

TRACCIA 4

The current age in which we live in is dominated by rational thinking and science, but in the past life was different. Many things were undiscovered and the unknown created fear among many. Even so, some of them, centuries ago, started to wonder whether what they could see, touch, feel and think were the only things and thoughts they could experience and express. Some started questioning the boundaries of the world they lived in and seeking answers through the observation of phenomena occurring around them: they began searching for factual proof able to describe the events they witnessed or they took part in, several studies and researches brought them to the point where they soon realized Earth was in fact just a dot in a seemingly unlimited space they started calling the "Universe". The development of science and rational thinking brought extraordinary results which future generations would be able to use in order to further expand their knowledge about themselves and the world they lived in. This strong and unlimited connection between past, present and future links our lives to our ancestors', eventually taking us to the modern age, the age of science.

Going through all of human history takes up an enormous amount of work and dedication, besides time and research. Science and history are bound to each other, without the understanding of our history there can't be any scientific progress. However, something that remains undermined when talking about the two is the important role of curiosity, amazement and wonder which are essential features needed to conduct experiments and studies in these fields.

Science is a driving factor of human progress but it also features a problem. The ambivalence surrounding both science and the image of a scientist is the starting point of the reflection about the role of wonder and amazement: when it comes to science, people tend to undermine the emotional side of it, perceived as the sum of feelings and ideas characterizing the process of experimentation and discovery; it seems rational to believe that a scientist's work is only based on proven facts, mathematical formulas and impartial thinking. This reflects only half of the picture, therefore, in order to draw the complete spectrum, the other half based on emotions can't be denied. This other half includes also feelings such as wonder and amazement. One main reason explaining the success of science and its adoption as a well-functioning model for human development and social improvement can be traced upon the role of wonder and amazement. These tightly-linked-together dimensions reside in the human mind unconsciously acting as "forces" pushing the person towards the unknown, putting them out of their self-reality. Wonder and amazement originate inside the mind which receives constant information from outside the body it controls, elaborating it and giving external outputs resulting in human action. These forces can be actually neutralized and equalled by other factors capable of reducing their impact on actions and decisions: these

opposite factors chain the human mind to ignorance and sufficiency, as Jeanne Hersch states in her "Storia della filosofia come stupore": "adults arrogantly consider the past from an attitude of

sufficiency, from the height of the splendor of modern science”, viewing the world from their one and only perspective, resulting in a loss of curiosity and feeling of discovery towards what they don’t know, at the same time the unknown is no more as everything obtains reasoning and meaning, whether it’s factual or not. As this type of thinking spreads, ignorance can’t be escaped, there’s no incentive encouraging to go further beyond as modern science seems to have already the solutions to everything that can be thought of.

This conclusion brings to the paradoxical state of an oblivious age where science is used as a solution to each and every aspect of life, at the same time suppressing those same feelings I have previously introduced. A way of thinking based on rationality is irrational in itself because it favours only half of the spectrum of the mind and avoids any confrontation with its opposite emotions and feelings, which amazement and wonder are also part of.

There’s however an “antidote” to it, residing in a simple concept whose origin is described by Jeanne Hersch in just two words: “Like children”. Children have fewer knowledge of their surrounding world compared to adults, so, in order to make sense of reality, they use their imagination, fueled by the need and urge to know: this basic act actually describes the relationship between mankind and everything else, the first one could be portrayed as an explorer seeking the knowledge to understand what the latter one secretly hides from him. Children’s “world” is simple, bare and overall more unaware. Since they don’t possess rational thinking they use different emotions as tools to comprehend, being the feeling of wonder one of them. In fact, they also tend to be more easily amazed by something, especially new and extraordinary things which they afterwards tend to think and dream of. On the other hand, science is not the lens through which they experience life, instead they do realize that in the future they’ll use it because they’ll understand how it works: children could therefore be, unwillingly and unknowingly, the holders of the purest form of certain feelings such as wonder and amazement.

Adults, on the contrast, take on an ambivalent behaviour: they know children use more heavily their senses and emotions and dispose of a limited range of criteria when it comes to comprehension, but they fail in acknowledging the pros that such method brings with it. They can’t distance themselves from the reality they live in because, to them, childhood is nothing more than a recall of memories from a past time. Unable to put themselves into their past experiences, it becomes obvious that the ability to comprehend children is linked to the one needed to be able to understand history and consequently analyse the evolution of human thought, from the origins of mankind to the current age, eventually bringing the attention to the main topic of the text.

In conclusion, referring to Jeanne Hersch’s statement in “Studio sulla filosofia come stupore”, “there are still and always will be human beings capable of amazement”, and again, “amazement is essential to the condition of the man”. Wonder and amazement reside in the human mind, it’s up to each person to decide when and how to use them. Science and non-rational thinking are complementary aspects defining the human species, neither part can live without any amount of the other, otherwise the effect could be either a total loss of knowledge or rationality in the absence of science, or a total loss of emotions and the formation of a rationalistic society if emotions are suppressed. People should become able to learn how to deal with both these aspects if their goal is to conduct the happiest and most fulfilling type of life possible.