REVIVING SOME ETHICAL VALUES
TO IMPROVING OUR SHARING-IN-LIFE IN A GLOBAL EXISTENCE

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Abstract. Being sensitive to the mankind evolutions of the last decades, and considering the particularities of our common future which is marked by the process of globalization, we think that the ethical referential is one of the most important priorities to be involved in our education and self-education, for individuals and for communities alike. Thus, we assess that an in-depth knowledge and understanding of both the axiological and normative dimensions of ethics represent a fundamental direction of the present debates among professionals, leading to an adequate work together. The aim of this paper is to reviving some major ethical values coming from the ancient Greek moral philosophy – like: phrónesis, sophrosýne, déon, philía, etc. – to exploring their potential for a better inscribing-in and sharing-in-life in a global world. In our vision, the university education must be continuously conceived and unfolded by articulating the offer of ethics within the curricula of different trainings of our students.

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In the context of the crystallization of a planetary consciousness, a basic idea of understanding the course of our manifestation as diversity in unity leads us to the necessity of implementing and developing the ethics as component in the framework of scientific and professional education. Undoubtedly, a very important area is that of the university education. In our view, ethics imposes itself as one of the most significant coordinates in the process of human becoming in its capacity of activating authenticity, freedom and dignity, following a progressive trajectory of the individual and communitarian life.

Nowadays, major problems the mankind has to deal with – the poverty, the famine, human rights, the war, the inequalities within and across nations, the great discrepancies in education, diseases, the altering of the environment, the consumerism, etc. – can find solutions by putting in act the ethics’ offer, in its long history, being attentive to the basic ideas coming from Antiquity, as concerns the force of human awareness of the moral dimension of the existence. The reflection upon our present situation articulated on the features of globalization (in social, economic, political, cultural, technological, ecological, institutional levels) stressing the worldwide social interactions needs a serious moral thinking and attitude, too; for which a peculiar education becomes one of the most prior directions.

We consider ethics in a holistic meaning, as moral philosophy and normative guide of human conduct, beyond any kind of taxonomies: fundamental and applied ethics, descriptive and prescriptive theory of moral, general and specific ethics, individual and social ethics, etc. Our interest focuses upon the nucleus values and principles that circumscribe the human beingness as moral experience within the complexity of relatedness with everything-there-is-alive in the world to which human being has access.

The fast movements and long-term challenges under the auspices of the information technology and the genetic revolutions, on the one hand; no less, under the auspices of the moral and ecological crisis of the last decades, on the other hand, claim an ethical culture in accordance with the global evolution of our humanity looking for cooperation, safety, sustainability, protection of individuals and groups, care for the future, communication and responsible action oriented towards a viable cross-cultural civilization.
A range of topics coming from the ethics’ territory can give us support in building a global architecture by respecting the need of equilibrium between “differentiation and integration”, by assuming an adequate understanding of and finding “effective responses to the global threats and risks”, working together for an extended cultural commitment in achieving of “a new pledge” within the passing “from the age of reason, to that of empathy” (cf. Rifkin), in the effort of overcoming our common vulnerability and affirming our potential to getting a fulfilled human life.

By its own structure, ethics opens to the shaping of relationships on the ground of universal values and norms with long-term impact on individual and community alike, in the social-cultural and natural environment of living. Starting from here, it is obviously the increased necessity of approaching ethical culture as a distinctive part in the general training of young generations. As a discipline of the academic curricula (no matters the particular domain of studies), ethics offers good opportunities for the improvement of our development and sharing-in-life in a global existence, with its advantages but also with its threats. Generally, a moral philosophical culture can operate as a healthy propaideia in inscribing ourselves on the positive trajectory of the globalization process we are facing.

Above all, we tackle the problem of virtue that deserves to be revaluated as a force of human being to comprehend in a better way the priorities, the possibilities and necessities in a global evolution. At the same time, the question of virtue guides in learning to harmonize the proper aspirations and ideals with the characteristics of the real context in which man/woman has to find the route of reaching the human well being. At stake is the virtue thought in a variety of hypostases, like: wisdom, temperance, courage, justice, duty, respect, tolerance, solidarity, mutual understanding and support, sympathy, benevolence, friendship, etc. Acting as veritable beacons of our life, such hypostases through that the virtue is revealing us are eloquently to justify it for the plenitude and health, for the self-fulfillment and accomplishment together with the others, for a dignified affirmation on the basis of freedom and self-creativeness of man.

Turning to the ancient philosophers, the best definition of virtue is to be disclosed in Aristotle works. According to the author of Nicomachean Ethics, “the virtue or excellence of man will be such a moral state as makes a man good and able to perform his proper function well” (Aristotle, 1106a20). Over the centuries, this understanding of the concept of virtue – the àreté, as the Greeks used to call it – has been approached and emphasized, until contemporary thinkers like Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, for example. For the North-American phenomenologist of life, virtue is “the vehicle of moral conduct” and “the bedrock foundation of human society and culture” (Tymieniecka, 598).

Embracing many forms, virtue imposes itself as a climax notion for ethics, upholding the total moral expression of the human being. It functions as a generic concept in defining, at the highest level, the human becoming. Virtue enlightens upon man in his becoming from a state of fact to an eternal project of metamorphosis, balancing between an ascertained, an estimated and long-expected dimension of existence, pertained to the real, but also to the ideal – an aspiration and an exigency alike. Actually, this moral-philosophical category covers both the axiological and normative nature of the ethical referential of life. So, it decisively counts for the interpersonal relations, for the relations of men with the institutions and the laws, and also for the mankind relating with the geo-cosmic environment. In such a view, it is clearly that the education of virtue(s) is very important in structuring a fitted behavior of individuals and communities face the spread of globalization in both its positive and negative aspects. It really helps for the development of the goodness of globalization; and no less for the stopping or the diminution of the evil of globalization. Virtue appears like an essential instrument able to give a human meaning to life, to significantly mark the existence into progress; and that, through the discovery of the equilibrium in psycho-somatic, cultural-societal, spiritual-natural order that lead to the wellness of man and of mankind, eventually.
Some of the plural hypostases of virtue have to be revived especially for improving the sharing-in-life of humans in a global existence. We here refer to: practical wisdom, moderation, duty and friendship. Certainly, these are intertwining with many other embodiments of virtue; and their action is most efficiently merely when all of them are working.

So, we just try to emphasize the major significance for the present days of a part of the ethical values that have been selected since the beginnings of the moral philosophy as ones of prime order.

Reminding the Greek terminology, in discussion there are: phrónessis, sophrosyne, déon and philia.

Phrónessis or the practical wisdom is the one that makes possible the “virtues of character”, its role being determinant for the moral behavior (Aristotle). Proving utility, it became “the most necessary virtue in the modernity”, being conceived “as the lucid and wise desire” (Comte-Sponville). Articulated in unity with the speculative wisdom / sophia, it operates in different contexts of life, manifesting itself like “a capacity to discern what is appropriate in a given situation; to see things as they really are; to make a true measure of people and events”, by the exercise of judgment “based on a mixture of experience and mature reflection” (Longstaff www.ethics.org).

Very close to wisdom, sophrosyne or the moderation / temperance / foresight designs the capacity of clear judgment and the sense of measure. As one of the cardinal virtues – in the European Antiquity -, sophrosyne synthesizes self-discipline, self-control, right thinking, reasonable decision making. The ideas of Plato as regards this value: sophrosyne is that which attracts all the other parts of virtue – dikaiosyne, andreia, sophia and phrónessis / justice, courage, speculative and practical wisdom -, facilitating the way through which one acts for the achievement of a personal good, and also for the social good (Plato, The Republic, 432a) are topical for the present situation. In fact, sophrosyne teaches us the science and art of doing what and how it ought to be done, and when and where it ought to be done.

But such values, as phrónessis and sophrosyne need to be correlated with the value of déon / the duty that comes with the power of the imperative and the regulating function in the framework of social interactions. Without the action of déon, any great idea remains just an ideal one. We need to understand how to make reality from the ideal. Since Democritus and Aristotle, the conscience of déon has been crystallized in the European culture; and the modern Immanuel Kant has underlined the importance of an ethics of duty, acknowledging the “categorical imperative” that enlightens our acts into the best achievement of personal and public life. It is eloquently the present situation of elaborating a lot of codes to regulate the professional activity of any type of organizations, in which the duty is the central value to be considered.

On its turn, philia / the friendship modulates our existence in a healthy and pleasant way, bringing us together in the endeavor of realizing the common good of life. As one of the forms of love – in the Hellenic established triangle: èros, philia and ágápe -, this form of virtue receives an especial status in structuring of the communion - a basic principle of interpersonal life. As mark of the unity generated by the harmonization of distinctive individualities, philia contributes to the creation of lasting relations; and, finally, to the syn-bolematical affirmation in an onto-ethical horizon, assuring the social order of a necessary increase together and mutual accomplishment. Being rooted in the desire for a complement, philia supposes ‘relationship within and towards virtue’, as ‘love aiming the Good’. According to Plato, it implies a progress from “neither-good-nor-bad” that true friends experience becoming similar to each other as related to the Good; philia being cultivated among people, but also in a larger area, as connection ‘between man and things’, as well as contact action coming ‘from man towards idea’ (Plato, Lysis; Euthydemos).

Each of these ethical values and all together make part of the core of an aretaic propaideia; respectively, the support for a training, a beforehand learning, gravitating around the àreté /
virtue. During present times, when we simultaneously experience good conquests of humanity, but also we have to face the danger of confusion, anxiety, insecurity, etc., such an ethical propaideia is an utter requirement in the process of striving for well-being, for the restoration of the humanness able to enlightening us about the meaning of life, eventually.

A better encompassing of the complete and active significance of àreté / virtue claims to reconsider the issue of measure valuation. Once again, the Ancients give us a trajectory to be followed as the so called theory of mediation. We have to revive the àreté as tension and harmony, as a mean between two extremes, as reconciliation of antagonisms. In other words, we disclose the functionality of virtue as the “golden mean”, as the intermediary’s excellence. It is the place to remember the Aristotelian comprehending of the àreté: “the midst way between excess and deficiency”, a “mean between a too much and a too little” (Aristotle 1106a30; 1106b30-1107a). This is exactly the Lupasco’s thesis about “the equilibrium of potentialization and actualization energy in T state” or the idea of Comte-Sponville about “the narrow climax between two opposite abysses”.

The measure resumes all the virtue’s embodiments, finally. Assuming such a view, we reach the integrator meaning of the central value and principle of ethics, that of the ‘right measure’: the Greek mesótes, respectively the Latin aurea mediocritas, which can guide either persons or organizations throughout the meanders of the effects of globalization. Conciliating between polar couples: man and nature, present and future, civilization and environment, tech-scientist success and humanist advance, efficiency and satisfaction, rights and duties, the virtue-measure assures a suitable play of opposites, carrying on both that is ought and that is desirable for the existential progress. As a pathway of avoiding the fall in any type of extremes - able just to lead to the damage -, by mixing desire and need, delight and imperative, preferences and rejections, choices and refusals, measure must be promoted and applied in any context of living; it shows itself as “a common indispensable denominator, … a point from which to gain purchase on reality”, displaying a responsible commitment toward all; these two aspects of the human conduct: measure and commitment, represent the “crucial requirements” of which Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka names the “anatomy of bewilderment – of the disarray humanity now finds itself in” (cf. Tymieniecka 615-639).

Threatening and salvation are permanently acting in the global design of life, generally. Here comes an old problem of ethics about the ‘necessary evil’: the evil that perils the world; and that is the reason for which it represents an inherent factor of the good, a generative one. The evil arouses the emergence of good as its opposite pole within the balance of the world; and, perhaps it is the factor that brings out the good to react stronger. In such a situation, man has to prove a minimal wisdom to be and to protect the development of life’s course, to assure the survival of civilization.

To conclude, virtue – manifested through a plurality of values, like those we have insisted in this essay - represents the essence of the moral character transposed in man’s behavior, which helps him to surpass difficulties, obstacles, failures, constraints of existence, and to register himself as a creative being alongside of fellow creatures in the world-context. Covering the entire system of ethical values, virtue is the pivot that motivates human commitment into joy, trust, harmony, peace, into the life plenitude’s instilling, in terms of an “ethics of enjoyment”; respectively, an ethics that has as criteria: “the positivity, the reciprocity, and the singularity” (Misrahi 98, 103), opening new perspectives for a practice of healthy and happy life as regards individuals and communities as well.

The resort to the ethical reference of virtue constitutes the center of a fundamental and wise learning in life, offering guidelines for the humanness fulfillment within an inner-outer balancing order in its constructive advance; it activates the tension-harmonization of propulsions in which man reveals himself in the flux of creation and self-creation. The complex process of the moral experience in its circularity of “continuous-discontinuous” and “inward-outward” (cf. Jankélévitch) directs us to the retrieval of life’s equilibrium which becomes even
an imperative of living on a global scale. It spurs the sense of duty and responsibility to proving
the human’s own intrinsic positive power to develop the moral sense for the protection and the
elevation of the entire existence.

Grounding on a basic ethical culture, man can master his very own condition; he can make
thoughtful choices and decisions; he can be an autonomous agent in managing the difficult
movement between what he is, what he might be, and no less what he ought to be. Thus, man
marks the whole existence in a human manner, that of the world’s transformation in a better
one.

By a kind of an ethical organon in life, leading the human conduct towards authentic values
that must be inoculated in the daily practice, there are real chances to surpass any difficulties of
a more and more globalized world; and to act, wisely, for changing any bad into good,
respectively to work for increasing our connectivity and integration on the route of the
advantages of globalization in a developing world. Certainly, in a large measure, it depends on
the good will and the (self-)education of each individual to make from the ethical values a vital
force of communion in a better world.

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