

## Drugs Are the Negation of Human Rights – Why Distribution of Drugs Is Inhuman

*Jeanne Hersch\**

Maybe I will disappoint you, since I am not going to say what one should or should not do. I will only tell you one thing, only one. I think that in my life I have never made a speech about *one single* message. I will only give you *one* message, but it is not an easy one. I think that there is no mere technical, external, legal solution to the drug problem. We can formulate the debate in many different terms but what never changes is what the human being is and should be.

From an empirical point of view, I can not fight against a doctor who comes up with a solution I don't agree with. He will tell me: "I am a doctor. The young man has come to me and needs help. I can help him, I have methadone or anything else that will at least let him work or live longer. I cannot deny this to him, that's why I am giving it to him". How could I possibly dare to say in my ignorance: "You are not allowed to do this"? I think that many of our contemporaries are in a similar situation.

As a reply to something I cannot confute I should not simply remain silent or lie. That's why in this speech I wish to appeal to your conscience: "When we are dealing with human beings we cannot possibly solve an existential, vital problem with a technical or chemical solution. We have to ask ourselves: What is really at stake? What is the fate of this person as a human being, not as a donkey, as a cow or any other animal, but as a human being?"

We have to persist until a person says: "I won't take it, whatever the consequences. Being saved with a chemical substance goes against my human dignity, against my human nature. I am not a being that can be saved simply with a chemical substance. It would be possible if I were only a physical being, but I am not." Whenever a young person, his conscience, his freedom are at stake, one should not offer a solution that could lead to an inhuman situation.

\* Philosopher, Professor Emerita of the University of Geneva, Honorary Doctor from the Department of Theology, University of Basle, Award-Winner of the Foundation for Human Rights, Switzerland.



*Jeanne Hersch and Giovanni Fantacci (right)*

It is not surprising that the fight against drugs in our own and other countries is so weak. I think that the reason is not only the fact that many people draw profits from them but that the understanding of the human nature is weak in our country. There are vipers in our society, drugs is only one of them, and they are very clever. There are anonymous vipers that draw their strength out of our weakness, that can sense the essence of the human nature. What is it? The essence of the human nature is that human beings are free and can decide their own destiny. Maybe they will not take a decision but they *could*, and as a consequence they would have to bear the responsibility.

Having the possibility to decide, was one of the driving forces which led the international community to proclaim universal human rights, at least in words. Why did human beings have those special rights? Animals have the same things we have except the ability to decide for themselves. Human rights are considered by the contemporary man as the most important laws, or even as the basis of any law. Laws are applied in order to safeguard human rights. And we Swiss should realise it more than other peoples.

For this reason I believe that it is an intellectual perversion to state that being able to choose whether to take drugs or not belongs to the

human being. That's not true! Drugs deny human rights, since it is often stated that a drug addict doesn't receive the permission from a doctor, rather than, from his/her conscience. Since human beings can decide in a responsible way – and since they *can*, they *must* –, they have the duty to be thinking beings: it is something inescapable, that was determined on the day human beings were created.

Of course we could tell young people: "Go to the doctor. He will give you all that you need technically". But then they must be able to decide for themselves: "Do you want to take it or not? Will you let a chemical substance decide what becomes of you? Can you accept it? At 14, 15 you find it difficult to tolerate that your parents decide for you, then why would you accept that a chemical substance decides about your fate? Can you bend before drugs? Can you fundamentally accept to stop being a human being?" That is what is at stake. Under these circumstances, although I am not an expert, I would dare tell a doctor "It's not you who is going to decide; it is the free, responsible human being".

I am not speaking of the human being who is practically free, rather of the human being who practically knows that he can be free and who has not the right to throw away his/her own life. I think that this very intimate awareness should be trained from a very early age, in nursery schools. "You can choose. Do you want it like this or that? And the child will develop the ability to choose, to reject certain things, and he will become democratic. To my mind, being a democrat, is nothing less than this.

Those who can't understand that human beings are responsible to become free, however difficult this may be, are incapable of being good educators. If you understand this, you will also realise that this conviction is stronger than any other knowledge, any authority, any sophism. That is all I wanted to tell you today.

Before coming here, I read several statements by doctors, people who are traditionally believed to be right. I could not find any sign of this awareness. It seems that our society has forgotten that we first of all have to save the human being. What does it mean to save a *human being* rather than an animal? It not only means to keep him alive as any other being. If we succeed in disseminating this basic consideration, we will deprive the serpent of its strength.

I believe that it is high time we started to focus solely on the essence of the human nature.