

HISTORY OF ROMANIAN PHILOSOPHY BY NICOLAE BAGDASAR AND THE TIMELINESS OF ITS METHOD OF APPROACH

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Abstract: *The study exposes, analyzes and exploits the method used by Bagdasar implicitly in his book *History of Romanian Philosophy*, republished in 2002 (first edition 1941). The author shows that Bagdasar opted for the exposition of Romanian philosophy on the main fields addressed by Romanian philosophers: general philosophy (ontology and epistemology), aesthetics, philosophy of law, philosophy of history, philosophy of culture, and not on each philosophical system separately. The author appreciates that the mentioned method is more advantageous, to capture the parentage of ideas in each philosophical field from one philosophical conception to another and clearly distinguishes between exposition and interpretation.*

Keywords: *research method, exposition method, subjective, objective, subjectivism, objectivism, exposition, interpretation.*

1. History of Romanian philosophy by Bagdasar in the context of other similar works

Among the philosophical appearances of the last year, a distinct place is occupied by the work of Nicolae Bagdasar, *History of Romanian Philosophy*, published by Ardealul Publishing House, in Târgu Mureș, in 2022, curated and with foreword, afterword and notes by Gheorghe Vlăduțescu and Eugeniu Nistor. Its first appearance in a separate volume was in 1940, and it was soon reprinted, in 1941, as a section in the 5th volume of *History of Modern Philosophy, Romanian philosophy from its origins to today*, together with two other sections by other authors: *Sociology* by Traian Herșeni and *Pedagogy* by S. S. Bârsănescu. Bagdasar's work was also republished in a volume entitled *Writings*, at the Eminescu Publishing House, in 1988, by Gheorghe Vlăduțescu, who signed preface and notes. At the same time, he added two other writings by Bagdasar to the end of the volume: the study *History of Philosophy* (1932)

and the collection of studies *Few Problems of European Culture* (1931), considering, of course, a necessary addition, because the author of *The History of Romanian Philosophy* did not include himself among the Romanian philosophers, not even in the final chapter *Other thinkers*, although he would have had enough arguments, i.e. other books already published, by his decision leaving himself in the shadow and behind his historical-philosophical synthesis.

Compared to the 1988 edition, the present edition does not retain the two writings added by the editor, although Bagdasar is not much known and commented even nowadays, but adds some portraits made by him, after the publication of his *History* in 1940, of some of the important philosophers, whose conceptions he had analyzed in the book (C. Rădulescu-Motru, P. P. Negulescu, Ion Petrovici, Nae Ionescu, Mircea Florian, Tudor Vianu), which brings an increase in knowledge, mainly to the biography of the respective thinkers, but, partially, and to their work. The additions of 1988, which were abandoned in 2022, are justified, but the current ones are just as justified, or even more consistent with the *History* of Bagdasar, giving it completeness with other additions made by the author himself.

Of course, in years and years, other works dedicated to the Romanian philosophical phenomenon as a whole have appeared, the most representative being two collective works, the first elaborated by the Institute of Philosophy in two volumes of the *History of Romanian Philosophy* (Editura Academiei, 1972 and, respectively, 1980) and the second by a new generation of researchers from the same institute, renamed the Institute of Philosophy and Psychology "Constantin Rădulescu-Motru", in a single volume of the *History of Romanian Philosophy* (Romanian Academy Publishing House, 2018).

To these are added the works of a single author, of which the book by Gh. Al. Cazan, *History of Romanian Philosophy* (Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House, 1984), reworked and expanded by the author in several volumes, namely: *Romanian Philosophy from Zalmoxis to Titu Maiorescu* (2001), *Diving into the Deep. Titu Maiorescu's philosophy* (2002), *Beyond Maiorescu, C. Rădulescu-Motru, P. P. Negulescu, Ion Petrovici* (2004), *Mircea Florian and Nae Ionescu* (2006), *The Metaphysics of Data Dispute – Lyrical Metaphysics* (2006), as well as *Romanian Metaphysics. 1900-1950* (2008), in which, among the thinkers after Maiorescu, also analyzed in previous works, Lucian Blaga is added. The regret that the author

confessed to me was that the approaching end did not allow him to publish a volume about Constantin Noica, although he had prepared all the necessary materials, to be systematized and finished in the desired book. Gathered in a single volume, all the mentioned works would make up a monumental and fundamental opus. It is also worth mentioning the work of Gheorghe Vlăduțescu, *Unconventional, about Romanian philosophy* (Paideea Publishing House, 2002). Nevertheless, the *History* of Bagdasar stands the test of time and is current both in the analyzes undertaken and in the methodology used.

2. Subjectivism and objectivism in the history of philosophy

That is why, not by chance, the current edition preserves the first part of the Preface signed by Gh. Vlăduțescu in the 1988 edition, in which, starting from the fact that in his work from 1940 N. Bagdasar did not present his own philosophical contributions and assuming the fact that he wanted not to leave the impression that the analyzes of other conceptions would be filtered and somehow deformed by his own conception, the author finds the opportunity to refer to the relationship between subjectivism and objectivism in the history of philosophy.

Of course, any historian of philosophy exercises both subjectively, at least insofar as his analysis depends on his degree of knowledge and understanding of the researched work, and objectively, insofar as he refers to a conception other than his own and not to one assumed by him. But the ratio between the subjective and the objective can shift, either towards the objective pole or towards the subjective one, coming close to neglecting one or the other of the two factors.

At the limit, whoever adopts the objectivist point of view limits himself to examining and presenting as faithfully as possible each philosophical conception, as it is presented by its author, renouncing any subjective introjection through evaluation and valorization. Obviously, the more it tries to be more faithful, the more objectivism misses the known object, because it no longer captures its essence, it no longer discerns between fundamental and secondary ideas, between significant and less significant. A completely thorough reproduction of a concept would be equivalent to the transcription of the respective concept, which the interested person can find in the philosopher's book, without resorting to the duplication offered by the historian of philosophy.

On the contrary, the historian of subjectivist philosophy remains so anchored in his own ideas that he either rejects those of mis (treated) philosophers, if they do not suit him, or corrects them, if they are suitable, in the sense of his convictions, considering that other conceptions he would only approximate, anticipate or confirm his own way of thinking, self-appreciated as the most truthful and advanced. Although in a different way, still the subjectivist historian arrives at the same result of ignorance of the object investigated and therefore of the futility of his enterprise, since he ends up substituting the object for the subject, the conception supposedly researched by his own conception.

In the aforementioned section of the Preface to the edition of Bagdasar's work, Gh. Vlăduțescu shows that historical-philosophical subjectivism was present in the first historian of Romanian philosophy, Marin Ștefănescu, the only one who, before Bagdasar, had attempted a panorama of our philosophical culture in his work *Romanian philosophy*, from 1922. Commenting on the mentioned synthesis, the author of the Preface highlights, on the one hand, the fact that the first exegete of Romanian philosophy thought more truthfully than Bagdasar about the nature/concept of philosophy in general and the beginnings of the Romanian one, including in philosophy and folklore creation, and the Teachings of Neagoe Basarab, and the chroniclers, and the Pashoptists, and the thinking of Eminescu. Through his acceptance of what philosophical culture is and includes, Marin Ștefănescu was subjective, he attributed, according to his own vision, a greater age and variety to philosophical creations, but he did not yet anchor in subjectivism. At the same time, as the same interpreter states, Marin Ștefănescu failed in subjectivism, but not by the area of creations assigned to philosophy, but by the fact that he projected onto cultural creations, including philosophical ones, his own conception of a harmonious spiritualism, through which he tried "a spiritualistic-harmonic reinterpretation of the psychology, history, culture of the Romanian people and, through all this, of the Romanian philosophy"¹.

¹ Gh. Vlăduțescu, Preface, in Nicolae Bagdasar, *History of Romanian Philosophy*, Ardealul Publishing House, Târgu Mureș, 2002

3. Subjective and objective in Nicolae Bagdasar's implicit method

Bagdasar did not explain and theorize his historical-philosophical method, but it is implicitly present, through the way it was practiced by him in the exposition of Romanian philosophy. Therefore, it is a method of exposure, but also involves a method of research/approach and understanding of the analyzed concepts. It has been exercised in a consistent way, so that it has taken shape with sufficient gravity, which allows us to analyze it, even if it has not been exposed by its practitioner in a logos, in a methodology.

As a historian of Romanian philosophy, Nicolae Bagdasar no longer fell into subjectivism like his predecessor, whose history he also ignored, but he did not fall into objectivism either. His method has both an objective and a subjective meaning, without absolutizing any of the two approaches.

The expository-interpretive method practiced by Bagdasar respected the objective meaning of the research, without slipping into objectivism, because through it he revealed and exposed the domains and problems of each philosophy, as well as the defining ideas, in their internal articulations and with their specific arguments, otherwise said, he freed the *essence* of the respective conception from the less important details, which could obscure it, and presented it in his own words, so he submitted to the object under investigation, without however becoming a slave to it, or more precisely a scribe, who would copy it.

The expository-interpretive method also has a subjective meaning, but not a subjectivist one.

First of all, the subjectivity of the historian intervened by the fact that he systematized the philosophical conceptions according to the domains that he considered that any philosophical system can have. Thus, he framed the concepts analyzed in one or more of the following thematic areas: *Pure Philosophy (Logic, Epistemology, Metaphysics), Aesthetics, Philosophy of Law, Philosophy of History, Philosophy of Culture*. The mentioned systematization made by Bagdasar has a somewhat subjective character, as it denotes his metaphysical vision, according to which a philosophy can deal with a field of maximum generality, the so-called *pure philosophy*, or also with fields/disciplines with a narrower character, called today branch or applied philosophies. According to the respective vision, according to which a creation is philosophical if it is theoretical and deals

with one/some of the mentioned fields, he restricted, naturally subjectively, the past of Romanian philosophy, which, according to him, begins with Dimitrie Cantemir, therefore with the first creator of system philosophical, which theorizes about knowledge and existence in general. Subjective, the systematization by fields/disciplines is not subjective either, because the respective disciplines are found in Romanian philosophers, who cultivated one or more of them, and the analysis given to their conceptions does not suffer from the way in which they were systematized.

Secondly, Bagdasar's history of philosophy is also subjective without subjectivism, and because its author not only expounded other conceptions, but also evaluated them, by favorable assessments or by objections, but without distorting them and alter. To this end, he clearly demarcated the exposition of conceptions from personal considerations on them.

4. The distinction between exposition and interpretation of philosophy

Any philosophy must not only be exposed in its internal structure (reconstructed), clarified and explained, but also evaluated, valued, interpreted. The method of thematic exposition, as applied by Bagdasar, regardless of the level of application, delimits between exposition and interpretation, the author reconstructing, first, the investigated conception and, then, formulating possible remarks on it. As a general rule, for a philosopher who is presenting for the first time, whether they are included in the *Pure Philosophy* section, or those who do not appear in the mentioned section, but in others, the scheme used includes: 1) a bio-bibliographic introduction, 2) an exposition of the respective conception, 3) Bagdasar's assessments. In this regard, in a clarifying Afterword regarding the content of the work, Eugeniu Nistor states: "As an operational working method, Nicolae Bagdasar resorts, to begin with, to the bio-bibliographic presentation of the philosopher in question, then proceeding to a rigorous analysis of the concepts, of the theories and ideas that constitute the fabric of his thinking, with the indication of sources and influences, belonging to currents and schools of thought (where applicable); depending on the philosophical personality treated and the value of his writings, in the end,

some conclusions are drawn or not."² The mentioned scheme can be illustrated in the case of any philosopher. For example, after referring to the life and writings of Vasile Conta, the author continues: "There are two philosophical fields in which Conta made his interesting contributions: epistemological and metaphysical"³, after which their analysis follows.

Admittedly, the appreciations given to the analyzed philosophers occupy a very limited place in relation to the exposition and analysis carried out along the way or, as stated in the excerpt quoted from the Afterword, sometimes they are not even inserted. However, it should be specified that the very comparative reporting of one philosophy to others also constitutes an evaluation of it and a fixation of the contribution made in relation to the others. The lack of final evaluations also signifies the adherence of the historian of philosophy to the analyzed concept, because, as can be seen, when he has reservations or observations, he does not shy away from formulating them.

5.The relationship between the method of exposition of philosophy by fields and the method of exposition on philosophical systems

The method of thematic exposition, on problems and solutions, does not contradict the more usual method, used in other works, that of the exposition of Romanian philosophy through the analysis and series of philosophical conceptions in their chronological sequence, each of the two approaches having both advantages and disadvantages.

The exposition by adding the conceptions has the merit of reconstructing each conception as a whole, in the connection of its components, but it obscures the understanding of the set of philosophical conceptions from a certain culture as a whole, to the extent that, focused on each individual philosophy, it does not expressly aim connections, with continuities and evolution from one philosophy to another.

The method used by Bagdasar has the merit of rendering the thematic unity and ideational evolution existing in each field of the national philosophy as a whole, but not enough at the level of each philosophical system in particular, because it breaks down a unitary philosophical conception in its field of maximum generality and in the narrower, applied

² Eugeniu Nistor, Afterword, in op. cit., p. 509

³ Nicolae Bagdasar, op. cit., p. 43

fields, to follow each field separately, to all the thinkers who made contributions within that philosophical compartment. Thus, in the situation of philosophers who illustrated not only the sphere of *pure philosophy* (logic, epistemology, metaphysics), but also some applied philosophical disciplines (Aesthetics, Philosophy of Law, etc.), Bagdasar detached the applied contributions from the area of pure philosophy and presented them separately, fitting them into the field they illustrate. Thus, seven of the fifteen thinkers included in the first section, the most extensive, *Pure Philosophy*, reappear in other sections: Maiorescu - in aesthetics, P. P. Negulescu and Lucian Blaga - in aesthetics and the philosophy of culture, Eugeniu Speranția in aesthetics and the philosophy of law, and C. Rădulescu-Motru, I. Petrovici and Nae Ionescu – to the philosophy of culture.

The method of exposition of Romanian philosophy on domains/disciplines and the method of restoring it on philosophical systems (philosophical concepts in their entirety) are not only distinct, but also interfering.

The systematization by fields does not exclude the unitary reproduction, in its entirety, of those conceptions focused on a single field, be it general-philosophical or applied. Well, in the Philosophy of History section Bagdasar includes the names of historians Alexandru Hașdeu, Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu, A. D. Xenopol, Nicolae Iorga and Vasile Pârvan, to which he also adds that of the economist D. Drăghicescu, whom he no longer presents with concerns and in other branches of philosophy, since they focused only on the philosophy of history.

On the other hand, rendering on philosophical systems implies the release of the major themes of each individual system, which constitutes a premise for reconstructing the evolution of thinking on one theme or another at the level of an entire national philosophy.

Of the two systematizations, the one on domains/disciplines/themes at the level of each philosophical conception and the same systematization at the level of a philosophical culture as a whole, the first one assumes a lower degree of abstraction and generalization, of the first degree, and the one of second a much higher degree, degree II. It is obvious, however, that the second degree cannot be attained without the previous completion of the first degree. Moreover, Bagdasar himself, establishing the philosophical fields cultivated at the level of the country (level II), completes it with the chronological sequence of the corresponding philosophical conceptions,

analyzed more in the singularity and organicity of each of them (level I) than in their connections, although it refers , comparatively, and to the filiations between them (level II).

6. Portraits of philosophers by Bagdasar – a complement to the understanding of their work

The considerations regarding the manner of exposition and understanding of Romanian philosophy by Nicolae Bagdasar cannot be concluded without also referring to the *Portraits* made by him of some of the most important Romanian philosophers, included in the Addendum. They were written by the author during and after the war. As mentioned in the Afterword, they were "taken" from Nicolae Bagdasar's volume, *Opere II (Works II)*. *Portraits* (edited by Rodica Pandele and Gh. Vlăduțescu (Romanian Academy Publishing House, 2006) and constitute a "priceless treasure for Romanian philosophy"⁴. And in the Preface of the volume, although it is stated that they express likes and dislikes, which "stop at people, without harming, by extension, the image of the work", because "few lives of philosophers are also philosophical", it is concluded that "they still participate in the judgment on the work if and when they give an account of the man in the age and, through them, of the age itself"⁵.

It is noticeable that the portraits refer to the lives of the philosophers whom Bagdasar knew personally, that is, to events particularly related either to their university life (regarding performance as teachers, relations with students or colleagues, research work) or of their political life (regarding the dignities entrusted to them), or of the trials some of them went through in their old age. They, the portraits, reveal those portrayed especially professionally, morally and politically. Portraits of philosophers correlate with their philosophy to the extent that the aspects under which they are depicted also have a certain philosophical echo. However, such correlations can really be made. I think that Rădulescu-Motru's diligence as an animator of Romanian philosophical research is also reflected in his philosophy in which he praises work. A certain severity and reserve shown by P. P. Negulescu towards the promotion of younger colleagues, although he himself had become a teacher at a very young age, reminds us of his voluminous historical-philosophical works, impressive through

⁴ Eugeniu Nistor, *Afterword*, in *op. cit.*, p. 514.

⁵ Gh. Vlăduțescu, *Foreword*, in *op. cit.*, p. 14

documentation and information, which naturally denotes a severity with his own life. I. Petrovici's passion for public conferences and the roundness of his speeches make us think of the professor and the rigor and, at the same time, the elegance of his philosophical works. The adventurous political life of Nae Ionescu has a counterpart in his lyrical, existentialist metaphysics (and vice versa!). The abundance of quotations from Mircea Florian's lectures is also found in the numerous references in his writings to a lot of contemporary foreign philosophers.

7. The merits and actuality of the method of exposition and interpretation practiced by Bagdasar

Indisputably, the historical-philosophical method practiced by Bagdasar has imposed itself and is desirable and current through all the indicated virtues.

Regarding the exposition and interpretation of a certain philosophical system, of great importance is the delimitation made by him between the expository part, the most extensive, in which the conception that integrates a certain philosophical discipline is presented with its issues and defining ideas, and the final part, in which the historian of philosophy presents his own remarks and observations. In this way, the presentation of a philosophical theory acquires fluency and congruence, offering the reader an essentialized, but articulated, sufficiently argued and undistorted image, which accounts for the philosopher's contribution in one field or another, in one philosophical problem or another. On the other hand, the interpretation given by the philosopher also becomes unitary and better defined, by delimiting it from the exposed conception, with which, if it were to interfere, it could contaminate it and, in any case, rob it of its inner harmony. However, Bagdasar remains exemplary through the crystal clarity with which he exposes, analyzes and, finally, evaluates philosophical concepts.

Also in relation to the analysis of a certain philosophical conception, it is particularly important to capture the nature/essence of all the works of the author and not by analyzing each work elaborated by the philosopher, as they were revealed, in chronological order. In this last method, by presenting the problems and ideas of each work separately, the researcher will no longer specifically follow the problems common to all works, nor the most advanced ideas he reached in one problem or another. That is why it is necessary and more significant and valuable to render a conception

through abstraction and generalization of the first degree, which reaches the main problems present in all the works of a thinker and their most advanced solutions. However, it is understood that such a method requires prior knowledge of each individual philosophical work.

As for the method of exposition and interpretation of a national philosophy as a whole, by raising it from the first degree to the second degree of abstraction and generalization, I believe that this would satisfy the highest goal that a history of national philosophy can propose. Bagdasar intended this goal by presenting Romanian philosophy by fields, but he did not fully succeed either, analyzing, in each field, the conceptions of different thinkers rather in isolation than in their relationship to each other. No other subsequent Histories have achieved this goal, which remains an ideal and perhaps an unattainable ideal for future research, at least for the work of a single researcher. The difficulty arises not only from the fact that a single researcher would be constrained to devote a lifetime's work to this goal, but also from the fact that philosophical thought is constantly evolving and in constant diversification. In addition to the fields referred to by Bagdasar, other philosophical fields or disciplines have been asserted, such as philosophical anthropology, axiology, philosophy of science, philosophy of philosophy (metaphilosophy), philosophy of morals (ethics), philosophy of religion, etc., to which and Romanian thinkers made significant contributions. But, precisely because contemporary philosophy knows a process of diversification, doubled, however, by one of unification by deepening the fundamental domains, it would be desirable for Romanian philosophy to be understood not as a series of philosophical conceptions, but as a unitary whole, in which, once the component fields have been identified, the historian should investigate, if not all conceptions, at least those in a certain disciplinary field. In this way, by revealing philosophical contributions from one field or another and by relating them to similar ones, existing internationally, Romanian philosophy can advance and actively insert itself into the debates of contemporary ideas.

