

## The Peasant And Modern Man In Vasile Băncilă's Sociology

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### **Abstract:**

The Romanian philosopher, sociologist, and ethicist Vasile Băncilă (1897-1979) distinguished himself during his lifetime by studying the phenomenon of celebration. The problem of celebration, however, was not the only one that concerned him, as the philosopher analyzed the difference between the Romanian peasant and modern man through his own sociological approach, which he called "spiritual organicism." Băncilă dealt with this problem at an ideal-typical level. The Romanian peasant "in his ideation," "uncontaminated by the city," is characterized by his "patriarchal ethnicity," "cosmic Christianity," "providential thinking," community spirit, and inclination to achieve "maximum festivity" through his "customs." Băncilă opposes the peasant uncontaminated by the city to the modern man, whose birth certificate is the Renaissance. Thus, the modern man, not fully harmonized with the "fundamental reality," is a "moral and metaphysical orphan" who tries, by putting his own person first (individualism), to subordinate general reality (the underlying reality, but also the nature that surrounds him) to his own will, aided by technology and erudition, in order to increase material well-being (epicureanism) and power, believing that he can bring heaven to earth by acting Faustian and pursuing unceasing progress.

**Keywords:** *Vasile Băncilă, Romanian peasant, modern man, modernity, celebration.*

### **1. On the sociology of Vasile Băncilă**

Vasile Băncilă was a prolific thinker. He distinguished himself during the interwar period through his multidisciplinary studies. Băncilă reflected on a variety of fields: from ethics, sociology, theology, aesthetics, to ethnography. As early as 1944, the philosopher wrote about his own system of thought, which he called *providentialism*.

Contrary to materialistic or strictly empiricist thinking, Vasile Băncilă bases his analyses on the premise that there is an "ultimate foundation of reality," a level of reality which, although shrouded in mystery, influences concrete phenomena, as pointed out by anthropologist Gheorghiță Geană: "Providentialism accounts for the ultimate foundation of reality—a mysterious realm that is nevertheless concretely manifest and thus partially accessible" (Geană).

The Romanian philosopher and sociologist's ambition was to solve the problem of modern man distanced from this fundamental reality. In his studies, Băncilă was concerned with finding ways to harmonize modern man with fundamental reality without, however, affecting his personality: "the ideal of culture is to be a humanism based on ontology. (...) What is specific to humans is individualization plus fitting in" (Băncilă, 2007a: 493).

Băncilă applied the concept of providence in several fields of knowledge, including sociology. While in the field of ethics, the philosopher emphasized compassion, morals, and personality as means of harmonizing with fundamental reality, and in the field of aesthetics, he highlighted moral beauty, in sociology,

providentialism took the form of “spiritual organicism”: “For us, society is something organic, rooted in the mystery of things and with purposes that are in accordance with the laws of reality, which transcend society. (...) Society is not a libertinism or a legal or epicurean association of man, but a great collective destiny, which evolves according to profound and, in part, enigmatic laws. Society is, therefore, for us, a kind of organicism, but not biological, rather, we would say, a spiritual organicism. The most appropriate type of this society is the ethnic one. It reflects, as in no other life, the destiny of people. For us, true society is therefore the organic environment that connects man to general reality, to the whole. Contrary to what moderns usually do, we do not tend to replace metaphysical reality, the transcendental absolute, with the visible social, secularizing all values and impoverishing them of their existential density and gravity, through a kind of empirical and presumptuous sociology, but we consider society itself as the environment or instrument through which the deeper will of things becomes more complex and gives itself the opportunity to create more differentiation, thus leading man to the limits of his destiny” (Băncilă, 2007a: 498-499).

Organicist spiritual sociology analyzes social reality based on several premises. Society is not, as contractualists argue, a sum of rational individuals who, through an invisible contract, diminish their freedom in order to be together. Sociality, defined by Ion Ungureanu as “the quality of humans to be social beings and the property of society to constitute itself as a form of human inter-existence” (Ungureanu, 2002: 23), has its source in the fundamental reality of things at Băncilă. By carefully observing Blaga, Băncilă reveals the social character of a man who is as real as can be, even though he is shrouded in mystery (Băncilă, 1935: 370).

The way in which the deep will of things, the fundamental reality, intervenes in concrete reality is destiny. In Băncilă’s system, society represents the means of deep will through which the individual is brought into harmony with his own destiny, as exemplified by Radu Baltasiu: “Destiny belongs to the transcendent and, at the same time belongs to the individual. That is, the individual is not only about what individual traits we see on the street but about his/her transcendental correspondent called by Băncilă ‘the deeper will’” (Baltasiu, 2020a: 96-97).

By the idea of destiny, Băncilă understands both a sociological and ethical meaning. He shows that there are three components of destiny: determinism, fatalism, and human freedom (Băncilă, 2007b). The concept of determinism is closest to empirical sociology. Man’s present position is determined by social causes, but it is not limited to them. Fatalism simply means that “destiny cannot be conceived without a hint of predestination” (Băncilă, 2007b: 213). Behind the chaotic events of people’s lives there is a moral meaning, and a person’s current position is also determined by this meaning. However, whatever the social and ethical (fatalistic) determinism of man may be, he can, through his own freedom, adopt a different social direction, that is, change his own destiny to a certain extent.

On the issue of destiny, Băncilă’s view is similar to that of Dimitrie Gusti. Like Băncilă, Dimitrie Gusti points out that a person’s current social position is based on a causality formed by the framework (“external factors”/“internal environment”) and social will (the voluntary and conscious character of man): “Through voluntary and conscious spiritual life, the determinism of external factors or even of the inner environment loses its power of influence that it has in the realm of dead nature or in

the animal-biological realm and changes into a simple conditioning, that is, a favorable circumstance, instead of a determining cause” (Gusti, 1939: 12).

The determinism of frameworks is not sufficient to understand human action. The perspective of freedom is required, meaning that humans can escape the influence of social and even ethical determinism (fatalistic, of fundamental reality). When it comes to fatalism, Gusti and Băncilă are similar to a certain extent. Like Băncilă, Dimitrie Gusti believes that humans are free to align themselves with the deeper will of things (one of the components of social will being religious sentiment) (Vulcănescu, 2005: 973). However, the founder of the Romanian school of sociology does not claim that there is an underlying reality behind social phenomena, but rather that society is the result of the alignment of social will with religious sentiment, which Băncilă defines as deep will.

The methodological aspect of băncilian sociology resembles that of Max Weber. For the father of sociology, understanding social reality – grasping the meanings individuals attribute to their own social actions – involves comparing the ideal-typical construction of the object of study – rational exaggeration – with the image that emerges from empathization with it (Weber, 1978: 5). Vasile Băncilă keeps the empathetic component unchanged, but makes changes to the ideal-typical construction. Instead of a “rational exaggeration,” Băncilă constructs an image that is as complete as possible from a moral point of view. So, not an ideal-typical rational construction, but an ideal-typical moral one.

Vasile Băncilă’s objectivity stems from his concern for the ideal-typical construction of the object of study. The sociologist attempted to encapsulate the themes he addressed in his essays in formulas that were as morally clear as possible, as Radu Baltasiu shows: “Objectivity, in Băncilă’s terms, refers to the ability to get in full the meaning of the object phenomenon while preserving its integrity” (Baltasiu, 2020a: 95).

## **2. The “ideation” of the Romanian peasant according to Vasile Băncilă**

Băncilă is concerned with the ideal-typical profile of the peasant. Băncilă was aware of the cultural changes that the peasantry had undergone over the last century and more. For example, the Romanian ethicist observed that through “contamination with the city,” the peasantry was losing its festive character. At the center of Băncilă’s analysis, therefore, we have the peasant “uncontaminated by the city”, “the true peasant”, or “the ‘ideation’ of the Romanian peasant” (Băncilă, 2006a: 529). Băncilă warns the reader that he is not analyzing the empirical peasant, but rather “how he should be” from a moral point of view. The ideal peasant, or, in other words, the idea of the peasant, which the sociologist does not separate from religion and morality. The idea of ideation appears, for example, when he describes the essential traits of the peasant (which we will develop below): “Indeed, anyone who wishes to study the Romanian peasant’s way of thinking will have to delve deeper into these three factors, which have enriched the Romanian phenomenon in its most noble aspects: Christianity, stoicism, and naturalism” (Băncilă, 2006a: 529).

### **a) Ethnic patriarchal and stoic Christian**

For Băncilă, the Romanian peasant was a festive anthropological type par excellence. We acknowledge that, for the sake of clarity, we have arbitrarily distinguished the general characteristics of the peasant from those specific to the way he celebrates, because for Băncilă, all the characteristics of the peasant class “uncontaminated by the city” have a festive character.

The term used by the Romanian sociologist to describe the peasant is “ethnic patriarchal,” a designation that has several variations: the peasant lived in an “ethnographic and patriarchal culture”(Băncilă, 2007a: 493), or in a patriarchal community/society.

The Romanian philosopher treated peasants as the cultural foundation of the Romanian ethnic group, especially since, during the sociologist’s lifetime, Romanians were predominantly part of the peasant class: “However, for these norms and attitudes to take root and bear fruit in the field of festive education, teachers must be aware of the importance of the philosophy of celebration in enriching life. They must look carefully and with infinite respect at the traditional world of our villages and the treasures of folklore, where the deposits of celebration are preserved, with the conviction that we were a people of peasants and must remain a people of peasants in culture as well, if we want to offer the world an original and essential spiritual configuration”(Băncilă, 2006a: 536).

Three traits are predominant in the patriarchal ethnic group: Christianity, stoicism, and naturalism. In describing it in this way, Băncilă echoes Mircea Eliade, the great historian of religions, who called the religion of the Romanian peasant cosmic Christianity: the integration of pre-Christian (magical) elements into the institutionalized belief system of Christianity (Cuciuc and Gheorghe, 2003: 126). Moreover, with regard to Christianity, the sociologist notes that the religion of the patriarchal ethnic group is a cosmogonic one (Băncilă, 2003: 17): “Who does not know that the true peasant is temperate and wise like a Christian stoic? And to stoicism and Christianity, the Romanian peasant added the experience of his rich and robust naturalism, as a pastoral and agricultural people, living and tempered among the periodic miracles of nature, in landscapes both colorful and anonymous, among plants and animals. The broad naturalistic framework of his life made the peasant admire the cosmos even more and penetrate even deeper into the knowledge and power of God. Indeed, anyone who wants to study the Romanian peasant’s way of thinking will have to delve into these three factors, which have fertilized the Romanian phenomenon in its most noble aspects: Christianity, stoicism, and naturalism” (Băncilă, 2006a: 529).

The ideal type of Romanian peasant is based on the trinity of Christian, stoic, and natural. His inclination towards “natural life” derives from his way of working (pastoral and agricultural) and from the geographical environment in which he has lived for centuries (“lived and tempered among the periodic wonders of nature”). His stoicism stems from his ability to endure the harsh conditions of life. Thinking providentially about life (Băncilă, 2015: 318) and living stoically in the harsh conditions of nature, the peasant in his imagination managed to create the synthesis of cosmic Christianity, a specific experience of the sacred derived from the three traits identified by Băncilă.

### b) Live and think providentially

In the providential system of thinking proposed by Băncilă, the peasant, uncontaminated by the city, occupies a special place, representing an anthropological model that solves the problem preoccupying the philosopher: how can man be integrated into the fundamental reality of things (“to moralize him”)? In Băncilă’s view, the peasant is a good example of “ontological framing” (Băncilă, 2015: 318), an example to follow for modern man, “[possessing] like no other the secret of reconciliation with this life” (Bănciă, 2006a: 528-529).

The peasant lives and thinks providentially. He “feels he is living in an orderly and meaningful world, a world permeated by a providential spirit” (Băncilă, 2015: 318). Here we find another parallel with the Bucharest School of Sociology. Analyzing the categories of thought through which the peasants he studied interpreted their existence, sociologist and economist Mircea Vulcănescu observed the providential nature of their philosophy of life. Vulcănescu discovered that peasants interpreted the course of their lives through categories such as: person („ins” in romanian), figure („chip” in romanian), nature („fire” in romanian), purpose („rost” in romanian), fate („soartă” in romanian), world („lume” in romanian), God, and the Mother of God (Baltasiu, 2020b).

We observe the providential nature of peasant thinking through another observation made by Vasile Băncilă. Peasant propriety is also part of the “Romanian peasant’s ideation.” What characterizes the peasant is a certain *discreet monumentality* („monumentalitatea discrietă” in romanian) (Băncilă, 2006b: 339), the awareness that there is and manifests itself in his world “something greater than himself”.

We ask ourselves how the peasant in the story fits into the fundamental reality, managing to think and live providentially. Băncilă shows us two ways: mercy and morals. Mercy has the power to make a person “step outside of themselves,” away from their concern for self. That is why, for Băncilă, mercy represents “the echo of the general in man.” It is no wonder that in a community dominated by *personal anonymity* („anonomatul personal” in romanian language), mercy emerges, through which man puts the community above himself. We will write more about customs in the chapter on Romanian peasant celebrations. Let us pause for a moment to consider the ability of customs to connect people to the wider reality, because “they originally contained a metaphysical intuition” (Băncilă, 2007a: 496). Băncilă’s concept of customs is close to Max Weber’s understanding of the same term, namely that of rules “which [are] kept on the beaten track simply because men are ‘accustomed’ to it and persist in it by unreflective imitation” (Weber, 1978).

Contrary to the perception that Vasile Băncilă presents the peasantry in a laudatory manner, he ends up criticizing their integration into fundamental reality through pity and morals, calling it vegetative. Peasants did not fit into the general reality in a “critical and conscious” way, as modern man *could do* if he focused on developing his own personality: “However, there is a danger: the purely vegetative framing of man in reality. This type of framing is complete in the animal and plant kingdoms. It is partial or even dominant in ethnographic and patriarchal culture. It is almost completely absent from the life of modern man, who, instead, has left or risks leaving reality and perishing. Better vegetative framing than departure from reality. Patriarchal life has advantages of harmony and depth that modern life does not have

by any means. And then, it is a great exaggeration to say that ethnographic and patriarchal man was fatalistic and vegetative. This may have been true in individual life, but not in collective life. Society was creative in the first place, it had initiative, it created a type of culture which, if not very differentiated in itself, had a harmony and a deep adherence to reality, which had to remain as an ideal. For the ideal to be complete, however, it is necessary to combine the advantages of harmonious adaptation with those of critical, conscious adaptation” (Băncilă, 2007a: 493).

### **c) Community spirit**

The concept of community has a special meaning at Băncilă, as not every group of people is automatically a community. In order to be called such, the social relationships within the group must be based on a certain “*spiritual osmosis*” („osmoză spirituală” in romanian language) so that the members of the group acquire a sense of continuity even after they leave that community: “A community is a society in which there is a kind of spiritual osmosis between its members, so that it becomes a large family and, to a certain extent, gives the individual a feeling of immortality” (Băncilă, 2014a: 20).

The communitarian character of the peasant can also be observed in his personal anonymity, the preponderance of the community in terms of creative acts. If the peasant himself has the status of personal anonymity among his peers, especially during festive periods, the ego gives way to the collective self, with a prevailing “feeling of community full of society” (Băncilă, 2006c: 330), then his creative acts (such as updating traditions through customs) have a communitarian character: they are carried out within the spiritually osmotic collective, and the initiative for creation belongs to the collective as a whole. For example, changes in the tradition of caroling take place in accordance with the community’s calendar of holidays, and the manifestation of creation (caroling itself) also takes place within the community: “Society was creative back then, it had initiative, it created a type of culture that, while not particularly diverse in itself, had a harmony and a deep connection to reality that was to remain an ideal. For the ideal to be complete, however, it is necessary to combine the advantages of harmonious integration with those of critical, conscious integration” (Băncilă, 2007a: 493).

### **d) The holiday and the Romanian peasant**

Celebrations occupy a central place in the peasant’s understanding because, together with the child, he “truly celebrates” in Băncilă’s view: “First, they must know that holidays are only truly beautiful if we celebrate them in the way our ancestors did. For our ancestors, mostly peasants, pure of heart and healthy of spirit, had something of the soul of children” (Băncilă, 2006d: 235).

Vasile Băncilă does not analyze the peasant outside the context of the festive phenomenon, which occupies a significant place in his life. The general characteristics of the peasant have been separated from the festive ones in an arbitrary manner for the sake of clarity. Let us therefore specify the connection between the above traits and the festive occasion, and then focus on the characteristics that we considered specific to the festive occasion.

Peasants, uncontaminated by city life, celebrate the festive season by embracing cosmic Christianity (a synthesis of Christian, Stoic, and natural trinities).

Festive acts bring to life religious or pagan motifs, but integrated into Christianity. Animals and plants are personified, being transformed into festive motifs, as shown by ethnologist Ion Ghinoiu in the Romanian pantheon (Ghinoiu, 2001: VI).

Providential thinking and living bring him into harmony with the underlying reality of things, which can be seen in the way he celebrates. Vasile Băncilă placed celebration at the center of his system, believing that it could ontologically reframe humanity. Through its providential character, the peasant celebration resolves the problem of immorality.

If the festive act does not take place in solitude, then we observe in the peasant's imagination the environment conducive to celebration, namely the community.

### **i) “Patriarchal (peasant) customs”: “the festive maximum”**

Peasant customs, also known as *patriarchal* customs, contain the elements that make up the celebration, Băncilă shows us. What are customs, we wonder?

Customs represent the concrete part of culture, its “living body,” which means a certain attitude toward life “manifested in collective practices.” “Customs” represent the implementation of an attitude towards the underlying reality of things, towards ethical, aesthetic and religious values pursued for their own sake, independently “regardless of their chances of success” (Weber, 1978: 24-25). If “the organization of transcendental visions” represents the abstract of culture, by customs we mean those collective practices carried out in accordance with this vision, the concrete moral-religious order: “Customs are, therefore, the living body of culture. To be so, we must understand them in their broadest and deepest sense, as a coherent set of attitudes towards the world and life, manifested in collective practices that are more or less picturesque, but always in accordance with their spiritual meaning” (Băncilă, 2006c: 327).

Holidays represent the culmination of “peasant customs.” Not all customs are festive acts, but those that are contain a festive character. Thus, Băncilă refers to peasant customs in his writings as “festive maxims” (Băncilă, 2006c: 329). Why do peasant customs represent “festive maxims,” we ask ourselves? Băncilă's answer lies in their success in being a place “where philosophy, art, and religion meet in a common way of knowing” (Băncilă, 2014b: 81).

The sociologist considers culture in its two forms: the abstract (“the world within: the natural and the metaphysical”) and the concrete (“the phenomenon, the history”). In abstract terms, culture represents “the organization of transcendental vision,” “the intuition of pure moral fact” (Băncilă, 2006c: 328). The difference between humans and animals lies in humans' ability to relate to the transcendent through their cultural acts (Băncilă, 2006c: 324). The act of culture, the organization of transcendental vision, means “the passage of general meanings, of the great veins of existence, through individual consciousness and its structuring into a harmonious consistency” (Băncilă, 1935: 372).

We can better understand Băncilă's vision if we bring into the discussion the theologian Nichifor Crainic with his concept of *nostalgia for paradise* (Crainic, 1994). Culture, in the abstract, represents the expression of man's nostalgia for perfect (paradisiacal) reality. For Băncilă, culture essentially overlaps with the moral and religious order of a community.

It should be noted here that Băncilă contrasts culture with the civilization specific to the modern era. Characteristic of civilization is “the splendor of the material apparatus of life, the refinement and complexity of the lifestyle in terms of comfort and all the subtle and convenient cares for the maintenance of life” (Băncilă, 1935: 369). The material apparatus of life refers to the technology used by humans to ensure comfort. If by culture Băncilă refers to the spiritual, the abstract, the metaphysical, by civilization he means the material, the concrete, technology, and comfort.

Returning to the issue of culture, Băncilă criticizes those analysts who “have impoverished morals of what is deeply real in them, of their metaphysical essence” (Băncilă, 2006c: 328). Even if the “metaphysical essence” of culture cannot be empirically proven, man’s attempt to reflect moral values in his actions is a fact. Max Weber, for example, introduced into his typology of social action the concept of rationally valued action (Weber, 1978: 24-25): “The mistake made by the sociologists mentioned above is therefore twofold: they impoverished morals of what is deeply real in them, of their metaphysical essence, and then sought to base the science of morality on such morals, without knowing that they brought with them the intuition of pure morality, which they could not extract from mere forms” (Băncilă, 2006c: 328).

#### **ii) Time organization: between holidays and in accordance with the Christian calendar. The issue of calendar reform after the Great Union**

Another characteristic specific to Romanian peasant celebrations is related to the organization of their time. Activities in an annual cycle were organized according to a popular calendar passed down orally from generation to generation (Ghinoiu, 2001: VIII), in such a way that “working days were attached to holidays” (Băncilă, 2006b: 550). For example, the beginning of the pastoral cycle was marked by a ceremony of death and rebirth of Saint George (Ghinoiu, 2001: 2), agrarian deity “over whom Christianity superimposed Saint George the Great Martyr” (Ghinoiu, 2001: 165).

In his very first appearance in Romanian publishing (with the work “Calendar Reform: Reasons and Organization of Calendar Reform” in issue 159 of the 1924 newspaper *Ideea Europeană*), Băncilă raised the issue of the peasant’s relationship to his own calendar for organizing holidays in the context of the adoption by the Kingdom of Romania (1919) and the Romanian Orthodox Church (1924) of the Gregorian calendar after the geopolitical changes that occurred after World War I. The change in the calendar was not welcomed by the peasantry of the time, as their relationship to the calendar was different from that of the authorities and high prelates.

For peasants, the holiday calendar is not a convention or an expression of astronomical knowledge, but rather, in their providential thinking, they perceive it as a given, a religious revelation, a traditional historical prejudice considered immutable. That is why it is imbued with sacredness (Băncilă, 2003: 15): “For the people, the calendar is not a convenient convention, kept as long as it is convenient, because the people do not know relativistic logic; nor do they have an astronomical conception of the calendar, as intellectuals do. Rather, for them, the calendar is a tradition indestructibly woven into their entire attitude and accommodation towards life” (Băncilă, 2003: 15).



## 2) Modern man

For Vasile Băncilă, modern man is, from an anthropological point of view, in opposition to the peasant, to the patriarchal ethnic group, being ideally characterized by the following traits:

- Metaphysical revolt;
- Metaphysical and moral Orphism;
- Individualism;
- Decline in community spirit;
- Mechanistic reporting on the surrounding nature;
- Focused on the Faustian time;
- Creator of a civilization that subordinated culture.

We note that Băncilă described the ideal-typical modern man on several coordinates: religiously (metaphysical revolt, metaphysical and moral orphism), strictly socially (individualism, decline of community spirit), ecologically (a mechanistic approach to the surrounding nature), in terms of the analysis of the relationship with time (focused on Faustian time), and culturally (creator of a civilization that has subordinated culture).

### a) **Metaphysical revolt, Metaphysical and moral Orphism**

The first characteristic of modern man is related to the moment of his appearance. For Băncilă, concerned with the moral dimension of man, with his harmonization with the underlying reality, modern man appeared with the Renaissance (Băncilă, 2006b: 342), when, on a philosophical and religious level, God was no longer at the center of human existence, man taking his place. Thus, from then until the post-war period, metaphysical rebellion characterised man in general. That is why the weak contact with underlying reality transforms the modern man into a metaphysical and moral orphan: “The metaphysical revolt (the philosophy of absurdity—the most ‘absurd’ philosophy in all of history, but one which, unfortunately, has given expression to the disfigured, deformed, and proud contemporary man)” (Băncilă, 2014c: 93).

### b) **Individualism and the decline in community spirit**

Individualism is another major feature of modernity in Băncilă’s system of thought. We recall that through his providentialism, he theorizes reality on several levels (philosophical, ethical, sociological, psychological, and aesthetic) starting from the axiom that there is a deep will of things, the expression of a perfect reality, which, although it cannot be captured by measurement techniques, interacts with empirical reality. Thus, with the metaphysical revolt of the Renaissance, modern man began to perceive fundamental reality as something morally neutral, as a simple object that he could manage, in his own pride, according to his powers. For Vasile Băncilă, individualism represents man’s attempt to subject the deep will of things to his own particular will. Instead of submitting to underlying reality, modern man rebels and tries to subjugate or ignore this reality: “Modern man is a revolutionary, a rebel proud of his personal power. He has shown this pride not only towards his fellow men, but also towards cosmic and metaphysical reality. He began modern history by attempting to confiscate for his own use the reason that his ancestors saw in the universe and in God. Great, objective reason was despised or denied, and instead it was said that the whole meaning of life lies in each individual, in the human person.

Modern man wanted general reality to be something neutral, if not absurd, so that he could exercise his power over this reality, so that it could be shaped according to his lust for power. This is called individualism” (Băncilă, 2006a: 530).

Băncilă discusses the *generalization of individualism* in modernity. Individualism has thus become a social norm. The sociologist does not deny that individualism did not exist in the peasant world, but there it was not generalized. In other words, modernity has increased the proportion of individualistic attitudes within a community, an attitude that already existed and was predominant in the early peasant world: “Băncilă discusses the generalization of individualism in modernity. Individualism has thus become a social norm. The sociologist does not deny that individualism did not exist in the peasant world, but there it was not generalized. In other words, modernity has increased the proportion of individualistic attitudes within a community, an attitude that already existed and was predominant in the early peasant world” (Băncilă, 2006b: 342).

The spread of individualism has been detrimental to community cohesion. Băncilă shows that modern man is also characterized by the loss of the communal nature of his social life. The loss of community spirit is caused by a change in philosophical attitude (metaphysical rebellion, individualism), but also by the emergence and use of modern technologies. Widespread technology (television, radio, reading, or, in the contemporary period, smartphones and social media platforms) actually represents means of the disappearance of the community phenomenon from history: “In the past, when peasants and shepherds met, they created community and folklore. Today, radio and television destroy community: contrary to appearances, people become more individualized through them. Reading, radio, television: means of eliminating the phenomenon of community from history” (Băncilă, 2014d: 72).

### **c) Mechanistic reporting on the surrounding nature**

If the peasant related to the surrounding nature stoically, morally, and religiously, that is, in relation to his cosmic Christianity, modern man does so mechanistically. His individualism – the imposition of his own will to the detriment of underlying reality – is also manifested in the case of nature. Excessive pollution is possible by virtue of such an attitude; modern man does not feel “the cosmos as a big family.” Studying nature through scientific methods cannot give rise to the feeling that he is part of the same “big family” as the surrounding nature, which Băncilă calls “spiritual companionship”: “Modern science has accustomed us to the idea that humans are very close to animals, the difference being more one of degree. It would therefore have been logical for us to feel close to them. But the opposite has happened. Morally, we have distanced ourselves from the animal world. In the society of love, he was close to them. The Romans had a day when they used to decorate animals with wreaths, man considered himself essentially different from animals, but through animals with wreaths. The Romanian people realized such a spiritual connection with animals that at times they even introduced them into their religious community. They gave holy water to animals, just as, in recent times, they gave them water from Zmeeni or Maglavit. (...) There is a fundamental fact here, full of consequences: modern man is increasingly losing the society of animals and entering the ‘society’ of machines” (Băncilă, 2006b: 346).

#### **d) Focused on the Faustian time**

Another difference between the man of ethnic patriarchy and modern man is their relationship to time. For modern man, time has taken on a “dynamic, Faustian character, marked by rapid acceleration and exasperating restlessness” (Băncilă, 2014a: 17), so that his working days are no longer related to holidays, as in the case of the peasant in the idealization. Festive time “follows” working time, not the other way around, as in the case of the patriarchal ethnic group (Băncilă, 2006b: 550).

Without clarifying the terms, Băncilă writes about the artificial time of modern man and the organic time of the peasant (Băncilă, 2014a: 21). However, the sociologist is more concerned with the consequences of modern time reporting, which he mentions:

1. concern for future progress and disconnection from the past (Băncilă, 2014a: 17);
2. “man no longer finds himself” (Băncilă, 2014a: 17);
3. the feeling of nothingness arises (Băncilă, 2014a: 17) from the separation of individual time from communal and cosmic time (Băncilă, 2014a: 20).
4. “people today feel that their spiritual heritage is disappearing because of the accelerated pace of time and history” (Băncilă, 2014a: 18-19). So he developed an entire *industry of commemorations* (Băncilă, 2014a: 18-19).

#### **e) Creator of a civilization that subordinated culture**

Băncilă also writes about modernity when he raises the issue of the difference between culture and civilization. By culture, the philosopher means the moral and religious order of a community, and by civilization, he means the material order (the technology that ensures the comfort of life). While in patriarchal, peasant, ethnographic societies, civilization was subordinate to culture, in modern societies the relationship has changed in the sense that culture (the moral-religious order) no longer provides the goals for the use of technology: “The Gluga, the art of building houses, the technique of shepherd dueling, the secret recipes of folk medicine, which sometimes surpassed the capabilities of today’s medicine, and a series of wonderful tools created by Romanian technical genius, formed a domestic civilization, which was imbued with and enhanced by cultural attitudes, forming a whole. In ethnographic and patriarchal times, there was harmony between the deeply spiritual and the technical” (Băncilă, 1935: 382).

The reversal of the relationship of subordination led to the emergence of a crisis of moral and religious order in the modern era, a crisis that Băncilă intended to resolve through his providential system of thought. The crisis of modern culture is, in fact, an expression of the crisis of peasant culture through the penetration of modern technologies into the village world, as the brilliant Mihai Eminescu summarized in a verse: “Eminescu, who was the greatest social and political thinker in our country, to whom all those who thought Romanian in this field are indebted, after him, when he said: ‘And as they come by rail/All songs perish,’ condensed in a few words not only the story of the transformation of Romanian society in the contemporary era, but also indicated a philosophy of culture, history, and technology” (Băncilă, 1935: 385).

Băncilă, following in Eminescu’s footsteps, intuited that technology is not neutral; technology not only provides you with the means to achieve a cultural goal,

but also, especially in the case of today's technologies, provides you with the goals to pursue. We will not address the issue of technology's lack of neutrality here, as it has been extensively discussed by media theorist Neil Postman in a work translated and published in Romania (Postam, 2023). We will limit ourselves to presenting Băncilă's idea: "technology is international, but not neutral," meaning that it penetrates any culture of a community, changing that very culture: "Technical products can serve as vehicles for foreign ways of thinking and feeling, just as microbes come on various goods. In this sense, it can be said that technology is international, but not neutral. (...) Foreign habits of thought and feeling either remain parasitic, powerless, where they were brought, but managing to prevent local forms from fulfilling their purpose, or they dissolve the latter altogether. (...) Moreover, by importing contradictory habits of thought and feeling from all corners of the world, moral and religious scepticism is produced, in which no culture can thrive" (Băncilă, 1935: 384).

If we have brought modern technology into the discussion, we must point out that, in relation to this, Băncilă theorizes other characteristics of modern man. Modern man attempts to become a *demiurge through technology* (Băncilă, 1935: 383), that is, to impose their individual will with the help of technology, acquiring abilities attributed only to the divine. Thus, technological development has become a myth which, together with the belief in unceasing progress, offers modern man the illusion that he can recreate paradise (the perfect world) here on earth (Băncilă, 1935: 385). We recall that archaic man attempted something similar through the act of celebration. The peasant in his imagination paradise his time through celebration, without, however, having the belief, like modern man, that he will ever be able to create paradise on earth.

Băncilă describes modern man as being focused on acquiring sensory pleasures (epicureanism) (Băncilă, 1935: 385), trying to acquire a high level of erudition that ethicists call *empty intelligence* because it does not moralize, that is, it does not help him harmonize with the underlying reality of things (Băncilă, 1935: 385).

### 3) Conclusions

The concern for drawing distinctions between peasants and modern man is part of the theoretical corpus of Vasile Băncilă's sociology, which focuses on the issue of celebration. The basis of the discussion is the "providentialist" thesis, according to which, in order to understand reality, one must also consider the "deep will of things." We can speak of a branch of sociology concerned with the study of morality in society.

Focusing on the ideal-typical moral description of human typologies as the basis of objectivity, in Vasile Băncilă's sociology, the peasant "from ideation," "uncontaminated by the city," is characterized by:

- ontologically framed being, thinking and living providentially;
- creator of culture (moral-religious order), which, through its concrete expression – customs – produces authentic celebrations, that is, those festive acts that frame man in the fundamental reality of things. Man of "maximum festivity".
- the quintessential communitarian, characterized by personal anonymity;
- synthesis of Christianity, naturalism, and stoicism – cosmic Christianity;

- patriarchal ethnic.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from the peasant is the modern man described in Vasile Băncilă's sociology as:

- a human type that is out of step with the underlying reality of things, characterized by rebellion and metaphysical orphanhood, even despite his own great erudition;
- creator of civilization, who through technology manages to bring about changes even in peasant culture;
- the individualistic man, who imposes his will, treating even nature as a mechanism that he can control according to his powers and for his own well-being (epicureanism);
- acting in a world where authentic celebration is in decline, trying to perfect reality through constant action and belief in the continuous progress of things in such a way as to achieve a utopian paradise on earth.

Băncilă's sociology draws our attention today through its relevance, namely that in analyzing modern and postmodern man, we must not ignore the decline in morality, which Băncilă called "the lack of alignment with the fundamental reality of things." Morality serves to strengthen social bonds within a community; without it, people become isolated and anomic.

Băncilă also proposes that sociologists study how postmodern man celebrates, given the ability of celebration to remoralize modern or postmodern man. For a development, therefore, of the sociology of celebration, a fruitful endeavor that sociologist Radu Baltasiu undertakes by arguing that Băncilă laid the foundations for a new sociological paradigm – the paradigm of revival (Baltasiu, 2020a: 96-97).

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