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LUCIAN BLAGA: AN AMERICAN PRAGMATIST IN EUROPE

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Introduction

There is no contradiction between the assertion that Lucian Blaga was an original thinker and the admission that the influence of numerous other thinkers can be seen in his work. Blaga composed a systematic philosophy whose single most striking feature may be its creativity. Nonetheless, the influences of many preceding philosophers are unmistakably evident in his opus. The neo-Kantian aspects of Blaga's philosophy are well documented.¹ The Neo-Platonic elements, and, Blaga's dispute with Stăniloae notwithstanding, the related influence of Orthodox theology and Orthodox religion,² virtually shout themselves to the non-Orthodox reader. The similarities between Blaga's philosophy of culture and

¹ See G. G. Constandache, "Critique of the Unconscious: Kantian Influences in the Works of Lucian Blaga." *Man and World* 30 (1997): 445-452; Petru Ioan, "Matricea Kantiană a Filosofiei Lui Blaga." *Revista de Filosofie* 44 (1997): 213-221. Blaga alludes to the influence of Kant and also of Marburg neo-Kantianism in his autobiography, *Hronicul și cântecul vârștelor*, vol. 6 of *Opere*, ed. Dorli Blaga (București: Editura Minerva, 1979), 129. Kant's influence on Blaga is very clearly seen on page 56 of *Cultură și cunoștință*, where Blaga writes that the most significant problem in the theory of knowledge is that of the categories. Blaga devotes a whole chapter of this book to this problem, Lucian Blaga, "Categoriile," in *Cultură și cunoștință*, vol. 8 of *Opere*, ed. Dorli Blaga (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1983).

² On the influence of Orthodoxy, see Vasile Băncilă, *Lucian Blaga, energie românească*, 2nd ed. (Timișoara, RO: Marineasa, 1995), 80.

Spengler's cultural morphology are well known.³ Many other influences have been detected in Blaga's philosophy as well. Scholars have noted the parallel between Blaga's differentials and Leibniz's monads,⁴ a possible relation between Blaga's epistemological modesty and the subjectivism of German Romanticism,⁵ the important influence of Freud and Jung on Blaga's understanding of the subconscious,⁶ and even certain similarities between Blaga's thought and Indian philosophies.⁷ However, one very American aspect of Blaga's philosophy seems to have escaped notice by most of Blaga's Romanian commentators. This aspect is his epistemological Pragmatism. It is the thesis of this article that Blaga's philosophy contains all of the elements necessary for him to be considered a pragmatist in the American sense of the term.

In order to sustain this thesis, I will need to accomplish two things. First, I must briefly describe what it means to be a pragmatist in the context of American philosophy. Second, I must show that Blaga's philosophy fits this description.

³ Michael S. Jones, "Blaga's Philosophy of Culture: More than a Spenglerian Adaptation," *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai, seria Philosophia*, XLVIII: 1-2 (2003), 167-174; Alexandru Boboc, "Blaga, Nietzsche și Spengler. Demersuri moderne asupra paradigmei <<stil>>," *Seculum*, serie nouă, 1:3-4 (1995), 28-34.

⁴ Lucian Blaga, *Diferențialele divine*, in vol. 11 of *Opere*, ed. Dorli Blaga (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1988), 95, 165ff.

⁵ Vasile Muscă, "Specificul creației culturale românești în câmpul filosofiei" in *Lucian Blaga – cunoaștere și creație* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1987), 468-469.

⁶ Liviu Antonesei, "Repere pentru o filosofie a culturii," in Ghise, Botez, and Botez, *Lucian Blaga – cunoaștere și creație*, 402ff; Muscă, "Specificul creației culturale românești în câmpul filosofiei," 471, 473

⁷ Mircea Itu, *Indianismul lui Blaga*, (Brașov: Editura Orientul Latin, 1996); see also Lucian Blaga, *Hronicul și cântecul vârstelor*, 174.

Pragmatism Defined

Pragmatism is a school of thought. Like many schools of thought, those thinkers who are considered to belong to this school differ from each other on so many points that scholars have found it difficult to single out exactly what elements are pragmatism's defining characteristics. There is a popular conception of pragmatism as an attitude that espouses a practical approach to resolving difficult or problematic situations. However, this simple conception of pragmatism is not an adequate description of the philosophical school that bears the name. As Philip Wiener has observed, "We cannot simply equate the "pragmatic" with the "practical" as is so commonly done by popular writers."⁸

Pragmatism may be thought of as a school of philosophical thought that is characterized by a set of attitudes and doctrines most of which are shared by most of its proponents. In this, Pragmatism is a "family resemblance" in the Wittgensteinian sense: not all of the family traits are visible in every member of the family, but each member bears enough of the traits in order to be recognized as belonging to that family. John J. Stuhr, in the introduction to *Pragmatism and Classical American Philosophy*,⁹ discusses what he considers to be the essential elements of classical American Pragmatism. He lists the following seven themes that can be traced through the writings of Peirce, James, Royce, Santayana, Dewey, and Mead: 1. Rejection of the practices and options that had become the accepted tradition of modern philosophy. 2. A fallibilist view of the human epistemic situation. 3. A pluralist view of human

⁸ Philip P. Wiener, "Pragmatism," in *The Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas*, Philip P. Wiener, ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973-74), vol. 3, 553, http://www.pragmatism.org/companion/pragmatism_wiener.htm. Viewed 4/1/2005.

⁹ John J. Stuhr, ed. *Pragmatism and Classical American Philosophy: Essential Readings and Interpretive Essays*, 2nd Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 1-7.

experiences and values. 4. A radical empiricism in which it is recognized that the subject is active (rather than passive) in experience and that experience admits of no subject-object distinction. 5. The methodological continuity of science and philosophy as pragmatically justified experimental inquiries. 6. The belief that one goal of philosophy should be the improvement of the human situation. 7. An emphasis on the social context of all human endeavors.

The details of this analysis of the core of Pragmatism could be disputed. Most, and perhaps all, of the characteristics that Stuhr lists can be found in other schools of philosophy. It might also be argued that some of them might better be seen as secondary traits not central to the movement. However, from these themes enumerated and elaborated by Stuhr can be distilled a draught that flows from the very headwaters of American Pragmatism. This draught is epistemological by nature. The *sine qua non* of pragmatism is its particular approach to the theory of knowledge.

Pragmatism's Negative Element

The epistemology of American Pragmatism contains two essential elements, one negative and the other positive. The negative element is a response to the objectivist epistemological tradition of the West. From Descartes through to 19th and 20th century Positivism, and continuing in some figures in contemporary analytic and phenomenological philosophy, the Western epistemological tradition has pursued the goal of apodictic certainty and has sought objective criteria of truth. Postmodern philosophy has gained fame by repudiating this goal. However, even before Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, et al. pronounced the end of modernity, Pragmatists such as James and Dewey had presented strong arguments showing that beliefs are historically situated, that knowledge is a construct, and that the criteria that one employs in making assessments of truth are

subjective and contingent upon the perspective of the person doing the assessing.¹⁰

Going against the current of epistemological objectivism, Pragmatists have argued for a much more “modest” epistemology, one that is more in keeping with human nature and the situation in which we find ourselves. This is evident in James’ understanding of the nature of truth. James embraces a multi-faceted theory that combines correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic elements.¹¹ According to James, the pragmatist view of truth is part of a process-oriented epistemology that relates to a process-metaphysical world. Because the world is dynamic rather than static, truth is changing, and therefore human beliefs must change along with it. Therefore beliefs are necessarily both constructivist and contextual: “...the absolute truth will have to be made, made as a relation incidental to the growth of a mass of verification-experience... so far as reality means experienceable reality, both it and the truths men gain about it are everlastingly in process of mutation – mutation towards a definite goal, it may be – but still mutation.”¹²

This epistemological modesty in Pragmatism is also reflected in Dewey’s instrumentalist approach to Pragmatism, the contextualism of which is sensitive to the developing contexts of belief. Dewey was aware of this, and saw it as a key feature of Pragmatism: “‘pragmatism’ is, in its truth, just the fact that the empiricist does

¹⁰ Wiener emphasizes this anti-objectivist aspect of Pragmatism, 551-570.

¹¹ There are places in James’ writing that seem to oppose the correspondence theory of truth, but what he is really opposing in these places is a view of the correspondence theory that assumes a static view of reality. See James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (New York: Longman, Green, and Co., 1907), 198, 223; Charley D. Hardwick and Donald A. Crosby, editors, *Pragmatism, Neo-Pragmatism, and Religion: Conversations with Richard Rorty*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 206.

¹² James, *Pragmatism*, 224-5; see also Hardwick, 206.

take account of the experienced ‘drift, occasion and contexture’ of things experienced.”¹³ The constructivism of Dewey’s Pragmatism is reflected in his bold statement: “... knowing is an act which modifies what previously existed... its worth consists in the consequences of the modification.”¹⁴

These same features are found in contemporary Pragmatism as well. Richard Rorty, for example, speaks as a contextualist when he states that “getting rid of ‘the view from nowhere’ – the idea of a sort of knowing that has nothing to do with agency, values, or interests – might have considerable cultural importance.”¹⁵ He speaks as a constructivist when he argues that “every belief, no matter how primitive or vicious, corresponds to some ‘world’ – the ‘world’ that contains the objects mentioned by the belief (Ptolemy’s crystalline spheres or the subhuman nature of the slaves.)”¹⁶ Historicism and constructivism are the central themes of Joseph Margolis’ book “Historied Thought, Constructed World.”¹⁷ Margolis’ perspectivism is clearly seen in his statement, “the choice of truth-values (or truth-like values) assigned, as a matter of policy or principle, to any sector of inquiry is a function, under symbiosis,

¹³ Dewey, “The Postulate of Immediate Empiricism,” in Stuhr, 459.

¹⁴ John Dewey, “The Quest for Certainty,” 245, quoted in Forrest Oran Wiggins, “William James and John Dewey,” in *The Personalist* 23 (1942), 191.

¹⁵ Rorty, 45.

¹⁶ Richard Rorty, *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 1-2. In this passage Rorty is not defending the correspondence theory of truth: on the contrary, he is employing argumentum ad absurdum against it in order to substitute for correspondence a (presumably) more pragmatic theory of truth, one that is similar to Dewey’s *instrumentalism*. However, Rorty also argues that a coherent theory of the nature of truth is not possible, and states that James denied the correspondence theory (p.3). I consider both of these points highly improbable. Regarding the latter, see James, *Pragmatism*, 198, 223.

¹⁷ Joseph Margolis, *Historied Thought, Constructed World: A Conceptual Primer for the Turn of the Millennium*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

of what we take to be the nature of the domain in question,” and again, “Everything that exists and is real is socially constructed.”¹⁸

Pragmatism’s Positive Element

Counterbalancing this negative element of Pragmatism is a positive element that is Pragmatism’s most noted feature: a *de facto* criterion of truthfulness.¹⁹ The traditional criterion of truthfulness is correspondence with reality: a proposition is true if what it asserts corresponds to the way things actually are.²⁰ However, how to determine the truth of a proposition using the correspondence criterion is quite a boondoggle: it may be just as difficult to determine whether or not a proposition corresponds to reality as it is to determine whether or not it is true. In essence, correspondence as a criterion may be a begging of the question. As a result of this and other considerations, correspondence as a criterion of truthfulness has received much criticism,²¹ and alternative criteria have been proposed.

The most prominent of these alternatives is coherence: a proposition is taken to be true if it functions coherently within a system of beliefs.²² Another theory, one that combines correspondence and coherence, suggests that a proposition is known to be true iff it can be shown to correspond to reality or is properly

¹⁸ Margolis, 65, 151.

¹⁹ Some contemporary pragmatists eschew the notion of criteria of truthfulness as being a remnant of the supposedly “discredited correspondence theory of truth” (Rorty, i) and therefore substitute notions such as *value* in its place.

²⁰ Brad Dowden and Norman Swartz, “Truth,” in James Fieser and Bradley Dowden, ed., *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/t/truth.htm#H3>, viewed 4/6/2005.

²¹ See, for example, Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.

²² Keith Lehrer, “Coherentism,” in Dancy and Sosa, 67-70.

related to propositions that can be shown to correspond to reality.²³ The former of these views seems to overlook the meaning of the word truth in ordinary language; the later suffers from the same question-begging shortcoming as does the coherence theory. A third alternative is presented by deflationary theories of truth, which view assertions of truthfulness not as descriptions but rather as endorsements indicating what the speaker believes about the proposition.²⁴ However, this theory offers no criterion of truthfulness.

Pragmatism offers a unique solution to the problem of criteria of truthfulness. This solution honors the ordinary use of the term “truth” and at the same time offers a criterion of truthfulness that avoids begging the question. Pragmatism suggests that a proposition is true if it succeeds when put into practice. In this context, to succeed is to be useful in resolving cognitive or practical problems, such as problems of scientific, technical, ethical, or religious inquiry. Ideas are viewed as adaptive means of action; therefore the propositions which express them are true only insofar as they are able to adapt actions (and thoughts) to various circumstances.

James did not reject correspondence and coherence as criteria of truthfulness. However, he did observe that there are many truth-contexts in which neither empirical correspondence nor coherence is appropriate. To James, these areas are among the most important areas of human existence: religious practice, ethical decision, aesthetic choice, etc.²⁵ In these areas the criteria of “satisfaction”

²³ See Susan Hack’s proposed “foundherentism,” in Timm Triplett, *Recent Work on Foundationalism*, *American Philosophical Quarterly* 27 no. 2 (April 1990), 107-108.

²⁴ Paul Horwich, “Theories of Truth,” in Dansy and Sosa, 511-514.

²⁵ For James, “this entire spectrum of objective knowledge of matters of fact merely provides the stage, setting and backdrop for the really important issues of our lives. The important questions are not about

and “power” are more appropriate.²⁶ By “satisfaction” James means expedience in a particular context. This is the most clearly pragmatic area of James’ theory of truth. A belief is “true” (or taken to be true, considered to be true) if it satisfies a person’s need to perform a task at a particular time. James’ famous statement, “You can say of it then either that ‘it is useful because it is true’ or that ‘it is true because it is useful.’ Both these phrases mean the same thing...”²⁷, expresses his view concisely.

James proposes a pragmatist approach to justification: consequentialism. This approach encompasses evidential justification where appropriate, but does not rely on it exclusively. According to consequentialist justification, a belief is justified iff it produces desirable consequences. If two competing beliefs both produce desirable consequences, the one that produces the best consequences is justified, or the one that produces desirable consequences most reliably is justified. If a particular ethical system can be seen to produce the best consequences, that ethical system is justified. If religion produces desirable consequences that would not be had without religion, then religion is justified.

Dewey’s “instrumentalism” is a pragmatist approach to knowledge wherein knowing is viewed as an activity that is directed towards the overcoming of the “problematic situations” that arise during enquiry. Knowing is an experiment: conclusions are tentative hypotheses that may be revised when a new problematic is confronted. This is reflected in Dewey’s pragmatic description of truth, “Just as to say an idea was true all the time is a way of saying *in retrospect* that it has come out in a certain fashion, so to say that an idea is “eternally true” is to indicate *prospective* modes of application which are indefinitely anticipated. Its

matters of fact, but about our justification as persons and whether our lives are worth living.” Hardwick, 210.

²⁶ Hardwick, 212.

²⁷ James, *Pragmatism*, 204.

meaning, therefore, is strictly pragmatic. It does not indicate a property inherent in the idea as intellectualized existence, but denotes a property of use and employment."²⁸

In instrumentalism, ideas or thoughts are instruments that relate experiences, making predictions possible, which guides actions. These predictions (and consequent actions) are in turn tested by other experiences, which show whether or not the actions are expedient, and therefore whether the predictions were true. In this scenario, "true" is seen to refer retrospectively to the value of ideas or thoughts and predictions judged according to their effectiveness in guiding actions expediently. A proposition, then, is taken to be true if it is thought that it will effectively serve to predictively guide actions, or retrospectively is taken to be true if it has been seen to be an effective guide to actions.²⁹

These views from early Pragmatism are reflected in the thought of contemporary pragmatists. A pragmatic tendency is evident, for instance, in W. V. Quine's program of naturalized epistemology when he writes: "But why all this creative reconstruction, all this make-believe? ...Why not just see how this construction really proceeds? ... If we are out simply to understand the link between observation and science, we are well advised to use any available information, including that provided by the very science whose link with observation we are seeking to understand."³⁰ According to Quine, the traditional projects of epistemology no longer offer any hope of success, and the task that remains for epistemology is the psychological one of analyzing how human cognition succeeds to the degree that it does. The truth of cognition is evident in its

²⁸ John Dewey, quoted in Stuhr, 436 (italics are Dewey's).

²⁹ Antony Flew, *A Dictionary of Philosophy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 175.

³⁰ W.V. Quine, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1969, 75-76.

functionality: therefore the task of epistemology is not the justification, but rather the explication, of our belief mechanisms.³¹

Although there are significant differences between Quine and Rorty, Rorty also evidences this pragmatic view of justification. "...the question 'Do our practices of justification lead to truth?' is as unanswerable as it is unpragmatic. It is unanswerable because there is no way to privilege our current purposes and interests. It is unpragmatic because the answer to it would make no difference whatever to our practice. But surely, it will be objected, we know that we *are* closer to truth. Surely we have been making both intellectual and moral progress. Certainly we have been making progress, by our lights. That is to say, we are much better able to serve the purposes we wish to serve, and to cope with the situations we believe we face, than our ancestors would have been. But when we hypostatise the adjective 'true' into 'Truth' and ask about our relation to it, we have absolutely nothing to say."³² Rorty's point seems to be that our beliefs are justified by their successes rather than by their relationship to some abstract ideal of truth.

Thus we have seen that Pragmatism contains two seminal moments, one negative and the other positive. We shall now see that both of these key elements are present in the epistemology of Lucian Blaga.

Blaga's Philosophy

Blaga's philosophical writings encompass a systematic philosophy that includes most of the major divisions of modern philosophy. This fact distinguishes Blaga from most American Pragmatists, who tended to avoid constructing philosophical systems along the lines of traditional philosophy. Furthermore, one of the most striking and central features of Blaga's system is his elaborate metaphysical proposal. Although many of Blaga's insights could stand on their

³¹ Quine, 82-83.

³² Rorty, 3-4.

own without the support of his metaphysics, it is precisely the metaphysics that binds the various elements of his philosophy together as a system. This significantly separates Blaga from American Pragmatists, since the great majority of Pragmatists have disavowed speculative metaphysics in favor of what they see as a more empirical and more practical focus to philosophy.³³ Although Blaga's metaphysics does relate to the empirical and has significant practical implications, it is perhaps best described as a conjectural and suggestive heuristic.

However, although most Pragmatists have eschewed speculative metaphysics, there have been exceptions. Peirce, for example, held a metaphysical/epistemological view that included "psycho-physical monism," the belief that the physical universe is essentially mind.³⁴ Most American Pragmatists have espoused metaphysical realism, either implicitly or explicitly, and although they may refrain from elaborating metaphysical systems, this does not protect them from the accusation of harboring metaphysical views. Margolis' previously-cited book, for example, can be read as being precisely a (anti-metaphysical) metaphysics.³⁵

These examples indicate that it is not the absence (or presence) of speculative metaphysics that makes one a Pragmatist. Nor is it the particular conclusions that one reaches in one's philosophizing: Pragmatists range from left to right across the range of

³³ Stuhr, 3.

³⁴ Burch, Robert, "Charles Sanders Peirce", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2001 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2001/entries/peirce/>>. Viewed 4/24/2005.

³⁵ In support of this interpretation, it need only be noted that Margolis considers the following metaphysical assertion to be the first of six "master themes" from his book: "There is no principled difference between the world (the world as it is, independent of our inquiry) and the intelligible world (the world as it appears to us to be). Call that doctrine *symbiosis*." Margolis, 300.

philosophical issues. Rather it is the presence of the aforementioned two elements, one negative and the other positive, in one's epistemology that qualifies one as a Pragmatist in the American sense. Therefore in spite of the prominence of metaphysics in Blaga's philosophy, if these two elements can be shown to be present in Blaga's epistemology, one may say that, in his epistemology if not in his philosophical tradition, Blaga is a Pragmatist.

A Similar Negative Element in Blaga's Epistemology

That there is a prominent and very important epistemological modesty in Blaga's theory of knowledge is doubtless very well known by all who have studied Blaga's philosophy. Both epistemological and metaphysical considerations lead Blaga to assert that "positive-adequate cognition" is not humanly possible.³⁶ Epistemologically, Blaga analyzes cognition into the following seven theoretically possible "modes": 1. Positive-adequate cognition. 2. Quasi-cognition. 3. Negative cognition. 4. Cognition which is in part positive-adequate and in part quasi-cognition. 5. Cognition which is in part positive-adequate and in part negative cognition. 6. Cognition which is in part positive-adequate, in part quasi-cognition, and in part negative cognition. 7. Cognition which is in part quasi-cognition and in part negative cognition.³⁷ According to Blaga's analysis, only the second (quasi-cognition) and the seventh (part quasi- and part negative-cognition) of these modes are humanly realizable. The first mode listed, positive-adequate cognition, is realized by the Great Anonymous.

³⁶ Blaga's term "positive-adequate cognition" refers to that mode of cognition that accurately grasps its object in all of the object's aspects and details. Blaga also refers to this as "absolute cognition." Using language common in analytic philosophy, positive-adequate cognition would be described as that cognition which has a 100% correspondence to its object.

³⁷ Lucian Blaga, *Cenzura Transcendentă* in vol. 8 of *Opere*, ed. Dorli Blaga (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1983), 545-6; see also 529ff.

Blaga articulates an interesting argument for the thesis that humans do not have positive-adequate cognition. In brief, his argument is that, by definition, cognition is an act wherein the subject surpasses itself in possessing the cognitive object. By definition a phenomenon is an existence centered in itself. Therefore cognition cannot be a phenomenon. This leaves two possible conclusions regarding cognition: either it is something paradoxical, an existent non-phenomenon, or it does not exist. Blaga favors the latter conclusion, and argues that all human “cognition” is mere quasi-cognition, either distorting its objects or incomplete in its grasp of them.³⁸

One of the most interesting parts of Blaga’s philosophy is his discussion of specific modes of cognition permitted to humanity in order to allow humans to approach the unknown, to cognize mystery. These are the three forms of “luciferic cognition.” These approaches do not eliminate mystery, but they allow a deeper understanding of mystery or an accumulation of information about the mysterious.³⁹ The preservation of mystery even in luciferic cognition is another indication of Blaga’s epistemological modesty.

Another important aspect of Blaga’s epistemology is its constructivism. Constructivism, the view that human knowledge is a human construction, is an ubiquitous element of Blaga’s philosophy. This open acceptance of constructivism is seen in his freely creative metaphysics. It is also reflected in his epistemology in the role accorded to culture and in the analyses of mythic, occult, paradisiac, and luciferic cognition. That human knowledge would be a human creative construct is no surprise once one understands Blaga’s metaphysics. The human destiny to be a creator, ever provoked to this effort by the abilities and limits given to humankind by the Great Anonymous, leaves no option but that

³⁸ Blaga, *Cenzura Transcendentă*, 505-6.

³⁹ See Lucian Blaga, *Cunoașterea luciferică* in vol. 8 of *Opere*, ed. Dorli Blaga (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1983).

humanity will strive to cognize the unknown without ever quite reaching it. This scenario sounds macabre, but seen from within Blaga's metaphysics it becomes a gift to humankind and to creation: to humankind, because it gives humanity purpose and pleasure; to creation, because it perpetuates creativity while at the same time protecting creation from potential self-destruction.

There have been numerous other constructivist philosophers, and it cannot be said that Blaga was the first. Nonetheless, there are several important things about Blaga's constructivism that make it particularly noteworthy. The first of these is how neatly and consistently constructivism fits within the larger philosophical picture that Blaga paints. Blaga's philosophical system gives constructivism a context, an explanation, and a purpose that are sometimes lacking in other constructivist philosophies. A second noteworthy aspect of Blaga's constructivism is that it is argued for in a wide variety of cognitive contexts: Blaga shows that human thought is constructivist whether it occurs in math, in the natural sciences, in philosophy, in theology, in the arts, or in any other cognitive context.⁴⁰ A third important aspect of Blaga's constructivism is *how* it is argued: Blaga does not cease being a constructivist when he argues for his own philosophical system. He views his own system as merely a possible thesis supported (but not proved) by evidence and pragmatic utility. Therefore he does not seek a foundationalist justification of his system: he argues for his system using evidences and illustrations taken from a wide variety of intellectual domains, and by showing the fruitfulness of his proposals for further philosophical research. He does not try to prove his system beyond all possible doubt. Were he to attempt to

⁴⁰ See Traian Pop, "Inteligență și intuiție în cunoaștere," in *Introducere în filosofia lui Lucian Blaga*, 141-146. Although each of these modes of cognition is unique in comparison to the others, they also share certain elements, including constructivism, and Blaga considers them to be equally valid ways of approaching mystery, Blaga, *Ființa istorică*, in vol. 11 of *Opere*, ed. Dorli Blaga (București: Editura Minerva, 1988), 508.

show that his theory is apodictically certain, he would be inconsistent with his own system. However, that he does not argue for the certainty of his system does not indicate that he does not believe his system to be correct. On the contrary, it indicates that he views his system as correct, and that because it is correct, he must conduct his philosophizing as a constructivist, which entails viewing his own system as a human construct.

The idea that human cognitive ability is limited is not at all new. Much more interesting is Blaga's explanation of these limits and his hypothesis about their source and purpose. According to Blaga, both the ability of human cognition and the limits imposed upon this ability are results of the "grace" extended to creation and the care exercised over creation by the Great Anonymous. The purpose of these measures is the protection, preservation, and promotion of creation. Individual cognition is permitted within very specific limits: when knowledge is of a type that is "positive-adequate" it is strictly limited with regard to its extent. When knowledge is of a type that is in principle unlimited, it is strictly censored in regard to its accuracy.⁴¹ Blaga's term for this limitation is "transcendent censorship." This censorship fulfills the purpose of the Great Anonymous of spurring human creativity, providing an outlet to this inner human yearning, and at the same time preserving the order of the cosmos. Blaga poignantly suggests that these limits imposed upon cognition both shape cognition and facilitate its fruitfulness.⁴²

In Blaga's metaphysics there are two important measures employed by the source of the cosmos in preservation of cosmic equilibrium. One of these has already been discussed: transcendent censorship. The other is differentiated creation, the main subject of

⁴¹ This is discussed at length in *Cenzura transcendentă* and more briefly on 529ff of *Cunoașterea luciferică*.

⁴² Blaga, *Cenzura transcendentă*, 461: "Although water fights against the riverbanks, without the banks the river would no longer be a river."

his book “Divine Differentials”.⁴³ Blaga hypothesizes that the human epistemological predicament is an intentional result of the way that the creator (The Great Anonymous) formed the world. The creator formed (and forms) the world through the emanation of what Blaga calls “differentials.” These are the fundamental matter of the universe, the combination of which creates all that we know.⁴⁴ The Great Anonymous regulates the types of differentials that are emanated and how the differentials combine in order to assure that they do not jeopardize the well being of creation.⁴⁵ Since the continued supreme governance of the Great Anonymous is essential to the well being of the cosmos, part of this regulating involves the limiting of all aspects of creation so that no rival to the Great Anonymous may arise. For this reason human cognition is regulated and limited. This is Blaga’s metaphysical explanation of the limits of human cognition, a creative and illuminating, even if not highly scientific, theory.

A Similar Positive Element in Blaga’s Epistemology

The negative element in Pragmatism is counterbalanced by an equally important positive element: the pragmatic criterion of truthfulness. Blaga’s epistemological modesty is also counterbalanced by a significant and well-developed theory of the criteria of truthfulness. Like James, Blaga’s theory retains correspondence in his definition of truth⁴⁶ and coherence as a criterion of truthfulness.⁴⁷ He observes that internal criteria of

⁴³ Blaga, *Diferențialele divine*.

⁴⁴ Blaga states that the substance of the differentials is not an empirical substance. The differentials are more basic than quanta, which are complex energy entities and are composed of differentials. All material, psychical, and spiritual entities are composed of differentials. Blaga, *Diferențialele divine*, 95-96.

⁴⁵ Blaga, *Diferențialele divine*, 77.

⁴⁶ Blaga, *Cunoașterea luciferică*, 381.

⁴⁷ Blaga, *Cunoașterea luciferică*, 381.

verification are limited to showing that a theory cannot be verified: coherence never serves as a positive mode of verification. Therefore it seems that Blaga views coherence as a necessary but not sufficient criterion of truthfulness. Correspondence, on the other hand, seems to be viewed by Blaga as a sufficient but not necessary criterion of truth. If a statement can be shown to correspond to what it is describing, it stands as verified, but the inability to show that this relation pertains does not falsify a statement.

A difficulty with correspondence as a criterion of truth is how the relationship of correspondence is verified. Blaga is definitely concerned that statements have the correct relationship to “external” reality, but he is aware that verifying this relationship is problematic,⁴⁸ and consists of a tentative evaluation based upon the success or failure of the statement when put into application. Thus while Blaga may have a correspondence theory of truth, he clearly disavows correspondence as a criterion of verification.⁴⁹

In discussing his own theory of truth, Blaga writes, “The external criterion consists in a relation of the theory to plan A

⁴⁸ See especially Blaga, *Geneza metaforei și sensul culturii* (București: Fundația pentru Literatură și Artă “Regele Carol II”, 1937), 417, “There certainly exists a nominal definition of truth, understood as the equation between an idea and reality. But this ideal definition is equivalent to a simple postulate, for the realization of which no certainty is given to us, nor any criteria of judgement nor possibility of a test.”

⁴⁹ Also on page, 409 of *Cunoașterea luciferică* he writes, “Let us presuppose that in truth there exists a ‘reality in itself’... The single thing which can be affirmed about knowledge in relation to a reality in itself is that we cannot know whether knowledge is able to contain reality in itself, nor whether it is not.” While Blaga admits some importance to a correspondence between propositions and that which they are attempting to describe, his advocating of the theory of transcendent censorship proves that he does not believe that a proposition can ultimately correspond to reality (whatever that would entail). This is made clear in *Cenzura transcendentă* 506, where he describes cognition as a “catching hold of” an object, and says that such an act is only incompletely possible.

effectively realized.”⁵⁰ The phrase “effectively realized” hints at his solution to the problem of criteria of truthfulness and the verification of correspondence: there is a distinctly pragmatic aspect to Blaga’s view of verification. His criterion for judging correspondence is pragmatic, as is seen in his statement, “Verifiability consists, as was proved, in the ‘actualization’ of the *empirical potential* of a theory. This signifies something completely different than the correspondence of the theory to a ‘reality in itself.’”⁵¹ Blaga seems to be aware of the circularity of proposing correspondence as both the definition of truth and the criterion of truthfulness. He appears to avoid this by proposing that the criterion according to which a proposition should be accepted as corresponding to reality and therefore as true is how effective the proposition is when put into practice. This is remarkably like the criterion of truthfulness advocated by American Pragmatists.

That a pragmatic criterion is in fact what Blaga advocates can be seen from his own practice. Blaga does not philosophize like Socrates, proceeding dialectically, nor like Descartes, attempting to build a philosophical system upon some infallible first premise(s). Blaga philosophizes by suggesting new theories and then showing their fruitfulness. It is this fruitfulness, in Blaga’s eyes, that vindicates many of his most significant proposals. When in his epistemology Blaga proposes the theory of “plus cognition” and then argues for the truth of his theory by reference to its success in explaining the intellectual process employed in numerous scientific advances, he is utilizing a pragmatic criterion of truthfulness.⁵² When in his metaphysics Blaga proposes that the cosmos and its teleology are best explained by a system that posits the existence of an intelligent creator as the source of the universe, and then

⁵⁰ *Cunoașterea luciferică*, 381.

⁵¹ *Cunoașterea luciferică*, 409. The italicization of *empirical potential* and the quotes around “reality in itself” are Blaga’s.

⁵² Blaga, *Cunoașterea luciferică*, 357, 358, 366, 374, 418.

supports this hypothesis by showing its rich and extensive explanatory power, his argument utilizes the pragmatic theory of verification.⁵³

This same approach to verification is seen in Blaga's philosophy of science. In one passage, commenting on the nature of scientific progress, he writes, "With what right does he (Einstein) transform a 'paradoxical finding' into a 'principle'? With one single right. With the right that is given to him by the theoretical fruits which this change of accent has been able to bear."⁵⁴ There may be times when science proceeds via the gradual accumulation and analysis of data, and when one scientific theory overturns a previously accepted one by means of this process. However, it is very often the case that scientific data is open to more than one very plausible interpretation. In the latter case, a criterion other than correspondence is needed to determine which theory is most valid. In such a situation a scientific theory is not accepted as true because it corresponds to reality and rival theories do not: that would be question-begging. In this situation a theory is accepted as true because it is seen that it works.⁵⁵

⁵³ Blaga, *Cenzura transcendentă*, 450, "Forced to choose between incomplete justifications, we can make a concession to the critic, namely that of viewing the proposition of the Great Anonymous as a simple point of view. The value of this point of view will be measured through the results which it has the gift to bring."

⁵⁴ Blaga, *Știință și creație*, in vol. 10 of *Opere* (București: Fundația Regală, 1946), 162.

⁵⁵ This is admittedly an oversimplification of the pragmatic criterion. There are complications: theories can work without being true, and there are other important factors that influence the acceptance of a scientific theory. This oversimplification, for purposes of succinctness, is mine, not Blaga's. Blaga is aware that pragmatic validation is not inerrant, and argues that pragmatic successes are sometimes achieved using erroneous premises, see *Ființa istorică*, 465.

Conclusion

It may seem rather far-fetched to argue that Blaga, a very Continental philosopher whose works contain few references to American Pragmatism, is himself a Pragmatist. It may seem that such a project is the folly of an American philosopher who wants to impose his own tradition onto another's work. Nonetheless, I think that this article shows that a strong argument for the Pragmatism of Blaga's epistemology can be made.

The two essential features of American Pragmatism are its repudiation of epistemological strategies that aim at apodictic certainty and its proposal of a pragmatic criterion of truthfulness. Any philosopher who does not share these two features is not a Pragmatist. Likewise, any philosopher who does embrace them can be regarded, at least in his or her epistemology, as a Pragmatist. Blaga rejects the goal of apodictic certainty on a number of grounds. He also advocates a pragmatic criterion of truthfulness. Therefore Blaga is (can be considered) a Pragmatist.

Pragmatism is currently experiencing a revival in America. New arguments have been formulated in its support, and its proponents include many of America's leading philosophers. That Blaga embraced a similar philosophy more than half a century ago reflects his insight as a philosopher. Perhaps his works contain other insights that would be useful to contemporary philosophy as well.