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DI LETTERE
E FILOSOFIA

Seminari di Filosofia

a cura del Percorso d'Eccellenza

Towards a Political Theology of Peace:

Lorenzetti, Cusanus,
Kant, Levinas and Butler

prof. Andrew Benjamin
(Monash University)

CALENDARIO

mercoledì 23 marzo, ore 15
via Laura 48, Aula Magna

I. The Death of Niobe's Children. Sacrifice and War

martedì 29 marzo, ore 15
via Laura 48, Aula Magna

II. Towards A Political Theology of Peace

giovedì 31 marzo, ore 15
via Laura 48, Aula Magna

*III. The Figure of Peace in Ambrogio Lorenzetti's
The Allegory of Good and Bad Government*

giovedì 21 aprile, ore 15
via Laura 48, aula 103

*IV. Who Were the Faithful? Nicholas of Cusa's
De Pace Fidei*

martedì 26 aprile, ore 15
via Laura 48, aula 106

V. Peace as Coexistence: Kant's Towards Perpetual Peace

giovedì 28 aprile, ore 15
via Laura 48, aula 103

VI. Peace Now: From Levinas to Butler

Background

The lectures have two interrelated elements. In specific terms the first is to trace the way ‘peace’ figures in a set of frescoes in the late Medieval period, - i.e. Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s *Allegory of Good and Bad Government* located in the Palazzo Pubblico in Sienna; then in a central text from the Renaissance, Nicholas of Cusa’s *De Pace Fidei*, and finally to note the still influential formulation of peace in Kant’s *On Perpetual Peace*. A final Lecture will follow the reiteration of ‘peace’ in texts by Emmanuel Levinas and Judith Butler in order to address the question of how peace is formulated in more recent philosophical engagements.

However, the project is more than the provision of a catalogue; hence the second element. Approaching peace has to have a setting. While the argument to be developed in the lectures is that peace is not the consequence of the suspension of war, other than pragmatically, and thus that peace may indeed be an original condition, a start still needs to be made with a consideration of war. The relationship between war, sacrifice and fate creates the setting to which peace comprises the countermeasure. And yet, peace is itself a complex term. The assumption that underpins the project as a whole is that peace - understood either conceptually or etymologically - does not have an essential nature. There is not an ‘essence’ of peace to be recovered from the history of its use. Nor is there the suggestion that the presentation of the term ‘peace’ historically hides or obscures an original sense. If this is the case what has to be taken up is the following question: *how are configurations of peace to be both understood and evaluated?*

In more general terms what then emerges is the way the problem of judgment attends anti-essentialism. The response, and the elaboration of this response becomes the intention of the lectures taken as a whole, is that if there is to be an evaluative position then it has to emerge from the ways the creation of a genealogy of peace gives rise to a configuration of judgment that occurs at the heart of political theology. The argument to be developed in this context is that judgment becomes possible because of the effective presence of imminent conditions. (Part of the argument to be developed is that what signals the presence of political theology is the effective presence of immanent conditions.)

Developing such approach to a genealogy of peace – one that depends upon the presence of immanent conditions - has two further points of orientation. The first is linked to the position that Nietzsche advances in the opening of *On the Genealogy of Morals*. His argument is that what is needed is a ‘critique of moral values’. For Nietzsche there are clear consequences of this position namely, again in his words, that ‘the value of these values must themselves be called into question’. In order to progress such a claim, the argument of the lectures series is going to be that the impossibility of essentialism means that peace is part of a set of terms which incorporate within them configurations of identity and difference. (In this instance two of the most important additional terms are ‘concord’ and ‘justice’.) While the detail will be systematically outlined in the context of lectures, it is the presence of what are, in fact, the articulations of configurations of identity and difference, on the one hand, and the concomitant conceptions of peace on the other, that allow for judgments to be made. Judgment relates to the ways in which peace is configured. In the case of Nicholas of Cusa, identity is understood in terms of the universalization of ‘faith’; in the case of Lorenzetti it results from a specific conception of the civic; while in Kant it results from a generalizable relation to the ‘earth’.

Lecture 1. The Death of Niobe's Children. Sacrifice and War

As noted, to take up peace, a concern with war has to figure. As war cannot be thought other than in relation to sacrifice and fate the approach here will be to begin with setting in which war, sacrifice and fate coincide, namely the myth of Niobe. Niobe's children (the Nioboids) died as the result of a direct order from Leto. Niobe had boasted of her fecundity. As a result, Leto then ordered her two children, Artemis and Apollo to kill the Niobids. The story appears in Homer and Ovid as well as in a vast range of contexts both literary and artistic. Remaining indifferent to Niobe's plight is almost impossible. However, that plight has a type of ambivalence at its centre. One valence is to concentrate on the figure of Niobe herself. Niobe's fate then predominates. This is the figure of Niobe that appears in Sophocles' *Antigone* in which Antigone compares herself to Niobe. She describes herself as 'the daughter of Tantalus'. From that moment the predominating concern then becomes the solitary figure of Niobe. What matters is her presence as a singularity. When Niobe reappears in Hegel's *Aesthetics* the central question is the possibility of her being a figure worthy of love. The emphatic contrast, for Hegel, is with Mary who is the personification of loves itself. For Hegel, Niobe cannot be loved. While Niobe's singularity is an important area of investigation, the emphasis in the lecture will be different. The Niobid's are fundamental insofar as their deaths will be interpreted as a direct result of Leto's declaration war on Niobe. Niobe's children are sacrificed as integral part of the prosecution of that war.

Sacrifice, while opening in different directions, has two defining characteristics. The first is the withdrawal of justice from the sacrificed. That withdrawal is immediate. It occurs in the form of a calculative logic that precludes the possibility of deliberation. Iphigenia was sacrificed by Agamemnon (here to be discussed in relation to Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*) in order to secure success in battle. The calculation was both exact and deliberate. The second element stems from the first and seeks to justify sacrifice by appeals to fate. What emerges from the interconnection of war and sacrifice is a certain conception of the political. One that grounds the political in a founding and constitutive relationship between *polemos* and *polis*. Part of the argument to be made in the opening lecture is that not only does peace stand in opposition to war, an insistence on peace – developed in the context of these lectures in terms of a political theology of peace – enjoin a different conception of the origin of the political, and thus equally of the political itself.

The sacrifice of Niobe's children was essential to the prosecution of war. The argument is then going to be that the constancy of an appeal to war from Heraclitus to Simone Weil needs to be countered by the possibility that peace is in fact the constancy of an appeal to justice. The latter cannot be thought other than in relation to law (as an immanent presence). Once law is a fundamental part of the project for peace, then peace has to be thought within the confines of a political theology.

Lecture 2. Towards A Political Theology of Peace: from War to Judgement

The aim of the second lecture will be to connect further ‘peace’ and ‘judgement’. The absence of essentialism does not preclude the possibility of judgement. If there is to be judgement, there has to be that in relation to which judgment is in fact possible. In the work of Jacques Ranciere, for example, the possibility of judgment inheres in what he deems the proletarian impulse for equality that attends every configuration of inequality. In the case of this project the possibility of judgment can be located in a different configuration of that which attends pragmatic instances. Here, that which attends has two elements. The first will be termed the *necessary territorialization of human being*. That necessity, it will be argued, has the quality of an immanent condition. In addition, and this is the second element, it is a condition whose defence necessitates a reworking of law rather than an immediate recourse to violence. Again, the centrality of the law is that which works to locate the project of the lectures within political theology. Law will move from its equation with either statute or norm to its redefinition in terms of the constancy of its openness to unconditional justice. This will be referred to henceforth as *law’s constancy*. In addition, it should be noted that ‘unconditional justice’ introduces another dimension of immanent presence.

Holding to the *territorialization of human being* as itself an immanent condition starts by noting an always already present relation between human being and place. The argument is that the relation is not contingent. On the contrary, it defines human being. Moreover, it is a definition that has important implications. One of which can be located in Hannah Arendt’s claim in *The Human Condition* that,

The space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government, that is, the various forms in which the public realm can be organized. (199)

If there is a summary position then the argument is that *to be is to appear* and that appearing has to be understood in terms of ‘speech’ and ‘action’. Fundamental to this configuration is Arendt’s use of the formulation ‘predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm’. That formulation will be interpreted, perhaps *pave* Arendt, as a claim pertaining to an immanent condition and thus it works to provide a ground of judgement. The further argument to be developed in the course of the lecture is that the relation between judgement and its necessary grounding in an immanent condition acquires force precisely because it will be defined in relation to *law’s constancy*.

Lecture 3. The Figure of Peace in Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government*

This fresco series which were painted in Sienna in the years 1338-9 have been and remain the subject of numerous interpretation. One of the most significant moments within the history of their reception concerns the exchange between Quentin Skinner and Nicolai Rubenstein on the origin and direction of the conception of the civic within the frescoes. However, rather than start with their more recent reception this lecture will begin with an engagement with Lorenzetti, by focusing on one the earliest recorded discussions of the frescoes. It occurred in a sermon given by Bernardino of Sienna in 1425. Part of his ekphrasis included the following description of 'peace',

When I turn to peace, I see commercial activity; (*Voltandomi a la pace, vego ...*) I see dances, I see houses being repaired; I see vineyards and fields being cultivated and sown, I see people going to the baths, on horses, I see girls going to marry, I see flocks of the sheep, etc. And I see a man being hanged in order to maintain holy justice. And for this [reason] everyone lives in holy peace and concord. (*E vego impicato l'uomo per mantenere la santa giustizia. E per queste cose, ognuno sta in santa pace e concordia.*)
(Emphasis added.)

In the sets of frescoes 'peace' also – and it might be thought more centrally – exists as a figure. A woman seated on a couch. Her allegorical presence reinforced by the words PAX written directly above her head. What is interesting about Bernardino's description is that he does not comment directly on the allegorical figure as such. In fact, he constructs a complex economy to describe peace.

The first part of that economy involves civil activities; the market, farmers and field labourers at work, marriage celebration, the husbandry of animals, comprise some of the elements seen in the turn to peace. It is almost worth noting his formulation '*Voltandomi a la pace, vego...*'. Not only is there the language of sight (*vego ... I see*) what is seen are the activities which, while they may assume peace, are what he sees when he 'turns' to peace. However, that is only one part of what is in play. Decisively, there is another element. Again this is what is 'seen'. In the instance it is the 'hanged man' (*impicato l'uomo*). In the actual frescoes he is held in place by the hand of 'Securitas'. Not only does this underscore the effective presence of a network of related concepts, more importantly, in this instance, the presence of the hanged man is given a precise formulation. It occurred *per mantenere la santa giustizia* (in order to maintain holy justice). The *per mantenere* – 'in order to maintain' - marks the presence of an economy of relations. It has a clear result. Firstly, 'holy justice' is maintained, and then secondly the latter's presence is the precondition for 'everyone' (*ognuno*) being able to be (*sta*) in 'holy peace and concord'. Peace – whether it is there presented by the allegorical figure, or coterminous with the activities that Bernardino 'sees' - cannot be separated from the expression of absolute state sovereignty, namely the death penalty.

The lecture as a whole will locate both the identification of peace with the allegorical figure, as well as peace as a set of activities, within the setting created by the necessity of the coterminous presence of peace and the death penalty. The work of Jacques Derrida as well as Walter Benjamin on the death penalty will be used to develop this identification as well its subsequent analysis. Again, the interpretation is constructed in order to address the relation between peace and expressions of sovereignty. Central to that interpretation and subsequent evaluation will be both the necessity of territory and the ineliminability of law's constancy.

Lecture 4. Friends, Enemies and the Faithful: Nicholas of Cusa's *De Pace Fidei*

Nicholas of Cusa's *De Pace Fidei* is a text that operates on a number of different levels. At the outset it should not be forgotten that it is a specific philosophical and religious response to the events of 1453 and thus to what is called in Turkish *Istanbul'un Fetbi* namely the 'Conquest of Istanbul', but which is referred to in the literature as the 'Fall of Constantinople'. Its specificity can be located in the additional argument that the recognition of the unity of faith (and religion), and it is essential to underscore that it is an act of recognition enjoining action, is that which 'stems the sword' (*cessabit gladius*). Only then does peace become possible. It is an intervention in the name of peace.

The aim of this lecture is to show in what way the nature of peace in Nicholas of Cusa's *De Pace Fidei* is dependent upon a conception of human being thought in terms of the relationship between identity and difference that was itself structured by a specific construal of 'faith'. As noted the centrality of faith is not arbitrary. Firstly, it has its ground in the larger metaphysical positions which can be located in a range of Cusanus' texts. (Most significant here is the *Triologus de possess.*) Secondly, it creates a subject position defined by relations of inclusion and exclusion. The response to such a setting – a response which has the form of a judgment – is not to demand the inclusion of the excluded. Rather, it is to argue that the guarantor of both inclusion and non-exclusion, position related to the *necessary territorialization of human being*, cannot be located in an abstraction that governs subject positions, i.e. faith, but only in a conception of law that is itself defined in terms of what has already been identified as *law's constancy*.

Lecture 5. Peace as Coexistence: Kant's *Towards Perpetual Peace*

Within the larger project Kant's text continues to play a central role. From the beginning it privileges the possibility of peace over the necessity of war. Contextually his text follows the intervention made by the Abbé St. Pierre, who had published his *Project for Setting an Everlasting Peace in Europe* (*Projet pour rendre la paix la paix perpétuelle en Europe*) in 1713. Kant's text appearing in 1795. While the historical context is important and the replies made to the publication of Abbé St. Pierre's text by Leibniz, Voltaire and Bayle amongst others are central to the setting in which Kant's writing on peace occur, the argument to be developed in this lecture is that the actual significance of Kant's text is that it is central to securing the position in which peace is no longer defined as the suspension of war and the political configured in terms of the friend/enemy distinction. As a result a radically different configuration of identity and difference then becomes possible. In the wake of Kant's text, it becomes possible to identify peace with *coexistence*. Coexistence would not be a secondary state. It would be based, following Kant, on an affirmation of the shared nature of earthly inhabitation, and thus on the *necessary territorialization of human being*. Coexistence would be linked to Kant's thinking of 'hospitality'. In addition, the repositioning of peace as *coexistence* brings with it a set of actions that assume the unconditional nature of the conception of right that allows for peace as a point of departure. Again this is a conception of peace whose defence is linked to claims made in relation to *law's constancy*.

While the evocation of the unconditioned plays a fundamental role in Kantian philosophy, part of what has to be developed, both as an exegesis of Kant and the subsequent development of peace as an unconditioned state – a state already hinted at in the formulation 'perpetual peace' – is a response to two questions. How does the unconditioned figure more generally within this overall setting? Secondly, what does it mean to claim that both peace and hospitality are themselves explicable in terms of the unconditioned? Answering these questions means that Kant's position does not generate a set of empty abstractions since what has to be addressed in every instance is the necessity of the relationship between the conditioned and the unconditioned. One result is that what then follows is not the withdrawal of activity, on the contrary, it opens up the possibility of an active conception of hospitality as a generalizable instance of coexistence in which reference to the unconditioned – which figures for example in the formulation of unconditional hospitality, what Kant calls 'universal hospitality' – as that which provides both the ground and the possibility of judgment. The terms 'universal' and 'unconditional' become aligned when Kant argues, later in *Perpetual Peace*, that morals are presented 'as the sum of laws commanding **unconditionally**' (*als Inbegriff von unbedingt gebietended Getsetzen*). (emphasis added) As will emerge the presence of the unconditioned in this aspect of Kant's philosophy occasions the possibility of a non-anthropocentric philosophical anthropology. What that means is that a decisive element of the constitution of human being is not located in the human understood as a pure singularity. Rather, it is the result of a relation to a form of externality that while constitutive of human singularity, are not defined in exclusively human terms. Here, the example, it is the relation to the earth. A position evincing what will have been identified as the *necessary territorialization of human being*.

Lecture 6. Configuring Peace today

In a recent interview which took place just after the beginning the war in Iraq in 2003 Judith Butler argued that peace

is the active and difficult resistance to the temptation of war; it is the prerogative and the obligation of the injured. I think that peace comes up as an issue precisely when one is injured.

The aim of this final Lecture is twofold. Firstly, a restatement of what has occurred in the move from Lorenzetti to Kant and then secondly to argue that the form of resistance which Butler envisages necessitates *law's constancy*. In other words, it necessitates positioning peace defined in relation to the unconditional presence of law's openness to justice at the heart of the conception of political theology developed throughout the lectures as a whole. This will occur by working through texts by both Judith Butler and Emmanuel Levinas.

Andrew Benjamin

Andrew Benjamin is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Monash University and was Anniversary Professor of Philosophy and the Humanities at Kingston University London as well as Distinguished Professor of Architectural Theory at the University of Technology, Sydney. His recent publications include: *Towards a Relational Ontology. Philosophy's Other Possibility* (SUNY Press 2015); *Art's Philosophical Work* (Rowman and Littlefield 2015) and *Virtue in Being* (SUNY Press 2016). He is currently completing two books: *Law as Political Theology* and *On Gesture: Classical and Renaissance Expressions*.