

The Indifference of Being. Parmenides, Heidegger and Severino

DAVIDE SPANIO

Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia
davidespanio@unive.it

Parmenides represents the meeting point and conflict between two perspectives, the Heideggerian and the Severinian one. The return of Heidegger and Severino to Parmenides helps to evoke a being who does not differ and establishes the welcoming space of ontological transit. The circumstance therefore aligns Heidegger with Severino's attempt to conceive being without being, that is, being without difference, in the direction of the indifferent. Here, however, Heidegger's and Severino's path would seem to diverge – Severino is convinced of this. The paper aims to introduce the essential elements to start this comparison.

Keywords

Heidegger, Severino, Parmenides, Being, Nothingness, Indifference, Difference

1.

Severino and Heidegger (but I ought to add at least Gentile as well) share the persuasion that being is nothing but the being of entities. Besides, the fall of being into the entity represents the essential hallmark of contemporary philosophy (so to speak), which seeks to variously explore this fall.

I have written *persuasion*, to allude to *Peitho*, upon which – according to Parmenides (who actually sets out in another direction) – “truth attends” (Parmenides, 2009: fr. 2, 4). The being of the entity is *true*, so much so that to speak of *being* is to immediately point to the entity as *that-which-is*. When turned into the entity, however, being (which is precisely the being of the entity) is not simply the entity: for in being this, the entity – once it has carved out a suitable place for itself – vanishes in the indistinctness of being, which prevents any distinction (and simply is not). Being is therefore the being of the entity which, in the entity, diverges from itself and, while being, *is not*. In what sense?

Severino and Heidegger both draw attention to *appearance*: the *not* which being is in the entity, is its appearance (the appearance of the entity). This appearance is precisely identical to the entity because, unlike the entity, it is not something, but rather the entity’s non-existent coming to light and imposing itself. The *not* underpins the entity because the entity appears (and not in an abstract way): the being of the entity is that being which appears in the guise of the entity and hence releases a wide range of meanings (e.g. table, bottle, etc.). As already noted, being turns into the entity: the appearance of being therefore coincides with the being that appears, in the guise of the entity, without rejects or residues, but it is necessary to stress once again that the entity does not coincide with being; not because the entity is not, but precisely insofar as, in appearing, it appears and disappears.

With Severino and Heidegger we must therefore conclude that being *is and is not*, but only because the entity, in being, appears and disappears.

The phenomenological process, however, is destined to remain ambiguous until we establish the meaning of the *not* which thus pertains to the entity that makes itself evident. We must bear in mind that in Heidegger's background there lies Husserlian phenomenology, just as in Severino's background there lies Gentilean actualism (which from the start he viewed in the light of Heidegger's phenomenology). To argue that appearance is the *not* of the entity is to point to the identity of Being and Nothingness on which Gentile and Heidegger indeed dwelt, followed by Severino, by approaching the first Hegelian triad when dealing with Parmenides.

In this respect, the "quiet becoming" that Severino (Severino, 2020, p. 175) detects in Hegelian Being meets Gentile's actual "becoming" (Gentile, 1954, p. 11), which, insofar as it refers to an "unchanging" Being, does not need to grow quiet; but it also converges with Heidegger's idea of the "essence" of Being, which "makes itself known" in the existence of *Da-sein* (Heidegger, 1998, p. 87). In the wake of the *Science of Logic*, it was therefore a matter of entrusting ontology to the passing – the having already passed – of Being-Nothing *into* Nothing-Being, which, being everlasting, bore witness to the coming and going of entities.

What I am trying to suggest is that, along this path, the overcoming-fulfilment of Parmenidean Eleatism, evoked by the whole history of Western philosophy, passes through the narrow gates of a discourse which, by emancipating itself from Idealism, assigns Being the consistency of the spectator of every spectacle – past, present, and future. In this sense, given that the oblique reference to the transcendental realm of Husserlian-Gentilean inspiration, Heidegger and Severino's *return* to Parmenides does not at all consist in a theoretical, preliminary, or preparatory operation. Rather, it consists in the adoption of a primal experience which, by distinguishing the entities in being, *does not differ* and establishes the welcoming space of ontological *transit*.

2.

Severino writes: "Difference' is that which has brought itself into something else, crossing the distance separating it from itself and from that other into which it has brought itself. [...] This "difference" (something different from another thing) is the outcome of 'becoming', of 'movement'. 'Differences', in other words, are the 'things' that manifest themselves in

the world. They are indeed a becoming-other, having become other” (Severino, 2007, pp. 134-135).

Severino’s *being*, which distances itself from the wound (*dif-ference*, from *fero, ferio*) of the becoming other, and which overcomes the world’s obstacles, therefore displays the features of the *Indifferent*. But what is truly “radical” – to quote Severino’s own words – is the “violence” that language – which is called to bear witness to the “destiny” of the entity – must exercise upon itself in order to indicate “the inflexible, the unwounded, the not-different” (Severino, 2007, p. 139). Besides, the being evoked by Severino, particularly from *Returning to Parmenides* onwards, represents the *negation* of being which Western ontology – conveyed through the primordial wisdom of language – has established at the centre of the philosophical stage. According to the Indo-European roots that convey its meaning, “being” bears an essential reference to “differing”, which Severino deems responsible for the “folly” of the Western metaphysical project, marked by the paradoxical search – beyond the primal differing of being – for that “entity which does not differ and is not the outcome of any differing”.

According to Severino, therefore, *being* means that which, in being, does *not* differ – without the *not* here alluding to any differing. In other words, for the being envisaged by Severino, *not* differing means *negating* the difference that afflicts the *things* in the world evoked by philosophical thought, i.e. it means, for being, negating one’s own differing from the differing of the world. Indeed, by differing from the world, being would amount to a difference and *not* to the indifferent (the not-different). By contrast, Severino’s indifference of being, insofar as it alludes to the “not-different”, contains the *not*, so to speak, and thereby displays the concrete *negation* of difference: not the *external* negation which the “determined” devised by the West is always called to represent (*omnis determinatio est negatio*), but the *internal* one which, by abiding *in* the determined, spares the determined the outrage of the *not*.

Severino’s being, in other words, invites us to approach the idea of the internal negation (the “primal” negation, as Bertrando Spaventa wrote, reforming Hegelian Nothingness) which, by pointing to *nothingness*, emancipates itself from differing and from the external negation that accompanies it: precisely that *being* which, by not being (for it is the *not* of difference), is and imposes itself through its being evident in the guise of the *entity*. Indeed, being is the totality of entities, the undeniable fullness of the primal spectacle on which – as Parmenides puts it – mortals set “eyes that

do not see” (if not the differing of the different). With no leap or hesitation, being – insofar as it has always coincided with the entity (i.e. that-which-is) manifesting itself to any gaze capable of imposing itself – bears witness to the abstract part of a whole that, as such, is destined to remain concealed. And it is precisely the primal concealment of being (which, in being, appears) that leads “mortals” to see in the manifest entity that difference which heralds the folly of crossing the ontological abyss: the *not* of appearance, in which difference disappears, thus shows the difficult and elusive features of *nothingness*.

Now, according to Severino, once entrusted to the steady care of the *indifferent* which denies itself, in order *not* to differ, the entity finally escapes that ontological *indifference* which in his view instead afflicts the “world”, which is forgetful of being. The *world*, evoked by philosophy, announces the indifference of the differing entity, thereby crossing the infinite distance separating being and nothingness. In this respect, according to Severino, the indifference of being averts the indifference of the entity (the different) with respect to itself and the other-from-itself, to which it thus ultimately yields, becoming absent, without ever having been. Given all this, the different differs from itself and *therefore* is not at all (although once we have lost sight of the absurdity to which it makes itself open, it is precisely the different that heralds the endless and impossible search for the indifferent called to keep it within being). By taking the “path of day”, Severino’s *return to Parmenides* ends up making room for the firmly self-enveloped entity and for the gaze that grasps it once and for all: not the different (*from* being) indifferent (to being and nothingness), but the different (*of* being or *in* being) which does not differ (and therefore is always spared from nothingness).

3.

Heidegger’s notion of ontological difference in a way follows the same path, insofar as it invites us to think of that being which lies forgotten behind entities. Certainly, Severino stresses the fact that, in its attempt to establish *being* and *appearance* on the same level and in the footsteps of Husserlian phenomenology, this ontological difference represents “a model for the attempt (comparable to the neo-positivistic one) to purge the meaning ‘being’ from genuine philosophical language” (Severino,

2007, p. 319). According to this perspective, therefore, Heidegger's being – traced back to “appearance” – approaches the differing of the world by translating it into its coming to light, crossing the boundary separating it from the concealment invariably destined to always enclose the visibility of entities. By disappearing and appearing, the differing of the world both is not and is.

This circumstance, however, brings Heidegger in line with Severino's challenge of envisaging being *without* being, i.e. being *without* difference, in the direction of the indifferent. It alludes precisely to the need to reach, along this path, the *not* of each entity, which – without referring to an other entity above the first – “essentially unfolds (*west*) as appearing” (Heidegger, 2000, pp. 217 and 107). Heidegger's being differs from the entity insofar as it *is not* the differing entity, moving out of its concealment. Precisely by not differing (or differing differently from the entity which differs from being), *it gives itself* (*Es gibt*).

Heidegger too, then, announces his attempt to emphasise the role of the *not*, which being is, as that which, by being caught in oblivion, paves the way for its forgetful negation of itself: “The ‘not’ does not originate through negation; rather, negation is grounded in the ‘not’” (Heidegger, 1998, p. 92). And what is the *not* directed at? In what sense can we say that it *grounds* the negation of which the different takes hold by falling – and it is precisely by taking hold of it that it falls – into the eddy of becoming? The *not* – to begin to answer these two questions – is directed at that “nihilation of the nothing” (Heidegger, 1998, p. 92) displayed by being, which leads Heidegger to turn his gaze towards Parmenides, in view of that being which, in being, grounds *nothing*.

Insofar as it the *tautótes* of *eînai* and *noên*, which according to the Eleatic philosopher are indeed *the same* (Parmenides, 1991, fr. 3), being enigmatically diverges from itself, *before* any “before” and any “becoming” that witness difference. Ontological difference thus extends beyond ontic difference, whereby an entity is not other from itself, making ontic difference the outcome of a *distraction*: it is not the entity that imposes itself, but being (which is the genuine appearance of the entity).

However, according to Heidegger, if being *is* the appearance of the entity, appearance – by showing the entity – does not entirely turn into the entity which appears: a reject remains. How are we to interpret this? Here Heidegger's path and Severino's would appear to diverge – and Severino is convinced of this. By pushing the discourse beyond Husserl's Ego, beyond Kant and Descartes, Heidegger's challenge – not least through its reference

to the dawn of philosophy – stresses how, in celebrating the world’s visibility and its incessant differing (with Hegel, and in the wake of the crisis of dialectical thought), contemporary thinkers omit the essential. This silence is unavoidable, since there is no voice of being which – by removing any appropriation to which the entity, as the guardian of the own, lays claim (*Ereignis*) – does not confirm it, amid the din of the world.

The silence of being, in other words, would appear to allude to the irruption of that *nothing* which the indifferent continues to leave outside itself, in differing from the entity. It thus seems to Severino that Heidegger’s indifference remains within the entity, in the guise of a difference, thereby pushing the whole discourse towards that “pure and empty” being which – prior to any philosophical appeal to the things of the world – Parmenides removes from the primal spectacle of experience.

Parmenides, then, represents the point of encounter and conflict between two perspectives, the Heideggerian and Severinian. According to Severino, it is necessary to come to terms with Parmenides and with the nothingness that his Poem for the first time ambiguously introduced within the sphere of *logos*. In other words, it is necessary to *return* to Parmenides – not simply to *turn towards* him (I should recall that, at his 1973 Zähringen seminar, Heidegger, in all likelihood alluding to Severino, remarked: “it is not a question of returning (*zurückzukehren*) to Parmenides. Nothing more is required than to *turn towards* (*zuzukehren*) Parmenides”: Heidegger, 2003, p. 77).

Returning to Parmenides means structuring the primal imposing itself of that being which appears (as the totality of entities, which appear and disappear). In its “simplicity”, to which indifference ultimately alludes, being *becomes complicated* in the entities *destined* to immutably portray its features. *Turning towards Parmenides* instead means approaching – yet never reaching – the “simplicity” of a Being that leaves ontic *complications* to the whims of nothingness, mere nothingness, to be filled through a *leap*. Therefore, by evoking the “simplicity” of being Severino notes that while “Hegel [...] directly affirms the simplicity of ‘being’, which thus remains an assumption”, “neither does Heidegger go beyond this direct affirmation.” This means that without such a radical engagement with the ontology of the Eleatic philosopher (and hence with Hegel), the *different* – with “all the connotations of the ‘simply null’ from which Heidegger [...] wishes to distance himself – and all the aporias which are raised by the ‘simply null’ [...] resurface, and do so in their not having been clarified and resolved” (Severino, 2013, p. 347).

4.

The ambiguousness of Heidegger's "nihilism", which is inconsistent with the outcomes that Severino identifies in Leopardi, Nietzsche, and Gentile, rather seems to confirm Heidegger's adherence to the Western philosophical project (as revealed by Severino – an ally of the German philosopher at the time – in his graduation thesis). However, it also strongly evokes the need to *slow down* our journey along the path traced by Hegel and modern thinkers, all the way down to Nietzsche, whose philosophy ought to be regarded as the most mature outcome of that metaphysical thought which can be traced back to the Greeks.

Heidegger and Severino are both involved in the failure of Western philosophy (*Being and Time* and *The Essence of Nihilism* reveal – each in its own way – an awareness of this failure). Both, while denouncing the stalemate of reason, look to Nothingness and to the overcoming of "logic" in view of a path that finally makes it possible to approach it, via the establishment of the truth of Being. For both philosophers, it is necessary to envisage the *undeniable*, by bearing witness to it precisely *as* indifference, with and beyond Parmenides. Besides, "[t]here stand the gates of the paths of night and day" (Parmenides, 2009, fr. 1, 11).

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