

The Discussion between Leonardo Messinese and Emanuele Severino in View of a Rigorousization of Classical Metaphysics

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This essay focusses on the proposal for the rigorousization of classical metaphysics that has been put forward by Leonardo Messinese, presenting his critical dialogue with Emanuele Severino concerning the originary truth of the being and its implications for the future of entities. The purpose of this paper is to solicit the continuation of the dialogue between Messinese and Severino, after having highlighted the reasons that lead Messinese to consider only partially convincing the solution provided by Severino about the complete understanding of the «variation» of the experience, which led him to re-propose the «Principle of creation».

Keywords:

Emanuele Severino, Leonardo Messinese, metaphysics, transcendence, creation, becoming

Premise

In this essay I wish to present the essential features of a proposal of rigorousization of classical metaphysics carried out by Leonardo Messinese, whose originality consists in making use, in many respects, of what Emanuele Severino claims regarding the truth of being although Messinese takes a different path compared to Severino's thought about the final outcomes of its philosophical production.

Later on I will proceed to enucleate the essential terms of the confrontation between the two philosophers, reporting the «reasons» of the agreement and of the disagreement which still apply today.

By doing so, given the relevance of the matter being discussed, I wish to encourage the continuation of the debate; after having highlighted the reasons that lead Messinese to regard the solution provided by Severino about the complete understanding of the «variation» of the experience, which led him to re-propose the «Principle of creation» as a more concrete intellectual understanding as only partially convincing.

Leonardo Messinese's proposal

The philosophical intent of Leonardo Messinese is a continuation of the metaphysical rigorousization implemented by Gustavo Bontadini – which invited his students and friends to provide “help to further perfect short discourse” (Bontadini, 1996, p. 3) – and on its further clarification and specification, carried out mainly on the basis of Severino's teaching, which Messinese has always considered as an indispensable point of reference to achieve the goals he pursued.

The main work where Messinese confronts Severino's thought, and in particular *La struttura originaria*, is called *L'apparire del mondo* and was published in 2008. In this core text he wishes to enhance the contribution offered by Severino regarding the rigorousization of classical metaphysics.

It is necessary to remember that the speculative itinerary of *La struttura originaria* ends with a chapter entitled «The originary metaphysics», of which I will here mention the fundamental theses. In that work the unchanging being acquires the traits of the Creator, for which *the becoming wholeness* is: affirmation that expresses the ontological dependence of the becoming and the immutable whole. Moreover, the author claims that the becoming wholeness does not necessarily belong to the immutable being, but the fact that this is a decision of the immutable, with the result that the freedom of the creative act is also affirmed. More precisely, as Messinese indicates, although in this fundamental passage the *term* «creation» is not used even if its *res* is. The immutable whole is what positively poses, what makes the becoming reality true by willing it freely, deciding precisely that it shall be.

This is the originary metaphysics of Severino that Messinese intends to enhance by keeping always in focus, and partly accepting, the «self-corrections» that Severino has made to his discourse, especially in *Ritornare a Parmenide* and in the related *Poscritto* (cfr. Severino, 2016, Part one). He himself specified it in the opening pages of *L'apparire del mondo*, a text that “consists in the attempt to re-read the metaphysical speculation of the early Severino in the context of the ‘later’ Severino, but with the theoretical intent to valorise the originary *intentio metaphisica*” (Messinese, 2008, pp. 21-22) of Severino’s philosophical discourse, showing “the possibility of benefiting, albeit in a different way, of *both* the phases of Severino’s thought in order to offer a contribution to the rigorousization of classical metaphysics” (Messinese, 2008, p. 24).

Returning now to the development of the thought of the «later» Severino, it is precisely the *Poscritto* to *Ritornare a Parmenide* that plays a role of great importance: it is here that Severino supports the non-phenomenological evidence of becoming in the ontological sense, which he affirmed previously until *Ritornare a Parmenide* included: experience does not testify to the production/cancellation of entities but only their appearance/disappearance, and this must also be said of their appearance.

In *L'apparire del mondo*, Messinese welcomes the outcome of the *Poscritto* to *Ritornare a Parmenide* related to phenomenological immediacy, but it is not for this reason that he believes it is no longer necessary to mediate experience at the metaphysical level as it might seem because of the elimination of the opposition between experience and logo, which for Bontadini constituted the «springboard» to affirm the transcendence of the absolute. Indeed, it is precisely this acquisition that allows a better re-

covery of the metaphysical discourse. Therefore, Messinese does not put itself «somewhere in between» the «creationist» approach of Bontadini and the «non-creationist» one of the later Severino but, within a speculative framework that in its result converges with that of Bontadini, believes that some traits of Severino's thought allow us to propose again the creationist metaphysics on a step of higher speculative rigour.

The becoming attested by experience, therefore, should no longer be understood in an ontological sense; this would cause metaphysics to fall into criticism moved by the later Severino to metaphysics in its entire historical path, so this would essentially be «physics».

On this point Severino believes that the thesis of the «seriousness of history» of progress put forth by Giovanni Gentile, which involves the «destruction of the immutable» possesses a greater coherence – but not a greater truth. This brings along with it the rejection of all metaphysics that reaches the affirmation of the immutable as the *raison d'être* of becoming in the ontological sense (Severino, 1978, pp. 121 and following). Once the becoming has been understood as the «oscillation» of the entities between being and non-being, there cannot be any immutable existence (Severino, 1980, pp. 47-48).

Messinese (2013), instead, claims that

this critical outcome towards philosophical theology [...] is not necessary when [...] one affirms that the becoming of things attested by experience should not be understood as coming from nothing and return to the nothingness of the *being* of the entities (p. 172).

So on the one hand the non-nihilistic conception of becoming understood as *variation* is not in conflict with the possibility of metaphysical inference; at the same time, however, this «change» – according to Messinese – must also be justified. In other words, he underlines “the need to not leave the manifestation of being, which is ‘processual’, to its simple dimension of phenomenological attestation, but also to assume it in the sphere of the logo and, in this sense, to establish it, to show the ‘*ratio*’ *essendi* in a determined way” (Messinese, 2014, p. 49).

I would like to point out the advantage of Messinese's position compared to that of Bontadini, which precisely is its not violating the logo, even as regards the simple «abstract consideration» of the phenomenological becoming. If this were to happen, the road to the inevitable collapse of the immutable would reopen. In a particularly eloquent passage, Messinese (2014) states that:

It is good to underline, in particular, that becoming here is not theoretically exploited as ‘ontological’, becoming so that it, on one side, would need to be freed from the contradiction that, *sibi permissus*, would belong to him (this is Bontadini’s position); but then, on the other hand, it would remain subject to criticism that was raised by Severino (p. 49).

It is Messinese (2014) himself, on the other hand, to remark how

one of the recurring themes in my critical dialogue with Severino, in relation to the ‘originary structure’, concerns the exhibition of the *raison d’être* of the totality of the experience, that is the Unity of the Experience (in the words of Bontadini) or of the totality of the F-immediacy (in the words of Severino) (p. 43).

It is also significant to point out that another contemporary thinker, Gennaro Sasso, who belongs to a philosophical context that is very different from that of Messinese, asks a similar question to Severino. Sasso (2010) notes:

Should we wonder why the being, of which we, in an incontrovertible way say that it is eternal, and therefore non-becoming, becomes manifest in the sign of partiality and processualness, the answer could certainly not be sought in the immutability and eternity which, taken and considered as they are, can only explain, give reason of themselves, and not of their opposite: however, it cannot be sought in the appearance that, by the force of the evidence itself, offers only the facts of the processualness but not its reason (p. 155).

Messinese also claims, as does Gennaro Sasso, that what remains to be explained, and which leaves room for the inference of the *transcendence* of the Absolute, is precisely *the fact* of the variation of experience, which does not form a perfect equation with the same being as it affirms at the level of logical immediacy: so the true metaphysical question for Messinese (2012) is “Why the *entities* (multiplicity and becoming) and not just the being (= Being)?” (p. 141). It is the variation of experience, inclusive of the multiplicity of entities, the «unexpected» of the thought which affirms the original truth of being and which, therefore, demands to be justified: what Messinese emphasizes is that we need to explain in a more determined way the «variation» of appearing.

The solution proposed by Messinese that aims to a more concrete insight into the multiplicity and variation attested empirically refers to creation. He therefore finds, in the Principle of Creation, considered as the most concrete determination of the Principle of Parmenides, the answer to the problem of the full understanding of the experience's taking upon itself the quality of being: the being of the experience that appears variant and manifold implies the Being (with a capital «B»).

Creation, however, does not take on the nihilistic aspect that Severino perceived in it, understood as the making of the world by God, which draws the entities from their non-being, but rather makes it possible to give a concrete explanation of the «not» that the entities of the experience implicate with respect of the being's fullness, that is of the inequality between the totality of being and the totality of appearing. The metaphysical integration of experience is achieved precisely with the introduction of the Creator God as a more complete justification of the experience's being.

Severino's reply to Messinese

I will now move on and consider Severino's reply to Messinese. It will be necessary to consider Severino's reply from two points of view:

- as regards the observations made by Messinese about the more concrete «raison d'être» of becoming that characterizes Severino's philosophy;
- and as regards the solution proposed by Messinese himself with regard to this question.

Regarding the first point, Severino in one of his 2009 texts recalls that he already provided in Chapter III-IV of *Destino della necessità* an explanation to this problem and in particular in that same work

there is a strong, well-defined indication of [...] the contradictoriness of a finite appearance whose content is not variant, i.e. in which a certain dimension of the essents [...] does not arrive in the way it “de facto” arrives [and therefore] the “variation” of the essents beings is the arrival of the eternal in the transcendental circle of appearing, that is this arrival is the “reason” of that variation (2009, p. 141).

In that work the necessity of what happens is affirmed by the very fact that this something happens: the hypothesis that what happens may not happen would mean denying the character of being to something that «is» because it happens and that therefore, like any other entity, it is eternal; therefore if every entity is eternal, that entity which is the happening of the entity is also eternal. The summary of Severino's position, as expressed in a more recent text, is as follows:

every essent is eternal; but *the eternal* could *have been not able* to come in that circle, or arrive in a different way from what appears? *Destino della necessità* shows that true necessity implies *also* the necessity of arriving and of the way in which the eternal arrive *in the appearing* of destiny (2013, p. 349).

For Severino, Messinese criticizes the way in which he indicates the *raison d'être* of the appearance of the entities – that is, since every essent is eternal, that entity that is the happening of the entities is eternal too – judging it not sufficient,

because he believes that it is due to the abandonment, in the development of my philosophical discourse, of what in his opinion should not have abandoned, i.e. the theological-creationist dimension still present in *La struttura originaria* and in the same *Ritornare a Parmenide*. So mine would be a 'broken path' (Severino, 2009, p. 142).

Considering this response from Severino, it seems that we can say that the two participants to the discussion move on two levels that are not perfectly aligned. Indeed what, for Messinese, constitutes the problem to be discussed, is the very fact that we give an arrival (a variation) and a multiplicity of surprising entities, because, as stated above, this is not in perfect identity with the L-immediacy, as being L-immediate is indivenient and unitary, so the answer of Severino would not seem to be on the same line as asked by Messinese and also, as we have seen, by Gennaro Sasso. The answer provided by Severino in his reply, in my view, is to restate what was already stated in *Destino della necessità*, without providing an adequate answer to the question that is inherent in the imperfect equation between experience and logo, which in my opinion continues to assert itself and being deeply relevant. This is, then, the question to be taken into consideration, the one on which reflection should be addressed and around which the philosophical dialogue between the two interlocutors can continue.

Turning now to the second point, we will briefly consider the reason why Severino does not consider the solution proposed by Messinese to be adequate. Severino basically states that the Messinese solution is “a leap in the dark” (2009, p. 142). This is the solution for which, in Messinese’s words (2008): “the being that is *beyond* the totality of the experience is, with respect to experience, *absolute totality*. We call this absolute ‘totality’, *Absolute Totality of Being*” (pp. 314-315).

This is due to the fact that, for Severino, an adequate justification for the statement of the *transcendence* is not provided. He remarks:

in addition to the experience there is an ‘other being’ this does not in fact mean, in itself, that this ‘other being’ is the ‘absolute Totality of being’, that is the ‘Being’ with the capital B (which for Messinese is ‘God’). Since my critic does not justify his statement, the leap is still a leap in the dark. ‘*Another being*’ can only be a part of the ‘totality of being’ (that is, of the ‘totality of the beings’) (Severino, 2009, p. 142).

For the later Severino the «other» separated from the experience is the «infinite totality of the beings» («the infinite appearing»). However, in my humble opinion, if saying this means – for Messinese – not to provide the most concrete «raison d’être» of what experience attests, then, things being that way, to envisage an «identity» separated from the being that transcends experience appears to be a completely legitimate operation, as will be better specified in the following paragraph.

Messinese’s counter-reply

An initial response from Messinese to Severino’s critical observations is provided in the article titled *La teologia razionale e la determinazione dell’Altro dall’esperienza* of which some useful points will be reported below for a better review of the debate.

The initial moves put in place by Messinese, before responding to the criticism of Severino, are the following: first of all, Messinese notes the presence of some elements of resemblance between Severino and classical metaphysics with reference to the «integration of experience»:

- Severino refers to the finite-infinite link to give adequate intelligibility to the variation attested by experience

- Severino poses both the «what» and the «how» of the finite-infinite relationship, as does classical metaphysics.

On this point, Messinese recognizes the presence of both aspects in the Severino way of proceeding, which – he himself noted – had not been adequately highlighted in *L'apparire del mondo*. In fact he writes: “I should have more appropriately talked about a *different way* to ‘integrate’ the experience, compared to that proposed by Severino” (Messinese, 2009, p. 547, note 25).

In fact, Severino, in his reply, pointed out how Messinese had not taken due account of what he had “within hand’s reach” (2009, p. 141) in his writings, or of the justification that makes sense of the variation of experience and that is “the ‘variation’ of the essents that appear is the arrival of the eternal in the transcendental circle of appearing, that this is the reason of that variation” (2009, p. 141). In his main work, Messinese considered it necessary to develop the «antinihilistic logo» so that it was able to present the «theoretical understanding» of beings that change (2008, p. 295), understanding that it is the “*how to make intelligible* the entering and exiting of the Appearing [or even] *how to give reason* of the ‘variation’ of the Appearing” (Messinese, 2008, p. 300).

There remains however – among others – a particularly significant difference between Severino’s position and classical metaphysics on the way of understanding the finite-infinite relationship, a difference that is constituted by the different way in which the finite-infinite relationship is represented. In fact, while recognizing that Severino also has this decisive aspect of the finite-infinite relationship, according to Messinese the *way* in which Severino poses the «how» of the relationship is not fully satisfactory and we will later face more closely the reason behind this statement. Therefore it is not enough to state that even in Severino both aspects of the finite-infinite relationship are present in order to call «settled» the issue about the determination of what transcends the experience: rather, it is necessary first of all to understand whether the solution proposed by

Severino has the incontrovertible trait that it affirms and, subsequently, ascertain whether it is possible or not to propose a different solution capable of explaining the «how» of the finite-infinite relationship more satisfactorily.

Before proceeding to consider these aspects, we will now analyse the way in which, in the essay, Messinese re-proposes the elements of agreement between himself and Severino, the same elements that at the same

time differentiate them from classical metaphysics, in particular the way in which the inequality between the wholeness of being and the totality of experience is affirmed.

A first element is precisely the fact that for Severino and Messinese the «wholeness of being» is not perfectly equal to the totality of experience, as instead affirmed by immanentist philosophies: while this is still compliant to classical metaphysics, it is the way in which this conclusion is reached that distinguishes the latter from the position of Messinese and Severino. In the words of Messinese (2009): “*since* essents do not come out of nothing and do not return to nothing, so that the *being* that appears and disappears ‘is’ before its appearance, and is still, after its disappearance, *then* it is necessary that the totality of appearance is not the totality of *being*” (p. 547); by reading this excerpt it is possible to make at least two observations: it is the truth of being that constitutes the motive to justify the affirmation that the totality of experience does not exhaust the totality of being. If this were so we would say that the essent that appears and disappears enters and leaves the being, that is, the appearance/disappearance of the essents should be understood as entering into being and going out of being, contravening in this way to the truth of being. From this point of view, Messinese reaffirms his adherence to the truth of being described by Severino and his distancing himself from the nihilistic way in which Western philosophy has always understood the becoming of entities that are manifest in experience, interpreted as entering into being and coming out of it.

Moreover (second observation) another element of difference between Messinese and Severino appears in the last part of the work, where Messinese calls «totality of being» what Severino calls «totality of the essents» and which lead Messinese to present the passage I mentioned earlier as a «rewriting» of the following passage by Severino (2009):

since every essent is eternal (does not come out of nothing and does not come back to it) so every essent that appears and disappears is already, before its appearance, and is still, after its being disappeared, *then* it is necessary that the totality of what appears is not the totality of the essent, and that the *other* separated from the totality of the essent (that is of the eternal) that appear is the dimension of the eternal as they do not appear in the finished circle constituted by the totality of what appears (p. 142).

As you can see, the first part of the two essays overlaps perfectly as to the content while distancing itself considerably from the fact that what

Messinese calls «totality of being» is for Severino the «totality of the essent». For this very reason we have summarised here what unites and what divides the two philosophers.

More specifically, the term of the issue that distances the two interlocutors, and which Messinese intends to bring to the centre of the discussion, consists therefore in determining what lies beyond the totality of the experience, which is understood by Severino in the «pluralistic» sense, as totality of the essents – or appear infinite (and that Messinese defines also “weak metaphysical transcendence” (Messinese, 2009, p. 550) – and in a sense that is linked to the metaphysical tradition of Messinese, as the totality of Being or *Ipsum esse subsistens*.

We may sum the above up in the words of Messinese (2009):

the omne punctum of the discussion with philosophy before Severino does not seem so much to regard the alternative immanentism/transcendence if ‘immanentism’ refers to the statement that the ‘totality of Experience’ identifies itself with the ‘Absolute [...] even for the Severino that critiques classical metaphysics, we cannot close ourselves in the ‘totality of experience’ (p. 546).

Therefore (2009):

Having established the need to affirm the inequality between the Unity of Experience and the Whole, one must go and see if the other with respect to the Unity of Experience is, as Severino now believes, ‘the dimension of the eternal [i.e. of the essents] because they do not appear in the finished circle constituted by the totality of what appears’; or is it the transcendent God of the metaphysical tradition and of Severino himself in the first phase of his thought (p. 547).

Messinese wishes to reaffirm what has already emerged in *L'apparire del mondo*, i.e. that the reference of the becoming being to the Creator God, allows us to affirm the *raison d'être* of the *finite appearance* of being, in a more rigorous form than that provided by Severino (Messinese, 2009). This solution is not the mere repetition of a thesis belonging to classical metaphysics, but is directly related to what Severino himself said in *La struttura originaria*. Therefore, it is the «early» Severino that holds the answer: it is the whole perceived as immutability that provides the opening

of concrete logical immediacy (Severino, 1981²), that is, the principle of non-contradiction considered in its ontological value, so that absolute Totality can only be the same absolute Being, and it is the reason why the absolute totality of being cannot be identified with the infinite totality of the beings but with the Being. With the own Severino's words (1981²): "The non-contradiction principle has the same essential meaning of the ontological topic: immutability or absolute permanence of the whole [...] it is the same Absolute being, that is the position of the non-changeability of the whole, the opening of the concrete logical immediacy is the same presence of the Absolute being" (p. 531).

The eternity attributed to the essents by Severino must therefore be preached in their relationship with the immutable Being, that is, the Being in its fullness that «overcomes all negativity and finitude», namely the *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*: it is on the basis of this reference that the authentic meaning of their eternity must be determined, that which Severino calls the «truth of the essents». The relationship between the Totality of experience and Being is what is traditionally defined by the term «creation», so that the beings are eternal as they are ontologically dependent on the Eternal One, which is therefore the condition of their being and their being «eternal». Messinese (2009) writes:

What Severino calls 'eternity of the essents' is actually the eternity that shall be preached by the essents in relationship with their needed reference to the *unchangeable whole* and, therefore, to *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*. It will be on the basis of this reference that the 'truth of the essents' must be completely determined, in particular the authentic meaning of their 'eternity'" (p. 554).

The reflection of Messinese is then further developed in the speech with which he participated to a conference held in Venice in 2012 – the Conference was held at the Ca' Foscari University and dedicated to Emanuele Severino, and it was called «Il destino dell'essere. Dialogo con (e intorno al pensiero di) Emanuele Severino» – which reiterates the need for a complete justification of that 'negative' constituted by the appearance of appearing and disappearing of being (Messinese, 2014). The foundation of phenomenological becoming concerns the justification "of the negative of the Unity of Experience [which] is precisely the 'non-identity of being with oneself' that formally characterizes Unity of Experience, as considered in connection with the L-immediacy" (Messinese, 2014, p.

50). That is, the incomplete identity of that region of being which is the being F-immediately attested (Unity of Experience) with the L-immediate being: “this is the ‘negativity’ that must be [...] founded [...] is this the phenomenological dimension that must be brought to a full circularity with the logo” (Messinese, 2014, p. 50).

Messinese judges that, in order to fully explain the «negative» of the Unity of Experience, two possibilities are available, each an alternative to the other:

- the Being enters and exits from appearing because it enters into being and leaves from being (Messinese, 2014, p. 50), that is, it becomes in an ontological sense;
- or “the being enters appearing and disappears *because ‘it is the finite appearance’*, by virtue of the relation of creation, *of the infinite Being*” (Messinese, 2014, p. 50).

The first possibility is not practicable because it contradicts the truth of being; so only the second remains standing: the asymmetry in the relationship between God and the world radically justifies the asymmetry between the «totality of the appearance of being» and the “being as such” (Messinese, 2014, p. 51). It is by virtue of the theoretical introduction of God the Creator that, for Messinese, the originary truth of being, or to use early Severino’s words, the «originary metaphysics» are realised.

Conclusions and Future Study

This essay has tried to offer – I hope objectively – the essential terms of the confrontation that Messinese developed with the thought of Emanuele Severino. I believe, for the reasons explained in the course of the work, that this is a comparison that deserves to be researched more in depth with the hope that those who refer to the philosophy of Severino may receive further arguments in response to the requests of Messinese that I myself have tried to comment on in my essay, after trying to highlight the core points.

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