

## The two faces of the “primal structure”

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This essay aims to establish the basic relationship between the book published by Emanuele Severino in 1958 with the title *La struttura originaria* [*The Primal Structure*] and the configuration which the primal structure of the truth of Being has assumed subsequently within the thought of the philosopher from Brescia. To achieve this aim, the series of writings ranging from the famous article *Ritornare a Parmenide* [*Returning to Parmenides*] (1964) to the important Introduction contained in the new edition of *The Primal Structure* (1981) will be examined. Thus, both the element of continuity that characterizes Severino's writings with regard to the “truth of Being” and a differentiation that they present with regard to the “face” of Being that transcends experience will be highlighted.

**Keywords:**

**phenomenological immediacy, logical immediacy, Being, not-Being, World, God**

## Introduction

The work entitled *La struttura originaria* [*The Primal Structure*] was indicated by Emanuele Severino as the one that underlies his later writings. It contains the ontological and logical “foundation” of his thought or, better said, the primal truth of Being as “witnessed by language”.

Inspired by this consideration, the fundamental purpose of my paper is to dwell on the relationship that exists between the work published in 1958 with the title *The Primal Structure* and the configuration that the “primal structure” of the truth of Being has subsequently assumed. For this purpose, I will examine the main writings enclosed between the first and the second edition of the work (1981), paying attention to highlight two distinct elements that connote them: one of them is an indication of the continuity that undoubtedly characterizes Severino’s speculation and that the philosopher believes should be emphasized more; the other element expresses a differentiation in order to the *concrete determination* of the content of the author’s “First philosophy”.

The element of continuity consists in giving a more concrete development to the theme around which the 1958 work was collected, which is that of the “foundation structure” – that is, the unitary structure of “phenomenological immediacy” and “logical immediacy” that characterizes every being – and in confirming that the speculative summit of the development of this structure consists in the establishment of the “primal metaphysics”. This summit can still be expressed in the following terms: “the primal structure is realized as an affirmation that the immutable whole transcends the totality of the Ph-immediate [...]. In this sense the primal structure is the concrete opening of metaphysical knowledge” (Severino, 1981, chap. XIII, par. 21, p. 545; the expression Ph-immediate is for the “phenomenological immediacy”). The element of differentiation consists in a change that is inherent in the *concrete face* that assumes the aforementioned “primal metaphysics”: first, it is the face of the transcendence of the “Creator God”; in a second moment, it is that of the transcendence of the

“infinite totality of the beings” with respect to the beings that enter in Appearing. In this respect – in relation to which it should be stressed that the “Introduction” to the new edition of *The Primal Structure* is a very important document, due to its return, both in retrospective and perspective, on the major conceptual structures of the work – in Severino we go, then, from an initial “recovery” of the classic metaphysical knowledge, to a subsequent critical *retractatio* of that knowledge. The “First philosophy”, therefore, is seen to free itself from traces of nihilism that persisted in the first edition of the work, in which becoming appeared as a beginning to be (and a cessation of Being) and the “truth of the beings” was connected to the doctrine of creation. And yet, at the same time it must be emphasized that even in the second phase of Severino’s thought there persists an irreducible difference between the “totality of the appearing Being” and the “Whole of Being”, so that in this aspect it remains in the area of metaphysics.

This paper consists of two parts, closely articulated between themselves. In the first part, of a reconstructive-interpretative nature, I intend to show in which way progressively one comes to these *two different physiognomies* of the “primal structure”. In the second part, I propose to discuss the two distinct configurations of primal knowledge. In particular, I intend to argue that, returning to consider again the fundamental circle of “phenomenological immediacy” and “logical immediacy”, it is possible to arrive at the affirmation of the Creator God even after the first of these two spheres has been, quite rightly, freed from the “nihilism” that it still presented in the text of the first edition of *The Primal Structure*. To this end – we can already anticipate – the aspect of phenomenological immediacy must be shown for which, assuming that it is not the place of an “ontological becoming”, the determination of the full truth about the Being of the being remains connected to a *synergy* between the respective contents of the two spheres of immediacy.

## • Part one

### The Primal Structure (1958) and the subsequent “retractatio” of metaphysical knowledge

As I said, the first step that I intend to take is to show the evolution that has affected the theoretical core of metaphysics within Severino’s thought, having in mind the arch of thought that is most decisive for our question.

My discussion will consist above all in an analysis aimed at fixing the *concrete meaning* possessed by the thesis of the “immutability” of the being as being – from a certain moment on, formulated as the thesis of the “eternity” of the being as being – in the two main phases of Severinian thought.

## The Primal Structure

The principle that “being, *as such*, cannot not be”, is the cornerstone of Severino’s theoretical position. It expresses the authentic truth contained in the Principle of Parmenides in a “historical assumption”.

This principle constitutes the backbone of the famous article of 1964 entitled *Returning to Parmenides* (= RP) and was already placed in *The Primal Structure* (= PS): “It resides in the very meaning of Being, that Being has to be, so that the principle of non-contradiction expresses not simply the identity of the essence with itself (or its difference from other essences), but expresses the identity of the essence with existence (or the otherness of essence from non-existence)” (Severino, 1981, chap. XIII, par. 6, p. 517; see also Severino, 1956, now in Severino, 2005, pp. 115-142). For Parmenides, at least if we are held to the canonical interpretation of his thought, the impossibility that Being is not-Being did not concern the “differences” of Being – which he relegated to in the *doxa* – but rather “pure Being”. In this way, however, the appearing of “Being” was improperly disqualified and the latter was assumed “abstractly”. In this respect, Severino expresses a strong criticism of the “historical” Principle of Parmenides.

This being the case with regard to the fundamental principle of the (logical-ontological) truth of Being and of being, one must ask for *the reasons* in PS Severino affirms this primal truth together with the metaphysical doctrine of creation, while in RP he has criticized the latter. While, in fact, in the first of these two writings we found an essential coordination between the Principle of Parmenides and the doctrine of creation, in the second writing the philosopher expunges the “relationship of creation” between the beings and the transcendent Being – for the moment, however, only as regards its “metaphysical” categorization (see Severino, 1967, now in Severino, 2016, pp. 167-168) – and introduces the concept of “ontological difference” as an *analogon* of such a relationship. The latter, according to its first formulation, is to indicate the *difference* between the totality of the “positive that supervenes and vanishes in Becoming” (Severino,

1964, now in Severino, 2016, p. 47) – that is, the finite dimension of Being – and the Whole inasmuch as it is “sheltered and contained in the immutable circle of Being” (*ibidem*).

The answer to be given to the above question can not be expressed reductively in a few words, but I think it is appropriate to perform an exegetical reconstruction in order to highlight with what specific theoretical articulation Severino in PS expressed a position that was, substantially, in line with the speculative orientation of classical metaphysics.

In the work of 1958, in the first instance, we continued to identify a relationship of contradiction – that is recognized as an “aporia” – between: *a*) the being inasmuch as being *to be*, as established in the name of concrete “not contradictory nature of Being”, i.e. in the name of the Principle of Parmenides in its authenticity; and *b*) the giving of *not-Being* of beings – “when they are not yet” and “when they are no longer” – which would be attested by their becoming manifest in experience. In a second moment, after recording the appearance of such an aporia, the speculative structure of *The Primal Structure* provided for the prospect of its removal. To this end, an eminent role was played by the non-abstract, but concrete consideration of the manifest becoming in experience: that is, from *a consideration of the becoming in which the phenomenological immediacy* (= the manifestation of Being) *was not separated from the logical immediacy* (the *logos* of Being): “What from a point of view that stands to the simple consideration of the totality of the Ph-immediate Being [...] manifests itself as an arrival and an annulment, it is revealed, in the concrete structuring of the primal as an appearing and a disappearing” (Severino, 1981, chap. XIII, par. 26, p. 547).

This conceptual structure, by virtue of which a certain “not-Being” is resolved in “Being”, was considered by Severino as the embryo of the metaphysical doctrine of “creation”. Being, the immutable that allows the non-nihilistic affirmation of becoming, in the book of 1958 is configured as “the immutable Whole [...] for which that totality [of becoming] is” (Severino, 1981, chap. XIII, par. 33, p. 554); furthermore, continuing, it is explicitly said: “and that the totality of becoming ‘is’, it is a *decision* of the immutable” (*ibidem*).

The speculative situation that distinguished PS was, therefore, the following: 1) on the one hand, the impossibility of not Being in reference to every being was affirmed, and this because of the necessary overcoming of a “formalistic” conception of a recognized *ontological* value of the principle of non-contradiction, that is of the conception present in Aristotle (see

Severino, 1981, chap. XIII, par. 6, pp. 517-518); 2) such a statement, however, in that book constituted only *one* aspect of the truth about the being and its Being; it demanded an integration, due to the fact that, together with the assumption of the above principle in its strictly ontological value, to grasp the truth about the Being of beings, it was necessary to give voice also to the phenomenological report having “becoming” as its content (understood, then, as the arrival and annulment of beings) (see Severino, 1981, chap. XIII, par. 19, p. 535). 3) Therefore, one came to consider beings, inasmuch as *becoming*, in their relationship with the *absolutely immutable* Being. In the absence of this last consideration, in fact, the beings would have been left in the *contradiction* that, in the name of the primal truth of Being, emerged from referring to the purely “phenomenological” dimension of becoming.

In this way, the truth of the “circle” of phenomenological immediacy and logical immediacy led to the truth to be recognized in the *metaphysical* consideration of beings, according to the classical meaning of the term “metaphysics”. By virtue of this circularity, not only was their becoming established as “appearing” and “disappearing” of Being (see Severino, 1981, chap. XIII, par. 26, pp. 547-549), but this acquisition, together with some further conceptual developments, led to the affirmation of the relationship of creation between God and the world.

The “primal metaphysics” constituted the speculative vertex of *The Primal Structure* and of the concrete truth of the Being of beings; this, because on the one hand we came to establish the “what” (see Severino, 1981, chap. XIII, par. 21, p. 544) and the “how” (see Severino, 1981, chap. XIII, par. 29, p. 553) of the otherness between God (the absolute Being) and the world (the totality of the beings) and, on the other, we came to clarify what the nature of the “becoming” of beings is.

## Returning to Parmenides

Let us ponder, now, on the next phase of Severino’s thought, the one that was inaugurated by the famous article *Returning to Parmenides*. The first findings that emerge from the examination of this essay can be indicated as follows.

Unlike what was claimed in PS, the affirmation of *the impossibility that being inasmuch as being is not*, from now on, is no longer just the heart of logical immediacy (with respect to which, however, we must take into con-

sideration also the contrasting report of phenomenological immediacy, with the speculative outcome that was witnessed by the book of 1958). The logical immediacy now assumes such importance with regard to what is implicit in it, to be induced to envisage for the “aporia of becoming” (see Severino, 1964, now in Severino, 2016, pp. 43-44) an outcome that is in part different from that established previously. And so, although the phenomenological immediacy continues to be seen as the appearing of the “becoming” of beings – in fact, for now, the showing of their “coming to Being” and “returning in not-Being” continues to be affirmed (see Severino, 1964, now in Severino, 2016, p. 43 and p. 45) – a solution emerges that, at a certain point, differs from that constituted by a substantial recovery, however original, of classical metaphysical thought.

In RP the need to welcome the firm voice of logical immediacy regarding the Being of the becoming beings is already considered, by itself, as able to establish the *integral truth* of “being inasmuch as being” (see Severino, 1964, now in Severino, 2016, pp. 44-45) and acquires its own standpoint compared to the way in which in PS it was proceeded in order to achieve this purpose and, that is, establishing that specific relationship between the two spheres of immediacy (see Severino, 1981, pp. 13-24). Consequently, in RP it is held that the same “metaphysical” doctrine of creation should be set aside (see Severino, 1964, now in Severino, 2016, pp. 48-49) which, previously, was constituted as the summit of the speculative structure that was defining the contrast between the opposing findings of the logical immediacy and of the phenomenological immediacy about the Being of beings and, precisely for this reason, constituted as the summit of the “speculative”.

As I have just indicated, however, the first step of this new position, that relating to the solution of the aporia of becoming, is *not* based on the remark that the “appearing” of beings does not show their emergence from not-Being and their return in not-Being. In fact, this will be affirmed by Severino only in the *Postscript to Returning to Parmenides* (= RPP). Consequently, it is even before that with this last text it came to show what is the actual content of the phenomenological dimension – which does not attest to the arrival and the annulment of Being (see Severino, 1965, now in Severino, 2016, pp. 119-123) – that in RP one came to hold that the theoretical structure of traditional metaphysical thinking no longer converged with the solution that had been proposed in the aforementioned paragraph of the final chapter of PS concerning a non-nihilistic understanding of the becoming of beings (see Severino, 1964, now in Severino, 2016, p.

45). And therefore, it was independently of a consideration of the authentic content of the phenomenological immediacy that, in RP, was radically called into question that the “truth of Being” is affirmed by confirming the form of classical metaphysics. Even in the latter, the “not-Being of Being” relative to the beings of experience is no longer considered to be contradictory when considered *in relation to the immutable totality of Being*. However, unlike what was thought in PS – where this relationship had been affirmed developing it to articulate a synthetic philosophy of Creation – the position expressed in RP intended to point out that, already considering being in a relationship of *ontological dependence* as to its “Being a being”, would lead to a loss of the concrete truth of the being’s Being. The result, at that point, was that one would not avoid leaving, in a contradictory way, the being *as such* in identity with not-Being.

On closer inspection, *this* is the essential novelty present in RP, compared to what was sustained in PS by Severino.

Let’s consider, then, carefully the problem from the perspective that characterizes RP. The reference to the residue of nihilism that, in that writing, was judged present in the PS, still did not concern the *phenomenology* of becoming (which, instead, will emerge from RPP), but consisted in that “metaphysical Platonism” that is also perpetuated in the Augustinian-Tommasian doctrine of creation. This doctrine, in fact, had indeed proceeded to perfect Greek metaphysical thinking, eliminating the independence of the “raw material” from God which constituted a supporting element, but at the same time ultimately contradictory; but this, precisely, in the perspective of fully confirming “essential Platonism” and, in other words, *affirming a region of Being that “may not be”*. And so we did not realize that, precisely in that literally “metaphysical” way of eliminating the contradiction glimpsed in the mundane Being left to itself, it contained an effective, though well hidden, nihilism. In this new perspective, the fundamental error of Greek metaphysics, though perfected by the Augustinian-Tommasian doctrine of creation – in which there would be no trace of the impossibility for being “inasmuch a *being*” not to be – would lie precisely in that *metaphysical transcendence* to which “this being”, each “being this” is subjected, that is, the becoming being of experience: which is so “becoming being”, but nonetheless it is a “being” – that which, instead, metaphysics would not have succeeded to fully understand.

Even the doctrine of creation, then – as a theoretical settlement of the metaphysical conception for which beings are “saved” from nothing only by virtue of a transcendence of their “being this” oscillating between Being



and not-Being in a further context – can no longer to be conserved within a thought that intends to be an authentic expression of the truth of Being for every being. In this way, what was stated in paragraph 26 of the final chapter of PS, now acquires a different meaning, as it is no longer considered to be coordinated with the metaphysical-theological thought of tradition.

Severino in his work of 1958 had explicitly emphasized the need to keep the two spheres of the primal structure together, in order to implement the “concrete knowledge” about the becoming being and, indeed, ultimately about “being” as such (see Severino, 1981, chap. XIII, par. 26, p. 547). Since the aforementioned concreteness was ultimately constituted by the “relationship of creation” – which conferred its maximum determinateness on the theorem that resolved the becoming of the phenomenological immediate Being in an “appearing and disappearing of *Being*” – one understands for what reason it’s necessary to assign a certain weight, on the level of speculative, also to the content of phenomenological immediacy. Instead, in RP, the task of affirming the truth of the becoming being – and, therefore, of “Being a being” as such – contained in the experience, even in the presence of the contrasting phenomenological immediacy report, is already entrusted to the logical immediacy. The 1964 paper still attested to the “becoming” (meaning nihilistically) of that content. Therefore, it is legitimate to note that in the meantime it is the coordination between the theorem established in the aforementioned PS paragraph and the Creation theorem affirmed in the following paragraphs has failed.

Thus, in RP a further argument is indicated to deny that the being of experience is united with not-Being; but at the same time it is held that the affirmation of the “metaphysical difference” between God and the world must cease, and that instead the circle of phenomenological immediacy and logical immediacy leads to the affirmation of what is called by Severino the “ontological difference” relative to a same being, which *qua* immutable, is different from itself *qua* coming-to-be (see Severino, 1964, now in Severino, 2016, p. 47). Add, finally – again in order to indicate the novelty made up of RP with respect to the previous Severinian philosophical production – which in line with the basic perspective that characterized the first phase of his thought, in PS Severino had made the following remark: only when the “concept of the coming-to-be” is *isolated* from the “concept of the immutable”, the (erroneous) thesis of the necessary belonging to the Whole of the Being can take shape (see Severino, 1981, chap. XIII, par. 29, pp. 550-553). Once again, it is confirmed that the

meaning of the “becoming being” is not separable from the meaning of “being as a being”.

## Returning to Parmenides. Postscript

In the *Postscript* to *Returning to Parmenides* the analysis of becoming attested by phenomenological immediacy has changed and it is here that Severino comes to the conclusion that *the annulment of Being* (of the becoming being) *must be denied* also for a reason other than those which had been indicated, respectively, in PS and in RP. The immutability of the being as a being thus receives further confirmation and the distance from historical metaphysics is preserved.

The immutability of being is now affirmed not only, as in PS, for the reason that phenomenological immediacy and logical immediacy constitute a circle and should not be taken separately from one another, thus giving rise to a positive solution of the aporia of becoming; and not only because of the gain achieved in RP inherent in what follows from keeping absolutely firm the theorem that prohibits thinking that being can not be. Now, the immutability of being as a being is affirmed because the thesis of the annulment of the becoming being is also refuted by the report of *authentic phenomenological immediacy*. In this way, to those who could not accept the fundamental thesis of RP, believing that Severino misunderstood the phenomenological immediacy report, it was shown that the aporia of becoming does not establish itself – as metaphysical thought holds – between the report of the phenomenological immediacy and that of the logical immediacy, but rather between the latter and a position of the phenomenological content not at all *immediate*, but which is already the result of a *wrong interpretation* of the phenomenological data (see Severino, 1965, now in Severino, 2016, p. 111).

The phenomenology of becoming attests to the disappearing of Being and not “the appearing of its annulment”. For example, when burning a sheet of paper, when the paper appears, the appearing of the ash follows, that is, when the sheet of paper no longer appears, the ash appears (see Severino, 1965, now in Severino, 2016, pp. 107-109).

As can be seen, the statement that *the non-appearing of the paper coincides with the annulment of the paper*, is not an *experiential content* at all. And, on the other hand, it is in the light of the truth of the Being that the authentic sense of *appearing* can be grasped. And when it should be noted

that to cancel itself is at least the *appearing* of the paper – the fact being that at a certain point the paper *no longer appears* – we must reply that, in reality, even the appearing of the paper *disappears* and it can not be argued that its “annulment” appears; and this because, in the process of becoming, what emerges from appearing is not only the paper, but *the paper together with its appearing* (see Severino, 1965, now in Severino, 2016, pp. 121-123).

## The Path of Day and The Earth and the Essence of Man

The essay *The Path of Day* can be considered the “manifesto” of a further step of Severino’s increasingly radical criticism, since it is no longer directed only to philosophy as pure theory. “Metaphysics has by no means been reduced to a mere mode of thought that was once effective in the limited sphere of cultural phenomena and is now in decline even there. On the contrary, it has progressively extended its sphere of influence to the point of determining and guiding the entire course of Western history. And this is more so today than ever before, both because metaphysics has come to dominate all aspects of life, and because Western civilization is in the process of supplanting every other form of civilization. *Technological civilization is in fact the latest manifestation of metaphysics itself*” (Severino, 1967, now in Severino, 2016, pp. 149-150; italics mine).

Compared to this broad tradition of civilization, the essay *The Path of Day* was intended to be the manifesto of the “possibility of a new age”, the concrete way of “preserving” the possibility of opening a new era outside of the nihilism of metaphysical matrix (see Severino, 1967, now in Severino, 2016, p. 150). Referring to some famous expressions of Parmenide, Severino in this paper basically supports two things, the extent of which does not have a strictly philosophical value. In the first place, he contrasts the possibility of a new course of the West (the “Path of Day”) to the path that was inaugurated by Plato when, for the first time, every being was explicitly understood as that in which Being and not-Being are identified (the “Path of Night”) (see Severino, 1967, now in Severino, 2016, pp. 150-157). The “world” – understood not in a generic way as the totality of the beings that become, but specifically as the whole of the beings whose becoming is passed as the *coming to Being from not-Being* and *returning into not Being* – is the legacy left to men by Plato (see Severino, 1967, now in Severino, 2016, pp. 150-151). Secondly, Severino argues that, since “the

history of Christianity is the history of the domination of metaphysics on the Sacred”, Christianity itself should first question about the Night within which it is maintained, but also about the possibility of a new encounter with the truth of Being along the Path of Day (see Severino, 1967, now in Severino, 2016, pp. 160-163).

In this regard, continuing to refer also in that essay to Creation, he observes that “the word ‘Creation’, pronounced in the tongue of Day, signifies theophany” (Severino, 1967, now in Severino, 2016, p. 172); furthermore, reflecting on the possible “freedom” of the appearing of Being, he asks himself: “Is Being ‘Master’ of its appearing?” (*ibidem*), which question still implies the “possibility”, for the philosophical thought, of a personal God.

A similar type of reflection is carried out in relation to that “exceptional sojourn” of God among men who in Christian theology is expressed with the term “Incarnation” (see Severino, 1967, now in Severino, 2016, p. 174). In both cases the intent of Severino was to preserve the possibility that Christian revelation, as it is brought back to a silence about the “truth of Being”, may pursue to consider its “prodigious announcement” and, in this way, may constitute itself as an “authentic problem” for the truth (see *ibidem*).

In a short time the critical remarks of Severino towards metaphysical thinking are enriched by further elements. Deepening his analysis, the philosopher goes on to underline that, on closer inspection, metaphysics proposes *to save* something – that is, the whole of the becoming beings – which, properly speaking, “is not”. Let us try to understand well what he intends to support with this observation.

Severino notes that, at first, metaphysics itself evokes “what” would seem to demand to be saved, that is to say the *becoming being*, being understood as that which comes from “not Being of itself” and returns to the “Nothing of itself”; and then, in a second moment, noting the contradiction that affects the becoming being in the presence of the truth of Being, metaphysics holds to heal the aforesaid contradiction by operating that *transcendence* of the becoming being that qualifies it, precisely, as “metaphysical” knowledge: the knowledge that has as its content the Being who transcends the world. It is in this sense that it must be recognized as, properly, there are no beings *to be saved* and that the “world” of which metaphysics speaks has no reality whatsoever. Such a region of Being possesses precisely the character of having been “evoked” by metaphysical thought. It is only the result of a nihilistic – and therefore erroneous – interpretation of the finite appearing of Being.

It would therefore be confirmed, also for this other verse, that metaphysics does not have as its authentic reference the being *as being*, that is, the being considered strictly referring to its “Being”.

Metaphysics, however, still Severino notes in *The Path of Day*, relates effectively to the being primarily intended as that which “oscillates” between Being and not-Being, according to what was established for the first time by Plato. In fact, a critical reference to the Platonic *metaxy* had already appeared in the *Postscript to Returning to Parmenides*, inviting to reflect on the inevitable nihilistic consequence contained in the statement that the being partakes in Being and not-Being (see Severino, 1965, now in Severino, 2016, p. 113).

Deepening this assumption, according to what Severino emphasizes in the essay *The Earth and the Essence of Man* – thus placing a kind of tombstone on his previous work to put “rigor” in classical metaphysics – it will be necessary to recognize that “the fundamental notion of metaphysics is that being, *as such*, is nothing” (Severino, 1968, now in Severino, 2016, p. 207). The categories of metaphysics (Being, not-Being, being, Becoming, immutable, this, other, etc.) are the “fragments” of the truth of Being, but collected in a distorted way with respect to their true unification, so that those categories then, they are effectively constituted as *supreme conditions of the thinkability of the isolation of the Earth from the truth of Being* (see Severino, 1968, now in Severino 2016, pp. 247-249).

In this alienated thought, in which it is also primarily impossible to comprehend authentically “the meaning of man”, first the different forms of anthropology stand out which, in spite of everything, remain anchored to the philosophical tradition; and later will come to prevail the “construction” project of the human which, however, legitimately takes over, in coherence with the common understanding of the beings as “isolated” from the truth of Being (see Severino, 1968, now in Severino, 2016, pp. 210-212).

## «Introduction 1981» to The Primal Structure

Despite this radical questioning of metaphysics, Severino does not exclude that even after such criticism one can recognize a value of truth to it. However, one must understand well in this regard.

In the *Introduction* written for the new edition of PS published by Adelphi, he clearly states: “If ‘metaphysics’ is the language that expresses the re-

relationship of beings with the totality of being and the fundamental sense of this relationship, then this book [PS, *NdA*] is ‘metaphysical’ (together with all my other writings). That is, metaphysics can be configured both as nihilism (this is the historical configuration of metaphysics), and as a denial of nihilism” (Severino, 1981, p. 22). In other words, he comes here to make a distinction between metaphysics in its “permanent” dimension (which consists in considering the totality of being) and metaphysics in its “historical” dimension which, dividing Being into the two distinct regions of the becoming Being and immutable Being, would contain an effective nihilism regarding the affirmation of the mundane Being.

The *actual* relationship that is constituted between these two different meanings of metaphysics is such as to make Severino hold that, in the course of its history, metaphysics has always failed in its “ideality”. Consequently, compared to the primal truth about “being *as being*”, all of historical metaphysics in its different forms must be radically criticized because it, in disguise, is rather the doctrine of *the “being” as a “coming-to be”* [“diveni-ente”].

It is in this light that Severino comes to point out the equivocity of the syntagm “primal metaphysics” which gives the title to the final chapter of his 1958 work (see *ibidem*). In fact, that syntagm presents a speculative development such that, on the one hand, seems to finally give concrete expression to the “ideal” metaphysics but, on the other hand, it still tends to present itself as internal to the “history” of metaphysical thought. Even here, Severino is very clear in expressing his *retractatio*: “It is precisely because it does not focus on the historical meaning of the word ‘metaphysics’ [...] but on the common meaning of metaphysics as a historical event and as a negation of nihilism, that *The Primal Structure* can qualify itself as ‘metaphysics’” (*ibidem*).

Although we must undoubtedly make the most of these explanations, what we are still asked to establish is the determination of the *content* of the “primal metaphysics”: if it – albeit with some clarifications that must be made – remains fundamentally established in the first edition of *The Primal Structure*; or if it has to take on a different face, where the previous one has an irreducibly nihilistic connotation, considering in the light of *Returning to Parmenides* and subsequent writings the manner in which in the concluding chapter of PS the “aporetic of Becoming” was set and resolved: we must not forget that at the vertex of that solution there was the affirmation of the Creator God.

Well, the very remarkable Introduction of 1981 to PS, full of numerous

and important clarifications concerning some fundamental conceptual structures of that work, does not seem to give an adequate importance to this question. It seems to me that this text is concerned, above all, with tracing the residues of nihilism present in the various conceptual components of *The Primal Structure*. And so Severino performs a rereading of that work from which it now stands out as a treatise on “ontology”, in which a specific discussion about the “metaphysical-theological” trait that characterized it, comes to pass in background and to be considered, on the contrary, substantially resolved in the light of the strictly anti-nihilist ontology.

When he returns in the Introduction to the pages of the final chapter of PS, Severino underlines the fact that in passing the aporia of Becoming, there is a nihilistic persuasion “that being appears as an exit and a return to nothingness” (Severino, 1981, p. 69). In addition to indicating what is explicitly contained in it, this relief is functional to a double subsequent observation: namely that the aporetic of Becoming arises because of the *isolation* of that persuasion from the truth of Being of the being (see Severino, 1981, p. 70); and that it is removed “from the appearing of Becoming, in which Becoming appears as the appearing and disappearing of Being” (*ibidem*). In that chapter of PS, however, the aporetic of Becoming and the relative solution were not treated solely as a content of non-nihilist “ontology”, but also as the theme par excellence that led to determine a “philosophical theology” *in nuce*. According to what was said of the latter, if for the affirmation of the immutable Being the Aristotelian procedure was inessential, the valorization of the thought of Parmenides being already sufficient in this regard (see Severino, 1981, chap. XIII, par. 19, p. 539), nevertheless it was true that “with the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy one gains [...] the existence of the world [...]: the world is gained in the sense that the conditions are shown (or in any case we go much further in this way) of his coexistence with God” (*ibidem*).

And now a second exemplification about my thesis. Exposing immediately after the relationship between the primal structure and the Whole, in the Introduction of 1981 Severino identifies the latter to the “Totality of the being”, or even to the “All concrete, full of being” (see Severino, 1981, p. 72), adopting two formulations that are very close to that which characterizes the second phase of his thought, i.e. “totality of beings”. However, in paragraph 17 of the final chapter of the 1958 work, there is a passage from which it is clear that the Whole is not understood as the totality of “beings”, but as what “omnes dicunt Deum”, as it is identified with the ab-

solute Being (written with the capital B): “The principle of non-contradiction is the same essential meaning of the ontological argument: the immutability or absolute permanence of the whole – that is, the whole as absolute permanence – is indeed the same absolute Being; or the position of the immutability of the whole, the opening of concrete logical immediacy, is the very presence of the absolute Being” (see Severino, 1981, chap. XIII, par. 17, p. 531).

Even in the light of these findings, therefore, I believe the thesis that I have expounded as a hermeneutic key of this paper, and that is, that “two faces” of *The Primal Structure* must be identified.

At this point, continuing the dialogue with Severino, I now intend to re-propose the “theological face” of the primal metaphysics.

## • Second part

### Brief discussion about the two faces of the “primal metaphysics”

#### A reconsideration of phenomenological becoming

The articulation of this second part, at least implicitly, has already been outlined in its essential lines from the foregoing. The first step that I propose to do is to critically examine the *pars destruens* of the second Severini-an position in relation to the content of the incontrovertible in its primal dimension; and, consequently, to discuss also the distance with regard to Western metaphysics in its various articulations. Proceeding along this direction, the reasons which guide the configuration of the primal content of the incontrovertible in the direction of a *theological metaphysics* would appear more understandable and, as I hope, sufficiently persuasive.

With regard to metaphysical knowledge Severino has reached this absolute conviction: it is only thanks to the speculative progress regarding the “*being self*” of *being* – which was realized with RP – and to the further theoretical settlement regarding the “phenomenological becoming” – appeared in the *Postscript* to RP – that the primal truth of Being has been affirmed in its authenticity and, as for its essential core, in an accomplished form (see Severino, 1980). Faced with this speculative outcome, I intend to pose the following question: *the opposition of being as a being to “not Being”*, according to the dictate of logical immediacy freed from any mixture of nihilistic elements, *excludes the doctrine of Creation and the affirmation*



*of the transcendent Being of the world according to the “metaphysical” meaning of transcendence?*

To offer an answer to this question is not at all simple and, moreover, to justify having to give it a negative sign, as it comes to re-expressing the truth of metaphysical Transcendence arguing for a “metaphysics of Creation”, it is even less; and this even more so if, by approaching the answer, we intend to positively incorporate some elements of the same criticism of Severino to the concrete establishment of the metaphysical knowledge considered in its historical development.

The point around which I would like to start focusing attention is essentially this one. In order to produce this answer, it is necessary to achieve the utmost clarity as to what is the *specific element* of the totality of the experience that, in the moment in which we proceed to theorize a “metaphysics of Creation”, must be highlighted in its necessity to be founded and, because of this, requires to be integrated on the speculative level. I would add that the metaphysics of the creation referred to here contains the thesis that the non-contradiction of Being must be preserved at every level and, therefore, the opposition of Being to not-Being. Thus, it maximizes the Severinean theory and comes to meet, to a large extent, with the reorganization of metaphysics made by Gustavo Bontadini. Some years ago, on the subject of this convergence, but also echoing the underlying sense of the final chapter of PS, I spoke of a harmonious unity between the “Parmenidean way” and the “Aristotelian way” to the transcendence of Being (see Messinese, 2008, pp. 381-393).

On the basis of what has just been indicated, we can now clarify that this element of phenomenological immediacy cannot be constituted by the becoming totality of Being *understood “nihilistically”* (according to which, moreover, Severino himself had also considered up to RP included, and Bontadini on his part would have continued to support). On the other hand, tracing in the totality of experience an element that is *equivalent* to that in relation to which in PS, in line with classical metaphysics, the “theological” argumentation rose, might seem an almost impossible undertaking. In any case, I think that, now, we must accept the acquisition that had emerged in RPP, which leads to having to exclude the reference to phenomenological becoming, when it is understood *nihilistically*, in order to apply in a more rigorous way the aforementioned argument.

In this way, the perspective that I intend to carry forward begins to take shape and according to which, on the one hand, it does not withdraw from the “parmenidean” theoretical line (which was clearly defined with PS)

and, on the other hand, it is articulated according to a direction in part different from that which was designed on its own account by Severino since when RP started to express the conviction that holding firmly to the Principle of Parmenides – seen in its extreme consequences – would not allow to affirm the relationship of creation between God and the world.

## Becoming and theological metaphysics

The phenomenological dimension *as such* does not present the arrival and the annulment of “Being”, not even of that Being constituted by the *appearing* of beings. Consequently, the metaphysical question about the becoming of beings does not arise from the report of phenomenological immediacy. Rather, it is precisely something like the “coming-to be” of beings – that is, their “coming from” – which must be *inferred*. I will try to explain myself.

The transcendental appearing, that is to say the Appearing understood as a total horizon, is the sphere of the “manifestation” of beings. But what is the precise meaning to give to this statement? The transcendental appearing, without prejudice to the fact that it is manifestative of the *Being* of beings and not at all a mere “representation” of the latter, inasmuch as “appearing” does not formally give indications regarding what must be affirmed of the beings on the plane of “truth of Being”, but precisely on what concerns the pure dimension of their *appearing*. After this first clarification, always in relation to the “becoming” of beings that appear, it will be necessary to recognize that, as I had anticipated above, their “entering” in Appearing and their “coming out” coincides with the appearing of their specific *definiteness*: and, therefore, with the appearing of their *finiteness* and not, instead, with entering into Being and coming out of Being (cfr. Messinese, 2008, pp. 291-298).

This being the case, despite the fact that the language adopted, by naming an “entering” and “coming out”, seems to lead towards the habitual understanding of becoming, is not on the plane of *Appearing* as such, or on the strictly phenomenological plane, that the game is played about the giving or not of a “residue” of negativity of the totality of experience *in terms of “not Being”*: a certain “not Being” that would be to be affirmed uncontestedly, in opposition to what Severino claims (see Messinese, 2008, pp. 208-213), and that would also constitute a supporting element of the speculative structure that leads to the “theological” affirmation, according

to the most evident aspect of the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition of metaphysics.

A rethinking of the Severinian position according to a metaphysical-theological perspective, should take into account, rather, the “weight” possessed by the phenomenological report and should assert it to balance the weight of the logical dimension of the primal structure of truth. Consequently, a revision should be made in relation to the way in which this second dimension is concretely operative in the thought of the second Severino. I will try to explain briefly on this assumption, postponing for a further study of some of my previous writings.

The focal point of the discussion about the content of First philosophy, then, is to calibrate with great attention the reference of the meanings of “Being” and “not Being” for each being; and, at the same time, in examining with equal attention if, with respect to the *undeniability of Being* and the *denial of not Being* for each being, the new settlement of the “primal structure” appearing for the first time in RP, which was perfected in RPP, and was subsequently maintained by Severino, is satisfactory from every point of view.

The “metaphysical” consideration of beings, formally, disregards the “physical” consideration of the latter – that is, the assumption of the being as becoming – in the sense that it is in the former that the meaning of the being *as such* appears. Moreover, only by discussing beings as they are *beings*, is it also possible to make clear what the *authentic meaning* of their “becoming” is, that is the true meaning of the aspect for which the beings belong to “physics”. Consider, in fact, that it is precisely the *concrete meaning* of the “variation of things” that requires being clarified, not isolating the dimension of Appearing from the other sphere of the primal structure. In order to grasp that meaning, it is not sufficient simply to register the *phenomenological datum* of “varying” of the content of Appearing; nor, even less, that meaning emerges when the “nihilistic” interpretation of the aforesaid variation is superimposed on the pure appearing of the beings. The phenomenological element relative to the beings must be assumed in its inseparable unity with the “logical” element of the primal structure which affirms the absolute opposition of Being and not Being. (It is in this sense that I underlined how the “coming-to be” of the beings does not present itself as a *datum* and that it should be inferred).

To do this implies, therefore, that *the “concrete concept” of both spheres of the primal structure* should be exhibited in the best form, avoiding that both are assumed even for a moment *in isolation*, that is to say, according

to their respective “abstract concept”. This is a complex conceptual articulation that I have exposed elsewhere (see Messinese, 2012, pp. 137-149) and of which, here, it is possible simply to state some of the theses that constitute it. In the first place, with regard to the classical “aporia of becoming”, it must be noted that the contradiction in question which demands to be removed is not that which is established between the report of phenomenological immediacy and logical immediacy, but rather between the “abstract concept” of becoming that appears in the experience and the “abstract concept” of the logical immediacy (see Messinese, 2012, pp. 143-144). Secondly, in relation to the structuring of the non-nihilistic sense of that “non” that the phenomenological immediacy still contains inasmuch as it is “becoming”, the totality of experience requires speculative reference to “other”. Please note that Severino agrees on the necessity to relate the totality of experience to “other”. Thirdly, the affirmation of the “other” from experience ultimately leads to affirming the “theological face” of the primal structure, because of the need to think about the Being of the world according to the “creatural relationship” *in order to give reason for the appearing of the world* (see Messinese, 2015, pp. 142-147). This relationship, then, is not affirmed in opposition to the thesis of the immutability of the whole Being, but constitutes a specific determination of that.

## The metaphysics of The Primal Structure

According to Severino’s self-interpretation, the essential element of the primal metaphysics that is contained in *The Primal Structure* is constituted by the “eternity” of beings, in relation to which we can affirm non nihilistically the becoming – according to a specific conceptual structure (which in the book *Dike* will be called “deductive foundation” of the eternity of the beings) (see Severino, 2015, p. 204) – and with respect to which the “theological” outcome of that work would itself contain a nihilistic residue regarding the conception of Being. My position in this regard is, in part, different. We must dutifully annotate regarding the work of 1958 the presence of both the thesis according to which the predicate of “Being” for every being benefits the logical immediacy, and the thesis that is contradictory to affirm the “becoming” of Being – understood the becoming as an increase or decrease of Being – also limited to a part of it. Anyway, the center of PS consists in the recovery of the Platonic and Aristotelian problem-

atic in relation to the negation of the world operated by Parmenides and in the solution that is given. It will certainly be necessary to discuss whether the metaphysical-theological solution which, in this regard, is presented in the last chapter of PS must still be asserted in every aspect; but it should not be denied that the heart of that work ultimately resides in the thematization of the relation between the totality of the experience and the Whole, and that the latter in PS is understood as the Being which transcends the world.

*The Primal Structure* contains an ontology, yes, but it is not reducible to a simple “ontology” treatise. It is a work of genuine “metaphysics”, both in that it has as its essential reference the “Whole of Being” and in that it presents an *inequality* between the Whole and the totality of the experience. And it remains so, even considering the criticism of Severino of “historical” metaphysics and of his way of working the distinction between two regions of Being, as well as of the self-interpretation that he made of his thought in reference to *The Primal Structure* (see Messinese, 2010, pp. 129-135). It is the actual carrying out of that work to indicate it, showing the need not only to problematize the totality of the experience as to its equation with the Whole, but also to move from a position of the metaphysical plane only as “formal knowledge” – that is, as if we were unable to determine whether the outcome of metaphysical knowledge is “immanent” or “transcendent” – to a position of metaphysics as “concrete knowledge” in so far as one reaches such a determination (see Severino, 1981, chap. XI, pp. 457-498; Messinese, 2008, 139-149). This itinerary is carried out, in particular, through comparison with Kantian philosophy and with the “problematicism” of twentieth-century philosophical thought.

In the first part of this paper I recalled that Severino, in paragraph XV of the essay *The Path of Day*, asked himself: “Is Being ‘Master’ of its appearing, or does everything that appears necessarily appear?” (Severino, 1967, now in Severino, 2016, p. 172). This question, formulated in a theoretical context in which the metaphysical concept of “creation” had been deprived of value, at the time had not received an answer, thus leaving open the possibility of a different way of understanding the creation relationship. That question can also be heard again on the horizon of a creationist metaphysics that has undergone the scrutiny of a “rigorous re-thinking”; and it can receive a different answer from the one that has matured in Severino starting from a work, *Destiny of necessity*, which for the philosopher turns out to be the decisive one in order to witness in a more authentic way the truth of Being.

The answer I intend to suggest is, then, this one. Since it is starting from the need *to give reason for the “happening”* as such, one must proceed to identify the Whole (or to determine its face or content), when one comes to affirm the relationship between the Whole of Being and the content of the finished appearing in terms of creation, one must maintain that yes, “Being is ‘Master’ of its appearing”; and that one must also maintain that the “happening” (the finite, the world), thought concretely, *is* inasmuch as related to the divine Consciousness (see Severino, 1981, chap. XI-II, par. 34, p. 554, footnote 19), which therefore shows to be *the face*, susceptible of an amplification of its features in revealed theology, of the “destiny of necessity”.

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