

# Reciprocal determination and the unity of distinct determinations in *The Primal Structure* of Emanuele Severino

**ALDO STELLA**

Adjunct Professor, University for Foreigners Perugia  
aldo.stella@unistrapg.it

**GIANCARLO IANULARDO**

Lecturer, University of Exeter, Streatham Court, Exeter (UK), EX4 4PU  
g.ianulardo@exeter.ac.uk

The concept of “reciprocal determination” is constituted by two moments: “known-through-itself” and “known-not-through-something-else” that are referred to Being and give rise to two judgements in which these two terms are assumed as subject and predicate. These judgments are reciprocal and complementary and show the unity that substantiate them, which is interpreted as a synthesis, so that the *identity of distinct determinations* counts as identification: duality is not abolished in it. On the contrary, if one claims that a term is essential to the other, as with reciprocal determination, one must acknowledge that the latter constitutes the former, so that each one is in itself the other: each term is its self-contradicting. To prevent this conclusion, one must acknowledge that the pretended co-essentiality is only apparent and *the identity of the distinct determinations* is not authentic, for duality has not really been resolved in unity.

**Keywords:**

**Relation, unity, duality, unification, whole, identity**

## Linguistic Foreword

In this article we refer to the second edition of “La Struttura Originaria” (“The Primal Structure”) for the original Italian text which was published in 1981. Translations are ours since this work has not been translated into English. We have benefited from the only English translation to date of one of Severino’s works, though the language and concepts used in “The Primal Structure” are different: Severino (2016). Given the absence of translations, in our translation of some passages we had to take some decisions regarding some specific terms used by Severino and, among the key expressions that are recurrent in this article, we want to highlight that we decided to use “known-through-itself” and “known-not-through-something-else” to translate “noto per sé” (*per se notum*) e “noto non per altro” (*notum non per aliud*) respectively, following the use adopted in the English philosophical literature (see Blackburn, 1996, pp. 282-283, and Schmidt, 1966, p. 244). For the use of terms as “immediate”, “abstract”, “concrete” we have followed the usage adopted in the Hegelian tradition (see Hegel, 2010). Also, we translated with “knowing” the Italian “no-tizia”, thus “knowing of Being” is our translation for “presenza dell’essere”. In some (few) cases, we have included in brackets the original Italian term preceded by “or.” staying for “original”.

### 1. Introduction

*The Primal Structure* is the framework Severino constantly refers to for the most accomplished presentation of the essence of ground. The entire theoretical proposal, even though refined and integrated in subsequent works, relies on it. This structure is characterised by the co-presence of a set of meanings immediately connected (related) among them, for this reason the essence of ground is presented as “a complex or a unity of the mani-

fold” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 107). Indeed, for Severino Being “cannot be the simple, but is that semantic complex in which the sameness of identity with itself consists” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 34), and then he adds: “with the term ‘Being’ we mean a semantic complex or concreteness whose abstract moments are formal Being and the determination of this formality” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 144).

Thus, due to the essential role played by “connection”, relation becomes the very essence of “structure”, so that any determination, if it is separated from this structure, represents the abstract, whereas the concrete is the primal synthesis, which places every given in the totality of immediacy. Moreover, Severino has repeatedly re-instated the incontrovertibility of this structure, for anyone wanting to deny it should presuppose it. Thus, if that which is primal is a structure and the *relation* constitutes the essence of this structure, we must stress that reciprocal determination represents the essence of any relation, for it expresses the reciprocity among the terms that constitute it.

The theme of reciprocal determination is examined initially in Chapter Two of *The Primal Structure*. Therefore, we think that to fully assess Severino’s theory it is essential to tackle his arguments supporting the concept of reciprocal determination. His intention is to legitimise Being as immediate without resorting to a proof that would deny its immediacy.

In order to legitimise without proving, Severino resorts to that which we consider a fundamental logical figure of *The Primal Structure*: the *concept of relation*. Incidentally, we observe that the very primal structure is the relation that exists between ground and its negation. In this case, relation is conceived in the ordinary sense: as a *nexus between two extremes*, such that it constitutes a *construct*, that can be defined as mono-dyadic, since it amounts to a *structured set of elements*. On the other hand, with regard to the immediacy of Being, Severino resorts to a concept of *relation* that, according to us, should not be considered as a construct and, precisely for this reason, we believe that this argument is of paramount theoretical relevance.

To be theoretically assessed, Severino’s argument must be analysed with reference to the concept of “relation”. We need to investigate whether, speaking of the unification of distinct determinations, relation, interpreted as a construct, can be maintained, or whether, instead, aiming at attaining an authentic unity, the construct must be lifted (i.e., abolished, sublated), because it is still based upon the duality.

## 2. The immediacy of Being

As we have said, the second chapter of *The Primal Structure* is devoted to the immediacy of Being (a detailed introduction to these themes can be found in Goggi, 2015, pp. 60-66; Cusano, 2011, pp. 103-21; Stella, 2018, pp. 109-178), which had only been anticipated in the first chapter. Severino introduces his argument with these words:

The immediately present Being – the “immediate”, as that which constitutes the subject of the primal judgment [...] – is that which to be affirmed does not require or does not presuppose other than the presence of itself, or it does not presuppose other than itself as present: the *per se notum* (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 144).

Being is the primal, the ground, and can count as something immediate because the other is not other *than* it, but other *in* it. Now this *other* are the determinations of Being: “The term “Being” indicates a synthesis – which will have to be thoroughly examined – between the meaning “Being” (*formal Being*) and the meanings that are constituted by the *determinations* which indeed *are*” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 144). This remark is of utmost importance, for first of all it allows us understanding the value of Being’s openness, that is, of its being an intrinsic relation (synthesis); secondly, for it reminds us that we are moving from the point of view of Being’s “affirmation”, which considers Being as the subject of the “primal judgment”, i.e., a meaning that is in relation to other meanings, which are, indeed, its “determinations”.

More precisely, Being is *open* because the *relation* that constitutes it is the same relation that opens it to the difference, since the latter is included in Being. Thus, in this sentence Severino explains in which sense the ground, i.e., Being, is a moment of itself: it is so precisely because it posits itself as a *synthesis*, which is constituted by Being, intended as a meaning that indicates only immediate presence, i.e., formal Being, and the manifold meanings, which equally are and constitute those determinations in which formal Being specifies itself, ceasing to be only formal.

Towards the end of the previous chapter, Severino had clarified the sense of the “primal meaning”, which expresses “self-meaning” (or. *autosignificazione*). He had affirmed that

Outside the primal structure we end up in meaninglessness. Thus, it is only because *we are already* placed in the primal openness of meaning, that the *question* on meaning receives a meaning; but at the same time that it receives a meaning, it disappears *as a question* because of the primal answer. That is, questioning is authentic (=it becomes meaningful) with the act of answering it. [...] Put differently: there is nothing meaningless *simpliciter*; all that is, it is, in its own way, meaningful (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 132).

In a footnote he had added: “the primal meaning makes meaningful the request of meaning” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 140) and this allows to understand the identity of Being, ground and primal meaning.

Being, as primal meaning, is the ground not only of its “primal self-meaning” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 139) (or. *autosignificazione originaria*), but also of all determinations that constitute “meanings”. As a moment in relation with determinations, it counts as formal Being; as a synthesis that embraces also itself as a formal moment, it counts as concrete: “with the term ‘Being’ we mean a semantic complex or concreteness whose abstract moments are formal Being and the determination of this formality” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 144). Thus, relation, by unifying abstract moments, gives rise to semantic concreteness, but also allows *detecting* a presence, which is the very manifestation of Being.

Relation to truth is now expressed as a relation to Being. Truth is such if, and only if, it is comprehended; so Being is such if, and only if, it is immediately present. This presence or manifestation of Being “is precisely the sentence: “Being is” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 143), so that relation to Being is tantamount to its *affirmation*. What is the condition – Severino asks – that allows to affirm Being? The condition is that it manifest its own presence, which coincides with *knowing* (or. *notizia*) itself of Being, that is, knowing that it is. Knowing of Being *depends* only on Being (it is a function of Being only) and this is the reason why Being is *per se notum*. This being *per se notum* constitutes the “phenomenological Immediacy”, that Severino calls “F-immediacy”. Now if by *principium cognitionis* we mean that by which we affirm that Being is, we can say therefore that the ground of the affirmation of Being is the very same affirmation of Being.

Thus, immediately and primally “it is known” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 144) that Being is and this *knowing* is realised in the affirmation “Being is”. Here Severino introduces an important distinction: he notices that in the affirmation “Being is” the immediate connection between the subject

and predicate of the proposition is posited; in the proposition “it is known by itself that Being is”, instead, “the immediacy of *knowing* (presence, position) of this connection” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 144) is stressed. The first immediate connection, between subject and predicate, is the logical immediacy or “L-immediacy”: “The immediacy of that connection is indeed the immediacy of *identity* or *non-contradictoriness* of Being (logical immediacy)” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 145). The second immediacy, that of knowing, is – as we said – phenomenological immediacy.

Severino’s focus now will be on the phenomenological immediacy, but starting from a further consideration which we consider extremely relevant: the difference between ground in itself (Being in itself) and the ground as known or posited. Why does Severino start from this theme to examine phenomenological immediacy? Because, only starting from the intrinsic *relation* to the ground (Being), i.e., constitutive of the ground, one can understand the *relation* which posits the presence of Being as well as *knowing* this presence.

### 3. Reciprocal determination

With regard to the connection between Being and *knowing* (i.e., *presence*; or. *notizia*) of Being, Severino says that this *knowing* must be *known*, i.e., posited. In order to be posited, ground too must be known, i.e., posited, in other words, the *status* must be overcome by which “ground is only *in itself*: is not posited: is not known” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 146). Indeed

To the extent that we confine ourselves to the moment of in-seity or implicitness of ground, affirming that Being is cannot emerge (i.e., cannot *show* its validity) and thus lets that negation of Being be: it cannot lift it. This means that if ground *is* (simply) the ground, it *is not* the ground (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 146).

Until when Being does not show itself, does not show its presence, does not manifest itself and remain in itself, its negation cannot be lifted (i.e., removed). To really lift this negation, Being must manifest itself: “The opposite, the negation of Being [...], is lifted only to the extent that *one grasps, one posits* that Being is *immediately present*” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 147). This means that the immediate fundamental connection is that existing between Being and knowing: only if it is known that Being is imme-

diately present – and knowing this is tantamount to grasping it – the negation of Being corresponds to negating its own ground, that is, negating itself.

In synthesis, immediacy is tantamount to self-grounding Being, but “it is ground only because it is *shown, or posited as immediacy*” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 147), i.e., only insofar as it is known. Yet Severino makes more precise the sense of this immediacy and writes:

As immediate presence we mean known or affirmed Being through itself, on the ground of itself. Saying that Being is known through itself means excluding that it may be known through something else. That Being is, on the one hand is known through itself *because* it is not known through something else; on the other hand, it is not known through something else *because* it is known through itself. Reciprocal determination (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 148).

Now, the concept of reciprocal determination is that which explains the concept of immediacy: therefrom its importance. Severino reminds that immediacy cannot be proved: indeed, if it were to be proved it would not be immediacy, for that which is proved is mediated (see Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 143). Thus, *reciprocal determination explains immediacy without proving it*. [We can notice that Fichte, 1794, had already observed, with regard to the ground or first principle of science, that “this can be neither *proved* nor *defined*, if it is to be an absolutely primary principle” (p. 93). Severino shares the unprovability or immediacy of the principle, but not its indeterminable nature]. Then, how to comprehend it? In the case of the *knowing* of Being, we know that Being is known through itself because it is not known through something else and is not known through something else because it is known through itself.

Severino wants to show that reciprocal determination is not a (process of) grounding and, precisely for this reason, this is not a vicious circle. If it were a grounding then there should have been a “logical antecedence” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 149) of one of the two terms with respect to the other, which instead does not occur, and this does not occur precisely due to its being a reciprocal determination. Only if the two terms constituting the reciprocal determination are taken separately, and thus abstractly, they are not grasped in what they are, that is the one is not seen “as belonging to the essence of the other” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 149).

Thus, reciprocal determinateness is the *co-essentiality* of the two terms,

that is their necessary relation or also “the *immediate relation* of distinct determinations, through which each of the two cannot be without the other” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 150). In order further to clarify this point, Severino writes: “For each of the two distinct determinations the other is not a logical antecedence (thus the consequent needs a grounding), but is, in fact, an immediately related term; so that neither is something immediate, but the two constitute the structure of immediacy” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 150). Here, even though the chapter is devoted to phenomenological immediacy, Severino is speaking of logical immediacy. We must stress the following point: reciprocal determination does not amount to the mediation of one term through the other, for the one is *immediate relation* to the other: thus, the middle is excluded from the co-essentiality of the terms.

For these reasons, Severino claims that we do not end up in a vicious circle. It would be a vicious circle, if one of the two terms would have been a ground of the other: if “A” were grounded on “B” and “B” on “A”, then we would have a vicious circle, for none of the two could accomplish its task, since the one is posited by means of the other. Thus, it is not a ground but a reciprocal referring of two terms, which are the one co-essential to the other and precisely for this reason *both* constitute the *immediate*. This means: immediacy must be understood in *relational terms*, for the *immediate* is a concrete structure constituted by two distinct moments, which, if taken in isolation, are abstract, but if taken one as the essence of the other, then they express the *concrete value of the immediate* or the *immediacy of the concrete structure*.

To show how a reciprocal determination exists between “known-through-itself” (or. *noto per sé*) and “known-not-through-something-else” (or. *noto non per altro*), i.e., a necessary relation which establishes the immediacy of Being in the sense of its being immediately known, thus writes Severino:

If we had *only* the first side of this reciprocity, the term: “known-not-through-something-else” would be *independent* from the term: “known-through-itself” [...]. And vice versa, if we had *only* the second side of this reciprocity, the term: “known-through-itself” would be *independent* from the term: “known-not-through-something-else” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 148).

The two sides are not independent and Severino defends their reciprocal dependence.

Since Severino's argument is based on the relation occurring between the two *relata* ("known-through-itself" and "known-not-through-something-else"), it becomes inescapable at this point to reflect on the way in which *relation* is theoretically understood, given that its comprehension has dramatic implications on the way in which *relata* and their *referring* are understood.

#### 4. Relation and primal identity

The following point should be investigated: in each relation, understood as a mono-dyadic construct, both are given: the moment of the reciprocity of terms and the moment of their difference. As to the first aspect, we say that *relata* are *relatively dependent*; as to the second, we say that they are *relatively independent*. Neither dependence nor independence can be absolute.

If dependence were absolute, and not relative, then one term would be reduced to the other and will be con-fused with the other. In this manner, the difference would disappear which is essential to the existence of a relation. On the other hand, should the independence be absolute, and not relative, the terms would no longer be in relation, i.e., *relata*, but they would be autonomous and self-sufficient entities. However, any determinate identity cannot posit itself unless it differs from its difference (i.e., it must be different from that which is different from it), due to the limit that intrinsically characterises it, so that independence cannot be absolute.

Reciprocal determination, constituting the essence of immediacy, stresses one aspect of relation, but cannot remove the other: there must be a certain difference between the terms, otherwise relation itself would cease. But Severino wants to stress the following point: this difference, which posits the distinction between terms, is subsumed under the sameness of their being. In fact, he maintains:

Indeed, the two sides of reciprocity are constituted by two analytical judgements (identical), in which the predicate is attributed to the subject based on a simple analysis of the predicate, i.e., it is immediately attributed. These judgements can be formulated in this way: "*Known-through-itself*(subject) is that which is determined by *known-not-through-something-else* (predicate)": "*known-not-through-something-else* is that which is determined by *known-through-itself*" (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 148).

The two judgments are reciprocal and complementary, so that, according to Severino, they cannot but be taken together. If taken together they reveal the unity that constitutes them and their sameness. This points to an identity that differs from formal identity. The latter posits that the identical is closed and separated from that which is different, without realising the necessity of referring (to other). The identity presented by Severino is open, relational and emerges as a *structure*. [The theme of identity in Severino has been tackled by Vitiello (2003) and it has been the subject of a debate between Severino and Vitiello (2018)]. And soon after, to clarify that identity of entities is a principle only as a moment of the primal structure that allows the identity to posit itself as such, Severino adds that “‘principle’ and ‘explanation’ are not the identity (even if understood as identity of entities), but the structure within which the identity is primally structured” (p. 14). If it is expressed via a judgement, it cannot be reduced to the identity of the subject with the predicate, but must be integrated by the complementary and reciprocal judgement, which affirms the identity of predicate and subject. Furthermore, one must add also the judgment that affirms the identity of the two preceding judgments. Translated into formulas, we would have  $(S = p) = (p = S)$ .

Thus Severino writes in the Introduction: “Saying is not the synthesis of subject and predicate [...], but the identity of the relation of the ‘subject’ to the ‘predicate’ and the relation of the ‘predicate’ to the ‘subject’” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 29). Now,

This identity between the relation of the “subject” to the “predicate” and the relation of the “predicate” to the “subject” is expressed by the equation  $A (=B) = B (=A)$  which can be expressed also in the form  $(A = B) = (B = A)$ . In this expression, the signs of “equality” which link these two equations between parentheses have a sense that differs from those signs of equality that constitute the two equations. It is the primal identity and, outside of it, the identification of  $A$  to  $B$  ( $A = B$ ) and of  $B$  to  $A$  ( $B = A$ ) is the contradictory affirmation of the identity of those determinations which are not identical ( $A = B$ ). If the two equations constituting it are *isolated* from the primal identity  $(A = B) = (B = A)$ , they are contradictory (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, pp. 29-30).

Therefore, the *primal identity* is that which grounds the two *identifications*, which, if isolated from the primal identity would be mere contradictions, because they would affirm that two different determinations would

be identical. If they are *included* in the primal identity, instead, they would reveal that each determination is posited by virtue of its relation to another determination, so that reciprocity reveals the fundamental feature of that which is determined. And reciprocity indicates the co-essentiality of determinations, that is their being each one by virtue of the other. Analysing the reciprocal determination, we have thus touched the theme of the *identity of different determinations*, or the unity that includes all determinations. This unity is Being itself, and reciprocal determination shows its immediacy.

By translating this argument in terms of “known-through-itself” and “known-not-through-something-else”, Severino maintains that it is the reciprocal determination that posits its terms:

This means the each of them is what it is because they are placed in this determination or reciprocal determination. And thus, only in this relation the “known-through-itself” is distinct from the “known-not-through-something-else”. Or also: *that which* is determined by “known-not-through-something-else” and *that which* is determined by “known-through-itself” – the “that which” that appears in the predicates of the two judgements – counts as “known-through-itself” and “known-not-through-something-else” respectively, only because they are so determined (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 149).

However, the fundamental question concerns the primacy of this identity that counts as a relation or of that Being that counts as synthesis. In the case of reciprocal relation, its primacy is even more debatable: in which sense is the relation primal with respect to its *relata*, if it is posited only thanks to the latter? One could say that reciprocal relation does not hold only among its *relata*, but also between the relation and its *relata*. And just like, in the reciprocal determination, there is no logical antecedence among *relata*, so this cannot occur between the relation and its *relata*, so that a relation cannot claim priority with respect to them. [In this article we refer to the Hegelian distinction between “external relation” (äusserliche Beziehung), which is found in Hegel (2012, p. 47; in the English translation it is translated as “external connection”, Hegel, 2010, p. 32), and “immanent synthesis” (immanente Synthesis), which is found in Hegel (2012, p. 100; 2010, p. 72) and to the aporia of the relation as highlighted by Bradley (1897), according to whom relations must be thought as an intrinsic and an integral constituent of the given (i.e., determina-

tion). The current debate in analytical philosophy concerning relational and non-relational properties, as synthesised in Marshall (2018), is extrinsic to the theoretical perspective with which we are tackling the problem of relation in this article]. If it is true that “known-through-itself” and “known-not-through-something-else” are determined as such only *within the relation*, but it is equally true that relation is determined as such only by virtue of its terms.

The impossibility for the relation to emerge beyond its terms concerns also the *primal identity*. By declaring it primal, one would like to posit it at a level that is different from that of the identifications that characterise the determinations of Being. However, it is precisely the fact that it counts as *determinate identity* that impedes it. Indeed, it is determined because it unifies the terms, so that it cannot be considered as primal with respect to them: determinate identity is a relation, the identity relation; on the other hand, relation, if considered as a *nexus*, has no priority on the *relata*. Nonetheless, one might maintain that that which counts as primal, primary, is the relation as a construct: as a *mono-dyadic construct*.

In this case, which is Severino’s thesis, when he speaks of the *primal structure*, one could ask if terms have or not an identity within the relation. We have seen that the answer could be that which stresses that they have a *relative* identity, that is one is posited by virtue of the other. However, if so, what we have anticipated above would apply: each term is posited *because* it is related to the other, and in this way that *difference* ceases which is a condition to have a relation.

Each term, indeed, positing itself by referring itself to another ends up losing its own identity, in a *strong sense*, that is, as such as to posit it as different from any other term, and it is reduced to the *act of self-referring, which is the same for both terms of the relation*. This is the reason why when relation is meant as a construct, it disappears as such because there is no *nexus* when the identity of *relata* disappears. If, on the other hand, one would claim that terms have their own *absolute* identity, i.e., each one is posited independently from the other, relation itself would be *eo ipso* denied, for both identities, because of their absoluteness, would posit themselves by denying any relation to other.

In fact, if identity were really *primal*, why would it be constructed through the “bricks” of difference? We think that the need for an primal identity is unescapable, for reciprocity, being only *horizontal* (placed among terms), is insufficient: a ground of the universe of determination is necessary which emerges *vertically* over this order. This means that what is

*primal* cannot stay on the same plan with and be reciprocal to that which it legitimises, for, if so, it would be conditioned by that which is conditioned by it, and thus, it would cease to be primal and unconditioned.

However, for the *primal* (i.e., the ground) to count as true, it cannot be determined. If it is determined, it falls back into the level of reciprocity, that posits that which grounds in a reciprocal relation with that which is grounded, so that the former is grounded (determined) by the latter. Severino had previously affirmed that this *status* was contradictory: “indeed it is contradictory that one of the two moments of the reciprocal determination be at the same time determined by other and determining it” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 149), but then by attributing a determinateness to the ground, reduces the *grounding* to a reciprocal determination, so that the primacy of the ground is *necessarily* lost.

## 5. Reciprocal determination and unity

The theme of reciprocal determination is investigated also in the third chapter. We remind that reciprocal determination cannot be understood as a *grounding*, that is, as a logical antecedence since neither moment can ground the other, for it is not capable of grounding itself. It must be thought as the *co-essentiality* of the moments of the primal structure.

Now, co-essentiality emerges as such if it is understood without reducing it to discursivity, which leaves the distinct determinations one out of other. On the contrary,

Position of F-immediacy and position of fL-immediacy [where the expression “fL-immediacy” indicates “L-immediacy, taken in its simple formal value” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 204)] count as *co-primal*, or as structuring of the primal. Because of this *co-primality*, none of the two positions must be assigned to the other in a moment that is logically distinct or further than that in which these positions are realised. Their coming-together [or. *convenire*] is primal, immediate (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 206).

The synthesis of the two forms of immediacy cannot be interpreted, therefore, as something “further with respect to their positing themselves” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 206), for

the position of these two immediacies constitute an primal synthesis; moments of this synthesis are not something that should be grounded: precisely because *they are already* (primally, immediately) in that synthesis, which if it came after (with respect to the moments in which the terms of the synthesis are posited) would determine instead the grounding of the moments that are presupposed to the synthesis (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 206).

The two moments, which in the second chapter had been defined as co-essential, are defined here as *co-essential*: these are two expressions that indicate the same concept, that is the impossibility that one of the two moments could be independently from the other. We add that here Severino provides a definition of the “concrete concept of the abstract”: “This synthesis is the concrete concept of the abstract – where the abstract is constituted indeed by the *two* positions of the immediacy” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, pp. 206-207). The distinction between the “form of non-contradictoriness” and “the content of this form”, however, remains and constitutes the “concrete concept of distinct determinations” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 207), because “the primacy of the synthesis does not deny the distinction” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 207) between the two indicated moments.

Nonetheless, distinction does not mean irrelativity: “But distinct determinations are not unrelated determinations: when distinction is understood as irrelativity, one has moved from the concrete concept of the abstract to the abstract concept of it” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 207). The passage from the abstract concept to the concrete concept of the abstract happens when the irrelativity of the two terms is overcome and they are thought as intrinsically connected. Indeed, the two distinct determinations are such that the one comes immediately together with the other: “The distinct determination is indeed precisely that which is *co-primal* to the other distinct determination, and for this it comes immediately together with the other” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 207).

“Reciprocal determination” – this must be stressed – should not be understood as something that as such could exist among moments that are initially unrelated (and may continue to be so), but as that which indicates the co-essentiality of the two moments, as it had been indicated in the second chapter:

Now, only the abstract moments of reciprocity, *abstractly conceived*, i.e., when one is not seen as belonging to the essence of the other,

can be determined in this sense, so as to have their ground in the other of the two, understood as a logical antecedence (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 149).

However, we would like to focus readers' attention on the very concept of *co-essentiality*, on which we started to reflect analysing the second chapter. If the first moment is co-essential to the second, and vice versa, we think that we cannot even posit the *distinction* between the moments. Indeed, distinction implies the identity of each distinct determination, which must show a *relative independence* from that of the other distinct determination. But if the first distinct determination finds its own *essence* in the other, how could it exhibit some independence from the latter? If the latter is the essence of the former, how could the duality of the *former* and the *latter* be maintained?

We think that the co-essentiality of the distinct determinations cannot but end up in their substantial *unity*, in the sense that, each determination is the *act of self-referring* to the other, so that they result in this *act*, which is *unique and the same* for both. Furthermore, this allows to overcome the concept of relation understood as a mono-dyadic construct, to reach the concept that understands relation as the *act of self-referring* of each term (relatum), i.e., that act in which differences among relata disappear.

Indeed, we think that this is only way to understand the *identity of distinct determinations*. To clarify this fundamental concept, let us go back to the second chapter, when Severino speaks of the co-primality of the position of Being and the immediacy of this position. If by  $P_1$  we indicate the position of Being and by  $P_2$  the position of its immediacy, then “the abstract consideration of the two positions implies that the primal positional whole (=I) be such that  $I = P_1 + P_2$  (where  $P_1$  counts as the positional positivity that is not included in the positional positivity constituted by  $P_2$  and vice versa)” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 162).

Thus, in the abstract consideration of the two positions, the *whole* counts as their sum. However, this is not the concrete consideration, according to which, instead, “ $I = P_2$ ” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 162). From this formula, we deduce that  $P_1$  is not logically antecedent with respect to  $P_2$ , “but the co-primality of  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  lifts, denies  $P_1$  as antecedent” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 163). And this is the conclusion: “ $P_2$  grounds  $P_1$ , not because  $I = P_1 + P_2$ ; but because  $I = P_2$ , that is because  $P_2$  includes  $P_1$ , or it is the whole of which  $P_1$  [...] is a moment” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 163). Moreover:

If  $P_1$  includes  $P_2$  [...],  $P_2$  in its turn, and *in its own way*, includes  $P_1$

[...] and includes it as itself including, in its own way,  $P_2$ . If then  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  are assumed concretely we obtain  $P_1 = P_2$ , and the difference of indices only points to the twofold aspect of *the concrete sameness*: twofold aspect represented by the different sense of the inclusion of  $P_1$  in  $P_2$  and of  $P_2$  in  $P_1$ . In this sense the ground is  $P_1 = P_2$ , or the concrete unity of distinct determinations (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 163).

Speaking of “unity of distinct determinations” is, according to us, a step forward with respect to the thesis of their co-primality (co-essentiality). However, *unity* is not effectively posited, for *unification* is maintained. In fact, Severino speaks of *reciprocal inclusion* of moments of the primal and the same concept is used to refer to the *primal judgement* and, in this manner, duality is maintained anyway. He does not attain the lifting (removal) of duality, which only could amount to establish authentic unity, and this is so because to the disappearance of *duality* would correspond the disappearance of the *determinateness of unity*.

In the case of the primal judgment, he affirms that this judgment “must not be affirmed by saying that Being is that which is immediate, but by saying that that which is immediate is immediate. [...] The subject has here itself as a predicate or the primal judgment is, in this formulation, an analytical proposition” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 171). Now, this is the point where Severino comes closer to the concept of the *duality that converges into unity* (i.e., the two that become one).

This is further confirmed by what he writes with regard to the proposition “Being is Being” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 180). As we have already shown, it is the abstract-intellect that “presupposes the terms to their relation – relation that, in this case, is the identity of that which, thus, is not two, but one” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 180).

By going beyond the perspective of the abstract-intellect we discover the *primal value* of the *identity of Being* with itself, which Severino himself defines as “absolute” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 181). The point is this: on the one hand, a real unity is requested, for only it has an primal (i.e., concrete) value. On the other hand, however, this unity is expressed by formulas which even though would like to express the identity of identity with itself (or unity of unity with itself), still reproduce the distinction within the identity (unity): “Distinction is in fact the very same articulation of identity” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 181). And also: “Identity is certainly identity of a difference” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 189).

However, the only difference that, in the end, can be found as “immanent to identity is the same difference between the abstract moment and the whole” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 189). This concept is then stressed: “Distinction implied by the proposition: ‘Being is Being’, is distinction between abstract and concrete, and not – as it would follow from the aporetic discourse – between Being and Being, both understood as abstract moments” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, pp. 192-193).

How the abstract is interpreted is clear: it is the irrelativity of moments. That which is concrete is instead their unity, but this unity or identity is also defined as “immediate connection”, and we think that these two concepts differ, since unity, according to us, should transcend relation and, thus, connection.

Moreover, we can ask: between the abstract and the concrete is there a distinction? We think that the distinction should pertain to the abstract consideration of the abstract; on the contrary, the concrete consideration grasps the lifting of the abstract in the concrete, and the issue lies entirely in the way in which this lifting (removal) must be understood. If the lifting leaves space for the unity only, without the distinction, then one necessarily emerges *over the determinateness* (any form of determinateness) and one grasps the effective *concreteness*. If, instead, the distinction is preserved, then the determinateness remains, but this implies that the abstract has not been *truly lifted* (removed).

## 6. Conclusion

Unification reproduces the relational construct which had to be overcome due to its being unintelligible, so that also reciprocal determination, thus interpreted, falls back into the ordinary concept of relation. The latter reproduces the vicious circle of the *infinite regress* of one term to the other, as if the insufficiency of one could be overcome by the insufficiency of the other.

The path followed by Severino is not that of interpreting relation as an *act* and determinations in their lifting in the *unity of the act* that grounds them by transcending them, but that of preserving relation in the form of the circle of presupposition, which undoubtedly has a formal advantage consisting in preserving the determinateness of the terms that refer to each other and of their synthesis.

We claim that one should have distinguished the *level* on which we place ourselves to argue (i.e., the *formal universe of discourse*), which *inevitably* has to resort to that which is determinate (i.e., *level of that which is inevitable*), and the *level* on which the ground is placed which is needed by the formal universe of discourse (i.e., *level of that which is necessary*). Ground is not inevitable, but necessary: it coincides with the *unconditioned condition* that grounds the universe of determinations only because it transcends it, and for this reason it cannot be determined without *eo ipso* falling back into that order that is in search for a ground (i.e., that needs to be grounded).

Severino does not accept a ground that is not determined and semanticised, and thus he does not accept an authentic unity, but he interprets unity as unification, which is determined by virtue of the determinateness of the unified determinations. However, in this manner, he ends up *denying the co-essentiality of the unified determinations*, which he discussed analysing the theme of the reciprocal determination, as well as the *unity of distinct determinations*, which is treated in various place of *The Primal Structure*. By not achieving an authentic unity, he does not achieve an authentic overcoming of the difference (distinction), so that the unity of distinct determinations is only apparent and the formulas by which it is expressed clearly show that it can only be posited by virtue of the terms on which it is based. The identity of subject and predicate too, which is expressed by the formula “(Sg = Pr) = (Pr = Sg)” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 285), witnesses that the *difference* is still preserved, despite the intention to attain *unity*.

To conclude, we can say that, from a certain point of view, Severino intends to lift *duality* in the *unity* and, thus, to achieve the authentic unity; but, from another point of view, he intends to maintain the determinateness and, thus, the *relation*, which represents a unification, not a unity, because it relies on the duality of the related terms, by virtue of which it maintains its determinateness.

Thus, we think that we are in the following alternative: *aut* one speaks of co-essentiality, but then, if one term is co-essential to the other, the latter is co-essential to the former, so that each is *in itself* the act of self-referring to the other so that, in the *unity of the act*, differences among terms are removed (i.e., are lifted) and thus terms themselves are removed; *aut* one intends to maintain the determinateness, but then one can never attain an authentic *identity of different (distinct) determinations*, which is only

effective if the multiplicity is resolved in the authentic unity, which cannot be determinable, counting as *ablatio alteritatis*.

## References

- Blackburn S. (1996). *The Oxford dictionary of philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bradley F. H. (1897). *Appearance and reality, a metaphysical essay* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., revised with an appendix). Ltd, London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co.
- Cusano N. (2011). *Emanuele Severino. Oltre il nichilismo [Emanuele Severino. Beyond nihilism]*. Brescia: Morcelliana.
- Fichte J. G. (1982). *The science of knowledge. With the first and second introductions* (P. Heath & J. Lachs, Eds. and Trans.). Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press (Original edition published in 1794 as *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre als Handschrift für seine Zuhörer*. Leipzig: Verlag Christian Ern Gabler).
- Goggi G. (2015). *Emanuele Severino*. Città del Vaticano: Lateran University Press.
- Hegel G. W. F. (2010). *The science of logic* (G. Di Giovanni, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Original edition published in 1833 as *Wissenschaft der Logik*. Berlin: Leopold von Henning. 9. Auflage (2012), Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag).
- Marhsall D. (2018). Intrinsic vs. extrinsic properties. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved from: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/intrinsic-extrinsic/>
- Schmidt R. W. (1966). *The domain of logic according to Saint Thomas Aquinas*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Severino E. (1981<sup>2</sup>). *La struttura originaria [The primal structure]* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Milano: Adelphi.
- Severino E. (2016). *The essence of nihilism* (I. Testoni & A. Carrera, Eds.; G. Donis, Trans.). London-New York: Verso (Partial translation of the original edition published as E. Severino, *L'essenza del nichilismo*, New edition, Adelphi, Milano, 1982).
- Severino E., Vitiello V. (2018). *Dell'essere e del possibile [On being and possibility]*. Milano-Udine: Mimesis.
- Stella A. (2018). *Il concetto di "relazione" nell'opera di Severino. A partire da "La struttura originaria" [The concept of "relation" in the work of Severino. Starting from "The primal structure"]*. Milano: Guerini e Associati.
- Vitiello V. (2003). *Hegel in Italia [Hegel in Italy]*. Milano: Guerini e Associati.