

Homo existimatus, adverse time and sense of measure

Homo existimatus, tempo avverso e senso della misura

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SEZIONE 6 – VALUTAZIONE, MISURA E VALORE

ABSTRACT

Misurazione e valutazione sono l'imperativo del nostro tempo. Se alcuni studiosi sostengono che l'esigenza di quantificare ogni attività umana è diventata un'ossessione, si parla infatti di «tirannia della valutazione», altri affermano che la questione non riguarda soltanto l'ambito educativo-formativo e economico-aziendale dove i due processi trovano naturale collocazione, ma aspetti della vita (relazioni, ore di lavoro, chilometri percorsi, *like* ricevuti, tempo libero, ecc.) che spingono a quantificare ogni attività umana. Il contributo focalizza un aspetto del tema poco indagato, cioè la condizione dell'uomo come *Homo existimatus*, e muove da due interrogativi: qual è l'unità di misura dell'umanità e se misurare e misurarsi serva a sentirsi esistenti o a migliorarsi. Interrogativi utili alla riflessione pedagogica per orientare il processo educativo-formativo delle generazioni future.

Measurement and evaluation are the imperative of our time. While some scholars argue that the need to quantify every human activity has become an obsession, they talk about the «tyranny of evaluation», others argue that the issue does not only concern the educational-formative and economic-field company where the two processes find natural location, but aspects of life, relationships, working hours, miles traveled, like received, leisure, etc. They push to quantify every human activity. The contribution focuses on an aspect of the theme little investigated, that is the condition of man as *Homo existimatus*, and moves from two questions: what is the unit of measure of humanity and whether measuring and measuring is needed to feel existing or to improve. Questions useful for pedagogical reflection and to guide the educational-formative process of future generations.

KEYWORDS

Misurazione | Valutazione | Tempo avverso | Condizione umana | Educazione
Measurement | Evaluation | Adverse time | Human Condition | Education

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Premise

The *leitmotif* of this reflection on the theme of measurement and evaluation, or to put it in Del Rey's words of «the tyranny of evaluation» (2021) consists of two main concepts, «adverse time» and «sense of measure» around which other notations are developed on aspects that consider the theme from a more general perspective in an attempt to focus on the particular condition of man in our time.

«Adverse time» and «sense of measure» are the basic concepts to try to understand and define the historical moment that all human beings go through because of the events that mark it (pandemic and economic crisis, natural disasters, old and new war conflicts, and more) which constitute what Taleb (2014) defines as «black swan» (black swan); events that are destructive in scope but capable of triggering, if well «used», regenerative processes for humanity. These concepts are also useful for understanding the current condition of man and the difficulty of building oneself as a person and as a member of the community-world in a time so complex as to make the «pain of living» more widespread than in the past (Minois, 2022).

The difficulty of living (Simone, 2022) that connotes man and propels him almost to assume postural traits of inner curvature and physiognomic characteristics of sadness and estrangement. A human tending, at the same time, towards the search for a definition of himself through numerical data that chooses to measure his being and his worth in both private and professional life; in his anxiety to determine which has greater value, the «recognized greatness» that is of performance, measurable and therefore evaluable, or the «silent greatness», unmeasurable but not quantifiable, from whose union the person takes shape and attributes meaning to existence.

The «Silent greatness» to which society today struggles to attach importance and which the mild but not trivial words of Saint-Exupery in *The Little Prince* (2015) emphasize. The relationship between measurable and not measurable, between valuable and non-valuable, which dominates the present is contained in what might appear to be a «child dialogue» and which is instead an «adult teaching» addressed to the adult world as a warning; and that which with the greater effectiveness of a detailed analysis from which emerges the cult for the quantifiable and for all that derives from it that well represents our time. Saint-Exupery writes:

Grown-ups love numbers. When you tell them about a new friend, they never care about the essentials. They never ask: What is the tone of his voice? What are his favorite toys? Does he collect butterflies? But they ask you: How old is he? How many brothers? How much does he weigh? How much does his father earn? Only then do they think they know him (p. 31).

The religion of numbers and algorithms, therefore, has exiled the intangible and the unmeasurable, which is also incorruptible, namely the emotional-affective life and the different degrees of the human feeling (Scheler, p. 1999), the ability to create and to give value to human relationships, the desire and the dream. Aspects of the human person and «lenses» through which to observe society, the world, as well as the direction towards which the whole of humanity seems to move.

1. Adverse time and *Homo existimatus*

The South Korean philosopher Chul Han in *Le non cose* (2022) takes-up Saint-Exupery's lesson on the importance of that «essential invisible to the eyes» in whose research resides not only the peculiarity of the human being but also the same happiness and contentment that derives from a well-oriented life (Spinoza, 2007), describing contemporary man as *Homo digitalis* as a «subject of performance». A subject enclosed in practices of self-optimization of the exploitation of himself, even in his free time and when he feels immersed in a flow that he calls freedom (Chul Han, 2022). The word digital refers to the term *digitus*, the finger that counts, and indicates the characteristic of *homo digitalis* which is to count, to calculate, to measure, to be measured and subsequently to be evaluated himself. An existence marked by calculation and performance.

This life condition, in which it is not difficult to identify, characterizes not only the time of complexity



(Morin, 2017) but also the «adverse time», an expression that differs in semantic depth from the neologism «permacrisis» with which the Collins Dictionary describes the long period of instability and insecurity in the world. The expression indicates not only the state of crisis and global instability defined by Collins, but also the difficulty of living, the psycho-emotional-social fragility that comes from living in this time, the different dimensions involved in the global crisis, the growing challenge to the human and of the human. The «adverse time» is a time full of threats and hope; permeated by collective fears, including that of being at the bedside of humanity, of having reached the end of the world, along with others of a subjective character: not being able to express their potentialities; not being able to build and realize oneself within relationships; not being builders of their own destiny; ending their own life story prematurely. A gloomy climate in which emotions and feelings of negative value prevail; in which the fatigue of living, increases and the idea of the future as a threat (Benasayag, Schmit, 2009) becomes prophetic of even more catastrophic, tragic and imminent events that will burden the subject and nail him to the present.

The «adverse time» is therefore an obstructive time, contrary to man and to the explication of his human qualities. A cruel and primordial time, especially because of the ungovernability of certain events that seem to history back to the beginning of human evolution, despite scientific progress in all areas. A counter-time that, in order to remain relevant to the theme of this reflection, urges and often forces man to measure himself with man, without however seeking a «good comparison» and without interest in the existential dialectics, that is what makes personal and collective improvement possible, the recognition, even in diversity, of a common horizon of meaning and value to be attributed to the life of the individual and in general to all human life (Molinari, Cavaleri, 2015).

A time that Chul Han defines as «one against one and one against all» and in which there is, on the one hand, the disappearance of the Other (2017), on the other, the measurement of man subjected to the «tyranny» of the algorithm (Del Rey, 2021) which attempts to measure human frailty and which threatens the «singularity of the living» (Benasayag, 2021). A human being considered as a skill that is calculable from childhood, educated and urged to be more and more performing to be able to dress then, as an adult, the double face clothing of measured and measuring, evaluated and evaluating.

The theme of measurement and evaluation cannot be the subject of reflection only from a methodological-didactic point of view or from learning outcomes or a business-economic perspective, but also the condition of *Homo existimatus* must give rise to a wider comparison, guided by pedagogical knowledge, to go back to attributing the right value to those dimensions of the human being that are not subject to quantification, because of their unmeasurable nature. To continue to cultivate and take care of them (Mortari, 2019), to defend man in his entirety, opposing the process of treatment that these dimensions could meet if they were considered as not qualifying the human. Non-functional dimensions in a time that is affected by the fascination of the trans/posthuman.

The life of man therefore appears strongly conditioned by measurement and evaluation, exasperation but also by intrinsic limits to the processes themselves; something which does not seem to provoke in the subject either impatience or rebellion but instead addiction and subjugation, as well as an unbridled search for the incontrovertible data in which he can recognize himself, a measure by which to be defined. A quantum, that is, through which to be able to reach a more certain knowledge of himself, since it is numerically based, and which becomes existential comfort in the turbulence of the «adverse time». Expressions such as «existential economy» and «measuring community» underline this aspect (De Marco, 2018; Soncini, 2022; Invitto, 2012).

In this scenario, what is taking shape is an increasingly functional human being but existing less and less. A version that the world seems to prefer as the only reason for being in a society that favours evaluating rather than valorizing, where the consubstantial fragility to human nature is to be ashamed of, and consequently therefore emotions and feelings, and where cultivating certain dimensions, the spiritual for example, is a reason for hiding, according to a logic that gives value to the useful and neglects or even despises the useless. This is a question addressed by the Order in *The Usefulness of the Useless* (2013) and which concerns not only disciplines, knowledge, but all those aspects of the human being considered unimportant to the economy of the world but which are instead fundamental. The emphasis on functioning rather than existing is changing the subject's life (Benasayag, 2019) and the perception and consideration he has of himself. A dystopian perspective in which what is emerging is a human being unable to think and reflect, unprepared to face complexity.



Measure and evaluation are not only issues underlying human action, but also the framework within which the subject-person carries out, expresses, tries to achieve, justifies his existence, and attributes qualities to his life. Morin's *Homo complexus* (2017) is now also *Homo existimatus*. A man whose thinking and acting is subjected to continuous quantification and evaluation, professional and personal, singular and plural, which involves a process of linearization of the human. A process, while indispensable to the mathematical sciences in order to operate reductions of a setting, a theory, etc., in a simplified form, if applied to man, causes a separation between the dimensions belonging to him; a diminutio, which does not lead to re-composition in the post-evaluative act of restitution, enhancement and re-evaluation. Clinging to the measure with which he is measured, to the perimeter of the human and to his evaluation, Protagora's teaching that «man is the measure of all things» has thus been forgotten.

2. The Measure of Humanity

The condition of *Homo existimatus* struggling with algorithms and a growing desire to catalogue, sort, and accurately place aspects of reality and their actors, serves as a corrective, defense and comfort to life and nourishes the illusion of being able to operate a control over what is inherently ungovernable. Interesting in this respect is the dialogue that took place at the XXVI Conference in Paris in 2018 on weights and measures between Peter Hunter, mathematician, theologian and philosopher of the University of Oxford; Guido Tonelli, physicist at CERN in Geneva and professor of General Physics at the University of Pisa and Silvano Petrosino, professor of Theories of Communication and Religious Anthropology and Media at the Catholic University of Milan. These scholars, although starting from different positions, agreed that man remains irremediably inhabited by a measure that he cannot measure because, as Galileo teaches, only what is identical, replicable and does not change is measurable.

Not, therefore, man with his feeling, his freedom, his evolution and his intrinsic complexity. While there is no scientific criterion for measuring humanity, scholars agree, some measuring systems are chosen for political or social reasons. A measure of man must instead keep in mind the categories of time and space as well as some quantities, including «recognized greatness» and «silent greatness». The latter, in particular, includes the actions that the human being carries out towards the Other and the community, which define him more than any measurement and quantification, because they refer to aspects and qualities that, although unmeasurable can be and give the «sense of measure».

Pedagogical science, that holds together and connects existing and functioning, in the subject, which questions and is committed to the enhancement of all human dimensions, his potential and factual greatness, can promote an education in evaluation, capable of reaffirming the importance of those aspects of human life, affectivity, relationality, solidarity, empathic capacity, self-care, etc. which, although not subject to measurement and evaluation, are indispensable to live a full life worthy of being lived, as well as to act as a barrier to certain challenges and claims of the trans/posthuman.

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