

Jeanne Hersch's Pedagogy of Life

A Wonder-Ful Way to Authenticity¹



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Abstract:

During her life, Jeanne Hersch has engaged herself in different fields, like human rights, politics, education, medical and scientific progress, always developing a *pedagogy of life*, which is able to link everyday life to its original meaning, thus leading to an authentic existence. This is possible thanks to the deep connection between the theoretical reflection and its actualization in ordinary life. The aim of this contribution is to present the ground of Hersch's *pedagogy of life* and to show in which way *wonder* can be found at its beginning, leading to some essential consequences for philosophy and for education. In the first part of the paper, I clarify the role of wonder in Hersch's philosophical reflection, between the theoretical ground of her philosophy and the practical indications that it implies. In the second part, I point out Hersch's application of her theoretical findings to education and contemporary issues in education, highlighting the importance of educating human wonder in order to exist authentically.

Keywords: authenticity, Hersch, pedagogy, freedom, wonder

1. Wonder between *L'illusion philosophique* and *L'être et la forme*

L'illusion philosophique

L'illusion philosophique and *L'être et la forme* are the most relevant texts to understand the theoretical ground of Herschian philosophy, thematising Jeanne Hersch's original interest for the strong connection between reality and philosophy, which leads her to appreciate Karl Jaspers and Existentialism. The first philosopher that Hersch studies is Henry Bergson, with his attention to theoretical reflections that move from and come back to reality, through a metaphysics from things to concepts and a freedom as *organic development*. Her graduate thesis, *Les images dans l'oeuvre de M. Bergson*, analyses Bergson's most famous works and retraces freedom as a capability that is «necessary and free at the same time, because it realises itself through an internal law of the subject and is actually identifiable with her/him»².

¹ All the passages cited in this work are my translations.

² J. Hersch, *Le immagini nell'opera di Bergson*, in R. De Benedetti, "Lucrezio", trans. A. Carenzi, Medusa, Milano 2001, p. 141.

At the end of her university studies, Hersch has already stated that freedom gives the possibility of actualizing one's authentic nature in reality. Nevertheless, this freedom has not a solid basis, since without an indication, which is deeper than pure free will, the subject is disoriented and reality risks to flow without leaving traces.

Thanks to Jaspers and his continuous dialectic between existence and reason, Hersch finds that freedom has a second root next to the first root in reality, namely the root in existence, which is the indication that can solidly ground the actualization of freedom. The result is the publication of *L'illusion philosophique*, a necessary metaphilosophical analysis that tries to avoid actualizing freedom in a randomly chosen direction³. To Hersch, after Kant, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, philosophy is no more able to compete with science in finding a certain and objective truth, because totality is always philosophically unreachable. In his existential path, Jaspers definitely unmasks the limits of reason, demonstrating that pretending to state something objectively true about Transcendence through philosophical systems is just an illusion. Since old philosophical systems make some scientific mistakes, it is clear that today we are not studying them for the knowledge they bring. Their richness lies in the example of authenticity that they bring, as a model that can wake up our freedom⁴.

It is all about a *philosophical problem*, in which morality and metaphysics are mixed in the vital question "Will I be or will I not be?"⁵, when something is in front of the subject in all its essentiality and the subject can *choose to engage* itself towards this something or move on and remain undetermined. The greatest philosophers are the ones that have accepted to engage themselves and to choose, *deciding* that object that is unconditionally necessary for them. This is the *simple gesture* on which they ground their whole life and thought, and it becomes

3 "I was asking myself which was its legitimacy [of philosophy]. If, as I already thought in that time, the philosophical subject is freedom, one risks to come to the conclusion that he can say whatever he wants. So I asked myself what is the relation between this freedom and the research for the truth. What does truth mean, when freedom is at stake?" (J. Hersch, A. Dufour, G. Dufour-Kowalska, *Rischiare l'oscuro: autoritratto a viva voce*, trans. L. Boella and F. De Vecchi, Baldini Castoldi Dalai, Milano 2009, p. 65).

4 Hersch affirms that there is a *real sense* of philosophy, which is constituted by the subjective decisions of the philosophers, next to the explicit sense, which is constituted by the knowledge the philosopher offers: "There is therefore in every philosophical problem – whatever its content is and whoever may ask it – a duplicity: its real sense is a decision of the subject, and its explicit sense is the knowledge of an object" (J. Hersch, *L'illusione della filosofia*, trans. F. Pivano, Mondadori, Milano 2004, p. 52).

5 Ivi, p. 25.

the *metaphysical truth* of the philosopher that the reader needs in order to understand how to engage her/his own freedom⁶. Such freedom can be called *existential*, since it engages one's existence towards the object that has an unconditional value for the existing subject. We cannot just *know* philosophers, we have to *mime* them and their use of freedom⁷.

It is important to highlight the central role of wonder in those existential dynamics. In 1936, in *L'illusion philosophique*, Hersch says that to the philosopher «the activity goes from the willingness of being, explaining herself/himself and expanding herself/himself, taking over the world of the objects, reaching the completely formulated system»⁸, while in 1981, in *L'étonnement philosophique. Une histoire de la philosophie*, Hersch points out that every authentic philosophical experience moves from wonder⁹. It seems that without wonder it is impossible to talk of *existential freedom* for the philosopher and every human being, since Hersch continues: "Being capable of feeling wonder is particular to the human being. It is all about raising up again that wonder. Thanks to the example of the other, the reader will regain her/his ability of feeling wonder. [...] Wonder is essential to the human condition"¹⁰. For the moment, it is enough to remember that without wonder there is no philosophical experience and *existential freedom*.

L'être et la forme

6 "We can understand now which nature has the interest that we have for the philosophical theories of the past, even when they are false from a scientific point of view. It is not a value of theoretical truth that we are searching for, because there is not and we know this. Now, we have seen that philosophy has two sides of which one is theory and the other is decision. Since the searched truth is not on the side of theory, it must be supposed that it is on the side of decision. One can recognize it for the cohesion that it keeps around the centre of the system, for an unprovable feature of loyalty, authenticity, 'going by itself'. [...] It is true for it has the total imprint of a person that was creating breaking out of it. It does not matter what it does reveal on the objective universe, but what it does of the subject [...]. And in this way, for indicating that the truth that we are talking about transcends the physical world in his general meaning of "world of the subject-object relations", I will call this truth metaphysical truth" (Ivi, p. 44).

7 When trying learning something from the philosopher, the scholar's "Philosophical activity was not to look and to learn, but repeating and acting. And it is exactly her/his freedom that the scholar wins 'communicating' with the freedom of the author. A philosophical system that must, as it was said, shipwreck in its research for a total objective knowledge finds its *metaphysical truth* in the appeal that it makes to freedom" (Ivi, pp. 54-55).

8 Ivi, pp. 51-52.

9 "What I will try to show, through some example chosen among more than two thousand years of Western thought, will be only in which way and in front of what some men are taken by wonder, by the same wonder from which philosophy was born" (J. Hersch, *Storia della filosofia come stupore*, trans. A. Bramati, Mondadori, Milano 2002, p. 1).

10 *Ibidem*.

The absolute choice of *existential freedom* is the edge of metaphysical *being* and moral *existence* of the subject, but, in the world, there are not only philosophers dealing with their vital decisions and their readers. In daily life, one meets mainly common people, dealing with their routine and some duties or responsibilities that are important, but not decisive. *L'illusion philosophique* needs a verification and some practical contents. Hersch needs ten years to think at the problem and finally publish *L'être et la forme* in 1946, which sums up some implicit ideas of *L'illusion philosophique* and other contributions of this period¹¹. This text is the clearest clue of Hersch's debt towards Kant and it tries to understand which conditions must be satisfied for something to be real from a human point of view¹². Remembering that the Kantian *thing in-itself* is an unknowable *noumenon*, the human being that walks through the world meets objects that it would know, but she/he manages just to scratch the objects that resist to her/him, exerting her/his *hold* on this *matter*. She/he thus takes the *form*, which is a new creation that has the imprint of both the subject and the object. Since she/he is unable to know the world *in-itself*, the subject can only fulfil her/his *reality* with the *forms* that she/he produces from time to time¹³.

The dynamics described in *L'être et la forme* need to find a connection with the metaphysical-moral horizon of *L'illusion philosophique* in order to become ontolo-

11 See J. Hersch, *Discontinuité des perspectives humaines*, in J. Wahl (edited by) "Le Choix, le monde, l'existence", Arthaud, Paris 1947, pp. 83-123.

12 "Exploring the anthropomorphism of human conscience means studying the conditions that must be satisfied for something to be real in the conscience. It is about a critic work with a clearly Kantian origin" (J. Hersch, *Essere e forma*, trans. S. Tarantino and R. Guccinelli, Mondadori, Milano 2006, p. 4).

13 Piguët gives a clear explanation of these passages: "Reality is neither the divine and the absolute, nor the human and the relative considered in isolation, but a compromise among the two. Or better: a *mix-up*. This mix-up, is called by J. Hersch *shape*. Let us explain us: the human being is there, in front of the unknown: she/he opens her/his eyes, and she/he want to know these things in-themselves, trying to eliminate herself/himself just for reaching this goal. But she/he does not manage to eliminate herself/himself: she/he wanted an object that should be 'pure object', she/he wanted something 'in-itself'; she/he has obtained only a 'object-for-the-subject', a shape. [...] Something has escaped her/him – J. Hersch says: the *matter*. She/he wanted 'to hold', but her/his *hold* bumped into an impregnable matter. Shape is the result of this conflict; it is a mix-up between the hold and the matter" (J. C. Piguët, *La pensée de Jeanne Hersch*, in "Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie", 1 (1951), 1951, pp. 54-55). Hersch concludes: "Reality in a human sense is limited. It is a ridge between two abysses, given and unknown, the I in itself and the not I in itself. [...] The human being exists only where it realises itself inserting its hold, imprinting its effective mark, making its forms to exist" (J. Hersch, *Essere e forma*, trans. S. Tarantino and R. Guccinelli, Mondadori, Milano 2006, p. 13).

gical. Hersch explicits this connection in two moments: in the central part of *L'être et la forme*, she affirms that "for man the decisive test of existence will be the transposition in the mode of existence of nature. [...] Being, in human terms, means being also among phenomenon. [...] This is the law of man. Being the incarnator"¹⁴; in *Éclairer l'obscur*, she says that the human being forms and welcomes in her/his reality that object that "there is not yet but deserves to be there"¹⁵ through a *judgement of value*. It is now clear that metaphysics and morality need a gradualist ontology for becoming *real*. This gradualist ontology leads to an actualization of metaphysics in a *good life* in the world and the realization of morality in an existence that forms depending on its *engagement*. This is the answer to the questions left open in *L'illusion philosophique*.

Existential freedom becomes the top of the pyramid of every human existence, which can be reached going up through the levels of what can be defined an *ontological freedom*. As the novel *Temps alternés* shows¹⁶, *existential freedom* guides *ontological freedom*, which is used in everyday life. *Existential freedom* is engaged in the few moments of highest metaphysical intensity, when the subject decides her/his being and existence, but then this engagement must be confirmed day by day, when the decisions produce forms that are ontologically less full of being but still morally engaged towards the *simple gesture* freely chosen. Otherwise, the *reality* attending the *test of existence* will not be an authentic image of the subject and her/his existence will never be actualized.

Hersch's theoretical reasoning is finally clear. The *matter* the subject engages her/his *existential freedom* to become the obsession of the *simple gesture*, so the subject exerts her/his *hold* on it in always-new *ways*. She/he uses her/his *ontological freedom* to get different *forms* that lead to the determination of the subject while knowing deeper the object, testing subjective existence through the actualization and the *test of existence*. Also in this practical activity, wonder has a central role: the wonder described in *L'étonnement philosophique* lies behind the *judgement of value* that helps the subject in deciding what to welcome in her/his reality. The human being states what *there is not yet but deserves to be there* when she/he walks through the world and finds something wonderful, which incarnates something new in the world and

14 Ivi, pp. 113-114.

15 J. Hersch, A. Dufour, G. Dufour-Kowalska, *Rischiare l'oscuro: autoritratto a viva voce*, trans. L. Boella and F. De Vecchi, Baldini Castoldi Dalai, Milano 2006, p.78.

16 See J. Hersch, *Temps alternés: roman*, LUF Librairie de l'Université, Fribourg 1942.

thus lets the subject go deeper in her/his answer to her/his existential questions¹⁷. The wonder that is met in the horizontal dimension of the world wakes up the exigence of the vertical dimension of decision, when the subject theoretically decides that her/his wonderful object is worth it and practically incarnates her/his decision in new *forms* in the world. The authenticity of human existence is determined by the free decision of incarnating what is subjectively worth it.

From wonder to the pedagogy of life

Before analysing the practical actualization of Hersch's theoretical horizon in education, it can be useful to add some interesting points, beyond *L'illusion philosophique* and *L'être et la forme*. Two good definitions of Hersch's original philosophy can sum up the consequences of the dynamics outlined so far. The first one is from Francesca De Vecchi: "From the beginning of 1950s, Jeanne Hersch's philosophy becomes also a practical philosophy. The philosophical practice [...] takes the form of a "pedagogy of life" that brings the "facts" of life and the human condition back to their meaning"¹⁸. The second one is from Stefania Tarantino, who affirms that in Hersch's philosophy *to be is to do* and the subjective *metaphysical truth* is both an intellectual and a practical activity of the subject, implying its becoming¹⁹.

What De Vecchi says can be understood by thinking about Hersch's biography and bibliography. On the one side, she spent her twenty years of formation, between 1930 and 1950, travelling, dealing with the problems of her time and finding worthy objects to engage her *existential freedom* to. After this, she tested her *good life*

17 "Everyone of us, in fact, has its own philosophical experience: every time that we face the necessity of taking a true decision, we make questions to ourselves in a philosophical way without knowing it. Children, in their fifth year of life, make question in a philosophical way; young people of fifteen or sixteen years too. [...] Their radical philosophical wonder [of ancient philosophers], which was completely new at that time, witnesses in fact the creative power and the inventive ability of man. [...] Recognizing their wonder, [the reader] will say: 'Yes, it is exactly like this. How is it possible that I had not felt wonder for this thing yet?'" (J. Hersch, *Storia della filosofia come stupore*, trans. A. Bramati, Mondadori, Milano 2002, pp. 1-2).

18 F. De Vecchi, *La libertà incarnata. Filosofia, etica e diritti umani secondo Jeanne Hersch*, Mondadori, Milano 2008, p. 221.

19 "The coincidence between being and doing introduces what Jeanne Hersch calls 'metaphysical truth', a truth that refers to another freedom compared with the one which is merely objective and that constitutes more than anything else the philosophical activity. It is a truth that is different from the objective truth because it is about the activity of the subject, her/his becoming" (S. Tarantino, *Per un'ontologia del singolare: invenzione e incarnazione in Jeanne Hersch*, in "Annali di studi religiosi", 8/2007, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna 2007, p. 133).

collaborating with important associations and organisations as UNESCO, giving her solutions to some of the principal problems of her time, from the drugs to the respect of human rights, passing through politics, women condition and the relation with science and technique. On the other side, early Hersch has written systematic texts clarifying her *simple gesture* to the reader that wants to *mime* her, while late Hersch has published short contributions, interviews, collections, analysis of specific problems. She tried to grasp the meaning of the problem, in order to make order and wake up the reader's attention, always moving from her personal engagement.

Remembering the ancient distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis*, to Hersch, it is possible to find a moment of reflection, for *practically producing* a *habitus*, and a moment of actualization that *poietically* produces a reality with the imprint of a subjective existence in the world. Coming back to De Vecchi's definition, the *pedagogy of life* holds together the *philosophical practice* that fixes existential decisions on a *praxis* and the *practical philosophy* that deals with an existential *poiesis* in the world. In this way, the human being moves continuously between the verticality of transcendent meaning and what is met in the horizontality of daily life. A double dialectic should be highlighted here. First, the dialectic between reasoning and action, because every intellectual or ideal decision must be incarnated on the one side, while every authentic act must come from or refer to a theoretical existential reflection on meaning on the other side. Second, the dialectic between reasoning and feeling or sensibility, because reason can use freedom to decide what is worth it only starting from what the subject senses and feels in the world on the one side, while the objects the subject feels and senses as worth it or necessary²⁰ must refer to an existential horizon of sense that only reason can determine.

What Tarantino states is already clear, but there are some implications that must be explicated. Saying that being coincides with doing to the human being means that freedom is an unavoidable duty before being a possibility of authenticity. Engaging the *existential freedom* in an intention of *good life* is useless, if the intention does not use *ontological freedom* to give a *form* to itself in *reality*.

To the human being, who is the only natural being that

20 Here the aforementioned Bergsonian idea of freedom as *organic development* must be recalled, as something that goes beyond reason and determines us since the beginning. To Hersch, this something can give a direction to our existence, but we have to give meaning to it, otherwise our decisions flow without leaving traces. Thus, freedom is the capability of saying yes to what we feel and sense as worth it or necessary, taking the responsibility for actualizing it in a *praxis* and incarnating it in a *poiesis*, which are rational activities.

can freely choose what is worth it, *wonder* involves both respect and love: the respect for what is worth it, as in the case of Antigone, who prefers dying rather than renouncing to her freedom and denying what she feels as worth it, and the love for the possibility of giving a form and incarnating what is worth it.

Here Tarantino develops some relevant considerations about the attitude that deals with wonder and the philosophical activity. In *La libertà in formazione. Studio su Jeanne Hersch e Maria Zambrano*, she extends the reflection to the models of authenticity. Talking of *freedom in formation* means that freedom is actualized not only thanks to a solitary reflection, but also thanks to meeting others' freedom. *Mimesis*, from which *mime* comes, is an essential condition in the relation with one's freedom, since it is impossible to understand that there is something that *deserves to be* without a *pietas* as *sympathy* towards the object or the subject: "To move 'through sympathy' in the object. [...] We can get nearer to this 'centre of power' not through the mere objective comprehension, but rather miming the unique gesture that can be found in every thinker, [...] trying to live it internally"²¹.

The purification of intention through the theoretical moment is useless, if it is not sustained by the right attitude, and it risks to be like the Platonic philosopher that finds the right way but still cannot see what is all around after going out from the cavern. In order to exist, the philosophical movement needs a triple wonder, for human nature, the model of philosophers and the ability of every subject of shaping freedom²². It needs a mimetic ability as well, to reach an *existential communication*, in which two existences offer themselves each other, to be elevated

and enhanced²³. The subject of *L'être et la forme* not only walks through the world but also *listens* with an *active receptivity*²⁴, namely the humility that leads to wonder, welcoming the object that produces wonder and accepting the dialogue with it. The philosopher cannot be an old wise man that already knows everything about the world but rather the child that welcomes the mystery of what is all around it, completely devoting himself/herself to it for learning something²⁵.

Roberta De Monticelli, who met Jeanne Hersch and tried to maintain alive her memory in Switzerland and Italy, perfectly grasps the conclusion of this articulated *pedagogy of life*. If, at the beginning of every study of the history of philosophy, everyone learns that the philosopher moves from wonder, De Monticelli observes that for Hersch the mute and unarmed *émerveillement* is not sufficient. *Candor* as desire of communication must be added immediately to the initial surprise: coming back to the Platonic philosopher, going out from the cavern and the consequent *émerveillement* are only a part of the process of the *awakening*, since the story goes on and the philosopher needs to come back to the cavern, in order to communicate to the others what he has discovered – even if he will die for this. This is the true philosophical

23 "With the expression philosophical communication, Jeanne Hersch reconciles the Jaspersian formulation of *liebender Kampf*, which she translates in French *combat par amour*, loving fight, absolute openness, pure offer between two 'absolute exigencies' that in their difference stake the nudity of their existence. The philosophical communication is here intended as the witness of that internal acting, of that awakening to oneself as free and responsible beings, of that possibility of enhancing the conscience of one's life thanks to the living presence of the other" (Ivi, p. 119).

24 "In listening there is something essential, in which for a moment we are able to welcome something, to leave an empty space where we have the possibility to transform ourselves, to discover in what seems to miss us the most 'the strongest object of our love'" (Ivi, p. 105). Tarantino goes on: "Active receptivity means *saying yes* to the words of the other, to her/his freedom, means *prepare oneself* to welcome everything problematic, paradoxical, in life, knowing that it is useless locking oneself up in an ivory tower of formulations that does not consider the richness 'despairing and wonderful of this world', because it is only from there that the irreducible appears. It means, in other words, opening oneself to the comprehension of the other. The possibility of mime, of subjective identification, is given only through this active receptivity that represents one of the fundamental elements of every teaching" (S. Tarantino, *La libertà in formazione. Studio su Jeanne Hersch e Maria Zambrano*, Mimesis Edizioni, Milano 2008, p. 149).

25 "Even among the same physics, there are some that continue to feel wonder: their works are full of a philosophical and metaphysical wonder, similar to the one of children. 'Like children', says the Bible: we have to become like this if we want to understand what it is: we have to undress the arrogance of the adults that consider all the past with an attitude of sufficiency, from the top of the splendour of modern science" (J. Hersch, *Storia della filosofia come stupore*, trans. A. Bramati, Mondadori, Milano 2002, p. 2).

21 S. Tarantino, *La libertà in formazione. Studio su Jeanne Hersch e Maria Zambrano*, Mimesis Edizioni, Milano 2008, pp. 71-72.

22 "It is from our desire of giving a shape that we go meet our freedom, from the desire of looking the mystery of our human nature through this great ability that we have of thinking. Only in this way the comparison with tradition, ancient philosophers, moderns, contemporary, becomes an endless and fruitful resource of new relations of thought, [...] which has an immense value in so far as they can wake up our ability of inventing, of giving back a new meaning to the deep feeling of our being still 'human'" (S. Tarantino, *Il «mimo» e lo «stupore» nel pensiero di Jeanne Hersch*, in P. Ricci Sindoni (edited by) "La sentinella di Seir. Intellettuali nel Novecento", Edizioni Studium, Roma 2004, p. 108).

movement, whose original *wonder* is an *émerveillement* moved by a *desire of restitution*. De Monticelli's synthesis must be read in its entirety:

We will conclude coming back to the initial move, to the experience in which takes root the ontology of doing and work: that desire of restitution, we were saying, fed with gratitude, which unites everyone that aims at giving back something of the being that hit them in the discipline of form, without naming it in vain. This "move of soul" is wonder. [...] From wonder, traditionally, it is said that philosophy is born: but the Herschian word, *étonnement*, is stronger than *émerveillement*, the unarmed and initially mute aspect of wonder, and, without suppressing the one of admiration, it underlines the one of candor. [...] At the root of every loyal restitution of truth, [...] at the bottom of every "miming", [...] there is wonder²⁶.

The one that feels wonder is amazed and grateful at the same time, it has something to communicate and a reason for communicating it. Wonder is the basis of *mime* and the desire of communicating authentically with the world and the freedom of the other, which are always to be discovered and crossed. Moreover, it is now clear in which sense wonder is the ground of morality, metaphysics and ontology in Hersch, since – from a causative and not temporal point of view – the subject finds in her/his initial wonder: a *value* to her/his engagement, an *ideal* for driving the actualization in daily life and a *matter* on which she/he has to exert her/his *hold* in different ways to create new *forms*. In other words, a subjective law that becomes *regulative* to *praxis* and *productive* to *poiesis*. Without wonder, there would be nothing new in the world, this is the reason why the *subjective truth* stimulated by wonder becomes the metaphysical truth in *L'illusion philosophique*²⁷.

What happens when *wonder* is separated from the *pietas* and the *candor* that are essential to *wonder*? In these cases, wonder is not a gift to take care of and transmit but rather an object of possession, which must be violated in its intimacy and considered as an instrument of superio-

26 R. De Monticelli, *Jeanne Hersch: una filosofia dei contorni*, in "Lectora" (13), 2007, p. 176.

27 "In the essay on Chagall, instead, this thought exemplifies it, showing how the 'fundamental move' of a soul (of *that soul*) becomes – Jaspers would say – *Weltanschauung*, and this time exactly in the literal sense of way of looking at the world. The 'metaphysical truth', must be a metaphysical truth that corresponds to a possible existence, and being like this it has nothing subjective or arbitrary, and instead it has all the 'necessity' of 'imperious decrees'. Jeanne Hersch sees this internal necessity, this being closely driven and determined, everywhere she finds authenticity of thought" (R. De Monticelli, *I gesti del pensiero. Prospettive su Jeanne Hersch*, in P. Ricci Sindoni (edited by) "La sentinella di Seir. Intellettuali nel Novecento", Edizioni Studium, Roma 2004, p. 65).

Original *wonder* is then converted in the *contempt* for what is not the wonder itself, leading to the opposite of the philosophical activity: man as *incarnator* becomes man as *enchanter*. Since her university studies, Hersch had already found in Heidegger's depth the model of disincarnated *wonder* as occasion of *contempt*. In *Les enjeux du débat autour de Heidegger*, she tries to explain her position: "In the heart of the philosophy of Heidegger we find that power, the most alive in his thought, which is not [...] the wonder in front of being, but the contempt for everything is not this wonder, in his nudity and sterility. A burning contempt, passionate, obsessive, for what is common"²⁸.

If *wonder* is considered as an answer and not as a question, the research stops. It is the end of disquiet of the lover that tries to give a better shape to her/his love, but it is also the end of the human: when the object is reached, there is no more need of reasoning on the reference *values*, there is no engagement to renew and there is no new hold towards a more authentic reality. When the object is reached, the dialogue is not a *loving fight* between two subjects that search together for their *subjective truth* but rather a manifestation of despising superiority, when the interlocutor is still searching for her/his answer, or a fight to the death, if the interlocutor has found her/his certain answer²⁹. The *shallow* that is despised becomes the house that one decides to live in, condemning the others to a state of inferiority that does not deserve dialogue and condemning oneself to a biology without *wonder*³⁰.

One last point deserves further examination: the originality of Hersch's attitude among Existentialist philosophers. Existentialist philosophers – from Kierkegaard to Jaspers, going through well-known philosophers like Sartre or even Heidegger – try to give importance to the uncertainty of existence, in order to understand which are the limits of reason. To them, choosing freedom means

28 J. Hersch, *Il dibattito su Heidegger: la posta in gioco*, trans. S. Tarantino, in "Oltre la persecuzione. Donne, memoria, ebraismo", Carocci, Bologna 2004, p. 3.

29 "It remains the poetic mystery and the appeal exerted by Heidegger. Through his obsessive questioning, through his poetry. [...] It is similar to a totalitarian spell. [...] It does not reveal the depth, it raises it. It does not propose his thought to the thought of the other, it imposes it. [...] There is with no doubt some sorcery and also some banality, closed in the rigidity of a language that intimidates. A way of doing philosophy at the same time dictatorial and irresponsible" (Ivi, p. 6).

30 "The contempt here kills in advance every imagination of possibilities that the technique can open to man and that are not only techniques. Will I dare to say it? Exerting contempt, what Heidegger refuses, is the whole human condition, in its 'mixed' nature between finitude and finite, with its endless efforts, modest, historically situated in time and history, towards and despite of death. [...] Maybe one must not even pronounce in vain *the name of being*" (Ivi, p. 5).

renouncing to possessing Truth, since the subject should say yes to a total and universal Truth should, thus losing its freedom. But choosing freedom means also engaging it, since a freedom that repeatedly postpones decisions seems to be a wasted potentiality, and in the moment in which one engages her/his freedom without knowing the Truth, he/she is alone and harmless in front of the responsibility of a crossroad, for the *yes* to a way is the *no* to the others.

Here Herschian realism is decisive: Kierkegaard's *anxiety*, Sartre's *nausea*, Jasper's *shipwreck* are all justified by the heroic solitude in the moment of the decision, while Herschian freedom is not alone, since it comes from the Bergsonian freedom as *organic development*. Remembering the definition in *Les images dans l'oeuvre de M. Bergson*, freedom has a past, in the *datum* of what the human being did in its existence and of what has happened before it, and even a present, since the subject is always spatially and temporally determined. In addition, it has a natural tendency and a body that forces it to respect natural laws. The subject's decision is not based on Sartre's *nothingness* and it is rather rooted in the world. Those limitative constraints become an occasion for the human being: as Kant recalls, the dove thinks that the air limits its flight, ignoring that it can fly better with the support of the air³¹. Thanks to her realism and her conception of existence as being rooted in the real world, Hersch conceives the engagement towards a free existence not as a nauseating navigation in a sea without safe ports but rather as a wonderful and unique occasion of being human. To Hersch, human nature is enriched and evaluated only when it is constrained: only renouncing to possess Being, it is possible to feel the wonder for the dialogue and the relation with it.

2. A real human education through wonder

A contribution that aims at *miming* Hersch has to convert those theoretical reflections into a *poiesis* that can concretely take care of human wonder and authenticity. To Hersch, such *poiesis* that actualizes the *praxis of pedagogy of life* is an education model that preserves the human. The Genevean has never written systematic texts about pedagogy, but she gave many contributions about it, especially in the second half of her life. She has taught at the *École Internationale* from 1933 to 1955, she has been preceptor in South America between 1935 and 1936

and at the court of Siam between 1938 and 1939, and she has had many students at university, between 1956 and 1977. Many important thinkers and professors remember her ability of making order and always educating to find new spaces to reaffirm and engage subjective freedom³². The Genevean has defined herself a *teacher of school* and not a philosopher several times, since she prefers searching for practical answers to concrete problems rather than transcendental answers. It must be considered that the teacher has a bigger responsibility than the philosopher does: the philosopher elaborates and shares her/his engagement towards her/his freedom and wonder, but the teacher devotes her/his whole life to education, having a more active role in the diffusion of wonder. If the philosopher is an occasion to feel wonder and go in depth, the educator has the duty of taking care of the extension of this occasion, so she/he is the one that has the biggest honour of serving wonder and humanity.

Since the human being is the *incarnator*, she/het must actualize herself/himself, but only wonder leads to an authentic ontological practice, so the pedagogical dimension and its education to wonder are the conditions of every form of human actualization. Educating means leading to freedom, waking up to that wonder that drives to the flourishing of the authentic actualization, between the restitution to the others and the creation of the self. To every human being, freedom is the ground, wonder is the attitude and *mime* is the way. And pedagogy must teach how to apply this theoretical principle.

To Hersch, 1968 uprisings are the right occasion for reflecting on the educational situation in and out of schools, applying her theoretical engagement to a problem of her and our time. The Genevean thinks that school has failed, justifying students that claim an happiness as full justice in equal opportunities and professors or teachers that prefer passive students that are easy to control, listing notions that must be memorized. This general anesthetization makes school safer and under control, but this system sacrifices authenticity. To Hersch, the first imperative for the educator is *to surprise and never to bore*³³, finding the way for giving to every class and stu-

32 "Your work as philosopher and pedagogue oversteps the framework of scholastic and academic teaching. Your philosophy affirms that the human thought, far from being hang in the cloud, is inscribed, if it wants it or not, in time and history, is not it? Do you think that there is somehow a continuity between your work as teacher and what Father Fessard has defined, thinking at you, a 'pedagogy of life'?" (J. Hersch, A. Dufour, G. Dufour-Kowalska, *Rischiare l'oscuro: autoritratto a viva voce*, trans. L. Boella and F. De Vecchi, Baldini Castoldi Dalai, Milano 2009, p. 255).

33 "For all my life I have heard repeating until boredom the principles of active school, without having stated a true progress. The theory of

31 See I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. P. Guyer and A. W. Wood, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998.

dent not the same knowledges but rather the right categories for linking concepts and notions freely, because only different and participated paths lead to new answers and new wonder.

Going on, Hersch observes that this anesthetized society risks to uproot itself from its ground, in an emancipation that is an escape from uncomfortable duties rather than the research of a personal space. The Genevean has always tried to row against the current to give occasions of responsible freedom, since freedom is not free will and it is something we are responsible for, even when we decide to hide the problem³⁴. Once again, Hersch prefers being positive and facing the limits and difficult situations that threaten the human, because there is always light at the end of the tunnel until there is wonder. The capability of staying grounded in reality is the key to understand the relevance of Hersch's answer to the *shallow* society that tries to escape from reality and the *test of existence*, with decisive consequences for educators and younger generations:

I think that drug is the most striking and gloomy symptom of what youth lacks of in our world today. Which is this lack? I told you: the lack of meaning. And then it is the lack of gratitude to the men of the past, the lack of duty towards the future. Everyone wants to like to the youth, but the youth does not need this. If a part of it today is unhappy, it is for it lacks of, not, as it is said, freedom, but a really adult world. The youth needs someone around it, in the family, at school, adults that show to it the possible dimensions of human being, who are somehow the proof and the incarnation of this. It is needed that the youth can count on them, love them and being loved by them. We live in a permissive society in which models, rules and behaviours are unstable and changing, and the youth lives in an inconsistency without precedent in the history. [...] No, it is not about an excess of authoritarianism. The youth needs to revolt, it is a normal fact; but it is needed that it has something to revolt against.

active school, indeed, is not yet the active school. G.D.K. – Pedagogy is a practice. J.H. – It is a practice. A practice that is grounded on the student and the teacher, on the circumstances and on the 'game' in a class. It involves a part of constant inspiration. G.D.K. – A part of improvisation. J.H. – Yes. From this point of view, the first advice to be given to a young teacher is a ban: boring is forbidden. G.D.K. – One must never surrender to the supposed boring aspect of the transmission of knowledge. J.H. – Exactly. The second advice is: to surprise" (J. Hersch, A. Dufour, G. Dufour-Kowalska, *Rischiare l'oscuro: autoritratto a viva voce*, trans. L. Boella and F. De Vecchi, Baldini Castoldi Dalai, Milano 2009, p. 106).

34 "In my conferences, I always tried to orientate my reflection towards a meaning, a reason of being, that goes through particular problems. [...] We have lost the meaning of meaning, and we are in a not-meaning. [...] Only one principle is always the same: giving to every human being occasions of responsible freedom" (Ivi, p. 258).

When everything is permitted, it is in the nothingness³⁵.

Something got jammed in the ideal mechanism between *existential freedom* and *ontological freedom*. First, there is no more exerting *ontological freedom* to make *hold* and *matter* clash, in order to *form existential freedom* in *reality*. Second, there is no more exerting *ontological freedom* for there is the lack of power of engaging *existential freedom* in something that has an unconditional value for the subject. Third, the engagement of *existential freedom* lacks for there is a lack of reflection on meaning, namely the dialogue between reason and existence that understands and lives what obliges the subjects with its necessity. Fourth, the reflection on meaning lacks of its ground and its way, namely *freedom* and *mime*. They are both present in their possibility, but the right attitude and the wonder for the human condition has been lost. If one stops at the beginning of the wonderful way in the world, giving in at the first problem, she/he escapes thanks to an imagination without reality and actualization, which leads to the vicious circle just described.

If adults are too irresponsibly weak for staying in the world, it is easy to understand what the consequences *on* and *for* youth are. Hersch denounces the situation in *L'ennemi c'est le nihilism. Antithèses aux "Thèses" de la commission fédérale pour la jeunesse*, trying to retrieve stable and valid principles, maybe a bit too rigid in some passages but still necessary as a temporary treatment for what, thinking at Baumann, can be defined an educational – and not only social – *liquidity*. To Hersch, education in general and the youth uprisings in the second half of 1900 are two linked issues, since if the human being needs to be an *incarnator* that faces the clash with matter, also the young must face the initial disorientation in front of possibilities that seem all the same.

History repeats itself: as the pure existentialist that lacks of the lifeline of real *datum* and sails in open sea risking the shipwreck or the subject that faces *wonder* protecting herself/himself with a disoriented *contempt*, so the young person that claims to the right of an *unconditional freedom* finds the cliff of *everything is permitted* on her/his wonderful way. Contemporary societies are frequently attracted by a freedom that means absence of limits, but it is just in such open and desolated lands that one fe-

35 Ivi, p. 268. The prosecution of the conversation deserves to be quoted, for its actuality: "G.D.K. – They revolt the same. J.H. – But it is a revolt that is not able of saying its object, it is unfolded in an incoherent violence, in an intoxication of drug. And when they protest against something determined, generally they borrow a matter from revolutionists of yesterday or today. It is not their own attitude. [...] There are many types of factors that destroy the life of some young people or incite them to different forms of escape" (Ivi, pp. 268-269).

els alone and disoriented. The *Thèses* written after youth protests have tried to encourage this wrong and inhuman claim, transforming it in an educational model. In *L'être et la forme*, in the dream one can do whatever she/he wants, while the one that faces the world can survive only *by way of constraints*; in the same way, in the *Anti-thèses* it is possible to expect something from the youth only if it is previously helped by any means in its education or formation.

From the beginning of her/his life, it is quite clear that the human being searches for models rather than for a free space: "It is claimed that 'young people' have always suffered and continue to suffer repression. But the opposite is true. Some of them feel lost, without a compass, in front of the infinity of possibilities that, for this reason, lose their meaning"³⁶. Hersch goes on: "When it is not important where one goes, why going somewhere? Everything is allowed, and everything is possible. It is enough then to discard the world of adults to find the easy satisfaction of heaven"³⁷. Every human being is disoriented by the infinity of possibilities, especially if she/he is still young, so it is normal to search for a model. If even an experienced human being needs someone to compare and dialogue with, to understand itself better, why one should deny an authentic occasion of dialogue to a young person? The young person needs something that resists to her/his strength more than everyone else does, a *test of existence* to gain consciousness.

In this sense, the Autonomous Centers that the Federal Commission considered as a solution become the nihilism that plays the role of the enemy in the title of Hersch's text³⁸, because the wonderful way of existence must move from a datum on which one has to work freely rather than from nothingness. Without the datum, without a resistance, without decisions that limit, there are no choices to be taken and one lives in the dream of *everything is possible*. It must be clear that the fact that the young person needs models does not mean that she/he has to be the copy of someone. Models are the datum, the past on which it is possible to build something, but the past can be enhanced, modified, denied. It is always there, as the solid basis of the building of existence. And

36 J. Hersch, *L'ennemi c'est le nihilisme. Antithèses aux "Thèses" de la commission fédérale pour la jeunesse*, Georg, Genève 1981, p. 6.
37 *Ibidem*.

38 "In the end, and against all appearances, the majority of these young people are looking for the mother, the father, the teacher they did not have. [...] But then, how to remedy this, now that is too late? Surely not by an 'Autonomous Center', by a 'space of freedom', which is exactly the opposite of what they need, even if they sincerely believe they want it. Because the Autonomous Center is the void – the arbitrary – the enemy nothingness" (Ivi, p. 7).

the more the basis are wide, the more the building can be high. A human being is never satisfied, so models are there as boundaries that remember that every change must respect the limits of human conditions.

Adults as models need to transmit the roots that must be preserved³⁹ and re-establish the order every time that something goes wrong and the scared young rebels to ask for help⁴⁰. Parents know well that in order to teach a child to ride her/his bicycle it is important to start with a small wheel bicycle, while in order to teach her/him how to swim it is needed to initially help her/him with water wings. The reason is that *learning* is needed in order to develop every ability. This learning comes from the wonder for being able to fight and to win against something that resists but can be *hold* in a *shape* nevertheless. The kid is disoriented from the beginning without a small wheel bicycle or some water wings, while she/he would never do by herself/himself with too helpful parents. In both those situations, there is no learning. The true question is: if in the first years of their life, adults accept that children cry when they wake up and cannot see familiar faces around them, why they cannot understand the young person when she/he wakes up to existence and cries if no one is ready to reassure her/him? Hersch concludes that the problem is not concerning only the youth, but also not-adults:

It is in the field of learning that is indispensable for history that our time stands out from the previous. It is in this area that we have to look for the specific causes of the strange misfortune suffered by a part of our youth, and the "troubles" to which it allows itself to be drawn, is not it? These causes must therefore be seized at the level of *our culture*, *our traditions*, *the education* given to our children. We have failed to assimilate and culturally digest the scientific revolution. [...] We have simply absorbed certain words, the words of certain laws without referring to some methods, using products delivered with their instructions. This has led to an arrogant extrapola-

39 "The human race is the only one that develops a *history*, namely to take advantage of the succession of generations to transmit the gains of each of them, instead of being satisfied with a purely repetitive succession. This is a decisive psychological and social fact, which implies, with each new generation, a deep and extensive *learning*: [...] learning about life in society, learning from the human condition over and over again, with its past, its present, its future" (Ivi, pp. 15-16).

40 "This initial situation of the little human, of having *to learn*, implies for it an initial uncertainty, something interrogative, to which answers must be given. Not the kind of answers that destroys the interrogation and silences, but the kind that reassures, deepens and allows to continue. The little human immediately needs rules, habits, regular and constant requirements. [...] None of this disappears in the young person. [...] She/He *provokes* the adult to restore an order that is essentially necessary to her/him. If the adult misses it, provocation can go up to the big scene of despair" (Ivi, p. 16).

tion of scientific and technical knowledge in the human field, a deep and general atrophy of the sense of continuity and of the future⁴¹.

The human being has tried to get rid of its humanity, claiming from science the absolution and the exemption from the responsibility intrinsic to her/his *responsible freedom*. This loss of humanity leads to the loss of wonder as well, with some clear consequences. The clearest clue is the increased use of drugs. The young's drug is the glass of wine of the adult submerged by her/his duties that says: "I'll do this tomorrow". The young person, having less consciousness than the adult does, risks to escape from her/his life and not just from some commitments. The young person does not feel the pressure of society but rather the pressure of her/his own essence, when she/he feels that she/he *has to be* and she/he does not know where to start. Time passes, everything flows. And when one gets to know that she/he has something precious in her/his hands but this something slips fast, when she/he asks for help multiple times in many ways but no one helps her/him, the initial wonder, gratitude, curiosity become the despair. Such sufferance cannot be borne and it is necessary to dilute the density of reality, to let it be that dream that is more similar to the coma, waiting for the end. This is the crime of a society that kills wonder in its young people, generation after generation. It is necessary to make order, to let the young person and the adult find the right way. To Hersch, making order means moving from a precise consciousness:

The "culture" propagated by education is a lie itself: it lies about the human condition by proclaiming a right to society without effort and constraint, by nourishing the claim to pubertal heaven; it lies about freedom, by making it seem that every human being is born free and teacher of itself, that freedom is "a condition of nature". [...] To be free it is necessary, first of all, to be⁴².

Society is becoming inconsistent when colliding with the creative eagerness of the young person, while the young person is starting to speak too much and to listen too little, developing a "counter-language", which is a way for her/him to cry its despair⁴³ and leads to refuge in her/his "ghettos that are not places of exchange, but drowned solitudes, submerged by noise"⁴⁴. For getting through this isolation, it is essential to come back to an authentic

41 Ivi, p. 17.

42 Ivi, p. 25.

43 Ivi, p. 20.

44 Ivi, pp. 25-26.

dialogue. This needs two conditions: first, the recovery of the right roles, since dialoguing means recognising each other but there is no recognition without knowing one's own position; second, the use of the right attitude and the right way, since without *wonder* and *mime* there are only fear and violence⁴⁵.

Once clarified the importance of education, one has to remember that teachers, parents, educators must be for the young person the occasion for deepening and shaping that wonder that the society and the world should have already waken up. Also the professor has a relevant role in the educational dimension. Here the reasoning is far less articulated, but also university risks to sacrifice the meaning to productivity⁴⁶. In *Les allégeances multiples de l'Université*, Hersch points out university *duties of loyalty*, as a factory of culture that must give a formation to artisans of meaning.

When shaping spirits, university has the duty of not only enriching knowledge but also giving to the student the serenity of an engagement that renounces to a safe certainty to gain its subjectivity, in the period between the insouciance of the infant and the responsibility of the adult. The second duty is towards society, because a democratization of education is as dangerous as a freedom without limits, since it does not emphasize the *cultural* path, which must be different from the *professional* path; the difficult part is to select who can continue the mission of university, without leading to a superb attitude towards the other paths. At the third level, university is the warm and tolerant shelter of thought and this is the only situation in which it can be inclusively democratic, as preservation of the possibility of searching for the truth for every human being. It is necessary to diversify the degree programs in order to transform university in a temple of meaning. Once more, authenticity can be reached only dealing with the datum and the *test of existence*: "The tasks that are required seem to me to constitute the most solid ground for those who want to renew University without losing its permanent duties in the way. The time has come to put us all to work"⁴⁷.

Some final indications conclude this overall introduction to Hersch's reflection on education. Hersch recalls several times that the child is a *baby human* at birth, who is unable to defend herself/himself and is the most depen-

45 "Dialogue! Magic word. It is needed for every use. But there is no dialogue without a common rule, in the dignity and in the respect. Not in the fear" (Ivi, p. 27).

46 Hersch has also collaborated to an important project of analysis of the university in USA, presented in E. Shils, *The Academic Ethic*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1984.

47 J. Hersch, *Les allégeances multiples de l'Université*, Reggiani, Genève 1968, p.19.

dent animal of all. Nevertheless, she/he has the capability of being educated, since she/he is a *homo docilis*⁴⁸. This means that a path of in-formation is needed to direct the child and offer her/him some representations of the world as a starting point: freedom is not found at the beginning of the path, because it is rather acquired and actualized when the teachings that are absorbed as *tradition* by children and young people are problematized and reworked in the *innovation* of a new existence in the world⁴⁹. Contemporary liberties are a double-edged sword, since they let the subject adhere to what she/he truly feels her/his own on the one side, but the absence of solid references and shared social symbols or conventional behaviours risks disorienting and exposing subjective choices to more violent disputes on the other side. Much more firmness than in the past is needed, so that the *baby human* can mature *convictions* from the *conventions* she/he learns, thus becoming an adult⁵⁰.

In conclusion, to Hersch, existence is the acceptance of the human condition and its mission to incarnate what is subjectively worth it despite the limits intrinsic to its rationality and its biological part. The authenticity of existence depends on the subjective actualization of freedom, giving a real form to the worthy matter in the world and thus creating something new in the world. Such process occurs when the human being is moved by wonder and the *desire of restitution* rather than the anguish and nausea for its uncertain condition. Hersch teaches us that we are not alone in our incarnative mission. First, we must consider the human bond with the real world. When moving from abstract theory to concrete practice, we discover that the human action is always grounded in the natural datum, which is both the body we have with its determinations in space and time and the cultural, social, historical *tradition* we can transform into *innovation*. Second, we are meant to learn how to be free and existence

48 J. Hersch, *Der Mensch als erziehbares Wesen*, in "Schweizerische Lehrerzeitung", Zürich 1974, p. 9.

49 See J. Hersch, *Der Lehrer in der heutigen Krise*, in "Schweizerische Lehrerzeitung", Zürich 1970, pp. 1106-1111.

50 "We live in a society where very few things work smoothly and very few behaviours are indisputable. On the other hand, there were times when in a certain sense behaviours were established by more or less tacit conventions. It was much easier because it was admitted that in certain surroundings an individual behaved in a certain way. Now, however, similar codes of conduct no longer exist. What then? One has to find the right way for itself, and when it has enough substance, strength and personality, it can replace convention with conviction, with something it really wants. It is a good thing, but many are unable to put it into practice: and since they are not supported by society and there is nothing that can support them, they feel lost. I believe that today a very strong inner wealth is needed to stand this society, much stronger than the one that was necessary until some time ago" (J. Hersch, *Per salvare dal contagio la nuova generazione*, in "Nachlass J. Hersch 11.A.15", p. 2).

is not a solitary affair, since we have models that can inspire us and educators that can teach us. Here education comes in as a guidance to shape our wonder, learning how to be free and exist authentically.

We are not alone in our task of appreciating our wonder and giving a real form to it, so we can safely incarnate our authentic existence, experiencing the fullness of actualizing freedom and offering new models that can inspire other people. At the end of theory, every philosopher, educator, young person has a *poietical* task to come back to.

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