

Loving openness towards Nature: Aldo Capitini and the moral value of biophilia

Gabriella Falcicchio¹, Giuseppe Barbiero^{2,3}

¹ Dipartimento di Scienze della Formazione, Psicologia, Comunicazione, Università degli Studi di Bari "Aldo Moro", Italia

² Laboratorio di Ecologia Affettiva, Dipartimento di Scienze Umane e Sociali, Università della Valle d'Aosta;

³ Centro interuniversitario IRIS – Istituto Ricerche Interdisciplinari sulla Sostenibilità, Università degli Studi di Torino.

Abstract. Can the loving openness of human beings lead to “the liberation of qualities in animals that would otherwise remain hidden?” This observation made in 1959 by Aldo Capitini, the Italian philosopher and promoter of nonviolent theory and action, not only poses a question relative to neo-Darwinism, but it also offers a new and radical perspective on human evolution, bringing to the fore the moral value of biophilia. According to Stephen Kellert (1996), the relationship between Man and Nature comprises of nine basic values, and together they constitute the biological tendency of Man to affiliate himself with the natural world. The expression of these values has proved to be adaptive over the course of human evolution, developing into genetic inclinations over time. They include the moral value of ‘biophilia’, which concerns Humanity’s ethical and spiritual affinity towards Nature. On the one hand, the formation of a ‘biophilic ethics’ enhances the inclination of Man to protect Nature; on the other hand, it entails the search for underlying meanings in Nature. Aldo Capitini was extremely concerned about the moral value of Nature, revealing very early on a biophilic sensibility that, he believed, fuelled his motivation to promote nonviolence and, at the same time, generated new and profound sentiments towards living creatures. Indeed, the above-mentioned observation by Capitini recalls the unity of all “beings that form life”, each one of which was intended to be treated ethically and to participate actively in a relationship of openness towards the ‘thou’ in everybody. He considered it a human responsibility to engage in joyous friendships with all living beings, an approach which led him to vegetarianism – a liberating act for those who practice it, because it opens up unexpected horizons for Man’s complex association with Nature, opening the way to true ‘Compresence’, that offers insights to achieve new visions for sustainability.

Keywords: biophilia; love for life; moral values; Nature; nonviolence.

ISSN 2384-8677

DOI: 10.7401/visions.03.02

Article history: Accepted in revised form June, 06, 2015

Published online: June, 21, 2015

Citation: Falcicchio G., Barbiero G. (2015). Loving openness towards Nature: Aldo Capitini and the moral value of biophilia. *Visions for Sustainability*, 3:05-15

Copyright: ©2015 Falcicchio, Barbiero. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Competing Interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Corresponding Author: Giuseppe Barbiero, Università della Valle d'Aosta, Strada Cappuccini 2/a, 11100 Aosta, Italy.

E.mail: g.barbiero@univda.it

Perspective: Theoretical vision

Fields: Human sciences

Issues: Sustainable transformation of conflicts, Geo-ethics

*And in the grand presence of the sun you
move, sternly crossing the light.*

*If the storm rages with flashes of
lightening all around, and the sky closes
in over the humiliated land, you know
that the sun will return.*

*And when it is upon you, to your heart
you celebrate*

shapes, colours, stable horizons.

*Waves of light from east to west, and
from west to east.*

*But you stop for a moment, and the
streets, the hedgerows, the torrents, the
villages seen as you pass by, are not
enough for you.*

*You come upon and gather up a fallen
swallow, sullen for its lost flight;*

You release it and give it back its call.

*You bring unison to Infinity, a melody of
beginnings enclosing all thoughts, like
the sun's rays, the contours of the
sunrise.*

*The sweet earth, opens up following
man's angry strike, and reveals its damp
interior, you watch from close by.*

*The plants, you stoop down swiftly to
touch them.*

*The strong trees, the hundreds of
innumerable beasts,*

*with each glance upon them, love
expands.¹*

¹ "E nel grande cospetto del sole muovi, attraversi
severo la luce./ Se la tempesta scuote con le sue
folgori intorno, e il cielo chiude la terra umiliata, sai
che il sole ritorna./ E quando sta su di te, al tuo cuore
celebri/ forme, colori, costanti orizzonti./ Onde di
luce da oriente a occidente, e da occidente a oriente./
Ma ti fermi per poco, e le strade, i cespugli, i torrenti,
i paesi veduti in viaggio, non ti bastano./ Incontri e
raccogli la rondine, cupa per il volo perduto;/ la lanci
e ridesti il suo grido./ Porti unità con l'immenso, una
musica d'inizi cingenti tutti i pensieri, come i raggi
del sole le forme dell'aurora./ La soavissima terra,
dischiusa dal colpo nervoso dell'uomo, e svela il suo
umido interno, tu vicino la guardi./ Le basse piante,
rapido andando, ti chini e tocchi./ Gli alberi forti, le

This article introduces the figure of Aldo Capitini from a combined perspective that embraces both the human and the natural sciences, and it was motivated by the passion for nonviolence shared by the two authors. The work is the result of an interdisciplinary dialogue developing on two levels (see Camino, et al, 2005). In the first instance, it developed from the dialogue between two disciplines – pedagogy and biology – which are constituted by very different epistemological statutes, fields of research and methodological traditions. This dialogue turned out to be reciprocally fruitful because it brings together the various views on one of the most profound aspects of human beings: the love for life, biophilia. On the second level, by consciously choosing the nonviolent option as a personal standpoint, we have been able to look at and understand aspects of biophilia that elude the predominant mainstream values based on violence and thus gain new insights into the topic and the possibilities for humans to achieve a vision for sustainability.

1. Biophilia

Biophilia literally means 'love for life'. The term was introduced by Erich Fromm (1964) to describe the psychological tendency to be attracted to all that is alive and vital. Twenty years later, Edward O. Wilson used biophilia to describe the bonds that human beings create with other living organisms (1984). Wilson developed the idea that biophilia is a fundamental need that emerges, often unconsciously, in many human activities; in our thoughts as in our artistic expressions. This human tendency seems to be genetically determined (Wilson, 1993) and has an evolutionally adaptive character. In other words, we could say that biophilia has

frotte d'innumerevoli bestie,/ ogni sguardo su loro,
affetto espande", Capitini, A. (1943) *Atti della
presenza aperta*. Firenze, Sansoni; now in (1998)
Scritti filosofici e religiosi. Edited by M. Martini.
Perugia: Protagon, p. 122.

evolved over the many thousands of years that our species spent in the African savannah, prior to our colonisation of the other four continents. The survival of our ancestors have depended on the capacity to accurately interpret their surrounding environment, starting with the plants and animals. The biophilia hypothesis suggests that the affiliation to life and to its connected processes has conferred important advantages in the human evolution, to the extent that humans have adapted, persisted and emerged, both as individuals and as a species. The distancing of humanity from Nature's life cycles has led to an increasingly deprived and compromised existence in relation to a vast spectrum of emotive, affective, cognitive and reflective aspects. Regaining an intimate connection with Nature, reviving our biophilia, is necessary for mankind to re-establish its existence in a full and coherent manner.

2. The moral² value of biophilia according to Stephen R. Kellert

Stephen R. Kellert, together with E.O. Wilson, has relentlessly sought to systematise the biophilia hypothesis (Kellert and Wilson, 1993), by exploring its presumable biological bases (Kellert, 1996). According to Kellert, the biophilic tendency takes nine, different forms of expression: utilitarian, naturalistic, ecological/scientific, aesthetic, symbolic, humanistic, dominant, moralistic and negative. Each form of expression has an evolutionary basis that first favours survival and then the full realisation of the Self.

Kellert thought that these values constitute a kind of "genetic inclination" to affiliate with natural processes. These values reflect an affinity for Nature that is adaptively

expressed through human evolution. Constituting "weak" biological tendencies, the functional and adaptive characteristics of these values are mediated in an important way through language, culture and experience. As a result, we can observe a high level of diversity and intensity of expression of these values across individuals and groups. Nonetheless, they are universal values present in all the known cultures spanning all latitudes, and their expression is both healthy and adaptive (Kellert, 1996).

The adaptive benefits associated with the formation of these values include an underlying sense that gives meaning to things, to orders, the inclination to protect and to treat Nature with kindness and respect, and to reinforce social exchange, sharing moral and spiritual convictions (Kellert, 2002). A strong sense of affiliation with Nature forms the basis of the moral value of biophilia and sustains our ethical responsibility for the natural world. Sometimes the sense of affiliation can be particularly intense, becoming pneumopoietic (source of spiritual meanings). Thus, not infrequently, sensations of being connected with Nature have found their expression, not only in philosophical language, but also in the language of religion and art and, more recently, in science. In each case, the various languages draw upon the spiritual inspiration to preserve the integrity, the stability and the beauty of the living community (Leopold, 1966).

From an evolutionary point of view, the strong dependency upon Nature and connection of the human community with Nature has favoured the emergence of a set of moral laws centred on the pantheistic idea that the natural world is a living being, with which a profound relationship, vital for each human being, can be established. To cultivate a respectful attitude towards Nature has various advantages for a small group of humans that are mainly bound by family ties. The connection with one's own environment

² In some languages the word 'moral' usually refers to the customs, habits of life. The word 'ethical' concerns philosophical reflection that inspires morality. Some Authors (i.e. Kellert, for example) don't use this distinction.

generates a sense of belonging and of loyalty, which extend from one group of humans to all of Nature and which favours cooperative and altruistic behaviours and mutual aid.

The processes of industrialisation and urbanisation have distanced large sections of the population from Nature, rendering such an experience ever the more difficult. The ethical and spiritual bonds that we have always held with the land (in the sense of Leopold) have been broken. The ethics of the land, that has informed generations of human beings living at all latitudes, has disintegrated in confrontation with the modern world. It is a physical, psychological and spiritual fracture that involves all human beings who live disconnected from the natural world. We have lost the physical and psychological well-being that is derived from a healthy connection with Nature, a connection that favours the sense of identity and trust in oneself (Thomashow, 1996). It is imperative that this bond is recovered, for our physical and psychological health, and for that of our future generations.

3. Aldo Capitini, father of the Italian nonviolence movement

Aldo Capitini (Perugia, 1899-1968) represents the key figure in Italy relevant to nonviolent theory and action. Born into a modest family in Perugia, his father worked for the council as custodian of the city's bell tower. Capitini initiated his studies obtaining his diploma from Perugia's Technical Institute, but then he continued his studies, autonomously at first, focussing on the classics, eventually becoming secretary of the Normale University of Pisa. During his adolescence, however, he abandoned the vitalistic impetuses of nationalism in face of the tragedy that was the First World War, to focus on and bring together the teachings bequeathed to us by St. Francis of Assisi, Giuseppe Mazzini, Immanuel Kant and Mohandas K. Gandhi. Capitini advanced a new and highly original line of thought, one that

was never disjointed from daily action, antifascist at first and then in opposition to all forms of war and violence. Capitini was a tireless activist: he launched countless initiatives, many of which are still in vigour today, such as the Nonviolent Movement, the Italian Vegetarian Society, the Perugia-Assisi Peace March and the Brotherhood of People. Capitini met with and became one of the most important intellectuals of his day, promoting the Italian culture of the 20th century that pertained to his line of thought. However Capitini was marginalised for his critical ideas and open dissent to all forms of violence, to the extent that he remains almost unknown to young Italians today.

In the violent context of fascism, Capitini worked as an antifascist, active on both the political and the social level. He was arrested twice and subject to police controls throughout his life, even after the fall of the regime (Cutini, 1988; Moscati and Maori, 2014). Capitini was a thinker capable of generating profoundly innovative visions on both the philosophical and religious levels. Capitini's visions held nonviolence at its core, next to the "compresence of the living and the dead", that started out from the initial "religious problem of finding a place for the ill, the worn out, and he who activist society throws out as something that is unproductive and without use" (Capitini, 1967). Capitini suggested to interiorise this problem, initiating an internal process of metanoia (intimate conversion), for changing our views. Of course, reality has its own limits (wickedness, disease, death), that we might also experience within ourselves. However, the moment which we open ourselves up to the 'thou' of the other, we become aware that the other incessantly gives us something precious; indeed, we receive this gift before we are even aware of it, and its existence imparts much joy to us. "Nonviolence, in fact, is saying a thou to each concrete being; it is to pay attention, to care, to respect, and to bestow affection towards the other; it is to feel joy that the other exists and was indeed

born, and that if he were not born, we would act such that he is born; let us take it upon us to see that he finds it to this world, we are like mothers” (Capitini, 1962).

The act of opening oneself up towards the other allows one to acquire the profound awareness that while I say ‘you’, I am saying ‘thank you’ for the gift that the utterance of this ‘you’ will continue to give me forever. One’s openness, stimulated by the “passionate awareness of finiteness” (Capitini, 1969), becomes an “infinite opening of the soul” (Capitini, 1937), in a restoring gesture that expands to encompass everyone. In fact, openness, by way of its own nature, cannot be anything but infinite and is thus directed towards each and every ‘you’ – what Capitini would call the ‘thou-everyone’, i.e. all forms that have come to life, including those that have died – because everyone, no one excluded, contributes to the collective production of values, i.e. the circulating good. Compresence is generated by means of this cooperation, by this chorality that cannot however be guaranteed (i.e. experienced and lived as a profound truth) without an affective and ethical act of loving openness towards ‘thou’.

Moreover, compresence can be thought about on two levels: as the possibility that it can be achieved by the single act of openness, or as an eschatological viewpoint. With loving openness, compresence is already in effect and becoming reality, starting a long-lasting process; we could say that today we are nourished by infinite acts of openness, and by the chorality of these acts, to the point that we can imagine a “hopeful tomorrow” in which compresence is perfect, full and complete. Capitini refers to that tomorrow as the “reality of everyone” or “reality liberated” from limits, with respect to limited reality, and to reality as it is now, or finally “celebration”. Celebration is the full realisation of that that we could already live today through nonviolence.

This is an extreme synopsis of a highly articulated and complex way of thinking, disseminated by Capitini through umpteen years of writing. The whole of Capitini’s writings contain references to Nature. Nature constituted a major protagonist in Capitinian contemplations. Capitini sought to demonstrate his sensibility towards Nature, and his sensibility was both prophetic and a precursor of visions that the western world only came to realise decades later, and in a very different environmental context: almost a confirmation of the heightened levels of awareness that Capitini expressed back in the 1930’s. Even if there is no single text or key text in which he offers a specific, focussed discussion about Nature, however in each of his books of philosophical and religious mould attention is directed towards Nature. Nature was also conferred a special place in his lyric productions.

4. Precognitions about biophilia by Capitini

To understand how Capitini conceived the natural world, we need to consider the following notions that he put forward; the everything/everyone; the past-present/future; and the limits/liberation notion. Nature is not an ‘everything’: it is not a background, a compact ensemble, an entity that is distinct and irreducible to human beings, or the expression of a distant alternative, and governed by structurally different laws. Instead, it is occupied by ‘thou’, singular and unique, individual beings endowed with subjectivity and relational capacity. Even inanimate objects (natural and artificial things) are included within the sphere of yous. With regards to these yous, nothing changes in relation to openness, since the intimate dynamic of opening oneself up necessarily implicates that it is incessant and oriented ideally towards all of the yous of the past and present. Nature – all beings that have come to life – are embraced by openness and are included in the concept of compresence. They are born into

compresence and they are implicated in the process of overcoming their limits.

Here, we come to the second characteristic of Nature according to Capitini: today, even Nature is affected by limits such as disease and death, and by the competitive philosophy of “big fish eat little fish” which characterise modern times. However, nothing is stopping the laws that may seem as unchanging today, intrinsic to natural dynamics, from entering into a process of (even radical) change or transmutation; i.e. the transformation at the ontological level of the structure of reality itself.

Thus, Nature appears as an archipelago, a constellation of subjects interacting according to laws that are not unchangeable. In fact, it is the quality of this interaction (whether in the name of violence or of nonviolence) that will initiate changes that may even be revolutionary, capable of overturning the logic that is today considered to be the “norm”, i.e. natural (like the law of life and death). So, what is the nature of this action we are referring to and who takes it? Capitini replies that it is that of nonviolent openness, and the only beings who can initiate such an act with full awareness are human beings.

When I open myself to the thou of an animal or a plant, listening and contemplating, I realise just how much I receive: “To live near to trees with openness is to receive much more from them than might seem; but this attention must be open and friendly, respectful of these life forms and of their exertion; and thus they reciprocate and bring peace” (Capitini, 1953).

To allow oneself to be pervaded by this peace, to be touched by the thou of a dying cat, or to experience deep down the harmony of a landscape coincides with the highest intention of not wishing any harm to come to nature, of the desire to repair the harm already inflicted (the wounded swallow, in the opening poem), and to choose actively not

to reiterate violent habits (like killing for feeding purposes³) as a profound conviction that these attitudes and choices of action will have real and tangible effects on changing the natural order, starting with the relationship between humans and other living things; a synergic dialogue that expands from the interaction with individual ‘yous’ (for example, the animal that ceases to be afraid of man, and that opens itself up in a trusting way, demonstrating previously undisclosed characteristics⁴) to the rapport between Humanity and Nature in general, until it changes the supreme laws of the being.

Thus the ultimate horizon that Capitini aimed towards was a conviction of fundamentally spiritual significance, one that can nevertheless be approached today through the nonviolent action of compresence; in this sense, order and harmony in Nature are not perfect in the present world, but they are visions to strive towards, in which compresence will be fully realised. At the centre of all of this is human responsibility, i.e. the act of openness, the unity and love for all beings that have come to life, without which harmony cannot exist.

³ “Vegetarianism makes an important contribution towards the *transformation* of man and reality [...] Vegetarianism contributes towards this transformation because it instates in man a sense of *solidarity with many beings*, which man previously considered to be things, and it develops a *sense of life* that is *choral* and not egocentric”, Capitini A. (1959). *Aspetti dell’educazione alla nonviolenza*. Pisa: Pacini Mariotti, p. 6.

⁴ “Why not retain that previously *undisclosed qualities* can also be awakened in animal individuals that would otherwise remain hidden? *So great is the value of the act, of the encounter* with the animal, of that sense of safety it must feel in our presence, that it must be left bewildered after the horror of all the bloodshed that humanity has relentlessly caused to the animal world! [...] one can understand how *the pleasant surprise of such peace cannot but cause the release of new inspirations in animals*”, *Aspetti dell’educazione alla nonviolenza*.

The nonviolent quality of openness qualifies human action in a very precise manner: it is not the action of *homo faber*⁵ that the western Weltanschauung (world view perception) has celebrated for thousands of years and consecrated with modernity: the action that intervenes aggressively with Nature and that rests on a mechanistic and deterministic view which dictate that humans are of a different substance from the rest of life and are hierarchically ordered at the ontological level such that man is permitted to exploit other beings endlessly. Without wanting to discard the positive outcomes of centuries of epistemological reflections, discoveries and knowledge, Capitini breaks away from the past and brings human action back to a religious essence: it will be the action of *homo religiosus* (that has little to do with the historical confessional institutions) that will be capable of modifying even the laws of nature, initiating and rendering solidarity ever more complete, and bringing about the collaboration between all beings in view of a common destination – liberation.

5. The nonviolent way and love for life: an anecdote

In order to unite the discourse on Capitinian nonviolence with the theorisations of Kellert, we turn to the narrative form; in this case, a short story. The events of this story actually occurred to one of the Authors (GF).

The sleeping beauty and the beetle

Once upon a time there was a young woman who lived in a cottage overlooking open fields. In the daytime she hung her washing out to dry, enjoying the view of the countryside; and in the evening, she brought her washing in, enjoying the fresh evening air and watching

the sun set, while the nocturnal birds stretched their wings in their nests, before setting out to search for their evening meal. Every so often, a small shiny green beetle would fly on to her washing, magnificent in its emerald green jacket, and go for a walk across the laundry hung out to dry. If one of her cottage windows was open, it would sneak inside to enjoy some warmth. The young woman, who also had two cats, would gently pick it up and take it back outside, placing it down on the plants on her balcony, fearing for its safety in the cats' presence. She would warn the beetle about the four-legged dangers inside, but before too long the beetle would be found back inside the house again.

One evening, the woman changed into her pyjamas and went to bed early; she read a story to her young daughter and turned off the light, quickly drifting off into a peaceful sleep. In the middle of the night, the strangest thing occurred. She was lying on her back when all of a sudden her eyes opened. There had been no strange noise to disturb her and she'd had no bad dream. But she opened her eyes, fully lucid. Then, she felt a slight tickling sensation on the inside of her leg, just above her left knee. Without questioning what was happening and without thinking, she acted quickly, performing a series of movements that seemed to know what to do on their own. She quickly brought her left hand down to the location of the tickle, cupping her hand over the mystery that moved inside her trousers, grasping it within a cocoon of pyjamas; she swung her legs down from the bed and whilst maintaining the gentle pressure of her grasped left hand she quickly removed her trousers in one swift movement using just her free hand. The woman moved towards the window. She turned her soft pyjama trousers inside-out and out of the cocoon it appeared, the brilliant green beetle that didn't want to stay outside. "Oh, but it's you!", exclaimed the woman softly placing the beetle down onto the plant residing on her windowsill. She returned to bed and went straight back to sleep. The following morning, she reflected on her curious night time encounter...

⁵ *Homo faber suae ipsius fortunae* is the expression, adopted by Pico della Mirandola, that represents the humanist-renaissance ethic at the base of the modern idea that human beings are the creators of their own destinies.

It is a short and very simple story, nevertheless a true one, which is interesting to analyse. At a certain moment during the night, a woman becomes aware of the presence of a small unidentified animal, an insect, in direct contact with her body. It is to be found under her layers of clothing, whilst she is in the most private of places (her bed). Moreover, the events take place during nocturnal sleep, a situation in which primordial fears can be easily evoked, signalling the dangers that our ancestors would have actually experienced and that remain intact in our brains even today after hundreds of thousands of years and despite the relative safety of our present day surroundings. It would not be considered unusual if the woman had displayed a defensive-aggressive reaction, directed at destroying the intruder or at least getting rid of it in such a way, and using whatever means were available to put the intruder's existence and integrity at risk in order to save oneself. This, however, did not occur, despite the sense of lucidity that the protagonist described, one that was very different from the usual conscious state, like a mental state that was independent of the self, automatic, and different from the conscious and rational form of analysis that involves the neocortex. She recalls a sensation of very rapid and clear thought, accompanied by perfectly synchronised, harmonic and precise actions conducted by the subcortex.

If it is so, the anecdote says a lot about the origins of nonviolence, rooted within the inner-being, where humanity can begin to detach from our simplified vision that laws of Nature are based on 'fight or flight' instincts. The only action usually perceived in front of a potential danger is to save one's own life at the cost of another's. But it is interesting to consider the two facets of nonviolent persuasion⁶: thought and action – ethical

choices that are therefore conscious, non-harming and at the same time internalisations of the choice via its practice. This connection is subtle and particularly important for the rapport that a nonviolence advocate has with him/herself: the interweaving between a person's inner world and the practice of certain behaviours is so complex that we cannot simply say that they progress hand-in-hand, nor can we say that one of the two precedes the other. One might imagine the existence of a circular relationship between the two elements, one that is recursive and (in an attempt to provide a more dynamic image) helical or fractal, branching out and dividing in both directions, towards spiritual profundity (perhaps engaging subcortical dimensions?) and outwards towards the world itself.

In the first direction, the "sleeping beauty" reflects on her choice of action that night. She cannot avoid realising that her acting in such a non-harming way would, in turn, have left some trace within her inner being, taking hold and possibly becoming incorporated into the deepest of neuronal structures. It may be surprising to realise that such structures are not usually associated with ethical reflection, but are more attentive to the conscious dimensions of choices which are deliberated and mulled over. While it is undoubted that emotional connotations are involved, that level of neuronal activity would not usually be considered as influencing the structures that bring about action. In this sense, nonviolence opens up interesting situations and can form a basis for the recovery of the biophilic instinct.

In relation to the second direction, that goes from nonviolent action of the individual towards the external world (and to reality), one of Aldo Capitini's phrases carries extraordinary weight: "We have tried to avoid death, neither by way of thought nor with

⁶ According to Carlo R. Michelstädter (1887-1910), 'persuasion' is an intimate connection between thought and action. Capitini was inspired by

Michelstädter and he applied 'persuasion' to nonviolence (Cfr. Taurino, 2014).

action; have we done so to see if reality will follow us?" (Capitini, 1998). One adventurous hypothesis is such: if metanoia takes place in one element of reality, our inner world and subjectivity, then we can propose that nonviolence is also able to change the structure of reality.

6. Nonviolence as a moral value of biophilia

Over the course of our reflections we realised that the moral value of human biophilia intersected in every respect with the theme of nonviolence. Biophilia (Wilson, 1984) and nonviolence (Sémelin, 1985) share a common phylogenetic structure that has been expressed in a profoundly adaptive manner over the course of humanity. If biophilia is indeed the result of genetically determined learning rules that favour our harmonisation within the natural environment (Wilson, 1993; Barbiero, 2011; Barbiero, 2014) no less so is nonviolence, which traces its origins to genetically determined learning rules that permit living creatures to be assertive and to express their own aggressiveness⁷ (Barbiero, 2004). And if in the absence of adequate stimuli biophilia can atrophy (Barbiero et al., 2014), remaining buried within the human soul, the same can happen to nonviolence, which without adequate relational experience can atrophy and remain buried. The absence of biophilia stimuli and nonviolence experiences gives rise to biologically non-adaptive behaviours of destructive aggression that we can generically call 'violence' (Barbiero, 2004) or maladjustment by 'nature-deficit' (Louv, 2005). But the nostalgia for what "we could be but are not yet" can be the fly-wheel for a metanoia that regards not only our relationship with other

human beings but with all of Nature (Barbiero, et al., 2007). Nonviolence not only shares common evolutionary roots with biophilia, but it represents a legacy of moral principles from which an adaptive biophilia can emerge, a biophilia that allows us to reconnect with Nature and its equilibria (Barbiero, et al., 2015), regaining physical and psychological health. And yet, nonviolence is a stance towards action that originates from a profound connection with oneself and with the values of one's own existence. As we see from the experiences of Aldo Capitini, strong and deeplyrooted nonviolence favours the formation of connections with the natural world that are expressed through a biophilic attitude. From a psychological point of view, this would imply an overall harmonic development of personality. The invitation to nonviolent action becomes fundamental when it is practiced in order to protect Nature, but also in relation to protecting ourselves.

Nonviolence recalls a conversion that progresses slowly, because it is a pursuit towards enchantment by Nature, from which new energy and lymph are derived. It is the 'wildman' that allows physicality to be regained, pleasure, intimate happiness and mystic joy. In nonviolence, life that flows is paramount, coming before all theoretical discussions; and hence this is the common root that connects nonviolence with biophilia: life that flows, love in action towards others (human and non human) with whom we have the opportunity to interact.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge Stephanie Parsley for her accurate translation and polishing the manuscript, and the two reviewers for their very important critical suggestions.

⁷ According to Sémelin (1985), based on Fromm (1973), *aggressiveness* is a defensive reaction ("benign aggression") phylogenetically adaptive; *aggressivity* is a human propensity to destroy and to crave for absolute control ("malignant aggression") and is not phylogenetically adaptive.

References

- Barbiero, G. (2004) "La violenza: il carattere patologico della combattività destrutturata", in E. Camino e A. Dogliotti Marasso (a cura di), *Il conflitto: rischio e opportunità*. Torre dei Nolfi (AQ): Edizioni Qualevita, pp. 147-163.
- Barbiero, G. (2011) "Biophilia and Gaia. Two hypothesis for an affective ecology". *Journal of Bio-Urbanism* 1, 11-27. Also available from: <http://www.journalofbiourbanism.org/2012/barbiero/>
- Barbiero G. (2014) "Affective Ecology for Sustainability". *Visions for Sustainability* 1, 20-30.
- Barbiero, G., Benessia, A., Bianco, E., Camino, E., Ferrando, M., Freire, D.D., Vittori, R. (2007) *Di silenzio in silenzio*. Cesena: Anima Mundi.
- Barbiero, G., Berto, R., Freire, D.D., Ferrando, M., Camino, E. (2014) "Unveiling biophilia in children using active silence training: an experimental approach". *Visions for Sustainability* 1, 31-38.
- Barbiero, G., Gasparotti, F., Baruzzi, E. (2015) *La verde pelle di Gaia*. Limena, PD: Libreriauniversitaria.it.
- Camino, E., Barbiero, G., Perazzzone, A., Colucci-Gray, L. (2005) "Linking research and education to promote an integrated approach to sustainability". *Handbook of sustainability research*. Peter Lang Europaischer Verlag Wissenschaften, pp. 535-561.
- Capitini, A. (1937). *Elementi di un'esperienza religiosa*. Bari: Laterza.
- Capitini, A. (1969). *Il potere di tutti*. Firenze: La Nuova Italia.
- Capitini, A. (1943). *Atti della presenza aperta*. Firenze: Sansoni.
- Capitini, A. (1951). *L'atto di educare*. Firenze: La Nuova Italia.
- Capitini, A. (1953), *Il fanciullo nella liberazione dell'uomo*. Pisa: Nistri Lischi.
- Capitini, A. (1959). *Aspetti dell'educazione alla nonviolenza*. Pisa: Pacini Mariotti.
- Capitini, A. (1962). *La nonviolenza oggi*, Milano: Edizioni di Comunità.
- Capitini, A. (1967). *Educazione aperta*. Firenze: La Nuova Italia, vol. I.
- Capitini, A. (1998). *Scritti filosofici e religiosi*. a cura di M. Martini. Perugia: Protagon.
- Capitini, A. (2004). *Le ragioni della nonviolenza. Antologia degli scritti*. A cura di M. Martini. Pisa: ETS.
- Cutini, C. (a cura di). (1988). *Aldo Capitini. Uno schedato politico*. Perugia: Editoriale Umbra.
- Falcicchio, G. (2009). *I figli della festa. Educazione e liberazione in Aldo Capitini*. Bari: Levante.
- Falcicchio, G. (2011). "Gli animali, con i bambini, nella città postmoderna tra sorveglianza, invisibilità e aperture nonviolente", in F. Semerari (a cura di). *Metropolitania. Aspetti e forme di vita nella città postmoderna*. Milano: Ghibli. pp.151-186.
- Falcicchio, G. (2011). "Noi e loro: spunti per un'educazione nonviolenta con i viventi (seconda parte). *Azione Nonviolenta*. 569. p. 24.
- Falcicchio, G. (2011). "Noi e loro: spunti per un'educazione nonviolenta con i viventi (prima parte)". *Azione Nonviolenta*. 568. p. 26.
- Falcicchio, G. (2012). "Ma io non accetto. La religione aperta di Aldo Capitini". *Athanon*. 1. pp.271-275.
- Falcicchio, G. (2013) "Fecondità e apertura al vivente nel segno dell'andare nonviolento, per un'episteme pedagogica all'altezza dei tempi". in G. Elia, A. Chionna (a cura di). *Un itinerario di ricerca della pedagogia*. Lecce: Pensa MultiMedia. pp.117-125.
- Falcicchio, G. (2013). "Umani, troppo umani". *Azione nonviolenta*. 591. p. 21.
- Falcicchio, G. (2014), "La morte può finire. La morte nel pensiero filosofico e pedagogico di Aldo Capitini". *Educazione Democratica*, 8. pp. 60-84.
- Falcicchio, G. (2014). "L'abbraccio festivo. Riflessioni su educazione e nonviolenza", *Azione Nonviolenta*. 51. pp. 8-11.
- Falcicchio, G., Moscati, G., (a cura di). (2014). "Il pensiero di Aldo Capitini: percorsi di ricerca". numero monografico di *Educazione Democratica*, n. 8. pp. 13-186.

- Fioretti di San Francesco. A cura di D'Alatri (1982) Edizioni Paoline.
- Fromm, E. (1964) *The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil*, American Mental Health Foundation Books.
- Fromm, E. (1973) *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*. Available from: <http://filozofia.3bird.net/download/filozofia/erich-fromm/filozofia-erich-fromm-the-anatomy-of-human-destructiveness.pdf>
- Kellert, S.R.(1997) *Kinship to Mastery*. Washington DC: Island Press.
- Kellert, S.R. (1996) *The Value of Life: Biological Diversity and Human Society*. Washington (DC): Island Press.
- Kellert, S.R. and Wilson E.O. (1993) *The Biophilia Hypothesis*. Washington (DC): Island Press.
- Louv, R. (2005) *Last Child in the Wood*. Chapel Hill (NC): Algonquin Books.
- Pullia, F. (2010). *Dimenticare Cartesio. Ecosofia per la compresenza*. Milano: Mimesis.
- Pullia, F. (2012). *Al punto di arrivo comune. Per una critica della filosofia del mattatoio*. Milano: Mimesis.
- Moscatti, G., Maori, A. (a cura di). (2014). *Dossier Aldo Capitini*. Milano: Stampalternativa.
- Sémelin, J. (1985). *Per uscire dalla violenza*. Torino: Edizioni Gruppo Abele.
- Taurino, D. (2014). *La via della Persuasione con Carlo Michelstaedter e Aldo Capitini*. *Educazione democratica*, 8, 15-34.
- Thomashow, M. (1996) *Ecological Identity: Becoming a Reflective Environmentalist*. Boston (MA): The MIT Press.
- Wilson, E.O. (1984) *Biophilia*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.
- Wilson, E.O. (2006) *The Creation*. New York (NY): W. W. Norton & Company.