
NIETZSCHE'S REVALUATION OF THE CARDINAL VIRTUES: THE CASE OF SOPHROSYNE

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Die vornehmste Tugend. — In der ersten Aera des höheren Menschenthums gilt die Tapferkeit als die vornehmste der Tugenden. In der zweiten die Gerechtigkeit, in der dritten die Mässigung, in der vierten die Weisheit. In welcher Aera leben wir? In welcher lebst du?

Introduction

Peter Geach is reported to have said that temperance is far from being an interesting subject, but "rather a humdrum common sense matter". I hope to show that his opinion proves that he did not know the early history of the concept, nor what Nietzsche did on it. My subject will therefore be 'temperance', or *sophrosyne*, or in Nietzsche's language: measure.

One of the reasons of choosing this subject for my lecture lies in the double subtitle of this conference: "Nietzsche and the Hellenic Philosophers" on the one hand and "Nietzsche and the spirit of modern philosophy" on the other. It is my contention that these should not be two different subjects, but that the two belong together. I will try to point out what I mean with this in general in my first section. After that I will elaborate it in an application to the topic of measure.

1. Nietzsche and the Greeks

As you know, Nietzsche started his academic career as a classical philologist. But it is very obvious that from the beginning Nietzsche put his classical philology in the service of a philosophical critique of his own contemporary culture. There are many indications for this, including

- his "*Antrittsrede*" or inaugural lecture;
- the public lectures that are his first public appearance in Basel, outside the classroom: the lectures "on the future of our educational institutions";

- and his first official publication as a professor of classical philology: *The Birth of Tragedy out of the spirit of music*.

The courses he teaches are purely philological and archaeological, but in the notes from the time when he is preparing his courses, it becomes very clear what is inspiring him in his philological work. In one of those notes we read that the correct starting point for the philologist is not to try to recognize in antiquity what is esteemed in one's own culture, but precisely the opposite: "namely, to start out from the insight into modern perversity, and to look back from there".¹

Nietzsche's philology forms, just as his philosophy part of his culture critical efforts, his fulfilment of the task of being a physician of culture, that is, of his own culture.

According to Nietzsche, his own culture is through and through Christian. Therefore he very often works with the opposition between the Greek and the Christian, between "Griechentum and Christentum". One of his reasons for opposing the Greek and the Christian, or for stressing this very opposition, might be that Nietzsche hereby is polemically contradicting contemporary philology. As a classical philologist living in a Christian world, Nietzsche has mainly to do with these two religious cultures. But for him this also means that he has to establish the *tension* between them, as we will see. And in any case he wants to counter their amalgamation² in contemporary philology. Classical antiquity is according to Nietzsche successively used (or abused, as he would put it) as a seduction to Christianity and as its defence. And as soon as it no longer serves these goals, philology is invented to make antiquity harmless for Christianity (KSA 8, 5[107]).

Now my topic of measure has its roots in these two roots of European culture: Greek culture on the one hand and Christianity on the other. On the one hand it refers the classical virtue of *sophrosyne*, but on the other hand it is the Christian virtue of moderation and modesty. Concentrating on what Nietzsche says about measure is one possible way of touching Nietzsche's particular way of combining classical philology with a philosophical critique of contemporary, Christian culture. Let's explore this relation in more detail now.

For a critique of one's culture, one needs a standard. (It is important to know that the German word for standard or criterion is "Maß" or "Maßstab" which should be translated in English as "measure".) The philologist disposes of such a standard in his knowledge of antiquity, and especially of Greek culture. Philology is,

just as Nietzsche says in his second *Untimely Observation* on history, not the collecting of antiquities (the antiquarian mode of history), but a mixture of an antiquarian collecting and preserving, the erection of monuments in honor of those who are to be held up as an example, and a critical evaluation. This means that Greek culture is not only a standard for the evaluation of contemporary culture, but that it has to be evaluated itself as well.

Greek culture functions for Nietzsche as a standard for evaluation, but Greek culture is not an undisputed standard. Quite the contrary. In a note, Nietzsche writes: "The task would be, to overcome Greece (das Griechentum) by deeds. But for that one would first have to know it! -"; "One should continue to struggle with the Greeks, in the way Cicero did".⁴ The only adequate attitude for someone studying antiquity is, according to Nietzsche, an attitude of contest (this contest, or *agon*, being itself a very Greek characteristic). That is even a general rule: "Only in contest does one get to know the good".⁵ The great examples for the study of antiquity are the leading figures of the Renaissance and Goethe. They were able to compete. (In the threefold slogan of the Renaissance, "translatio, imitatio, aemulatio" we recognize the contest mainly in the third part, even if for many Renaissance figures this referred rather to a Christianizing of antiquity!) The contemporary philologists, however, no longer understand this art of contest (KSA 8, 5[167]).

The study of the opposition between Greek and Christian culture is - or should be - a study of the conflict within the foundations of our common culture. Nietzsche is interested in the conflict between "Griechentum und Christentum" because they can only be understood appropriately as conflicting, because as such (as conflicting) they show something of the foundations of culture. And because he is interested in the conflict between "Griechentum und Christentum", he has to be in conflict himself with the prevalent philological interest in Greek antiquity. For, whereas contemporary (philological) culture attempts to reconcile "Griechentum und Christentum", or remains indifferent or ignorant of the tension between them, Nietzsche tries to revive their conflict and by doing so, to revitalise contemporary culture.

So far to indicate the background against which I will treat on the theme of measure; a theme that is central to Nietzsche's thought: because of its Greek inheritance, because of its role in the critique of modernity, and - not the least - because of its tensionful relation with the transgressive excessivity of Nietzsche's own

thinking. Whoever reads Nietzsche will first and foremost be touched by his radicalness, his excessive perspectivism and experimentalism, his extreme pluralism, and his transgression of many borders, including the border between philosophy and other disciplines, as well as between scholarly and literary styles. Such a thinking and such writing will need some kind of measure itself. The theme of measure must have been very important for Nietzsche's own work and life.

In the following I will first - according to Nietzsche's design - try to take some distance from our common concept of measure or temperance, by giving a (very brief) overview of the history of the concept of measure in European, and especially in Greek thought (§ 2). Then I will try to render what Nietzsche says on the concept of measure (§ 3). And at the end I will try to suggest an interpretation of how Nietzsche re-evaluated the value of measure against the background of this opposition between Greek and contemporary culture.

2. From *sophrosyne* to temperance*

2.1. From the earliest Greek literature through Plato

Because of the time limits I can only point to some of the most interesting aspects of the history of the concept, and I will mainly concentrate on the early Greek history.

From the beginning, the virtue of *sophrosyne*, is characterised by a certain tension. The first time we find it is in Homer, where people like Odysseus, Nestor and Penelope are said to be *saophron*, but where there is a certain tension between the admiration for their virtue of sound thinking on the one hand and the greatest virtue on the other hand which is either courage (*andreia*) or *megalopsychia*.

Sound or healthy thinking is probably the most original etymological translation of *sophrosyne*, which is originally: *saophron*, and stems from *soidzein* and *phrenein*. This association between *sophrosyne* and health, might have been important for Nietzsche as well.

The *sophrosyne* is becoming more important from the time on in which the city-states emerge: it is the virtue through which the former heros have to be tamed, and thus tensionful again.

Both tensions are prevalent in the writings of Theognis of Megara, the author on whose work the young Nietzsche wrote several articles.

Heraclitus, another important author for Nietzsche, was the first one to relate *sophrosyne* to self-knowledge. Because this self-knowledge enables one to listen to the eternal laws of nature, *sophrosyne* is for Heraclitus the most important of the virtues: it enables human beings to live in accordance with nature.

The first highdays of the virtue of *sophrosyne* are in the great Greek art of tragedy. And again, *sophrosyne* is characterised by tension; in Aeschylus the tension between *hybris* and the *meden agan*; in Sophocles the tension becomes even internal: characters like Antigone and Oedipus are partly heroic but blinded and partly *sophron* and gifted with self-knowledge. Ever more it becomes obvious that the *sophrosyne* is itself problematic, because it needs itself a measure and has to be moderated itself. That is most obvious in Euripides, where a character like Hippolytus is not virtuous, although he is *sophron* in the sense of moderated, because he is it in a measureless way.

We find something similar, albeit in another way, in relation to Socrates. On the one hand he is a paradigm of the *sophron*: his *egkrateia*, his *autarkeia*, his moderated and cultivated *eros*, and most of all his self-knowledge make him in Plato's presentation into a model of *sophrosyne*. On the other hand some of his (cynical and sceptical) followers show how close the danger of exaggeration is.

For the sophists, *sophrosyne* is mainly a social 'virtue' between quotation marks: it sometimes is another word for 'a good reputation', makeable, manipulable, worthwhile but at the same time contested from a more naturalistic viewpoint (e.g. by Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias* 491).

As I said in the beginning: the *sophrosyne* is constantly characterised by some sort of tension; it not only has a tensionful relation to other virtues, but also, and as a consequence of this, it is itself a tensionful middle between too much and too little. Plato's reflections on the virtues in general and on this one in particular (especially in the *Republic*) seem to suggest a solution for the indicated problems. The virtuous human being and the virtuous city-state are characterised in terms of the right order or arrangement of the different forces and qualities. *Sophrosyne* becomes extremely important because it is precisely the principle of order, in stead of being one of the qualities that have to be arranged. Sometimes it is identified with the charioteer in the picture drawn in the *Phaedrus*. Of

course, this is not a complete solution, since the principle of order still has to be determined. And every determination (e.g. as reason, as in Plato) runs the risk of allowing again one-sidedness and exaggeration. The problem remains, although it is no longer thematized: how to give the right place to this principle of arrangement; how to moderate the principle of moderation?

2.2 From Plato through Christianity

I ended this very brief overview over Greek thinking on the *sophrosyne* with Plato. Of course there is much more. Only from Aristotle on it becomes a separate virtue with its own area of application (the area of the bodily pleasures of eating, drinking and sexuality). But I think that Aristotle's elaboration (how interesting it may be: *sophrosyne* as a middle between extremes, the relation between *sophrosyne* and courage/*andreia*, and the difference between *sophrosyne* and *egkrateia*) as well as all the different Hellenistic interpretations of this virtue, are to a great extent re-enactments of former interpretations, and in any case less important to Nietzsche. I do want to make one exception: Cicero, although he was - except for his stylistic mastery - not one of Nietzsche's favourites, might be important because of his translation which introduces *sophrosyne* in Latin history.

Cicero suggests 4 different translations of *sophrosyne*, that all have their own connotations: *moderatio* which means moderation in the sense of control and restraint; *constantia*, which means being (remaining) unperturbable or undisturbed; *frugalitas*, which means frugality and thrift; and the fourth one, which became the most influential: *temperantia*, which means of course temperance. But temperance has in Latin, certainly in Cicero's Latin the connotation of: "the right mixture", the right balance; *temperare* means to mix different liquids in the right proportion. I think this is important because it re-enacts some of the idea of tension that I underlined in the early Greek history. Temperance refers to the arrangement of a plurality. We will see how important this is for Nietzsche.

This connotation seems to disappear almost completely in later history, and especially in the Christian interpretation of the virtue of temperance: there it becomes the virtue of abstinence from bodily pleasures, especially the pleasures of sex. Interesting is that one of the problems with which the Greeks felt confronted, the problem of the relation between *sophrosyne* and courage, is "solved" in the Christian interpretation: the heroic force of the

courageous is not opposed to, but exactly instrumental to the virtue of temperance, as the saints and the martyrs show.

3. Nietzsche on measure

From the beginning of Nietzsche's writings it is obvious that the theme of measure is one of the central topics of his thinking. His fascination for the Greeks, as well as his biting criticism of contemporary culture in general and of Christianity and morality in special are riddled with the idea of measure.

In order to explore this more fully we would have to follow several lines and pay attention to the many facets of a rich vocabulary with regard to the concept of measure in Nietzsche's writings. There is not only the word-field of measure, measuring, measurelessness, moderation, temperance, and so on, but there are many other related words and concepts that are important here. There are the Greek and Latin words that Nietzsche uses, like: *metron*, *mesos*, *mesotes*, *sophrosyne*, but also *hybris*, *aidos*; *mensura*, *modus*, *moderatio*, *modestia*, *temperantia*, *discretio*. There are the many word-compoundings with 'measure', like *Werthmaass* (value-measure), *Übermaass* (over-measure or excess), *Gleichmaass* or *Ebenmaass* (*ebemässig*) (symmetry or proportionality). And there are especially the many related words and concepts, like e.g. *Bändigen/ung* (to tame), *Begrenzen/ung* (to limit) *Beherrschen/ung* or Herr (-sein), (to rule or master), *Einordnen/ung* or *Ordnen/ung* (to order, to arrange, to classify), to weigh or balance (*wägen*); and also the words for related virtues like *Keuschheit* (castity) and vices like *Unzucht/-züchtig(keit)*, and passions like *Scham* (shame, *aidos*), and so on and so forth. There is much more than this and certainly much more than can be handled in one paper. I will therefore concentrate on only a few of these concepts, and especially on *Maß* and *Mässigung*, etc.

I will now give a general overview of Nietzsche's use of the concept of measure and especially of the contexts or frameworks in which he does speak of measure, before making a suggestion about the positive meaning of measure in Nietzsche's thinking in the final section of my paper.

In Nietzsche's fascination for and occupation with the theme of measure, we may distinguish at least three different contexts in which Nietzsche uses the word as well as related concepts.

3.1. The Greek

Although Nietzsche clearly takes distance from the idea of the self-controlled Greek, as it was shaped by Winckelmann, he nevertheless is impressed by the Apollinian ideal of measure that characterises Greek culture according to him. Opposed to the barbarian measurelessness, the Greeks are characterised by their talent for measure. But Greek measure is a particular type of measure. And since Nietzsche will relate his own ideal of measure to the Greek one, we have to look for the particular characteristics of Greek measure. I will mention four of them, all taken from Nietzsche:

3.1.1. Aesthetic: creation

Greek measure is primarily aesthetic. It is related to beauty and style. The Greek enjoyed the beauty of measure, and they knew the measure of pleasure. Sometimes Nietzsche suggests that they did so "naturally"; he speaks of a "natural pleasure which the aesthetic character finds in measure, the pleasure in the beauty of measure".⁷ At other times he suggests that it were the poets that taught the Greek this "sense for measure",⁸ and he puts the question forward how these poets learned this sense. But in any case they had this sense of measure; and that might also be the explanation for their being a people of artists. Because "it is in moderation that lies the creative power; the proper artistic act is in the organising mastery of all artistic means" (HAH I,221)

In a passage from *The Dionysian Worldview (Die Dionysische Weltanschauung)* Nietzsche explains the relation between the aesthetic and the ethical use of measure on several occasions.⁹

The measure that has to be kept, is known in self-knowledge (*gnothi seauton*); but the self is known through the dream-image, the beautiful appearance of the Olympic Gods. The standard is itself an artistic creation, and enjoyed for its beauty.

3.1.2. Epistemic: self-knowledge

That does not prevent it from being a standard to be known. It can be known through self-knowledge. Even if this known self is an artistic creation and an ideal, it nevertheless contains a standard and includes some demands or requirements that one has to meet. The evil of measurelessness is caused by *hybris*, a recklessness that goes hand in hand with *atè*, being blinded, as temperance goes with self-knowledge. Although Nietzsche does not explicitly refer to the etymological background of *sophrosyne* (*saophrenein*: to think safely or healthy), he himself is not insensitive to the epistemic

nature of this virtue. He will however stress the artistic nature of the knowledge included.

3.1.3. Proportion

Also related to the aesthetic nature of the Greek measure, is the fact that it is never conceived of as an absolute measure. In an unpublished note we read:

"The ingenious sense for proportion, which we find in Greek language, music and visual arts, presents itself in the moral law of measure."¹⁰ This will turn out to be a very important characteristic. The measure to be met is a measure of proportion. That must mean at least that it is not the same for everyone nor in every circumstance. Maybe we can conceive of the virtue of measure as being a counterbalance, a force that restores a proportion? Maybe that is the reason why Nietzsche is fascinated by Sophocles' identification of the *sophrosyne*, the highest virtue according to him, as "properly speaking a negative virtue".¹¹ But we will have to explore this further. Because: we still do not know what proportion is the right one, nor do we know what kind of substances or forces have to be in proportion.

The quote that I gave before gives a hint, as it continues:

"The ingenious sense for proportion, which we find in Greek language, music and visual arts, presents itself in the moral law of measure. The Dionysian cult adds to this the *alogia*."¹²

We see here a reduplication of measure and proportion: the measure has to be in proportion with the measureless. The law of measure represents the *logos*, which has to be in proportion with the *alogia* of the Dionysian cult. This brings us to the fourth and final characteristic:

3.1.4. Apollinian versus Dionysian

Measure is associated with Apollo and the Apollinian, but - as we know from Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, Apollo cannot do without Dionysus. Dionysus is the God in whom the excess of nature is deified. But the truth of this chaotic and tensionfull nature can only be acknowledged and enjoyed, if it is counterbalanced by the Apollinian appearance of unity and order. The Greek sense of measure is a victory over the preceding force or passion of the Dionysian. In one of his last notes, Nietzsche writes about himself that he: "attempted actually nothing else than to find out (...) why the

Dionysian Greek needed to become Apollinian, i.e.: to break his desire for the enormous, the ambiguous, the uncertain, the terrible, on a desire for measure, for simplicity and arrangement in order and conceptuality (...).¹³

But the most important discovery by Nietzsche was this, that great Greek culture emerged not so much from the victory of Apollo over Dionysus, but from the continuing struggle between the two, or in other words: from the right proportion between the two that kept them in balance and that maintained their struggle:

"Not in the replacement of intoxication by temperance (Besonnenheit), but in their side by side, lies the dionysian artistry."¹⁴ That is the reason why Nietzsche writes that "The Greek virtues are ideals of people who have too much of the opposite".¹⁵

We begin to presume that Greek measure according to Nietzsche is a measure which is immanent in the struggle, as he writes with so many words: "according to inviolable laws and measures, which are immanent in the struggle".¹⁶

The measure is not a measure external to the struggle of forces. The opposing forces measure each other mutually. Nietzsche elaborates this in *Homers Contest*, where he writes that "in a natural order of things (...) several geniuses (...) keep each other mutually within the limits of measure. That is the core of the hellenic representation of the agon" (KSA 1.789) We will certainly have to come back on this. But first let's go over to:

3.2. (Contemporary) Modern man

The second framework in which Nietzsche uses the vocabulary of measure is his critique of contemporary man, society and culture. Nietzsche often phrases his critique in terms of measure. And remarkably he does so in two almost contradictory ways: on the one hand he is criticising modern culture for its sticking to some kind of dogmatic measure, on the other hand he attacks fervently the measurelessness of modern man. I will briefly elaborate on both, the combination of which puts forward the question what could be the standard or measure of this critique.

3.2.1. Critique of a dogmatic measure

Nietzsche criticises from the beginning different kinds of standards or measures. They all have in common that they are dogmatic in the following sense: they impose some particular measure on everything

and everyone, whereas however, this measure is taken from one particular, and always petty kind of existence. The "Bildungsphilister" whom Nietzsche attacks in his earlier writings, takes, according to him, "his own reality as the measure of reason in the world" (UB I,2; KSA 1, 170). Science more generally is a way of measuring the world not only with human standards, but even with "the human being as the definite and fixed measure of all things" (KSA 7, 625, 29[8]). The human being is taken to be an "aeterna veritas (...) as a secure measure of things" (MA I, 2).

In this realisation of the saying ascribed to Protagoras ("the human being as the measure of all things") Nietzsche criticises two aspects. *First* he criticises the dogmatic character of the standard. The modern state and the catholic church agree on this, he writes, that: "the human being should not develop; the measure is given!".¹⁷ Certainly after the death of God, such a dogmatic, eternal standard is impossible any longer, as the famous section on the death of God in the *Gay Science* points out.

This critique on the dogmatic nature of the standard is being intensified however, by a *second* element. For what is most horrible to Nietzsche in this anthropocentric way of viewing the world is, that not just the human being, but the "normal human being"¹⁸ makes the standard, and that therefore this standard or measure is always a reducing one. One of the most important discoveries in the development of the free spirit is this in which he acknowledges: "where the injustice is always the greatest: that is where life is developed in the most petty, the most narrow, the most needy, the most beginning way, and nevertheless cannot but consider itself to be the goal and measure of all things" (HAH I, pref. 6).

3.2.2. Critique of measurelessness

Apart from this critique of the measure used by modern man, Nietzsche criticises, however, his measurelessness. It seems to be one of the most continuous characterisations of modern man throughout Nietzsche's works, that he lacks any sense of measure. To give only a few examples: in the second *Untimely Meditation* he diagnoses the contemporary historical illness as a measurelessness of memory; in *Human All Too Human* (I, 221) he speaks about "the modern spirit with its typical unrest and its hatred against measure and limit" that has become predominant in all areas of culture. Nietzsche recognises it in the scientific work of his age, which is - according to him in the third *Untimely Meditation* (UB III,4) "made without any measure and in a completely blind 'laissez faire'"; he

speaks of a "measureless, unselective drive for knowledge" (KSA 7.422, 19[21]); Wagner as a typical example of modern man, with all his ambiguities is often characterised as unrestrained and measureless;¹⁹ Christianity is in *Human All Too Human* (I, 114) characterised as follows: "it desires to destroy, shatter, stupefy, intoxicate, the one thing it does not desire is measure". There are many more examples of Nietzsche's critique of modern people and culture in terms of its measurelessness. In *Beyond Good and Evil* (224) he seems even to include himself in these modern people when he writes: "The measure is foreign to us, let us admit this;"

I think that we find at this point a Nietzschean critique of our own post-modern identity. For Nietzsche sees the measurelessness especially in a feature of his time which is even more characteristic for us. Even more than the people from the 19th century, we are able to use many different standards, and to taste with different tastes; we appreciate styles of art, forms of religion, and modes of morality from different ages and cultures as more or less equally worthwhile, at least in their own framework;²⁰ we are even able to a great extent to put ourselves in the position of each and everyone of these different tastes, religions, morals etc. We call this our tolerance, which is, according to Nietzsche just another symptom of our being measureless.²¹

3.2.3. The ascetic ideal

There is one point in which these two, apparently contradictory lines of critique, seem to match, and this is Nietzsche's critique of the ascetic ideal. The ascetic ideal is on the one hand a very strict and rigid and restraining kind of measure. But as such it is, according to Nietzsche the treacherous symptom of a hidden measurelessness. The morality that demands "the extirpation of the sensory passions and the contempt of life (shows by doing so, to be) an emergency instrument of such natures, that do not know where to draw the line" (in German this reads: that don't know how to maintain the measure, "nicht Maß zu halten wissen" KSA 11, 193, 26[167]). "These radical measures are only indispensable to those who are degenerated" (G, v.2). Or, with a quote from the *Genealogy of Morals*: "The ascetic ideal (...) includes something which is arch-hostile to good manners, - Lack of measure, disgust of measure" (GM III, 22).

But nevertheless it remains difficult to see what there could be between measurelessness on the one hand, and strict measures on the other. Our exploration of Nietzsche's critical diagnosis of modernity must have made us more curious to know how he might

apply the concept of measure with regard to his vision of health or nobility.

3.3. The noble

Although it is obvious that some sort of measure does belong to the noble, or to Nietzsche's ideal, it is not clear what kind of measure, or what meaning of measure that would be. It sometimes looks as if Nietzsche is purposely hiding what he means at this point.

In *Human All Too Human* (II VM, 230 entitled: "Measure and Middle", "Maass und Mitte.") he writes: "Of two very exalted things – measure and middle – it is best never to speak. Some few know their significance and power through inner sacred paths of experience and conversion: they revere in them something divine and refuse to speak of them aloud. All the rest hardly listen when they are spoken of, and confuse them with boredom and mediocrity: except perhaps for those who did once hear a premonitory echo from that domain but closed their ears to it. The recollection of it now makes them agitated and angry."²²

At least we know that he counts "measure" among the "very high things", even as "something divine". But as if it were a kind of esoteric wisdom, he shuns to talk about it to people that are not worthy of it. An aphorism like this one makes the reader doubt whether he is able to understand, i.e.: whether he belongs to the initiated or not. I presume that this is more or less typical for many texts in which Nietzsche outlines his ideal, and therefore it is in my opinion very important: the kind of measure we are looking for, might be one that divides people, between those who are capable of it, and those who will not even understand what it is all about.

3.3.1. What it is not

We do find some indications of this ideal measure in the negative, along the lines of what we saw already with regard to the ascetic measure that is characteristic for modern man, that is: sometimes Nietzsche gives some indication of what we are looking for by opposing it to the criticised type of measure. In *Human All Too Human* (I, 139) e.g. he writes that to "maintain measure" (a literal translation of the German "Maß halten") with regard to a desire, is not only different from denying that desire altogether, but also much more difficult. And in an unpublished note he opposes the "Mäßigkeit" of the weak to the "Mäßigung" of the strong. The difference is hard to translate. My dictionary gives "moderation" for both - which indicates once more, how difficult it is to grasp what

exactly Nietzsche means. Maybe Nietzsche gives a hint in this same section, as he writes that "until now the belief in the pleasure in 'maintaining measure' was lacking".²¹ Pleasure is the main difference between the Aristotelian virtue of *sophrosyne* on the one hand and what he calls *egkrateia* on the other. The first is characterised by pleasure, whereas the second is not. The explanation for this is, that *egkrateia* is still fighting nature, whereas *sophrosyne* has become nature, second nature it is true, but still 'natural', or in accordance with nature.

This phrasing reminds of another passage in which Nietzsche speaks about "measure" in the negative, one which is again problematic, but which may give some indication of the right direction as well. In section 9 from *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche criticises the Stoics for their idea of living according to nature (living in accordance with nature, is living according to the measure of nature, in German: "gemäss der Natur leben"; the stoic ideal of *homologoumenos tei physei dzen*). But Nietzsche criticises this ideal in a particular way: he says that nature does not have a measure, it is prodigal or wasteful in a measureless way ("verschwenderisch ohne Maass"). This means that there is no fixed and determined measure in nature. But this might mean as well that we not so much have to look for such a measure elsewhere, but that our measure should be in accordance with this characteristic of nature. That is at least what is suggested in an unpublished note, where Nietzsche writes: "Supposing the world is untrue and life is only to be understood on the basis of delusion, under the protection of delusion, with the help of delusion, what would then be the meaning of 'living according to nature'?" (KSA 11, 40[44]). Nietzsche's presupposition or hypothesis here is one out of many formulations for what he calls the world as will to power. I cannot go into that "ontology" of Nietzsche now (although I will say a few words on it later), but for now I have to simply state that it says that all reality is to be conceived as a struggle or *agon* between wills to power (in the plural). Nietzsche seems therefore to search for a meaning of the stoic ideal of *homologia* in the framework of an ontology of struggle. To put it in terms of our topic: he is searching for a measure which is natural not in the sense of the Stoic conception of nature, or in that of Aristotle, but in the sense of Nietzsche's own understanding of nature, that is: he is searching for a measure of struggle. Let us see, if we can find out what this may mean.

3.3.2. Self-assured "dividuals"

But first I would like to take a quick glance to some other texts in which Nietzsche seems to speak in a more positive way on the measure we are looking for, if only in order to indicate that he does in fact foster something like an ideal of measure.

In a note on the "höheren Naturen" (the higher natures, or probably better: the higher types) Nietzsche gives as their distinguishing characteristic: that they have a singular measure or standard in their feelings or senses.²⁴ The text continues: "either one values other things than are valued, or one values things differently from how they are valued [in general]". The higher type knows that he and his equals have their own standards, and that they differ in this from the many. This is a characteristic we find continuously in Nietzsche's writings. The strong one, or the noble one imposes his own standard or measure. He can not be measured by any other measure than his own.²⁵

I mention this characteristic not because it is unexpected, but because it is so well known, and so easily misunderstood. It is often interpreted as a kind of self-indulgence, or as a the brutal egoism of Nietzsche's hero's, which is I think incorrect. In order to correct that misinterpretation, I refer to a note in which Nietzsche writes: "I distinguish between the imaginary and conceited individuals and the real systems of life".²⁶ According to him "each one of us, is such a 'system of life'". What then, however, is the difference, if each individual is a life-system? The difference is that the individual imagines to be a unity, an entity which is one. Nietzsche on the contrary stresses the multiplicity of the so-called "individual", and certainly of the strong individual. To give just one quote: "The wisest person would be the one who is richest in contradictions" (KSA 11, 26[119]). The self-assured valuing by the strong ones, their imposing of their own measures, must therefore be understood in a sense which does justice to their being "dividuals" rather than individuals. You might presume with me, that this has something to do with the struggle from our former point. This relation is indicated in another note by Nietzsche in which we find also the concept of measure: "The highest man would have the greatest plurality of instincts, and also in the greatest relative measure which can still be endured. Indeed: where the plant man shows itself strong, there we find the instincts powerful acting against each other" (KSA 11, 27[59])

4. Nietzsche's measure

In my final section I will try to gather some of the lines that have been drawn, and to include them into an interpretation of Nietzsche's re-interpretation of the classical virtue of measure.²⁷

4.1 Will to Power, Plurality and Struggle

We saw that Nietzsche criticises contemporary culture for its measurelessness as well as for its holding on to rigid, dogmatic and ascetic measures. This critique is not just a denunciation of certain aspects of modern culture and modern man. It rather is part of a diagnosis, that shows the characteristic features of modernity, or - as I am inclined to say - of postmodernity. This diagnosis has to be understood in the framework of Nietzsche's theory of the will to power. When Nietzsche proposes "will to power" as "his name for the world" he is saying that all reality is to be conceived as a struggle between an endless plurality of wills to power. Reality does only exist as a living reality, as long as it has this nature of contest or struggle. It therefore is threatened by everything which could bring this struggle to an end and install a definite pacification. Such an eternal rest would indeed be the death of reality.

Now, contemporary culture is *on the one hand* the greatest realisation of plurality so far. Greatest in extension, insofar as contemporary culture gathers more or less all the cultural possibilities of all different cultures from all ages (in our museums, in our historical knowledge, in our knowledge of all the cultures of the world); but also greatest in intensity, because we no longer gather this plurality in the world, or in our society, in our museums and libraries, but even within ourselves: (post-)modern people understand themselves as a plurality of possibilities.

On the other hand, however, this plurality is in our culture threatened more than ever before, and this in two ways: *first* in the indifference in which this plurality is admitted without it being felt as conflicting or being realised as a conflict. Our (European) politics of difference is usually realised as a politics of indifference towards differences; and the same is even more true of the postmodern politics of the soul, as we find it for instance in Rorty: it is rather a frivolous playing with possibilities than a struggle. The *second* threat for plurality in our world is the growing predominance of one single type of culture, morality, politics, science, religion and so on, the one that Nietzsche calls the Christian or herd type. The first danger refers to Nietzsche's critique of the measurelessness of contemporary man, the second to his critique of the ascetic ideal.

Nietzsche's therapeutic counterpart of his diagnosis (I refer to the two aspects of his task as a physician of culture) consists of an effort to reintroduce struggle in human reality, through a re-interpretation of culture. This re-interpretation is extremely polemical: it does not only fight the prevalent interpretation, but tries to install antagonism and struggle of interpretations where ever consensus and uniformity lurk.

It is this feature of Nietzsche's thinking which brings the question of measure to the fore. A struggle without any rules or measure is, after all, the spectre against which many philosophers have aimed their arms. And Nietzsche's intensification of the struggle - the idea of the "(in)dividual" as itself a conflicting plurality - seems to bring us (or him) close to madness. Therefore it seems that some measuring of the plurality and the conflict is necessary. But at the same time, this measure should not be itself a threat to the living core of all reality, which is struggle and plurality. It should not so much limit the struggle, but rather enable it and promote it. What kind of a measure could this be?

Nietzsche develops his thoughts on measure in the framework of a polemical confrontation between contemporary ignoble culture and the great noble culture of the Greeks. They knew the significance of contest and struggle more than any other people. And their idea of measure reflects this valuation of the struggle: as we saw before, proportion is central to their idea of *sophrosyne*, and - according to Nietzsche - they knew that even the God of measure and proportion, Apollo, should be brought into a proportional relation with the measurelessness of Dionysus. But although Nietzsche certainly admired this Greek virtue of measure, he will not simply repeat it. The characteristic extensification and intensification of the plurality in contemporary culture, as well as the way in which this plurality is threatened nowadays by the ever more predominant Christian, democratic, European culture, make that Nietzsche has to overcome the Greeks, just like the scholars and artists of the Renaissance did. Let us - by way of conclusion - try to phrase the concept of measure that results from and functions within Nietzsche's effort to re-agonise his own culture through his polemical re-interpretation of it.

4.2 Nietzsche's measure

In an unpublished note we read: "the measure of our ideal morality is the measure of our power, under the presupposition that we can raise this power" (KSA 9, 126, 4[104]). Nietzsche's measure is for

sure to be conceived of as a proportion. But this proportion has to be specified in several respects.

The possibilities we harbour, the different passions, or even the different personalities we gather in ourselves, have to be unified to some extent, in order to enable us to live. This can be turned the other way around, and then it says that we may permit as many conflicting forces in ourselves, as we are still able to manage and to keep under control. This control is the first, and more or less traditional meaning of measure in Nietzsche. I said 'more or less', because in traditional morality it is not so much the plurality of and the struggle between the forces that have to be controlled, but only their strength. For Nietzsche on the contrary, plurality is itself of utmost importance, because of the possibility for conflict that it raises. He calls it his "insight", "that with every growth of the human being also his reverse will grow, that the *highest* human being, if such a concept is permitted, would be the one who presents the oppositional nature of existence in the strongest way, as its glory and its only justification..." And he distinguishes the ordinary people from the great man precisely in this respect: "ordinary people are ruined as soon as the plurality of the elements and the tension of opposition growths" (KSA 12, 519f, 10[111]).

This measure of control has to be in proportion with what should be controlled. It is itself a force which has to balance the other forces. This introduces a second meaning of measure, because it makes this balance itself into a kind of measure. In terms of the early Nietzsche: the Apollinian measure must be in balance with the Dionysian. This is exactly what the great Greek artists and other nobles knew to realise. People can be measured according to the extent to which they manage to keep their controlling force and their inner plurality in balance. I will give some examples of this in a moment, when I will show a further characteristic of this measure as balance.

But first we have to mention still another implication of the emphasis Nietzsche puts on plurality. Since every measure will manage or organise the plurality in a particular way, plurality demands that there are even many measures or standards: "the wise man understands the necessity of opposite standards (or measures: "Maaßstäbe"), he wants the most variegated chance among many oppositions".²⁸ It will be clear that this complicates again what has been said so far. For the different standards will again be in conflict with each other, they will need a measure to

keep this conflict manageable, and there will have to be a balance between this measure and the standards it measures or controls.

The most important characteristic of what Nietzsche says about measure, however, is this: any measure should be open to growth and self-overcoming. The forces that are being managed and measured by some standard should not be reduced and weakened, but rather strengthened. Or more precise: they may be reduced only temporarily, as long as it is needed for the organisation of the whole. But the perspective of this arrangement should always be towards growth and strengthening. I referred before to this note in which Nietzsche speaks about "the pleasure of maintaining measure".²⁹ There he compares this pleasure with "this pleasure of the horseman on a fiery horse!" The horseman is of greater quality to the extent to which he is able to ride more fiery horses. And the better horseman will not so much reduce the forces of his horse, but rather stimulate them while keeping them under control. The ideal is not control, but the greatest multiplicity and strength of forces, that are still under control. In other words: the ideal is: to be able to endure a tensionful plurality without reducing it along the lines of the ascetic ideal, and without the weakening 'laissez faire' of the (post)modern measurelessness.

In order to allow for this, the controlling measure has to be open at least; and this refers to the final, and most proper meaning of measure in Nietzsche. His measure values people according to the extent to which they manage to grow in their balance. Very often his valuations have this 'relative' form, as will be clear from only a few examples:

- "The highest measure of fullness of force is, the extent to which someone is able to live with hypotheses, the extent to which he can sail out on unlimited seas" (KSA 11, 148, 25[515])
- "This is the measure: how much of truth does one endure, without perishing. And also: how much of happiness -- how much freedom and power!" (KSA 11, 540, 35[69])
- The measure of health is determined by "how much of illness it can tolerate and overcome" (KSA 12, 108, 2[97])
- "The measure of power is: to what extent is one able to acknowledge the illusion, the necessity of lies, without perishing" (KSA 12, 354, 9[41])
- "It is a measure of force, the extent to which one is able to get rid of virtue" (KSA 12, 477, 10[45])

I could add many more examples. And what is true of Nietzsche's valuation of human beings, is also true of his valuation of cultures. A culture is ranked higher to the extent to which it allows more, and more dreadful and greater passions.

In this "relative" nature of Nietzsche's measure we may recognize some of Cicero's translation of *sophrosyne* with *temperantia*: temperance is far from being a reducing kind of moderation, but rather the quality which enables you to get the right mixture or the right balance.

I hope to have shown how Nietzsche, with the help of the Hellenic philosophers (as well as other Hellenic writers) and their Hellenistic translators, has given an polemical re-interpretation of the spirit of modern philosophy and of modern culture in general.

Notes

N.B.: Nietzsche's writings will be cited from: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, hrsg. von G. Colli & M. Montinari. München/Berlin: DTV/De Gruyter 1980. Quotations from the published works are indicated with the number of the aphorism; quotations from the unpublished notes are indicated with KSA, vol. nr., page nr., number of the note.

1. "nämlich von der Einsicht in die moderne Verkehrtheit auszugehn und zurückzusehn -" (KSA 8, 3[52]).
2. "Verquickung" (KSA 8, 5[39]).
3. "Das Griechenthum durch die That zu überwinden wäre die Aufgabe. Aber dazu müßte man es erst kennen! -" (KSA 8, 5[167]).
4. Es ist nach der Art Cicero's fortzuringen mit den Griechen (Nachlaß 32[2] KSA 7.753).
5. "Nur im Wetteifer lernt man das Gute kennen" (KSA 8, 23[132]).
6. Main reference for what is said in this section is: Helen North, *Sophrosyne; self-knowledge and self-restraint in Greek literature*. Vol. 35. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966.
7. "das natürliche Wohlgefallen der aesthetischen Natur am Maaße(,) der Genuß am Schönen des Maaßes" (KSA 11.103).
8. "den Sinn für Maass" (KSA 8.551).
9. Cf. E.g.: "Der Bilderdienst der apollinischen Kultur, ob diese sich nun im Tempel, in der Statue oder im homerischen Epos äußerte, hatte ihr erhabenes Ziel in der ethischen Forderung des Maaßes, welche der aesthetischen Forderung der Schönheit parallel läuft. Das Maaß als Forderung hingestellt ist nur dann möglich, wo das Maß, die Grenze als erkennbar gilt. Um seine Grenzen einhalten zu können, muß man sie kennen: daher die apollinische Mahnung *gnothi seauton*. Der Spiegel aber, in dem sich der apollinische Grieche allein sehen d. h. erkennen konnte, war die olympische Götterwelt: hier aber erkannte er sein eigenstes Wesen wieder, umhüllt vom schönen Scheine des Traumes. Das Maaß, unter dessen Joch sich die neue Götterwelt (gegenüber einer gestürzten Titanenwelt) bewegte, war das der Schönheit: die

- Grenze, die der Grieche innezuhalten hatte, war die des schönen Scheins." (KSA 1.564v.)
10. "Der geniale Sinn für Proportion, der in der griechischen Sprache und Musik und Plastik ausgebildet ist, offenbart sich in dem Sittengesetz des Maaßes" (KSA 7.137).
11. Cf. KSA 1.569 and KSA 1.597f.
12. "Der dionysische Kult bringt die alogia hinzu" (KSA 7.137).
13. "bemühte sich im Grunde um nichts als um zu errathen, warum gerade der griechische Apollinismus aus einem dionysischen Untergrund herauswachsen mußte: der dionysische Grieche nöthig hatte, apollinisch zu werden, das heißt: seinen Willen zum Ungeheuren, Vielfachen, Ungewissen, Entsetzlichen zu brechen an einem Willen zum Maaß, zur Einfachheit, zur Einordnung in Regel und Begriff. Das Maßlose, Wüste, Asiatische liegt auf seinem Grunde: die Tapferkeit des Griechen besteht im Kampfe mit seinem Asiatismus: die Schönheit ist ihm nicht geschenkt, sowenig als die Logik, als die Natürlichkeit der Sitte — sie ist erobert, gewollt, erkämpft — sie ist sein Sieg ..." (KSA 13.225).
14. The Dionysian Worldview; KSA 1.556.
15. "Die griechischen Tugenden sind Ideale solcher Menschen die zuviel vom Gegentheil haben; (KSA 9.338; cf. also Dawn 165).
16. "nach unverbrüchlichen, dem Kampfe immanenten Gesetzen und Maaßen" (PHG KSA 1.825f.)
17. "das Maaß ist da!" (KSA 10.318, 7[242])
18. "den Normalmensch" (KSA 9.537, 11[252]).
19. Cf. e.g. KSA 7.790, 33[11].
20. "Man handhabt jetzt die Maaßstäbe der verschiedensten Culturen zugleich" (KSA 9.78f, 3[109])
21. Cf. KSA 9.476f, 11[99].
22. I follow the translation by Hollingdale (*Human, All Too Human*. Cambridge UP 1986), with one exception: Hollingdale's translation of "Mitte" with "moderation" is obviously false. — Von zwei ganz hohen Dingen: Maass und Mitte, redet man am besten nie. Einige Wenige kennen ihre Kräfte und Anzeichen aus den Mysterien-Pfade innerer Erlebnisse und Umkehrungen: sie verehren in ihnen etwas Göttliches und scheuen das läute Wort. Alle Uebngen hören kaum zu, wenn davon gesprochen wird, und wännen, es handele sich um Langeweile und Mittelmässigkeit: Jene etwa noch ausgenommen, welche einen anmahnenden Klang aus jenem Reiche einmal vernommen, aber gegen ihn sich die Ohren verstopft haben. Die Erinnerung daran macht sie nun böse und aufgebracht."
23. "Der Glaube an die Lust im Maaßhalten fehlte bisher".
24. "ein singuläres Wertmaaß im Gefühle haben macht die höhere Natur" KSA 9.242 6[175].
25. Cf. e.g. UB III,1, KSA 1.339; MA II, VM 277; KSA 9.476f, 11[99]; FW 117, KSA 10.288f, 7[137]; KSA 11.220, 26[268], etc.
26. "Ich unterscheide aber: die eingebildeten Individuen und die wahren 'Lebens-systeme'".
27. For the framework and background of the interpretation as given in this section, I refer to my: *Reinterpreting Modern Culture. An Introduction to Friedrich Nietzsche's Philosophy*. Purdue, Indiana: Purdue University Press 2000.

28. "er will den buntesten Zufall unter vielen Gegensätzen" KSA 11, 181, 26[118].
29. "die Lust im Maaßhalten" KSA 11, 123, 25[420].