Metaphilosophical Sketches
between Emanuele Severino and Graham Priest

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Adopting the metaphilosophical perspective, the article considers some implications of the relationship between two contemporary thinkers able to open two important new perspectives of thought: Emanuele Severino and Graham Priest. Severino reasons with the theoretical instruments involving the logical ones; on the other hand, Priest with that of the logical which secondarily involve the theoretical ones. Both are interested in metaphilosophical questions, among which the relationships between truth, contradiction/non-contradiction, and logic emerge as important. However, their solutions are quite different, if not completely opposite. The aim of this brief essay is not to make a comparison between them, but rather to retrace their possible contributions in normal science and any possible paradigm shift passing through the epistemological question. The paper attempts to open the discussion on their contributions to find their differences but also their possible areas of consonance.

Introduction

This present brief contribution to the second number of "Eternity and Contradiction" traces the relationship between Emanuele Severino and Graham Priest with respect to their importance in the area of metaphilosophy and then of epistemology, since both can somehow be defined as metaphilosophers. In fact, their work discusses philosophy and the main points of philosophy. Indeed, their work analyses the aims, boundaries, methods, and, especially, the question inherent to the definition of truth, logic, and reality. In particular, we want to stress some epistemological key concepts of science and their connection with other possible conceptualizations derived from different ways that knowledge indicates reality (Lazerowitz, 1970). From a metaphilosophical point of view, this specific area of thinking is particularly significant, since many authors, epistemologists, and scientists want to reduce all philosophy into the brackets of science and its methodologies. This effect is due to the fact that science is considered a priori, able to construct/explain the world out and independent of the mind. For example, in their *Introduction to Metaphilosophy*, Søren Overgaard, Paul Gilbert and Stephen Burwood (2013, p. 45) recall the declaration of Stephen Hawking, in which he expressed the opinion that philosophy is dead because it was not able to keep up with modern developments in science, particularly physics. From this perspective, scientists would have replaced philosophers as "bearers of the torch of discovery in the human quest for knowledge", because philosophy is an outdated form of thought surpassed by contemporary history and scientific technological strategies that can find answers to important and concrete questions. In reaction to the Continental and phenomenological philosophy, the New Realism moves precisely in this direction (Ferraris, 2014), affirming that human conceptual schemes and perceptual apparatus play a constitutive role to the tangible world. However, as widely considered by Severino (i.e. 1984, pp. 203-5), in discussing the

Hegelian dialectic on "certainty vs. truth", this perspective had already and definitively been refuted by Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Indeed, it is quite difficult to infer any possible form of reality today on the basis of "certainty", especially after the critical discussion sprung from the Vienna circle and developed from Herbert Feigl to Paul and Patricia Churchland. Indeed, their eliminative materialism, claiming that human understanding is deeply wrong, affirms that mental states posited do not actually exist and have no role in thinking truth, because thoughts are only states of the neurological matter and cannot observe themselves.

The theme of illusion and error is at the basis of scientific investigation, which, although based on hypothetical and falsifiable assumptions, always considers the principle of verification on the basis of the recognition of error. This is certainly the territory where philosophy and science find their meeting point. But the most insidious problem for science is to observe reality without seeing the distortions that the observation instrument can put into the observed field. Philosophical reflection, in particular the epistemology, helps scientists in the complex work of recognizing theoretical and/or methodological biases; whereas, from criticism, they often take the shape that Thomas Kuhn (1962) called "paradigm shifts" which are structures of knowledge able to remove conceptual limitations.

Overgaard, Gilbert, and Burwood point out that Hawking's statement, despite his persuasion of speaking only scientifically, utilizes a language hugely rooted in philosophical background. The fundamental problem on which such forms of reductionism are founded is perfectly foreshadowed by Edwin Abbott, author of the satirical novel *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (1884), in which the setting is described as a two-dimensional world. It is inhabited by geometric figures, in which women are segmented lines, men are various polygons, and the narrator is a square that guides readers through the implications of life in two dimensions. The difficulty is that of being aware of the air we breathe, or, as Einstein said (1950, p. 5), the water where fish swim: "Of what is significant in one's own existence one is hardly aware, and not bother the other fellow. What does a fish know about the water in which he swims all life?" Priest, in his paper "What is philosophy" (2006, p. 189), sketches the same question, saying, "Any person knows by acquaintance what breathing is; but this does not mean that they know the nature of breathing: its mechanism and function". Following this metaphor, we can say that both Severino and Priest are metaphilosopher because they want to discover the meaning of water, showing the fishes how they are immersed in it.

In his book *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, Priest introduces a sense of his studies affirming that "Finitude is a basic fact of human existence. Whether one treats this as a source of sorrow or of relief, it is without doubt that there are limits to whatever people want to do, be they limits of human endurance, resources, or of life itself. What these limits are, we can sometimes only speculate; but that they are there, we know. For example, we can only guess what the limit time for running a mile is; but we know that there is a limit, set by the velocity of light, if not by many more mundane things" (1995, p. 3). Priest's perspective considers certain kinds of limits of the mind that he calls "limits of thought, though 'thought', here, should be understood in its objective, Fregean, sense, as concerning the contents of our intentional states, not our subjective consciousness. [...]. Limits of this kind provide boundaries beyond which certain conceptual processes (describing, knowing, iterating, etc.) cannot go; a sort of conceptual ne plus ultra. [...] *My* thesis is that such limits are dialetheic; that is, that they are the subject, or locus, of true contradictions. The contradiction, in each case, is simply to the effect that the conceptual processes in question do cross these boundaries" (ibid).

Severino is also rigorously interested in the clear definition of the error and everything that conceals it, causing the delusion of certainty. He explains the impossibility of Western rational thought to understand its fundamental fault. The philosopher defines the boundaries within all this philosophy develops "nihilism", which is the language conceiving beings isolated from their necessary eternity. This isolation causes a fundamental real contradiction, which indicates impossible contents that cannot be true, because they are all immersed in the paradoxical believing that being is nothing. However, his discourse considers science as a radical form of faith because it is entirely immersed in an abysmal fundamental error.

1. Beyond the logic or beyond the limits of the error?

Also, Hilary Putnam (1992), after developing the links between mathematics, logic, and philosophy and then wandering around a renewal of philosophy while dealing with Wittgenstein, relativism, deconstructionism, unrealism, and the conundrums related to the representations, was convinced that philosophy is increasingly dominated by science, because of the belief that science is able to describe the world in itself, that is, to objectify the reality. Indeed, the evolution of his perspective, caused by

difficulties related to the definition of what reality is, sprang from the problem of defining what allows us to know what we know and how: "meaning of meaning" (Putnam, 1975, pp. 215-271).

As Severino and Priest discuss, the fundamental framework that permits to manage these reflections is what is indicated as "truth" that means the discourse without errors, articulated in a formal structure (logic), which content are related to being (ontology), whereas "reality" is exactly the expression of their contact. Whether the debate on the validity of metaphilosophy seems to be endless, despite it is surely acceptable that this field of study is still philosophy in itself, however, it is possible to recognize that the two authors stay at a superior level, giving an important contribution in the renewal of philosophy, from which it is recognizable the fundamental structure of thought and the same meaning of meaning. Indeed, both of them found their reflection on the sense of truth and of non-truth from which their logic derives, analysing the role and limits of the Principle of Non-Contradiction PNC). The question consists of defining if their standpoints are radically opposite or they can somehow be integrated.

Priest is famous because coined the word 'dialetheism' and developed this area of logic, which is define "paraconsistent". Dialetheism affirms that there can be a true statement whose negation is also true. A "dialetheia" is a sentence, A, such that both it and its negation, ¬A, are true, and dialetheism is the view that there are dialetheias. Such statements are called 'true contradictions'. From a metaphilosophical point of view, logic is a crucial element because, as argued by Michael Dummett (2010, p. 4, 13), if philosophy is rooted in the "systematic quest for truth", logic defines the grammar of the statements, guaranteeing the possibility of developing substantial accordance between different philosophical viewpoints, epistemology, and sciences. From this perspective, thanks to the the language of logic, whose grammar contains expressions that cannot be inconsistent with the content it indicates, philosophy defines what makes sense, as Rudolf Carnap and the Vienna Circle debated. However, dialetheias indicate that the ἔλεγχος (èlenchos), one of the fundamental principles of logic, is no longer considered a universal law. In this way, does not logic simply become a formal way to describe any form of speech as pronounceable?

Against this direction, for his part, despite the growing success of the epistemologies of suspicion, of the thought of disenchantment, and of the perspectives of uncertainty, Severino's discourse developed, proceeding through a vigorous critique of the science, technique, and meta-

physics, but also any form of weakness characterizing the strategies of contemporary thought for overcoming the traditional use of principle of non-contradiction (PNC) to indicate truth. His main goal is to identify the dynamics that necessarily produce the sunset of truth as understood by traditional thought, and above all, to show how both the traditional way of thinking truth and all the contemporary forms of confuting it are at the same time the expression of the extreme alienation reached by Western philosophy (nihilism). In this way, Severino's indication has irrevocably distanced itself from the entire history of philosophy, since it aims to exhibit how its framework could not but engender the destruction of the whole philosophical tradition and especially how it attempts to know the ultimate truth about the meaning of reality. And this path, which questions the way in which the meaning of truth has been understood by the tradition, is not only inevitable but also an expression of the greatest rigor achieved by the traditional thought (in particular, the epistemic metaphysics). Undoubtedly, the rigour of Severino's thought on: a) the authentic sense of truth; b) the forms and the reasons why philosophy ("Western thought") has thought for the first time and in an irreversible way the sense of the truth; c) the forms and the reasons why philosophy has radically and utterly betrayed the sense of truth; d) the solution of the Western thought error (nihilism) makes Severino a great critical philosopher but also a great re-founder of the same sense of truth.

2. Future Philosophy

First and foremost, Priest is interested in the loss of universality by the logic that decrees the possibility is increasing to make any speech logical. Quoting Thomas Kuhn, Priest considers philosophy as "subversive. Time and philosophers have shot at religions, political systems, public mores. They do this because they are prepared to challenge things which everybody else takes for granted, or whose rejection most people do not countenance" (2006, p. 202). And further on he states, "I have suggested that philosophy is precisely that subject where anything can be challenged and criticized. This may make it sound terribly negative, as though all that philosophers try to do is knock things down. That's not a terribly attractive picture. Neither is it an accurate one. For philosophy is a highly constructive enterprise. Philosophers are responsible for creating many new ideas, systems of thought, pictures of the world and its features" (p. 203).

The future of the Priest's perspective inheres the consequences with respect to language, realism, antirealism, and deflationism, but also, in particular, with metaphysics and contemporary epistemology. In fact, it is possible to develop the implications of dialetheism with the Aristotelian metaphysics, so that the area of incontrovertible truth may be considered the divine dimension of the absolute being. In this sense, dialetheias should be considered as the field of scientific studies, where the probabilistic calculation should measure the percentage of the degrees of freedom with respect to truthfulness or approximation to the truth of each of the two contrary assertions. In this respect, dialetheism should be a new expression of modern science (i.e. Newtonian and Gelilean). Undoubtedly, from this viewpoint, he somehow re-founds the relationships between truth and opinion related to un-decidability with respect to the truth of a set of assertions, so that he seems to be an Aristotelian metaphysician, able to solve the metaphysical problems that have made traditional thought obsolete in modernity compared to science. On the other hand, if its application develops in the epistemological field, definitively aimed at founding indecidability with respect to any opposites that can be considered true, dialetheism could be the basis of the expansion of all Taoist and Buddhist epistemologies, which already characterize some contributes of physics (i.e. Capra, 1975). At the end of this brief analysis, we want to refer to Kuhn's perspective again, in particular to his definition of "normal science". Since it is the regular work of researchers theorizing within a settled paradigm framework, which permits a slow accumulation of explanations of the world in accord with established broad theories, without destructuring or challenging the assumptions accumulated during the history of science, then it is possible to say that Priest further grounds the normal science. Indeed, Priest improves the possibility to found the maintenance of an area of contradiction which may give sense to opinions (*doxa* and, why not, myth). Briefly, in Kuhn's perspective, Priest's contribution can be considered as the logical solution for the further development of normal science in two of its traditions: the modern and the contemporary. It all depends on how it is contextualized and then used in the paraconsistent logic of dialetheism.

Despite his radical and total critique, Severino attributes to philosophy a more eminent magnitude (1984, pp. 17-19), claiming: "Philosophy is born great. The first steps of its history are not the uncertain preamble to a more mature development of thought but establishes the fundamental traits of its entire historical course. For tens and tens of mil-

lennia, man's existence – globally and in every single aspect – has been guided by myth. Myth is not meant to be a fantastic invention, but the revelation of the essential and overall meaning of the world. Even in the Greek language, the oldest meaning of the word mythos is 'word', 'judgment', 'announcement'; sometimes mythos even means 'the thing itself', 'reality'. Only in a derivative and later way, in the Greek language mythos means 'legend', the 'fairy tale', the 'myth'. For the first time in human history, the first Greek thinkers came out of the guided existence of myth and looked it in the face. In their gaze, there is something absolutely new. That is, the idea of a knowledge that is undeniable appears, and is undeniable not because societies and individuals have faith in it, or live without doubting it, but because it itself is capable of rejecting all its adversaries. The idea of a knowledge that cannot be denied either by men, by gods, or by changes in times and customs. An absolute, definitive, incontrovertible, necessary, unquestionable knowledge. [...] The first thinkers called this knowledge with ancient words of the Greek language [...]. These words are *sophìa*, *lógos*, *alétheia*, *epistéme*. If we want to translate them, they correspond respectively to 'knowledge', 'reason', 'truth', 'science'. But these words tell us little (or too much) if we do not put them in relation to that unheard-of meaning. As far as the word philosophy is concerned, which, however, appears in the Greek language together with its name, it means, precisely, to the letter, (*philo-sophìa*) 'taking care of knowledge'. If we accept the hypothesis that in *sophós*, 'wisdom', (on which the abstract term *sophìa* is construed), resonates, as in the adjective *saphés* ('clear', 'manifest', 'evident', 'true'), the sense of *pháos*, the 'light', then philosophy means 'caring for what being in the light' (outside the darkness in which the hidden things are instead – and *alétheia*, truth, literally means not being hidden) can in no way be denied. 'Philosophy' means 'caring for the truth'; therefore, it also gives the latter term the unheard of meaning of 'absolutely undeniable'".

This means that not all philosophical content can be denied. In Severino's indication, philosophy is the thought that would be freed from myth through the true discourse, which means it is irrefutable; however, at the same time, it is not able to maintain its aim; therefore, it is pervasive auto-contradiction. The emergence of philosophical thought, as indicated by Severino, is intended to define the line of separation between true discourse, pointing at the extreme error (nihilism) and making it recognizable through the "non-error". Truth is the non-error and its basis, which is the basis of any possible true discourse. This is what he calls

the "original structure" and later the "original structure of the destiny of truth". Nihilism becomes evident as the fundamental error of traditional and contemporary thoughts, thanks to the original structure of truth, which shows the non-sense of the contradictory persuasion that suffers from the tyranny of time. Definitely, the opposite of the error of nihilism is the true indication of "destiny", and the original structure of destiny is the appearance of what is not other than itself; that is, of the being itself of every being and, above all, of the beings that appear and that cannot be denied because its negation denial is self-defeating. Severino indicates in an irrefutable way (a very true way) the necessary eternity of any single being, affirming that everything exists forever, and everything is eternal. The concept of eternity inheres both the entities and the horizon where the entities appear. The theoretical structure of the irrefutable indication of eternity ("the necessary being-self of the being that appears") is the core of the original structure. The "being's being itself" is the dimension whose negation is self-negation. The original structure of the destiny shows that the basis of nihilism is faith in the becoming of beings, which is believed to be an oscillation between being and nothingness, such that everything can be reduced to a product of contingency. The concept of "faith in becoming" indicates the acritical assumption of the oscillation between being and nothing. This faith is the basis of nihilism and found in both traditional (then metaphysics), contemporary thoughts, and all sciences. Severino shows that, contrary to what Western philosophy assumes, no becoming appears in the sense of the appearance of the annihilation or of the becoming 'ex nihilo' of beings. The scenario of transformation does not testify to creation or annihilation: beings cannot come into or go out of being, because they cannot be created or annihilated by any God or scientist.

The Severinian indication can recognize and solve any contradiction indicating the basis of all possible theoretical errors and then can solve any kind of dialetheias. From this perspective, contemporary epistemology is facing a real and substantial scientific revolution, similar to that described by Kuhn. As a result, starting from Severino's indication, a new epistemology may be opened, because it is possible to change the basic nihilistic and contradictory Western paradigms, which assume that 'being is nothing' (which means that the basis of being is time) and develop a new epistemological era that can authentically integrate science, logic, and ontology (Testoni, 2019; Testoni et al., 2017).

Conclusion

Despite the fact that Severino's and Priest's discourses are so different, it is possible to find a metaphilosophical dimension, a novel chance, based on the conceptual structure of eternity. If the challenge of the Severinian assumption is that consistency is a requirement for truth, validity, meaning, and rationality, on the contrary, dialetheism could consider the possibility of inconsistent theories that are nevertheless considered meaningful, valid, rational, and true in the area of nihilism. In this sense, inconsistency turns out to be a necessary condition for any of these notions considered in a nihilistic way, and dialetheism could show how consistency turns out not to be an essential characteristic for all nihilistic theories, showing that everything said in the universe of nihilism is a dialetheia. Since he works with Priest and was a pupil of Severino, maybe Francesco Berto could develop such a field of research, perhaps making the role Severino played in his thinking more explicit.

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