

## **Editors' Introduction**

*That swing of the pendulum, with which our time was represented, (Heller 1990), and which either moves forwards denying "what has been" or nostalgically back to the past and therefore eager to recover what has been broken, seems to perpetuate itself in the most sensitive beings. When exhausted by the endless and incessant struggle between what is fleeting and what remains, they take refuge in the kingdom of "high culture" (Heller 1999) in order to find a stable home in which to shelter themselves from the uncertainty of these continuous oscillations (Costanzo 2007). They feel sheltered because they sense the familiarity and affinity between this kingdom and their soul; beyond the fracture and dissonance of post-modernity, they feel they are part of a line of continuity such as that between the new and past generations. In a sense, this kingdom is what remains and endures, either as an epitaph or as a warning; as an epitaph in taking leave of a bygone time, it represents the desires and moments that now seem distant; as a warning, in investigating the line between what is and what should be, it expresses dissent towards what surrounds us, to yearn for the "best" that is yet to come. And this yearning strikes and resounds loudly when the voice of the writer- of the charismatic philosopher, admonishes and enchants. For this reason, when this voice disappears, there is a great silence. It is Maurice Blanchot who solemnly says: "this is what is said when a writer dies: a voice has fallen silent, a way of thinking has disappeared. What a silence then if no one else spoke in that exalted way that is the language of texts that come accompanied by the rumour of their reputa-*

tion. Think about it" (Blanchot 1969: 219). A year after the sudden death of Ágnes Heller, one warm carefree summer day on her beloved lake Balaton, it is still impossible to skim through the pages of her books- works that she left us and that accompany us today as they did yesterday, without the desire to break that deafening silence. How then can we not think of her open and unadorned smile, of her witty and quick-to-respond mind, of her cheerful voice and of the habit of repeating aloud and at every step what was done the night or the year before, all of which accompanies what lingers in our memories with impressions of the present. It was a way to memorize and share memories with those around her; a way to express her attention and care aloud to those who showed the same respect in listening and conversing. In one of her interviews she had said: if every thought must enter the sphere of existence and history in order not to remain sterile and abstract, then as Nietzsche writes, every philosophy is basically an "autobiography", in that a "philosopher writes books representing autobiographical experiences written from various points of view" (Heller 2012: 11). Her books are points of view, impressions, never epitaphs - even when she steps back from Marxism and the leftist militants, even before the fall of the Berlin wall; they are bridges she extends to the world, bridges to cross - debating and reasoning with her beloved philosophers, such as Kierkegaard, Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger - positioning her feet on the ground, to shed light on what surrounds us and leave a visible sign of her footsteps. Her belief is that to philosophize means to act with awareness and responsibility in the world, to orientate oneself and find a compass with which to understand the events and the complex world of "human affairs". Therefore, her works were written, out of a desire to be present and not remain fearful and indifferent.

*Her books are lucid representations-expressions of that civic courage which is «capable of saying no to the power of oppression in whatever way it appears, in visible authoritarian or in invisible democratic forms» (Mario Tronti); they are reflections for the pleasure of being part of a larger community, a community of thought and affections with a cosmopolitan aspiration. She herself had been for a long time, not only Hungarian, not only Australian, not only American, but citizen of the world. It is from this supranational home, that she captures the spark in European and American youth which she uses to lecture and debate; the spark which lifts the gaze from the contingent towards that realm which each of us should aspire and find access to as if to enter a new and even more crowded Platonic symposium (Francesca Brezzi).*

*The intellectual path of Ágnes Heller is truly complex to outline in a nutshell, not only because it is intertwined with the shattering experiences of the European twentieth century - from the Shoah to the Gulag, from the spring of '56 to the fall of the Berlin wall up to Orban's politics (which she publicly attacked and for which she was again banned, as she had been in the sixties) - but also for the many interests that crossed her thinking: from ethics, to the philosophy of history, to aesthetics, to psychoanalysis ...*

*These were the themes and interests she used as a springboard to relaunch and revive debate. I still remember the week in Turin, the one in which she "discovered", through the long discussion with many young students who surrounded her curiously, that her thought had taken Hegelian-shape in a "system"- pursuing the trajectory of questions and answers which had accompanied her in the various moments of her entire existence: apprenticeship, dialogue, construction and intervention, wandering.*

*During this week as well as at the events organized by Laura Boella in Milan, and Paola Ricci Sindoni and Francesca Brezzi in*

*Rome, it was striking to see her tireless energy for the curiosity of the students, her inexhaustible passion for walking in the city, and for places of art. She is a philosopher who has always sought the "truth" or rather the rational understanding of issues and events in a shared vision of interpretations and explanations and in which each guest or participant was made to feel like a guest- welcomed because they were «aware of the right and the duty to think autonomously» (Laura Tundo), a conviction she had sensed to be the most precious legacy of Kant and of the teachings of her father, Pal Heller.*

*For that matter, Vittoria Franco's interview book, A life for autonomy and freedom, reveals that the tension towards the autonomy of judgment which she speaks of in her texts is part of the character that always distinguished her as a child; and it is what she recognizes her continuity with in two central figures of her existence: her grandmother, Sofie Heller, «one of the first women to have access to education in the late nineteenth century Vienna» (Heller 2019) who she dedicates some letters to in the third volume of An Ethics of Personality; and her father Pál Heller, who she continues to dialogue with throughout her entire life, and whose exemplary expression "a sinking ship mustn't be abandoned" she owes her ethics of personality to (Paola Ricci Sindoni). Hers is an ethics which makes an existential choice for goodness in which she finds the resources not only to defeat evil, but also the banality of existence - understood as what prevents the leap into exception and singularity; and the lack of attraction to the good that the other represents (Vittoria Franco and Michele Sità). After all, Agi herself found, in the bonds created with her community of friends and colleagues - of affections and affinities - (on the model of the amcha which Emil Fackenheim speaks of), the strength to survive and to be reborn in every place and temporal abode (See Heller 2019). She found the reasons for the deep sense of responsibility towards the historical context and the gratitude for the*

*ties of friendships which accompanied her from place to place, even when they ended. She had always felt reluctant and uncomfortable to speak of those Jewish ties, as did her great friend Jack Derrida (Derrida 2005).*

*Only in these last few years did she gain the courage to treat this theme, albeit with dignified respect for those who are no longer with us, which prevented her from falling into the cliché of the victim and survivor. When grief begins to prevail, even thinking risks being less clear and prolific. It gives way to feelings of resentment towards what others have, and shame for what others represent. Such a feeling would risk self-closure in a sterile individualism unless there was the courage to face the other and detect the strength in his gaze to call oneself into question, and start over. In this sense, Heller's long journey was marked by curiosity but also by the choice "in the direction of what is right and good": a beauty understood as the search for a place to cling to for self-balance and resistance to the many dystopic narrations of the post-truth, and of the end of the great narrations; and a good as the necessity to know how to choose what does not harm the other. It is an existential choice towards a good which resists changes in history, and the end of the great ideologies. In the nostalgia of what has been lost, as in the imagined worlds of the utopias (Laura Tundo and Giovanna Costanzo), it finds a resource to avoid succumbing to the fatalism and suggestions of the liquid hyper-connective world.*

*This collection of essays takes shape following the chance day dedicated to the thought of Heller, The utopia of conversation, which had been planned and organized by the "Cenacolo Tommaso Moro" and the thinker herself, on October 17th, 2019 in Rome at Palazzo Altieri in cooperation with Antonio Casu, Francesca Brezzi, Paola Ricci Sindoni, Laura Boella, Giovanna Costanzo, Cristina Guarnieri, and Mario Tronti. Her unexpected death made the day vibrate with a so-*

*lemnity and inestimable value, which was also shared by the visibly moved public present at the event.*

*Vittoria Franco, Michele Sità, Laura Tundo, Andrea Vestrucci joined this last group by making the collection of essays, which come out on the occasion of the Hungarian thinker's first anniversary, even more precious and an occasion to show their affection and esteem, to glimpse the vitality of a way of thinking which continues to be current if it is able to intercept the voices of men and women and converse with different generations.*

*Thus, what emerged was the face of a radical thinker for the strength she had not to succumb to the sirens of the seductions and contradictions of our time (Mario Tronti). In the profound ties with Pal she also finds the reasons for living a life of righteousness at all costs and in all contexts in the name of «the duty not to give in to the status quo, well-aware that the world needs to change and be redeemed» (Paola Ricci Sindoni). By cultivating Kant and Kierkegaard, her thinking found the reasons for making an existential choice (like in Vittoria Franco and Michele Sità's essays); and in the «need for a concrete and rational utopia»- that aspiration to good and truth (Laura Tundo), which is able to drive the utopic imagination that saves the world from the nudity of its contingency (Costanzo).*

*Hers is a "chorus of voices which stages a utopia, an oasis of respect and spirit of opposition to the regime of mass media and political communication in which we find ourselves living" (Laura Boella). It is a "utopia of conversation" if each of us is invited to participate as a member of humanity, which is such as long as it is not reduced to "an empty slogan", and if as a member we feel welcomed because everyone is the same and different (Francesca Brezzi). Even though this humanity perceives the harshness of reality, it is able to leave "concrete impressions of shared experiences".*

*And thanks to these experiences which were and can be shared with other readers and scholars, it is impossible not to express an endless debt of gratitude and recognition, as Andrea Vestrucci does in the ideal letter he writes her, questioning how it is possible in the contemporary world, to defend the reasons for philosophizing. It is a conversation between many voices for one who was a virtuoso of thought, great in her humility, "because alien to the forms of display and vanity which often take hold of many pompous intellectuals" (Paola Ricci Sindoni); and unique in the friendship she knew how to cultivate with each and everyone.*

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Giovanna Costanzo  
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