

Nonviolent words. Introduction to a glossary for a Capitinian lexicon

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Abstract. *Aldo Capitini (1899-1968) is the most important philosopher for the nonviolence in Italy. In this article I will try to write a brief philosophical introduction about his complex thought, focusing on Capitini's peculiar use of language. By throwing the proposal of a Capitinian Lexicon, here I'll speak about three coordinates of Capitini's philosophy: nonviolence, persuasion, co-presence. In my opinion these coordinates give the idea of revolutionary scope of his thought: trying to clarify the meaning of these terms is essential for the understanding of its influence and to imagine future researches and nonviolent actions.*

Keywords: *nonviolence, persuasion, co-presence, Pietro Pinna.*

Who assures you that I have a nonviolent nature? It seems to me that I have a thousand violent instincts, and I often feel ready to fight back violently. However, I started from long time to work in order to curb the violence inside me [...] This means that nonviolence is a persuasion supposed to work inside of us, and that it's not instinctive. For this reason it's more a matter of personality (which gets formed as time goes on) than a habit you are born with [...] The problem, therefore, is not to be in one way or the other, but to choose to work for an inner persuasion to nonviolence¹.

Aldo Capitini's thought was an epiphany that brought me to my

present lifestyle. For me, it was not a simply study of an author, in which you analyze ideas or concepts, but a source of meaning for the personal existence – and its enhancement. So, I liked the possibility that the journal *Polis* gives to its readers more knowledge about Capitini's nonviolent perspective and influence outside the Italian academy. I want to thank my friend Gabriella Falcicchio for including me in this initiative. For a Revolutionary² like Capitini who went against the grain “in the Fascist and Post-Fascist era. Maybe it was too much for a single life. But surely beautiful”³ every borders isn't enough. Capitini's philosophy is complex and woven by his life and actions. So, it's

hard to write something about him without considering his peculiar use of language and words. For this reason, my purpose in these pages is to firstly introduce Capitini in the context of his life and works, saying something in general about his philosophy and then to outline a specific *Glossary* (such a list of words and expressions used from the elected Author, explaining or defining their problems and their unusual use with respect to the tradition and common sense) that will be the heart of a future *Capitinian Lexicon* (a large book containing an alphabetical arrangement of the words in his particular language and their definitions, with specific references to the entire corpus of texts and to development and clarification of the various terms over time). I think that this *Lexicon* could be a useful instrument for researches on Capitini, both for understanding specific concept and for comprehending his present-day importance; but above all to have a common starting point to use for confrontations with other authors and traditions.

Aldo Capitini (1899-1968) is the most important philosopher *for the nonviolence in Italy*⁴. He was born in modest circumstances in Perugia (bell-ringer's son of the Umbrian city) and went to a technical school, although his passion was literature. So, at the same time, he was committed to the study of Latin and Greek languages. Capitini's health was weak but he drove himself to study and won a scholarship to study

philosophy and literature in Pisa's University, precisely in the Graduate School called 'Normale': an excellent research center that has been under the leadership of the idealist philosopher and Fascist Minister of Education Giovanni Gentile after 1932. Capitini took up active politics when he observed the Concordat between the Roman Catholic Church and the State in 1929. He believed that the Church could have brought down the fascist regime by noncooperation, but disgracefully compromised. From then on he made a sharp distinction between religious institutions and a free religious faith exemplified by Jesus, St. Francis, Buddha *et cetera*. After a scandal in academia for his choice to become a vegetarian, Capitini also dismissed from his teaching post in University 'Normale' of Pisa because he would not join the Fascist Party⁵ – declaring this intention in front of Gentile - and returned to Perugia where he began to hold private lessons and writing. His first book (after numerous clandestine sheets drawn up together with his friend Claudio Baglietto and some work about Leopardi's conception of poetry), was published in 1937 with the Benedetto Croce's providential help: *Elements of a religious experience*. It seems to me clear up until from this first work that the starting point for understanding Capitini is his refusal to accept the *reality*, "so how it is". The big fish has necessarily to eat the small fish over time? No, he says. Capitini refuse to accept that sort of *reality*, so

strongly colored by violence and death. In his prospective, *reality* is not immutable, we can change it here and now; we can transform, or transmute, it. Hence, his lifelong, unflagging activity amid the hostility of some and the indifference of many in an effort to bring about this complete revolution using the nonviolent method⁶. Capitini “he had always clearly in mind that the ideal of nonviolence, in the realistic tradition of Italian political thought, was the absolute novelty of his work”, as writes Norberto Bobbio in his preface to the Italian reprint of *Elements of a religious experience*. Thanks to him “also in Italy a long way has made the conviction that nonviolence is no longer a visionary dream, an illusion of the weak-minded, a way to escape reality, something not to be taken too seriously by strong spirits, if not as an extravagance. Instead nonviolence is an ideal to be pursued without illusions, with tenacity, with seriousness, with the belief that the power of violence’s instruments is so strong that it requires a radical change in our reflections on the past and on our way to face the future”⁷.

However, Capitini remains a stateless person within the Italian culture, a philosopher but not idealist, a politician but independent from political parties, a free religious but declared heretical. So, his figure stands out like a monolith so bulky as to make difficult his placement. Almost a contrappasso⁸ for a thinker who has always talked about opened education and religion, reality and

power of everyone, choral values. For the same reason that Capitini touches existentialism, but he is not an existentialist, thus he takes on some of the Leopardi’s themes, but he is not a Leopardian (if not negatively): in fact Leopardi’s infinity is the sea in which “being shipwrecked is sweetness”, it’s a contemplative moment; instead Capitini’s infinity is experienced in the co-presence plan (of which we’ll talk about further on), it becomes a practical act, a moment of “religious praxis”. In other words, Capitini tells us that in doing (not simply contemplating) any horizon has already exceeded: the active and contemplative lives are no longer as two ways of life in conflict with each other. Bobbio sums up the philosophy of his friend in this formula: eschatology here and now.⁹ But perhaps it is not enough. Of course for Capitini transcending is not referring to transcendence, it is not waiting for liberation from outside or from above, but ongoing liberation ongoing through the infinite openness to all, dead and living, humans, other animals, plants and things. His notion of reality, as we have already mentioned, infers different levels of depth. Into impetus of his philosophical speech and his life experience, full of both tension and familiarity, even evil becomes a temporary category, not eternally needed: you must not vote or accept the lesser evil, but you can overcome it, he says. More than by following Marx¹⁰, in which the utopian project is vitiated in its formulation by the

use of the Hegelian dialectic, there is with philosophy of Capitini the concrete and always opened possibility to change the world and society *hic et nunc*. The high point of the value, by which is meant the unfolding of individual histories, is the authentic experience of the *Thou*.

After doing these partial considerations, it seems to me that we can still say that the thought of Aldo Capitini, in its originality, is a profound criticism of the West's cultural code. In fact, he calls into question what are the four key pillars that dominated the historical life of the West:

1. $A=A$, $B=B$ *et cetera*. The principle of an unique identity, in which every relation becomes a conflict.

2. Power (as a masculine idea). The means and the ends are usually measured by their efficiency¹¹, excluding the sharing as natural practice to arrive at important achievements.

3. Property. The Other is an object in the best case, or an enemy. In the relations with things and emotions is in force the *apparatus* of sovereignty.

4. Sacrifice. It is always considered as an exit from present contradictions a destructive moment as unique possibility able to achieve a greater good in the future. This concept was also called "Creative destruction".

The Italian philosopher of non-violence fight against the principle of a unique identity presenting the co-presence of the dead and living. The

ethical value does not lapse at the death of the body, because values' enhancement and nonviolent methodology it allows you to draw fully from energies of everyone. The *will to power* instead is joined to the power of mildness, which is able to hold contradictions without multiplying lacerations in the spiritual and social context. His lifestyle, for example, was never a barrier to the Other. He deconstructed property and sovereignty's *apparatus*, which always produces vertical lines of power, with the concept of "free addition" (*libera aggiunta*): what you give is what you never lose. Free addition is the ability to express oneself by feeding the value's experience. So, radical non-violence has to be rooted in inner being, but without forgetting that the horizon of meaning is beside oneself (*Thou's* act). Finally, the sacrifice is disjointed from Capitini in his conception of forgiveness, understanding it as the capacity to climb, in front of a wound, towards an internal point where I can feel "Mother of him". According to Capitini this is the authentic way of reconciling love and justice. If for the Greeks the human being is a political animal, or *Logos*, for the philosopher of kindness is the being who has the possibility to daily learn to be receptive to love's power. In particular:

The nonviolent has to be really active in order to know the reasons of violence, to discover the implicit violence disguised as legality and to fearlessly unmask it, both to supply the efficiency of violent methods

through the increasing of nonviolent method (similarly to small beasts which are more prolific and survive the species of bigger beasts), and to win the accusation and intimate danger of nonviolence being chosen as the easiest and less dangerous way. The nonviolent is always supposed to be on the front line of every action, of every right cause, in order to cure his possibly stagnant sentiment and to be forgiven by society for his singularity¹².

**The Capitini's Coordinates:
Nonviolence, Persuasion, Co-
presence**

We will now try to clarify what I consider to be the three most important terms in Capitini's philosophy due to their frequency and conceptualism. Investigating these terms, we will come across many others, whose meaning in the philosopher's use diverges from common sense. These terms should form the core of a Glossary dedicated to him (we will underscore these other words throughout the text). "Nonviolence – in the famous, non-limiting definition of Aldo Capitini – is an opening to existence, freedom and development of all beings, and for this it is supposed to take part to social and political fields, orienting them". During his speech on the "Techniques of Nonviolence" at the Perugia Seminar 1963, recordings of which have been recently found and made available thanks to the collabo-

ration between the Nonviolent Movement and Radical Radio, Capitini's voice uses the adjective "affectionate" to qualify the type of opening he is talking about, remarking once again the ability to transform the act of love into a practice addressed to "you-all" (Tu-tutti). Another distinction: instead of "non-violent", at most, we should call ourselves "friends of nonviolence" because we should remember that yesterday we were all violent, that there are no damned and elected. The ability of this friendship to open is endless, up to including everyone's sacredness, where the sacred should be understood as an eternal foundation that keeps growing and goes unseen because, the way we live, we are deeply and tragically limited. We must strive every day to see everyone and address each one of them as "Thou", this is the gift. The above mentioned definition makes it immediately clear that there is difference between a-violence, nobly practiced by an individual who rejects the use of violence to achieve his goals, and nonviolence, which needs the Other, whose starting point is its own deficiency, an "impassioned conscience" about its finitude – and opens chorally to live with a prophetic strain towards a different reality, freed from the limits of violence and death. Capitini does not want to build hierarchies of value between these two attitudes. If they are aware of the constituent difference there is between the two of them, they can communicate and

work together to build a better world. Nonetheless, nonviolence, in the strict and historically appropriate sense of the word, is a persuaded philosophy that puts forwards and defends the use of nonviolent means even in extreme situations (for instance, in the case of resistance against unbearable oppression), in cases when public opinion considers violence legitimate, even when traditional theories morally justify the use of war. These beings the characteristics of nonviolence, the imputation of being absolute, dogmatic, or metaphysical done to it, condemnation or weakness, is pointless. Nonviolence is this way – whether we like it or not, it is something else: this is the moral asymmetry between killing and not killing that characterizes Capitini's nonviolence. Without this asymmetry, the very concept of nonviolence would not have arisen. In fact, the author defines its two sources of meaning as “nonkilling” and “nonmendacity”. To talk about nonviolence without considering its foundation means to step outside nonviolence and deny its “openness”. In the political field, for instance, nonviolence is a religious supplement that sets in motion, hence throws into crisis, the common acceptance of democracy as having the aim of enhancing its value as much as possible: “omnicracy”, the power of all, which excludes no one. Only by virtue of this strain, nonviolence it is intimately and politically revolutionary. There is only one constant question those who undertake the

task of making nonviolence the center of their political action have to ask themselves: what have I done so far, faced with the certain prevision of what would be a horrendous succession of human tragedies, to make nonviolence enter the consideration of political thought, popular consciousness, and everyday costume, and what can I do at present to work in its service, open it to everyone, and organize it?

Nonviolence is one possible language, not the only one, but possible nonetheless: it is up to us to try to argue why it is the best one. Reality, as Capitini has taught us, is not a description of what it is, but the portion of the world we can change. Nonviolence is in opposition to reality, it does not even accept the fact of death (co-presence), its horizon contains the liberation, in whose bosom the big fish will no longer be forced to eat the small fish. Through his open definition of nonviolence, Capitini also invites us to abandon the false rhetoric of pluralism or relativism: some societies are better than others, those where violence is minimized, up to its total extinction. A passage is opening in front of us, an open horizon that requires us to put a spotlight on it, and the ability to share things with as many people as possible. We must not allow the fact that prospects are widening, embracing also other pressing issues and compromises, to make us forget the crux of the nonviolent “addition” (*aggiunta*): antimilitarism. Let us remember the words of Pietro Pinna, Capitini's closest collaborator:

I don't accept this orientation not to talk (as usually done by nonviolents themselves) about the request of immediate and complete unilateral disarmament, which is the only possible way according to us to avoid war. Proposing a mediation, on which society may rest satisfied until another tragedy comes, we do consider ourselves responsible for not letting the consciousness of an immediate and complete disarmament slip away and be forgotten. For this reason, those who believe in this idea have the firm obligation – anytime, anywhere and in any circumstance – to set people and situations this way, knowing that the world absolutely and desperately needs this pure novelty as vital path in our story full of death.¹³

Is it thinkable that by letting reality be as it is, unless we foster a fertile preparatory ground, nonviolence can establish itself suddenly and overcome the rooted violence which dominates social and economic loop of the globalized world? No, because nonviolence – as articulated by Capitini – is not support injustice; it escapes the misunderstanding of identification with the peace (and its activists with the pacifists); in fact, nonviolence is not only rejection of past and present violence, but desire to build a better world. Believe that nonviolence is equal to peace is not the only common mistake: it is often likened to the desire for order, to the passivity, to the desire for a “quiet sleep, weddings and children in abundance”. But you cannot be persuaded of Capitini's

nonviolence with nothing of broken in your things, no dings in your body, because it is “not the literal and symmetrical antithesis of war”, indeed:

Nonviolence itself is war; more properly, it is a fight, a continuous fight against circumstances, existing laws, your own and other's habit, against your inner being and subconscious, against your own dreams full of fear and desperate violence. Nonviolence means being prepared to face intimate chaos, social disorder, evil people's prevarication; it means preparing yourself to a tormented situation. Nonviolence has good reasons not to promise anything but the cross¹⁴.

Individual energy and strength to lead this ongoing struggle arrives, according to Capitini, by an inner persuasion. The Capitini's Persuasion is rooted in that of which Carlo Michelstaedter was prophet - because he announced it without finding the way to practice it – and it escapes explicitly to logic of *cogitare*, or rather, of mere *non entia coagitare*. Capitini looked for and found what was missing to the understanding, which is the specific quality of that Action, of that activity (*energheia*) by which it's only possible to make experience of the persuasion itself, in his dual role – that can only be *rettoricamente* (i.e. in artificial and violent way) split – being persuaded (*arghia*) and persuade (to benefit, give). Our present precarious condition – but in a sense is the human condition of all time – in which it is easier to feel fragments still meaningless, than to

build aims (an absolute to which offer our commitment), brings us to lead a dull existence, partial, obtuse, not free, indeed powerfully bound by the chains of that dish utilitarianism that is only able to produce what is artificial and alien from the love-unity of All. The Useful is only repetition, does continue the *reality*, the Value transmutes it. Here is in what sense, well caught by Capitini, the conflict is no longer on the human action plan, i.e. what of the free choices, but it is touches the ontological dimension. Even the individual himself is overthrown by an illusory stable subjectivity, becoming Contention, *Polemos*, which is the “come to loggerheads with own life”. What inevitably escapes: this is the Persuasion. One who philosophize assuming such removal is, before being a philosopher, a human being capable of entering into loving contact with their own kind and not. It is a prophet because he lives in the world and operates in it turning his gaze towards universal ethical criteria, not intended them as an abstract set of principles and rules, but as a point of reference or guidance which obliges every time and always again to a free choice within a given context. Freedom, in this perspective, it is a continuous and endless liberation from the limits, seemingly absolutes, of the fact of death. It is the opening a passage to a new form of life, opening that obviously leaves its traces also in the use of a particular language. In fact, “he who is persuaded is silent because it has no

longer any motive to speak. One who is not persuaded is silent too, because it has nothing to say. He speaks only one who thinks of being persuaded”, says to us Michelstaedter. The keywords of Capitini’s philosophy is, therefore, used in a way different from the current one, which reveals not only numerous influences, but, above all, his relentless pursuit of space for the birth of the Novelty. On the other hand, is the way of Persuasion that does not allow us to slavishly follow in the footsteps of those who have drawn before us because during this journey, “everyone is always the first and the last one” and must be the “way-life” by himself:

The way of persuasion is not run by *omnibus*, it has no signs, instructions that you can communicate, learn, repeat. But everyone has in himself the need to find her, and in her grief the index, each must again open the way for itself, because everyone is alone and cannot hope for help if not from himself: the way of Persuasion has only this indication: you do not adapt to the sufficiency of what gave thee. The few individuals who have walked this way with honesty, they then found themselves at the same point, and to those who intend them, they appear in different ways on the same luminous way¹⁵.

The human being can keep within the limits: enclosed in its singularity, as a separate being and fighting with other singularities. In this case he precludes himself the way of

Persuasion. Or it can become a choral subject, “become a Centre” of that possibility, he can open up to others, cancel his limit, saying *Thou* to other humans, to nonhuman animals, to nature, to things. The Persuaded, must have the strength to say, “they are blind – I have already given everything”; in fact, “he – explains Michelstaedter – must feel in itself the inadequacy and respect for them what they themselves do not respect in themselves; because attracted from his love they will take the person that he loves in them: then the blind will see”¹⁶. That’s what Capitini called “act of unity-love”. And the philosopher rightly speaks of act, because being persuaded is only possible in the concrete exercise of the activity of Persuasion, exercise that makes us in turn as persuaded, in tautological not of *Logos*, but of life, and thus indeed utopian and dangerously impossible: experiment with the truth, in its concreteness and historicity. The way of Persuasion remains the only valid alternative – compared to our decadence – for a possible happiness for mankind, for a “company among those who seek the good” really achievable. Just approaching the complexity of persuasion, we also understand that we cannot stop us, and that for us there’s always something to do, to give without receiving in return the soul peace: the *arghia* is our endless task, our tomorrow hoped, our reality liberated, the breach of the Celebration. In fact, since from the beginning it is clear in Capitini the quality of addition and

transformation that persuasion can bring forth from deep in all of us; a kind of quality which is able to give tirelessly guidance to the actions:

I must transform myself in persuasion, that is, take all the content into my soul, which in this way shows all its infinity: it is near even to the entire universe, near to blade of grass, the truly infinite to be placed next to, it is not another universe but the impassioned consciousness that is total nearness. This persuasion of all content, and above all, of my limits as a suffering being and sinner is, unfortunately, irregular, weak; but when it is there it is no longer a glance, like a collision of one thing against another, a cold awareness, almost a measuring, with the hands outstretched and the closed eyes¹⁷.

Any individual or choral response is given to the thrust of Persuasion, this response will not remain only on the level of theorizing since Persuasion is one of the expressions of the way to be of reality. So, you can only waiting for you radical impact on the options of daily life – the persuasion forces us to do these things with power. It forces us to continue persuaded the path to nonviolence service. A path that does not allow separating theory and practice, means and ends, words and actions, indeed imposing to reduce whole life to exceeding form of this vision. Now we can try to define the act persuaded: persist at one point and live each moment like a century of life of others, but by peace (hopefully future) to activity (here and now in

order to benefit) – and conversely. On the other hand we as living individuals should require us to pay the debt to justice for the violence with endless activities; and there is no other way to be able to share and build chorally this practice unless the consciousness of our finitude, preferably impassioned, against the pain of such a life fatally destined to individual defeat. So, we are in the order of the impossible? The answer is yes both Michelstaedter and Capitini, but we are in this order with courage and love. “Yet: the impossible! Since the possible is what is given [...] limited power given to continue [...] the courage of the impossible is the light that breaks the fog, in front of which the terrors of death fall and the present becomes life”¹⁸. Persuasion, this set unspeakable and unthinkable, risks being even unworkable – and then barren – unless it is open to a method, that of nonviolence, of which it’s *in nuce* content and container at the same time. Supreme task of nonviolence friends is and shall be then to find in all times and places prophetic language able to trace the path of Persuasion, a way in which “every man is the first and the last”; a way in which *experimenta* become valid only if they acted chorally, in so far as, escaping the individual logic, they do not exclude anyone. Then Persuasion can be called, perhaps with the voice of all, living and dead, abandoning this way the voice of the *self*, which is destined to live with “desperate devotion” the struggle between ideal and real. In this

perspective one can begin to understand how the co-presence of the dead and living is an opened completion of the path of Persuasion...really its transmutation¹⁹:

I deeply suffered seeing, right in the center of my attention, that there are people struck by the actual reality: the sick, the exhausted, the fool, the dead, and I put myself into a relation (being close using *thou* to that unhappy one) with a reality which doesn’t exclude him, but keeps him in contact with others beings who are born and makes him equal to others and compensates him developing into infinite cooperation to the values as those who are healthy, strong, living²⁰.

The conception of co-presence of the dead and the living is probably one of the main characteristics of Capitini’s nonviolence. His conception was able to act as a *trait d’union* between the philosophical system and religious feelings, between collective history and intimate stories, nature and civilization, Being and Praxis. Although this complex conception works on multiple levels, not only by influencing the nonviolence’s theory and action of the persuaded ones but it also finds in several nonviolence friends elements of justified concerns. There are some who think the co-presence as a sophisticated and almost incomprehensible way of enhancing the memory we have of those who are passed away, as the feeling of closeness to them, as the force that sometimes we feel we get from the

examples of the past; there are still those who interpret it as a close view to the oriental philosophies, specifically to certain currents of Buddhism. But we must be careful not to make the co-presence of a slice of “Heaven”, a free pass to a peaceful acceptance of the fact of death, because few things would be far from the intention of Capitini; let’s listen to his words:

For love, for caring to the *thou*, of the living being, for a desire of proximity, of participation to his existence, for unity with the fact that he’s born, I find unequal to him the fact that he’s struck by a limit such as dying or being mad, insufficient, and sick. I do not recognize to natural facts a prominent dignity on the fact that he is born and has entered somehow in relation, actual or potential, with other beings. There’s an absolute iniquity between the being that I love for what he and can be, as he is coexisting with me, and the fact that a shingle falls on his head killing her. I’m closer to him than to the fact of the shingle²¹.

In July 1966, exactly 50 years ago, Capitini’s philosophically densest book was released *The co-presence of the dead and the living*. The fact that nowadays the book is unobtainable is already in itself very significant. If we got the chance to hear and understand more about Capitini’s concept, we owe it to the leader of the Radical Party Marco Pannella and to his Sunday interviews on Radical Radio. Pietro Pinna, who unfortunately passed

away before Pannella, would always listen to those interviews and when we would find ourselves talking on the phone, he expressed his amazing irony in sentences like “Marco is always there ready to quote Capitini’s co-presence, lucky him for being able to understand it!” or “I wish he could explain it to us once!” This was our way of introducing this difficult topic that in recent times became very dear to Pietro who regretted not having had the opportunity to request more clarifications to Capitini himself because of the intense amount of work dedicated to the first years of organization of the nonviolent movement. That’s when he granted me the difficult task of explaining it. The intimate feeling each of us may get to experience that we can call “co-presence” can be quite hard to explain so it needs some practical examples. In what way does an oyster and Hitler cooperate for the construction of nonviolence? How is a relationship with the dead that is not a spiritualist presence possible? Now I will briefly try to outline the analogy I’ve sketched out with the help of Pietro during our last meeting which I find interesting as it uses the operation of drones heuristically. The drones teletechnology clarifies how we can be both near and far in a field of action²².

It is sufficient that there is coverage of a network (although virtual) so that the co-localization is no longer a necessary precondition of presence to each other. The co-presence of the dead and living act as

a network in which each individual (every single *thou*) is connected with the other without allowing hierarchical relations to be formed. It is to maximize this possibility that Capitini repeatedly stresses the inclusion of the dead in this perspective: the dead as a guarantee of “unanimity of condition”. So, only openness can go beyond the memory without being restricted to limited categories of the living. Drones also introduced the possibility to cause mortal violence anywhere and at any time that managed to radically change our perspective in interpersonal relationships starting a revolution. Drones are controlled by devices that work through non-mutual fundamental choices (basically it allows exercising such a powerful influence on other lives). This process can make actions happen unconsciously and forget they produce effects in reality. Therefore it is not a matter of simple co-existence for which the existence simultaneity would be necessary and sufficient. In fact co-presence implies an addition that is explicable in a special causal relationship: the instantaneous possibility, even if not always ongoing, for a term to have effects on another or suffer effects from it. This total – and naked – accessibility of a term to another redefines the idea of range and, thanks to drone’s teletechnology, means that the entity in connection may also not be given at the same time, because everything, through the network, can be programmed. The co-presence, in praxis, is defined

only in the relationship between the various entities involved (beings, monuments, events) and is autonomous from the co-localization. It may be unknowingly, that is, without a consciousness of being simultaneously present; it is not reducible to a subjective feeling; it has an effect on reality without requiring a univocal place for the action. All these elements can help me to clarify conversely, the Capitinian co-presence under the sign of nonviolence: a metaphysics of praxis that, precisely because it can’t accept the fact of death (the possibility for people – especially the most vulnerable – to be continually subject to the power of death) asks us the effort of producing continuous additions to the inadequacy of the current reality. Who’s to say that the various modes of explanation of unity (natural, spiritual or technological) should always be used to repeat the violent laws of today? A special praxis as that of co-presence, which takes note of all the possibilities to connect, may be the pick available to us for opening of a beauty’s and justice’s swathe – within a reality completely exposed to violence. Finally, I propose to be guided by one of the most successful and famous Capitini’s quotes:

I don’t say: in a short or long time we’re having a perfectly nonviolent society, reign of love we’ll be able to see with our own eyes. I know there will always be many and many obstacles, which may also keep on existing, even if it’s not that absurd hoping for a certain improvement. I

basically care about the purpose of this modest life of mine, of my hours and my few days, and putting on the intimate scale of history the weight of my persuasion²³.

Sure enough, one of the main points I like to underline when talking to a person that is first approaching the non-violence vision (especially Capitini's nonviolence) is to focus on denying the existence of passive nonviolence. Instead, it is an active mechanism that manages to transform our rejection and our indignation into an essential union between theory and practice that makes the basis of Persuasion that there will always be something we can do. In my opinion this is the real meaning of Gandhi's saying "Be the change you want to see in the world". Those who live the reality liberated from the limits of death are "persuaded of the value of presence", persuaded "that, when pressed, they feel like mothers of the others and give without wanting anything back", priests "because they are openers of presence", intellectuals because they

are "reverent to values", politicians because they are also "men-multi-tude". Who is persuaded keeps always in mind and in hands "at once the means and the ends", so collecting his confidence and the confidence of others in the use of non-violence's techniques. We can now understand well that he who is persuaded makes the jump, or rather has built a bridge, from the mere absence of violence in a given fact or action, and nonviolence that allows us to live already now the feast in its highest expression of infinite openness to the novelty. We can then envision Capitini's nonviolence like an underground river which on the surface appears only through its tributaries. Although maintaining the course seeking the source (just listening to the sound of the deep water) doesn't remain a small quest, we must act - letting ourselves be guided by the coordinates that Capitini gives us - like lovers who do not know and cannot wait for everyone else to fall in love to declare their feelings.

Note

- ¹ Aldo Capitini, *La nonviolenza oggi*, Edizioni di Comunità, Milano, 1962, p. 99. All the translations concerning Aldo Capitini's works are by Jessica Todaro.
- ² E.g. see Aldo Capitini, *Rivoluzione aperta*, Parenti, Milano, 1956, p. 9: "More and more times up to now there have been several revolutions and some people still want a

revolution. We don't fear this word; on the contrary, we do consider ourselves revolutionaries, since we can't accept society and reality to keep on being this way, with this social evil represented by oppression, exploitation, fraud, violence, bad administration, unjust laws. Revolution means changing all these things,

it means liberations, reborn as liberated and now united people”.

³ A piece of speech declared by Socialist leader Pietro Nenni at Capitini’s funeral.

⁴ He was responsible also the insight to write the term “nonviolence” without spaces or hyphen, to positively connote meaning of this word.

⁵ As Rocco Altieri writes in his biographical work about Capitini: “Non-violence seems the highest spiritual teaching, a religious idea of absolute purity, to love for its own sake, the only power able to defeat fascism. If Mussolini in order to assert himself resorted to sinister means – deceit, lies, murder – Capitini counterposes the highest values of truth, nonmendacity, nonkilling” (See Rocco Altieri, *The Nonviolent Revolution. An Intellectual Biography of Aldo Capitini*, translated by Gerry Blaylock, IGINP, Madurai, India, 2008).

⁶ See, Aldo Capitini, *Attraverso due terzi del secolo*, the author’s short autobiography consultable online: “The lesson was to prepare the strategy and the nonviolent relationships before, for them to be ready when necessary; it is undeniable that in Italy during Matteotti’s assassination in 1924 and in Germany in 1933 a vast and complex nonviolent cooperation would have been able to obstruct and defeat governments” (<http://www.webalice.it/chicomendes/Autobiografia%20di%20Aldo%20Capitini.htm>).

⁷ Aldo Capitini, *Elementi di un’esperienza religiosa*, Cappelli, Bologna, 1990, p. XIX.

⁸ I just wanted to point out that in this context, according to Dante, *contrappasso* (retaliation) does not

correspond to the Biblical concept of “eye-to-eye” etc. This is a misinterpretation of the real meaning of the biblical principle. The ancient Jewish lawmen tried to establish a principle on which compensation, not punishment, should be based. In other words, if someone lost an eye, he should receive a compensation corresponding to the damage, and not that the person found guilty should undergo the mutilation of an eye!

⁹ See Norberto Bobbio, *Il pensiero di Aldo Capitini. Filosofia, religione, politica*, Edizioni dell’Asino, Roma, 2011.

¹⁰ In this way Capitini addressed the Marxist circles: “You are right to be unsatisfied about this wrong and unjust society, but how will you be able to immediately change everything with your own hands? Do you want to destroy those you see as enemies and the ones who are suspected not to be revolutionaries? Do you want the revolution to advance with massacres, with tortures, with the absolute government of a group denying others the freedom to talk, to get informed, to criticize, to live? We want society to be everybody’s; will we do this through the killing of thousands of people? We want a loving society; will we grow and encourage hate? We want a free society; will we empower tyranny and absolutism? We want a good and clear end; will we use unclear and terrible means?” (Aldo Capitini, *Rivoluzione aperta*, loc. cit., p. 10).

¹¹ On the contrary, for Capitini the matter of the relation between means and ends is “way more important that if it were about scruples”. It is about making an action’s end “not just

- something painted in the background”, initially focusing instead exclusively on the efficiency of the mean to get it; in fact the end already exists “in the quality and assumption of the mean”, and it is supposed to be perfectly recognizable even from that. Capitini continues: “Putting time in the interval and postponing the harmony between the mean and the end until an undefined moment means not being interested in the life of the end, in its choice, in its pursuit. If you love the end, this already exists and changes the present, instead of being indefinitely procrastinated” (Aldo Capitini, *Religione aperta*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2011, pp. 155-157).
- ¹² Aldo Capitini, *Il problema religioso attuale*, Guanda, Parma, 1948, p. 24.
- ¹³ See Pietro Pinna, *La mia obiezione di coscienza*, Movimento Nonviolento, Verona, 1994.
- ¹⁴ Aldo Capitini, *Il problema religioso attuale*, loc. cit., p. 21.
- ¹⁵ Carlo Michelstaedter, *La persuasione e la rettorica. Appendici critiche*, Adelphi, Milano, 1995, p. 43.
- ¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 45.
- ¹⁷ Aldo Capitini, *Elementi di un'esperienza religiosa*, loc. cit., p. 44.
- ¹⁸ Carlo Michelstaedter, *La persuasione e la rettorica*, loc. cit., p. 65.
- ¹⁹ About the concept of transmutation in Capitini is curious the analogy with the meaning given to the term by Gadamer in *Truth and Method*. For the latter, according to the concept of transmutation, the so-called reality is defined “as the non-transmuted and art as overcoming that places this reality in its truth” instead in a Capitinian perspective this reality is insufficient “and is defined as transmuted and *versus* the reality liberated thanks to nonviolence is able to overcome this reality towards the co-presence plan”.
- ²⁰ Aldo Capitini, *La compresenza dei morti e dei viventi*, Il Saggiatore, Milano, 1966, p. 11.
- ²¹ Idem, *Educazione aperta*, vol. II, La Nuova Italia, Firenze, 1968, p. 18.
- ²² See Gregoire Chamayou, *Teoria del drone. Principi filosofici del diritto di uccidere*, DeriveApprodi, Roma, 2014.
- ²³ Aldo Capitini, *Elementi di un'esperienza religiosa*, loc. cit., pp. 115-116.

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