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A Philosophy of Culture Approach to Inter-Religious Understanding

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Michael S. Jones

Introduction

I have stated previously that one important step in making Blaga known outside of Romania will be to show how his philosophy leads to fresh insights when applied to contemporary philosophical issues being discussed outside of Romania.[1] This article is an attempt to put this suggestion into practice. The question of the possibility, extent, problems, and benefits of inter-religious and inter-ideological[2] understanding and communication has received much attention in recent European and American philosophy. These same issues are being discussed by non-philosophers and outside of the West. If Blaga's philosophy can be used to shed new light on these issues it may help to make Blaga known outside of Romania.

One important aspect of the question of inter-religious understanding is the role of culture. The importance of culture as the context of belief formation and even in the formation of the modes of rationality has been fairly widely acknowledged, but few detailed analyses of this aspect of culture have appeared. As any Romanian philosopher should know, the philosophy of culture was Blaga's hallmark. Prior to his banishment from the university by Romania's post-WWII socialist government, Blaga taught philosophy at the University of Cluj, where a special chair in philosophy of culture was created in his honor. Blaga published more books on the philosophy of culture than on any other single philosophical subject. Blaga's philosophy of culture is a systematic, detailed, and innovative analysis of the origin, purpose, nature, and effect of culture on human life, productivity, and cognition. Its breadth makes its application to religion and to the particular issues at hand an easy task.

Blaga and the Philosophy of Culture

One interesting aspect of Blaga's philosophy is its explication of the role of culture in human cognition. Although Blaga opens his systematic philosophy with epistemology, and brings metaphysics into every aspect of his system, many have interpreted culture as holding the central place in Blaga's system. The philosophy of culture is interwoven throughout all the other areas of his philosophy.

Culture is, according to Blaga, the sine qua non of humanness.[3] It is culture more than anything else that distinguishes humanity from other forms of animal life.[4]

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[1] Michael S. Jones, "Blaga, John Hick, ∏i Problema Diversit|⇔ii Religioase," in *Meridian Blaga*, vol. 3, ed. Irina Petra∏ (Cluj-Napoca: Casa C|r⇔ii de ™tiin⇔|, 2003), 247.

[2] In this context the term "ideology" is being used to refer to any systematic body of beliefs, including religions and belief systems that are not usually considered religions but that share significant similarities with religion, such as Marxism, scientism, humanism, and other such systems. This use of the term "ideology" has precedent in the World Council of Churches' *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies* (Geneva: WCC, 1979) and in other publications of the World Council of Churches.

[3] Lucian Blaga, *Fiin⇔a Istoric|.* In *Trilogia Cosmologic|,* ed. Dorli Blaga. Vol. 11 of *Opere*. Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1988, 292.

According to Blaga's analysis, a culture is a collective product of human creativity actuated through a given "stylistic matrix" and within a particular set of concrete circumstances. It is a "precipitate" of the fullness of human existence. Full human existence involves living in the face of mystery and for the revelation thereof. Culture is an inevitable result of this human attempt to reveal/depict/grasp mystery.

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

The Categories of the Understanding and the Abyssal Categories

A very important aspect of Blaga's philosophy of culture is his original analysis of the categories of the human mind and how these categories relate to human culture. Although the Kantian influence on this area of Blaga's thought is unmistakable, Blaga departs radically from Kant's understanding of the categories.[5] According to Blaga's theory, humans are equipped with not one but two sets of intellectual categories. The first of these he names "the categories of the understanding." These categories correspond fairly closely to the Kantian categories. Their role is the organization of sensory data in type I cognition ("paradisaic cognition").[6]

Contrary to many scientists, who take categories such as time and space to be objective realities, Blaga agrees with Kant that the categories of the understanding are subjective. Kant's reason for drawing this conclusion is that the conceptual contents of the categories surpass the contents of experiential data, and therefore cannot themselves be a product of experience, and thus must have their source in the mind itself. Blaga writes that the climate (influenced by the Enlightenment and the growing influence of natural science) within which Kant worked prevented him from positing a supernatural source of the categories, and therefore Kant concluded that if they are a product of the mind, then they must be subjective.[7] Nonetheless, the conclusion that subjectivity is the only alternative left after the elimination of the possibility of an experiential origin of the categories is mistaken. There remains the possibility that the categories are the product of a supernatural source, and furthermore that this source created them as objective.

In Blaga's view, the categories are in fact the result of a supernatural source: the Creator.[8] However, Blaga is in agreement with Kant that the categories are subjective.

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[4] Ibid., 498.

[5] See especially ™*tiin*⇔/∏*i Crea*⇔*ie*, in *Trilogia Valorilor*, ed. Dorli Blaga. Vol. 10 of *Opere* (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1987), chapters 18 ("C>teva probleme de teoria cunoa∏terii") and 19 ("Doua tipuri de cunoa∏tere").

[6] Ibid., 176; Lucian Blaga, *Geneza metaforei ∏i sensul culturii*, in *Trilogia Culturii*, ed. Dorli Blaga. Vol. 9 of *Opere* (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1985) 407.

[7] Blaga, ™*tiin*⇔/∏*i Crea*⇔*ie*, 184–85.

[8] Blaga's postulation of the existence of a creator of the universe is discussed in the chapter on metaphysics in my forthcoming book, *The Metaphysics of Religion: Lucian Blaga and Contemporary Philosophy*, Farleigh-Dickenson University Press, 2006.

Blaga's reason for this interpretation of the categories is quite different from Kant's, and has to do with the structure and purpose of cognition. Blaga's reason for believing the categories to be subjective is that, according to his proposed metaphysics, in order to further its purposes in creation, the Creator does not permit humans to have objective ("positive-adequate") cognition. The categories are one of the means utilized by the Creator to guarantee that humanity does not achieve objective cognition. The categories act as both facilitators of cognition and as limits to cognition, enabling subjective knowledge but preventing objective knowledge.[9]

According to Kant, the categories of the understanding are a fixed set that is necessarily possessed by all people. In other words, according to Kant all people have the same immutable categories of the understanding. Spengler argued, contra Kant, that particular sentiments of spatiality are culturally relative. He argues that there are at least nine different space/time sentiments that are found in different cultures.[10]

In reflecting on these views, Blaga observes that, while the perceptions of space, time, and so on appear to be universal, space and time are also constructed differently in different cultures.[11] The categories of the understanding, though subjective, are not affected by culture (and do not bear the imprint of style) because they are not human creations—they are created by the Creator.[12] He accounts for the apparent variability of the categories by proposing that humans have two sets of categories, not one: the cognitive categories of the conscious and the abyssal categories of the subconscious (also called the "stylistic categories").[13] The former are invariable, but the latter are quite variable. Space and time (as determined by the cognitive categories) are universal concrete horizons of the conscious. However, their "texture" is determined by the abyssal categories of each individual's subconscious, and is therefore variable. For example, space can be conceived as being tridimensional, flat, undulatory, arched, or other ways.[14]

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[9] ™ţiin⇔/∏i Crea⇔ie, 185–86. This is discussed in more detail in the chapters on metaphysics and epistemology in Jones, *The Metaphysics of Religion*.

[10] Lucian Blaga, *Orizont ∏i Stil*, in *Trilogia Culturii*, ed. Dorli Blaga. Vol. 9 of *Opere* (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1985) 101–2, 108, 136. Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, see vol. 1, ch. 4, "Makrokosmos: The Symbolism of the World-picture and the Space Problem," especially the subchapter "Spatial Depth as 'Time Become Rigid': The prime symbol."

[11] Blaga, *Orizont ∏i Stil*, 137–38.

[12] Blaga, *Geneza Metaforei ∏i Sensul Culturii*, 402; ™ţiin⇔/∏i Crea⇔ie, 199, 211. According to Blaga, Nietzsche argued that the categories are human creations and are influenced by culture (ibid., 164).

[13] While the existence of a subconscious within the mind is generally taken for granted today, in Blaga's day it was still a controversial issue. Blaga was a contemporary of Freud and Jung and interacts with their views on the subconscious, see *Orizont ∏i Stil*, 97. Vasile Dem. Zamfirescu contrasts Blaga with Freud and Jung in his chapter "Filosofia culturii ∏i psihoanaliz| la Lucian Blaga," in *Dimensiunea Metafizic|a Operei lui Lucian Blaga*, ed. Angela Botez and A. Firu⇔|, 271–75. Regarding the stylistic categories, see Blaga, ™ţiin⇔/∏i Crea⇔ie, 174–76, and ch. 9 ("Doua tipuri de cunoa∏tere"); and *Geneza Metaforei ∏i Sensul Culturii*, ch. 5 ("Categoriile abisale").

[14] Ibid., 413.

Based on its particular set of abyssal categories, the human subconscious attributes to space and time details of structure that are similar to but more determined than the indeterminate structures of space and time in the conscious.[15]

       The abyssal categories lie at the base of all cultural creations.[16] They form a complex that Blaga names the "stylistic matrix."[17] The immense number of combinations of the stylistic categories possible within an individual's stylistic matrix accounts for the plethora of possible and actual cultures.[18] Because of this important role in forming culture, the abyssal categories are constitutive of the substance of humanity, whereas the cognitive categories merely enable the integration of objects to the conscious.[19]

       Structurally, the details of the cognitive categories are immutable and universal, while the details of the abyssal categories are variable and individual.[20] It is sometimes the case that there are parallel cognitive and abyssal categories, such as in the case of time and space. These are what Blaga calls "doublets of horizons."[21] The two categories of a doublet are complementary but differ from each other in detail.

       Both cognitive and abyssal categories are part of the Creator's plan for protecting and enhancing created existence.[22] While the specific cognitive categories are direct creations of the Creator, the specific stylistic categories are human creations. The cognitive categories are one way that the Creator implements transcendent censorship, while the abyssal categories are a means of implementing "transcendent braking." The two types of categories working together to fulfill the Creator's "principle of the conservation of mystery."[23]

The Stylistic Matrix and its Key Components

       Each human subconscious possesses a "stylistic matrix," a set of stylistic categories that determines the results of its creative endeavors.[24] This matrix is the sum of all the stylistic categories and their influences upon a person's creativity and is composed of four primary factors and an unspecified number of secondary factors.[25] Two

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[15] Blaga, *Orizont ∏i Stil*, 109. In the words of Vasile Musc|, with the introduction of the stylistic categories, "Blaga operates a transfer of criticism from the upper level of the conscience, the seat of the cognitive activities the analysis of which preoccupied Kant, to the dark basement of the subconscious, the hearth of creative activity." Vasile Musc|, "Specificul crea⇔iei culturale române∏ti în c>mpul filosofiei"), in *Lucian Blaga*, ed. Ghi∏e, Botez, and Botez, 469.

[16] Blaga, *Fiin⇔a Istoric|*, 498.

[17] Blaga, *Geneza Metaforei ∏i Sensul Culturii*, 409.

[18] Ibid., 412–413.

[19] Blaga, *Orizont ∏i Stil*, 133.

[20] Blaga, *Geneza Metaforei ∏i Sensul Culturii*, 414.

[21] Blaga, *Orizont ∏i Stil*, ch. 7, "Teoria dubletelor."

[22] This plan is discussed in detail in Jones, *The Metaphysics of Religion*.

[23] Blaga, *Fiin⇔a Istoric|*, 490, 502–3; *™tiin⇔| ∏i Crea⇔ie*, 176 (footnote).

[24] The term "stylistic field" is sometimes used as a synonym for stylistic matrix, as in *Fiin⇔a Istoric|*, ch. 5, "C>mpurile stilistice"; see also *Fiin⇔a Istoric|*, 420, 485.

[25] Blaga, *™tiin⇔| ∏i Crea⇔ie*, 176–78. In some places (e.g., *Orizont ∏i Stil*, 177) Blaga lists five factors, listing the spatial and temporal horizons of the subconscious separately. In other places he includes the spatial and temporal horizons under the single heading

different creative styles can be separated by as little as one of these secondary factors.[26] The idea of a stylistic matrix explains why and how creations within a particular culture bear certain similarities and also why they are not identical.[27] Furthermore, it is that which enables a creation to have a sense of fittingness and context. A judgment that a particular creation "lacks style" may be nothing more than an indication that there are subtle differences between the matrices of the creator and the critic.[28] Conversely, the ability of one culture to appreciate the creations of another is explained by the shared elements of their stylistic matrices, which can enable reciprocal understanding.[29]

Stylistic matrices are shaped by the physical and spiritual environment in which the person or community lives.[30] They are usually conservative by nature: they are resistant to criticism and change.[31] This explains why two different cultures sometimes coexist within the same physical environment: their stylistic matrices were formed at a time when the cultures were geographically separate, and although they are not indifferent to their current cultural setting, they do retain much of their old cultural formation. However, it is possible for the factors that make up a particular stylistic matrix to change, which leads to a change in the stylistic matrix itself.[32]

The four primary components of any stylistic matrix are: 1. The horizon of the subconscious; 2. An axiological accent; 3. A particular sense of destiny; and 4. A particular formative aspiration (*nazuin⇔a formativ/*).[33] The first of these, the horizon of the subconscious, refers to the particular way that a person's subconscious mind structures space and time, and therefore the particular forms of the abyssal categories that imprint the spatial and temporal aspects of a person's creations.[34] There are at least three possible temporal horizons of the subconscious: past, present, and future. These horizons sometimes combine and overlap, causing blurring or hybridizing of the horizon.[35] The

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"horizon of the subconscious" (e.g., *Orizont ∏i Stil*, 175). I follow this later practice in my enumeration of four factors.

[26] Blaga, *Orizont ∏i Stil*, 175.

[27] Ibid., 177, 182–83; *Fiin⇔a Istoric/*, 420–39.

[28] Blaga, *Orizont ∏i Stil*, 177-8.

[29] Ibid., 184–85. The chapter "Interferen⇔e stilistice" in *Fiin⇔a Istoric/* discusses the different ways that stylistic matrices relate to each other.

[30] Diaconu and Diaconu, *Dic⇔ionar de termeni de filosofice ai lui Lucian Blaga.* (Bucharest: Univers Enciclopedia, 2000), 218.

[31] Blaga, *Orizont ∏i Stil*, 179.

[32] This is discussed in the chapter "Durata factorilor stilistici, in *Fiin⇔a Istoric/*.

[33] Blaga, *Orizont ∏i Stil*, 152ff., 175, 179; *Geneza Metaforei ∏i Sensul Culturii*, 410.

[34] Blaga, *Orizont ∏i Stil*, 109, 179; concerning space see *Orizont ∏i Stil*, ch. 4 ("Cultur| ∏i spatiu") and ch. 5 ("Intre peisaj ∏i orizont incon∏tient"); concerning time see *Orizont ∏i Stil*, ch. 6 ("Orizonturi temporale"). A variety of spatial horizons are possible. Blaga gives the following examples of spatial horizons of particular cultures: Arabian culture—veiled space; Babylonian culture—twin space; Chinese culture—rolled space; Greek culture—spherical space; popular Romanian culture—undulatory space; Saxon culture—infinite, tridimensional space. *Orizont ∏i Stil*, 107 (footnote), 117.

[35] Ibid., 120–21, 127.

temporal horizon of a culture is reflected in the creative constructions of that culture, including its histories and its metaphysical creations.[36]

The second component of a stylistic matrix, the "axiological accent," refers to an attitudinal reflex of the subconscious that is superimposed upon the spatial and temporal horizons. Although the subconscious is intrinsically united with its horizons, it is not always in complete accord with them.[37] The axiological accent is a valuation of the respective horizons of the subconscious, an evaluation that is positive, negative, or neutral, resulting in an affirmation of, negation of, or neutrality toward the spatial or temporal horizon. A particular horizon can have different senses depending on the accent it receives.[38] A negative axiological accent does not result in the annulling of the particular horizon, but rather in that horizon being used in a negative way in the construction of cultural creations.[39]

The third component of a stylistic matrix, the "sense of destiny," refers to the attitude or predisposition of the subconscious that influences how it views life as a trajectory within the horizon of the subconscious.[40] This movement can be one of advancing toward the horizon (which Blaga labels "anabasic"), one of withdrawal from the horizon ("catabasic"), or it can be static ("neutral" or "vegetative").[41]

The fourth of the key components of the stylistic matrix, the "formative aspiration," refers to the human drive to imprint one's own inner form on the things around oneself.[42] This drive takes different forms in different cultures. Blaga notes three distinct possible forms that the formative aspiration takes: individualized, standardized, and elementized.[43] Through each of these approaches those that employ them aspire to reveal "truth," to portray through their creativity things as they really are. Each believes that his/her respective approach is the correct approach.[44] To the question whether their attempts reflect objective reality or a "style of thought," Blaga affirms the latter.[45]

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[36] The first chapter of *Fiin⇔a Istoric/* contains a long analysis of the interaction of the stylistic matrices and historiographies of various cultures: Egyptian, Persian, Indian, Chinese, Greek, and medieval and modern Europe. Blaga, *Fiin⇔a Istoric/*, 354–66.

[37] Blaga, *Orizont ∏i Stil*, 141. Although this suggestion may sound somewhat odd, Blaga points out that there are numerous common examples of similar phenomena. For example, a person is intrinsically linked to his/her self, but this does not entail that s/he positively values all of his/her qualities.

[38] Ibid., 150.

[39] Ibid., 142; see 142–51 for illuminating examples of this.

[40] Here, as elsewhere in his philosophy, Blaga is forced to make recourse to metaphoric language to express his concepts.

[41] Ibid., 152; for illuminating examples of this see 152-55.

[42] Ibid., 157.

[43] Ibid., 158: modul individualizant, modul tipizant, modul stihial (elementarizant).

[44] Ibid., 158. See also Blaga, *Ferestre Colorate*, 359.

[45] Blaga, *Orizont ∏i Stil*, 161–62. For illuminating examples of this see 159-70. Blaga hints that the sense of a cultural creation is only appreciated when one steps out of the habitual mode of observation (individualized or standardized) and views it from the perspective of its own formative aspiration, 167.

These four primary components and an unnumbered quantity of secondary components make up the stylistic matrix of the subconscious. The stylistic matrix is the inner horizon of the subconscious, and it functions according to its own norms, relatively independent of the conscious. The stylistic matrix is responsible for the unity of attitudes, accents, and aspirations that distinguish one culture from another and that give to a person's conscious the support of continuity and to a person's subconscious the connection to a collectivity.[46] Furthermore, the existence of stylistic matrices witnesses to the creative destiny given to humanity by the Creator.[47]

Philosophy of Culture and Blaga's Epistemology

Blaga's philosophy of culture has a direct impact on his epistemology.[48] According to Blaga's analysis, there are two types of cognition: type I cognition (paradisaic) and type II cognition (luciferic). Type I cognition increases knowledge quantitatively, through the numerical reduction of the mysteries of existence by adding new facts to human knowledge. It utilizes the cognitive categories. Type II cognition increases knowledge qualitatively, through deepening the understanding of the mystery of a cognitive object. This deepening of the understanding involves creative constructs that provide theoretical explanations of the phenomena in question. Since all creative acts are affected by a stylistic matrix, these acts of type II cognition are as well. They operate through the application of both the cognitive and the stylistic categories.

Type I cognition is limited by transcendent censorship via the cognitive categories. The stylistic categories do not affect type I cognition.[49] Type II cognition is limited by both transcendent censorship and the stylistic categories. Therefore all knowledge acquired via type II cognition is culturally relative.[50] The stylistic categories function both positively and negatively in cognition, and these two functions are intrinsically related. They function as a structural medium for revelation of mystery and as a limit to this revelation ("stylistic brakes"). Thus the abyssal categories both lead humans to create and prevent human creativity from reaching absolute adequacy.[51]

Corresponding to the two types of cognition and the two types of limits on cognition, there are two definitions of truth that spring from Blaga's philosophy of culture. In type I cognition, truth consists in a relation of correspondence between an idea and reality.[52] This is what Blaga names "natural truth." This type of truth involves the

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[46] Ibid., 186.

[47] Blaga, *Geneza Metaforie ∏i Sensul Culturii*, 414.

[48] For a more detailed explanation of Blaga's epistemology, see Jones, *The Metaphysics of Religion*, ch. 5, "Blaga's Epistemology."

[49] This does not imply that type I cognition is not interpretive—all human knowledge of this world is interpretive, even type I cognition, which interprets based on the cognitive categories. Blaga, *Experimentul ∏i Spiritul Matematic*, 657.

[50] Blaga, *™tiint/∏i Crea⇔ie*, 199, 211.

[51] Blaga, *Fiin⇔a Istoric/*, 492–94.

[52] "ecua⇔ie intre idee ∏i realitate" (Blaga, *Geneza Metaforei ∏i Sensul Culturii*, 417). Blaga is well aware that this definition of truth raises a criteriological issue, but we cannot enter into that discussion here.

application of the cognitive categories to empirical data. Because the cognitive categories are not influenced by culture, "natural truth" is not subject to cultural influences.[53]

What is judged to be true in type II cognition, on the other hand, is relative to one's stylistic matrix. What is judged to be true does not depend only upon the criteria of logic and concrete intuition. It involves style, culture, and a feeling of resonance between the proposition and the cognitive subject.[54] "Judgments of appreciation, which refer to 'constructed' truths, will vary therefore according to how the people's stylistic matrices vary."[55] This is because what is being judged is not the relation between an idea and a supposedly observable reality, but the relation between an idea that is a construct and a reality that is known to be hidden. The fact that the reality is hidden necessitates that constructive nature of the idea. The constructive nature of the idea implicates the incorporation of culture (since all constructs are cultural constructs according to Blaga's analysis). The incorporation of culture implicates the employment of the stylistic categories, as much in the appreciation/evaluation of the idea as in its construction.

That type II cognition involves culture in its truth-judgments has implications that reach far beyond philosophy. Even science is affected by this conception, since scientific hypotheses and theories are constructs that involve type II cognition.[56] The extent to which Blaga was convinced of this is revealed in his startling statement that "the new physics . . . is more the expression of our kind of thinking and of our style, than the reflection of an objective reality."[57] Furthermore, he argues that the domination of one mode of rationalization over others within science, and the overthrow of one mode of rationalization by another, provide an argument for the significance of style as a factor in scientific change.[58]

Both type I and type II cognition operate by utilizing categories. These categories both facilitate and limit cognition. In this way the two types of categories work together to fulfill the Creator's "principle of the conservation of mystery."[59]

Philosophy of Culture and Blaga's Metaphysics

Blaga's philosophy of culture dovetails with his metaphysics.[60] Blaga's metaphysical system posits the existence of a single source of all other existents and that

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[53] Ibid., 417–18. Both types of cognition attempt to reveal mystery. The former does so in a cognitive way that is subject to specific limits, and the latter does so in a cognitive-constructive way that is subject to additional limits, 447, 449ff.

[54] Ibid., 417–18; see also Blaga, ™tiin⇔/∏i Crea⇔ie, 180.

[55] Ibid., 418.

[56] Ibid., 417–18. A brief but useful discussion of Blaga's writings on philosophy of science and culture is Mircea Flonta's article, "Analiza cultural| a cunoa∏terii positive", in *Dimensiunea metafizic/a operei lui Lucian Blaga*, ed. A. Botez and A. Firu⇔|, 257–60.

[57] Blaga, ™tiint/∏i Crea⇔ie, 160–61. See also Angela Botez, "C>mpul stilistic ∏i evolu⇔ia ∏tiin⇔ei" in *Dimensiunea metafizic/a operei lui Lucian Blaga*, ed. A. Botez and A. Firu⇔|, 261–66, where Botez compares Blaga's philosophy of science to that of Thomas Kuhn and other recent thinkers.

[58] Blaga, *Experimentul ∏i Spiritul Matematic*, 685.

[59] Blaga, *Fiin⇔a Istoric/*, 490, 502–3; ™tiin⇔/si Crea⇔ie, 176 (footnote).

[60] For a more detailed explanation of Blaga's metaphysics, see Jones, *The Metaphysics of*

this source created the cosmos in such a way as to both perpetuate and preserve creation. It created humanity with specific abilities and limits that both motivate and enable humanity to approach mystery, but that also prevent humanity from eliminating mystery.[61]

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

The Creator protects itself from the possibility of human rivalry by the stylistic limiting of human revelatory acts. The Creator also prevents this rivalry by creating humanity in such a way that humans put a positive value on style rather than viewing style and culture as limits imposed upon humanity by the Creator (Blaga calls this tactic "transcendent conversion").[62] According to Blaga's metaphysics, culture is a positive value, but it is also a necessary and useful limit upon human revelation of the mysterious. The relativity that culture imposes upon all human creations has the perhaps tragic effect of isolating humanity from the absolute, but Blaga asserts that at the same time it gives humanity a dignity beyond comparison.[63]

Claimed Practical Benefits of Blaga's Philosophy of Culture

A practical benefit of Blaga's philosophy of culture is that it yields explanations to a number of perennially vexing problems. For example, Blaga's theory provides an explanation of how styles are originated. Two views on the origin of style are widely accepted. It is often supposed that a particular style is initiated by an individual and then others imitate that style, causing its spread. Conversely, it is sometimes held that a style exists independently of any individuals and imposes itself upon individuals.[64] Blaga rejects both of these views. Against the first view he points out that expressionist painters, Bergson's psychology, and Mach's physics all reflect the same fundamental style, but that they were ignorant of each other's work, therefore imitation cannot be the

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Religion, ch. 4, "Blaga's Metaphysics."

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

[62] Blaga, *Diferen⇔ialele divine*, in *Trilogia Cosmologic/*, vol. 11 in *Opere*, ed. Dorli Blaga (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1988), 179, and *Arta ∏i Valoare*, in *Trilogia Valorilor*, vol. 10 of *Opere*, ed. Dorli Blaga (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1987), 631–32.

[63] Blaga, *Aspecte Antropologice*, in *Trilogia Cosmologic/*, vol. 11 in *Opere*, ed. Dorli Blaga (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1988), 293, *Fiin⇔a Istoric/*, 467 ("*destinul tragic ∏i mare⇔*"); *Geneza Metaforie ∏i Sensul Culturii*, 459.

[64] Blaga states that the second of these views is a development of a Hegelian view on one of the attributes of the Idea. Blaga, *Orizont ∏i Stil*, 181.

explanation of how they came to share the same style. Blaga's theory of a subconscious stylistic matrix, however, nicely explains this parallelism: the appearances of the same style in the works of people within the same culture who are not aware of each other's works are due to their shared stylistic matrices. Differences between their works are explained by variations between the particular secondary categories within the stylistic matrix of each individual.[65]

Similarly, Blaga's theory of style illuminates the nature of the relationship between an individual and a collective group. The problem involves questions such as, what is the relationship between an individual and a collectivity to which that individual belongs? What distinguishes an individual as belonging to one collectivity rather than another? What is it that distinguishes between different collectivities? Why are there differences between individuals within the same group? Is a collective group a real unit, or is it nothing more than a collection of individuals, the latter being the real existent? Or are individuals merely exponents of the group, and the group the real existent?

Blaga reviews and rejects the solutions proposed by romanticism, positivism, and naturalism. His own partial solution to the problem (he grants that there are other aspects in addition to the stylistic one) sees the collectivity as a community of individuals with a shared stylistic matrix.[66] The individual, on Blaga's view, shares in these categories and has additional categories that are unique to that individual. Particularly individualistic people can, moreover, reject some of the categories shared by that individual's group. Therefore the individual is neither merely a component of the collectivity, nor is the community merely a conglomeration of individuals. Seen through the lens of Blaga's philosophy of culture, the distinguishing characteristics and "familial resemblances" of both the individual and the group are seen to result not from one or the other being a "real existent" but from shared and not-shared abyssal categories.[67]

This explanation of the relationship between individuals and communities leads to an elucidation of a further problem: the problem of cross-cultural communication. The question of whether it is really possible to overcome cultural barriers and have effective cross-cultural communication is not a new one.[68] Many have argued that cross-cultural communication is doomed to produce misunderstanding. Blaga takes it as evident that this is not always the case. He argues that any overlapping elements of two different stylistic matrices facilitate communication between the matrices. He states that points in common can be sufficient not only for communication between the two, but also make possible the influencing of one culture by another and the "contaminating" of one culture by another.[69]

A further benefit of Blaga's philosophy of culture, and in particular his view on the thwarting of the human aspiration toward the transcendent, is that it confers meaning

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[65] Ibid., 181–83.

[66] Blaga, *Geneza Metaforie Ṣi Sensul Culturii*, 439.

[67] Ibid., 437–39; *Orizont Ṣi Stil*, 184ff.

[68] Blaga writes that Spengler is among those who believe that all cross-cultural communication results in misunderstanding. He states that Spengler did little more than transpose Leibniz' metaphysics onto a philosophy of culture, making cultures comparable to monads without windows, and therefore incommensurable. Ibid., 184–85.

[69] Ibid., 185.

upon the relativity of all human productions. That human creations are always of finite scope, limited duration, and mitigated success is often viewed as a human shortcoming. Blaga's philosophy of culture provides an explanation for these "shortcomings" that shows their value and removes their condemnation. Humanity's aspiration toward the transcendent is laudable, and the failure to reach this goal is a result of important factors that are necessarily beyond the human reach.[70] The Creator's creation of humanity with an insatiable desire for the transcendent is, according to Blaga's philosophy of culture, an expression of the Creator's care for creation.[71]

The Problem of Inter-religious Understanding: The Contemporary Debate

There is a debate in contemporary philosophy over the possibility or impossibility of inter-religious understanding. This problem is perhaps more widely acknowledged in the Continental than in the analytic tradition, but has also received some attention in English-language philosophy of religion.[72] Inter-religious dialogue has become a very important theater of religious and philosophical reflection. However, frustration is a common experience in inter-religious dialogue. This has led to a dialogue about dialogue.[73] Some have suggested that even dialogue does not guarantee the ability of overcoming the barriers to inter-religious communication, and therefore such frustration may always be part of some attempts at inter-religious communication.[74] Two questions related to such a communicational chasm must be addressed: the question of its existence and size, and the question of whether such a chasm (if one truly exists) can be overcome.

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

[71] Blaga, *Geneza Metaforie ∏i Sensul Culturii*, 452.

[72] Influential Continental philosophers have written on the topic of inter-ideological communication; see, for example, Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), and *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), and *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); and Jηrgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), and *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987). For views from English-language philosophy of religion, see many of the contributions to *Religious Pluralism and Truth: Essays on Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Thomas Dean (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), and some of the contributions to *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, ed. Leonard Swidler (New York: Orbis Books, 1987).

[73] A dialogue about dialogue is what takes place in *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, ed. Leonard Swidler, especially sections 3, 4, and 5, 118–250.

[74] See, for example, Norbert M. Samuelson, "The Logic of Inter-religious Dialogue," in *Religious Pluralism and Truth*, ed. Thomas Dean, 146; and Raimundo Panikkar, "The Invisible Harmony: A Universal Theory of Religion or a Cosmic Confidence in Reality?" in *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, ed. Leonard Swindler, 124–32.

That there exist a number of religions and ideologies that are so different from each other that they encounter difficulties in understanding each other is not disputed. It is possible to view the differences between these belief systems as insignificant and surmountable, as significant but surmountable, or as significant and insurmountable. If the differences between these belief systems are accepted as being significant, it is possible to view the conflicting beliefs involved either as truly incompatible or as complementary.

It is possible to view religious diversity positively or negatively. Positively, many view diversity as having aesthetic benefit. Some also view diversity as having pragmatic benefits. Negatively, it could be argued that among multiple incompatible beliefs on a given subject only one of them can be correct, and that therefore diversity often points to widespread cognitive error. It can also be pointed out that diversity often leads to conflict.[75]

Inter-religious communication is useful, perhaps even critical, to avoiding conflict between groups holding to different beliefs. It would seem that since all humans are probably descended from common ancestors and since all humans inhabit largely similar environments, all human belief systems should be reducible to a set of common elements. If, on the other hand, real pluralism (multiple incompatible systems) exists, then there can be no inclusive reconciliation except at the cost of the elimination of pluralism.[76] The diversity of existent belief systems could be a result of a situation in which a variety of distinct equally valid interpretations is possible, or it could simply be an indication that human cognition is prone to error. That disparate beliefs are as widely held and pervasively defended as they are has been taken to suggest that there is more than one possible and accurate way of interpreting reality. On the other hand, it could be an indication of the extent of human cognitive error.

It has been suggested that if all belief systems are reducible to a set of common elements, then there exist sufficient commonalties within the nonreduced systems to enable communication.[77] If, on the other hand, real pluralism exists, interideological communication may not be possible.

In addition to these epistemological facets of the problem of inter-religious communication there is an aesthetic aspect to the problem. It can be argued that the valuation of truth-criteria is aesthetic: that the valuation of homogeneity or consistency over diversity or paradox, and vice versa, is an aesthetic judgment. It is also possible that the weight given to certain kinds of support in one tradition versus other types of support in another tradition (e.g., historical evidence rather than contemplative experience) is based on aesthetic criteria, and that allegiance to a system is sometimes a result of the

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[75] See S. Mark Heim, "Different Views of Difference," in Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995) 131-144.

[76] "The striving for categorial unity between different worlds necessarily leads to reductionism either in the form of semantic/ontological imperialism or of abstract synthesism." Ashok K. Gangadean, "The Hermeneutics of Comparative Ontology and Comparative Theology," in *Religious Pluralism and Truth*, ed. Thomas Dean, 228.

[77] This has been argued by Noam Chomsky; see Chomsky, *Rules and Representations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 206–15, 226, 232–34, and many other passages.

personal appeal and satisfaction of a system, which may vary from one individual to another. The price of unity may be the loss of diversity or of individual identity, and vice versa. So, what might seem like gain to one may seem like loss to another. Furthermore, the price of diversity and/or individual identity may be the loss of universal intelligibility (it has been argued that diversity entails incommensurability).[78] If that is the case, then inter-religious communication may only be possible at the cost of diversity and individuality.

It has been argued, from the perspective of hermeneutics, that the meanings of terms are strictly relative to the belief systems in which they are used.[79] Some have argued that because of this, belief systems can only be understood from within, and therefore there can be no objective comparison or evaluation of such systems.[80] This argument may err in viewing such understanding as an "all-or-nothing" affair. It may be more accurate to view understanding as occurring in degrees (that is, understanding might better be viewed as being shallow, poor, good, better, profound, etc.). If that is the case, it still may be possible that systems of belief can only be well understood when understood from within.

A number of thinkers have also argued that there is no neutral ground from which competing truth-claims can be viewed—no "God's-eye perspective"—and that therefore it is not possible to have an objective evaluative comparison of the truth-claims of different belief systems. However, this argument may overlook the significant distinction between truth-claims and truth-criteria. While truth-claims differ in such situations, truth-criteria might possibly be the same, which might make possible the evaluation of the truth-claims of adherents to various belief systems. Ninian Smart has analyzed a variety of attitudes toward religious diversity and criteria by which religions can be evaluationally compared, and has concluded that although there are no absolutely neutral arenas of comparison, there are at least seven valid inter-religious evaluative criteria.[81]

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[78] Heim, 132. On diversity and incommensurability, see Margolis, *Historied Thought, Constructed World*, 169; Gangadean, "The Hermeneutics of Comparative Ontology and Comparative Theology," in *Religious Pluralism and Truth*, ed. Thomas Dean, 229.

[79] Ashok K. Gangadean, "The Hermeneutics of Comparative Ontology and Comparative Theology," 225–26.

[80] This is argued by Michel Foucault in "What is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 32–50. A similar line of thought is applied to religions by Panikkar, in "The Invisible Harmony: A Universal Theory of Religion or a Cosmic Confidence in Reality?" in *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, ed. Leonard Swidler, 118–53, and perhaps in Dean's "Universal Theology *and* Dialogical Dialogue" (ibid.), where he states that "Theology, as a human, cultural, historical enterprise, can be done only from some particular perspective or other, and any claims to be able to dispense with such a perspective or to universalize it must simply be rejected" (173).

[81] Ninian Smart, "Truth, Criteria, and Dialogue," in *Religious Pluralism and Truth*, ed. Thomas Dean, 67–71. The seven criteria that Smart lists are: 1. The appeal to religious experience; 2. The appeal to history; 3. The appeal to charismatic authority; 4. The appeal of ethical fruits; 5. The appeal of "modernity"; 6. The appeal to psychological relevance; and 7. The appeal to aesthetic properties.

William Wainright, sympathetic to Smart's analysis, has proposed additional criteria.[82] Additionally, it is possible that all belief-systems share at least some minimal number of common elements (common experiences, common communicative elements, etc.). These shared elements may enable inter-religious communication,[83] but more than that, how successfully these common elements are accounted for by each system can be a criterion of evaluation.

Central to the issue of the possibility of inter-religious communication, then, are two important and interrelated questions: 1. Which is more significant, the shared elements of human belief systems or the differences between human belief systems? and 2. Do the shared elements of human belief systems provide a basis for inter-religious communication, or do the differences between them prevent such communication? Some have argued that the two opposing forces (difference and commonality, or communication and estrangement) may exist simultaneously, and that the concurrence of the two may in fact be a primary factor in dialogue.[84] No accord has been reached about the possibility of such a resolution of this dilemma: the questions of the commensurability and the communicability of belief systems continue to be discussed by philosophers, religion scholars, and linguists.

The Problem of Inter-religious Understanding: Blaganian Contributions

One of the questions posed earlier in this article was whether or not a communication and understanding chasm exists between differing belief systems. Blaga seems to admit that such a chasm does exist. This is implied in his statements to the effect that cultural and subjective factors play a large role in determining the reception or rejection of metaphysical systems. Blaga addresses the issue more directly in a short discussion of the supposed "impermeability of cultures" in *Orizont Şi Stil*.[85] In light of Blaga's emphasis on the role of culture in cognition, his constructivism, and his epistemological modesty with regard to the knowledge of other kinds of cognitive objects, it would be no surprise if he sees inter-ideological communication as being potentially problematic.

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[82] William Wainright, "Doctrinal Schemes, Metaphysics and Propositional Truth," in *Religious Pluralism and Truth*, ed. Thomas Dean, 73–86. Wainright's additional criteria are internal consistency, coherence, simplicity, scope, explanatory adequacy, and existential or pragmatic utility (81).

[83] As is argued in Habermas' theory of "universal pragmatics," and also in Gadamer's understanding of philosophical hermeneutics, see Mary Ann Stenger, "Gadamer's Hermeneutics as a Model for Cross-Cultural Understanding and Truth in Religion," in *Religious Pluralism and Truth*, ed. Thomas Dean, 156–62.

[84] Dean discusses the significance of religions being open to dialogue and simultaneously being opaque from the point of view of being understood by other religions in "Universal Theology *and* Dialogical Dialogue," in *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, ed. Leonard Swidler, 170.

[85] "Impermeabilitatea culturilor," Blaga, *Orizont Şi Stil*, 184. In this context Blaga criticizes Spengler for supporting the view of such impermeability, accusing Spengler of transposing Leibniz' metaphysics onto a philosophy of culture, and thus making cultures comparable to monads without windows, 184–85.

Blaga's philosophy goes beyond merely affirming the existence of such a chasm: it offers a possible explanation of its source. According to Blaga's philosophy, the probable reason for the problematic nature of communication between belief systems is stylistic braking, which has been introduced in the first part of this article. Stylistic braking is a method employed by the Creator for the purpose of preserving its own hegemony and thereby preserving the order of creation. Stylistic braking operates by necessitating that all human creations, including belief systems, occur through the guiding and molding influences of the abyssal categories formed into a stylistic matrix.

Religions and other similar ideological systems involve both type I (paradisaic) and type II (luciferic) cognition. Religious beliefs of the type I sort involve truth-claims of a correspondence nature that can be easily communicated and are relatively easy to verify or falsify. Claims such as "Siddhartha Gautama is the founder of Buddhism," "Mohammad taught that religion should not be a matter of coercion," and "Jesus rose bodily from the dead" are "natural" truths that are readily understood and tested.

Religious beliefs of the type II sort involve creative constructs that provide theoretical explanations of the issues relevant to the particular belief system. Since all creative acts are affected by a stylistic matrix, the creative constructs of type II cognition are as well. Therefore the theoretical explanations offered by any religion are affected by the culture of the people involved in constructing that religion. Furthermore, the belief system of any religion is not a single construct: it is a complex of constructs. Religions involve a complex interweaving of large numbers of elements derived at least in part from the historical cultural settings of the people who have constructed them.

Here it becomes important to point out that stylistic matrices affect not only the production of stylistic creations, but also their reception. As was stated earlier, luciferic cognition is limited by both transcendent censorship and the "stylistic brakes," which are the abyssal categories that comprise any stylistic matrix. Because of this, all luciferic cognition is culturally relative.[86] The abyssal categories function both positively and negatively in cognition, and these two functions are intrinsically related. They function as a structural medium for the theoretical cognition, and as a limit to this cognition (it is the latter that is properly the "stylistic brakes"). Thus, as previously stated, the abyssal categories both facilitate human creativity and prevent human creativity from reaching absolute adequacy.[87] Likewise, the abyssal categories both facilitate theoretical cognition and prevent such cognition from being positive-adequate.

Because of these factors, religious beliefs of the type II sort involve truth-claims that are constructivist, claims that involve judgments of appreciation in addition to judgments of correspondence. Sometimes these beliefs cannot be easily communicated and are difficult or impossible to verify or falsify. Claims such as "Buddhism is the deepest philosophy," "Islam is the purest monotheism," and "Jesus lived an unparalleled life" involve subjective evaluations the acceptance of which is dependent upon harmony with a person's abyssal categories and the cultural matrix that they form.

The fact that human theoretical constructs are so *intrinsically* cultural may explain why different belief systems sometimes seem to each other to be opaque. Understanding a belief system or the statements of its adherents is not so simple and straightforward as it

[86] Blaga, ™tiin⇔/∏i Crea⇔ie, 199, 211.
[87] Blaga, Fiin⇔a Istoric/, 492–94.

at first appears. Understanding a belief system involves sharing in or at least understanding the cultural matrix that produced it. This involves the sharing or at least understanding of a whole complex network of cultural and historical elements, including the four primary components of a stylistic matrix and a potentially large number of secondary components, that may be largely foreign to the person trying to do the understanding.

A second question posed earlier in this article was whether this chasm can be overcome. The heightened emphasis that Blaga places on the cultural factors in cognition and creation might make it seem that inter-religious understanding is doomed to failure, or at best to very moderate success. According to Blaga, however, it is the very same cultural factors that render inter-religious understanding problematic that also make it possible.

According to Blaga, all (complete) humans have a cultural (stylistic) matrix.[88] This matrix is defined as a group or constellation of factors that together determine the style of the creations of a person or society. It is the sum of all the stylistic categories and their influences upon a person's creativity. A cultural matrix is composed of four primary factors and an unspecified number of secondary factors (as was explained earlier).

Two different creative styles can be separated by as little as one of these secondary factors. It is theoretically possible that two belief systems could be truly incommensurable: this would be the case if their creative elements are completely different, which would be the case if their respective matrices share no common factors (primary and secondary). In reality, however, this is not the case. Stylistic categories are shaped by the environment in which one lives. Environmental commonalties can lead to similarities in stylistic matrices. Since all humans share some environmental commonalties, it seems that there will always be at least some areas of overlap between stylistic matrices.

Just as differences in matrices are responsible (at least in part) for the difficulties of inter-religious communication, overlapping areas of matrices are what enables inter-religious communication.[89] Since all humans have at least some areas of overlap between their stylistic matrices, there is always a foothold for inter-religious communication. It is the existence of commonalties between stylistic matrices that enables understanding and communication between cultures. According to Blaga, the extent of theoretical commensurability resulting from inter-matricial overlap goes beyond mere understanding and communication: he states that it enables "contamination" of one culture by another.[90]

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[88] Blaga does not directly address the question of the status of those humans who, because of a mental disability, are not able to function on the level of luciferic cognition. His writings make it clear that he views luciferic creativity as the acme of humanness. They might also be taken to imply that luciferic creativity is necessary to full human personhood.

[89] It seems possible that some instances of communicative difficulty may be caused by simple accidental misunderstanding. Likewise, it seems possible that some instances of communicative success may be due simply to happy accident.

[90] "Teorea noastr| despre 'matricea stilistic|', în înteles de complex incon∏tient de factori determinan⇔i discontinui, care pot fi izola⇔i, lamure∏te modul cum, cu toata

The questions posed at the beginning of this section of the article involved the existence and extent of the communicational chasm between religions and the question of whether such a chasm (if one exists) can be overcome. In attempting to answer these questions three related issues surfaced: 1. Which is more significant, the shared elements of human belief systems or the differences between human belief systems? 2. Are the differences between belief systems something that should be valued, or are they something that should be overcome? and 3. Do the shared elements of human belief systems provide a basis for inter-religious understanding and/or communication, or do the differences between them prevent such understanding and communication? Blaga's philosophy has provided tentative answers to all of these questions.

According to Blaga's philosophy, the differences between belief systems are significant. They are the significant expressions of the culture and the creativity of those who are their creators. These differences form a chasm between the belief systems. They impede inter-religious understanding. Both from the perspective of type I cognition and from the perspective of type II cognition, Blaga would say that positive-adequate cognition of a religion is not possible.

Since these differences are a result of religion being a creative attempt to understand and express ultimate realities, the differences between religions are something that should be valued. The distinctives of each religion reflect the cultural creativity of that religion's adherents, and are every bit as much a work of art as are the paintings, music, and literary masterpieces of that culture. However, can the adherents of one religion understand another religion enough to appreciate its differences without rejecting them outright? When a religion makes assertoric statements about the nature of ultimate reality, it is doing more than merely expressing deep inner feelings: it is making statements the veracity, suitability, or cogency of which would seem to be open to public evaluation. Is such evaluation precluded by the bias built into every human by the cultural matrix that s/he has already absorbed? This is the third question raised above: is such evaluation possible without the inevitable result of the adherents of the second religion misunderstanding and therefore misevaluating the statements of the first?

According to Blaga's analysis, the differences that separate religions only account for part of the situation. The other parts of the situation involve the non-constructivist ("natural") elements of religions, and the commonalties between the abyssal matrices that shape religions as human creations. The type I elements of religions are fairly easily shared and can serve as a basis for and beginning of inter-religious understanding. Furthermore, all humans share at least some common abyssal categories and some common elements in the stylistic matrices that these create. These commonalties are extremely important, for they enable people from different religions to begin to understand each other's constructivist beliefs and to communicate regarding their type II cognitions. It is at this last stage that real inter-religious understanding is most challenging and also most interesting: the possibility of truly understanding and appreciating another person's evaluative beliefs offers the greatest hope for peace and reconciliation between religions.

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specificitatea unei culturi sau a unui stil, e totu∏i posibil| ∏i contaminarea de la cultur| la cultur|, de la stil la stil," Blaga, *Orizont ∏i Stil*, 185.

Thus it can be seen that, according to Blaga's philosophy, both the differences and the commonalties between belief systems are significant. Neither seems more significant than the other within Blaga's system. The commonalties are effective in providing a basis of inter-religious communication, but they neither eliminate nor depreciate the differences between belief systems. Differences should be respected and appreciated as cultural productions. We should strive honestly to understand them, realizing that our own evaluative beliefs are also culturally conditioned products of stylistic matrices. Blaga's philosophy and the commonalities between matrices do not guarantee that inter-religious communication and understanding will be easy. However, they do show us both that inter-religious communication and understanding are possible and why they are possible. Thus Blaga's philosophy of culture promotes a high regard for culture and cultural distinctness and at the same time vindicates, enables, and promotes efforts at inter-religious understanding.

Conclusion

This article has discussed a number of issues that are of intense interest to religion scholars, philosophers, and sociologists in Europe, America, and also in the Orient. It has shown that significant insights into these issues can be found in Blaga's philosophy. Unfortunately, Blaga's philosophy has yet to be translated into English. While there are a number of articles discussing Blaga's philosophy in English, and my own 300-page book describing his philosophy and applying it to contemporary issues in philosophy of religion is soon to be published in America, it is still the case that most of the world is unable to benefit from philosophical insights like those described above for the simple reason that they cannot read Blaga for themselves. It seems evident that Romania has the obligation to make this striking philosopher available to the rest of the world: for the sake of the understanding and appreciation of differences, for the sake of inter-ideological communication, and for the sake of the other philosophical insights that the world will find in his work.