
Rediscovering Wonder in Education: Foundations, Approaching Methods, Feelings

Redescubrir el asombro en la educación: fundamentos, enfoques, sentimientos

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Abstract: This article explores the relationship between wonder and education in a pedagogical perspective involving human educability and ability of every person to fully develop his/her own being. The experience of wonder reflects the questions, problems and disorientations typical of contemporary life and requires the person to be able to rediscover a passion for critical thinking and for the sense of good. In this context, the article makes a distinction between cognitive wonder and wonder as a moral feeling, enabling us to acquire a unique knowledge of reality, of our own self and of people around us.

Keywords: wonder; education to wonder; education to critical thinking; moral education.

Resumen: En este artículo se examina la relación entre la educación y el asombro desde una perspectiva pedagógica que promueve la educabilidad humana y la capacidad de cada persona para lograr la plena realización de sí misma. El asombro refleja las preguntas, las dificultades y la desorientación características de la vida contemporánea y reclama que la persona sea capaz de redescubrir el gusto por el pensamiento crítico y la sensibilidad hacia el bien. En este artículo se estudia la diferencia entre el componente cognitivo de la admiración y el asombro como sentimiento moral, esencial para educar y mantener una relación personal con la realidad, con uno mismo y con otros.

Palabras clave: asombro; educación para el asombro; educación para el pensamiento crítico; educación moral.

INTRODUCTION

This article explores the relationship between wonder and education in a pedagogical context on human educability. It considers the potential of each person to fully express and develop his/her being when reality is approached in a stimulating and original way.

Educating to wonder cannot be reduced to a simple question of methods and projects: it implies a complete re-interpretation of the very concept of education, if we don't want it to lose its significance. What's more, wonder is behind all those feelings, thoughts and ways by which we approach and know reality, it is related to the difficulties, problems and uncertainties that constantly upset our everyday life. Being able to rediscover wonder is crucial, not only for the young who need to find their way in life, but for any person who is open to knowledge and has an educational role. Educators, in fact, are required to exercise the ability to wonder in order to be able to spot *educational possibilities* in every situation and every person. People who are capable of being surprised are attentive, open to the world and to others, in search of a meaning for their existence.

As we are taught by philosophers of all times, wonder can be experienced in different ways: through nature, people, the universe. In all cases, it promotes man's ability to make questions and to care about reality.

ANAESTHESIA, DISENCHANTMENT, INDIFFERENCE,
IN POSTMODERN CULTURE

A pedagogical hermeneutics of this experience must be accompanied by the study of some features typical of our time: fast-flowing information and ever-changing knowledge, the precariousness and uncertainty of existence, lack of trust in human relationships. As a consequence, people are seeking a more genuine life-style that allows them to fight apathy, routine, demotivation and a general sense of frustration.

Anthropologically, wonder may be associated with childhood. Growth and maturation start the dynamics of adult life, the understanding of reality through abstract concepts which, though useful for orientation in everyday life, make us forgetful of the child we were and incapable of perceiving *the mystery and beauty of existence* (Musaio, 2007). In addition, it becomes increasingly difficult to get in tune with the deepest and most valuable part of our inner self and with our emotional world. This is partly due to the influence of the time we are living in, a sort of "*aesthetic age*". The name doesn't necessarily imply a strict relationship with art and works of art, but it celebrates *aístesis*, the aesthetic feeling, as the only criteria for

knowledge and practice. Because of this aesthetic inclination, a person is no longer able to experience his/her feelings in a personal and direct way and is forced to follow the pattern of the *déjà vu*: “objects, people, events are perceived as predictable, and we only take a superficial interest in them, since they are emotionally and spiritually pre-determined” (Perniola, 2002, p. 4).

The effects of an era in which the aesthetic component of feelings prevails, clearly marks the difference between present and past generations. As noted by Perniola, in the past life appeared as something to feel and experience, a source of joy or pain, of emotional and spiritual participation. People cultivated expectations, ideals, a sense of surprise towards life, which sometimes left them disappointed. Today, on the contrary, people live in an era dominated by “sad passions” (Benasayag and Schmit, 2004), as if they were a mirror image of something they don’t belong to, something stranger to their own inner self. By acting as mirrors of pre-established experiences, we become incapable of genuine feelings. These are only some of the features of today’s men and women, who are open to all sorts of inputs, and yet appear as if anesthetized:

“He is the man (...) for whom all emotions are alike, in whom the divorce between hearing and speaking, and between emotion and feeling is finally completed. (...) He is therefore a mixture of disenchantment and asceticism: everything has been heard, seen, known before, in a word, everything has already happened” (Perniola, 2002, p. 27).

The prototype of this man is “*The man without qualities*”, introduced by Robert Musil to describe a subject who tends to adhere only to the perceived reality. Those who get along as “strangers to themselves”, inevitably tend to lose their sense of individuality and identity.

Other common attitudes that contribute to make our time an age of “*disenchantment*” are, for example: easy dependency, habit, indifference (Fabris, 2004), lack of interest in learning (Desbouts, 2006; Painchaud, 1972), carelessness towards the others (D’Andrea and Pulcini, 2001), as well as the stereotype of the already known, which consists in taking other people for granted, and the assumption that the other is a stranger, to keep at a distance.

The influence exerted by these existential changes has fostered ambivalent attitudes in the younger generations: excessive openness to reality in the form of superficial attraction, evidence of a culture of the *déjà vu*, narcissism as forms of self-defence, the tendency to follow usual patterns of behaviour rather than experiencing new and personal approaches. As a whole, these features may lead to a

“sleepwalker’s existence”, made of mental and spiritual apathy, instead of human relationships based on involvement, curiosity, respect and sense of brotherhood.

What are the instruments to start facing reality with renewed spirit and genuine interest? How to recover our capacity of being surprised?

WONDER AT THE ORIGIN OF PHILOSOPHY

The desire of knowledge

Getting deeper in our research, we would like to remind you of the importance of wonder in philosophical speculation. The surprise that man experiences for the very fact of existing is at the origin of various human creations, such as myths, philosophy, religions. The capacity of establishing relations between our inner self and the reality around us carries big consequences, and almost always produces a set of reactions: surprise, curiosity, dismay and, sometimes, anxiety. It is neither obvious nor granted for mankind to know to exist in a particular place at a particular time. Indeed, that explains why man has always been hunted by questions. Overtime, these primary questions have given way to wonder which, in turn, has laid the foundations of philosophy by gradually freeing the *logos* from the fantastic implications of the myth. The myth supplies the logos with new inputs: “In Plato (...) the myth acquires a new significance: it isn’t so much related to *fantasy* as, rather, to the concept of *faith*” (Reale, 1984, p. 18). It is indeed the power of faith, rising from the myth, that Plato entrusts with the task of guiding the human soul to transcendental levels. This theory may provide a useful pedagogical approach by establishing an analogy between *childhood of the human kind* and *childhood of the person*. See, on this regard, J. Hersch’s analogy between the attitude of the adult who questions himself about his own existence and that of the child who starts making questions:

“Each one of us, in fact, has a philosophical experience: every time we need to make a real decision we question ourselves, unbeknown to us, in a philosophical way. Children around five years of age ask questions in a philosophical way, and so do young adults fifteen or sixteen years old” (Hersch, 1981, p. 2).

According to Hersch’s point of view, the problems concerning human condition today suggest that we go back precisely to the wonder from which philosophy was born, to the basic questions that people ask when they try to avoid habits and to go beyond the *déjà vu*, in order to reach higher levels of meaning. Wonder, understood as the philosophical and naive gaze at reality, can be described as follows:

a) it is a fundamental component of human nature, that leads us to ask essential questions about existence; b) it is responsible for creativity and imagination, and therefore for man's ability to develop creative processes; c) it is typical of children, but can be developed also by adults who try to avoid attitudes of cognitive presumption and narrow-mindedness. At the origins of philosophy and of all great philosophical questions, the concept of wonder is already present in Plato and Aristotle. In the *Theaetetus*, through Socrates, Plato says:

“It is part of being a philosopher to be filled with wonder, that's where philosophy comes from, and he who said that Iris was generated by Thaumás was not mistaken, I believe, in genealogy” (*Theaetetus* 155d).

Iris, the messenger of gods among men, is here identified with philosophy, the daughter of Thaumás, a Greek name from *thaumazein*, “to wonder”. In Plato, wonder has a key role in the development of knowledge which, in an early stage, he compares with the sense of sight (Plato, *Cratylus*, 439b–440d) because, in a still imperfect way, it allows what is inside and what is outside of us to meet:

“the pure fire of the view (that), by associating alike with alike and by joining them together to form one homogeneous body in the direction of the eyes, at the exact point where what comes out from within meets what flows into from the outside” (*Timaeus*, 45b-c).

As a consequence, our perception of the outer reality becomes not so much a matter of “seeing” as of “watching”: by learning to watch we can learn to know (Petrosino, 1997, p. 15). In this perspective, the theme of wonder is the subject of a “*theory of vision*” that marks the passage from *seeing* to watching. Also Aristotle at the beginning of the *Metaphysics* says that “*men began to philosophize because of wonder*” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982b 12-13). Both philosophers agree, therefore, to identify wonder as “the beginning” of knowledge and philosophy as “love” of knowledge. Aristotle provides us with a detailed explanation:

“The man who is uncertain and wonders (*I aporôn of kai thaumazôn*) thinks he is ignorant, so even those with a penchant for myth (*I philomuthos*) are, in a certain way, philosophers, since myth is made of wonderful images: and then, if it is true that men began to philosophize in order to escape ignorance, it is equally true that they were pursuing science (*to epistasthai*) to the sole purpose of knowing, and not for any practical need” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982b 17-21).

Wonder, therefore, arises from the awareness that men have of their ignorance and from their desire to learn and be able to know reality. As Aristotle remarks, however, wonder comes after the satisfaction of men's primary and secondary needs:

“Following the course of events, only after men had at their disposal, not only the means of survival and subsistence, but also those apt to ensure them wealth and prosperity, they began to indulge in such investigation. At this point, in fact, they were able to investigate without being distracted by other needs whatsoever. Therefore, just as we call “free” a man who lives for himself and not for others, we consider philosophy as the only free science, since it exists for its own sake” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982b 22-28).

As a theoretical attitude independent of needs and desires, wonder feeds on pure desire of learning about the most basic questions of human's life: what is the origin of the universe?, what is the human being?, who are the gods?, what is man?, on what arguments do we base our opinions?, what is happiness?, what is the fate of man after death? (Berti, 2007).

The rediscovery of the “original”

Together with wonder, understood as a desire to know, philosophers refer to the original component with which man comes into contact as to “the dawn of knowledge”, which Aristotle relates to our ignorance and which would act as an input for research. The acknowledgment of a starting point for our questioning suggests, according to Petrosino, a possible definition of wonder as “witness of the beginning of the world” (1997, p. 25).

Wonder springs into our lives as a source from which we start to explore ourselves. On the subject, the theologian von Balthasar explains that, during the whole process through which our being is formed, we tend to bend “backwards to this original wonder” (2006, p. 24). Since we perceive the intrinsic limits of our being, we deal with them by trying to catch throughout our life that sense of “sweet attraction (...), of wonderful something that makes overly happy: the seal of where we belong, the kiss of the origin” (2006, p. 18). The words of von Balthasar specifically address to young people, in order to help them to recover their ability to meditate without being distracted by the “noise of the world”, to educate them to the ability of questioning, to make them understand that, beyond the roar that marks our way of living, a higher search is being carried out about the force which is behind

the creation of man and the universe. It follows the necessity to recover the *ontological dimension of education*, through a series of approaches aimed at opening the mind to explore reality in all its forms, including mystery and the idea of a transcendent Being.

So both philosophy and theology deal with the theme of wonder in relation to the questions that man asks about existence. If on one hand it represents a sort of awakening of the awareness of the origin, on the other it testifies that our perceptions of reality can go beyond a purely rational explanation. Man is an inside always projected towards the outside, carrying within himself an aspiration to go beyond his limits. Endless anxiety accompanies him because he is conscious of his frailty, and this explains his tension towards the transcendent. “Our surprise –says Chretien– is for us a revelation of the “abundance” that surrounds us” (2010, p. 50), which we could not have achieved alone and which reveals our limited selves, stretching between our desires and our capacity to satisfy them:

“Man exists from the origin in the form of possibility (...). But this possibility is somehow diminished. The possibility of becoming a man is limited from the inside, as it is threatened by his spiritual life, by the possibility of getting away from the Being to which the soul belongs and towards which it is, by its own desire, always attracted” (Chretien, 2010, pp. 78-79).

By standing in awe in front of reality, we experience a continuous attraction towards transcendence. When we wonder we do not stop at mere surprise, but we start a chain-reaction of questions and answers, with important repercussions on the educational level, as long as we encourage independent and innovative responses.

If what surprises us in wonder and calls our attention is the truth and the ultimate essence of something, it is precisely this essence of things, of reality, of people around us, that can rouse us from the dullness of our daily life, and prompt a quest on our way of being. In fact, it is an experience that turns seeing into watching, into an exploration of our inner self. Although this experience may be difficult to describe, we can try to explain wonder as “the situation where seeing must turn into watching, involving the subject and forcing him to keep his self at bay” (Petrosino, p. 88). Wonder starts a process of introspection which can sometimes be very arduous, especially in the critical moments of our existence. On this regard, I would like to quote the intense words of S. Augustine where he explains that wonder can be perceived as a strong experience, aimed at reminding us of our inner search:

“And yet I myself do not understand all that I am. My mind must be too narrow to contain itself! And where is then what it doesn’t contain? It must be inside my mind, not out of it. So how can’t it be contained? A great surprise arises from this thought, and I’m amazed” (St. Augustin, *Confesions*, X, 8-15).

EDUCATIONAL PROPOSALS

Wonder in childhood

A pleasant sensation of surprise aroused by something new or unexpected, a synonym of marvel before something moving or beautiful, wonder is first perceived as a sense of surprise, not necessarily before something unusual or extraordinary, but certainly before something that affects us deeply, causing a strong impact on our lives. With practice, even common events from the daily life or things we are accustomed to, may cause surprise:

“Wonder is a unique experience, not of the exceptional, but of the common things, in the sense that the object of our wonder is not the external appearance, but the very essence, the true nature of things (...) in their own way of being” (Petrosino, pp. 74-75).

The very moment we start to explore the world we become capable of surprise. Infancy, the first step of man’s formation, is populated with moments and situations full of wonder: think, for example, to a child’s dreamy smile as he observes the world, or to his endless asking *why?*, full of marvel and expectations. Both attitudes suggest that wonder is a complex feeling. Starting as a primary and sudden emotion, it turns into a strong feeling that challenges the child’s ability to face new experiences and to gradually gain self-awareness. In other words, it is related to the experience we have of ourselves as *existing-speaking-feeling-thinking units*, as unique sources of interiority. On this regard, Romano Guardini (1997) refers to the individual as to a “junction point” of the complex of feelings and thoughts that distinguish each one of us.

The curiosity of childhood is a source of questions which, if properly answered, help to build self-confidence and to trust other people as something good to know and interact with. Curiosity acts as an impulse to an explorative attitude, but it needs to be fed and directed. Wonder then intervenes by providing curiosity with a semantic mode for the different areas of daily life: learning, introspection, scientific, technological, and artistic activities (Musaio, 2007). Thanks to this semantic mode we can combine the data coming from experience with a deeper understanding of

our thoughts and actions. Wonder supplies a broader perspective that enhances people's ability to think and to cope.

Taking into account "the reflective potential" of children, which emerges precisely from their ability to wonder, some scientists –such as Lipman and his colleagues at the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC)– have developed educational programs to use wonder as a cognitive method and to start a philosophical reflection since childhood. These studies have shown that wonder precedes the cognitive demand and manifests itself as "the shell of a psychological problem" (Lipman and Sharp, 2000, p. 125). The way children question about things, undoubtedly show the features typical of their age. According to Lipman's studies, in fact, the "why?" of children over three years of age reveals, at the same time, the intuition that events must be interrelated and the attempt to express this intuition by the use of the language. Then, around six, seven years of age, the relations between facts and mental contents drawn from experience get more organized through the introduction of the *how?*, which highlights the peculiar curiosity of the child.

Through an evolution made of continuous questions, answers and explanations, knowledge reaches a degree of further complexity around ten-eleven years of age, with the development of intuitive and symbolic thinking. At this stage, in fact, the boy becomes able to perform mental operations and to form pictures in his mind without relying on sensory perceptions. The progress of thought, with the development of imagination, opens to a wide range of cognitive operations focused, not only on the real, but also on the possible, and introduces critical thinking, essential for the achievement of an increasingly personal knowledge.

"Cognitive wonder" and "critical thinking"

From a pedagogical point of view, this theme is particularly relevant in the arduous attempt to conciliate educating with thinking. Since the eighties, teaching to think has gradually become more of a synonym of education to critical thinking. Recently, in the wake of Dewey's studies on the importance of thought in education, Lipman has laid the foundations for "a revision of the educational practice" consisting in replacing the "traditional approach" with a "reflective approach". The first, based on the transmission of knowledge, the distinction between disciplines, the role of the teacher in the educational process, favours the acquisition of knowledge in the belief that an educated mind is a mind well provided with information. The latter, instead, relies on the development of understanding and judgment, and identifies as fundamental component of the educational process not the simple ac-

quisition of data, but “the internal relations and the mutual understanding of the topics investigated” (Lipman, 2005, p. 29).

The reflective approach can be seen as a “combination of critical thinking, creative thinking and caring thinking” (p. 283). The *critical thinking* follows the principles of rationality (reasoning, argumentation, deduction, induction, shape, structure and composition of what is known). The *creative thinking* highlights the surprise factor: “If critical thinking tends to dismiss this factor as a shocking event that is bound to happen, creative thinking tends to dignify surprise, considering it as the first of a series of similar events occurring in rapid succession” (p. 299). Finally, the *caring thinking*, refers to our dedication to what we appreciate and recognize as worthy. “The caring thinking has a double meaning: on one hand, it means being concerned about the object of our thoughts; on the other, it means watching our own way of thinking” (p. 284). Watching one’s own thoughts is essential for students because it stimulates their assessment of things and situations that matter to them, encouraging them to reflect on the context in which they act and to become aware of the implicit or explicit values they assign to their judgments. By promoting the practice of all three forms of thought, educators encourage students to go further in their research, to increase their capacity of judgment and to aim at what Lipman calls *education to reasonableness*, understood as a combination of reasoning and judgment, where one implies the other, and together help to achieve a realistic view of education in order to form subjects more and more “reasonable” (p. 32).

Lipman’s research on reflective thinking reminds us of the concept of wonder. As a cognitive state, in fact, wonder refers to the act of enquiring, generating questions to which we may or may not find answers; and although wonder in students always produces “authentic search” there is, in addition to a cognitive aspect, a more profound and existential one:

“There is wonder that becomes dismay not for how the world works, but before the world itself, its existence and its possibilities. It is this intellectual mode that Aristotle alludes to when he speaks of wonder as the starting point of philosophy” (Lipman and Sharp, 2000, p. 125).

From a pedagogical point of view, the emphasis on the difference between *cognitive wonder* and *existential wonder* does not limit the relation between thinking and learning to the activation of a series of cognitive processes, but it explores this relation in connection with the formation of the individual. Throughout a person’s evolution, existential questions become more and more detailed, and children are no ex-

ception, with their ability to wonder¹. There are, of course, different educational approaches to help children practice their wonder ability: a) developing an attitude of care towards reality (through observation, contact with the outside world, with nature); b) teaching to know their needs, feelings and capacities in order to evaluate the effects that experiences have on their inner self; c) training them to respect themselves and the others, in order to be able to look at people and things not as “disposable”, but as someone or something to appreciate and be grateful for. Whatever the model adopted, however, it must generate questions within us and consequently direct our actions.

Wonder as “existential” thinking

Not many authors have got themselves involved with the existential implications of wonder: among them, I would like to point out Jean Guitton who, despite the fact that he was no pedagogist, dealt with the relation between education and wonder in his treatise on thought and the “art of thinking” written in 1946. This work and, in particular, the passages concerning the practicability of the so-called “virtue of wonder”, has proved a source of inspiration for various generations of educators (Guitton, 1954, p. 13). According to Guitton, the task of educators is very similar to the task of philosophers because, although teachers must help students to realize themselves as human beings and as individuals, in order to achieve their goal they need to approach the “*mystery of thought*” like philosophers, in constant dialogue with philosophy. And since to develop the art of good thinking you must consider thought in its potential aspect, the first step to take is getting in touch with the original wonder, similar to the one experienced by the artist and the child in front of reality. The effect of such revelation on man’s inner self may take different forms: a “shiver of surprise in front of the essence of the being” (Guitton, 1954, p. 15); the impression of not understanding what the world finds easy to understand; admiration for the reality that surrounds us by the very fact of realizing it surrounds us, but also admiration that actively stimulates questions, although: “Surprise is no thought, it prepares to thought” (Guitton, 1954, p. 37).

1 On this regard Lipman and Sharp argue: “Children, source of questions, are no strangers to wonder. Indeed, in their questioning, that may appear trivial or obvious to adults, they are often capable of a sensitivity to the wonderful quite close to philosophy. The wonderful, in fact, needn’t be something exotic or fantastic, but it’s all that can charm and capture one’s eye. A stone, the sky, the movement of the sun, everything can find an explanation of its why and how but real wonder arises from the very existence, its complexity, its infinite possibilities of reasonable and unreasonable” (p. 125).

Starting from the recognition of wonder, we can train ourselves to think according to some fundamental rules: *the election*, that is the choice of a topic on which to focus our attention pushed by an “intellectual emotion”, because every thought is prompted by an underlying emotion; *the distinction* between the single pieces of information that we collect, in order to reduce them to a “*inner unity*”, to express through a “inner speech”, peculiar of each person.

Although there are various approaches to thought, we become really capable of thinking when we catch the essence of our being and discover our true self. Various are the methods that can help us thinking, but they must all tend to a single, superior goal. In Guitton’s words:

“The irony of Socrates, Plato’s dialectic, the logic of Aristotle, Saint Augustine’s elevation, the method of Descartes, Kant’s system, the triad of Hegel or Comte, Bergson’s metaphor, contains them all and hides many more. (...). However, different are the approaches, their use must be directed and regulated by a superior sense” (Guitton, 1954, p. 168).

The progressive internal flow of thought originally started by wonder should subsequently develop into introspective wonder before the individual’s inner self, a process that extends throughout the time of his educability (Musaio, 2010). Guitton helps us to track it down by defining it as a sort of “quiet amazement” fuelled, at the same time, by inextinguishable love and by a sense of surprise that only finds relief in front of the being (1954, p. 169).

EDUCATING TO THE FEELING OF WONDER

The *marvelled look* that the educator must find in himself first, and then pass on to his pupils, can be traced in the form of narration in a variety of writings, such as *The Little Prince* by Saint-Exupery which, although not a model of sublime literary and poetic expression, earns the merit, in my opinion, of providing educators with a sort of “pedagogic handbook”. In the novel, seeing things “as for the first time”, is typical of children who, while exploring the world of adults, manage to expose their limits and narrow-mindedness, causing them to regain the pleasure of discovery, the genuine joy and the magic of childhood, as opposed to habit which tends to make everything opaque and expressionless. On the planet of the *Little Prince* the daily succession of 43 sunsets does not induce in the child indifference or habit, on the contrary, he still manages to be surprised, because he is able to look at things from the inside: “one sees *clearly only with the heart. The essential is invisible to the eye*”, is

the message being delivered into the hands of the reader. Wonder is a look that transforms *seeing* into *looking inside ourselves* and therefore involves the way we feel, think, and act, educating us to a choral feeling, both aesthetically and morally organized. That explains why the feeling of wonder is being studied with great interest by aesthetic and ethic philosophy. From this combination of surprise and contemplation comes the aesthetic pleasure (Pareyson, 1954, pp. 41-45) which causes, not only excitement before novelties, but also a state of quiet *contemplation* in which, as L. Pareyson says, “attention, suddenly awakened, stops and stays, concentrating on its object” (Pareyson, 1954, p. 42). When we marvel before something, we feel pleasure both for the surprise and interest it arouses in us, and for the look that stays and focuses on that something. Hence we can deduce that wonder encloses all practicable routes towards research and interpretation, that we may learn and develop: as a “motion of surprise”, it stimulates understanding and exploration and as knowledge “in progress”, although still not perfect, it foretells the outcomes of research. Pareyson says: “Wonder produces a tension towards research, anticipating the final success and the fulfilment that goes with it” (1954, p. 43).

According to C. Xodo, “Wonder is also deeply connected to our moral component, (...) in its dealing with the new, the marvel, the unexpected. In terms of knowledge, wonder can be defined as a deep longing for curiosity that predisposes to learning” (2010, p. 376). The author believes that the moral component of wonder is traceable in Kant, who, however, makes a distinction between “*wonder*” and “*marvel*,” so far regarded as synonyms. Recalling Kant’s writings, in fact, marvel is a feeling of novelty easier to grasp in terms of cognitive curiosity, while wonder is “*the affection, produced by novelty, which goes beyond expectation*” (1996a, p. 100). In other words, wonder escapes the limits of our mental functioning opening the human soul to *something that goes beyond the sensible representations*” (p. 188).

To understand the meaning of Kant’s reflections, we must remember that Kant puts them in the *Critique of judgment* where, referring to our perception of the beautiful, the sublime and the good, he tries to explain how moral good can promote a sense of esteem, of enthusiasm in the human soul, capable of “elevating the soul, by means of moral principles, above the obstacles of sensibility” (p. 100). When “the force supplied by the ideas gives the soul an impulse far more powerful and lasting than the one produced by the sensible representations” (p. 100), the human soul reaches a spiritual state that Kant calls “*noble*”, that is the sort of *astonishment* that man experiences when he realizes his being referred to an “*ultimate principle*” that lays beyond sensible representations. In this case wonder “becomes admiration in front of the intellectual discovery of our moral destination: admiration and respect for the moral law that action can no longer ignore” (Xodo, 2010, p. 377).

The pedagogical study of wonder goes far beyond education and involves thinking about the relation between reason and feeling, between subjective and universal good, in view of a person's *moral education*. The implications of wonder are all the more relevant today, in front of ethical behaviours marked by apathy, indifference and lack of confidence.

The terms *wonder* and *astonishment* acquire still more significance through Kant's interpretation of *the beautiful* and *the sublime*. If good is what attracts, arousing cheerfulness and serenity, the *sublime* is what moves, producing admiration and wonder. What matters, is "not so much what the intellect understands, –Kant notes– as what the soul feels" (1996a, p. 102). In his work *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, Kant explores man's intimate behaviours, his moods, his delights, in search of a moral sentiment, referred to as the "rightful inclination towards the beautiful and the noble", which belongs to every man and that should be strengthened and developed since early childhood:

"and above all we hope that the secret of education, not yet revealed, be saved from the old madness, so as to strengthen, since an early age, in the heart of all young citizens of the world, the moral feeling (of which he feels the intimate presence) in the form of an active effort, so that their subtle intelligence may not be lost on the trifling pleasure of giving superficial judgments on what is happening around us" (1996b, p. 138).

The *moral dimension of wonder* further highlights its educational role: when we open ourselves to wonder we fight the passive attitude by which we tend to reflect reality as if through a mirror, limiting ourselves to repeating what we see or hear. What makes the difference in the things that attract our attention by arising wonder, is the peculiarity of the approach: it doesn't consist in a mere registration of the images imprinted in our view, nor in the simple observation and recording of something happening outside us.

What we experience starts a process within ourselves which, in turn, generates something else and casts a provocation. As the philosopher Luigi Stefanini underlines, wonder related to the experience of the *beautiful* "is a shock, a disruption of an order that must be re-established from the inside" (1954, p. 70). In this sense it is a "*provocation*" that urges the subject to react positively. For this reason education cannot be reduced to a routine, nor can it be allowed to standardize the original traits of the personalities that are taking shape before us, asking to be recognized and respected. Standardizing our relationships with students for lack of time and proper locations, for inability to risk that educational paths may differ from those

we had foreseen, for the pretention that we can't do otherwise, impoverishes the very concept of education, which feeds mainly on dissimilarity, originality, divergency. On this regard Stefanini says:

“the closer education comes to achieving its ideal, the more effectively it replaces “inductive knowledge” with “deductive knowledge”, as a personal acquisition by the student. (...). To expand the breath of our soul we must accept to be questioned by: the voice of things, the voice of man, the voice of God” (1954, pp. 68-69).

Today, the real priority of any pedagogic discussion seems to be a re-discovery of the origins as a condition to revive the educational mission. I believe that the re-discovery of wonder may represent a good start for an educational program apt to be developed together with the learning subjects. Although education to wonder is built on our knowledge of the reality and of the things that surround us, it will gradually evolve into a process where the person, by relating with other people, will finally grasp the moral dimension of wonder, a higher, spiritual wonder open to a transcendent “other than myself”. In the *unity* of the *educational act* every teacher must look, listen and plan for and with the person, and watch things, people and events, from a higher point of view, looking beyond the here and the now. It is true that to develop educational programs to wonder, educators have to deal with an external contest formed by the parties involved, the operating conditions, the projects and actions to be implemented, the required educational skills. The practice of active education however, cannot be only functional: it should aim at developing the principles of education, in accordance with the person's originality, by making use of instruments and languages belonging to one's inner self. Educating to wonder is a route towards the re-discovery of the individual dimension of education, starting from within the person in an effort to capture the *beautiful*, the *good*, and the *true* that everybody carries inside, that the educator has the responsibility to recognize and promote.

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