

**A NEW EXEGESIS OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF  
VASILE BĂNCILĂ  
A BOOK REVIEW**

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Vasile Băncilă (1897-1979) became known in the interwar period mainly through his two books *The Doctrine of Energetic Personalism* of D. Rădulescu-Motru (1927) and *Lucian Blaga, Romanian Energy* (1938) and remained so until the end of his life his, because, in the post-war period, removed from the chair and unpublished with far-reaching philosophical works, he had to waste himself in numerous essays on a variety of subjects, published in different cultural magazines, his writings could only be corroborated by someone who would have followed them expressly, to reveal their philosophical lines. After the philosopher's death, his daughter Ileana Băncilă collected a series of his small writings in a volume of *Portraits and Meanings*, prefaced by Zoe Dumitrescu-Bușulenga (1987), and after 1990 she re-edited his two works and published his volumes *Aphorisms and Para-aphorisms* (1993) and *Philosophy of Ages* (1997). Subsequently, the researcher Dora Mezdrea published his other works: *The Religion of Love and Pestalozzi* (1998), *Vastness of Bă răgan* (2000), *Art and Knowledge* (2002), and from 2003, she took care of the publication of the complete work, designed in 33 volumes, of which, so far, more than half have appeared. Simultaneously with the restitution of his work, Vasile Băncilă tends to assert himself more and more in the history of philosophy as a thinker with a personal and comprehensive philosophical conception. Given the multitude and variety of his writings, a systematization of his philosophical ideas is naturally not easy to achieve.

After the first attempt to synthesize the philosophical work of Vasile Băncilă, made by Valentin Popa in his book *Vasile Băncilă. The Man and the Philosopher* (Brăilei Museum, Istros Publishing House, 2006) and a second undertaking by Ion Dur, *Post-restant. The "Case" of the Thinker Vasile Băncilă* (Ed. Museum of Romanian Literature, 2020), the tireless researcher of Ethical Statements in Romanian philosophy and culture, Constantin Stroe, dedicates to the same thinker two works published in the last two years, namely the ethical-moral dimension of the system philosophy of Vasile Băncilă, with a Preface by Ion Dur (Istros Publishing

House of the "Carol I" Museum, Brăila, 2021) and "Diffuse Providentialism". The philosophical system with metaphysical foundations and ethical-cultural purposes of Vasile Băncilă (Istros Publishing House of Museum "Carol I", Brăila, 2022). I will refer to the second work, since it starts from the most general ideas of the philosopher, called "metaphysical", in relation to which the other ideas, including the ethical-moral ones, are "secondary", in the sense of subordinate or logically derived.

The first two (out of the five) chapters of the successful synthesis by Constantin Stroe cover the themes addressed in the first synthesis (in chronological order) due to Valentin Popa, by the fact that they deal with the metaphysical coordinates of the Banchelian philosophical system (chapter 1) and the metaphysical perspective on culture (ch. 2). The following three chapters complete the mentioned theme, dealing, in order, with elements of cultural-moral anthropology (chap. 3), ethics and pedagogy of the nation (chap. 4) and national cohesion (chap. 5).

Benefiting from the volumes of Works in which Băncilă's philosophical system is also exposed, or, more precisely, the works from which a system can be derived, the exegesis signed by Constantin Stroe does not conclude, but brings some additions to the ideas presented in the synthesis from 2006. first of all, right in the Introduction of his work, in which he analyzes the sketch entitled Philosophical Framework (from 1938), which includes the principles of the projected Banquelian system of philosophy, the author emphasizes the fact that the philosopher originally from Brăila criticized subjectivism and individualism and advocated "individualization plus framing ", namely "the inclusion of man in the general reality" (by reference to society, to the cosmos, to divinity).

Hence, the requirement of the Brailean philosopher that in the branches of his philosophical system - *psychology, logic, ethics, aesthetics, sociology, pedagogy, metaphysics* - to project, in forms specific to each discipline, a general, metaphysical vision of man in his various poses. In this regard, the exegete subscribes to Valentin Popa's remark, according to which metaphysics would no longer have a special place within the projected philosophical system since all other disciplines are permeated by metaphysics. I note, for my part, that Vasile Băncilă included in his philosophical system, in addition to metaphysics, ethics and aesthetics - proper philosophical disciplines, and psychology, logic, sociology and pedagogy - autonomous disciplines, because, in his view, these they also contained, more than others, a philosophical treatment, without which, he considered, they would not have been complete. Or, extending his

consideration, it could be said that philosophy would be one with the set of particular sciences treated philosophically, because any science can also be approached philosophically, metaphysicalized, becoming a component of the philosophy of science. Discrimination between science and philosophy is nevertheless required, because they are forms of knowledge with well-distinct objects and cognitive modalities, philosophy not being reduced to metaphysicalized sciences and, even more so, not to sciences on which one can reflect philosophically.

Constantin Stroe highlights, then, with accuracy, which is the metaphysical foundation of the Banquelian philosophy. Namely, quoting Valentin Popa's assessment, according to which the unity of the world (or "general reality" or the essence of the world) in which man falls is, in Băncilă's view, both transcendent and intramundane, he specifies that, however it may be called, the principle of the world is, in the words of the philosopher, the absolute Spirit or the original Perfection, in other words God or Providence. According to Băncilă, "Spirit was from eternity and in matter and outside it" (p. 30, quoted from *Opere/Works*, vol. X) and created the world from nothing only once, imprinting a finalism or providentialism on it, in meaning "leading thread in Existence". Otherwise, "without finalism (or providentialism), the Universe becomes chaos" (p.27, quoted from *Opere/Works*, vol. X). From here, it follows that, insinuating itself into all forms of existence in the created world, providentialism rules the world, so Băncilă himself calls the system he projects "diffuse providentialism". His conception of the principle of the world and of its manifestation in the created world is, as his recent exegete shows, much more complex, since the principle action is only diffuse. Thus, the source "of original, transcendent, eternal perfection, which creates a diffuse providentialism in the Universe" indeed keeps the world in balance and harmony, but also admits deviations, catastrophes or the existence of evil, because it is "in battle with a demonism (or with a historical demonism), in the created world, partly tolerated, partly abusive (autonomized) and in which man realizes his personality and salvation" (p. 44, quoted from *Opere/Works*, vol. X). If finalism can be proven with arguments provided by the sciences, such as biology, psychology, cybernetics, informatics, electronics, on the other hand, the question of why God created the world and how he created it from nothing remain, even for the philosopher, unfathomable mysteries.

Constantin Stroe reveals the fact that, through its metaphysical or ontological foundation, the philosophy of Vasile Băncilă, as the philosopher himself says, "is not anthropocentric, but theocentric and ontocentric",

giving man "an orientation towards the ontos and the divine", he, Băncilă, not being neither "demiurgic, like Blaga, nor humanist-egoistic, subjectivist, like the moderns" (p. 36, quoted from *Opere/Works*, vol. XIV). His philosophy not only deals with the Absolute, like religion, but aims to lead to religion.

Finalism or providentialism of philosophy implies, epistemologically, apriorism, the possibility of overcoming the immediate data of sensation, because "without apriorism (which means the gnostic form of finalism) knowledge becomes impossible or an empiricism that does not leave the phase of sensation" (p. 27, quoted from *Opere/Works*, vol. X). In this case, the philosopher, Băncilă asserted not without justification, "seeks to overcome logical reason and to give the understanding or intuition of the great forces or metaphysical entities that are the basis of the general reality; the philosopher who does not manage to do this is not a philosopher (he is at most a scientist)" (p. 37-38, quoted from *Opere/Works*, vol. VI).

Constantin Stroe shows that Vasile Băncilă projected the metaphysical foundation of his diffuse providentialism on the explanation he gave to culture (ch. 2). He argues that the philosopher metaphysicalized culture by originating it in the ethnic/nation and considering the ethnic as deeply philosophical, religious and moral. In this regard, Constantin Stroe states that, in Băncilă's view, culture is born simultaneously either with morality, or with religion, or with philosophy or with all three forms together, because they communicate with each other and have a unifying role in relation to other elements of culture. Therefore, there is no culture without philosophy, but also without religion or morality, which presuppose each other. Great philosophy, exemplifies the philosopher, includes a religion and a morality, just as religion, "the very basis of culture," would essentially be "a philosophy infused with complete, harmonized and precise dogmas and practices, of what which only revelation can give" (p. 54, from *Opere/Works*, vol. VI).

Bancila adds that a philosophy harmonized with religion would be his own philosophy, centered on a Transcendent "which manifests itself in the phenomenon especially through religion, morality, arts, sciences, nation, order... and is served by more or less framed personalities community", so that his philosophy "is a personalized communitarianism or a communitarian personalism" (p. 56, quoted from *Opere/Works*, vol. XIV), more precisely a national personalism, which its creator distinguishes from the energetic personalism of C. Rădulescu- Motru and the cultural personalism affirmed by D. Gusti.

The idea of the basis of culture and its communal character, the exegetical work shows, is the same as the idea of its national or ethnic background. As the ethnic background, especially religion and morals, was seriously affected in the culture of his time, Băncilă ended up privileging folklore at the expense of cultured creation and, using Blagian terms, superiorizing the minor culture and claiming that this is the true major culture.

The philosopher from Brăila also meditated on the relationship between culture and civilization, considering that the former needs the support of the latter. He rejected, however, industrial civilization - advanced science and technology - on the grounds that it, through means such as radio, cinema and, notably, television (home cinema), perverted man's morals and isolated him. Consequently, he advocated the restoration not only of the authentic folk culture, but also of the corresponding civilization, one of medium technical level, centered on peasant agriculture, of small agricultural owners and which would be subordinated to the spiritual life and would not make people uniform.

Next, dealing with *elements of cultural-moral anthropology* (chap. 3), Constantin Stroe shows that Vasile Băncilă also vilified the man "specified by our era", called "homo faber" or even "vagrant", who "is a sensual being, desirous of power and with predominantly technical intelligence" (p. 90, quoted from *Opere/Works*, vol. XIV) and predicted the return to a cultural-moral, spiritual man, who "returns to the virtue of framing, of obedience" and for whom "the ideal it must be the communitarian" (p. 92, quoted from *Opere/Works*, vol. XIV), namely a communitarianism served by the spiritual elites.

Further, the author of the monograph moves from the culture-ethics of the individual man to the ethics and pedagogy of the nation (chap. 4), analyzing, in the footsteps of the philosopher, the following: the distinction between national consciousness and ethnic consciousness or ethnos, which is "like a collective ethos lived (incarnated) in the entirety of life" (p. 107, quoted from *Opere/Works*, vol. XII); the mobile of national morality (love of the nation); its purpose ("care for the creative power of the nation", p. 108, quoted from *Opere/Works*, vol. XII); national moral norms (including justice for all social categories); the Romanian qualities and defects (among many others, as C. Rădulescu-Motru had also remarked, easy enthusiasm in opposition to superficiality and inconsistency, or an inferiority complex towards foreigners); the correspondence between universal moral rights and duties and the moral principles of the nation (love of the nation,

concern for the affirmation of the creative spirit, social justice, contempt for national treason, understanding towards other nations, etc.). Summarizing, the morality of the nation provided for the agreement of ethnic or national morality with humanitarian, universal morality, the achievement of this agreement being the task of national pedagogy and national politics. In this context, the author of the monograph emphasizes the Banquellian ideas regarding the distinction between individual education (made through others) and national education (made not through foreigners, but through the nation, more precisely through the elites of the nation, who can change the mentality of a people); the values on which the ethnic soul depends; the involvement in education of all institutions: family, school, church, army, cultural institutions and all others, etc.

The last chapter of the recent synthesis book of Băncilă's philosophical work refers to the problem of patriotism (chapter 5). As characterized by the philosopher, patriotic feeling takes the form of several kinds of feeling; of filiation, of fraternity, of paternity, of religiosity - towards the nation, more precisely towards its time (with its hypostases: past, present, future), its space (geographical, but also culturally impregnated) and its national culture. It is a feeling equated with national feeling and national consciousness. Bancila also admits a supranational feeling, which, according to the interpretation given by the exegete, refers to homo universalis.

Through the monographic research that I have presented, which also corroborates with the work on the ethical-moral dimension of the Băncilian philosophical system, Constantin Stroe has the merit of offering a more comprehensive systematized exposition on the work of Vasile Băncilă, to evaluate his philosophy and to compare it to other Romanian philosophical creations. Not by chance, he ends his book with a complex profile of the philosopher Vasile Băncilă, made up of no less than 15 characteristics, most of them excellent, but also a few against which he delimits himself or expresses certain reservations. Finally, he considers the analyzed thinker "the founder of his own, original philosophical system", by which he places him in the gallery of the other creators of philosophical systems: Conta, C. R.-Motru, Blaga, Florian, Noica.