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THE PHILOSOPHY OF ROMANIANISM
DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD

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PhD Thesis Summary

In the history of Romania, the interwar period is viewed from very different perspectives. For some authors, it represents an era of real economic, social, political and cultural development, taking into account the fact that after the Great Union of 1918, during a relatively short period of time, there was a growth in the economy, particularly the industry, the social structures were set into motion, important figures in the scientific, artistic, philosophical fields asserted themselves, and in the political realm democratic mechanisms solidified. An awareness of a national identity instilled creative inspiration into the Romanian culture, a wish of the Romanian people to take a stand, which was voiced by Vasile Pârvan in his opening lecture at the University of Cluj on 3 November, 1919: “Thus spread your wings, soul of my nation, strike with them strongly and broadly the air of the world below and like an eagle take off to brighter and fairer countries”. On yet another occasion he contends that “it is not our fierce Romanianization, towards the ethnographic vegetative, but our continued humanization towards the human sublime that will produce the ultimate splendour of the Romanian creative culture”¹.

For other authors, the first half of the 20th century was “a period in which we went from one calamity to another, with two World Wars, a Bolshevik revolution, the rise of dictatorships in Europe and of the fascism that destroyed liberal democracies, an unprecedented economic crisis; it was a disheartening era whose growth potential was undermined by a series of disasters.” Citing such opinions, B. Murgescu puts forth a more nuanced analysis of the interwar period, during which time the socio-economic development met with fluctuations over time and unequal rhythms, from one country to another.

In what concerns Romania, there is an idealized image of this period, shaped in reaction to the communist propaganda which saw the bourgeois-landlord regime as marked by failure, when in fact, with the realisation of the Great Union, the ideal of national unity was accomplished, the agrarian reform was implemented, industrial production grew, Romanian culture flourished and a democratic political regime was in effect.

The data show that in 1938 the national income per capita was \$76, compared to \$378 in Great Britain and in comparison to the average of \$222 in 20 European countries. Also, meat

¹ Vasile Pârvan, “Universitatea națională a Daciei Superioare” in: *Datoria vieții noastre*, edition published by Eikon Publishing House, Cluj – Napoca, 2012 îngrijită de acad. I. A Pop. 71

consumption was of 18 kg/year, compared to 60 in Great Britain, textile consumption was 2.6 kg/year, compared to 12.3 kg/year in Great Britain, steel consumption was of 22 kg/year, compared to 227 kg/year in Great Britain, electricity consumption of 58 kW/year compared to 539 kW/year in Great Britain. The social indicators did not place Romania in a better position. The average life expectancy was 40.2 for men and 41.40 for women, compared to 62 years for men and 63.8 for women in Denmark, and the rate of illiteracy was of 54.3%, compared to 31.4% in Bulgaria, 6% in Hungary, 3.8% in France and zero in Germany, Great Britain and Denmark.

It was difficult for Romania to recover after World War I, as it made little progress towards bringing the agriculture up to date, failed to take advantage of the international conjuncture concerning agricultural and oil products and did not have a firm prospect of durable economic growth.² At the same time, Romania could not have been the exception in the evolution of the whole continent which, in the period following World War I faced some major changes. The Austro-Hungarian empire had crumbled and the Russian empire (“restructured” into the Soviet Union out of states which were forced to adhere, following a politically-controlled self-determination, to a new imperial organism) was driven back to its nostalgias. Having ceased to exist as a state on a few occasions, Poland was reborn, and new countries appeared in the Balkans and Central Europe.

The geopolitical structure was changing and a new equilibrium forming, where the role of the nations became decisive.³ The League of Nations was meant to manage them, although it did not succeed in every case. A national awareness took shape and, in this context, Romanianism tried to identify itself with a new dialectic. Although at some point during the hostilities it was on the brink of being taken over completely by the Central Powers, with the king and the government retreating in the last redoubt, Iași, after the war ended and the peace treaties were perfected, Romania more than doubled the size it had before the war (137,000 km², before 1918, and 295,049 after the war) and its population increased one and a half times (7,250,000 inhabitants before 1918, and 18,052,896 after 1920). Romanians made up 72% of the population and no minority went over 8%, according to the 1930 census. Romania was the eighth European

² Bogdan Murgescu, *România și Europa, Acumularea decalajelor economice (1500-2010)*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2010

³ Peter Rietbergen, *Europe. A Cultural History*, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Publishing House, London, 2005

country by size and population, which lead some Hungarian politicians to state that Greater Romania was as large as the former Austrian Empire and the Kingdom of Hungary had been⁴.

The reality was that Romania had returned, almost completely, to the boundaries of former Dacia, the new state stepping on the path to modernity with mentalities and traditions, but also regulations that were not always in accord. The process of legislative and administrative unification continued not without difficulties, seeing as its realization gave rise to a genuine clash of ideas and programmes. It was being said, in too simplistic a way, that the main confrontations were taking part between neoliberalism, the peasant doctrine and Marxism⁵. Of course, it is hard to argue that Marxism was just a simple diversion of the Comintern, but it is obvious that its ideological place and spread are greatly exaggerated in the Romanian historiography of the second half of the 20th century. It would be best to simplify things a bit, in favour of the historical truth, of course, and to assert that the main confrontation was between traditionalism, in its various incarnations and nuances, and the theories of progress in every field, with some targeting revolutionary changes and others only reforms, more or less broad. Some of these came, as well as their protagonists, from the pre-war climate, albeit they spoke out for sweeping changes in Romanian society. Almost all of them were fuelling, be it with alluvia, or far-sighted ideas, the theories and philosophy of Romanianism.

Draped in various forms of nationalism, with different tones and nuances, Romanianism represented the *sine qua non* condition of the political behaviour and ideological displays of the interwar period. Even those who were accused of representing foreign interests did not hesitate in stating that everything they were doing was for the triumph of Romanianism.

The idea of the ground-breaking nature of the philosophy of Romanianism strictly required an analysis of the relationship between tradition and innovation, between the accretions of the past and the opportunities of promoting new directions with regard to the spirit, and then the socio-political aspect. It was not the first time that this topic of discussion had appeared in Romanian culture.

A situation as complex as the one Romania was in during the interwar years gave rise to a way of thinking tied to the identity of the Romanian people, to the search for elements capable of explaining its mode of existence. In this effort were incorporated various humanities and

⁴ Ioan Aurel Pop, Ioan Bolovan, Susana Andea. *Istoria României*, The Romanian Cultural Institute, Bucharest, 2004

⁵ Ioan Scurtu: *Istoria României între anii 1918-1940. Evoluția regimului politic de la democrație la dictatură*, Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House, R.A., Bucharest 1996.

social sciences, but, at the same time, “Romanianness”, the identity of Romanians, is already interpreted from a philosophical and ideological perspective in what is known as Romanianism. But this concept is also created from various angles, so that the question arises of whether or not we are dealing with the philosophy or the philosophers of Romanianism.

To answer this question that deals with a vast doctrine, which purports to be complex and articulate, and is supported by arguments from history, psychology, social and political theories, anthropology, biology, philosophy of culture, religion, philosophy of history, from which, for that matter, it tends to be coagulated, we start from the idea that Romanianism is formulated starting with the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, but it establishes itself in the language of the era during the interwar years. Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, in particular, was the one associated with it, in public addresses and in various works, the most cited being “Romanianism, the Catechism of a New Spirituality”⁶.

This concept can be found, however, even before his time, expressed in broad ideas and theories of varied approach, meant to coalesce the constant effort of building up a national consciousness. “Who we are, where we come from and where we are headed” is a preoccupation shared by many of our scholars, from court historians to, in a bolder form, Dimitrie Cantemir (who was for a short while prince of Moldavia), and continuing with the Transylvanian School, the Forty-Eighters, Mihai Eminescu and many other remarkable intellectuals of the 19th century, and with those who in the 20th century tried to bring “Romanianness” to the level and prestige of philosophy. We can talk about ideas and elements of the philosophy of Romanianism in many thinkers, writers and politicians; there are remarkable philosophers of Romanianism, but in what concerns an actual, conceivably coherent, philosophy we must remain more reserved and employ the term in its broader and more traditional meaning of “wisdom”.

There is no school of the philosophy of Romanianism for the simple fact that we cannot tie the doctrine to the name of a thinker with disciples and a constant creative drive. There are, however, philosophers of Romanianism, who, no matter how prominent, do not seize one view or another, do not try to set up absolute positions or directions. Speaking of them, we must point out that, more often than not, their renown and credibility depend, first of all, on the resonance of their cultural oeuvre throughout the age. It is absurd to believe that there might be thinkers who

⁶ C. Rădulescu-Motru: *Românismul, catehismul unei noi spiritualități*, The King Carol II Publishing House for Literature and Art, Bucharest, 1936.

devoted themselves exclusively to Romanianism. There is nonetheless, among them, constant attention and action channelled toward Romanianism. Mihai Eminescu's ideas, for example, have great emotional potential owing to his poetic works as well, wherein he incorporates some of them. In much the same way, Titu Maiorescu, whose influence in the era, as a philosophy teacher and shaper of culture, is extraordinary, "lends" to the theory of form without substance his reputation and credibility. The same thing holds true, almost a century later, for Nae Ionescu, a thinker caught in the messianic nationalist movement, who was succeeded by his great disciples Mircea Eliade, Mircea Vulcănescu, Constantin Noica, etc. Subsequently, Lucian Blaga and Nichifor Crainic will "promote" their ideas of Romanianism through their poetic writings as well.

We can thus ascertain that a coherent, systematic philosophy of Romanianism is more in the realm of aspiration, than that of a theoretical representation. Nonetheless, fairly stable reference points and widely accepted views are established. Unfortunately, these are, on more than one occasion, disrupted by the ideologies of the times, some of them borrowed, and by political contingency, a fact illustrated by the same Rădulescu-Motru who was aiming, as we shall see, to lend Romanianism the shape and functions of a party doctrine, as other authors will try in turn.

Not taking these circumstances into account, even if we truly wanted to talk, without any sort of reserve, about a philosophy of Romanianism, we would have to ascertain that it is, most definitely, not centered on a unifying concept. Nichifor Crainic, for example, does not stand by Rădulescu-Motru in what ethnicism and ethnocracy are concerned, categories which inevitably define, in some respects, the essence of Romanianism. In the third decade of the 20th century, Crainic, the director of the "Gândirea" magazine, also laments the youth's pro-occidental mimicry, but does in no way head in Rădulescu-Motru's direction. As for father Dumitru Stăniloae, who was much involved in the clash of ideas at the time, he is indignant at the lack of the mystical component from the "catechism" of Romanianism.

Romanianism, has, at the same time, external determinants, and even if it happens not to have them, it defines its priorities in respect to certain geopolitical instincts. "Starting out by being good Europeans, we will end up by being good Romanians. The conclusion: Romanianism

is learned through Europeanism” – this is how Mihai Ralea reverses the viewpoints⁷. Ralea’s claims stem from Poporanism, a heterogeneous doctrine, which acknowledges that European aspirations, adapted to the time and place, are necessary for the believability of Romanianism.

The disagreement is, of course, much older than that, and it involves intellectuals of any stature and orientation, philosophers, writers, politicians. “It isn’t cultural moulds that we are searching for, but live contents”, writer Liviu Rebreanu stated in 1924, after having triumphantly entered the public consciousness with his novels *Ion* and *The Forest of the Hanged*. “Moulds can change; the content seeps into the souls and revives them. Romanianism will find in it the ways to its specific fulfilment”.

Faith is among the few aspects of Romanianism that is unanimously accepted. We point out that in mysticism and faith it is accepted only to the point where it establishes its function and role in carving out the national destiny. In his essay “Mysticism or Rationalized Work?”, Rădulescu-Motru states that we should not wait for everything to fall into our laps, without acting rationally, decisively, lucidly and competently, in order to harness the potential of the soul⁸. Even the legionnaires, in whose doctrine the Christian component is “sacred”, state that we cannot aim to be twenty million monks and nuns, wanting thus to point out the *activism* of The Legion of the Archangel Michael.

Lucian Blaga is the only one who integrated Romanianism into a system of philosophy, not only in *The Trilogy of Culture*, but in other writings as well. Moving leisurely between the plane of the philosophy of culture and that of the philosophy of history, even in the appendix to his only novel *Charon’s Ferry*, published posthumously, he remarks on the spirituality of the Romanian people, on their circumstances in European culture and history. Blaga is of the opinion that not only the moments of triumph and the full manifestation of willingness have a special significance, but so do the missed opportunities. This idea that we have a mission in historical Dacia, inside the area bordering the Black Sea and the Danube, with the Carpathian Mountains in its centre, is not to be found just in the romantic national enthusiasm of poets and artists. Some of those considered the wise men of the nation assert that Romanians have the obligation to fulfil a noble, holy destiny. Romania was seen as either a defence of the West and of the civilized world

⁷ Mihail Ralea: *Fenomenul românesc*, edition, scientific study and notes by Constantin Schifirneț, Albatros Publishing House, 1997, 153

⁸ C. Rădulescu-Motru: “Misticism sau muncă raționalizată?”, in *Revista de filosofie*, vol. XIV, issue 4, oct.-dec. 1929, 468.

against Ottoman invasion, and implicitly the defence of Christianity from Muslim threats, or as a bridge between the East and the West, bringing them together in mutual understanding of the values of the two civilizations. There is a vast literature in this respect consisting of impromptu poetic writings.

From the second half of the 19th century onwards, Romania opens itself up to the European culture and civilization. Cultural contact is no longer a rare, random occurrence, but a systematic one, supported and promoted by institutions. It is no longer a whim to study in Paris, Vienna, Berlin or Rome, but a necessity for young Romanians from Moldavia and Walachia. The Transylvanians will do it by virtue of their surroundings, because to them Vienna is inevitably *home*. To be sure, the national emancipation of Romanians is congruous with the Europeanism of the majority of intellectuals who, on returning to their country, give Romanianism the great cultural opportunity of expressing itself and of returning in the collective state of mind to a much broader horizon through arguments which are much more consistent and in agreement with the sciences and the philosophy of Europe.

Looking at some of these remarkable intellectuals, we try to shine light on the “unity in diversity” of their concepts, on the unifying element. However, before this, we will have to bring up, at least briefly, the Forty-Eight movement and its ideology, though the precursors of this movement are themselves reference points in the Romanian culture. Even without the protochronistic exaggerations and generalizations, Prince Dimitrie Cantemir (1673-1723), ruler of Moldavia between 1710 and 1711, remains, in Romanian culture, an exceptional figure, a reference point that cannot be ignored. Compared to the *titans* of the Renaissance, he nonetheless lived and wrote after the Renaissance had spent its immediate effects in Europe. This does not stop us from considering him a groundbreaker, a herald for the assertion of our national identity, and the fact that Russia too is claiming him should only be a reason for joy.

The offensive of the Transylvanian School, not only a cultural, but also an ideological, movement of the Romanian intelligentsia in Transylvania, from the late 18th century and early 19th, for the acknowledgement of the Latin origin of the Romanian language and people, of its ethnical continuity and homogeneity, exceeds the significance of that moment, echoing in time and generating remarkable consequences.

Mihai Eminescu, neither a historian, nor a philosopher with a rigorous training, but having a propensity to both, as well as a solid knowledge of both fields of study, represents, for

the age in which he lives, but also through a resounding echo, for the future generations, an important touchstone in the philosophy of Romanianism. His political writings are notable as well, although some of them have a circumstantial nature, referring to the political games of his era.

Maybe “initiator of the Romanian people’s self-awareness”, an often used designation when enthusiastically referring to Eminescu, is a bit of an exaggeration. But inside, it also contains the echo of his nationalist, patriotic poetry.

In Eminescu’s writings, especially the ones from “Literary Conversations”, “The Courier of Iași” and “The Time”, the articles about the origin of the Romanian people and language, the immigration theory, the relationship between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, as well as the need for a new perspective on history are the main background themes of his views. Romanians can indeed find out a great many things about themselves from Eminescu’s newspaper articles, about what they have been and what they should be; his ideas are not only of a conservative nature, they have substance as well. In any case, the poet becomes aware of the need for a philosophy of history, which would justify the fundamental directions of a *new nationalism*: “We do not feel that a philosophy of history is superfluous. The peoples are not a product of intelligence, but of nature, this has to be recognized. At the start of their development they require a fixed point around which their collective work, their country, can crystalize, just as the swarm needs a queen bee. If bees had periodicals, these would be staunchly *legitimist*.”

Thus, the idea around which Mihai Eminescu centres his theory is that of the country as “an institution of nature, and not of reason”. Taken out of context, this statement can illustrate a conservatism that lacks any theoretical grace. Let us not forget, though, that the idea of a society that represents *movement*, vitality, and of a state guaranteeing *stability*, had been formulated only a year prior to the start of the war for national independence. Therefore, everything is in the logic of things: a state which can exert its stabilizing functions authoritatively and competently becomes a *sine qua non* idea.

When structuring the interpretations of Romanianism, a series of attitudes emerge, of thinkers who, in their philosophical views taken on the whole, are particularly distinct, oftentimes in incompatible positions; we can even go so far as considering them antagonistic if we refer to their practical approaches. From philosophical thinking to aesthetic, religious,

political or moral thinking, the authors of the theses of Romanianism can only arduously be placed in a systematic frame.

This is why I believe that they can be represented through what each of them has brought as defining remarks to a concept. The multiplicity of their options is in itself significant because of the idea that Romanianism is a heterogeneous spiritual creation, with viewpoints that range from a highly humanistic and progressive strand, to a nationalistic and ultimately retrograde one.

In presenting the various representatives of the philosophy of Romanianism, I thought it necessary to organize them in a certain sequence in relation to the perspective from which they established their positions, but more so in respect to how they related to the available ways of asserting our national character.

Naturally, this presentation seeks to emphasize a possible contribution on the part of each of them in shaping the concept, in such a way that Romanianism can stand out as a topic more or less specific to the cultural tumult of the interwar years.

Thus, I have first mentioned thinkers of profound philosophical pursuit, in the spirit of some traditions that have given this undertaking a constructive character, meaning that they were supposed to be critical speculations on the identity of our people and the opportunities for historical assertion. In this category fall Rădulescu-Motru, Brătianu, Vulcănescu and Lucian Blaga.

A second grouping of authors can be determined by their appeal to an irreducible ethnic fact that should be stated in more or less exclusivist formulas: of a religious nature in Crainic and Stăniloae, of a political one in Nae Ionescu, N. Paulescu, Marin Ștefănescu, and of a cultural one as seen in Cioran and Noica.

1. C. Rădulescu-Motru about Romanianism

Motru's musings on Romanianism unfold in a very general plane whose premise is given by an anthropocentrism with a wide scope, where man is considered part of a universe in which he stands apart due to his ability to create and his adherence to axiological norms, which give life a certain meaning. Romanianism's *raison d'être* resides in the nation's historical reality, "tailored to fit eternity and not the present"⁹. The philosopher seems to go round in a vicious circle,

⁹ *Ibid.*

especially as one of the arguments with which he supports the triumph of Romanianism is precisely the tragic logic of history in the way the leaders of the modern era have taken responsibility for it. In comparison with Europe, though, we have an advantage in that our individualism is not of a bourgeois nature, “of lying in wait for opportunity to strike”, and seize it at any cost and by any means necessary. But he equalizes, this time without resorting to the expertise of the historians, the conservatism of the higher classes with the anarchic individualism, and collectivism, the national solidarity of the many (in our case, mainly peasants), with the mystical tradition. According to Rădulescu-Motru, we, as a people, have oscillated between these two contraries, Romanianism now having the redeeming mission of “ending the spiritual antagonism” that has alienated the Romanian people.

Viewed through the prism of philosophical thinking, Romanianism can be considered “an extraordinary reaction of the Romanian soul against materialistic concepts and methods, borrowed from the European culture and indiscriminately implemented in our country, in the economic and political life”¹⁰. The supreme proof of the falseness and the danger of materialistic *concepts and methods* is Marxism.

According to Rădulescu-Motru, it is still fairly difficult to promote Romanianism, because “our ethnicity has not sufficiently prepared our vocation”¹¹, which can be taken to mean that the historical accumulation has not reached the level of creation, so that “the compromises of ethnicity” have not been purified by the “the fire of the awareness of vocation” pertaining to a critical eye. Therefore, Romanianism is not just mere theory that would assert itself or not as time passes, but a spiritual reality meant to perpetuate itself over the years through the advancement of the nation-state: “What the normal state with natural roots does is put in a higher judicial order what the people adhere to when living their day to day life.”

Rădulescu-Motru believes that the political structure in which it is possible to fully achieve Romanianism is the peasant state. And it – he assures us – does exist, but its functions have been almost completely annulled, or, in the best case scenario, they have replaced group interests. Nonetheless, “the peasantry has seized the dominant position it holds within the Romanian country, thanks to the universal vote”¹². Placing, in his philosophy of Romanianism, the peasantry at the basis of the state, Rădulescu-Motru is happy to note that “the peasant state is,

¹⁰ Ibid. 120

¹¹ Ibid. 125

¹² Ibid. 150

for us, the national state". This is yet another promise that Romanianism will, one day in the near future, become the reality from which we must not stray.

He speaks about the Romanian spirit and the spiritual order congruent with the village mentality, about the qualities and defects *assigned/ascribed* to our people ("there is no other nation more reviled than ours") and, eventually, about the historical opportunities of Romanianism from an abstract, theoretical, invariably optimistic, point of view, bestowing to some assessments a dual role, that of premise, as well as conclusion: "Romanianism is the school of Romanian resilience. By this we mean that it is the essence called forth to give us confidence in the future of the Romanian people. We had onsets of political and cultural organization, which any people would be proud to have. And we still have enough stamina to successfully face an age of rebirth. We can again organise our peasant village, from a sanitary, administrative and economic point of view, to make a nation's fortress out of it. We have enough intellectuals, from all walks of society, to establish the basis of a new school with them, in the villages, as well as in the cities. We have the still vivid memory of the victorious war for the unification of our people. It is time that, after the unification of the people, we had the courage to assert ourselves and the faith we have in the nation's worth"¹³.

Although they must act united, "Romanianism and Orthodoxy cannot be merged without one causing the other to collapse, because the nature of one's spirituality is completely different from that of the other. Orthodoxy cannot carry on in the service of a nationalistic spirituality without losing its nature as Christian, religious spirituality; and Romanianism can only carry on relying on orthodoxy at the price of resigning its role as the promoter of progress in Romania's economic and political order. Their fusion, that some wish for, cannot happen in the future unless one or the other betrays its calling. "

The author of *The Energetic Personalism* is not, in the least, an atheist, but a metaphysician interested in the activism of the human character and the creativity of the nations. The Romanian people have got boundless reserves of creativity, including that of spiritual assertion. That is his creed.

¹³ Ibid. 212

2. Gheorghe I. Brătianu about the Miracle of Perpetuation

His musings posit a general problem: “For the past years, some historians that are not Romanian have once again brought up a *Romanian issue* before European eyes, a matter that we had believed to be solved”, concerning the continuation of our identity, of life on this land. By examining the theory of immigration in more recent works, of Hungarian, Russian, Bulgarian, Greek and Serbian origin, all marked by immediate political interests, Gheorghe I. Brătianu manages to highlight not only their inconsistencies and divergence from the most basic historical truth, but also their evasion of common sense.

Gheorghe I. Brătianu (representative of a new generation of Romanian historians, a new *school*), tackles the issue of continuation through *interdisciplinary* methods. There is an emphasis, of course, on beginnings, but equally as important is the spread in space and time of continuation, the institutions of perpetuation and the state organization, the alliances, the invasions, the influences, the capacity for assimilation, the social evolution to which our historian assigns their due importance. “If there is a key to enigmas and an elucidation of miracles – Gheorghe I. Brătianu ends his demonstration – they cannot exist, at least in the area of historical sciences, in unleashing the national passions and enmities”.

“An enigma and a historical miracle: the Romanian people” is a model, and, in what the writing is concerned (style, rhetoric), it is a masterpiece. The chapter in defence of continuation actually ends with this line, contemporary historiography considering its eventual resuscitation, with political motivations and goals, to be a false problem¹⁴.

The philosophy or Romanianism will continue to be proclaimed, with the tools of philosophy, by the new generation of philosophers of the interwar years.

3. Mircea Vulcănescu and the Pure Spirit

Vulcănescu’s metaphysical musings fall under the sign of this idea: “Beyond us, there is a single thing: the feeling of *the existence of a Romanian scale of values*. It is an absolute scale, which, although unprofessed and maybe loathed, has always dwelled inside of us, even in spite of ourselves. It is a scale which makes out of every one of us a witness and an instrument called

¹⁴ Mircea Vulcănescu: “O idee”, in *Criterion*, year I, issue. 1, 15 Oct. 1934

upon to shine it in front of the whole universe, as if it were our own justification. It is something which, if dark today, will shine tomorrow, something whose kingdom will come as destiny, as the vehicle for our own universalization and deliverance: *I was seeing the scale of all things Romanian*¹⁵. As it is clearly apparent, Mircea Vulcănescu does not so much refer to his own concerns, but to those of the most prominent representatives of his generation. The idea of the kingdom of the Romanian values as *an orientation axis of the spirit* will be brought up again in the phenomenological sketch from 1942: “We are looking for the orientation axis of the Romanian spirit in existence and the rationale by which we justify the right to be Romanians in the face of the pure spirit. These simple and philosophical things [...] are actually very important things which are, as we shall see, very tied to the meaning of everything that we do, be it willingly or not. These things are of particular interest today, in a world that is in constant transfiguration, in which a lot is at stake, in which every individual and every people is enticed by all sorts of formulas of anchorage into existence, in which they hope to pour their life in the future and in which the temptation is that of losing ourselves”¹⁶.

The way in which Mircea Vulcănescu puts together his phenomenological sketch is not an ordinary one, and the acceptance he gives phenomenology is, itself, a particular one. The meaning, though, reveals itself not through a specific definition, but precisely through the organization inside a broad argument of the Romanian *claims* about existence.

Mircea Vulcănescu maps out the Romanian dimension of existence in relation to the western metaphysical determinations that are contrasted, in both views, with the acceptance given to the *fact* of being and the *way* of being: “The difference is seen in the fact that, while for those in the west, once a thing is constant, situated in *space*, once it takes *place*, once this has happened, that thing IS; for Romanians, what is happening seems to have an existence even *before being* and it holds on to it even after it no longer is in the world, a *passing* and not a *coming into being*”.

Romanianism subsists through this effort of emancipation as well, in such a way that, at some point, thinking about the potentialities of language becomes itself philosophy. If we consider Lucian Blaga and Constantin Noica the thinkers in whose systems Romanianism is expressed through the idea of the astounding vocation of our language of creating metaphysical

¹⁵ Ibid. 113 – 114

¹⁶ Ibid. 110

images, then we are entitled to call Mircea Vulcănescu an immediate precursor, at least of the theory of *Romanian philosophical utterance*. With him, the philosophy of Romanianism takes an important step forward towards emancipation.

4. *Lucian Blaga and the Mioritic Space*

The rich exegesis of Blaga's work, although it contains divergent views, oftentimes noticeable, is consistent in stating, as Muscă writes, a triteness, that of placing his work in "a quite significant, direct link with the national folk cultural reserve, with the Romanian ethnic spiritual heritage"¹⁷.

Blaga's philosophical system was valued precisely for the fact that it applied categories of maximum generality to the national reality. In this way, he focused on the Romanian spiritual heritage, on his very own way of thinking, of feeling and of creating by offering an ideal approach to expressing this spirit. Blaga later set up a philosophical system concerning the character of the Romanian spirit, in continuing with some older and more permanent concerns of his, also present in the Romanian culture.

Muscă rightfully writes that "through Blaga's philosophy, the Romanian cultural consciousness sees itself as a subject of study, becoming a theoretical topic, of cultural-philosophical study, but at the same time a reason for creating original works, offering the surest and most comprehensive way of determining the specificity of the Romanian cultural consciousness. Blaga's philosophy thus constitutes, in its main content, a theory of the consciousness of the national culture, of self-consciousness, in other words, of Romanian consciousness"¹⁸.

Consequently, there is a logical premise of this system put forward by the idea that the human phenomenon is marked by a destiny, that of creation, in all of its material and spiritual configurations, which is man's supreme and unique dignity. Creation is, in turn, representative of a style inherent to man, prior to history but impressing upon creation particularities through which it goes down in history. Romanianism becomes in Blaga's works the embodiment of an "a priori" style that leaves its mark on the identity of the Romanian people, inhabitants of the

¹⁷ Vasile Muscă, *Filosofia ideii naționale la L. Blaga și D. D. Roșca*, Apostrof Publishing House, Cluj, 1996, 19

¹⁸ Id., 25

mioritic space, shaped by latencies and accomplishments that must be made known and compiled in an explanatory system.

Blaga sees Romanianism first of all as stylistic heritage, a matrix with certain determinants, with potentialities that lend themselves to discovery. (Vulcănescu and Noica, but others too, sometimes even Blaga, call these latencies.) What are these? First of all, “there is a certain wavy spatial horizon”, as well as “a horizon of waddling movement in time”. It is in these space and time coordinates that a “sense of destiny” (in Vulcănescu and Noica, the sense of existence and of being) takes shape, which helps to progress in a “sidereal homeland, where one rhythmically follows the hills of trust and the valleys of resignation”. But these are not the only determinants. To these are added the preference for the categories of the “organic” and the tendency of “a ‘Sophianic’ transfiguration of reality”, which takes place *in an undertone* (meaning more like latencies), determining, in turn, an amazing sense of nuance and discretion.

As Alexandru Boboc so accurately points out, “Blaga emphasizes the autonomy of the cultural creation, which cannot be reduced to natural factors and which fulfils a revelatory function besides that of knowing”¹⁹.

Culture, Blaga wrote, is not an epiphenomenon, or something ... contingent in connection to man. It is the fulfilment of man... Culture is not an addition overlapping man’s existence, which clings like a demonic parasite, as Spengler sees it, but is “the expression of a *sui generis* manner of existence”²⁰.

Blaga’s efforts were aimed at determining the specific way of achieving a cultural creation that bears the style, which for each nation, is determined by a unique matrix.

Metaphorical and metaphorizing: this is an abstract vision from which, Lucian Blaga purposely eliminates history and historicity. For those anxious to decipher its metaphors, and in the end to encipher its ideas, Blaga hastens to state that the *potencies* of the stylistic matrix can also play the role of the *categories*. He thus makes the distinction between the “*apriorism*” of *spontaneity*, and that of *knowledge*: “We consider the stylistic apriorism, whose nest and home is the unconscious, as varying from one region to another, or from one people to another. We must not be afraid of the term. After all, this apriorism means nothing else but the more emphatic

¹⁹ Al. Boboc, *Filosofia românească, Studii istorico-filosofice în perspectivă comparată*, Grinta Publishing House, Cluj – Napoca, 2007, 191

²⁰ L. Blaga, *Trilogia culturii*, The Publishing House for Literature, 1969, 366

philosophical circumscription of the statement about the existence of certain active stylistic factors that leave an undeniable mark on the products of our ethnic genius”²¹.

Anticipating, this time as well, that he might be misunderstood, he stated that “an existing stylistic matrix remains a strong organ that assimilates foreign influences”, at the same time having the possibility of asserting its *sovereignty*.

Parallel to the dialectical, successively-rhythmical history of westerners, keeping in time with the *eras*, we build our existence on achievements of simultaneity, *parallelly* and *rectilinearly*, of continuous growth. It is hard to come up with prophecies about the future for Romanians, but we will not give up on the exciting thought that we have a *Messianic mission* in the world, as some of the promoters of our culture do not cease to state. Donning the messianic garb would be a great error, Lucian Blaga thought, as “to this day no nation has achieved greatness by starting from a Messianic programme”²².

Here is an idea that could have stirred a lot of disappointment among the philosophers of Romanianism, as well as at the level of some nationalistic ideologies. But Blaga’s system is too broad to try to eliminate it one piece at a time. It is maybe for this precise reason that those who feel so inclined eliminate it entirely.

The Romanian apriorism is not, for Lucian Blaga, as we have seen, a barrier to stop the benevolent influences of the western culture and civilization, on the condition that they do not invade this space with the intention of replacing our culture. It is only starting with this reference point that the metaphysics of his Romanianism has meaning and substance, fitting into a creative spiritual outlook.

Analysing Blaga’s view of the national character, Muscă states that it is less sturdy in some of its joints, but this does not diminish its importance and general worth.

This deals, first of all, with finding the stylistic factor that gives a nation an identity in unconsciousness. This fact has been emphasised by several authors (although they were situated on very different philosophical positions), like Crainic and Ralea. Blaga considered the unconscious to be a structuring and creative force with a “cosmotic” structure, becoming the object of a separate science called abyssal noology. The unconscious is the centre of some forces

²¹ Lucian Blaga: *Trilogia culturii*, The Publishing House for Universal Literature, Bucharest, 256.

²² *Ibid.* 258

that integrate man into a superior order of cosmic rationality. This introduces a contradiction by which an unconscious becomes the basis for the structuring of a conscious.

Second of all, the way in which a natural gift, like that of the unconscious stylistic reserve can materialise into a national cultural life, is unclear. There would have been a need to resort to the socio-historical factors through whose action cultures gain their character, in relation to one another.

Thirdly, Blaga deduces the stylistic matrix from what he calls the minor culture that acts inside folk culture, in this way having a strong pre-modern ethnographic strain, therefore limited in time and in the village, so limited in space as well.

In the end, Muscă writes, Blaga's theory of the Romanian stylistic matrix suffers from an ahistoricism that gives it a static metaphysical character, in contradiction with the activism of Blaga's work. The subconscious, as the original source of the stylistic factors, takes shape in certain historical circumstances, but once it is formed, it remains invariable, ignoring the fact that this original nucleus is itself a reaction of the Romanian nation, forged in its history connected to production, to customs, to political and judicial organization, to contact with other nations, to fights and wars.

Thus the relationship between, on the one hand, being Romanian and holding on to this identity, and, on the other, of becoming Romanian, is engaged in a history of our own, connected to the general dynamics of mankind. Blaga himself wrote that to be Romanian meant a reflection on your own survival, which lead to identification being entrusted to a national cultural pre-determinism, to an apriorism that brings about a glorification of the past, protochronism and a disheartening feeling.

Blaga's invoking the local roots of our culture, the Dionysian character of the Thracians, to the detriment of the Latin pride, is at odds with the need to be integrated into universality, which he himself had illustrated. It is possible to explain Blaga's endeavours through the very national and European cultural context around and after World War I, when the country unites under one national state, when the European culture is fraught with crises and the only philosophical solution that Blaga came up with was to resort to the nation's constants, capable of offering it resistance in the face of new challenges.

5. Crainic's Ethnocratic Interpretations

At least three directions of the philosophy of Romanianism become better defined by the year 1940, when the Romanian state is mutilated by history. In these circumstances, philosophizing about Romanians' philosophy of life proves, in some respects, to be outdated. The first firm direction, though not substantial enough, as we have seen, is that of Rădulescu-Motru, with his new lay spirituality and the project of the peasant state, then Blaga's metaphysical Romanian apriorism, purposeless in the organization of the nation and, finally, Nichifor Crainic's orthodoxy, with his ethnocracy (an improvised term, circulated by the man himself, starting with the year 1937). His philosophy did have a political aim in "The programme of the ethnocratic state". We could also take into consideration Traian Brăileanu's corporatist sociology, but this is *melted* into the legionnaire project and later disguised as party ideology. (The legionnaire movement, The Legion of the Archangel Michael, The Iron Guard, become, in 1937, the "Everything for the Fatherland" political party, in order to neutralize the proscription of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu's organization.)

Nichifor Crainic's Christian nationalism, the doctrine of orthodoxy, is fairly compact and centripetal, and, in its intentions, does not isolate us from the civilization of the West, just from some of its moral values. It is, thus, a fairly aggressive part of the philosophy of Romanianism, hard to couple ideologically with other similar doctrines. It individualizes itself and, at the same time, it isolates itself from other nationalistic tendencies which the theology professor does not tolerate, through ethnocracy.

Particularly toward the end of the 1940s, when the philosophers of Romanianism should have been, through their ideas and theories, markers of coherence, suggesting solutions that would stand as "pillars for the nation" (Nicolae Iorga), at the level of ideology and politics, they are, to a great extent, mere dissolution factors. Nationalism becomes an acerbic political competition, oftentimes lacking a moral compass, nurturing personal and group ambitions that go against public interest.

6. Dumitru Stăniloae

During the 1940s, Dumitru Stăniloae²³ brings to the focus of Gândirism the purely theological interpretation of orthodoxy, through which the spirit of the Romanian people finds its identity.

Stăniloae's thoughts on the *ontology* of Romanian spirituality are focused on its *interpersonal communion spirit*, as opposed to the antithetical, individualist, pantheistic character of the Western culture.

The idea from which he proceeds is that of Romanians taking roots in their specific area. We are, Stăniloae states, *mediating beings* in a *mediating space*. Born at the boundary between the East and the West, the Romanian nation could lose itself if it were to be moved from its original place. This is what sets us apart from other European peoples. Stăniloae diminishes the specificity of the peoples to the idea of *simplified beings*, to their ability of being themselves in various historical circumstances. The Romanian nation oscillates between the East and the West *without losing itself*, the Jewish, Greek and Armenian people being, in this respect, perfectly settled in. If displaced, Romanians lose their identity: "They thrive in the complexity of their own being only through this mediating space, in the same way that some trees only thrive at a crossroads [...] The Romanian being thrives between the East and the West. Because it was wrought in this particular place, no other being is more connected to its site than the Romanian nation"²⁴. Taking root in their own place determines the *emotional consciousness* of the Romanians' *emotional humanity*. The Romanian landscape, balanced, radiant, humanizes the being as, in turn, the being humanizes everything around it in a Romanian manner, is what Stăniloae believes.

7. Emil Cioran or Romanianism at the Dead End of History

Vasile Muscă emphasizes the fact that philosophies have focused particularly on two topics, connected to the way of being of a people: those that wish to determine this way of being

²³ Born in Transylvania, Dumitru Stăniloae begins his study at the Faculty of Letters in Bucharest, but he interrupts it in order to pursue the Faculty of Theology in Cernăuți. He masters in dogma, in Athens, Berlin and Munich. He teaches theology in Chișinău and Bucharest, and between 1959 and 1963 he is imprisoned in Aiud. He lives for more than 90 years and is chosen as a member of the Romanian Academy. Besides his religious writings, he is also the author of several important books on the history of the Romanian people.

²⁴ Ibid. 7

through its existence and those that are more concerned with the act of becoming, with the history that the people acquires. Thus, drawing on one of Noica's conclusions, Muscă asserts that the philosophies of being define the mentality of the ancient world, while those of becoming largely define the modern mentality.

Seen from a broad perspective, the philosophies devoted to our national character are mainly concerned with establishing the existential traits, placed, if possible, outside history, of becoming. Within this framework, Cioran's philosophy dedicated to the historical destiny of Romanianism seems to be a direct reply to the solutions put forward by the theories of the national character. Muscă writes that Cioran gives himself up wholeheartedly to the idea that the meditative, ahistorical state in which the Romanian people had indulged for centuries must be left behind. There is a need for a decision in favour of an active historical state, of engaging with all the strength that we have at our disposal in the process of historical becoming. "The national character, conceived as a Romanian apriorism, means to decree a sum of qualities inherent to the Romanian spirit, preceding time and outside of it, thus invariable, as forming the inalienable condition of its national state"²⁵.

From here stemmed the idea that such a notion implies a call to faithfulness, to preserving the traits that stand out as being defining, because otherwise, the Romanian people would lose its identity, its way of being. "The corpus of our identity, Cioran wrote, has many good things, but at its core there is a wound. It is connected to a refusal to engage with history, to an ultimately reactionary gesture, of making the national character absolute, to a genuine sense of pride in the fact that our identity is unique"²⁶.

From here on there is a fatalism tied to the idea of a historical destiny that we cannot escape, which for Cioran means two things: first of all that our history is defined by a thousand years of inertness, in paradoxical terms a becoming that does not move forward but stays still, if it does not in fact spring back; second of all, the relation between potency and action, between the characteristics of identity and the way they express themselves in history is reversed. The consequence is that the current shortcomings of the Romanian nation are not the product of history but it is history that is the result of these structural, psychological shortcomings.

²⁵ V. Muscă, *Filosofia ideii naționale la L. Blaga și D. D. Roșca*, Apostrof Publishing House, Cluj – Napoca, 1996, 104

²⁶ E. Cioran, *Schimbarea la față a României*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1990, 106

Cioran believes that Romanians have to regain “the taste for becoming” in order to take the historical leap of converting to the determination for assertion and for establishing a destiny, for anchorage in the great cadence of history. This is an attitude that courageously and vigorously opposes the unpredictability that historical becoming entails. Making history implies having a great Romanian idea that, once achieved, would allow us universality.

8. *Constantin Noica: The System of Speech*

Noica *definitively* ties “the value of philosophy to language”²⁷. And this attempt is not accidental or more recent, caused by the need of the philosopher to accept a field in which, after prison and house arrest, he was allowed to write, and, most importantly, to publish, getting involved, as far back as 1924, in Nae Ionescu’s attempt to compile a “Philosophical Romanian Dictionary”. The focus on the philosophical latencies of the vulgar tongue, inspired maybe by Heidegger’s *paradise* of the language, makes Noica believe that, where it does not culminate in solid works, the being finds its shelter and expression in language. “Language is the house of being”, Heidegger said. And, continuing this idea, Constantin Noica points out: “The important thing in philosophy, and maybe even in culture, is not so much reaching the universal and the law, but raising the particular to the level of the universal and the law”.

If language does not preserve well-rounded, organic views, offering instead only certain tools, some possibilities and suggestions, then it follows that the resulting philosophy of Romanianism would have as many versions as there are apt philosophers daring to fulfil its destiny.

Because of Constantin Noica, the philosophy of Romanianism does not remain a simple battleground for various orientations and theories that are more or less nationalistic, but also becomes the subject for heated debate, with some contesting its legitimacy within a system of democratic values, in a world governed by political correctness.

²⁷ Gheorghită Geană: “Rostirea românească: un individual cu înzestrare ontologică”, in *Studii de istorie a filosofiei românești*, V, The Romanian Academy Publishing House, Bucharest, 2009.

9. Nae Ionescu or the Obsession with Deliverance

He was a controversial figure, about whom supporters say that he had shaped the generation of brilliant intellectuals from the interwar period, which subsequently is credited with having established undisputed bench-marks in Romanian culture, while detractors state that, on the contrary, he had dragged them in the cesspool of politicking, in the slough of the far right. Nae Ionescu waved the flag of language in his attempt to overtake orthodoxy as an element of national identity, with faith being used as a political tool. His brand of Romanianism will take on a less speculative air, particularly after being co-opted by the legionnaires, with their aggressive, so called *sanguineous*²⁸, Christianity.

10. Nicolae Paulescu and Marin Ștefănescu

They both adhere to a *sui generis* spiritualism, with Nicolae Paulescu exemplifying it in physiology and Marin Ștefănescu in philosophy. The former is drawn to (and draws other towards) nationalistic politics, particularly in the actions of some Christian parties, the legionnaires being those who involve him in the history of their movement among the proto-legionnaires. The latter interweaves philosophical thinking with faith and the divine directives.

For nationalism, Paulescu finds its basis in his very own biological theory, in his philosophy and psychology, considering it the social expression of divine instincts. Nicolae Paulescu is of the opinion that nationalism is the instinct of loving the country you are born in by the grace of God.

It is true that his being associated with Alexandru C. Cuza – which is sometimes based only on external criteria (he writes about freemasonry, about the fate of the Jewish *race*, etc.) – and especially with the legionnaires, which put Nicolae Paulescu in a shadow cone, cannot justify the statement that his nationalism is not only of a politicking nature, the same way that Romanianism cannot be considered to be just a matter of conjuncture. Unfortunately, the anti-Semitism he expresses on several occasions, in very definitive statements, is beyond all debate. What makes it even harder to bear is the fact that he bases it on racism: “I have long been attending to the issue of race from a scientific standpoint, seeing as I teach physiology at the

²⁸ Dumitru Micu: *Gândirea și gândirismul*, Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1975.

University. The Jew problem in this respect becomes unsolvable because, according to my research, I have discovered that Jews have a badly formed brain, meaning that they are all degenerates²⁹”. Not even Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu fully accepts these arguments.

Rejecting Paulescu’s anti-Semitic racism, we find it even harder to accept his so called Romanianism.

As a supporter of *total nationalism*, Ștefănescu believes that, being a synthesis of particular sciences, philosophy reveals the national spirit, in its turn conditioned by the religion of the community. As such, the real thinkers have the opportunity to express, in their own way, a content created and shared by the national community. This is by no means a thankless task for the Romanian philosophers. On the contrary, they have the chance, according to Marin Ștefănescu, to map the coordinates and the aspirations of a philosophy superior to all other European systems and theories. The huge potential only awaits the inspired interpreters, to whom Romanian Christianity, whose epicenter is the New Testament, will become their guide.

In what his Romanianism is concerned, it is nothing but a vain mythology, watched over by a false pantheon.

11. The Hermeneutical Power of Etymology

Dan Botta, from the Criterion’s circle, begins to write, as far back as 1934, about the philosophy of language, delving deeply into the universe of semantics. He writes: “Words enclose, beyond their symbolic value, an infinite world, larval, latent in its intensions, of undertones, of allusions, of discarded meanings which constitute a presence of a second order, lunar, annular, halo-like. They are, I would say, the phases, the stigmas that the luminous body of the words has suffered along their evolution and which register as an obscure memory. It is what semantics brings to light, as archeologists do”³⁰. The manuscript he began the same year he finally finishes in 1954. It is modestly entitled “Roma-Threicia. An attempt at an etymology of the Romanian language”. It is not, as one can plainly see, a work of history linguistically defended, nor is it one of hermeneutics, not even of semantics, in the more recent acceptance of the field of study, but a dictionary that can offer arguments for the possible theories and interest in the

²⁹ Nicolae Paulescu, in “Apărarea națională” 17 ian. 1926.

³⁰ Dan Botta: “Puterea cuvântului”, in *Criterion*, year I, issue 5, 15 dec., 1934.

philosophy of Romanianism. It contains 12000 entries grouped together in three sections: ancient Greek records, words of Byzantine origin and words from Vulgar Latin.

The purpose of this unusual investigation is, according to the few specialists who make reference to it, to test spiritual continuity “at the junction between an ancient Indo-European, Dacian culture, itself a very distinct branch of the Thracian community that was, since its settlement in the Balkans, in very tight contact with the ancient Greek languages, especially with Dorian, and at the same time with the Italic languages, and thus with Vulgar Latin”³¹. The theory of the convergence of the Dacian language and Vulgar Latin is fundamental not only in its assumptions and romantic hypotheses of great scientific risk. Furthermore, for the first time “the theory of the convergence of the Dacian language and Italic Latin, both at the level of the kinship with the most vigorous and spread out Indo-European language from the Balkan-Mediterranean region in the first millennium (the Greek language and all its dialects), as well as the level of the parallel evolution of the Dacian words and their Latin equivalents, which, naturally, almost perfectly overlapped after the Romanization of Dacia and the birth of the common Romanian language, the pool from which the Romanian we speak to this day will grow and evolve”.

Not letting himself be lulled by mythical “stories”, by illusions of protochronism, Alexandru Surdu follows the historical timeline, in order to highlight the magnitude and significance of the whole: “We have been given history and philosophy so that we can look back on ourselves. Following the thread of a history and philosophical thinking spread out over millennia we can almost arrive at the beginning of the world. And follow it we must, so as to truly live up to what we are, since we need to know, in our own way, where we came from, in order to be able to acknowledge, in a shared anamnesis, through remembrance, what we can be. And since we didn’t come, like others, from wherever the winds blew in, our testimony that this was and ever shall be our home should be lent credence, even if each of us, in turn, will pass into the great beyond, be it for better or for worse, according to one’s own deeds and thoughts”.

³¹ Mihai Nasta, cited by Dolores Botta, in the forward to Dan Botta: *Roma-Theicia. O încercare de etimologie a limbii române*, Crater Publishing House, 1999, . 7.

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