

# **Vasile Băncilă**

An ethnic-spiritualist metaphysics banned by the  
totalitarian regime

**Ion Dur**

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Preface by

**Dan C. Mihăilescu**

**Series in Philosophy**



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In eternal memory of my wife,  
***Doina Marieta***



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# *Exordium*

## Recovering archaeology

If for Horia Stamatu's journalism he needed to use selective archiving, for the metaphysician Vasile Băncilă Ion Dur had to accomplish a work of recuperative archaeology in order to give coherence to a wealth of projects, conspectuses, excerpts, capricious paths and centrifugal impulses. In short, he had to do this in order to bring together as systematically as possible a fragmentism that would otherwise have condemned Băncilă to enrich the string of bio-bibliographical near-misses for which Cioran decreed the curse of the 27th generation to be an achievement in failure, namely the adventures of Bucur Țincu, Petre Țuțea D. C. Amzăr, Cioran himself, Mihail Polihroniade, G. Racoveanu, Ernest Bernea, Sorin Pavel, Petru Manoliu and others.

Thanks to the selflessness of the philosopher's daughter Ileana Băncilă and the efforts of the tireless editor Dora Mezdrea, we have today a substantial series of Vasile Băncilă's Works, published by the Museum of Brăila – Istros Publishing House, as well as by the Museum of Literature Publishing House, where Ion Dur's essay *Poste-restante*. The "case" of the thinker Vasile Băncilă, the princeps edition of this book, was printed in 2020. After 16 volumes published out of the 32 projected, we can now understand in a well-documented way that Vasile Băncilă, formed in the spirit of the historian Nicolae Iorga and the philosopher C. Rădulescu-Motru, is situated between the metaphysician Nae Ionescu and the sociologist Dimitrie Gusti when seen from the lectern; or between Mircea Vulcănescu, Dumitru Cristian Amzăr and Anton Golopenția, when placed among his generational colleagues.

The first exciting sequence that Ion Dur's exegesis uncovers is Băncilă's undergraduate thesis, dedicated to Schopenhauer and later melted into a possible doctoral thesis on the ethics, sociology and politics of the German philosopher, with many captivating observations about his reception in Maiorescu's and Eminescu's Romania. The thread unravelled here will beneficially wrap round all the rest of this speculative energy devoted to ethno-psychology, the philosophy of culture and militant sociology, with the perspective of the Romanian Idea as a philosophical category in its own right.

Ion Dur's approach is established as a welcome counterpoint to the unfair and tendentious verdict applied in the academic treatise on Romanian philosophy by the Dumitru Ghișe, Nicolae Gogoneață team of researchers;

Vasile Băncilă, who aimed at the sapiential elevation and metaphysical accreditation of the Bărăgan Plain on the level of the undulating Blagian Mioritic space, was seen by them as stuck in the formulas of Thoughtist Orthodoxy. Yet with Wundt, Frobenius, Blaga and Motru's energetism in mind, the young philosopher practised a veritable referential bulimia and worthily studied not only Schopenhauer but also Kant, Bergson, Dilthey and Faguet.

Romanian Existence is the dense chapter that places Băncilă alongside Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, Dumitru Drăghicescu and Mihai Ralea, and the section that deconstructs Transylvania as a "differentiated ethnic psychology" is still highly topical, given that the symbiosis of the Romanian provinces, long dreamed in 1848, 1878 and 1920, is still in the dream stage. Observations on the exceptionalism of the Transylvanian region, the aristocratism of Moldavia and the ambivalence of Dobrogea are well directed inside the ambivalence of destiny, with a section reserved for binomials considered specific to the Romanian space – individualism vs. communitarianism, moralism vs. aestheticism, lyricism vs. intellectualism – but found also elsewhere, either in Europe or on other continents, not to mention on the limes between Catholicism and Protestantism. All these binomials, Ion Dur observes, "make up a spiritual harmonism with complexity, variation and dynamism"; after which he quotes Vasile Băncilă: "The Romanian people never leave the harmonious complex because they are healthy, balanced, classical, because they use culture for life and salvation, and not for show."

Ion Dur's critical discourse aims to identify in some of Vasile Băncilă's finished texts – both published and unpublished – and also in the enormous quantity of thematic worksheets, the unfinished project of a metaphysics that springs from, and rests upon both the ethnic and the spiritual. The exegete runs the risk of asserting that Vasile Băncilă's philosophical performance lies somewhere in the middle; between what the thinker gave and what he could have given, if we extend the potential vectors of his metaphysical syllogisms. Ion Dur's exegesis pleads for the inclusion of Vasile Băncilă among the names that make up the table of values of Romanian philosophy, the strong argument being the existence of a work that cannot be ignored or eluded. Through his ideas, Nae Ionescu's compatriot seems to have ensured for himself an ever contemporary posterity, through – and for – those yet to come.

Vasile Băncilă remains an important private thinker for the Romanian cultural space; an author who, isolated and rejected by the totalitarian ideology, continued to philosophize on his own in the posture of a housebound Anchorite, living and creating in an exemplary communitary solitude.

**Dan C. Mihăilescu**

The best metaphysics is religion,  
and the noblest and ultimate function of philosophy  
is to introduce one to religion: the *ancilla* of religion.

*Philosophy deals with integral reality  
based on the idea of the Absolute*

Spirit has existed from eternity both in matter  
and beyond it. Analogy with Jesus Christ incarnate;  
that is why He could also be perfect as a man. This  
is the only solution to the metaphysical problem.

I am not lost in matter, but in God yes. God  
is the great and only sufficient reason.

Matter is *densified spirit*.

**Vasile BĂNCILĂ**



# An atypical philosophical diary – *starting frames* –

## Metaphysics is waiting at the *poste-restante*

For history in general and for the disciplines of the human spirit in particular, it is not the future that often seems unpredictable, but the past. The value map of the latter, with its atmosphere and structure, produces surprises that please or displease those concerned with the hermeneutics of values. Since we have been talking about memories of the future, why not accept, with the same conceptual ease, some forecasts about the past!

The intellectual biography and the metaphysical-moral performance of Romanian philosopher Vasile Băncilă (1897–1979) can be best understood through this historical lens focused on the axiological pyramid of Romanian spirituality, a lens turned upon itself, tainted with egoism and envy by the *commodities experts* of Romanian culture before 1989. An occultation operation involving not only Vasile Băncilă, but also other personalities of the Right-wing culture of Greater Romania.

Vasile Băncilă's work is waiting in the *poste-restante* (French: *poste-restante*). I don't know how many people still send letters to the *poste-restante* today, especially since there are fewer and fewer senders of messages who still use pen, pencil and paper. *E-mail* is, perhaps rightly, the dominant *medium* for a number of reasons – speed, efficiency, convenience, even the discretion that the *poste-restante* mechanism implies. Except when e-mail doesn't help at all (or merely serves as notification) – i.e., when someone has to send a parcel somewhere.

Changing what needs to be changed, I could say that the relationship between the authentic critic and the author is similar to that between the sender and the recipient in the case of the *poste-restante* service. However, instead of letters, we have writings, and the recipient – the one who is fit to read them – is unnamed (perhaps known only by reputation), a collective proper noun that refers to those critics able to use axiological-aesthetic criteria in order to decipher the meanings and significances of a text. *The more, the better* for the possible polysemy of a writing. From the average of critically applied angles and variously drawn conclusions the reasonable moral and aesthetic truth (even the *metaphorical* truth, as Paul Ricoeur would say) of a work or – generically speaking – of a type of discourse finally emerges.

I took this explanatory detour in order to suggest that the writings of a Romanian thinker, the philosopher Vasile Băncilă, attempted to reach their readers/critics using a poste-restante address; these were texts that awaited a favourable critical meteorology, after the fall of the totalitarian regime. After decades of freedom of expression, his work is not the only one which falls into the category of *backlog* of contemporary Romanian culture; there are restitutions or recoveries that need to be attempted in a balanced way, without prejudice, as far away as possible from the temperature radiated by the magma of politics or political correctness; received, so to speak, *sine ira et studio*, and not *cum ira et cum studio*.

\*

Whoever opens the second volume of the Treatise on the history of Romanian philosophy, in the section “Thoughtist Orthodoxy”, learns who Vasile Băncilă was and what he thought, from three lines to which is added a footnote visibly biased towards the totalitarian ideological context. It is said of Thoughtist metaphysics that “it was mainly represented by *Vasile Băncilă* and *Petru P. Ionescu* (who succeeded the former, after the latter stopped collaborating with *Thought* magazine) and, to a certain extent, by *Stelian Mateescu*” (Ghișe–Gogoneață, 1980, p. 682).

And in the bibliographical reference, in addition to brief information on the writings and publications to which he collaborated, it is mentioned that Băncilă broke away from the Thoughtist circle in 1938–1939, “noting that the national doctrine is being transformed into a form of 'chauvinistic imperialism', used as an instrument for various 'competitions in domestic and international politics'” (Ghișe–Gogoneață, 1980, p. 411).

It is also stated that he isolated himself from the publication *Thought*, although he was: “the main 'metaphysician' of the group” and that he “set out, in extensive attempts, to philosophically found Orthodoxy, to develop a spiritualist-theistic philosophy that would assimilate the 'attitudinal' data of the ethnic” (Ghișe–Gogoneață, 1980, p. 682).

The paragraph “Attempts to establish a spiritualist-Orthodox metaphysics” (Ghișe–Gogoneață, 1980, see pp. 704–706) of the same Treatise, where the subject of metaphysics is addressed, also invokes some of Vasile Băncilă’s ideas, quoting in particular from the essay “The Spirit of Celebration” (*Thought*, no. 4, April 1936) and from the exegesis on the philosopher Lucian Blaga (*Blaga, Romanian Energy*, 1938).

In Băncilă’s project of metaphysics based on the transcendent, on divinity (through the concept of *cosmism*), the following are invoked: the overabundant

use of metaphors and less of concepts with heuristic force, an overemphasis on the metaphysical meaning of celebration (it is a “*summum bonum* in the world of values”), the transformation of ethnicity into the foundation of philosophy, the reduction of the role of “systematic philosophy to the updating, clarification, completion and sublimation of the 'latent and diffuse philosophy' that the people would possess, the 'intuitions and lines of peasant spirituality', of the 'peasant philosophy'”.

A fundamental flaw was allegedly detected in the fact that Vasile Băncilă linked “the ethnic, some elements of the popular worldview to a religious conception”, seeking to “exploit the peasantry, popular culture in favour of Orthodoxy (...), misinterpreting them [!]”

To these would be added the relation between the cosmic world of the peasant and the idea of God as the ultimate essence, both dogmatic and divine; and the perception of the peasantry as something undifferentiated, static, “outside real historical evolution”.

Perhaps much more has been said about Vasile Băncilă, in different times, by Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu<sup>1</sup> or Dumitru Micu,<sup>2</sup> even if a few “biased truths” were also included.

\*

Anyway, I harbour only good thoughts about this raccourci from the Treatise on the history of Romanian philosophy! For the intentions of the exegete, who thought he had formulated his ideas *à rebours*, in the “official” code of the totalitarian era, appear to us today, fortunately, as value judgments fully appropriate to Vasile Băncilă’s thought. The indictments of that time are today, paradoxically, a more than politically correct plea for the truths in which the ethnic-spiritualist and personalist philosopher had always truly believed.

This represents a favourable hermeneutic turning point favoured by the installation, after 1989, of a different value climate in Romania, with different evaluation criteria and a different measure of transparency in the management of its historical and cultural past. It has thus been possible to exploit an immense archive that contains the “tremor of nerves” (Eminescu) of a “housebound Anchorite” such as Vasile Băncilă – who “belonged to the city of Brăila more than any member of Brăila’s elite” (Popa, 2006, p. 7); Nae Ionescu,<sup>3</sup> Petre Andrei,<sup>4</sup> Ernest Bernea,<sup>5</sup> Sorin Pavel,<sup>6</sup> Anton Dumitriu,<sup>7</sup> Mihail Sebastian,<sup>8</sup> all imbued with the aura of a tragic destiny.

The recovery of Vasile Băncilă’s philosophical-literary legacy has, above all, the support and encouragement of his daughter, Ileana Băncilă (who justifies a form of posterity in which the author believed, posterity through one’s

children); to this was added to this the effort of a skilful and seemingly tireless researcher – editor Dora Mezdrea, together with the understanding and help extended by the “Carol I” Museum of Brăila, the Istros Publishing House and, in equal measure, the Museum of Romanian Literature.

Some essays, perhaps the best known and most consistent,<sup>9</sup> were thus re-introduced into the public circuit, and printing of the *Works* began in 2003; it is estimated to comprise no less than 32 volumes (I will refer to some of them later in our analyses). With such a massive legacy, with such a deep imprint, Vasile Băncilă is unquestionably a *case in point* in our culture as a whole, and in Romanian philosophy in particular (Vlăduțescu, 2002, see pp. 110–115).

This is a special case, firstly, because of all the material written over time and through the *construction site* that opens under the eyes of the archive researcher; secondly, because of the *ideas* and *virtualities* inherent in a partially known work, one that is ambitious in its encyclopaedic tendency, but above all in its intention to build its own personally original system of philosophy.

In fact, most of the manuscript pages left by Vasile Băncilă to posterity constitute a veritable and atypical *philosophical diary* of dense opinions, judgments and syllogisms reflected in ideas and attitudes. A diary that constitutes the meta-physical testimony of a Christian thinker who finds in the Spirit, in the Great One, in God the Archimedic point and the constellation of his life-long reflections.

The philosopher Blaga<sup>10</sup> saw Vasile Băncilă as a threat to the spirits of high Romanian culture, N. Bagdasar<sup>11</sup> considered him “the most prolific creator” of his generation, and Nichifor Crainic<sup>12</sup> appreciated his “intellectual honesty”.

### **Avatars of a biography**

Vasile Băncilă’s biological biography was extremely tense, if his not at all agreeable confessions are to be believed. He had various troubles because of his wife’s “family of origin” (Băncilă–Blaga, 2001, p. 72) which is why he wanted to move to Transylvania, and he was also tempted to go abroad for about five years. Wounded by a gun in his left arm (July 1917) after voluntarily joining the battle front, he never made a complete recovery. The “serene and dreamy” young man had suddenly become a man “dominated by physical suffering”, so that, after repeated surgeries and six or seven months in hospital he was left “practically an invalid”, without ever asking for a reward for “what had been his faith and his duty” (Băncilă, 2000a, p. 78).

In his correspondence with Lucian Blaga<sup>13</sup>, Vasile Băncilă accuses, more than once, along with moral revolt, a nervous weariness close to a kind of

Sartrean nausea (he even uses the term “scorn”) towards various familial and social constraints. He seems to be constantly harassed by life; his job as a teacher is very demanding; at one point he commutes between Brăila, Bucharest and Sinaia, where he had been appointed professor of Philosophy to the class in which King Michael studied; he loves Brăila, the Bărăgan and the Danube, but will eventually move to Bucharest.

However, it is not for all these that Vasile Băncilă becomes *a case*, but rather for his intellectual biography (the philosopher and historian of philosophy Gh. Vlăduțescu classifies him as belonging to the “new spirituality”): the various lectures and conferences he held, some of which became texts in their own right; the essays and studies published in the press of the time; and – above all – the huge piles of annotated files and notes regarding his supreme goal: the elaboration of a system of philosophy.

In the same exchange of letters with Blaga, he does not hesitate to say, on the one hand, that he does not exclude the possibility of only the former (*id est*: conferences, printed essays) surviving him; and on the other hand, that he will probably be judged *not after what he offered*, but *after what he could have offered*. The latter seems to be the code applied to the huge archipelago of thematic files designed by this *housebound Anchorite* during the totalitarian regime. Posterity was not, therefore, eluded by his work, even if Băncilă, as he tells Blaga, valued more – perhaps only rhetorically – the posterity one obtains through having children.

If I were to compare him with anyone, the closest example would be Nae Ionescu. The shorthand lectures or notes taken by the Professor’s former students are a kind of the equivalent of Vasile Băncilă’s immense documentary fund, huge numbers of unprocessed files that, because of their lack of interpretation, remain unassembled and unprepared for publication in a final form.

For both thinkers, *oral style* and the *occasionality* of creation are essential determinants of their *scriptural* being. In the case of Băncilă, one can also add the summary character his files often have, the continuous approximation from various angles of an obsessively pursued theme. Hence the difficulty of the exegete approaching the unfolding act of his thought, a process intermittent on the surface and continuous in its deep layers, a panorama of fragmentary meditation yet not a tautological datum, the figure of tautology being an arduous repetition of cardinal, elementary i.e., fundamental ideas. All this frequently and involuntarily imprints upon the hermeneutics of Vasile Băncilă’s texts the characteristics of an interpretive archipelago, a fragmentism of commentary despite his desire for exegetical organicity.

The continual reworking of ideas is, I believe, something other than “an itinerancy of the spirit, driven by its own all-knowing vocation” (Băncilă, 2008, p. 58). It constitutes not exactly a retroactive hermeneutics, but an implicit form of correcting or straightening what has already been said. I am forced to take into account those added nuances, which – willingly or unwillingly – change the overall picture. They are rectifications by added meaning, implied by new entries springing from the “author’s mood, disciplinary perspective, a sudden revelation, another cognitive angle, a recent reading or the immediate reality, pure and simple”, as editor Dora Mezdrea rightly says.

Might it be the case that the philosopher does not aim to complete his work, but rather his cognitive journey, without falling into contradiction and sophistication! I would say that such a judgment is partly true. The compilation of *ad-hoc* files or notes is the first stage of research, of whose important pedagogy Băncilă was fully aware.

But then, where does this *unending continuum* of a possible whole that only cares about parts but not about their assembly into a unitary structure, come from! One gets the feeling that he deliberately left this last operation, the assembly, to posterity; which will probably decide to evaluate him, as the philosopher wrote to Blaga, not after what *he offered*, but after what *he could have offered*. Otherwise, I could suspect him of hesitation – and not of helplessness – in front of a construction site where the craftsmen and construction materials needed to erect a building are all present, but the beginning of the work and the tying of all the parts into one are relegated *ad calendas graecas*.

\*

There is no doubt that the most fertile period of Vasile Băncilă’s creation remains the interwar period, especially the third decade of the last century; beyond the projects completed during this period, the intellectual exercise developed after 1950 (tens of thousands of written sheets) amplified the fecundity of his elaborations. The Second World War discouraged him, his public appearances became fewer or non-existent, his collaborations with magazines also entered a shadow zone; Blaga’s repeated invitation to send him something for the *Saeculum* magazine received no response from the man he considered when he was designing the publication, to be his “main collaborator”.

Vasile Băncilă took “early retirement” from his teaching position at the age of 51 (1948); as if by a miracle he escaped the prison experience, lived modestly and avoided visibility in that “obsessive decade” of culture strangled by political

and ideological revisions. Along with other personalities, his name was also put in parentheses and omitted from the value hierarchy of Romanian culture.

It is a period in which, in his “housebound Anchorite” room (I like the phrase!), he sketches projects, reads and writes enormously, file after file, in the hope of times more favourable to the affirmation and publication of his creations.

After the partial contextual *ideological thaw* that began in 1965 (without the phenomenon being the exclusive merit of any political figure at the top of the decision-making pyramid), Vasile Băncilă began to emerge, timidly, in the cultural agora (see “The case of Vasile Băncilă in Romanian philosophy”: Popa, 2006, pp. 9–20). He was invited to speak about Iorga<sup>14</sup> at the Romanian Radio Broadcasting Conference (October 4, 1968); the magazine *Tribune* (Cluj) asked for his collaboration (“Memories and reflections” on Blaga; no. 25, June 19, 1968).

Later, at the beginning of the eighth decade, his signature appeared in *The Star*, *The Morning Star*, *The XX<sup>th</sup> Century*. Almost a decade after his death, in 1987, an Opus consisting mainly of his unpublished essays, *Portraits and Meanings*, will be printed with a preface by Zoe Dumitrescu-Buşulenga (“Unicorn” collection of the *Journal of Literary History and Theory*, G. Călinescu Institute, Bucharest). And also, in the ninth decade of the twentieth century, an exegete like Paul P. Drogeanu made the most of Băncilă’s meditations on the idea of celebration in his book of cultural anthropology, *The Practice of Happiness. Fragments about celebration* (Eminescu Publishing House, 1985); while Ion Oprişan (from the same G. Călinescu Institute) included a long interview with Vasile Băncilă about Blaga in his volume *Lucian Blaga among his contemporaries. Annotated dialogues* (Minerva Publishing House, 1987).

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Pătrăşcanu, L. (1900–1954). Romanian sociologist, jurist, Marxist philosopher and politician; for my approach, see “Three students of Nae Ionescu”, in *Currents and trends in Romanian philosophy* (1946). Bucharest: Socec Publishing House, pp. 120 et seq; other works: *Basic problems of Romania* (1944), *Under three dictatorships* (1944).

<sup>2</sup> Micu, D. (1928–2018). Romanian historian and literary critic; see “Thought” and *Thoughtism* (1975). Bucharest: Minerva Publishing House, pp. 168–176; other works: *History of Romanian literature: from popular creation to postmodernism* (2000), *Tudor Arghezi* (1940, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Ionescu, N. (1890–1940). Interwar Romanian logician, pedagogue and philosopher, a Balkan Socrates, mentor of Mircea Eliade's generation; with the exception of one volume, his work was published posthumously, after 1990.

<sup>4</sup> Andrei, P. (1891–1940). Romanian sociologist, politician and philosopher; among his writings are *Philosophy of Value* (1945), *Sociological Works* (1983).

<sup>5</sup> Bernea, E. (1905–1990). Romanian sociologist, ethnographer and philosopher, follower of the ideology of the Legionary Movement; specialized studies of Marcel Mauss and Martin Heidegger; among his writings: *Christ and the human condition*, Christian anthropology (1932), *Invitation to simplicity. Confessions for a New Man* (1939), *Frameworks of Romanian Popular Thought* (1985).

<sup>6</sup> Pavel, S. (1888–1941). Nonconformist interwar Roman intellectual, one of those who promoted the “White Lily Manifesto” (1928); among his writings: *National Revolution* (1935), *Krinonis or Steps of Loneliness* (2001).

<sup>7</sup> Dumitriu, A. (1905–1992). Romanian philosopher, logician and mathematician of Greek origin; among his writings: *The Metaphysical Value of Reason* (1933), *East and West* (1943), *History of Logic* (1969), *Alétheia* (1984).

<sup>8</sup> Sebastian, M. (1907–1945. Real name: Iosif Mendel Hechter, Romanian intellectual of Jewish origin with Right-wing ideological views, novelist, playwright, literary critic; among his writings: *For two Thousand Years. Texts, Facts, People* (1935), *The Holiday Game* (1939), *The Star Without a Name* (1942).

<sup>9</sup> See Băncilă, V.: *Portraits and meanings*, prefaced by Dumitrescu-Buşulenga, Z., edited by Băncilă, I. (1987). Bucharest: Supplement of the Journal of Literary History and Theory; *Aphorisms and para-aphorisms*, vol. I, edited by Ileana Băncilă (1993). Timişoara: Marineasa Publishing House; *Lucian Blaga, Romanian energy*, edited by Ileana Băncilă, (1995). Timişoara: Marineasa Publishing House; *The religious initiation of the child* (1996), Anastasia Publishing House; *Philosophy of ages*, edited by Ileana Băncilă (1997). Bucharest: Anastasia Publishing House; *Correspondence Vasile Băncilă – Basil Munteanu*, edited by Zamfir Bălan (1997). Brăila Museum, Istros Publishing House; *Constantin Rădulescu-Motru*, edited by Ileana Băncilă (1997). Constanţa: ExPonto Publishing House; *Manuscriptum*, Băncilă, Vasile, special issue, year XXIX, no. 3–4 (112–113), 1998; *The religion of love and Pestalozzi*, edited by Dora Mezdrea (1998). Constanţa: Ex Ponto Publishing House; *Small testaments*, vol. I–II, edition, notes, indices by Dora Mezdrea (1999). Bucharest: Eminescu Publishing House; *The space of the Bărăgan Plains*, edited by Dora Mezdrea (2000). Bucharest: Museum of Romanian Literature Publishing House, Museum of Brăila – Istros Publishing House; *Correspondence Vasile Băncilă – Lucian Blaga*, edited by Dora Mezdrea (2001). Bucharest: Museum of Romanian Literature Publishing House; Brăila Museum – Istros Publishing House; *Art and knowledge*, edited by Dora Mezdrea (2002). Bucharest: Museum of Romanian Literature Publishing House, Museum of Brăila-Istros Publishing House.

<sup>10</sup> Blaga, L. (1891–1961). Poet, playwright, translator, the most valuable Romanian philosopher of the last century; among his works: *Poems* (1942), *Dramatic Works* (1942), *Trilogy of Knowledge* (1943), *Trilogy of Culture* (1944), *Trilogy of Values* (1946).

<sup>11</sup> Bagdasar, N. (1896–1971). Romanian philosopher; among his works: *Contemporary Philosophy of History* (1930), *David Hume. Research on the Human Intellect* (1936), *Theory of Knowledge* (1941).

<sup>12</sup> Crainic, N. (1889–1972). Pseudonym of Ion Dobre, Romanian poet, theologian and philosopher with Far-Right ideological views; among his works: *Orthodoxy and Ethnocracy* (1938), *Nostalgia for Paradise* (1939), *Germany and Italy* (1943).

<sup>13</sup> See Băncilă, V. – Blaga, L. (2001). *Correspondence*. Museum of Romanian Literature, Museum of Brăila: Istros Publishing House.

<sup>14</sup> Iorga, N. (1871–1940). Romanian University Professor, historian, writer, politician. He founded and edited several newspapers and magazines. He wrote and published extensively on Romanian and world history.



# Introduction

This essay is a recovery and resignification of the thought of Vasile Băncilă, a Romanian philosopher banned by Nicolae Ceaușescu's totalitarian regime. In the notes left by the author to posterity, we find harsh judgments against Romanian national Communism. In particular, he sanctions the tragedy that it brought about on a human level in Romania, a country that had become a desert of the soul under the dictatorship. A kind of Sahara that changed even the meaning of his meditation, as he says in a confession made in 1962, somewhat at the beginning of the totalitarian hell: “my philosophy fights against the decline of the spirit: today, the values in which I believe, the classical values of man, are in decline, in danger of death; so my philosophy *today* is an *agonistic* philosophy: it fights with death”. Then, a decade and a half later (in 1976), he spoke of the birth of that “new man, the demiurge of the laboratory and the planet, the human termite armed with 'science'”, the “original” product of a miserable *industrial and political romanticism*.

\*

It is estimated that Vasile Băncilă's work will comprise 32 volumes, of which about 17 have been printed so far. The recovery of this philosophical-literary heritage has the support and encouragement of the author's daughter, Ileana Băncilă; to this must be added the efforts of a skilful and tireless research done by the editor Dora Mezdrea, together with the Museum of Brăila “Carol I” – the Istros Publishing House and the Romanian Literature Museum Publishing House.

With such a deep tracing, Vasile Băncilă constitutes, indisputably, a *case* in Romanian culture today, especially in philosophy. He is a special case because of the material he produced over more than five decades and because of the vistas he opens up before the eyes of the archival researcher. On the contrary, we do not elude the ideas and virtualities inherent in a partially known work, which is ambitious by its encyclopaedic tendency and especially by the intention of building its own original system of philosophy. The philosopher Lucian Blaga saw the essayist Vasile Băncilă as a threat to the spirit of Romanian culture, the historian of philosophy N. Bagdasar considered him “the most fruitful creator” of his generation, and the philosopher and theologian Nichifor Crainic appreciated his “intellectual honesty”.

\*

The essay has three parts and several chapters. In the first part, I was interested in the author's early writings. The reflections on the role of philosophy in life, including the role of this discipline in the education of high school students, are very important. The young Vasile Băncilă writes dense pages about the relationship between irony and education, about the thoughts of one of the greatest Romanian poets, Mihai Eminescu. The philosopher's syllogisms on the fringes of Descartes' and Schopenhauer's philosophy, from which he tries to detach himself through a slightly passionate criticism, are also notable.

\*

In the second part of the essay, I explore the writings of Vasile Băncilă who tries to put together a possible system of philosophy, more precisely: an *ethnic-spiritualist metaphysics* which, when it was elaborated and even afterwards was in clear contradiction with the official ideology of the totalitarian regime. I analyse, step by step, the relations between part and whole (*pars pro toto*), but also between existence and metaphysics. Then, as a consequence, I am interested in the philosopher's judgments about a kind of metaphysical *curriculum vitae* of Romanian existence.

\*

The philosopher Vasile Băncilă starts from the bottom, from metaphysical reality, to reach the top, the Absolute, the Great One, God. It is a philosophy of one who has a spiritual sense for what extends beyond the immediate. Or, which seems to be the same thing, the thinker has a philosophical vocation manifested by a sense of the transcendent, in the general sense of the word.

Vasile Băncilă meditates on wisdom in two registers: either he speaks of philosophy, or he has the philosopher by his side. There are also instances in which he expresses himself impersonally. His notes detail, in an original way, the ideational and problematic load of the great chapters of the disciplinary understanding of philosophy: ontology, gnoseology, axiology, praxeology; or the 11 sections that comprise his own system of philosophy.

Towards the same chapters point philosophy and the philosopher, philosophy ultimately. One thing must be said, however: through Băncilă's literary aptitude, his reflections often have the gift of plasticising ideas through the wording and examples given, sometimes reducing the degree of conceptual combustion by ambiguities of meaning. He is very interested in the *intensity of expression*, he is attracted by memorable forms and formulas, as concentrated (militant, as he says somewhere) and creative forms of aesthetic and, perhaps, metaphysical emotions.

\*

I received the metaphysician Vasile Băncilă *sine ira et studio*. But I did not hide the shortcomings and shadows of his reflections, just as he himself did not treat one thinker or another lightly. I have not eluded the rancour of his opinions towards various authors, his xenophobic accents towards Jews and, in part, towards some Gypsies.

Receiving a philosophical system, Vasile Băncilă says at one point that “you occasionally get to places where the argumentation becomes worryingly sparse and you see the author instinctively resort to paralogisms or, in the rarer case, when he is aware of what is happening, sophisms”. It’s a judgment that can also be, unfortunately, self-referential, which is why we’ve also used it.

\*

The Romanian version of this book: *Post-restant. The “Case” of Vasile Băncilă* (2020, Bucharest: Museum of Romanian Literature Publishing House) has had an excellent reception from specialized critics. I will limit myself here to quoting a small fragment of what the critic and literary historian Dan C. Mihăilescu said, in a text that appeared in the cultural magazine *Horizon* (2020, no. 10), a review that became the *Preface* to the present volume:

Ion Dur's critical discourse aims to identify in Vasile Băncilă's finished texts – published and unpublished – but also in the enormous quantity of thematic worksheets the unfinished project of a metaphysics that springs from, and rests on both the *ethnic* and the *spiritual*. The exegete runs the risk of asserting that Vasile Băncilă's philosophical performance lies somewhere in the middle between *what the thinker gave* and *what he could have given*, if we extend the potential vectors of his metaphysical syllogisms. Ion Dur's exegesis pleads for the inclusion of Vasile Băncilă among the names that make up the table of values of Romanian philosophy, the strong argument being the existence of a *work* that cannot be ignored or eluded.

Vasile Băncilă remains an important *private thinker* for the Romanian cultural space, an author who, isolated and rejected by the totalitarian ideology, continued to philosophize in his own spheres in the posture of a *housebound Anchorite*, living and creating in an exemplary community solitude.

*Give me some room!* – so would sound the command of the metaphysician, ethicist and moralist Vasile Băncilă, a command not at all pathetic or indulgent, but uttered in a clamorous tone; and as an argument for such an imperative,

coming from the best of all possible worlds, he points to his published and unpublished essays in print, along with the dozens of piles of manuscripts.

The hundreds and thousands of Vasile Băncilă's worksheets are, basically, the pages of an interesting *atypical metaphysical diary*, certainly one of ideas, in which the author expounds concepts, his own syllogisms, or enters fragmentarily into a dialogue on various topics with philosophers of all calibres and from all times, including philosophers considered “anonymous”.

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He has published essays, chronicles, studies and articles on philosophy, literature, aesthetics, literary criticism, media criticism in several Romanian and international cultural publications; collaborated with the Romanian Radio Broadcasting Services, on public and private television; was a participant and organizer at/of national and international symposiums.

He has written over twenty books of philosophical essays and monographs (Cioran, Constantin Noica, Vasile Băncilă, Horia Stamatu, Nae Ionescu) and translated in collaboration two works by Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (with Mircea Ivănescu; 1994, Bucharest Humanitas Publishing House) and *Crises of the Republic* (with D.-I. Cenușer; 1999, Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House).



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