

Blaga

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Piously, on Race



Lucian Blaga
(1895–1961)

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“I am an apolitical person”

LUCIAN BLAGA kept his distance from politics in his vast literary and philosophical work. He was not a politician, nor was he an intellectual fascinated by power games, seeking to influence them through critical or propaganda pieces or by joining a party and running for office. “In politics, I haven’t yet thrown in my lot with anybody, and I am reluctant to do so, at least for the time being,”²¹ Blaga wrote to Sextil Pușcariu in 1931. Or: “He [Zevedei Barbu] knew me to be an apolitical person, or so I believe. I did not talk to him about politics,”²² declared he on 29 November 1943 as a witness for the defense in the trial of Zevedei Barbu, his assistant at that time, tried in a military court under the charge of communist affiliation. Or: “In 1939 I returned to the home country. Both until and after that time I carried out no political activity whatsoever, and I was never the member of a political party. I devoted my life to literary and philosophical creation and

to my duty as a servant of my country,”³ the philosopher claimed in an autobiography in 1958. [I am] “someone who stayed away from politics even in the past,”⁴ as he mentioned in passing during a private conversation with a literary critic from the city of Timișoara, who visited him in the autumn of 1960 and whom he welcomed with great confidence—but everything he said to the man was immediately reported to the Securitate.

His lack of interest in politics was also noticed by one of his interviewers, in the autumn of 1934:

[Octav Șuluțiu]: The intellectuals’ reluctance to engage in politics is increasingly perceived as something akin to treason. How do you see the relation between intellectuals and politics? Is there any compatibility between them and political involvement?

[Blaga]: The issue of the intellectual’s involvement in politics is a personal one. It all depends on one’s temperament. We cannot speak of a general attitude of intellectuals in regard to politics.

[Șuluțiu]: But in dictatorships, even if they are of the left, the intellectuals have been compelled to speak in support of the regime.

[Blaga]: This has to do with the primacy of the political dimension within all extremist trends. In equal measure within all of them. We cannot say that one protects culture and the intellectuals more than another. Generally speaking, however, the alleged political positioning of intellectuals in dictatorships is merely their passive regimentation, which allows them to work in peace and be left to their own devices.

[Șuluțiu’s comment:] As we can see, Lucian Blaga finds politics of little interest. He reluctantly answers the questions above. But his eyes sparkle and his expression becomes vibrant the instant I bring up philosophy.⁵

Thus, Blaga showed no interest in politics and did not try—like other intellectuals of his time, such as Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, Mihai Ralea, Ion Petrovici, Nichifor Crainic, and others—to combine his creative activity with one that would grant him access to power. While other intellectuals were becoming ministers, directors, members of parliament, etc., Blaga was striving to become... a professor in Cluj, a dream he had been pursuing since 1919 and which he fulfilled only in the autumn of 1938. Until then, his tortuous career path saw him as: a journalist in Cluj (early 1920s); an unemployed person, living with his wife’s family in Lugoj (May 1924–late 1926), during which time he devised delightful ads for the dental office of his wife, Cornelia; then, from late 1926 to April 1939, a long stay abroad, in Warsaw, Prague, Bern, Vienna, filling positions “on the fringes of the diplomatic service,” as he put it in an essay,⁶ serving successively as a press attaché, press secretary, and eventually—due

to King Carol II, who held him in some regard—as a diplomat in the full sense of the word, for he became an envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary of Romania in Portugal (April 1938–March 1939).

In a way, his declared lack of interest in politics could simply indicate that he had had enough of it, because during his work in the various Romanian legations Blaga was officially tasked with monitoring the political situation in the host country, the manner in which Romanian political developments were covered in the press of the country in question, and then report back to the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His job was to write about the political situation in the host country, as reflected in the press and as revealed by his own numerous contacts; whenever he deemed it necessary, he provided explanations for the situation presented, so that his superiors in Romania could understand the matters without having to resort to additional documentation; similarly, he wrote briefs about the coverage of Romanian affairs in the country in question—and we know that Cornelia Blaga helped him with the latter. While working at the Romanian Legation in Vienna, he constantly reported on German national-socialism and its infiltration of Austrian politics. As the far-right movement gained momentum in Romania and began to generate events that were commented upon in the press of the country where Blaga was posted, he proceeded to write summaries of these articles. He was constantly informed on the political developments in the home country and also knew what was being said about Romania in the country where he worked; by the very nature of his profession, he was familiar with both A. C. Cuza's and the legionary movement, also understanding quite well what Italian fascism, national socialism, and communism stood for. Sent to Romania with clockwork regularity, Blaga's reports clearly demonstrate that he was quite knowledgeable when it came to all parties and political movements in Romania, the Legionary Movement included. His reports⁷ are those of a diagnostician who identifies the presence of one phenomenon or another and neutrally informs Bucharest about it. Technical, neat, and precise, his reports and notes are therefore most impressive indeed. On the basis of those of his reports that were published,⁸ we can conclude that, apart from proving Blaga's affection for his country and his impeccable credentials as a public servant, they give no indication whatsoever that their author sympathized in any way with one or another Romanian political party or movement, or with any European political ideology.

Given his lack of interest in the political-social life and (what I assume to be) his saturation when it came to politics, in his vast work Blaga devoted little if any space to such topics. He is one of the very few Romanian philosophers, or indeed one of the few Romanian authors, who wrote no critical pieces about the social and political world, no propaganda texts or materials in support of a

political project, and also did not personally devise a project or political program meant to “save,” organize, and bring happiness to a contemporaneous or future Romania. From this point of view, he was quite *clean*. His interests lay elsewhere, and he pursued them in the fields of philosophy and poetry.

It is highly unusual, therefore, that when in 1935 the periodical *Gândirea* (The Thought) devoted an entire issue to a subject matter that was, alas, highly topical in Europe at that time, namely, that of “race,” Blaga joined other authors and contributed a text on this particular issue.

“On Race As a Style.” 1935

TITLED “DESPRE rasă ca stil” (On race as a style), Blaga’s piece is truly wonderful. He sees race as a reality (this was the general perception at that time, and the philosopher in no way felt he was committing an act of heresy¹⁰), but a reality shaped by *stylistic factors*. The philosopher indicates that, although he has studied biology and kept up with the discoveries in the field, he doubts the fact that “the scientists who claim to have worked out, using *scientific* methods, the issue of the races in all its complexity” actually managed to produce any valid conclusions; in point of fact, he calls them “charlatans.” In his opinion,

the issue of the races, in many of its aspects, is not a scientific one. There are aspects pertaining to it which a researcher can only approach and decide upon from the vantage point of metaphysics, morals, and aesthetics, that is, from the perspective of desiderata and values which far exceed the scope and the possible achievements of science.

As scientists had compromised the issue by the very nature of their approach, Blaga suggested no more and no less than

a request for a ban—let’s say, by way of an international convention—on the investigation of this issue, for at least another hundred years. Or, more precisely: let us ask science to confine itself to the matters that truly fall within its scope.

This is not an anti-science attitude, for Blaga was also familiar with both the history of science and the science of his time, and was often inspired by them, but rather a philosopher’s attempt to correctly set out the problem of the *existing kinds of people*, so to speak. It must be said that Hitler’s Germany was claiming that all of its policies, the anti-Semitic ones included, were based on *science*. Ger-

many was allegedly resorting to the science of biology and presented its racist policies as the logically unavoidable application of scientific conclusions. The Soviet Union, the other type of totalitarianism (and the first one in chronological order), was doing the same thing; the only difference was that the Soviet discrimination against certain social classes was based on the laws of history as formulated by Marx and on Marxist political economy.¹¹ Before these first two totalitarian states, the Soviet Union and Hitler's Germany, no one had invoked "science" as a supreme instance, as the reason behind the allegedly scientific, and therefore "legitimate" and implacable, pursuit of murderous policies: the class struggle and the racial struggle. At that time, a number of more or less "scientific" discoveries led to conclusions and political measures that made the 20th century a bloodbath, the century of mass murder.

In keeping with his outlook on the human being—which, according to him, as a result of the ontological mutation was experiencing a distinct existence, as an entity that required metaphysics, morals, and aesthetics—Blaga transferred the problem from the realm of science to that "of desiderata and values," in other words, to the field of axiology. He suggested that "for the time being, we should see race as an unfathomable fact of nature, and discuss it the way we usually discuss a human reality within a universe of human values."

For him, "in the current understanding of the term, the word 'race' is nearly synonymous to 'biological style'." The philosopher contends that, in the fashion of cultural styles, there might be biological styles present with the human race. Therefore, he approaches race in terms of his philosophy, in terms of style, seeing it as a complex human reality that needs to be discussed "using those terms that are closest to our intuition and feelings," namely, those of "sensibility" and "human values." Blaga was quite acquainted with Houston Stewart Chamberlain's famous *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*¹² (The foundations of the nineteenth century) of 1899, and even quoted from it; however, instead of approaching race in biological terms, in the wake of Chamberlain, who was one of the theorists of anti-Semitic racism, he sets it on the spiritual plane of human values, as according to him that was the only approach likely to make the issue "intelligible." Contrary to Chamberlain, the axiological criteria he employs indicate that things like "racial purity" or the particular race of one population or another are of no consequence:

In what follows I shall not be in the least concerned with the anthropological affiliation of the Sibiu shepherds to any particular "race," or with the "purity" of said race, and not even with the question whether the Romanians inhabiting other regions may or may not belong, from an anthropological point of view, to another race or mix of races.

When asked about the reasons behind the excessive attention enjoyed by beautiful people, Aristotle retorted: “That . . . is a question fit for a blind man to ask.”¹³ In a similar vein, Blaga argues that “the phenomenon of race, just like the phenomenon of style, is best understood if one positions himself right in front of it and points to it within its concrete universe and atmosphere.” The sight of a group of Jewish children, somewhere in northern Transylvania, and the image of the shepherds from the region of Sibiu delight him in equal measure:

Years ago, as I was travelling across northern Transylvania, I had to spend the night in a Jewish village; I went to a dark and smoky inn. I was offered a room. In the morning, as I left my room, I stepped into a small square courtyard, lined with verandas. Perfectly framed in the center of this closed courtyard was a gazebo overgrown with vines. It was a splendid May morning. In the gazebo, set at a table, about half a dozen lads of the biblical age of 12, their hair red like the autumn leaves on the vines, with spiraling forelocks and with eyes more lively than those of squirrels. In the fresh air of this sunny morning, the children were having a heated discussion over a huge copy of the Old Testament which lay open on the table, exchanging glances and guttural retorts. So caught were they in their discussion that not a single one noticed me, even if I was right behind them. I stood there for a while, looking at these scions of patriarchs and muttered to myself, as a commentary on the whole picture, the word “race”!

Ours is a country of considerable human diversity, but I experienced this strong sense of being in the presence of the race only when coming into contact with our shepherds from Poiana Sibiului. In these proud shepherds we see the full manifestation of the physical and spiritual qualities specific to the Romanian Carpathian people, qualities which in other regions—on account of misery or of rather well-known historical circumstances—have remained in latent form, or failed to fully develop. These shepherds demonstrably approximate the average level that our race may reach. I can assume, however, that some time ago, going back maybe a century or two, the race of these shepherds was even more thriving than today. Since then there have been developments rather known to the doctors in the region, which most certainly triggered the unfortunate physical decline of this splendid lot. At any rate, this observation in no way changes my belief that the shepherds from Poiana Sibiului are one of the apices of the Romanian biological style.

Blaga considered that the human groups called races deserved to be seen with respect, as the embodiment of the “styles” in which humankind exists: “In the presence of races, as vital and spiritual styles, one possessed of a flexible stylistic sensibility can experience states akin to piety, similar to those inspired by the original phenomena of nature,” contended the philosopher, also echoing the

vocabulary of Goethe. Still, he was aware of the risk that some theorists may “unfortunately” possess “a *rigid* stylistic sensibility,” in which case

we witness the disgraceful and lumbering phenomenon that we call “racist messianism.” This phenomenon entails the glorification of the physical and spiritual values of a single race. Racist messianism is characterized by the belief that one specific human race possesses all the qualities that God intended to bestow upon humankind, and that all the other races share these qualities only partially or in a distorted or perverted manner.

Racist messianism “of any kind has always been afflicted by a painful blindness to all the virtues of other races,” it openly or surreptitiously promotes “the spiritual, physical, and economic imperialism of a single race,” an attitude which “is completely unjustifiable.” And “[a] people struck by this spiritual blindness is unable to surpass itself and can only see itself.” In Blaga’s opinion, Chamberlain himself is a theorist affected by this spiritual blindness:

This blindness I have just mentioned did not spare even some outstanding thinkers. When it comes to Huston Stewart Chamberlain, one of the favorite theorists of German national-socialism, who on more than one occasion has approached the issue of race as such in a rather fortunate perspective, our main objection concerns his much too rigid stylistic sensibility. This lack of flexibility has rendered him incapable of perceiving anything that does not bear the blond hallmark of Germanism.

On the other hand, Blaga quite straightforwardly argued, “those Europeans willing to learn something, or to expand and nuance a bit their stylistic sensibility, are invited to read or at least leaf through Frobenius’s pieces on African cultures.” As we have seen above, in this article he referred to Jewishness, from the vantage point of his own philosophy of culture, pleading for a “quasi-religious respect” towards any form of human life and rejecting “racist messianism” as an act of blindness. The author’s conclusion points to *ecumenism* in regard to any human reality: “The sense of piety in regard to the phenomenon of races, the only feeling that can pave the way towards an *ecumenical* framework, compels us to be ourselves, under our stars, and to allow others to be themselves, under their own stars.”¹⁴

Blaga was therefore immune to the racist trend that gained momentum all over Europe in the 1930s and reached disturbing heights once Hitler became chancellor of Germany. On the contrary, by professing his *piety* in regard to all the peoples of the world, he openly challenged the racist and anti-Semitic

ideas of “one of the favorite theorists of German national socialism,” H. S. Chamberlain.

His quintessential “ecumenism” on the issue of races, nations, and peoples is also illustrated by the fact that when, in 1929, he contributed a presentation of the immediately contemporaneous Romanian literature to the Swiss periodical *Bund*, his list of representative authors—which featured the names of Tudor Arghezi, George Bacovia, Nichifor Crainic, Ion Pillat, Adrian Maniu, Ion Vinea, Tristan Tzara, Ion Barbu, Ștefan Nenițescu, Aron Cotruș, Perpessicius, Alexandru A. Philippide, Demostene Botez, Emil Isac, Vasile Voiculescu, I. M. Sadoveanu, Liviu Rebreanu, Emanoil Bucuța, Cezar Petrescu, F. Aderca, Gib I. Mihăescu, Ionel Teodoreanu, Mateiu I. Caragiale, Ion Călugăru, and Al. O. Teodoreanu¹⁵—was strictly based on the criterion of value, on their literary achievements in the Romanian language, disregarding any other considerations (ethnic, racial, etc.).

Undersecretary of State in the Goga–Cuza Government. 1938

THIS WAS Blaga’s stance on the issues of races, of Jewishness, and of the Romanian cultural identity in the 1920s and the 1930s. Interested exclusively in his own work, on the one hand, and on fulfilling his dream of becoming a professor at Cluj University, on the other, in late 1937 Blaga nevertheless found himself embroiled in politics.

The man responsible for this development was the king himself. Carol II appointed the philosopher to work as a technocrat without political affiliation in the Goga–Cuza government (29 December 1937–10 February 1938), a government that was the stopgap solution¹⁶ chosen by the sovereign as no political party had managed to gain enough seats to form a government in the parliamentary elections of December 1937, while the Iron Guard had done quite well (getting 15.58% of the votes). For want of a better alternative and after much deliberation, the king turned to Octavian Goga, whom he otherwise despised: “I am therefore left with just one constitutional solution, namely, to resort to Goga and Cuza’s National Christians. Of course, it is an unfortunate solution, but it is the least unfortunate one.”¹⁷ The king was counting on the fact that “Goga in particular, and also Cuza, are the sworn enemies of the Iron Guard and are determined to do anything to wipe them out.” The poet accepted to become prime minister “on the conditions set by me,” as Carol II happily recorded, alluding to the fact that some of the ministers had been appointed by the king

himself, for instance, some dissident members of the National Peasants' Party, intended to be a "democratic infiltration" into the government likely to forestall "certain fearsome excesses," or indeed anti-Semitism. In fact, this moderating element did not prevent the Goga–Cuza government from recasting the citizenship legislation,¹⁸ that is, from adopting anti-Semitic laws, or from taking other measures that marked the beginning of state-sanctioned anti-Semitism, paved the way towards authoritarian/totalitarian regimes in Romania, and signaled the twilight of democracy. Most disturbing indeed is the fact that the king—whose mistress was Elena Lupescu, a beautiful lady of Jewish extraction—had factored in an anti-Semitic political shift from the very beginning:

*The first measure he wants to implement is to revise the status of the Jews, of those who fraudulently entered the Country after 1919; he wants to deprive them of citizenship. I believe that this will affect a very small minority, and it may in fact rid us of some ballast, which could be good for the time being.*¹⁹

The king also took into account the possible backlash from abroad. Happy to note that Foreign Minister Istrate Micescu was "the smartest of the lot," Carol pitied him for the challenging task ahead: "Given the violent attacks likely to come from Geneva, poor Micescu will have to carefully prepare his material and his explanations."²⁰

It was this government, put together by the king after rather cynical-pragmatic calculations, that Blaga joined as an undersecretary of state in the Ministry of External Affairs.²¹ He was not the member of a political party and had not run in the parliamentary elections. In early 1937 Blaga had been a press attaché in Bern, and in the second half of that year he had once again prepared his bid for a teaching position at King Ferdinand I University of Cluj, something he had coveted since 1919. In November 1937, the news that the long-awaited competitive selection had been cancelled²² came as a serious blow. The month of December found him in Sibiu, living in the house of one of his brothers. It was there that he received the summons from Bucharest.

Two factors contributed to Blaga's appointment to this most unfortunate government. First and foremost, the king's newfound interest in his person, as seen during the philosopher's acceptance to the Romania Academy (5 June 1937), when the sovereign, in a remarkable speech, praised him as a representative of *their* generation (Blaga's and the king's) who was creating the "modern and living literature"²³ of Romania, of *His* country. Another most likely factor was the fact that Blaga was related to Veturia Goga, "a woman the likes of which appear once in a century," a he praised her in the novel *Luntrea lui Caron* (Charon's boat).

We can assume that, while surprised by this change of fortunes—just one year earlier, in December 1936, the then advisor of the Romanian Legation in Vienna was living in fear of unemployment²⁴—Blaga was pleased and honored by the offer extended to him. But whatever the circumstances, realistically speaking Blaga was in no position to say no to the king, to whom he was indebted for the lavish praise given to him at the Academy, as honorary chairman of the institution, in June 1937. Also, while both the king and the prime minister were aware of the future anti-Semitic turn in Romanian state policy, because the initiative had been theirs, Blaga had little idea of what was to come. Thus, for a short while—as the government itself was quite short-lived, expiring after only forty-four days—he became undersecretary of state in the Foreign Ministry of the Goga–Cuza government. (Ilarie Voronca, one of Blaga’s coworkers at the Foreign Ministry, a Romanian citizen of Jewish origin, claimed to be ill and resigned his position on 30 January,²⁵ upon realizing the change in the official policy of the Romanian state with regard to its Jewish citizens.) This government included a few other Transylvanians, the historians Ioan Lupaș and Silviu Dragomir, and some academics, such as the philosopher Ion Petrovici and the professor of law Istrate Micescu, to whom Blaga was directly subordinated. “This failed government, condemned by history, was the most intellectual one in the history of Romania (a team of academics led by a poet!),”²⁶ wrote Lucian Boia.

Even if he was most likely honored to have received such an appointment, his time at the ministry was a rather unhappy one for Blaga,²⁷ who had little penchant for both the work and the workplace. He spent his time in Bucharest all alone, staying at a hotel, as if aware of the provisional nature of his new employment. His wife and daughter returned from Bern, where Blaga had previously worked, only in mid-January, and were staying at the Coroana Hotel in the city of Brașov, where they had some relatives, and Mrs. Blaga took frequent trips to Bucharest. An eyewitness who worked alongside Blaga in the ministry, his cousin Corneliu Blaga, described the long working hours of the newly minted undersecretary of state, who presently had little or no time for writing, as in the absence of Istrate Micescu (who had left for Geneva), he had been practically left in charge of the whole ministry. The philosopher was asking, in despair: “Tell me, when can I become once again a human being?”²⁸ that is, when would he be able to write again. Upon hearing of the fall of the government, Blaga exclaimed: “Uff, I’m finally out!”²⁹

By appointing him to work as a technocrat in a government position, the king wanted to do Blaga a favor, but “Involuntarily, he caused him great harm,”³⁰ as indicated by the career diplomat Corneliu Blaga. Indeed, Blaga was most un-

happy during the time spent at the ministry, and after the introduction of the socialist regime in Romania his membership in this government led to constant political accusations against him.

In point of fact, the king did a lot more political favors to Blaga; after the fall of the Goga–Cuza government, he appointed him envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to Portugal (1 April 1938–1 April 1939), the only time when Blaga was well-paid. Then, after the philosopher requested to be allowed to return from Portugal, King Carol II personally appointed him,³¹ alongside G. Enescu, M. Sadoveanu, Emil Racoviță, Iuliu Hațieganu, D. Gusti a.o., as a senator in the National Revival Front,³² a position he held between June 1939 and the summer of 1940, when the king disbanded the Front (22 June 1940). In a way, even the teaching position at Cluj University—which Sextil Pușcariu had worked so hard to get for him, to the point of eventually devising a round-about way—had to do with the ministerial appointment that the philosopher had received from the king:

*Listen, is it true that I have been appointed as a professor in Cluj? After all that happened, it sounds more like a joke. How strange life can be! I had to become a minister twice, see a change in the law of universities and even in the Constitution, before I could become a “professor,”*³³

exclaimed the newly-minted academic upon receiving his “summons” from the university.

Blaga was given the opportunity to show his feelings towards the king in the year 1940, when *Revista Fundațiilor Regale* (The Review of the Royal Foundations) published a celebratory issue on the ten-year anniversary of the restoration. The contributors to this issue were, in this order: Tudor Arghezi, Camil Petrescu, C. Rădulescu-Motru, Mihail Sadoveanu, Lucian Blaga, N. I. Herescu, Cezar Petrescu, G. Călinescu, Ion Marin Sadoveanu, Perpessicius, Al. O. Teodoreanu, Ionel Teodoreanu, Metropolitan Bishop Irineu, Nichifor Crainic, Andrei Rădulescu, General Paul Teodorescu, General Nic. Sc. Stoenescu, Colonel D. I. Cantea, Anton Golopenția, Iuliu Moldovan, Dr. P. Cazacu, Gr. Nandriș, Dr. C. Grofșorean, N. D. Cornățeanu, N. Caranfil, Eugen Demetrescu, V. Vâlcovici, Emanoil Bucuța, Scarlat Lambrino, C. Daicoviciu, A. Oțetea, Tudor Vianu, G. M. Cantacuzino, Francisc Șirato, Mihail Sebastian, Vladimir Streinu, Pompiliu Constantinescu, Șerban Cioculescu, and Petru Comarnescu. Under the title “Renaștere sau creație?” (Renaissance or creation?), the philosopher praised the reign of Carol II for all the material and spiritual creations that it had made possible, without forgetting the urban construction projects

implemented during this period. Acknowledging that, in keeping with a European model, the king had introduced an authoritarian regime (“When the flaws and the dereliction of duty showed by politicians forced Him to introduce an authoritarian regime in His country...”), Blaga praised him from acting differently than the leaders of other countries. Thus, Blaga pointed out that the king showed no ambition to set the direction of culture, choosing instead the most praiseworthy path of supporting it:

In a single field the King has decided that it is best to offer support rather than impose a program: in the field of creative culture. The boundless trust and the tacit praise given to the spontaneity and the freedom of the spirit are yet another proof of the fact that the King himself has realized that the Romanian people is truly experiencing a creative stage, rather than one of mere “revival” . . . There are several kinds of authoritarian regimes in Europe today. With one exception, all of them thought it necessary to also direct the quill of the poet and the thought of the thinker. Therefore, in all of these regimes, with the exception of one, the poet and the thinker are regimented and condemned to sterility. The exception is Romania.³⁴

Petre Pandrea, the “Mediaș Group,” and Blaga. 1940

BLAGA NEVER revisited the ecumenical ideas on race—and implicitly on Jewishness—that he expounded in 1935. The books on the philosophy of culture and of values that he wrote after 1935 continue to follow this line of the utmost respect towards any culture and any people, towards any “race” on Earth. Whenever necessary, he proceeded in keeping with these axiological ideas and he never failed to intervene in tense and even dangerous political-legal situations in order to save lives. Thus, in the autumn of 1943 he became involved in the Sibiu trial of a communist group, in order to save Zevedei Barbu, charged with communist affiliation.³⁵ Also during the war, he quickly interceded in support of another communist, a student named I. D. Sîrbu,³⁶ who was facing a court-martial which, according to his own statement, could have sentenced him to death.

Another significant testimony in this regard comes from the writer and lawyer Petre Pandrea, who recounted how, in the autumn of 1940, Blaga helped save the lives of a group of communists and Jews from Mediaș, the so-called “Mediaș group,” who had Pandrea as their lawyer. This happened right after Blaga took up residence in Sibiu—he moved there as the entire university of Cluj had been forced to relocate following the Vienna Diktat—and immediately

following the establishment of the national-legionary regime, the whole episode being quite illustrative of the philosopher's attitude towards Jewishness.

After the dictatorship of Antonescu and of the Legion was introduced in September 1940, arrests were made in the industrial town of Mediaș among the communist workers and the Israelite merchants. A Mediaș group of defendants was created, with 300 (three hundred) people facing death sentences. On the occasion of the Yom Kippur, they had raised money to help prison inmates. The lists in question had ended up in the hands of the secret police. Arrests. Torture. A trial. Any financing of a banned party was punishable by death. The Romanian Communist Party had been banned. Ergo, death sentences. The entire group in question was sent, in chains, to Sibiu, to face a court-martial chaired by a magistrate-colonel, an ambitious and somewhat hysterical aristocrat, a Phanariot price. . . . Without Lucian Blaga, nothing could have been done in Sibiu in the early stages.³⁷

Blaga, who “avoided chauvinism like the plague,”³⁸ quickly moved to help Pandrea and the 300 people of Mediaș whose lives were hanging in the balance.

In Sibiu, with the serenity of an ancient philosopher, Lucian Blaga, professor, academician, and poet, immediately and unconditionally offered to help. Once I knocked on his door and managed to find my way to his heart, he accompanied me everywhere, for three days on end. It may seem simple and natural for him not to abandon his assistant in his time of need. But Lucian Blaga also offered his help to the 300 communists and Jews, my clients, at a time when communist and Jewish were synonymous to leper. He advised me on what to do. He guided me through the arcane local labyrinth, protecting my profession and my prestige against a potential judicial slaughter and striving to preserve untarnished our Romanian and rural humanity.³⁹

More precisely, the philosopher advised the lawyer to change the venue of the trial, as in Sibiu he was certainly doomed to fail. He purportedly told Pandrea: “If you have this trial in Sibiu, it will be a judicial slaughterhouse. The 300 defendants will be promptly tried and shot.”⁴⁰

This tells a lot about the city of Sibiu, which had indeed become an academic center after the university had relocated there from Cluj, but had nevertheless kept its fundamental character as an Orthodox religious center, driven by the judgments and the prejudices of Orthodoxist ideology. Paying heed to this advice and having the trial moved to Craiova, where he managed to avoid a death sentence for the 300 member of the “Mediaș group,” Pandrea remained forever grateful to the “kind man who was Lucian Blaga.”

IN PHILOSOPHY and literature, in culture in the broadest sense, Blaga was exclusively interested in the value of the work, and never in the ethnic or racial origin of its authors. In everyday life, he took into account the supreme value, life, followed by freedom, the freedom of thought, rather than the political ideas or the origins of the one voicing them. When it came to the life and liberty of human beings, it mattered little if he was or was not personally acquainted with those he helped; thus, he guided Pandrea through the labyrinthine administration of Sibiu for the sake of 300 communists and Jews who were otherwise complete strangers to him, and a little while later he interceded, on his own, for people whom he knew and cherished, Zevedei Barbu and I. D. Sîrbu. From this point of view as well, and not only from that of his superlative work, Blaga remains one of the shining lights of the Romanian twentieth century. □

(Translated by BOGDAN ALDEA)

Notes

1. Lucian Blaga to Sextil Pușcariu, May 1931, in *De amicitia: Lucian Blaga—Ion Breazu: Corespondență. Addenda: Ion Breazu, Note de jurnal*, devised and compiled by Mircea Curticeanu (Cluj: Biblioteca Apostrof, 1995), 165.
2. Lucian Blaga, “Proces-verbal de Depoziția unui martor,” 29 Nov. 1943, in Cornelia Blaga-Brediceanu, *Jurnale 1919, 1936–1939, 1939–1940, 1959–1960*, 2nd edition, edited by Dorli Blaga (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2016), 185–187.
3. Lucian Blaga, “Autobiografie pentru serviciul de cadre al Academiei,” Cluj, 29 Nov. 1958, the Dorli Blaga collection of Lucian Blaga Central University Library of Cluj-Napoca, in Mircea Popa, *Lucian Blaga: Perspective transilvane* (Cluj-Napoca: Școala Ardeleană, 2018), 19.
4. [Unnamed literary critic from Timișoara, Securitate informant], “Notă informativă privind pe Lucian Blaga,” 13 Sept. 1960, in Dorli Blaga and Ion Bălu, *Blaga supraviețuit de Securitate* (Cluj: Biblioteca Apostrof, 1999), 166.
5. Octav Șuluțiu, interview with Lucian Blaga, *Vremea* (Bucharest), 15 Sept. 1934, in *Dramaturgia românească în interviuri*, edited by Aurel Sasu and Mariana Vartic, vol. 1, A–C (Bucharest: Minerva, 1995), 223–224.
6. Lucian Blaga, “Nicolae Titulescu,” 1944, in *Izvoade* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2002), 191.
7. Lucian Blaga, *Din activitatea diplomatică: Rapoarte, articole, scrisori, cereri, telegrame, anii 1927–1938*, 3 vols., edited by Pavel Țugui (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1995).
8. Pavel Țugui, who edited the three volumes that document Blaga’s diplomatic activity between 1927 and 1938, did not include “some pieces of information deprived of political or cultural interest, which for this reason were left aside. Their place is

marked by square brackets,” as he indicated in the “Editor’s Note” to Blaga, *Din activitatea diplomatică*, 1: 37.

9. See *Gândirea* (Bucharest) 14, 2 (Feb. 1935); the featured pieces on race are: Nichifor Crainic, “Rasă și religione,” Lucian Blaga, “Despre rasă ca stil,” Dr. D. Grigorescu, “Fundamentul biologic al rasei.”
10. The great contemporary biologist Ernst Mayr contended “that although there are certain genetic differences between races, there is no genetic evidence whatsoever to justify the uncomplimentary evaluation that members of one race have sometimes made of members of other races. There simply is no biological basis for racism. . . . Paradoxically, it is precisely because the human population is genetically and culturally so diverse that we need a principle of civil equality.” Ernst Mayr, “The Biology of Race and the Concept of Equality,” *Daedalus* 131, 1 (2002): 92, 93.
11. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, new edition with added prefaces (San Diego–New York–London: A Harvest/HBJ Book, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1973), the chapter “Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government.”
12. Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, 2 vols. (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1899). In Romania, information about this book circulated as early as 1900, in *Noua revistă română* (New Romanian Review), the periodical edited by Rădulescu-Motru. See Marta Petreu, “De la lupta de rasă la lupta de clasă: C. Rădulescu-Motru,” in *De la Junimea la Noica: Studii de cultură românească* (Iași: Polirom, 2011).
13. Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, literally translated by C. D. Yonge (London: Henri G. Bohn, 1853), 188.
14. Lucian Blaga, “Despre rasă ca stil,” *Gândirea* 14, 2 (Feb. 1935): 69–73.
15. Lucian Blaga, “Rumänische Nachkriegs Literatur,” *Der kleine Bund* (Bern) 19, 12 May 1929; see id., *Din activitatea diplomatică*, 1: 150–154.
16. The king was already planning his personal dictatorship, for which he had secured the assistance of Armand Călinescu. In what the Goga–Cuza government was concerned, Carol II wrote in his journal: “I am perfectly aware that a government with such manifest anti-Semitic elements would not last long, and then I will be free to take firmer measures that would release both the Country and me from the so unpatriotic tyranny of petty party interests.” See Carol II, *Între datorie și pasiune: Însemnări zilnice*, vol. 1 (1904–1939), edited by Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă and Narcis Dorin Ion (Bucharest: Silex, 1995), 234.
17. Ibid.
18. See *Monitorul oficial* (Bucharest) 106, 18 (22 Jan. 1938): 314–316.
19. Carol II, *Între datorie și pasiune*, 1: 235.
20. Ibid., 234–235.
21. The official name was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, Carol II himself used “External” in his notes.
22. Blaga to Băncilă, Bern, 27 Nov. 1937, in *Vasile Băncilă–Lucian Blaga, Corespondență*, edited by Dora Mezdrea (Bucharest: Muzeul Literaturii Române; Brăila: Istros, Muzeul Brăilei, 2001), 82.

23. Carol II, “Cuvîntare rostită la recepțiunea în Academie a d-lui Lucian Blaga: Ședința de la 5 iunie 1937,” in *Cuvîntările Majestății Sale Regelui Carol II către Academia Română 1930–1940* (Bucharest: Monitorul Oficial, Imprimeria Națională, 1940).
24. A new ambassador, Alexandru Gurănescu, was dispatched to Vienna, and he was completely unwilling to work with Blaga. The solution was to have the philosopher transferred to Bern.
25. Ion Bălu, *Viața lui Lucian Blaga*, vol. 2 (*aprilie 1935–martie 1944*) (Bucharest: Libra, 1996), 171.
26. Lucian Boia, *Capcanele istoriei: Elita intelectuală românească între 1930 și 1950* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2011), 102.
27. I. Opreșan, interview with Corneliu Blaga, 1 March 1987, in I. Opreșan, *Lucian Blaga printre contemporani: Dialoguri adnotate*, 2nd edition (Bucharest: Saeculum, Vestala, 1995), 98–128; Corneliu Blaga, *Lucian Blaga necunoscut* (Alba Iulia: n.p., 1993), 30, 45, 52.
28. I. Opreșan, interview with Corneliu Blaga, 1 March 1987, in Opreșan, 109.
29. Corneliu Blaga, 243.
30. *Ibid.*, 45.
31. Boia, 135.
32. The National Revival Front was established at the initiative of the king following a suggestion received from an initiative group. As directed “from higher up,” Blaga was a member of this “initiative group.”
33. Blaga to Breazu, Lisbon, 14 Apr. 1938, in *De amicitia Lucian Blaga–Ion Breazu*, 296.
34. Lucian Blaga, “Renaștere sau creație?” *Revista Fundațiilor Regale* (Bucharest) 7, 6 (1 June 1940): 514.
35. For a detailed account, see Virgiliu Țărău, “Zevedei Barbu și mișcarea comunistă: Idealism și ilegalism,” in *Zevedei Barbu: Psiholog, sociolog și filosof român și englez*, edited by Daniela Maci and Michael Finkenthal (Bucharest: Tracus Arte, 2015), 64–121.
36. Ion D. Sîrbu, “L-am văzut pe Blaga plîngînd,” interview by Ion Jianu, 1989, in I. D. Sîrbu, *Atlet al mizeriei: În loc de autobiografie*, edited and afterword by Dumitru Velea (Petroșani: Editura Fundației Culturale “Ion D. Sîrbu,” 1994).
37. Petre Pandrea, *Turnul de ivoriu: Memorii*, foreword by Ștefan Dumitriu, edited and afterword by Nadia Marcu-Pandrea (Bucharest: Vremea XXI, 2004), 482. The trial is also mentioned, without specifics, in: Petre Pandrea, *Reeducarea de la Aiud*, edited by Nadia Marcu-Pandrea (Bucharest: Vremea, 2000), 543; *id.*, *Garda de Fier: Jurnal de filosofie politică: Memorii penitenciare*, edited by Nadia Marcu-Pandrea (Bucharest: Vremea, 2001), 164.
38. Pandrea, *Turnul de ivoriu*, 482.
39. *Ibid.*, 484.
40. *Ibid.*, 486.

Abstract**Blaga: Piously, on Race**

The present study analyzes the attitude showed by Lucian Blaga (1895–1961) in the 1930s and early 1940s in regard to the racial theory so fashionable in Europe at that time. Blaga rejected Huston Stewart Chamberlain's position on races, based on a biological reasoning. By analogy with his own philosophy of culture, at that time still under development, he suggested that races should be approached as "biological styles" in which humankind manifests itself. He also contended that the issue of races should be separated from the biological sciences and discussed in the context of metaphysics, morals, aesthetics—that is, within the philosophy of values. He argued that racism was defined by obtuseness and intolerance, and should therefore be replaced by an *ecumenical* attitude in regard to all the *styles* in which humankind exists. This moral imperative "compels us to be ourselves, under our stars, and to allow others to be themselves, under their own stars." Blaga's ecumenical attitude towards the styles of humankind was confirmed in the autumn of 1940 when, during the national-legionary regime, he helped the lawyer Petre Pandrea rescue the "Mediaș group" of 300 communists and Jews who were facing a possible death sentence. This study also discusses Blaga's membership in the short-lived Goga–Cuza government (forty-four days, between 29 December 1937 and 10 February 1938), to which he had been appointed by King Carol II. Realistically speaking, the philosopher was in no position to refuse the appointment, as he was personally indebted to the king for the remarkable welcome extended to him on his acceptance into the Romanian Academy, in June of 1937.

Keywords

Blaga, racism, race as a biological style, Jewishness, Romanian literature, Huston Stewart Chamberlain, ecumenism, freedom, human values, Leo Frobenius, Goga–Cuza government, Carol II, state-sanctioned anti-Semitism, the "Mediaș group," Petre Pandrea