

In Quest of the Measure's Restoration

Abstract. The acute consciousness of the moral crisis we face today makes us to inquire after the philosophy's opportunities in finding a viable way to overcome serious worries concerning life, world, and human being. We think that the ethical value of measure and the correlated principle of "golden mean" could enlighten, on a high level, our understanding upon the real needs and purposes to be identified in assuming and cultivating a fitting attitude to an authentic humanness in accordance with the demands of nowadays characteristics of the globalization development. Returning to the measure's integrator meaning that has been acknowledged by the Ancient thinkers of the Western culture, in this essay we try to emphasize the capital significance of the notion at stake, beyond any particularities of temporal and spatial context, like a basic philosophical concept to be explored and activated in its valences of promoting and increasing the quality of life. We pronounce for the necessity of measure's restoration in which, first of all, our moral status in the world has to be grounded. More than ever, we need to recover the measure as a guide in shaping human deliberations, choices, decisions making, actions into a constructive orbit, into equilibrium and order, security and harmony, into Good and Right, by commitment, respect for and responsibility toward the whole life on Terra. A culture of measure, eventually, is fully worth to be displayed in the framework of the moral philosophy in driving at the human well-being and at the wellness of the total existence, alike.

Keywords: measure, ethics, virtue, moral crisis, well-being, conscience of measure.

In a famous lecture which has been delivered at "Kulturbund" of Vienna, in 1935, Edmund Husserl was warning as concerns the risks of the European mankind's crisis as "alienation from its own rational sense of life", as "a fall in barbarity", underlining that such a situation could be avoided only by "a new spirituality", by "a renaissance of philosophical spirit through a heroism of reason"; and so, "a great and lasting future" for man would be possible¹. Unfortunately, over decades, this crisis has extended, becoming a global one, encompassing more and more the

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¹ Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis des europäischen Menschentums und die Philosophie*, in *Husserliana VI*, 1953.

entire existence, and threatening the world mankind by “a tripled self-destruction: material, biological and spiritual” one².

We must recognize the paradoxical climate we are implied in: the great benefits of the economic progress routes and of the science-tech advances, on the one hand; the harmful consequences that are brought forth by an unreasonable manner of using the extraordinary outcomes of knowledge and of accessing the sophisticated technologies, on the other hand. At the beginning of 21st century, mankind is confronting with serious problems that claim a fundamental change of thinking and action, to which philosophers might have a substantial contribution.

More and more, during the last years, we face tremendous problems in important areas we are engaged in and affected by, from natural environment to digital one within the ‘consumption and information society’. Many existential dilemmas are arising even regarding the maintenance of life on our Planet. It is enough to observe the radical meteorological changes – as result, most partly, of the mankind’s wildness – to understand the critical proportions of the real situation. In these conditions, philosophy can offer some guidelines, by priority in the ethical horizon with its potential of ideals and general values, as well as of principles and rules to organize and to orchestrate a good life / the so much desired well-being.

To re-discover major ideas and truths seems to be a chance for a bewildered humanity in looking for the optimal life-style; and to restore the relevance of *measure* in the life’s spread deserves a peculiar attention, as an imperative to stop extreme manifestations of mentality and practice, and to re-set / to defend the vital equilibrium in the world.

Meditating on the moral status of human being in nowadays, moving between impetus and limits, permissions and interdictions, hopes and dreads, the recall for *measure* appears like a urgency in reply to the global crisis we have cope with it.

In the assumed context, we tackle *measure* as one of the topmost philosophical concepts, rooted in ethics field. Leading us to temperance, self-control, moderation, theoretical and practical wisdom, giving us the force of balancing of body and mind, *measure* represents, finally, the inner element of structuring our moral values: freedom, dignity, kindness, courage, justice, responsibility, care, love etc. It is a central principle guider for the moral experience. We allow to assess that *measure* can be viewed like the cornerstone of a worthwhile life, with long perspective

² Cf. Basarab Nicolescu, *La Transdisciplinarité. Manifeste*, Éditions du Rocher, Paris, 1996.

goals, for humans and nonhumans sharing in life the same biotic community.

Seeing that to a certain extent *measure* represents a pivotal notion in our own ethical view upon 'human' / 'humanness', we have already attained this issue in previous approaches. Here, by dwelling on it broader, we try to articulate some necessary explanations – even for avoiding possible misunderstandings. A welcome remark belonging to Thomas Ryba makes us to display some considerations. As regards our 'urge to aspire after *measure* as following up a key principle of life', the American thinker features: "But in a curious way, this means that the desire for measure becomes itself the measure of moral excellence. It is the desire for measure which lies at the heart of truly creative self-individuation, but this desire for measure means that creative self-definition cannot proceed in opposition to life but must be accomplished in balance with it"³.

Indeed, as an important motive activating the moral ideal of life: the *Human*, "the desire for measure" has its undeniable role for the creative moral becoming of the individual. But, not merely the "desire for measure" is to be highlighted; by distinctively, we try to stress the need for a 'conscience of measure' that must be developed in the attempt of a veritable moral creativity to be manifested by a very own *human* being.

Life means a continuous alternation of dilation and contraction, imposing man to prove a 'conscience of measure', respectively a capacity to balance between existential dualities and to self-control by right thinking which is an extraordinary power that if not necessarily brings the wellness, at least it undoubtedly keeps clear of many harms; effectively, helping man to overcome "hard moments" in living. It's so wisely the Stoics' *adagium*: '*mens aequa in arduis*!' At stake, there is the due prudence in any circumstances – even when it seems to be no necessary, so speaking with Goethe: "Auch ohne Not hat Vorsicht wohl gegolten"⁴.

A peculiar knowledge of rise and decrease by educated simplicity and naturalness, and by paying more attention to antecedents and consequences of our choices, decisions and deeds alike guides us to the comprehension of the essential value of measure in our life. The 'conscience of measure' opens our minds to grasp the meaning of the

³ Thomas Ryba, *The Areteological Challenge*, <http://www.phenomenology.org/ryba-review.htm>

⁴ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Faust*, 10424.

harmonization / equilibrium at the same time on the horizontal and vertical coordinates of life. *Measure* has nothing to do with the idea of mediocrity. On the contrary, in the ethics territory, *measure* is tied with the question of 'excellence'. It engages the placement in the middle (on the existential horizontality); but, by elevating to the highest point of man's affirmation like a self-creator in the order of the ideal: the *Human*.

We dare to view *measure* – in its moral philosophical meaning, connected to the aspiration and the endeavor toward ethical excellence of human being – as *modus vivendi* by which individuals can find and increase the wellness, discovering part of the supreme law, harmony, and order.

Thus, *measure* is one of the most significant concepts in revealing human being as an agent of the moral sovereignty; respectively, as the actor of *virtue* in which human grandeur does subsist.

In the endeavor to motivate our insistence on *measure's* promotion in existence, we want to delineate its major role played within the personal, social, and cosmic style-to-be / become into *human* fulfillment, even by the *virtue* notion. Actually, we must reconsider the definition given by Aristotle to virtue: "the midst way between excess and deficiency"⁵; the mean between two extremes: a 'too much' and a 'too little' - that is *measure*. Such a vision is re-activated by contemporary thinkers. For example, according to Stéphane Lupasco, in the territory of a "dynamic-contradictory polyethics", virtue is the attainment of "the equilibrium of energy's potentialization and actualization in *T state*"⁶. Somehow similarly, in his treatise about the "great virtues", André Comte-Sponville states: virtue is "the narrow climax between two opposite abysses"⁷. As we can see, by *virtue's* semantics, we reach *the measure* in its function to assure the 'intermediary's excellence'. As pathway of a suitable life for human being, for its moral upsurge into authentic self-fulfillment, *virtue* implies *measure*. It is the *measure* in the play of opposites, carrying on both what 'is ought' and 'is desirable' for life's progress.

In correlation with the nucleus ethical category - that of *virtue* - we dare to say that *measure* can be approached like the core learning of moral philosophy in general. It enlightens the human character engaging the

⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1107 a 5-7.

⁶ Cf. Stéphane Lupasco, *L'homme et ses trois éthiques*, Éditions du Rocher, Monaco, 1986.

⁷ Cf. André Comte-Sponville, *Petit traité des grandes vertus*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1995.

capacity to realize the importance of the necessary compromise between polar couples: ‘humans and nature’, ‘civilization and environment’, ‘efficiency and satisfaction’, ‘rights and obligations’, ‘techno-scientist success and humanist evolution’, ‘present and future’, etc.

As the dynamic equilibrium state of antagonist tensions, avoiding any kind of damaging extremes, *measure* covers the ethical ideal of human excellence. Again, the old sapient lessons about order, proportion, harmony, about *measure*, generally, are reviving. We just mention: the Delphic precept of μηδὲν ἄγαν / *medén ägan* / *nothing too much* (!); the Greek μέσότης / *mésótes* or the Latin *aurea mediocritas*, the *golden measure*, the *just medium* functioning as the vital stick of all things. We are reminded that Plato has urged even to an “art of *measure*”; as he wrote, we need to report ourselves to the ‘right measure’ / ‘το μετρίον’ as to a *principle*, because it expresses “that is adequately”, that is fittingly; the “right measure” consisting in “which is timely, ... all is necessary, and ... everything there is living in the middle of the distance between extremes”⁸.

Over times, the entitlement of *measure* is also asserted by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, who accounts this concept like “a common indispensable denominator” for the entire existence, like the “point from which to gain purchase on reality”. Dwelling upon the need for *measure* like “the key issue for a New Enlightenment”, the contemporary phenomenologist of life considers *measure* to be a “knot principle” in the moral valuation, because it makes possible the coherence / the unity of life’s system; *measure* is one of “the crucial requirements of humanity in its present disarray”⁹.

Undoubtedly, by restoring *measure* in its active plenitude of meaning, with its long time consequences within the unity of ‘ethos-logos-cosmos’, marking the existence both on any form and level, and in its totality, we can unfold reasonable projects regarding a sustainable and right development’s order, starting from the preservation of the natural environment – the material source of all life, our common property and responsibility for the present and no less for the next generations – and going to the challenges of genetic and computer revolutionary age – in respect of life’s improvement.

⁸ Plato, *Political Man*, 286d; 284e.

⁹ See Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, *Logos and Life*, Book 4: *Impetus and Equipoise in the Life – Strategies of Reason*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht / Boston / London, 2000, pp. 613-639.

We restate that by valuating the *measure*, we could find responses and solutions for many problems of vital concern; that is possible because the ethical value and principle of *measure* give us a serious support for a good *organon* in life, by understanding what is really important, necessary, usefully and pleasantly. The conscience of *measure* would make us more wisely in comprehending the limits between which our knowledge must be instrumentalized, in catching the essential responsible role that we have to play in managing the existence in the benefit of a healthy and secure progress. By resorting to the “golden measure”, we reach the route of increasing in our true moral power of being, and we can really manifest ourselves as respectful masters-participants to the wellness of the whole living order.

An education focusing on ‘measure in all’ / ‘measure of everything’ represents a prime duty in shaping human ways of thinking, believing and acting in terms of a sensible moral commitment toward constructive (and not destructive!) purposes to be followed.

Measure could be the pivot of a significant “*metanoia*” - the challenge that Leszek Kolakowski has addressed to the philosophical community since 1994; being “urgently needed”, this “*metanoia*” means a radical change of mentality “that would enable people to fight more efficiently against all threats of our civilization”¹⁰.

To retrieve the *measure*, that can help us to succeed in awakening to a general perspective upon questions that really matter for *human* spiritual growth, and to realize a positive upheaval by overcoming the crisis in which humanity now recognizes itself.

In our own comprehension, *measure* is necessary in all human acts. It marks the life on every level (organic, vital, psychic, social and cultural) of manifestation. It orders the human possibilities and needs, aspirations and imperatives.

To conclude, we say just that *measure* is something without that we cannot live, finally. Under the sign of being disclosed in the heart of natural existence, *measure* is the factor guiding us to grasp the meaning of life with its imperative of a creative affirmation.

¹⁰ Cf. Leszek Kolakowski, “Introductory Remarks”, in *Dialogue and Universalism*, Vol.V, No.1, Centre of Universalism, Warsaw, 1995