of the thinking ego. This essential self - knowledge does not limit itself, though, to posit the thinking ego as pure self - identity, but beyond this restrictive self - ascertainment, it opens the ego towards a constructive potentiality of meanings. The transcendental ego of phenomenology is, of course, the ego that knows of itself that it is thinking but, in addition to this - and at this point it differs from the isolated Cartesian ego - it knows of itself that it is the aprioristic and universal Logos, which gives meaning and configures possible worlds (see esp. the end of *Cartesian Meditations*).

Nobody will deny the depth, subtlety and novelty of these philosophies which might be characterised as philosophies of the transcendence projected in immanence. But is this confinement to the field of ontological reflection or the ontology of the human enough in itself ? Man is a finite being, an “imperfect” being, a being destined to death. How

could he avoid thinking of an infinite, eternal, perfect being, be it only a possibility, of the “original initiator” of his existence, to use Blaga’s term ? How could he avoid referring to such a transcendent being ? The metaphysics of Blaga, as well as other contemporary models of metaphysics (inspired especially by Neoplatonism, Augustinism and Tomism) prove to us that an imperious necessity originating in the deepest layer of our soul is at stake. Let us add, hastily, that even Heidegger thinks, in his second period of thought, of a mysterious being which in its illuminating opening makes possible human being (the *Dasein* respectively), as well as the other beings. Therefore metaphysics which limits itself to the field of ontology does not seem to us to be the greatest philosophical idea possible. Metaphysics must be a theology as well, not theology as a science whose object of research is belief, but theology as Aristotle defined it in his *Metaphysics*, namely, the science of the “Primal Being”, of the supreme principle.

We cannot end this short study without making some reference to the way in which Blaga deals with the problem of metaphysical cognition and to where the philosopher is placed in the history of thought regarding this concept. The metaphysical cognition of the transcendent would be, according to the Romanian philosopher, a paradoxical cognition, a cognition that would not reveal mystery, but conceal it, keep it and in borderline cases even increase it. This un-knowing cognition is the work of the ecstatic intellect, that is, the metalogical intellect, the intellect which goes beyond the “logical functions” of the “common” intellect and expresses itself by a “dogmatic formula”, that is, by a statement which reunites opposite terms and it comes into being as an antinomic linguistical - ideative synthesis. The ecstatic intellect does not avoid using the concepts and categories of our logic but does this by defying its main laws (especially the principles of identity and of contradiction), thus transferring us in a supralogical level of understanding.

The metaphysical - dogmatic paradox aims at “determining a mystery preserving its nature of mystery” (see *Eonul dogmatic*, p. 66). To “determine” mystery is equivalent to asserting that in the effort of its “deciphering” we resort to its delimitation by concepts and categories, whereas preserving it coincides with stating that, beyond this effort of

determination, we have to accept it as something that, though it eludes the possibilities of explanation allowed by the laws of the logical functioning of thinking, is not “unconceivable” in this inner negativity of it. Besides, owing to the concentration of thinking on its inner negativity and to the great effort we continuously make to understand it and accept it as such, as an antinomic structure, mystery seems to become more and more incomprehensible to the understanding - which is nevertheless present, accepting it as something possible - thus increasing its feature of being a mystery.

Of course, this paradoxical cognition differs from the supercognition mentioned by Plotinus or by the thinkers influenced by him, which represents the mystical coincidence of the subject with the One, with God, with the Supreme Being (supercognition which goes not only beyond “science” but also beyond intellectual intuition). It similarly differs from supercognition referred to by negative theology, which also means the mystical coincidence of the subject with the transcendent (supercognition doubled, nevertheless, by our not knowing the Supreme Being in its essence).

This form of cognition, directed towards that which is beyond man, also differs by way of its finality and its “negative” result (it does not “illuminate”, but it “darkens” the cognitive object), of the “eidetic intuition” through which - in Husserl’s opinion - the transcendental ego knows immediately and directly its deepest constitutive essence, namely, the Logos, the universal apriori, the giver of meanings. It differs, after all, from Heidegger’s interpretation, through which the preceding (but unthematized) comprehension of temporality is brought to light, caught in the net of existential concepts and made transparent by language and enunciation.*

* Nevertheless, we could draw Blaga’s “un-knowing cognition” near the metaphysical modality of “containing” the transcendent being (God) through the “reading” of ciphers, a modality which Jaspers speaks of in his works (the ciphers or symbols “represent the language” of the transcendent being in this particular sense, for though we actually produce them, they are founded by and originate ultimately in this being). Indeed, Blaga as well as Jaspers, subjects logical -

Between the optimism of supercognition and the optimism of self-knowledge should we not find a place for the Blagian philosophic pessimism ? Why should we be so sure that we can become one with the Being beyond us in a mystic ecstasy ? Why should we be so sure that we would be able to explain even the last remains of mystery within ourselves? Why ? And why should we not accept as a final gesture, tragic, virile and poetic, the possibility of intensifying even more the mystery within us and outside us ?

abstract thinking given in its purity to a merciless criticism, and takes steps to surpass it permanently. But the criticism formulated by Blaga does not reach the radicalism of Jaspers' criticism. After all, Blaga still ascribes an important role to conceptual thinking and he does not hesitate to resort to the possibilities it offers in order to determine the object of research. Jaspers, on the other hand, refuses any reference to conceptual thinking, to "objectual" thinking, to determinative thinking; only the "philosophical faith", says he, only "existence" in its act of free relation to something which is transcendent to it, only a thinking based on the ultimate, nonconceptual nucleus of human interiority, a thinking which by dealing with the ciphers destroys the objectuality and possible determinability of the studied symbols, projecting us in the "evanescence" of thought, in the sphere of the indeterminable and undefinable, only this kind of thinking could "approach" transcendent being.