

# The Identity and Eternity of Every Being

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What Western thought regards as the ultimate evidence – namely, becoming understood as that process by which beings pass from non-being to being, and vice-versa – is the ultimate folly. Severino shows that thinking of a time in which any given being *does not exist* means slipping into the deepest contradiction. Non-folly coincides with the appearing of the *necessity* that any being, *qua being*, should exist – a necessity resting upon the indisputable appearing of the originary structure of that being: its appearing as what is identical to itself and other from what is other than itself. The impossibility that any given being *qua being* might not exist coincides with the very eternity of that being. The succession of events itself is something eternal that occurs by necessity. And the varying of the content of experience, which indisputably appears, coincides with the supervening of eternal in the eternal circle of appearing, and their leaving it.

**Keywords:**

**Identity, Opposition between Positive and Negative, Appearing, Becoming, Necessity**

## I. Introduction

To think that any given being *qua being* does not necessarily exist is to be able to conceive of a time in which such a being is nothing. Severino reveals the absurdness of this thought and affirms the eternity of all-that-is. In what follows, we will see that the foundation of the eternity of every being *qua being* is what Severino calls the *originary structure*, which is to say the indisputable appearing of being in the form of identity/non-contradiction. The originary structure of every being also entails the necessity that everything which supervenes should occur *in the way in which it occurs*, and the impossibility of ontological possibility. The apparent contradiction between logos and experience – insofar as the former attests to the eternity of all things, the latter to the becoming of beings – no longer holds if becoming is conceived of not as the fluctuating of beings between being and nothingness, but as the appearing and disappearing of eternal.

## II. From myth to philosophy: the ontological meaning of the “thing”

1. The varying of the world has always been understood as a *becoming other* whereby “things” are generated and perish – already mythical tales speak of cosmogony or even theogony. The whole history of mythical existence is governed by this meaning of “things” as the process of *becoming other*. But mythical tales do not conceive of the ultimate meaning of the “other” from which things come and towards which they are directed. To conceive of this ultimate meaning is to conceive of the “other” as “nothing”. It is only with the rise of philosophy that human beings begin to reflect on the meaning of nothingness in an explicit way. Mythology cannot express an awareness of the radical meaning of generation and decay, or even of the

radical meaning of the All, because – unlike philosophy – it does not offer a reflection on the radical meaning of nothingness.

2. Like the word “all”, the words “being” and “nothing” are present in those languages whose use predates the rise of philosophy. These words are not a philosophical invention. But it is philosophical thought which testifies for the first time to the *infinite opposition between being and nothingness*, by conceiving of nothingness as the absolute lack of any form of positivity, as the absolute lack of any being and of the totality of beings. And it is again with the rise of philosophy that “things” come to be conceived of as “beings” for the first time – where a being is to be understood as that-which-is, i.e. that-which-is-not-nothing. From the Greeks onwards, being a certain “thing” means being a certain “being”, i.e. being a certain non-nothing, and the totality of things is understood as the totality of that-which-is, beyond which there is only nothingness. At this point generation and corruption begin to be conceived of in “ontological” terms: what is generated is what previously was nothing, and what perishes is what will return to being nothing.

### III. Western thought: no being, *qua being*, exists by necessity

1. The West developed with the belief that no being, *considered as a being*, exists by necessity. Indeed, according to Western philosophy it is evident that things are subject to becoming, and the Greeks understood the becoming of things as a process whereby beings pass from non-being to being, and vice-versa. What this means is, precisely, that *things* (i.e. *beings*) do not exist by necessity.

2. The great philosophical tradition poses the question of whether there exists any necessary being: the *a posteriori* and *a priori* proofs of God’s existence are well known. Supporters of the *a posteriori* proofs set out from the *evidence* of becoming, ontologically understood (things did not exist before, exist now, and will not exist in the future), in order to affirm the existence of a necessary being. Particularly revealing is the following passage by Aquinas:

We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated, and to corrupt, and consequently,

they are possible to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which is possible not to be at some time is not. Therefore, if everything is possible not to be, then at one time there could have been nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist only begins to exist by something already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence—which is absurd [since being is present in experience]. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary<sup>1</sup> (*Summa theol.* I, q. 2, a. 3).

What is considered absurd is not the statement “at one time there could have been nothing in existence”, but the consequence deriving from it, namely that, if this were the case, then *even at this moment* nothing would exist. The supporters of the ontological argument will say that God cannot be conceived, if not as existent. Here we can turn to Spinoza:

By *cause of itself* I understand that whose essence involves existence; or, that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing<sup>2</sup> (*Ethica*, I, Def. 1).

An absolutely perfect being is one whose essence necessarily “involves existence”, yet not because it is a non-nothing, but rather because it is a certain non-nothing: that non-nothing which coincides, precisely, with the perfect being that cannot lack the perfection of existence. Generally speaking, the question of whether a necessary being exists is posed because it is assumed that the mere fact of considering a being, *insofar as it exists*,

- 1 *Invenimus enim in rebus quaedam quae sunt possibilis esse et non esse: cum quaedam inveniuntur generari et corrumpi, et per consequens possibilis esse et non esse. Impossibile est autem omnia quae sunt talia, semper esse: quia quod possibile est non esse, quandoque non est. Si igitur omnia sunt possibilis non esse, aliquando nihil fuit in rebus. Sed si hoc est verum, etiam nunc nihil esset: quia quod non est, non incipit esse, nisi per aliquid quod est; si igitur nihil fuit ens, impossibile fuit quod aliquid inciperet esse, et sic modo nihil esset: quod patet esse falsum. Non ergo omnia entia sunt possibilis, sed oportet aliquid esse necessarium in rebus.*
- 2 *Per causam sui intelligo id cujus essentia involvit existentiam, sive id cujus natura non potest concipi nisi existens.*

i.e. insofar as it is a non-nothing, does not allow one to rule out that this being might have been nothing or might return to being nothing.

3. This idea that a being, *considered as such*, does not involve a necessary existence, is clearly expressed by D. Hume: clearly, the context is different from that of classic metaphysics, but it reflects the same fundamental belief that beings, qua beings, do not exist by necessity. Hume writes:

Whatever is may not be. No negation of a fact can involve a contradiction. The non-existence of any being, without exception, is as clear and distinct an idea as its existence (Hume, 1975, Section XII).

The existence of “things”, therefore, is not necessary. Kant expresses the same concept when taking a stance against the ontological argument for God’s existence. He states that an “existential judgement” is not an analytical judgement, but a synthetic one: the proposition “this or that thing exists” is a synthetic proposition. According to Kant, this means that when we think that a thing does not exist (“ist nicht”), this thought does not entail the slightest contradiction (see *Critique of Pure Reason, Transcendental dialectic*, Book II, ch. III, sect. IV). This Kantian thesis, according to which anything that “exists” could not exist, lies at the centre of contemporary philosophy, whose underlying tendency – encapsulated by Nietzsche’s announcement of God’s death – is to exclude the existence of immutable forms and structures governing the becoming of the world. Along much the same lines, Quine criticises the very distinction between analytical and synthetic judgements (cf. *Two Dogmas of Empiricism*), by noting the presence of *a posteriori* elements *even* in supposedly analytical judgements, thus confirming the thesis that *no being exists by necessity*.

#### **IV. Emanuele Severino: the eternity of every being *qua* being**

1. Having established this historical-theoretical premise, I will proceed to outline the hallmark of Severino’s philosophy: the idea that the passing of things from non-being to being (and vice-versa) is something attested by experience, and therefore that the notion that beings do not exist by necessity is sheer folly. What the West regards as the ultimate evidence is actually the ultimate folly. Let us see why.

2. Let us take a being, say a common table lamp, and see what happens when we think that, in the process of becoming, this lamp begins to exist. What happens is that we think there was a time, in the past, in which this lamp was nothing – it was absolutely nothing. One might say that, in the past, not everything that constitutes this lamp was nothing: the materials of which it is made existed, as did its design, the worker who assembled it, and so on. But the belief that this lamp began to exist at some point implies the belief that, before the lamp began to exist, there was some part of it that did not exist: at least the specific shape of the lamp, its current configuration, was nothing before the lamp began to exist – absolutely nothing. Likewise, thinking that at some point this lamp will cease to exist implies the belief that at some point in the future this lamp – in its current and specific configuration – will return to being nothing. But in such a way we are identifying the positive which is this lamp and the negative, being and nothing. Severino writes:

“When this lamp is no more”! Will people never wake up to the *meaning* of this phrase, and of the countless analogous phrases that they think can be constructed? Just as the phrase “when the sky is cloudy” includes the affirmation “the sky is cloudy,” so the phrase “when this lamp is nothing” includes the affirmation “this lamp is nothing” (albeit referring to a different situation from the present one, a situation in which one recognizes that this lamp is not a Nothing). And yet, this affirmation is the unfathomable absurd – it is the identification of the positive (i.e., of that positive which is this lamp) and the negative, of Being and Nothing. Since this lamp is this lamp, and as such is meaningful, not only is Nothing, *in fact*, not predicated of it, but such a predication is *impossible* – given that the supreme law of Being is the opposition of the positive and the negative (Severino, 2016, p. 86).

When this lamp has been destroyed, and thus annulled, is there *something* of the lamp that becomes nothing, or does *nothing* of the lamp become nothing? [...]. Now either one holds that there is nothing (i.e., no determination) that becomes, or can become, nothing, or one holds that, in the annulment of a determination, there is something that becomes nothing and, having become nothing, is nothing. Clearly, the first belief cannot be that of alienated reason [...] The second conviction expresses the utter *forgettleness* of truth—because that very *something*, which has to become nothing when a determination, such as this lamp, is destroyed—

that something as such, is a not-Nothing. Envisioning a time (“when this lamp is nothing”) when something becomes nothing, therefore, means envisioning a time when Being (i.e., not-Nothing) is identified with Nothing: the time of the absurd (Severino, 2016, pp. 87-88).

It is folly to think that there is a time in which the non-identical – namely, a being (a non-nothing) and nothing, the positive and the negative – is identical. Let us ask ourselves: what does it mean to say “when this lamp is nothing”? It certainly does not mean “when nothing is nothing”; rather, it means “when that positive (i.e. that determined and meaningful being) which we call *this lamp* is nothing.” In any case, it is precisely *this lamp* – i.e. a non-nothing – which is said to be absolutely nothing. In other words, that whose absolute nothingness is affirmed (when it is does not yet exist and when it no longer exists) is a non-nothing: it is a non-nothing – i.e. something which does not signify nothing! – that is said to be absolutely nothing. And this is folly. The *nihilism* which Severino speaks of is *the belief that beings are nothing*: a belief implied by faith in the existence of becoming, understood in ontological terms. Non-folly instead coincides with the appearing of the impossibility that any given being might be nothing, and hence with the appearing of the eternity of every being *qua being*.

3. What appears is the eternity of every being, i.e. of all that is somehow meaningful. According to Severino, every *being* is a *meaning*, which is to say a kind of *meaningfulness*, a *being meaningful*. This is the crucial point:

*Everything is meaningfulness [...]. Being is meaningfulness. A certain being is a certain kind of meaningfulness. In its transcendental form, meaningfulness does not mean something other than itself, it is not the “signifier”, nor is it something “signified” by something else (in the sense assigned to these two terms in linguistics). The tree is a meaningfulness that signifies itself, which is to say that it is the meaning of its own meaningfulness (Severino, 2007, p. 366).*

A being, *qua being*, possesses the feature of being meaningful, where – and this is an important point – being meaningful coincides with the being meaningful of the being *considered in its transcendental sense*: every mode of existence – every mode of being meaningful in a certain way – is a non-nothing whose existence appears necessary. According to Severino,

the truth of being speaks of the eternity of every mode of being meaningful, be it real or unreal, corporeal or incorporeal, illusory, ideal, sensible, obscure, mirror-like, or historical: “And, in general, the plurality of modes of existence is nothing other than a plurality of the modes of not being nothing” (Severino, 2016, p. 86). The crucial point is that what is a non-nothing *is not* a determination separate from its being a non-nothing: what is (a non-nothing) is that-which-is-not-nothing. It may be argued, therefore, that being a non-nothing *est de intellectu essentiae* (i.e. *is* of the understood content of an essence), be it real or unreal, corporeal or incorporeal, etc., in the sense that every determination is in a “mode” of existence. Here too it is necessary to pay the utmost attention to what Severino notes in his criticism of Thomas Aquinas, according to whom (in keeping with Western thought as a whole) *esse non est de intellectu essentiae*:

Where – be it noted! – existence, which *is* of the understood content of an essence or quiddity (*est de intellectu quidditatis vel essentiae*), is not a certain *modality* of existence, but is *existence as such* – is *esse* in its transcendental sense, i.e., as pure not-being-nothing. Aquinas *on the contrary* thinks he can demonstrate that *Being* is not of the understood content of essence (*esse non est de intellectu quidditatis*) by pointing out that it is possible to think what “*homo*” is and nevertheless ignore whether he has existence in the real world (*ignorare an esse habeat in rerum natura*). But in this way he loses sight of the transcendental aspect of *esse* and reduces it to “*esse in rerum natura*,” i.e., to a particular modality of existence. For, in thinking “*phoenix*”, it is clearly problematic if this fabulous bird is to have the same mode of Being as this lamp, and which allows the lamp to be touched, looked at, held in one’s hand: it is problematic if it is to have *that mode* of Being which, if you will, may be posited as a mode of “*esse in rerum natura*” (just as this lamp’s assuming a modality of existence different from the one that is actually manifest is also problematic). And in this sense it is by no means false to affirm that *esse* – understood, however, as this *modality* of *esse*! – “is *not* of the understood content of an essence or quiddity” (*non est de intellectu quidditatis vel essentiae*). But while the implication between an essence and a *particular modality* of its existence (different from the one that it actually possesses) is indeed problematic, there is no problem whatsoever with the implication between essence (in the sense of *any* essence or determination *whatsoever*: unreal or real, incorporeal or corporeal . . .) and pure existence, i.e., existence in its transcendental sense. To the extent that this fabulous bird ap-



pears, and according to the modality of its appearing – and it indeed must appear, if “we can understand what a Phoenix is” (*possumus intelligere quid est Phoenix*) – to this extent and according to this modality it is not a Nothing, and this not being a Nothing is immediately (*per se*) predicated of it, in virtue of (*per*) its being a *what* that is in some way meaningful. Just as, to the extent that this lamp appears, and according to the modality of its appearing, it must immediately be affirmed of this lamp, as such, that it is not – nor can it become – a Nothing (Severino, 2016, pp. 98-99).

It is problematic for the phoenix to exist according to that mode of existence which is called being *in rerum natura*; but insofar as the meaning of “phoenix” appears, the phoenix is not a nothing, and it is impossible that a non-nothing (whatever the mode of its not-being-a-nothing, i.e. of its being somehow meaningful) should be nothing, i.e. other than itself. It is worth further investigating this *impossibility*, which is ultimately the *impossibility for the non-identical to be identical*, since this is the very *foundation* of the thesis of the eternity of every being *qua being*.

## V. The foundation of the eternity of every being *qua being*

1. Severino states: “since this lamp is this lamp” – i.e. since this lamp is self-identical – and “given that the supreme law of Being is the opposition of the positive and the negative”, it is impossible for nothingness to belong to this lamp. Before explicating this passage, we need to clarify a few other aspects of Severino’s theory.

- a) According to Severino, identity and non-contradiction are two sides of the *same* principle. Identity has no logical primacy over non-contradiction: being (any positive, any non-nothing) is not non-being *because* being is being, i.e. because being is self-identical; conversely, being is being *because* being is not non-being. The law of being is therefore the law of *identity as the identity of identity and non-contradiction*: “saying that being is being is *the same* as saying that being is not non-being” (Severino, 1981, p. 193).
- b) Given any meaningful positivity, the ‘negative’ with respect to the positive under consideration coincides with all that which, in different

ways, is not the positive under consideration. Thus, if the positive under consideration is 'this lamp', its negative will be – for instance – the sun, the moon... and hence nothing too; not in the sense that nothing is a 'being' which stands in opposition to this lamp – and differs from it as the sun and the moon do – but in the sense that 'this lamp' does not mean absolute nothingness, it does not mean the absolute lack of being. For nothingness is what is absolutely other from meaningful being; it is what is absolutely other from any positive and from the positive as a whole.

2. We here come to the key point: the necessity that every being *as such* be self-identical – i.e. the necessity that every being be other than its 'other' – implies the eternity of every being. This necessity entails the impossibility that nothingness be predicated of any being. We might also put it in the following terms: the eternity of any given being is *a specific mode* of the impossibility for that being to be other than itself. In other words, the necessity for every being to exist 'absolutely', i.e. to be eternal, is *one* identity-opposition, it is *one* individuation of that universal identity-opposition which is the law of being:

It is *necessary* to affirm that every being is eternal, because eternity is *one* opposition between the positive and the negative (it is that opposition by which the positive, any given being, is not nothing), which is to say that it is a form, a specific mode of that – the universal opposition between the positive and the negative, the universal determination of the being – the negation of which coincides with self-negation. The necessity of affirming the opposition between the positive and the negative [which is inclusive of every specific form of this opposition] *necessarily* implies the affirmation of that specific opposition between the positive and the negative which is the eternity of every being (Severino, 1995, pp. 243-244).

The identity-opposition of any given being *is distinguished* from the eternity of the being, and the implication is established between the identity-opposition of the being and the eternity of the being as 'distinct'. What is implied (the eternity of the being) is distinguished not as that which is simply *other* than what implies it (the identity-opposition of the being), but as that which expresses a greater concreteness than what implies it: in other words, the eternity of the being belongs to the concrete meaning of the being itself of the being in an essential way (that is to say,

by necessity). If the appearing of the being itself of the being were *isolated* from the appearing of its being eternal, the being itself of the being could not be the indisputable foundation of the eternity of the being. This means that what is indisputable is the appearing of the unity of the being itself of the being and of the eternity of the being: it is the appearing of the being itself of the being (its being non-contradictory) which is inclusive of that specific opposition between the positive and the negative which is the eternity of the being.

## VI. The indisputability of the opposition between the positive and the negative

1. It has been argued that it is impossible for any being to be other than itself. But at this stage it is crucial to ask ourselves: why can't we affirm the identity of being and non-being? Why can't we think of reality as contradictory? Are we not arbitrarily assuming that reality is non-contradictory? If reality is non-contradictory, then what has been argued so far ensues; but one might object, precisely, that the non-contradictory nature of reality remains an unproven assumption. Severino endeavours to show that the negation of the being itself of any being is a self-negation. To do so he draws upon the philosophical method of Aristotelian *élenchos* (cf. *Metaph.*, IV, 4, 1006 a 11-28), revisiting it in light of the thesis of the eternity of every being *qua being*. Here are the crucial aspects of his argument:

- a) The opposition between the positive and the negative (and hence the opposition between any given being and nothing) is the law governing all being, because the negation of this opposition is itself a being that differs from – and is thus opposed to – everything which it is not. The negation of the difference between the positive and the negative is based on the appearing of difference, i.e. it is based on that which it denies, since, in denying the *universal* opposition between the positive and the negative, this negation also denies that specific identity-opposition which is negation itself (i.e. it denies itself). And it is worth stressing once more that we are not at all arbitrarily assuming what we intend to demonstrate:

The *élenchos*, be it noted, does not say that the negation of noncontradictoriness is inadmissible because it is contradictory (since, in

that case, it would presuppose the very thing whose value it has to show: namely, noncontradictoriness), but rather that such negation fails to live as negation, because in the act in which it constitutes itself as negation it is at once also affirmation. And so it is, most definitely, contradictory: but the negation is not superseded insofar as it is formally ascertained to be contradictory – the negation is superseded insofar as it is ascertained that it fails to posit itself as negation, unless it grounds itself upon that which it denies, and so only if it denies itself. The negation, failing to free itself from that which it denies, becomes its very bearer; not only does it fail to tear what it denies off its back, so that it can then hold it at arm's length and condemn it, but what it thinks it has before it and has condemned, actually stands behind it and directs all its thoughts, including the thought that announces the condemnation. The law of Being is the destiny of thought, and thought is always witness to this law, always affirming it, even when ignorant of it or when denying it (Severino, 2016, pp. 64-65).

b) More generally, in order for there to be a genuine negation of opposition, it is necessary for differents to appear in their being differents (no matter what differents we wish to take into consideration – whether they be the negation of opposition and what is other than the latter or, if we grant that negation is something determinate, the individual elements constituting the negation). For if difference did not appear in any way, what would be denied by negation? In order to be itself, the negation of opposition presupposes – in any case – the appearing of difference. But then, in negating difference, negation denies itself, since it denies that appearing of difference which is constitutive of the very negation of opposition:

In order to have a real negation of the opposition (and not merely an apparent one), it is necessary that the positive and the negative should first be posited as different (and so as opposites), and that one then posit the identity of the differents, i.e., that the differents *qua* differents are identical. As long as the differents are not seen as different, they must unquestionably be said to be identical; but if they are seen as different, and if, indeed, they must be held fast as different, in order that the affirmation of their identity may be negation of the opposition of the positive and the negative, then this negation is grounded upon the affirmation of what it denies; and, this time, it is no longer grounded upon the affirmation of on-

ly a part of what it denies, but rather upon the whole content that is denied. Consequently, the negation is negation of that without which it cannot constitute itself as negation, and so is negation of itself; it is a quitting the scene of the word and of thought, a declaring its own nonexistence and its own meaninglessness (Severino, 2016, pp. 69-70).

The difference between each being and its other – which is to say, between each being and nothing – is undeniable; and it is precisely for this reason that it is necessary to affirm that being is self-identical and eternal. It may therefore be argued that the appearing of that being which appears in the form of self-identity and as that whose negation is self-negation – Severino refers to this appearing of the undeniable being itself of the being as the *originary structure* – is the foundation of the affirmation of the eternity of every being *qua being*. (And we have also seen that, strictly speaking, the real foundation lies in the unity between what provides a foundation and what is founded, between what implies and what is implied).

2. The necessity of the *affirmation* of the being itself of any given being and of its eternity can be called “modal” necessity and can be distinguished from the necessity that every being exist *absolutely*, i.e. that it be eternal. Let us call “ontological” this second sense of necessity, whereby we say that *existing* means *existing by necessity*, in such a way that anything that does not exist by necessity, is not, i.e. is nothing. One sense of necessity implies the other: on the one hand, every being is necessary, in an ontological sense, because the being’s eternity is something that is affirmed indisputably (for the being’s eternity is an individuation of the being’s indisputable being self-identical, i.e. of its being non-contradictory); on the other hand, this affirmation is indisputable because it affirms the self-identity of every non-contradictory being (and hence the eternity which this self-identity implies). Furthermore, “since the affirmation of the determination [i.e. identity-opposition] and the eternity of the being is an existent, [this affirmation] is not only ‘necessary’ in the first sense of necessity [i.e. in a modal sense], but it is also ‘necessary’ in the second sense [i.e. in an ontological sense], meaning that it is necessary because it is itself an eternal” (Severino, 1995, p. 249). Not only that, but the negation of the being itself of the being is also necessary, since the self-negating negation of the being itself of the being is a non-nothing, but is eternal as an eternal self-negation.

## VII. Some remarks on the impossibility of contingency and of ontological possibility

1. From the necessity that every being be self-identical it follows that everything is eternal (i.e. that everything is absolutely necessary) and that any form of contingency must be ruled out. In *Essenza del nichilismo* [*The Essence of Nihilism*, first Italian edition: 1972] Severino still leaves open “the possibility that in the eternal spectacle of Appearing there may appear that which might not have appeared” (Severino, 2016, p. 144). But from *Destino della necessità* [*Destiny of Necessity*, 1980] onwards, he shows that the assumption that what appears might not have appeared is itself an expression of nihilism:

Being occurs [...] and its occurrence is eternal; so it is necessary for being to occur. Nor can the synthesis between that being which occurs and its occurrence not be (i.e. be nothing). (Severino 1980, p. 98).

Denying the necessity of the occurrence means conceiving the impossible, namely that that non-nothing which is the supervening of the being might have been nothing. Moreover, since every being is eternal, each being stands in a necessary relationship to every other being. To think that a being, which has supervened, might not have appeared, is to think that the connection between that being and the sum of all other beings is not a necessary connection: in other words, it means denying the necessity of the connection between the All and its parts, by presupposing the (contradictory) possibility that the being might be nothing.

2. The possibility of being and not being – i.e. ontological possibility – is something contradictory. Severino denies it in the most radical way. He notes that “the sheer possible” (understood as the absence of contradiction), when it does not coincide with the potentiality to be and not to be, “can only signify a possibility in relation to which those conditions that make that sheer possibility a real potentiality to be and not to be have yet to be realised” (Severino, 2005, p. 109). If this were not the case, the possible in question would not be a possible entity, but something impossible. But the possibility of being and the possibility of not being are opposite determinations; and just as it is contradictory for opposite determinations to apply *to the same being*, so it is contradictory (and thus impossible) for

the possibility of being and the possibility of not being, which are opposites, to apply *to the same* being:

To say that A (the same being) has the possibility of being and of not being (whereby its non-being is the being of non-A) is to say that, *insofar as A is possible, non-A too is possible*, i.e. that precisely *insofar as A is possible, A is not possible* (Severino, 2005, p. 111).

What is denied is the idea that there might be some beings that are merely “possible”, i.e. beings that are not, were not, and will not be, beings which are potentially in things or in the potency of some producer or creator. Severino writes:

This *possibility* is impossible, because the real that might be if the possible *became* real is a being that, while having the possibility of being – i.e. despite the fact that there is nothing preventing it from being – nevertheless remains a nothing. And if a possible being were to become “real”, it would be annihilated – i.e. that mode of being whereby the being in question is something possible would be annihilated (Severino, 2019, p. 332).

From this it follows that the totality of all possible beings is always already “real” [...]. Besides, the fact that this feature belongs to the totality of possible beings emerges in the most direct way when we consider that, if any possible being were not “real” even for an instant, insofar as it is a being it would nonetheless be eternal as a possible being; but being eternal as a possible being, it would be impossible for it to cease to be what it is, namely to cease to be possible and become “real”; and this impossibility means that, being eternally possible, it would not be a possible being, but an impossible one (Severino, 2019, p. 333).

It is necessary, therefore, that the totality of the possible be always eternally “real”: a possible being that is merely possible would be *eternally* possible, could never become “real”, and would thus be an impossible being.

## VIII. The supervening of eternal

1. Everything is eternal. Yet, things appear to be subject to becoming: “This shadow on a sheet of white paper was never born and will never perish; and yet it just supervened in the content that appears, and now that I have moved my hand, it has already vanished” (Severino, 2016, p. 105). Is Severino arguing that there is no truth to becoming – which appears – since it is contradicted by the logos of the opposition between the positive and the negative? Have we gone back to Parmenides, according to whom the appearing of becoming is “doxastic”, i.e. a deceptive opinion? First of all, it can hardly be taken for granted that Parmenides’ “doxa” is to be understood as the appearing of becoming (rather than as the erroneous interpretation of what appears). But quite apart from this, Severino never denies the appearing of becoming: he never claims that becoming is illusory. What he does deny, as we shall now see, is the *non-veridical* interpretation of becoming, whereby we say that things are born and die, are generated and perish.

2. A response to Parmenides – regarded as the philosopher according to whom there is no truth to the appearing of becoming – had already been provided by Aristotle. The latter noted that, even if becoming were mere appearance, it would still exist, precisely as that *appearance* which we experience (see *Physics*, VIII, 3, 254 a 27-30). Popper states that the world described by the theory of relativity – a theory which in his view bears a strong Parmenidean imprint – is like a film reel, with each being in the world representing a still: the stills coexist and all of them are already real; it is only the screening that creates the illusion of change<sup>3</sup>. But our consciousness – Popper notes – is something real, since the change that is produced in our consciousness, and which we experience, is certainly something real:

If we experience successive images of an immutable word, then one thing at last would be genuinely changeable in this world: our con-

3 In passing, it is worth noting that Plato, Aristotle, and Hegel provide a different interpretation of Parmenides: in their view, the great Eleatic philosopher describes not just the becoming of the world as illusory, but also the existence of multiple beings, implying that only indeterminate being exists.



scious experience. A cinematographic film, although presently existent, and predetermined, has to *pass* through the projector (that is, relative to ourselves) to produce the experience or the illusion of temporal change. [...] And since we are part of the world, there would be a change in the world – which contradicts Parmenides’ [scilicet: Einstein’s] view (Popper, 1982, vol. II, sect. 26).

Even if we grant that everything is eternal, in order for there to be an experience of becoming, it is necessary to acknowledge at least the movement of our consciousness, which like a ray of light progressively illumines different parts of the changeless world. But this drifting of the observer along the line of the changeless world entails movement; and the existence of movement would strikingly disprove the thesis of the eternity of every being. When presented with this objection, Einstein “said he was impressed and did not know how to answer” (*ibid.*).

3. Does this criticism of Aristotelian inspiration also hold against Severino? No, it does not, because what Severino disputes is not the experience of becoming, but the Western interpretation of becoming. Popper assumes that becoming must be understood as the departing of things from non-being and the return of things into non-being. This is how Aristotle understood it – as did Einstein, apparently. But Severino shows us that the experience of becoming, *as such*, in no way attests to the annihilation of things, but only to the succession of events. Severino liked to employ the metaphor of the sun and sky: if we were to gaze at the sky and ask it what happens to the sun after its setting, the sky would be unable to answer. The “sky” here stands for the horizon of appearing, the dimension which things enter and exit, whereas the “sun” stands for the things that enter and exit the the horizon of appearing. The thesis of the eternity of every being does not conflict with what appears, it does not alter what appears, because appearing *as such* does not tell us anything – and cannot tell us anything – concerning the fate of what enters and exits the horizon of appearing:

After the fire, ashes; which means: when the fire no longer appears, ashes appear. But that something that no longer *appears* no longer *is* – *this* is not manifest in Appearing. On the contrary—it is *interpreted* on the basis of the way in which something appears and disappears. When something appears that has never appeared before, one says that it has been born and that previously it was a Nothing; when something disappears and does not return, one says that it

has died and become a Nothing. [...] Yet this is untruth's interpretation of Becoming: only the intervention of *doxa* compels one to posit as a Nothing (before and after its appearing) that which appears and disappears in a certain way. The *veritable* comprehension of the Becoming which is the content of Appearing instead throws into relief the *silence* of Appearing regarding the fate of that which does not appear. And if Appearing as such says nothing about this fate, it is disclosed "unadorned" [...] by the truth of Being which says that Being is and cannot not-be and keeps to itself, eternal (Severino, 2016, p. 109).

Thus: if Becoming is defined in terms of Being and not-Being, then the truth of Being proclaims Being's immutability; but if Becoming is defined according to the determinations that authentically belong to it as the content of Appearing – if Becoming is defined as the process of the revelation of Being – then Being's immutability and its Becoming no longer rank as mutually contradictory terms (Severino, 2016, p. 112).

Logos, the highest law of being and thought, attests that insofar as every being is eternal, the varying of things cannot mean the beginning to be and ceasing to be of things, but only *the appearing and disappearing of eternal*s. And since when "something" supervenes and disappears, its appearing too supervenes and disappears, we may argue that what also supervenes and disappears is the appearing of that "something" which supervenes and disappears.

4. The horizon of all that appears – i.e. the horizon in which determinations that become supervene, and from which they take their leave –, *cannot* appear as something that enters and leaves the appearing:

For supervening to appear *as* a supervening, there must appear the "earlier" with respect to which it constitutes itself as such; and for vanishing to appear *as* a vanishing, there must appear the "later" as a no-longer-including that which has vanished. And thus the horizon that includes every earlier and every later that appear – and this horizon is Appearing as the transcendental event – *cannot* appear as supervening and vanishing (Severino, 2016, p. 125).

What happens, then, when the lamp that Severino speaks of begins to appear? What happens is that within the total horizon of appearing –

which, borrowing the language of Idealism, we might also call transcendental appearing – the following begin to appear: a) that eternal which is this lit lamp; b) that eternal which is the appearing of this lit lamp; and also c) that eternal which is the belonging of this lamp and its appearing to the transcendental horizon of appearing. Likewise, when this lamp vanishes, the appearing of this lamp vanishes, and with it the belonging of this lamp and of its appearing to the transcendental horizon of appearing:

The belonging (or relation) of a part to the All is not the All. And only with regard to the part can we claim that it vanishes [and begins to appear], i.e. only with regard to what is part of that All which is transcendental appearing (Severino, 1985, p. 157).

The same relation of a part to the All is a part: it is an eternal that enters and exits the horizon of appearing. We can thus catch a glimpse of the further development of this argument: the fixed, transcendental dimension of appearing cannot be the appearing of the totality of beings; it cannot be that *absolute and infinite totality of beings* which Severino calls “infinite appearing” and which also encompasses the totality of what has disappeared, the totality of beings destined to appear, and the totality of beings destined not to supervene. These are further implications of the originary structure and each would need to be discussed extensively in order to be adequately presented. Here I have limited myself to illustrating that *golden implication* of the being itself of every being (see also: Goggi, 2019) which is the affirmation of the eternity of every being *qua being*.

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