

# Is an Ethics Inspired by the Philosophy of Severino Possible?

**CARLO CHIURCO**

Assistant Professor, University of Verona

• e-mail: carlo.chiurco@univr.it

This paper deals with the possibility to outline some ethical notions that may be consistent with the main tenets of the philosophy of Emanuele Severino. By exploring the notion of “plural transcendental” that lays at the core of Carmelo Vigna’s “ethics of recognition”, the argument infers that, if the structure of transcendental reality implies the original presence of a relationship of mutual recognition between at least two transcendental consciousnesses, then to violate the other-ness of the Other becomes impossible, otherwise no transcendental consciousness would self-disclose ever. Yet relationships cannot be “good” or “evil”, otherwise relationships where mutual recognition is actually denied would actually exist. The original plurality of transcendental consciousnesses perfectly mirrors the actual meaning of «the true spectacle of Being» as «the irruption of differences».

**Keywords:**

**ethics, recognition, transcendental, consciousness, otherness, nihilism**

## 1. Introduction

My paper investigates whether it is possible to formulate an ethical theory that can be considered soundly founded on the principles of the philosophy of Emanuele Severino, or at least does not contradict them. Such task does not amount to establish a general ethical theory inspired by his thought – an *ethica more severiniano demonstrata*. While the latter is a far more ambitious project, here I will humbly content myself to try to demonstrate that *some* ethical notions actually *can* be formulated without contradict the philosophy of Severino. More specifically, the interesting ethical theory formulated by Carmelo Vigna, if read from a Severinian perspective, can precisely provide such ground. As a consequence, even if I am well aware that the subject of the difficult relation between the philosophy of Severino and ethics has been approached several times during the years, with some interesting theoretical proposals trying to overcome the contradiction seemingly embedded in agency itself according to his philosophical thought (see for instance Brianese, 2013 and Candiotta & Sangiorgio, 2013), I choose to focus solely on this comparison.

However, this still happens to be a titanic task, even an impossible one, given that, in the perspective of Severino, from the ontological point of view ethics can occur only *as* a form of the alienation of the actual meaning of being, while historically it occurs *within* this alienation. Otherwise said, ethics seems to be *not* conceivable outside the dimension that not only marks Western civilization *per se*, but also lies as its foundation: the belief according to which being, inasmuch as being, is nothing, given that all Western interpretations of coming-to-be and passing-away consider these processes as, respectively, the generation of being from, and its return to, nothing:

When thought affirms the possibility that something (i.e., a not-Nothing) not-be, and thus that it acquire and lose its being, it

affirms that not-Nothing is nothing – it posits the identity of Being and Nothing. For indeed, it is not of a *Nothing* that thought affirms that it is not, and so is nothing – no, it affirms this of a *not-Nothing*, and thus of *something* that, as such, is Being (Severino, 2016, p. 155).

The fundamental notion of metaphysics is that being, *as such*, is nothing (Severino, 2016, p. 207).

Indeed, both the main question of ethics – “what are the actions that define me as such?”, a question that could generate other ones such as “what defines me as an agent?”, “what is agency about?” – and morality – “what actions are right/wrong?”, a question that in turn ushers in the problem of the definition of moral values, i.e. of the meaning of good, evil, justice, and so on – imply at least implicitly the belief in the existence of boundaries, which should not be trespassed, lest being may suffer a diminution whatsoever.

From the Severinian perspective, the domains of ethics and morality seem incapable to avoid the accusation of fostering nihilism. As for moral values, they invariably come as a sort of either “super-evaluation” or “under-appreciation” of being. If, speaking of something or someone, I consider it/him as good, such predicament comes as a sort of enhancement of the existing reality, of which is predicated, a sort of “over-being”; the contrary, of course, occurs with the predicate “evil”, which makes the reality, of which is predicated, appear as being “less”, a sort of “under-being”. Moral values, in short, presuppose not only that being may change, that it may grow or diminish, but also that such fluctuation actually occurs – as it happens in Augustine’s classical theory about the meaning of evil. As for ethics, the notion of agency questions the stability of being in an even more general way, because the former would not even be considered possible were the latter not be subject to any change: *if* agency exists, as it does, then being *must* be changeable, and open *per se* to a possible *complete* manipulation by the agent. In other words, being can either be destroyed or produced entirely, or, even if not *all* of it is destroyed or produced (i.e., in case something or even most of it remains), still any change occurred or carried out on it *must* actually *destroy* something, no matter how small or irrelevant, in order to be really effectual, otherwise we wouldn’t even consider it as a change: were being to remain *identical* to itself, received wisdom goes, then it would simply

have not undergone any change at all (see Severino, 1982, pp. 311-312). (Another possible objection goes like that: if nothing changes, given that everything is eternal, contrarian predicaments would then co-exist within the same subject, i.e. Socrates would be at the same time “young” and “old”: see Severino, 2016, p. 184, note 15, and also Severino, 1982, pp. 303-305). Finally, also the fundamental question of “ethics” as it is lay down by Heidegger, revolving, as it happens, around the definition of what human agency essentially is – i.e. the relation between human agency and man’s very essence – turns out to be formulated in nihilistic terms. Indeed, if, for Heidegger, the question about truly authentic agency – the one that uplifts the *Dasein* from the ontic dimension to the ontological one – becomes the place where the *Dasein* puts its very being at stake, this can only mean that the *meaning* of human existence is so radically put into question, that it could *also* be completely nullified – as a matter of fact, it is precisely such possibility that makes this question so important and valuable. The text of *Sein und Zeit* provides many references. First, the being of *Dasein* is described as something that is *essentially* always at stake – being constantly at stake actually belonging to the very *essence* of the *Dasein* as its most proper characteristic – from the very introduction of its notion in par. 9: «Das Seiende, dem es in seinem Sein um dieses selbst geht, verhält sich zu seinem Sein als seiner eigensten Möglichkeit. Dasein *ist* je seine Möglichkeit» (Heidegger, 1967, p. 42). But it is only in the liminal experiences of fear and above all death, that the *Dasein* feels the limit, which marks its essential relation with authenticity:

Nur Seiendes, dem es in seinem Sein um dieses selbst geht, kann sich fürchten. Das Fürchten erschließt dieses Seiende in seiner Gefährdung, in der Überlassenheit an es selbst (Heidegger, 1967, par. 30, p. 141)

Mit dem Tod steht sich das Dasein selbst in seinem *eigensten* Seinkönnen bevor. In dieser Möglichkeit geht es dem Dasein um sein In-der-Welt-sein schlechthin. Sein Tod ist die Möglichkeit des Nicht-mehr-dasein-könnens. [...] Der Tod ist die Möglichkeit der schlechthinigen Daseinsunmöglichkeit. So enthüllt sich der *Tod* als die *eigenste, unbezügliche, unüberholbare Möglichkeit*» (Heidegger, 1967, par. 50, p. 250).

The origin of such possibility – notably, that the Dasein is essentially always at stake – must be tracked back to Husserl’s phenomenology, for which, being impossible to decide whether being exists independently from manifesting itself, only manifest being, i.e. being manifesting itself in and as experience, may be the object of science. Heidegger stretches the conclusions of his master to their limits, by asserting that, of every being manifesting itself, is impossible to state whether it still is, when is not manifested any further (see Severino, 1989, pp. 293-314, especially pp. 301-307).

However, if it is not possible from the perspective of Western ethical tradition to draw conclusions that do not contradict the principles of Severino’s philosophy, it remains to be seen whether the other way round is feasible – that is to say, whether it is possible to rethink ethics, partially or completely, from those very principles. It is my personal conviction that an ethical theorization in particular, known as “ethics of recognition” and first proposed by the Italian scholar Carmelo Vigna, is suitable to become a form of ethics that complies with the «truth of being», as it has been outlined by Severino in more than sixty years of research and countless essays and treaties. My attempt is therefore absolutely not systematic, nor it raises any claim to completeness or exhaustivity, since there could be also other ethical theories that could fit into the main structure of Severino’s philosophy. Still, if an ethical theory whatsoever can be judged to be in conformity with this philosophy, the received wisdom, according to which ethics is *per se* necessarily nihilistic, and not just as a necessary consequence of the *history* of Western nihilism (even if such history is, in turn, ontologically necessary and not simply a fact), will not be tenable any further.

## 2. Encountering the transcendental

Ethics of recognition, as it has been theorized by Vigna, is founded on a nexus between a theoretical dimension and a practical one, where the latter comes as the self-disclosure of the former in the domain of factually experienced reality. In Vigna’s neo-idealistic perspective, reality is founded upon transcendental consciousness, which in turn is the “subjectivation of significance” – meant as, literally, the process of becoming-a-subject undergone by significance. From an “objective” perspective, significance *per se* is the transcendental horizon that makes every *determined* significance possible, just as the ontological difference

between being and every determined or individual being is made possible (i.e. thinkable) by the former. Every significance is entirely “objective” when considered as such, but becomes “subjective” when it is considered in relation with thinking activity, which poses and comprehends it: indeed, being and significance can hardly be found outside thinking activity conceiving them, every entity existing only if it is thought. But if we stop looking at significance in a purely objective way, and begin to relate it to thinking activity, without which it wouldn’t even exist – namely, given that significance is not *found*, as naturalistic realism believes, but coincides with the process of thinking itself – then being, understood as a transcendental horizon, becomes a transcendental *consciousness*.

All this, of course, belongs to the realm of the well-established tenets of idealistic philosophy, to which Vigna adds a very interesting theoretical corollary nonetheless. For idealism generally sees transcendental consciousness as belonging to the realm of self-manifest truths: nothing can be thought without previously admitting the existence of thinking in general, just as every determined significance presupposes the existence of significance *per se*. In addition to that, the transcendental nature of consciousness, as well as its many synonyms (such as being, thought, significance *per se*...), must be understood as essentially *open*: to claim that being (or significance) *per se* makes every determined being (or significance) possible, amounts to state that no determined being or significance may semantically match the width of transcendental significance.

Vigna often addresses transcendental realities in terms of «horizon», a term he always employs with reference to the category of Whole-ness, or totality: therefore, «horizon» may mean the whole of being, of reality, of significance, of thought, as for example in Vigna, 2016, p. 159: «The Origin consists of the synthesis between thought and what is immediately given to it. But thought immediately leans over its immediate content. Its horizon is the Whole of reality, since neither it does point to *this* or *that* content, nor to what entirely differs from every possible current content, that is from *any* possible given content». The sum of all possible determined beings or significances – those that were, are, and will be, plus all those that remain forever in the domain of pure potentiality – is *never* capable to match the semantical span of the transcendental significance «being», i.e. of transcendental significance *per se*. Transcendental significance is *actual totality*, whereas determined

totality is simply the sum of all determined beings/significances, real and possible. As said before, when I do not simply consider significance as something that stands before my intellect, distinct from thinking activity, but in close connection with the latter, then significance becomes consciousness: as a consequence, the actual totality of transcendental significance, considered from a “subjective” perspective, is transcendental consciousness, which enjoys the same absolutely open nature described before. This neo-idealistic structure is, of course, perfectly known also to Severino, forming a necessary element of his philosophy, and it is masterly epitomized in the sentence found in Severino, 2016, p. 159: «Man is the eternal appearing of the truth of Being». Other formulations of it may be found *ivi*, p. 172 («The “I” is this eternal place where worlds are born»), and p. 189; Severino, 2016, p. 211 («Not only is man eternal, like every being, but he is also the locus in which the eternal eternally manifests itself»), and p. 259 («“I” means: “This eternal self-reflection of Appearing, in whose truth Being has always dwelled”»).

### 3. Investigating transcendental “open-ness”: Vigna’s ethical theorization

Vigna’s argument precisely tries to investigate the nature of such “open-ness” of the transcendental, which comes as a necessary predicament of every transcendental reality. Idealistic philosophy does not pay much attention to such “open-ness”, considering it an essentially *immediate* predicament of the transcendental. Vigna, on the contrary, tries to resolve this residual naturalism – in the eyes of idealistic perspective, every belief in immediate-ness is potentially a form of naturalism, and must be put at test whether it can be overcome as such – by stating that such “open-ness” is not merely accessory, but comes as a *structure* – a nexus – that, like everything else, is itself the result of a mediation, a process. If this is the case, then the “open-ness” that marks transcendental as such must have a “purpose”. Vigna determines such “purpose” in this way: transcendental consciousness is “open” – it is a semantic «horizon» – because there is at least *another* transcendental consciousness beside it. The disclosure of consciousness may actually happen only as, and by means of, a reciprocal disclosing process with another (potential) consciousness. After rejecting all the possible alternatives for the determination of this other transcendental reality that originally stands

around transcendental subjectivity, such as God, the Whole, being, other transcendental meanings, and finally the I itself (see Vigna, 2015, pp. 37-42), Vigna concludes that it can only be

the immediate experience of an *actual transcendental reality* that is originally *different* from transcendental intentionality meant as an element of the structure of the Origin. In it, I experience someone else, but as another *subjectivity*, and not simply as a behaviour, which is similar or equivalent to that experience of the transcendental, which I call mine (Vigna, 2015, p. 42).

This amounts to a major shift in the conception of at least one of the main tenets of idealistic philosophy, because it turns the self-evident nature of transcendental consciousness from solipsistic or purely self-referent to something that rests on the existence of a plurality of actual transcendental consciousnesses. (Indeed, the “open-ness” of transcendental consciousness is synonymic with its self-evidence. Everything claiming to be transcendental – be it being itself or thought – is also universal. In the given examples, this implies that nothing neither can, respectively, exist nor be thought outside of them. But the universal is self-evident by necessity: being the Whole of reality, in order to deny it we must presuppose it.)

Such plural transcendentalism – which should not be confused with a plurality of transcendentals: see note at the end of this paragraph – is a theoretical condition that necessarily implies consequences both theoretical *and* practical. As for the theoretical consequence, since my transcendental consciousness is “open” because there is at least another one beside it, the nature of such plurality remains to be properly understood. Were it simply an *Urfakt*, then it would not be necessary: in this case, a transcendental consciousness *would* be such, simply because it so *happens*, i.e. because transcendental consciousnesses simply self-disclose themselves together – a merely *factual* necessity, not an ontological one. On the contrary, plural transcendentalism acquires a real necessary status when the “open-ness” of my consciousness does not simply imply the pure *fact* of the existence of another transcendental consciousnesses, but the presence of a transcendental consciousness *that recognizes me as such* (i.e. as a transcendental consciousness too): «The definition of the (actual) object of being’s becoming-visible as transcendental makes the self-disclosure of consciousness thinkable,



because it establishes an essential equation at the level of *intentionality*» (Vigna, 2015, p. 47).

The “open-ness” of a transcendental nature, as we said, is such, that it cannot be satisfied by any determined totality. Still, it is an “open-ness” awaiting to find something or someone *au pair* with it, such as only *another* transcendental consciousness can be. If there would *not* be at least another transcendental reality – another transcendental consciousness – capable to match it, my transcendental consciousness would not self-disclose itself, letting the whole world appear in such self-disclosure. Thus, Vigna’s theory distances itself from the solipsism of the self-evident Self, so typical of modern philosophy, as well as idealism and phenomenology, replacing it with a *plural* evidence of *more Selves*.

*Note.* In no way does plural transcendentalism amount to a plurality of transcendentals. More universals cannot co-exist, since the universal is transcendental, spanning over actual totality, the Whole of reality. When Vigna says there are “many” transcendental consciousnesses, such plurality is not merely formal, still all of these consciousnesses remain one and the same in the *structure* of their transcendental nature – not, of course, in the contents they disclose in each structures. See Vigna, 2015, pp. 49-50: «Inter-subjectivity, which the Origin consists of, somehow coincides with Heraclitus’ “common speech”. It should not be understood as if the Origin is a multitude, because this would imply that, as a consequence, we should explore the possible forms, by which such multitude convenes together. On the contrary, here accordance is part of the Origin itself, because the original inter-subjective condition – which is the original object of theoretical speculation – is the articulation of the constants that are part of the transcendental becoming-visible of being. Such constants must necessarily be found within every individual identification of the becoming-visible of being, i.e. in every individual “human being”.»

#### 4. Enacting mutual recognition

If the theoretical consequence of plural transcendentalism revolves around the *mutual* nature of the recognition enacted by both transcendental consciousnesses, its *practical* consequence sheds light on the *concrete* meaning of such mutual *recognition*, which cannot remain purely theoretical in terms of a mere shared notion, but must involve a deeper sort of communion. As we saw, a transcendental consciousness

never simply “becomes aware” of the *ursprünglich* presence of another beside it, but it rather *actively recognizes it as another transcendental reality*, whose transcendental nature matches its own. Given that i) the presence of another transcendental consciousness is the necessary condition in order that a transcendental consciousness may self-disclose itself as such; and that ii) such presence is never simply perceived, but always *recognized*, we could then infer that this recognition (of the other transcendental consciousness) is the essential mediation in order that (every) transcendental consciousness may recognize (and self-disclose) itself. It is precisely the extent of this recognition that is not purely theoretical: by originally recognizing me (and not simply becoming aware of me) as a transcendental reality, the other consciousness concretely recognizes me as I actually am *and* it opens itself up to me; and, such recognition being originally mutual, this means that I originally recognize the other consciousness as it is too, *and* I open myself up to it. Otherwise said, not only is the relation between two transcendental consciousnesses original, but it also originally is a relation of mutual recognition between them as they are, a recognition that in turn, being *actual* and not only theoretical in terms of a shared pure notion, is a mutual welcoming the Other in his/her other-ness. It is, in short, an actual *relationship*:

The synthesis of the two necessities (the original *and* immediate object of intentional relation must be real *and* transcendental) may be found in inter-subjective relation as revealing the authentic features of the structure of the Origin (Vigna, 2015, p. 48).

All transcendentals are, first and foremost, nothing but inter-subjective relation *itself*. Beauty is, before anything else, the beauty of a human face seen by a human gaze; good is, before anything else, a good person loving a good person (that is to say, good is, before anything else, a love relationship) (Vigna, 2015, p. 62).

Such relationship is theoretical and ethical-practical at the same time: «While Scholastic ontology characterized the Origin in terms of “there is something”, the characterization of the original “something” as “someone”, on the one hand, remains within the domain of theoretics [...], but, on the other, transforms theoretics [...]. Properly speaking, it

“curves” the whole domain of the Origin, making it inter-subjective itself» (Vigna, 2015, p. 48). It is theoretical, because transcendental nature, as said, always comes as plural, and ethical-practical, because such plurality is always a shared one, and recognized as such. If the transcendental nature of my consciousness, in order to be, presupposes at least another transcendental consciousness beside it; if this plurality is not simply factual, but is an *ursprünglich* mutual recognition; then such mutual recognition, revolving as it does around the shared transcendental nature of the (at least) two consciousnesses involved, necessarily comes with ethical consequences attached, the most notable among them being the impossibility to manipulate other consciousnesses because of their very other-ness. Indeed, in their original mutual recognition, both transcendental consciousnesses not only mutually open themselves up to each other, but they do *unconditionally* so. If my transcendental consciousness cannot self-disclose itself as such, thus disclosing the world in it, without the actual original (*ursprünglich*) presence of the other recognising consciousness(es) beside it, then manipulating other consciousness(es), as well as objectualizing them, amounts to not recognise that very transcendental nature of theirs – a recognition that is instead necessary for my own transcendental consciousness in order to self-disclose itself and blossom. This also brushes off the very possibility of the aporia, according to which a transcendental consciousness, i.e. an actual totality, cannot meet another actual totality as such, without making it a particular content, that is without objectivating, particularizing it (indeed, if something is contained within a horizon, what is contained cannot be in turn a horizon. If it were a horizon as such, it could be not distinguished from the original horizon). The mutual opening-up between two transcendental consciousnesses must be transcendental as well:

Subjectivity, which *exerts* intentionality, stands as a transcendental horizon that cannot be crossed (to imagine so is contradictory, because it would amount to think something as the object of intentionality, which would nevertheless be positioned outside the domain of intentionality itself). Yet the subjectivity, which finds itself as the *object* of intentionality, is just as transcendental, because it appears as meta-determined or “beyond thematization” (it is indeed a subject and not an object, not even an intellectual one). These two horizons *must* therefore *coincide*. Only their

*content* may differ, just as it actually does, as experience (even common experience) richly shows (Vigna, 2015, p. 57).

But to recognise another transcendental consciousness as such – a recognition that, as said, is always reciprocal – simply means, in Vigna’s eyes, that the theoretical *relation* between the two becomes a good *relationship* among them at the practical level – that is, a relation of love or friendship. By embedding the ontological necessity of relationships within the necessary overall ontological structure of transcendental consciousness and significance *per se*, Vigna has achieved the remarkable success of binding together the theoretical and the practical spheres in a way that highlights, on the one hand, how the fundament of reality is a *nexus*, and, on the other, the exemplaristic nature of such nexus, for reality as a whole too consists of a nexus between *lógos* and experience – a basic tenet of Severino’s philosophy since *La struttura originaria* [*The Original Structure*] (see Severino, 1981, pp. 16-17).

## 5. A Severinian critique to Vigna

The problem of Vigna’s theorization resides in its being a *closed* structure, since it is adamant in denying ethical status to all relationships that either are not based on mutual recognition, nor manifest it – in other words, it excludes all relationships that cannot be deemed ethically good. The weak point in Vigna’s argument – which is very sophisticated, often elegant in its subtlety – lies precisely in the definition of “ethically good relationships”, since the latter, in the eyes of the author, are simply *presupposed* to be the ones that can be usually inferred from perspectives such as naturalism or common sense, like heterosexual marriage or camaraderie male friendship. By adopting this stance, Vigna falls back into the usual frame of limit-bound Western traditional ethics, which, while actively trying to define ethical boundaries that should not be trespassed, reformulate – in Severino’s view – the essential nihilistic attitude embedded in Western ontology.

If we try instead to read Vigna’s ethics of recognition within the perspective of the most authentic feature of the «true spectacle of Being» as it has been formulated by Severino, namely «the irruption of differences» (Severino, 2016, p. 43), i.e. that *all* beings are originally eternal, we must draw the conclusion that a distinction such as that proposed by Vigna, between relationships of reciprocal recognition (or

good relationships) and relationships based on manipulation (or evil, ethically unacceptable relationships) – shortly, the sort of distinction typically found in Western ethics – is no longer tenable. Should we accept the actual existence of a violation whatsoever of mutual recognition, we would then be bound to accept also the factual existence of violence, and also of its pre-condition (the possibility of actual annihilation of being) as well as its effects (the reality of actual annihilation of being). Violence, on the contrary, may exist only as a pure form deprived of actual content, which in fact is the actual meaning of non-being as opposed to being. Non-being (meaning here absolute nothingness) must indeed signify *something*, otherwise the very truth of being would disappear: given that being is essentially opposed to nothing – it actually consists of such opposition, – if nothing does not mean anything, then such opposition i.e. being itself does not exist. Still, even if nothing must signify something, it must signify that very “something” that, indeed, is pure nothingness itself, *nihil absolutum*. The solution consists precisely in saying that the meaning “nothing” is a pure form, actually deprived of real content (which is the *nihil absolutum*: see Severino, 1981, p. 209 and ff.).

This leads us, of course, to the thorny issue of defining the nature of the horrors and devastations inflicted by humans upon themselves or the biosphere, which the original impossibility of violence set by «truth of being» makes *not* look as abominable acts – something practical reflection, as well as common sense, may find deeply repulsive to accept. Yet extreme coherence with the principles of Severino’s philosophy forces us to admit that everything appearing – according to the usual ethical perspective – as a *violation* of mutual recognition, like all forms of interaction apparently deprived of every minimal ethical connotation, such as sadism, brutality, or open cruelty, are actually attempts to deny the truth – inscribed in the very self-disclosure process of transcendental consciousness – that *there is no such thing as relationships that actually deny or violate mutual recognition*. If the «truth of being» brings forth «the original watershed of all determinations», then even the spectacles of violence, death and destruction are eternal, just like every other being:

The abuse carried upon Earth is the root of all fault. (Still, this should not be taken as a claim about man’s “responsibility”). The original fault is the strife between the earth and the truth of being. But earth’s abuse is eternal, like any other being. It *shows* itself at

the beginning of human history. Equally eternal is therefore also all we deem “mistake”, “evil”, “fault”, “sorrow” – that is to say, all the avatars of contradiction – just as eternal is also the overcoming of all the avatars of contradiction (Severino, 1982, p. 305).

However, what they – or we – *believe* they are, the *purpose* they – or we – think they serve – that is, to actually annihilate other beings, thus heralding the fundamental tenet of nihilism, according to which being is *per se* nothing – is originally impossible. They – “evil” relationships, all forms of relationships that actively pursue “evil” – are explicitly manifest violence, just as “good” relationships do so implicitly, because they all are issued from *will*, which is the origin of alienation:

If violence is the will, which desires what is impossible; and if will essentially consists in desiring that a being becomes something-other-than-itself; then – given that becoming something-other-than-itself is impossible, because the impossible is, first and foremost, to be other-than-itself – will is *per se* the desire of what is impossible: otherwise said, will is *per se* violence. The devastation brought over man and the earth is violence’s visible form; compassion, love, tolerance are its hidden forms (Severino, 1992, p. 26).

## 6. Only (relations of) recognition actually exist

Seen from the perspective of the «truth of being», on the contrary, all forms of relationship are *per se* but pure manifestations of mutual recognition. This recognition, in turn, precisely recognizes being as something not subject to any change at all, not even the slightest form of manipulation. From a caress given to a child given because of love (“good” will) to the needless destruction of an entire city out of pure criminal cruelty (“evil” will), being remains eternal and impermeable to any mutation. The furious ideological rage of the Nazis, desiring the annihilation of the entire Jewish nation, only reaffirms the impossibility to annihilate the Other in its other-ness. Moreover, such desire for destruction would actually never exist, were the other-ness of the Other *not* being *original*, i.e. *transcendental* – actually, what allows the transcendental consciousness of the torturer to open up.

The annihilation task is a Sisyphean one, since it is impossible to accomplish. The torturer must double his efforts precisely because the

annihilating acts inflicted on the victim seem *never annihilating enough* – it looks as if they always bring actual annihilation within reach, moving always a step further towards it, yet never fully accomplishing it. Indeed, no effort whatsoever, not even an induced mass extinction of mankind as a whole, will ever suffice to annihilate being. Thus, all the forms, in which violent behaviour articulates itself, actually witness only the impossibility to deny «the truth of being» – just like any other being. Otherwise said, the attempt to actually generate and perform acts that deny mutual recognition, absolutely or partially, only leads to the result that such acts actually *are* relationships where the Other is recognized in its other-ness, and fully so, precisely because the perennial search for even more systematic and furious ways to erase such other-ness invariably end up only confirming it – they presuppose what they try to deny, in the very moment they attempt to deny it. No action can deny the *actual* existence of relationships of mutual recognition, because these are the *only ones* «the truth of being» permits to occur. This, of course, implies that expressing moral judgements of value by stating the difference between good and evil relationships – between relationships that do affirm mutual recognition, and those that do not – is intrinsically nihilistic.

## 7. Conclusion: towards a Severinian “proto-ethics”

In conclusion, we can state that it is possible to claim that some ethical notions may be outlined according to the principles of Severino’s philosophy. Such notions are definitely rudimental – indeed they rather constitute a sort of proto-ethics, far less a fully articulated one, – consisting only of what could be arguably described as ethics’ very essential principle of mutual recognition of the Other’s original other-ness. Yet such principle has been recognized in its sound ontological consistency and, above all, necessity. This, in turn, allows such mutual recognition to be understood as the translation into “subjective” terms of the ontological *Ursprünglichkeit* of all differences (Severino’s original «irruption of differences»). Finally, such mutual recognition is also constitutive of the mediation, in which every identity originally consists – in the sense that it is less an *element of it*, than a *moment in it*.

Such proto-ethics states that every act that denies the other-ness of the Other, by manipulating, objectivating, or destroying it, is originally impossible, thus denying the very possibility of evil. Still, good makes no

sense anymore too: whenever a relationship of mutual recognition occurs between two beings (be they two humans, a human and an animal, a human and an object, and so on), such event is simply a self-manifestation of «the truth of being» – in other words, of the one and only spectacle that may actually eternally happen. There is no “value” in it, nor can we infer from it a given set of moral values, some “tables of the law”. Indeed, the mere thought of giving directions to human agency presupposes the possibility to do wrong, that is to deny «the truth of being» by damaging or destroying being by setting or changing the course of events – all necessarily impossible alternatives. That there can be no evil, violence being originally impossible, means there can be no good either from an equally original perspective. Therefore, such proto-ethics, given its equanimous attitude towards all sorts of acts, be they “good” or “violent” – and even towards violence itself, since «It appears that, if violence exists, it cannot be the will, which desires what is possible, but it must be the will that desires the *impossible*» (Severino, 1992, p. 19), – and its equally equanimous rejection of every attempt to distinguish between “good” and “evil”, as they would superimpose value judgements over being, would definitely be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to be enacted in practice. Moreover, it also structures itself as a sort of immediate *overcoming of ethics* – at least as ethics has always been imagined throughout the history of Western philosophy, i.e. the history of nihilism. However, the analogy between the structure of mutual recognition, with its original implication of a plural transcendental, and the structure of «the truth of being» is real: both witness the original primacy – hence, the eternity – of the Many, «the original watershed of all determinations».

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