Eternity & Contradiction
Journal of Fundamental Ontology

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Opening Note
by Giulio Goggi

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In the Presentation of the first issue of E&C, Severino writes: «this periodical intends to be a platform to discuss the central themes in the philosophical thought. Also, it is open to the discussion of what we called "destiny"» (p. 8). And by "destiny" Severino means the being itself of the being that appears as the *absolutely undeniable* because it appears as that one whose negation is self-negation.

In the second issue of E&C the voice of dialetheist logic has been raised. In this third issue (edited by Davide Spanio), other authoritative voices take a position as denials of *the primal structure of the destiny*: either because it is not recognized that it is valid as a foundation, or because only a part of it is recognized as a foundation. On the other hand, it is necessary that any objection raised to the destiny affirms the *difference* between itself and that content which is, precisely, the destiny of beings. As a matter of fact, a discussion that is not opposed to the destiny is not an objection to it. But the being itself of beings is the appearing of the negation of being other than itself by the beings: that is, the appearing of that *determinateness* of the being by which every being *differs* from every other being.

Explaining the sense of the objection addressed to the destiny, Severino observes that «"discussing" means affirming a *difference:* between what is discussed and what is opposed to it in several ways. And destiny, as already mentioned, is primarily the emerging of the meaning that appertains to the *difference* (that is, the difference of those which differ). To discuss destiny and oppose to it is therefore *to differ from it*. And precisely because of this it also means *sharing*, more or less unknowingly, its primal trait: the affirmation of difference. In this differing-sharing-what-we-differ-about, and to which we oppose by discussing it, the claim, earlier recalled, of the meaning of the incontrovertible, recurs, that is, the incontrovertible is the dimension whose denial denies itself» (*ibid*).

In fact, the foundation is the primal opening of destiny of being only to the extent that it shows its ability to *absolutely* deny its own negation, and therefore only to the extent that it *essentially* implies, as removed, its own negation.

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The Truth of Being between Unconditional and Conditional

FRANCESCO TOTARO

Former Full Professor of Moral Philosophy, University of Macerata

fstotaro@gmail.com; totarofr@unimc.it

The essay starts from the distinction between the being that is unconditional and the being that happens in a conditional way, that is within the limits of our experience and our existence. The synthesis of unconditional and what is conditional implies overcoming the features of being that are deficient and distressing and do not deserve to remain. This is the issue of the ontology that has to be completed by an axiology. According to the Author, the negative can be present in the "Glory" only as taken away within a dimension of transcendence. And so philosophy, at the peak of the supreme care for the sense of being, opens itself to a promise of salvation. Furthermore, because we do not have now the full manifestation of truth, the latter, unlike what Severino thought, needs a faith as keeping its perspective.

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1. Being that is and being that happens

The masterwork *The Primal Structure* of Emanuele Severino underlies my reflection. In the first edition of that work, dated 1958, Severino was still opened to the possibility of a theological dimension, although in a more recent book the Author excluded that such an opening to a divine being, in a privileged position in comparison to a common being, was the core of that essay (see Severino, 2018, pp. 209-213). Thus, the key point of my considerations is about the relationship of distinction between *being that is* and *being that happens.* That kind of distinction is suggested by a double question. The first question sounds with following words: to what extent can we affirm the absolute and unconditional feature of truth? The second question is strictly linked to the first one: when is truth conditioned by limits that mark its feature as relative and unstable? So, we have to give reasons to affirm both: something that can be said as unconditional, clarifying why its meaning is absolute, and something that we have to say as conditioned, because its meaning is relative. A path like this shall require not only to say in a different, but not contradictory way, either the being that is or the being that happens, it shall also require to show their structural interweaving.

2. Method and entire

The method – *metá* (towards) *odón* (path) – of thinking in a philosophical way doesn't involve taking any road, but taking up a journey that is oriented to the *entire*. The question is precisely that: starting from what are we pulled when we think from a philosophical point of view? The "from what" are we attracted as *philosophers* is the figure of entire. The philosophical path is marked by a primal opening to the entire. Now we can ask: what is consistent with this primal opening? We can answer that

thinking in line with the intentionality of entire shall require not to back down from the challenge of thinking, first of all, what is *up* to the entire. In line with the entirety of primal intentionality of thought is the meaning of being that cannot but be, thus the meaning of unconditional being. Unconditional being is being that overcomes the contradiction of negative, because the negation of being negates itself and its meaning consists in the semantic function of letting us say the being that is freed from the contradiction. The negation dissolves in signifying being from which it is excluded. The positivity of negation of being consists in letting show the absolute positivity of being, while negation of being does not have its own content; its meaning lies in letting us say its contradictory, that is the being. Being is thought in relationship to a not being that is taken away; so not being is put as taken away. A disturbing question remains: how do we explain our ability not only to think "not being" starting from being, but also to think "not being" as the primal foundation of being and as its point of arrival? Why can one even be attracted by not being and consider the nothing more primal than being? The separation of the thought of "not being" from the thought of being, from which the first starts - since there is in any case something rather than nothing - and in which it is resolved, is perhaps the exercise of a *diabállein* (namely "to separate") always rooted in the human.

3. The "unconditional" and its contradiction

The unconditional always gives itself to us within the limits of our condition, where the primal opening narrows in the contradiction of our experience and our existence. The contradiction is twofold, because it regards both ontology and gnoseology. Not only are we not the whole or the entire; it is not even evident in a determined way how we are linked to entire. What does not appear *for us* is how we are included within the entire. Therefore, what should appear does not appear to us, that is, *how* we are included within the being what is in an absolute way and so without any contradiction. All that has to do with what Severino declares, from *The Primal Structure* to the last book *Testifying the Destiny* (2019) as "contradiction C". According to me, contradiction C can be considered the real thorn in the side of conceptual apparatus not only of the work *The Primal Structure* (including the second edition of 1981), given that it is also present in the new course that begins with *Destiny of Necessity*

(1980) and marks a fertile furrow to insert critical observations that I will try to make.

The opening of the entire narrows in the bounds of existence. Existential context is marked by coming to light of a deficiency: content of the being absolutely free of contradiction does not appear in the way it should appear, and thus it is not *for us*. So being's scenery splits into twofold aspects: *being for itself* and *being for us*, absolute being and relative being. That means that existence – any being within the existence – has the dignity of being and so it has the right to be as included within an unconditional positivity; nevertheless any existent in a conditioned situation does not know the ways of inclusion and, due of this lack of knowing, suffers a distance from being that is relevant to it and also belongs to it. Being that is *in us* and *for us* is accompanied by contradiction, which is not absolute but relative to us. The being's *event* within the field of experience is inadequate to the fullness of being and, since this fullness does not appear, we could say that being that happens is a not yet being.

The truth of being consists properly in the full manifestation of being and, for this reason, is for us a goal that has to come. The manifestation of truth is given to us always incomplete. Since every being within the conditions of existence is inadequate in comparison of its fullness and thus it does not presume to can own the identity with the entire, the latter could only be approximated through multiple perspectives converging to the same point of attraction. That does not mean that perspectives are necessarily coinciding, because convergence can also be pursued through oppositions, provided they are not destructive.

4. Ethics as approximation to the Being

For each being in a conditioned situation, the path of approach to the entire assumes the character of a task that involves the totality of existence. Such a task not only involves the intentionality of knowledge; it also implies practical tension. Indeed, the deep meaning of praxis is to tend to manifestation of being that still does not appear to us, that is it consists in making-happen-for-us the Being that is for itself. This kind of praxis or, we can say, of action is not any practice, but it can be qualified as an ontological one. If we consider action in its essential constitution and how it unfolds, we can highlight *who* acts. Here Human enters the scene and Human expresses itself according to its structure with its fundamental fea-

tures. So, three dimensions stand out within human being; dimensions that we can find in the course of history and we can assume as *almost transcendental*, that is as transcendental elements at anthropological level. Human is a place where come together ability to be, ability to act in view of being, ability of having things that is not detachable from acting and being. The sense of human experience is played indeed in the overall task of making happen the being for us.

5.   Right to be and quality of being

In a situation of conditionality in which we are, we know we belong to positivity of unconditional being, nevertheless we do not know *how* our belonging to the unconditional being will manifest itself to us. At the heart of this question we have to ask: the synthesis of unconditional and what is conditional, which is waited by us although it is not manifested yet, implies that any feature or *modus essendi* of conditional being, within our experience, has to be taken in a synthesis like that? Or else there are, within the sphere of our experience, features of being that are deficient and distressing, going from material to immaterial sufferings, that do not *deserve* to remain? We cannot avoid a crucial question like that: in the event that deficiency and suffering had even to persist and perpetuate within the joining of conditional and unconditional, we would reduce necessarily the latter to a role of impotent ratification of negativity of any existent.

Therefore: how could we overshadow the issue of the *quality-of-being*? Considering quality of being means to satisfy in an adequate measure the right to be that belongs to the whole of being and so to every singular manifestation within it, that is to every being. Should not we, therefore, design a quality enhancement regarding all that is worthy to be in every being? That would mean to put a *difference* between the being that is "isolated" from the unconditional being and the same being that has overcome such an isolation. We could find a leverage point to support this difference in one of the most important works of Severino:

> That the concrete passing beyond the contradiction implies the concrete appearing of what is passed beyond, it does not exclude the *difference* between the being that appears in its not be passed beyond and "the same being" that appears within the context that passes it beyond. Within the infinite and eternally accomplished

passing beyond, what is passed beyond appears in its total concrete-
ness, even if another – that is, something different – is a being that
appears together with that to which it is necessarily connected; and
another is "this same being" in so far as it appears outside that rela-
tionship (Severino, 2001, pp. 538-539).

Nevertheless, Severino thinks that everything of experience (for in-
stance both pleasure and pain) has to be included within the infinite ap-
pearing and its context. The reason of that inclusion – at risk of simplify-
ing – might be this: if any element or aspect of finite experience was not
included within the infinite, the latter would not be infinite. In other
words, if something remained out of infinity, consequently the infinity it-
self, devoid of something, whatever it is, would no longer be such; more
essentially: the infinite would be at the same time not-infinite. I would ap-
proach this explanation to a following important statement of Severino in
the same work, when he says that "within the infinite appearing no being
(*essente*) can supervene (*sopraggiungere*)" (p. 541). Indeed, we have to rec-
ognize that if some being could arrive yet within the infinite, that would
mean that infinite was not actually infinite before the arrival of that being,
since it would have been of course lacking of that new arrival. Moreover,
if the infinite had to foresee that further contents could arrive, infinite it-
self would be damned to never be infinite.

6. A critique to Severino's vision of relationship between finite and infinite

About this issue, we could object that a concern like that is possible only
if the infinite is conceived, so to say, in a quantitative way. Such a vision
would mean that any increase of its content would imply, inevitably, its
downgrade. At this point our question would be: could infinite being
welcome finite beings, improving their finite condition, without imply-
ing a downgrade for itself? I would be inclined to think that the infinite,
precisely because it is such, would not be conditioned by the bestowal or
by the outpouring of the fullness of being in favor of beings who are de-
void of it. The concept of infinite, thought in a qualitative way as posi-
tivity without limits, demands that it cannot be changed because all re-
alizations are included in it, while the realm of finiteness needs its own
change in the relationship with the infinite, due to its lack of fullness.

And this relationship, considered the vision of the infiniteness that coincides with being without negativity, cannot be but towards a better being. The fullness bestowed upon finite beings, therefore the change due to the coming of a new relation between infinity and finite, should not cause infinity to increase or decrease. Therefore, the infinite can be extraneous to the logic of increment-decrement, which is immeasurable with it. The logic of infinite could be a logic of overabundance, which cannot be undermined by the arrival of a new relation of the finite to the infinite, due to the attainment of the fullness of the finite. To come would be the new condition of the finite and not the un-conditionality of the infinite being. This means, precisely, moving from a quantitative view of infinity to a qualitative one.

About this, theological thought can interpret the fulfillment of the finite, thanks to the relationship with the infinite, as an act of donation by the latter. Such a donation could be also named "love" of God for humans and for everything that belongs to the sphere of finiteness. To be rigorous, we must however admit that a theological interpretation of the unconditional being is only possible if we consider the latter "as a person", who is in a relationship with us "as persons". Passing from a notion of unconditional being to an image of God-person needs indeed a radical turn of philosophical intentionality.

Let come back to our critique regarding Severino's vision of relationship finite-infinite. Severino manages to avoid a contradiction in which infinite could fall if it did not contain the totality of contents whatever they are, but what is the quality of them? Severino does not put the question about the quality of contents that infinite would embrace. For this reason he does not manage to avoid a more important contradiction concerning infinite, that is a qualitative contradiction. Indeed, if the infinite – the absolutely absolute – had also to contain the deficit elements of beings, the result would be the permanence of negative within the absolute positivity of infinite being. To better say, the lack of fullness of beings within our experience would be a definitive feature of beings taken in their fullness (which is attainable thanks to the full appearing of the relationship between infinite and finite). The infinite positivity of being would be contradicted by not positivity. To avoid a contradiction like this, we should interpret the difference between the being that is "isolated" from the unconditional being, and the same being that has overcome such an isolation, as *transcendence*. Beings that get free from any negativity appearing within the limits of experience are assumed in a dimension that is transcending

experience. Transcendence would be the full expression of the difference between fullness of beings and their lack of fullness.   . Severino is undoubtedly opposed to a transcendence that means a radical removal of the negative of every isolated earth, because not yet appeared in the unfolding of glory.

Therefore he says:

> In the gaze of the destiny of truth it appears [...] the *necessity* that "the Holy Friday" of the solitude of the lands of the circles does not precede but appears together with its own sunset; that is, that the *tremendum* is not left to itself and to its horror, but appears in the very act in which it is surpassed by the "Easter" of the freedom of destiny. [...] In that glance, therefore, there appears the necessity for the extreme abyss of pain and death, which must open up into the finite, to manifest itself in the very event in which it is over-stepped, that is, at the same time in which it manifests, in the new glow of Joy – in the Glory of Joy – , its own fulfillment and its own be passed (*Glory*, pp. 543-544).

Then, in the Glory of Joy, must the extreme abyss of pain and death, as a figure of the negative within the experience, remain as a negative? Or the negative can be present in the Glory only as taken away, like the negative with which it engages "the being that cannot not be", rightly to take it away? Putting the negative - every negative - as removed is precisely the figure of transcendence. If the negative – relatively negative – accepted in the unconditional being cannot be identical to the negative isolated from it, putting the difference between these two states means precisely that the second of them transcends the first. It would be contradictory if the two different states were identical, that is that the negative separated from the fullness of the positive coincides with the negative assumed in such fullness, where the negative could remain only as removed.

7. Onto-axiologie and salvation

In this folds of our reflection is placed meta-physics as enhancement of ontological dignity. If it is innervated by metaphysical enhancement, ontology cannot fail to result in an onto-axiology, that is in an ontology at the height of being's value, to not fall into senselessness of the negative. And then philosophy, at the peak of the supreme care for the sense of being,

takes itself to the threshold where it is possible to listen to the promise of salvation. Where can the promise of salvation come from if not from a Being who does not suffer the insuperable conditioning of finiteness? So salvation refers to an un-finite being, which transcends the finiteness but in an inclusive relationship with it, and therefore able to realize that ontological gain sculpted in a formula that we can take from Augustine and put in a nutshell: "nothing will be lacking of what was and there will be what was lacking" (Augustinus Hipponensis, *De Civitate Dei*, Liber XXII, cap. 14). To be precise, in that context the Author faces an issue regarding the feature of children's body when they will resurrect, affirming that it will have the dimensions of a complete physical development; Augustine says referring to Luke, 21.18: "In sententia quippe Domini, qua ait: *Capillus capitis vestri non peribit*, dictum est non defuturum esse quod fuit, non autem negatum est adfuturum esse quod defuit").

The argument in favor of transcendence that we have indicated above is based on the necessity to give a full realization to beings otherwise uncompleted. In that case transcendence acts as a pushing force towards a completion of existence. We have to add that transcendence can also attract lives that have succeeded, but are not closed in a sort of complacency of their limits and, on the contrary, are open to an overabundance of sense. Transcendence as completion of lacking existences and transcendence as *excess* for lives rich in successes are interwoven.

8.   A comparison with Severino about being and being other

Previous considerations show a substantial debt to Severino's conception of process of becoming. Based on his conception, we have not to read becoming and its contents as coming from nothing and going to nothing. Instead we have to read becoming as a flow of appearing and not appearing beings, about which we cannot negate their permanence. This agreement must confront the sharpening of Severino's theorization about "being" and "being other" dating from *Beyond the language* (1992) and *Tautótēs* (1995). Thus, I try to give reasons for both convergences and divergences.

It is evident that a "soteriological" discourse leading to the figure of transcendence requires a transition to an *otherness*, that is to another level consisting in a step up of the "eternal beings", while an intransigent version of the principle of contradiction should refuse the possibility to think that the identity of being-itself can turn in an otherness meant as not identity. Such

a prohibition also involves the *status* of praxis, which is considered an unsustainable pretension to produce the transformation of beings. In order to break the ban or to overcome the reasons which oppose both the claims to affirm a transcendent dimension and the claims of a transformative practice, some interpretations of Severino's thought emphasize a significant difference between the first and the second period of his philosophy, expressing the opinion that the positions of the first Severino allow the possibility of both transcendence and praxis, that only the second Severino would have ruled out. I would rather support the view that we have just to tackle head on the issue that is linked to the radical turn that the philosopher made in the nineties, when he arrived to equate two different matters: being that cannot but be (or being that excludes not being) and being that cannot be other than itself (being excluding its becoming other). About such an equivalence, on the contrary we wonder if we are allowed to distinguish the issue of being from that of other. The question is precisely that: can we really equate the issue of other to the issue of becoming nothing?

In the book *Disputes* (p. 146), Severino states about the flow of incoming of eternal beings: "the variation in the content of the totality of what appears" means "starting to appear of an eternal that is *other* from eternals that already appear". Thus, to say it briefly, if there is a "variation" within the system of *Eternals*, the "other" that is considered according to the register of eternal being is not the same "other" that is considered according to the register of becoming from nothingness and going to nothingness.

So, if we conceive salvation as giving to beings the fullness of their being, and if we figure praxis as making happen eternal being into the sphere of beings that already appear, being's variation that is involved in tending to salvation and in engaging in praxis is not tinged with the colors of nihilism. With a quick hint we can notice that – as Severino does not fail to point out – the *language* speaking the truth is a kind of transforming praxis, since it wants to induce a paradigm shift in comparison of the traditional one. The language of truth is therefore a vehicle of an even indispensable transformation.

9. The serious case of creation

Furthermore, about the salvation we touch in short the uncovered nerve of the figure of the creator God, which was the object of a Gigantomachy between Severino and Gustavo Bontadini (about the "principle of Cre-

ation", which Bontadini supported, I advanced an interpretation of it as metaphor, which I based on the same words of the Author in the essay Σώζειν τὰ φαινόμενα, in Id., *Conversations of Metaphysics*, II, p. 145: "we are dealing with a concept that is analogic, symbolic, 'introduced' [....] therefore surrounded by a halo of darkness"; on the issue, I refer to Totaro, 2013, pp. 57-62). According to me, the figure of God who creates depends on the figure of God who saves, and cannot spun off from it. Extrapolated from the concrete union with the promise of salvation, the principle of creation entered into symbiosis with the principle of cause. Causal explanation was yet gradually removed from its metaphysical value, and in the modern era it has become fruitful in the exploration of the cause-effect connections within the physical-mathematical sciences, although we know that, with the advent of quantum physics, the transition to the indeterminist principle and stochastic-probabilistic logic has been affirmed . The "Creation" was then interpreted as a particular case of the principle of causality and the image of God was assimilated to the physical-mathematical scheme of the cause that produces effects according to a relationship of equivalence. For instance, if we consider the famous Spinoza's formula *Deus sive natura*, we cannot avoid to notice that it is based on the principle of a perfect equation of the cause with its effects.

On the contrary, we have to free the concept of God from concept of the cause and from relationship cause-effects. If we de-causalize, so to say, the notion of creation, we also put an end to the improper controversies – e.g. the emblematic controversy with evolutionistic theories – with the explanations of the hard sciences elaborated in modernity and their ulterior development. What does remain after such a renounce to a metaphysical use of the principle of causality? The central core of the idea of God as the foundation of what cannot be given by itself certainly remains valid. We have to precise that when we speak about beings (*entia*) that cannot give being to itself *by itself*, we mean beings that cannot reach by itself fullness of being. Indeed, we have stated, within the entire – or the whole – of being, a difference between unconditional being and conditional one. Conditioned beings are oriented to, and attracted by, unconditioned being to realize their ontological fullness. On this way we can purge the idea of a foundation in God of a nihilistic version, because foundation means referring to an unconditional being that, in the perfect realization and expansion of being itself, is able to call to a full realization conditioned beings, provided that they already have in themselves the dignity of being and the right to its own completion.

10. Appearance of finiteness and manifestation of absoluteness

The hermeneutics of the relationship between God and the world of experience, as relationship between unconditional being and conditional beings, brings us back to the relationship between appearing of finiteness and manifestation of absoluteness. In *Passing beyond* (pp. 537-538), we read:

> when the isolated earth sets, the necessary decipherment of the traces left in it by the All implies that the infinite All, concretely considered, supervenes in flesh and bone in the infinite constellation of finite circles, but that it supervenes as what appears there, precisely, in this constellation, and therefore in a dimension that, despite its infinity, is a finite dimension. The Infinite Supervening All in its concreteness is indeed the absolute manifestation of being but within the limits of that finite dimension [*scilicet*: the size of the constellation of finite circles, which, in spite of its infinity, is a finite dimension], that is, in that it [infinity] is present in the gaze of such a dimension [finite], and therefore not as *absolutely absolute* [my italics].

It is clear that the constant feature of Severino's thought is the attempt to conjugate finite and infinite, rooting the infinite in the finite. Nevertheless, the distinction remains firm between the absolute that is intertwined with the parts, namely with the constellation of finite circles, and what he calls the "absolutely absolute". The latter neither appears as whole within a particular circle of what appears nor can coincide with the constellation of parts in their sequence. There is not a correspondence between the formal opening of absolutely absolute, which should embrace every positive being in the sequence of the particular circles, and the already realized fullness of its contents. Such a matching is not possible because the chain of finite circles cannot adequate the infinity of the absolutely absolute. It remains, in a permanent way, a distance between the two dimensions. The permanence of distance means that the recurrent "contradiction C" in Severino's thought does not receive a solution.

Likely a synthesis would only be possible to the eyes, so to say, of *somebody* who could put together infinite and finite, embracing the entire or the whole where the positivity of conditioned beings can realize its own fullness within the unconditioned positivity of the being without limits. That would mean to introduce an almighty God, whose idea is perhaps the restless underground of the apparently compact reflection of our

philosopher. That would be, of course, a path to explore. It remains that the concreteness of the "absolute" cannot be realized, as such, thanks to going to the infinite or, better, to the *in-definitum*, of singles circles of the process and its sequence. Therefore, the appearing of "Glory" within particular circles of the process cannot be but a glow as immense as irreducibly formal, since the form is empty of content or, better to say, an adequate content does not match with its formal anticipation. The Glory is always moved forward and its full extension to the totality of particular circles does not appear. I think that such a consideration is also appropriate to the transcendental consciousness as eternal scenery of all empirical consciousnesses, because that scenery too is not fulfilled by the totality of contents, which, on the contrary, appear and disappear although the formal opening of transcendental consciousness itself. For this reason, the vision of the whole, and vision of the finite in its placement within the whole, remains unaccomplished. Definitely, the Glory should involve a going of finite beyond the isolated earth, and beyond death as annihilation, but Glory is not present, since the synthesis of finite, or of "relatively absolute", with "absolutely absolute" does not appear.

The infinite leaves a trace in every happening that "arrives" within the finite, receiving in turn this trace, but it itself is the not coming or, more exactly, is the coming All, in the process of the coming of finite circles, that is still not coming. The absolutely absolute cannot be diluted in the always relatively absolutes, that consist in the appearing circles. Distance between coming (finite) and not coming (infinite) is persistent. No overlap is given between the two dimensions. The relative absolute lives in an incessant tension to the absolutely absolute, in whose conjunction the brightness of Glory and the fullness of Joy should be reached, but it is not lord of the ways that lead to the goal; it is always *in itinere*.

11. Truth and faith

The truth of being, concretely considered, should consist in a situation where the contradiction due to the distance between relative and absolute would overcome. Actually, we do not have *right now* the vision of a synthesis of relative and absolute. More precisely, the truth to which we can approach, according to our 'catching' it is not able to master the ways of such a synthesis. In short, we do not have the vision of a truth fully unfold. That means that we have reasons to *trust* in a truth that we think as

absolute, but do not know in its full manifestation. We *believe* to can see what in the present we do not see. We know that a goal for us does exist; nevertheless, we do not see how that goal manifests itself in its determinations. Not seeing what we *have to see* is precisely the condition of the opening of truth to the faith. Truth aiming at its full manifestation needs faith. A truth that keeps aiming at what it does not see (if not partially), has to recognize its opening to faith. The path of truth becomes the path of faith. The truth continues as faith. Faith is a necessity – more than a need – of the truth.

About that, we can refer, though in a context that is not philosophical, to words of Paul in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians 5,7-8: "dià písteos gàr peripatoûmen, ou dià eídous" ("we walk by faith, not by sight"). The "epistéme" leads to the "pistis", which is based on a vision that manifests itself as imperfect. Faith means a not seeing that is rooted in seeing.

Severino says that faith is to believe as incontrovertible what it is not incontrovertible, but only believed and wanted. Therefore faith would be a negation of truth and a sort of violence against truth. In other words, faith would mean to declare visible what is invisible and so can only be believed; consequently, we should not sell faith as truth. What to say about that issue? Without any doubt, the place of truth is a vision that finds its expression in an incontrovertible logos. We can remember that Severino, since the *Primal Structure*, has spoken about truth as logical-phenomenological immediateness. Just based on that feature of the truth, we can argue that the structure itself of truth, and precisely its logical-phenomenological structure, *compels* to believe. Faith is founded on the truth in the moment in which the discourse of truth risks to fall in a contradiction, or in a *falsehood* consisting in affirming what it cannot affirm due to the limited feature of its vision, that is in affirming to already see what it does not manage to see: the synthesis of unconditional and conditional being, of infinite and finite. We can agree that seeing *facie ad faciem* is the undeniable destiny of truth, but we argue that *facies ad faciem* is not the feature of truth within the conditions where the truth is placed *in us*.

In conclusion, affirming to see what is not seen means to fall in a contradiction. Truth put itself in an impasse, from which to go out, thanks to a faith that has to be defined in a not nihilistic way or purged of nihilistic presuppositions. Faith has to be regarded as keeping the perspective of the truth along a path where the concrete determinations of its manifestation are not yet evident.

12. Truth and principle of benevolence

Faith is then the recognition, within the truth, of the limit of the contents attainable by it. This recognition, instead of making faith the place of an arbitrary belief driven to the exercise of an unilateral or even violent will, may be the condition of a shared search and of a principle of benevolence towards a plural mode of truth orientation. The attitude of benevolence would mean that the truth of being does not assume the philosophical positions, expressed outside of it, only as an error and, therefore, as a testimony of alienated thought, because of the persuasion that what is being is coming from nothing and goes into nothing, but also as a contribution to the manifestation of truth itself. Such a contribution takes also place *via negationis* and, precisely, in the denial of attempts to deny the truth. In a positive way, it would be configured as an exploration of different ways that converge, through the same different positions, to the truth. The truth would be nourished by a multiplicity of perspectives.

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The two faces of the "primal structure"

LEONARDO MESSINESE

Full Professor, Lateran Pontifical University

messinese@pul.va

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

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Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

• Part one
The Primal Structure (1958) and the subsequent "retractatio" of metaphysical knowledge

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

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

The Primal Structure

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Returning to Parmenides

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Returning to Parmenides. Postscript

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

«Introduction 1981» to The Primal Structure

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

• Second part
Brief discussion about the two faces of the "primal metaphysics"

A reconsideration of phenomenological becoming

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

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

of the transcendent Being of the world according to the "metaphysical" meaning of transcendence?

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

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

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

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

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

Becoming and theological metaphysics

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The metaphysics of The Primal Structure

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

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

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

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

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

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Form and matter of the semantic whole.
Notes to *The Primal Structure*

FRANCESCO SACCARDI
Catholic University of the Sacred Heart
francesco.saccardi@unicatt.it

In considering the concept of "Being", and the related concept of the "semantic whole", Severino probes the Hegelian criticism of the semantic autonomy of significances in depth. On the basis of this premise, in *The Primal Structure* the whole, that is the "totality of being", takes on the role of an organic structure in which every significance (every Being) is necessarily implied in the whole and implies every other significance. This contribution intends to show to what contradictions such a view of the totality of being may lead.

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1. *Introduction: the parts as constants of the whole* in The Primal Structure

In chapter XII, para. 17 of *The Primal Structure*, the author presents the theorem according to which "every significance is a constant of the infinite semanteme"; or also: "no significance can be a variant of the infinite semanteme". In a very general sense, by "constants" in *The Primal Structure* are meant those significances that are not simply included in a specific significance, but that establish the meaning of that significance, and are therefore necessarily posited or implied by their position. Here, what is actually being considered is the circumstance whereby *every* significance determines, to the extent of its concrete significance, the whole. That is, it determines the whole with respect to its total content, or absolute *semantic matter* (even if not with respect to its *formal* significance or, that is, its determination *as* "a semantic whole").

Severino affirms that the meaning "to be" (as a semantic whole) «includes the totality of meanings (= of the beings); in other words, every one of these belongs, in its own way, to the essence of Being (or of the whole)» (Severino, 2012, p. 292). Of every significance, he posits its being a constant of the infinite semanteme insofar as «every significance is L-immediately recognized as belonging to the essence of the significance "to be". Or also: by "to be" is meant the concrete totality of beings; thus every Being is L-immediately recognized as belonging to the essence of Being [the whole or the totality of being, N.d.A.]: just because every significance declares L-immediately that it is a Being» (Severino, 2012, pp. 292-293). Where L-immediacy acts precisely as an analytic connection – the negation of which contradicts itself – between every significance and its belonging to in the whole. It is interesting to observe how Severino accepts this conclusion – in a passage which has been removed from the new edition of the text (Severino, 1981) – as a consequence of the emphasis laid by scholastic philosophy on its consideration of the non-generic nature of Being: «Scholastic philosophy has particularly insisted on this all-inclu-

siveness of the infinite semanteme. (The concept of "Being" is not an "abstraction"!). We have to draw the consequences» (Severino, 2012, p. 293).

2. Principle of non-contradiction and analytical propositions

When he states that Being, viewed as the totality of being, is the horizon of all that which is not non-Being, he intends to recognize the primal synthesis of being and determination (or rather of existence and essence) which neither the part as distinctive (or separate) from the totality, nor the totality as distinctive (or separate) from the parts can guarantee. In the important paragraph 19 of chapter IX of *The Primal Structure*, he discusses the relationship between that *unique* analytic proposition (that affirms the identity with itself of the whole) and its various individuations (that affirm the identity with itself or the existence of determinations). If we affirm the identity of a certain determination with itself (of the type: "*A* is *A*"), we emphasize the fact that the identity does not belong to this determination as such (*A*), but because it is a certain determination of Being, or individuation of the universal one that is *Being* (the whole). Otherwise, the identity could not belong to any other determination (either: *x*, which would prevent the predication of its identity with itself, or: "*x* is *x*"). Likewise, the identity that is predicated on being *qua* being, considered in that universal abstraction or formality for which it can predicate itself on any determinacy, regardless of the concrete determination of this latter (or universal abstract), is the identity of the concrete content of this form, or rather it establishes itself insofar as the formal element is seen in relation to the determinate content (or universal concrete). Therefore, if determination *A* is itself (or, according to a different concept, is a Being determined in a certain way) insofar as *Being* is Being, on the other hand *Being* is Being insofar as every determination is itself (Severino, 2012, pp. 195-197).

3. Severino's Hegelian inheritance

But the totality (or *Being*), in this latter statement, is interpreted in two different ways: in the first case it means the semantic whole, in relation to whose identity (*Being* is Being) only, we can posit the identity of a certain content (*A* is *A*); in the second case, the totality stands for Being – as a universal abstract – whose identity is such only if placed in relation to the con-

crete content of universality. It is, however, only by jeopardizing the relationship between the concrete totality of being and finite determinations in a bi-univocal sense that we can posit every significance as a constant of the whole. It is one thing, indeed, to say that of every determination, as positive, one must necessarily say that it belongs to Being (or whole). It is another to establish also *how* this belonging is to be achieved: and, that is, to say that every significance is a constant of the whole. If it is «*precisely insofar as* every significance is L-immediately affirmed to be a Being» (Severino, 2012, p. 293, italics added), that every significance belongs to *Being* (or the whole) *as its constant*, however, with regard to the predication of the universal concrete identity, it is not possible, *per se*, to consider the inclusion of every significance in the whole (i.e. to consider every significance as a moment of the whole), likewise its belonging to the whole as a constant. If the "moment" of the whole is "that which the whole cannot lack", we then have to understand how it is possible to introduce this belonging without referring to the concept of the whole as a "totality of the parts that are its constants" (see below, para. 5).

Severino considers it impossible to think of the "totality" without thinking of the "part" as that which the totality exceeds, *in the sense in which* he considers it impossible to think of the totality without considering it inclusive of the part: something like a "totality" can only be posited insofar as we posit the significance "part", so that this significance belongs to the semantic field established by the "totality", without having the value of predicate of that same field – and, indeed, being contradictory it has the value of predicate (Severino, 2012, p. 166). Now, if x is any meaning that is not the totality of the meaning (the totality of being), then in the proposition: "The totality includes x", the significance of "including x" would be a predicate that is necessarily appropriate to the significance of "totality"; on the other hand, since the significance of "including x" exists only insofar as it implies the significance x, then this latter significance, and thus every significance that is not the totality of the significance, determines the significance "totality" (Severino, 1984, p. 191). With that, precisely, what he is saying is that the parts are constants of the whole, since he reiterates that the need of inclusion of the part, which is predicated of the totality, can be conceived only in reference to every part that is included.

4. The negation of the whole through the distinction of form and semantic matter

If we affirm, as Severino does, that «the concrete totality is *the* not Nothing, insofar as it includes all that is not a Nothing, and that is, insofar as it is in relation to the parts; and is *a* not Nothing, insofar as *also* the parts that it includes are a not Nothing» (Severino, 2000, p. 97, note), we are not stating – *simpliciter* – contradictory predications of the same thing, for which the concrete totality would be, together and in the same respect, "totality" and "part". Indeed, to be *a* not Nothing which is a predicate of the totality, does not imply the existence of a *set* that is itself the totality, and that therefore includes, on the one hand, the determinations that are parts of the totality and, on the other, that determination that is the whole. In this way the parts would be not included in the totality and the totality would not include the parts. Rather, the totality «is in relation not only to the parts but also to itself, *and to itself in its being inclusive of the parts*» (Severino, 2015, p. 219). The totality of the being is therefore the totality of that which is not a Nothing (*the* not Nothing), and is *a* not Nothing, although it does not include itself *as part* of itself.

At a closer look, we can see that the second part of the first sentence abstractly ignores what was stated in the first part, since it actually repeats that the parts are *also* not Nothing, regardless of their inclusion in the totality, for which they – as concrete content of the totality – are not Nothing. And this therefore affirms, with an act of logic distinct from that of which such a statement is a repetition, their not being Nothing (also) as distinct from the totality. Otherwise, in the second sentence, what is said of the totality affirms its being in relation to itself insofar as including the parts, but not only, because the totality is *also* in relation to itself (in its being inclusive of the parts), as well as being in relation to the parts. Thus it too is newly established as the logical moment subsequent to that in which the totality is put in relation to the parts – and that is after having prescinded from its being inclusive of the parts –, in its being inclusive of the parts as distinguished from its own content.

This occurs in spite of the fact that in *The Primal Structure* Severino explicitly makes reference to the warning that the absolute semantic matter (of the whole) cannot apply as something *distinct* from the form: in which case the semanteme "semantic whole" (or the totality *qua* totality), which is precisely, in this context, what is meant by the formal value of the infi-

nite semanteme, would not be included in absolute matter, so that this would not be that. In the proposition that expresses the identity with itself of the whole, the subject is absolute matter as the synthesis of matter and form, and the predicate is form, as the synthesis in turn of form and matter. In this sense, form and matter (in absolute terms) are, concretely, the same thing (Severino, 2012, p. 291).

5.   Conclusion: what it means that whole includes the parts

That every positive, insofar as it is identical to itself (or a Being determined in a certain way), is included in the whole, and that the whole, as universal concrete, necessarily confirms its inclusion of every positive, pertains to the concrete structure of logical immediacy. On the other hand, with regard to the claim – explored in all its expressions in the last chapter of *The Primal Structure* – that of every semantic content the Being, or the non-Being of its non-Being, is L-immediately predicated, to the extent that it is immediately contradictory to state that Being is not (Severino, 2012, p. 375), it should be noted that it is only the proposition: "Being is" (where by "Being" is meant the semantic whole), which is the same concrete L-immediacy. Of existential propositions in which, however, the subject has a finite determination, we have to say that, though L-immediate, they are only individuations of L-immediacy (Severino, 2012, p. 377). Of a particular determination (we'll call it: *d*) we state that it is not becoming because, if it were, *d* – or this certain Being – would not be. In other words, the predicate belongs – as denied – to the subject *ratione suae partis*, since becoming implies as such the non Being of the Being. But the proposition: "*d* is not non-Being", is not mediated in its turn, and thus its denial immediately contradicts itself in the measure in which it stands as individuation of concrete logical immediacy (Severino, 2012, p. 388, note 1).

Now, if experience – that in this text is indicated as the "totality of the F-immediate", or as the totality of that which is immediately present – illustrates *which* determinations belong to the whole (or are included in it), this latter, *as* absolute immutability, surpasses the totality of the F-immediate, that appears as the horizon in which Becoming shows itself – where we observe the arrival of Being out of non Being and the annihilation of Being (the primal structure is the primal opening of metaphysical knowledge); although, then, it is precisely for the L-immediate statement that the immutable whole is *other*, or lies *beyond* the totality of the F-immedi-

ate, that F-immediate Being is seen *as a moment* of the whole of the positive, or rather as that which is not the whole but that is included in it (because positive) (Severino, 2012, pp. 401-402). And since all L-immediate propositions that have as their subject the semantic whole are each the concrete realization of logical immediacy, the proposition: "The immutable whole surpasses the totality of the F-immediate", is itself a statement of the principle of non-contradiction (Severino, 2012, p. 402). Therefore, that the totality of the F-immediate is a positive that cannot contain any quantity or any mode of positivity that is not contained in the immutable whole, i.e. vice versa, that any F-immediate determination cannot not be included in it, is something that depends on the identity whereby the immutable whole is itself (the whole of the positive) (Severino, 2012, p. 403). "Otherwise", if, that is, the immutable whole did not contain all the positivity of the F-immediate, "it would not be the whole of positivity" (Severino, 2012, p. 403).

In this sense, the necessary claim of the inclusion of every positive – *qua* positive – in the whole, does not refer to a prior determination of the whole as the totality of parts which are its constants, but rather to the position of the semantic whole as such (*qua* whole), which implies L-immediately the exclusion of any surpassing of it. This also applies to exclude its not being inclusive of a certain positive, since its non-inclusion with respect to any positive at all would lead to that surpassing, and thus to the negation of the whole (Severino, 2012, pp. 291-292). Severino's further addition – "because immutability does not pertain to this or that Being but to *every* Being" (Severino, 2012, pp. 403-404) – appears pleonastic, and in any case subordinate to the preceding, unlike what seems be suggested by that conjunction placed at the beginning of the sentence. It is not true, as a matter of fact, that the immutable whole is the whole of positivity because immutability belongs to every Being, but rather, on the contrary, that every determination is immutable because the whole is immutable or – but it is the same thing – because it is identical to itself, as in the proposition: "The whole is the whole", the content expressed is the same as in the proposition: "The whole is" (Severino, 2012, pp. 375-377), and consequently the same as in that proposition which affirms the immutability of the whole.

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

ALDO STELLA
Adjunct Professor, University for Foreigners Perugi
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

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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 "notizia", 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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 judgement", 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, 1981², p. 132).

In a footnote he had added: "the primal meaning makes meaningful the request of meaning" (Severino, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², p. 146). Indeed

> To the extent that we confine ourselves to the moment of inseity 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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 identiy

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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², p. 206).

The synthesis of the two forms of immediacy cannot be interpreted, therefore, as something "further with respect to their positing themselves" (Severino, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², p. 207), because "the primacy of the synthesis does not deny the distinction" (Severino, 1981², p. 207) between the two indicated moments.

Nonetheless, distinction does not mean irrelativity: "But distinct determinations are not irrelated determinations: when distinction is understood as irrelativity, one has moved from the concrete concept of the abstract to the abstract concept of it" (Severino, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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 the 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², p. 181). And also: "Identity is certainly identity of a difference" (Severino, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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, 1981², 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*.

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The Nothing, the Negation, the Undeniable

CARLO SCILIRONI
University of Padua
carlo.scilironi@unipd.it

This essay discusses the notions of nothing, negation and undeniable as presented in Emanuele Severino's *La struttura originaria*. An alternative interpretation is proposed, taking into consideration how the so-called philosophical school of Padua (M. Gentile, G.R. Bacchin, E. Berti and F. Chiereghin) dealt with the same themes.

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The text *La struttura originaria* deals with the nothing, the negation and the undeniable, which seem to have a fundamental function and role: the *nothing* is the key concept through which the notion of being emerges; the *negation* is the essential condition that makes necessity possible; the *undeniable* is the very name of truth.

And yet, the primal aporia stems from the nothing, the negation seems to jeopardise the truth, and the undeniable appears to be unreachable. The nothing, the negation and the undeniable come to constitute an essential framework which, however, seems to be flawed, for it contains a constitutive dead end. However, it is undeniable that *La struttura originaria*, from its beginning to the very end, is an unquestionable proof of the struggle with the aforementioned dead end. It is certainly the most substantial work of contemporary Italian thought, and it seems to me, not only Italian. And being it both a great work and thought, it should indeed be seriously analysed. To do so one ought to *listen to it* and *discuss it*. Indeed, listening is an exercise of "discipline" (from *discere*, to learn): study discipline; discussing it, instead, is something altogether different, for it implies watching over it, in order to prove its degree of stability. But who would do this? We would doubtlessly need another Severino!

Being aware of the difficulty of the task at hand and of the limited amount of time that I have, I will take for granted that my audience is well acquainted with the work of Severino: therefore, I won't dwell on the analytical *reading* of the text. Instead, with regard to the critical discussion of the text itself, I will try to present those elements I deem essential by availing myself of the work of the so-called philosophical school of Padua (a school of classical metaphysics), whose main exponents are Chiereghin, Berti and Bacchin, who had all been students of Marino Gentile. At various stages this school had dealt with the themes of *La struttura originaria,* even though its approach rested, as Severino would have said, on a different chessboard.

This is the reason why the chessboard which constitutes its starting point is the milestone of all subsequent analyses. Severino lays claim on the

Greek chessboard, but so does the school of Padua. However, the differences are radical. The problem, of course, is neither historical nor historiographical: what matters is understating that the staring point from which it takes its origins is both essential and crucial.

The "Greek chessboard" of the school of Padua considers philosophy to be "a pure problematicalness". Marino Gentile coined the expression that philosophy is "everything questioning that is a whole questioning". Its origin can be traced back to the Socratic knowledge that one does not know. In 1963 Chiereghin published a text, *Storicità e originarietà nell'idea platonica*, which is still to this day the best contribution along this line. In the same year Bacchin published five books which constitutes the theoretical basis of the philosophical school of Padua. Moreover, in the same years Berti too investigated the problematicalness in Aristotle. Therefore, it can be said that the school of Padua bears the Greek mark of Socratism and remains faithful to the knowledge that one does not know. It is no coincidence that this notion implicitly crosses Kant, and in particular the Kantian knowledge of the limit. It is remarkable that both Chiereghin and Bacchin read Hegel in the same way.

Thus, the knowledge that one does not know is the milestone of the philosophical school of Padua. I wonder what this could entail and how it is related to Severino's *La struttura originaria.* I will try to answer. The fundamental idea could be expressed as follows: the school of Padua accepts the *structure*, but it does not consider it to be *primal,* which means that the school of Padua believes that Severino is able to pinpoint with a certain degree of exactitude the form of "saying", or "language", the *form* of thinking, but not the structure of the thinking itself, which always transcends the saying and cannot be matched by any form of language. Thus, such a structure can be *known,* can be *meant,* only in negative terms, only as the negation that every form it takes, every expression of it, has to adjust it. And this entails the *knowledge* that one does not know.

According to the school of Padua, Severino's *La struttura originaria* is the structure of the *doxa* or of the *doxai, not* the structure of being, of thinking, or of *noein.* Its constitutive principle, i.e. the opposition of positive and negative, is recognised as the necessary principle of every language, expression, form, but not as the primal *aplôs*, *simpliciter.*

This turning point is worth to be examined with a certain degree of attention: it clearly comes to light while approaching the themes of the nothing and the negation. *Punctum stantis vel cadentis ontologiae* still consists in the relationship between the nothing and the negation. Severino's

thesis is well-known: the IV chapter of *La struttura originaria* displays quite drastically the aporia of the nothing. And here I quote from paragraph 5: «La contraddizione del *non-essere-che-è*, non è *interna* al significato "nulla" (o al significato "essere" che è l'essere del nulla); ma è tra il significato "nulla" e l'essere, o la positività di questo significato. La positività del significare è cioè in contraddizione con lo stesso contenuto del significare, che è appunto significante come l'assoluta negatività»[1]. Severino closes paragraph 6 as follows: «È chiaro allora che il significato "nulla" è un significato autocontraddittorio»[2]. To sum up, the *omne punctum* is the contradiction between the "positivity" of meaning as such, and the "content" of what is being said, which means the negativity.

In its general structure, the solution of the aporia is displayed as follows in paragraph 7: «L'aporia dell'essere del nulla è risolta col rilevare che il principio di non contraddizione *non afferma la non esistenza* del significato autocontraddittorio [...], ma afferma che "nulla" non significa "essere" [...]; ossia esige l'inesistenza della contraddizione interna al significato "nulla" che vale come momento del significato autocontraddittorio»[3].

The school of Padua raises a radical objection to Severino's description and the solution he proposed to solve the aporia of the nothing, which could be stated briefly as follows: *the nothing which is mentioned by Severino is not the nothing!* Indeed, the contradiction *does not lie inside* the nothing.

Let us consider this passage attentively. Either thinking "of nothing" turns the nothing to something (one gives voice to the nothing), or such thought is denied (it is the impossibility of *thinking* the nothing).

Labelling the nothing as the opposite of being, of the denied being, does not mean considering it nothing: it means thinking about it as some-

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1 «The contradiction of not-being-that-is, therefore, is not internal to the meaning "nothing" (or to the meaning "being", which is the being of nothing); but lies between the meaning "nothing" and being, or the positivity of this meaning. The positivity of meaningfulness, in other words, is in contradiction with the very content of the meaningfulness, which is precisely meaningful as absolute negativity». (Translated into English by S. Kneipe, edited by G. Goggi and F. Perelda, in «Eternity and Contradiction» n. 4. Forthcoming publication).

2 «Thus, it is clear that the meaning "nothingness" is self-contradictory». (*Ibid.*).

3 «The aporia of the being of nothingness is resolved by noting that the principle of non-contradiction does not affirm the non-existence of the self-contradictory meaning [...]; rather, it affirms that "nothing" does not mean "being" [...]; in other words, it requires the non-existence of the contradiction intrinsic to the meaning "nothing", which ranks as the moment of the self-contradictory meaning». (*Ibid.*).

thing through which the being takes shape, as a function of saying. But the nothing, because it is nothing, cannot even *be* such a function, cannot even be the opposite of being and the denied being. It can take on none of the "thinkable" forms of the nothing, because the thinking always belongs to the being. Thus, thinking of nothing means not thinking, which is the annihilation of thinking itself. Claiming to be able to think the nothing is stating the impossible, it is a contradiction, that is, an act of self-contradiction in which the act itself of positing is at the same time an act of removing. After all, this is the impossible, the unthinkable.

For the contradiction *to be stated* – and it can be stated – it is necessary that the act of positing differs from the act of removing: if it were the same act, the saying would never be, would not come to being. The actual contradiction – the contradiction *simpliciter* – cannot be and cannot appear: it is the nothing. The contradictions which are given, which appear, are *consistent* contradictions: they present opposite theses, which are in conflict and cannot coexist one with the other; they are given and surface only as far as they are not actual contradictions for, if they were, they would not be and would not be able to emerge. In other words, they would be nothing.

This is precisely the point of the school of Padua: from the moment that thinking the nothing (that is, the actual contradiction) is unthinkable, it is impossible to imagine the being as opposed to the nothing. Since the nothing is unthinkable, it is impossible to think of the being as a semanteme which is opposed to nothing: since the nothing is not, opposing it would simply mean not opposing it. As for the saying, that is, the sheer executive *form* of thinking (which is language), the being becomes the opposite of the nothing; however, with respect to the thinking (to the *intelligibility* of saying), such an opposition implies that the being cannot opposed, since the nothing is not. The philosophical school of Padua states that the being does not have an opposite even if, in order to express it, language must be used, and language works through the opposition. However, language (the *saying*) is not the intelligibile form of thinking, but thinking (*the intending*) is the intelligibile form of language.

It is now possible to move forward. After having analysed the nothing, I'll move on to the second point of my theme: the *negation*. If the opposition is not primal, for the being has no opposite, the negation cannot be solved through the opposition between propositions – and, with respect to language, the negation is undoubtedly such an opposition. From the very beginning of *La struttura originaria* Severino writes (II chapter, par. 6): «Né l'affermazione, né la negazione sono in grado di escludersi o di tenersi

ferme di contro all'altra»[4]; then he adds: «L'oltrepassamento non è l'emergere di un *medio* tra l'affermazione e la negazione […], ma è l'emergere del fondamento di uno dei due termini contrapposti»[5]. Wonderful! Perfect! The philosophical school of Padua fully agrees, but it clarifies that such a resolution of the negation through the opposition (which is the unavoidable *form* of thinking, and the form of thinking is language) cannot claim to be the intelligibile form of the language itself: with regard to intelligibility, the negation cannot be the opposition between propositions, but it must be the non-position of the opposite.

The school of Padua states that if the opposition is considered as primal, the negation becomes unintelligible, for an opposition which is considered to be primal makes the "it is" and the "it is not" absolute; therefore, the affirmation and the negation become the same, as long as each one of them is the negation of the other: thus, with respect to the negation, they are not "other" at all. *Ergo*, they are unintelligible.

This point is fundamental, and it is worth being repeated in a more detailed way, which is less concise and even less cryptic. The negation appears in the propositional form. However, it does not appear as a single proposition, but rather as two propositions: "x is" and "x is not". Each of them is the negation of the other. The fact that the "not" appears only in one proposition is irrelevant, because each proposition excludes the other: each one of them is the "not" of the other. Both propositions are at the same time an affirmation and a negation: by stating one, the other is removed; every proposition affirms and denies, denies and is in turn denied. With regard to this I can state that, in its form – that is to say, the language – the negation is the opposition between propositions. This is accepted both by Severino and by the metaphysical school of Padua.

The difference between Severino and the metaphysical school of Padua emerges in the way in which the reduction of the negation to the opposition is solved: Severino claims that the opposition is *primal* and, therefore, the reduction of the negation to the opposition cannot be but the very intelligibile form of the negation; the school of Padua completely disagrees, for such an primal opposition would entail that the negation is unintelli-

4 «Neither affirmation nor negation can exclude each other or stand firm against the other».
5 «The overcoming of the opposition is not the emergence of a middle term between affirmation and negation [...], but rather the emergence of the foundation of one of the two opposite terms».

gible. I have already anticipated the reason why this happens: if the opposition is primal, the *it is* and the *it is not* (affirmation and negation) become absolutes; however, if they become absolutes, that is to say «primal structure», the *it is* and the *it is not*, the affirmation and the negation, end up being the same, for one is the negation of the other. Thus, with regard to the negation, they are not "other" at all. But if the *it is* and the *it is not* are the same, they are not intelligible.

How does the school of Padua proceeds from here? Simply as follows: it lets the propositional *form* be what it is, a mere form which requires an intelligibile form and it is not itself the intelligibility. Thus, if the being has no opposite and the opposition is not primal, but it is only the form of thinking – that is, the form consisting of saying and language – the negation reveals itself as what it always is in the *intention* of thinking: *non-position of the opposite*. According to the school of Padua, this is the intelligibile form of the negation: it aims at the primal identity of the being and the thinking, beyond the reduction of the negation to the opposition which is necessary to the form.

I will just briefly mention that the issue of the negation is quite essential, because the possibility to think the contradiction and the nothing depends on it.

I will now proceed with the third topic of my theme: the *undeniable*. I will touch upon it quickly to pinpoint the closeness and the distance between Severino and the philosophical school of Padua, with regard to the undeniable.

First of all, the proximity. They both agree on the *necessity*, to the fact that it cannot not be. What is undeniable is the thing, whose negation is in itself self-negating, something which the negation itself removes. This is the system of knowledge and of the linguistic form; on this level, Severino and the school of Padua fully agree. However, on another level there is a difference, which seems to constitute an interesting challenge to Severino's *La struttura originaria*. In short: if the truth cannot be denied, it is the impossibility of the opposite and not simply the negation of the opposite. However, if it is the impossibility of the opposite, the truth cannot be presented in any proposition, for every proposition is always the possibility of the opposite and it can always be denied. Thus, if it cannot be stated in any proposition, the truth, the undeniable, can only be in the *intention* of thinking (in its "aiming at") and never in a "thought". The truth, therefore, is the *knowledge that one does not know*.

POSITIVE/NEGATIVE
Denial, Opposition, Contradiction

MAURO VISENTIN
Full Professor, University of Sassari
maurovis@uniss.it

Starting from an examination of the current meaning of "positive" and "negative", the essay focuses on the impossibility of understanding the semantics of these terms through the concept of "relationship" and shows how their meaning is the same and coincides with that of absolute negation. This allows us to expose the existing conflict between the principle of non-contradiction (the expression of which is simply that of a "sense") and the principle of the excluded third, which, on the other hand, interprets contradiction in relational terms: as a relationship of mutual exclusion between the judgments one of which is the negation of the other. The point of view expressed by the essay is that between the two principles (and between the two ways of interpreting the "positive" and the "negative": one in terms of "sense" and the other in relational terms) there is the same distance as between truth and doxa in Parmenides' thought. A similar perspective allows us to recognize, in the ontology of the *Struttura originaria*, the dependence on and the derivation from the second principle rather than from the first principle.

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1. Identity and difference of "positive" and "negative"

It is certainly a widespread opinion, indeed almost unanimous, that affirming and denying are two distinct, independent and opposite acts. This means that – according to those who share this opinion – it is indisputably true that the existence of something can be affirmed (say, the existence of the picture that is placed on the wall in front of me) without having to deny something else. In the same way, one can deny the existence of something (for example, of a mythological animal like the chimera) without this requiring the corresponding affirmation – by those who deny this existence – of a different existence. In other words, according to this general way of understanding affirmation and negation, in order to deny the existence of the chimera I do not have to affirm anything; likewise, in order to affirm the existence of the picture I do not have to deny anything: these two acts are seen and felt as self-sufficient by all subjects endowed with a consciousness and an average self-awareness of what they do and above all of what they think. Such an awareness is reflected in the current way in which the world extracts meaning and sense from any word, which we usually call "common sense".

But is this "widespread opinion" a genuine opinion or is it rather a prejudice? If we could obtain evidence of its reliability on the basis of its unquestionably broad consensus, we would inevitably take it as a solid and well-grounded opinion. But, however widespread, a prejudice remains a prejudice and if we think that the above opinion might be no more than a mere prejudice, any appeal to its diffusion certainly cannot suffice to dispel any doubt about it. In fact, if we asked someone on what grounds she is certain that she is facing a picture, this picture unquestionably existing right here, right now in front of her, she would most likely answer, "because I can see it". But if – challenging her irritation – we insist, asking her why she feels so sure she is seeing it in front of her and whether it could not be that her eyes are presently victims of a hallucination, she might answer, for ex-

ample, "I have no reason to believe that to be the case". In other words, when affirming what we are convinced of, we always seem to implicitly assume, in the last instance, the untruth of something that could disprove our conviction. This mostly implicit assumption soon comes to light if someone – in the urgent and indiscreet manner just suggested by our example – tries to insinuate into us a doubt about the reliability of what we are persuaded of. This only indicates that the idea of a perfect separability of affirmation and denial, however widespread, is superficial and inaccurate. We would realize it even more clearly by carefully considering what denying the existence of the chimera amounts to. How could we deny such an existence if we did not have an idea of what the chimera is or represents, if we did not possess an image of it or if we did not have an entire iconographic repertoire about it? Therefore, when denying the existence of the chimera, we certainly do not deny that the concept of "chimera" corresponds to a meaning, a mental representation, something we can refer to through the word that designates it, even when we deny that it corresponds to an animal in flesh and blood: by denying the existence of a real chimera we implicitly affirm the existence of the ideal chimera.

By pointing out this, we have already done justice to the inconsistent though widely shared idea from which we started: an idea that implies the autonomy and the semantic or positional independence of the two acts we are talking about. On a closer inspection, they now appear to us as inseparably connected. Therefore, even though in affirming or denying something we omit – respectively – to deny or affirm something else (usually, the opposite of what is explicitly stated or denied, but in any case something alternative to it and incompatible with what it represents), this negation or affirmation falls by all accounts into the general meaning of what we explicitly deny or affirm, regardless of whether we are aware of it or not. To affirm *A* implies to deny *not-A*. To deny *not-A* implies to affirm *A*.

However, the issue immediately appears – in light of this summary formula – definitely worthy of other insights. Indeed, we are also able to "affirm *not-A*", that is, to affirm a negation. And this makes the problem even more troubling, since so far we still have not put into question that the two acts of affirmation and negation – be they separated or connected – are opposite to each other and not overlapping: we are presupposing that an affirmation has something existing, real and positive as its object, while a negation has something non-existent, unreal and negative as its object. If, on the other hand, one can also affirm a negation, then this alternative seems to fail.

However, are we sure that in this way we have added a new piece to our mosaic? Apparently, yes. We have said that we cannot affirm or deny something without (respectively) denying or affirming its opposite. In other words, two opposed things (one the "negative" of the other) can be affirmed or denied, the only caveat being that we cannot either affirm both or deny both *at the same time*. But did we not also say that an affirmation denies the opposite of what it affirms, i.e. that an affirmation is a denial from a different perspective? Yet more can be said about the issue: since every positive meaning is (or should be) also the negation of the corresponding negative meaning, *A* will always (also) negate *not-A*, i.e. it will be *not-not-A*. Consequently, not only is the statement of *A* also a negation of *not-A* but – insofar as *A* is also in itself always *not-not-A* (that is, we repeat, a negation) – an affirmation of *A* will also always be, in itself and this time from the same perspective, an "affirmation of a negation". In short, not only will each statement have a negation beside itself, but it will also have, whatever the circumstance in which it is expressed, a negation in itself. And the same must be said about any negation concerning the corresponding statement.

As a consequence, starting from the widespread prejudice that affirming and denying are distinct, separate, independent, autonomous and opposing acts, we first had to recognize the necessary connection of a statement with its negation, secondly their obvious complementarity, and finally the presence of the one in the other. Now, even if we wanted to characterize this situation as "dialectic", the use of this concept will not help us avoid embarrassment. As being both identical and different, the two acts would invite us to rediscover their identity in their difference and *vice versa* their difference in their identity, not simply because they appear to be *together* or one (identity) appears to be *beside* the other (the difference). But this would just mean that, by attempting to conceive such an identity of identity and difference, we would "pass" – unrestrainedly and restlessly – from one (the identity) to the other (the difference) and from the latter (the difference) back to the first (the identity). However, in this unstoppable flow we would never have to deal with the defined concept of one (identity, affirmation) or of the other (difference, denial), for the following reason: if the definition of each of them must include the *other as other*, then by grasping one and the other we would only grasp an abstract and indeterminate (or vaguely determined) representation of each of them; on the other hand, by grasping them *together* we would grasp their self-contradictory identity – because the acts of affirmation and of negation would

be two different acts here, but at the same time they would also constitute a single and identical act – again, nothing definite. All we can do then is grasp them in rapid succession, that is, *over time*, *pretending* that this sequence is a coincidence. But doing so would not give rise to a *logic reasoning* (and a deduction) – not even a "dialectical" one – rather to a *phenomenology*, from which would not emerge what Hegel claims: that the Being comes to be determined. Even less would we get a conceivable truth concerning the relationship between the two acts; rather, we would get only the consciousness's rebound from the elusiveness of one pole to that of the other, that is, the (badly) infinite coming and going of an inconclusiveness doomed to endlessly consume itself.

2. Terms contradict each other, judgments do not

The result of the examination carried out above on the concepts of "positive" and "negative", as well as on their relationship, led us to a 'conclusion' that is not really such and does not represent in any way – because it simply *cannot* represent – the expression of the truth of these two meanings and their connection. In other words, the problem of the positive and the negative *set in this way* – that is, the problem concerning the meaning of these two concepts and above all of their mutual determination – resolves into a simple and more or less consistent *opinion*, which is anyway *incompatible with the sense of the truth*. But if we ask ourselves what – properly speaking – it means for our problem to be "set in this way" here, we must answer that it means to be set as a problem about the meaning to be attributed to "positive" and "negative", insofar as these are seen and interpreted as opposite terms. In fact, this aspect has remained constant through the various steps of the journey we have undertaken in this respect: even when the two concepts appeared to us inseparably connected, we never stopped thinking of them as opposites, and even when they showed themselves as coincident to our eyes, we found them to be such *despite* their opposition, therefore "dialectically". Thus, this is the point we need to start from: "positive" and "negative" are normally thought of not as independent meanings (this can be, at most, an appearance), but as opposed meanings. About this way of understanding their sense, we have to ask ourselves this: what does such a way really represent? Is it an opinion, a prejudice, an undeniable representative content, or something else? Undoubtedly, it seems difficult – apart from the remarks that we have made

so far with respect to the *positive* and the *negative* – to challenge the idea that the positive is opposed to the negative and *vice versa*, just as the affirmation of a something is opposed to the negation of it and *vice versa*; this difficulty holds regardless of the issue concerning the consistency and the conceivability of the two meanings involved.

Indeed, even if one may agree that affirming A is inextricably denying *not-A* and even that affirming *A* is the same as affirming *not-not-A*, no one will ever be so foolish as to hold and declare that affirming *A* is the same as denying *A*. Given a single object, to affirm and to deny its existence are taken to be two different and incompatible acts: they are taken to be such that one rejects the other and both of them are mutually exclusive; in other words, they give rise to that relationship of opposition to which Aristotle assigned – about twenty-five centuries ago – once and for all the name of *contradiction*. Therefore, even if the acts of "affirming" and "denying", considered in themselves, tend to reciprocally confuse their profiles and give rise to a dialectic of semantic inconclusiveness, we would say that as soon as they are anchored to an object the ambiguity of their profiles vanishes. To affirm *A* implies, whether we like it or not, denying *not-A*, but this is not a contradiction, since we are not affirming and denying under the same respect but under two different respects (not the same thing, but two different things). To affirm *A* is equivalent to affirming *not-not-A*, but also here there is no contradiction: in this case we are not affirming the negation of what is affirmed, but the negation of the negation of what is affirmed. In short, we were perhaps too hasty in declaring that the meanings of these two acts are elusive and uncertain, if not self-contradictory: if we carefully examine their relationship it is easy to see it (a relation of difference but also of intrinsic belonging) as one that does not violate the principle of non-contradiction. On the contrary, such a relation fully respects the principle of non-contradiction, since the affirmation and the negation *of the same thing* – as expressions of opposite judgments – deny each other and are therefore mutually contradictory; moreover, in their mutual contradiction (or, if you prefer, in their opposition by contradiction), they are constitutive of the principle of the excluded middle ("*given two contradictory judgments*, one of the two is necessarily false, the other necessarily true") to which they provide the basis or the material support (given two contradictory judgments) essential to allow such a corollary or extension of the principle of non-contradiction (such is generally considered the principle of the excluded middle) to take shape.

Affirmation and negation (positive and negative) are therefore contra-

dictory judgments, i.e. judgments that deny each other. But the fact that in this way the affirmation denies as well – that it is itself a negation – no longer appears to us now paradoxical: it rather appears to us as something consistent, as logically associated with the principle of non-contradiction. Therefore, such consistency would now seem to have ceased being incompatible with the idea that affirming and denying are undoubtedly distinct – opposite indeed – but also intimately connected, in such a way to be almost indissoluble from each other. In fact, all the different manifestations of the connection between affirmation and negation – those which we have examined so far – can be now tracked back to a single root: the one which is precisely represented by their contradiction, that is, by their mutual denial. For the affirmation of *A* is a negation of *not-A* (and thus an affirmation of the negation of the negation of *A*) precisely *because* the affirmation and the negation of *A* are contradictorily opposed judgements. Such a circumstance – the simultaneous coincidence of affirmation and negation *on the one hand*, and their opposition *on the other hand* – is inconceivable: indeed, given the principle of the excluded middle (which entails the principle of non-contradiction), the above circumstance ends up being a perfectly legitimate relation between two judgements which does not offend against reason, *provided that* – obviously – the judgements so contradictorily connected are taken to be the one true and the other false. Therefore, not only does their reciprocal contradiction and necessary connection – if in fact there is only one contradictory judgment for any given judgement – cease to belong to a purely phenomenological dialectic (which could be taken as expression of a mere belief that is incompatible with the sense of truth—see above), but it now appears to our eyes the most explicit manifestation of the sense of truth: in other words, it becomes the manifestation exhibited by the principles of non-contradiction and the excluded middle. Such principles have been taken since Aristotle (followed by the whole Aristotelian tradition) as derivable one (the second) from the other (the first) in the most natural and analytical way. As a consequence, if the relation between affirming and denying as well as the relation between the positive and the negative are before all relations of *opposition by contradiction*, then in order to get the deep meaning of such a relation we should directly face up the notion of "contradictory" as directly called into question by the two principles just mentioned. So, it will be necessary to explicitly confront these principles insofar as – in the way we have just noted – they directly call into question the notion of "contradictory" and define its very profile.

The principle of the excluded middle seems to positively refer to the contradictory in a more explicit way than the principle of contradiction, although, given the dependence of the first on the latter – very clear though implicit in Aristotle's treatment – it will be better to start by considering the way Aristotle states the principle of non-contradiction in the fourth book of his *Metaphysics*:

τὸ γάρ αὐτὸ ἅμα ὑπάρχειν τε καὶ μὴ ὑπάρχειν ἀδύνατον τῷ αὐτῷ καὶ κατὰ (*Met.* IV 3, 1005b19-20)

a formula translated by Christopher Kirwan (Kirwan 1971) as follows:

For the same thing to hold good and not to hold good simultaneously of the same thing and in the same respect is impossible.

The expression through which Aristotle confers language to the principle of the excluded middle is the following:

ἀλλὰ μὴν οὐδὲ μεταξὺ ἀντιφάσεως ἐνδέχεται εἶναι οὐθέν, ἀλλ ᾽ἀνάγκη ἢ φάναι ἢ ἀποφάναι ἓν καθ᾽ ἑνὸς ὁτιοῦν (*Met.* IV 7, 1011b23-24)

which Kirwan translates:

Nor, on the other hand, is it possible that there should be anything in the middle of a contradiction, but it is necessary either to assert or to deny any one thing of one thing.

The close connection between the two principles for Aristotle is so evident as to be analytic. This is proved by the declaration that precedes the expression of the second principle. Aristotle, summarizing what he has said so far about the principle of non-contradiction (which he himself defines as "the strongest notion" just having stated it), asserts:

ὅτι μὲν οὖν βεβαιοτάτη δόξα πασῶν τὸ μὴ εἶναι ἀληθεῖς ἅμα τὰς ἀντικειμένας φάσεις, καὶ τί συμβαίνει τοῖς οὕτω λέγουσι, καὶ διὰ τί οὕτω λέγουσι, τοσαῦτα εἰρήσθω. (*Met.* IV 6, 1011b13-15)

that is, in the translation of the Metaphysics used so far (not very literal but substantially faithful):

It is now been fully enough stated that the opinion that opposite assertions are not simultaneously true is the firmest of all, and what are the consequences for those who make this statement, and why they make it.

In this passage, just before concluding the fourth book of *Metaphysics*, Aristotle summarizes the meaning of the theses argued for regarding the principle of non-contradiction (this is what is at stake here, as it is undoubtedly shown by his reference to it as to "the strongest notion of all") and establishes a clear link between this principle and that of the excluded middle, which he will enunciate a few lines later. In fact, if we interpret the principle of non-contradiction in such a way as to derive from it as a logical consequence that it is impossible for two contradictory judgments both to be true, substantially the principle of the excluded middle would have been already formulated; what remains to be added is nothing more than an explicit formalization or enunciation of it. However, is it not a little strange that Aristotle derives from the principle of non-contradiction (proposed at the beginning of the book) the thesis that two contradictory judgments cannot be true together? In the above reported formulation Aristotle asserts the impossibility for different attributes to be predicated of the same subject under the same regard and at the same time. In fact, attributing different predicates to the same subject under the same respect and at the same time means giving rise to two contradictory judgments. Indeed, two judgments are (reciprocally) contradictory only if, first, they have *the same subject*; and secondly, they are contradictory (only) if incompatible predicates are attributed by them to this subject: that is, such as to be taken as belonging to this subject *at the same time and under the same respect*. For example, judgments such as "the table on which I am currently writing is white" and "the table on which I am currently writing is gray (*i.e.* it is not white)" are contradictory because they refer to the same subject (the table on which I am currently writing) taken at the same time (currently) and under the same respect (the colour of its supporting plane) and attribute to this subject two different and incompatible predicates (two different colours: white and gray). But according to the formulation of the principle of non-contradiction proposed by Aristotle in the third paragraph of the 4th book of *Metaphysics*, which we have reported at the beginning of our comparison between non-contradiction and exclusion of the middle, two judgments that do this (that is, that predicate different attributes to the same subject, at the same time and under the same regard) are inconceivable. However, what the principle of the excluded middle de-

clares is precisely the opposite. According to this principle two judgments which contradict each other (i.e. which attribute to the same subject, at the same time and in the same respect, two incompatible predicates) cannot both be true, although from a logical point of view they can legitimately contradict each other, seeing that it is only by virtue of this mutual contradiction that the principle can assert, with regard to their condition, that they cannot be both true. In other words, the very same contradiction between judgments is an inconceivable contradiction in terms according to the principle of non-contradiction, yet is perfectly conceivable according to the principle of the excluded middle. Indeed, it is so conceivable as to ground the very idea that *two judgments of this sort* cannot both be true, but one is necessarily true and the other is necessarily false. Therefore, when Aristotle passes from one principle to the other, he unjustifiably omits to distinguish the relationship between the contradictory *terms* from the one that characterizes the contradictory *judgments*: the terms are contradictory as they are mutually exclusive (*A* is *not not-A*, this is not that), the judgements are contradictory not as they deny each other but as each of them denies *itself*. As a matter of fact, two judgements which "contradict each other" insist on a subject that could be the same only under the condition of being predicated by contradictory terms here-and-now, thus resulting for example in "a quadrangular square circle" as well as in a "circular square circle". Although, if this is the case, it is impossible not to conclude that two such judgements do not "contradict" impersonally (i.e. each other) but they "contradict" reflexively: in other words, they do not mutually contradict, because each of them rather contradicts itself.

3. Does the positive/negative nexus, interpreted as "a relation", possess any truth or is it the content of a simple opinion?

In light of this result, the solution we glimpsed beforehand is not available any more: that solution appealed to the relation between the mutual negation of positive and negative (affirmation and negation), and the consistency ensured by the principle of the excluded middle (through the continuity between this principle and the principle that denies the possibility of self-contradicting): our ability to consistently understand the polar nexus of the two opposites has come to be lost again in the high seas. Among the opposites, there is neither identity nor difference, or – to be more accurate

– difference and identity are *both and together* there. If positive and negative contradict each other, even the positive is negative (of its negative) and the negative is also positive (insofar as it affirms and defines itself through denying the positive). Now positive and negative are not differentiated and divided by anything but the linguistic (verbal or graphical) form: indeed *A* and *not-A* are distinguished just by their form, but with respect to the rest (the substance to attribute to this form) they are identical, two "somethings" identically positive/negative: *A* is as much positive as it is negative (it is *not-not*-A), in the same way in which *not-A* is not just *not-A* (the "not" of A) but also *something in itself*, something that is much less determined than A but all the same is not something *totally* or *absolutely undetermined* (as it was if we said "nothing"); *not-A* is not "*nothing*", it is rather something – as we have remarked – so it is something determinate (it is negative, and each negation is a determination, as is well-known); indeed its semantic field is delimited by the exclusion of *A*. However, one could reply, even the form is still "something". And this – made explicit – means that although A and non-A are identical in being positive/negative, as for their form they remain, as we have already said, irreducibly different. Their polar relationship – necessary and indissoluble as it is – does not just make them equal (as for the substance of their semantic 'sign') and thereby nullify them (so nullifying itself at the same time), because it is legitimate to hold that such a relation makes them also different, at the very least with respect to their form. As a consequence, the difference we cannot but recognize between them (at least from a formal point of view) must be possible exclusively in and through their relation of mutual contradiction and opposition. In other terms, *A* and *not-A* do not exist prior to their oppositional link, insofar as it is just and only within such a link that their polarity is (formal) difference and the specific identity of each exhibits its logical credentials, or its *raison d'être*. By means of the form and language (by means of the linguistic form) we would have – well or badly – saved everything: through saving the difference, opposition, and contradiction of the positive and the negative, we would have saved the difference, opposition and contradiction of *all* concepts, meanings and beings.

Thanks to the formal contradiction between the two terms, we are finally able to recover to the horizon of the *truth*, both the difference and the whole field constituted by the *sensible* and the intelligible world, the cognition of which we can *experience*; here, 'truth' represents the ground consisting of the mutual exclusion binding together the concepts of *positive* and *negative*, in its turn connected to the principle that establishes the

incontrovertibility of Being by denying the possibility of contradiction. Is that so? Is this conclusion persuasive? For it to be such, we should be able to derive/obtain the formal difference between *A* and *not-A* from the reciprocal contradiction between *A* and *not-A*. Now what *does* formally distinguish *A* from *not-A*? The "not". But in the reciprocal contradiction the "not" is one and the same; in fact if it was not the same, then the "not" of *not-A* and the "not" by which - implicitly - *A* denies it (i.e. denies *not-A*) would be different so they would not eliminate each other, that is, *A* would not be *not-not-A*. This means that the mutual and formal contradiction between *A* and *not-A* cannot be deduced from any formal difference between them: the contradiction, as well as the difference between *A* and *not-A* is *one* and we cannot deduce any difference from the *one* (we cannot deduce the *two*). Therefore, we must say that the different contents are such (if they are) not *due* to their mutual contradiction but *despite* it. Their being and appearing *different* (their ontic multiplicity) is not *deducible* from their relationship of mutual exclusion, that is from the truth of the principle of non-contradiction, because – on the contrary – it is rather this relationship that presupposes them: in other words, it is the concept of "difference" that presupposes *the fact* (and a fact by definition is *not* rationally *deducible*) that there are distinct perceptions, instead of such different perceptions presupposing the concept of difference. Consequently, we can establish as a general principle that the difference, as a relationship between different contents, and these same different contents between which the difference holds, are not conceptually ascribable to the horizon of truth. All of which means that they cannot be conceived in a consistent way, that is to say, in a non-contradictory way.

Yet, *the fact* that they cannot be thought of in this way does not mean that they can be thought of as "nothing" or that they even represent a nothingness, an emptiness, a silence of the consciousness (an absent consciousness). It cannot mean the first thing, because we do not think "nothingness" and even less so can we ever think "something as nothing": nothingness is not an object of thought and neither would the contradiction be such if it consisted in thinking "something" (therefore an entity) as "nothing", that is, in thinking that "something that is" is "nothing". It cannot mean the latter either, because consciousness must be able to detect the inconsistency *of* a concept in order to declare it inconsistent (i.e. to deny it): if consciousness did not perceive the concept and its own inconsistency as being immediately different – that means that it perceives them as being such that in order for the first to be declared "inconsistent" it cannot be *re-*

duced to the second – the consciousness would not be denying *this very* concept, but nothing or the self-contradictory outcome of the identification of being and nothing. And "this" concept, *as a matter of fact* would not be denied, nor could it ever be. As a result, we find ourselves in an absolutely elusive condition, a pure paradox in which we cannot however avoid feeling involved and enmeshed. By adopting a divisive lexicon that goes back to Parmenides, we call such a condition "opinability" and we '*opinably*' tell it apart from the truth which we rather conceive of as necessary and incontrovertible.

To be more precise, since we find ourselves in this condition and we move within its limits, we can affirm that this condition (reflexively) distinguishes *itself* from the truth; although, we cannot affirm that the truth distinguishes *itself* from this condition. Only by being self-aware as well as aware of its difference from 'opinability' could the truth distinguish itself from that condition. But if truth was aware of the difference between itself and something else, it would welcome this difference within its perimeter and so make it into something true and not opinable: in so doing, the truth would frustrate any effort the difference could make in order to show itself as *difference from the truth*. On the other side, if the truth could not embed any difference within itself it could not even be self-aware: indeed, in order to be self-aware, the truth should be reflexive and – reflecting itself in itself – duplicate, i.e. distinguish itself from itself. Therefore, since the truth can be aware neither of itself nor of anything different from itself, we should conclude that the truth is not aware at all: no awareness belongs to it, and consciousness, and so awareness, exclusively belong to the realm of opinion and the opinable. We should also conclude that only opinion can be awareness *of* the truth (objective rather than subjective genitive) and of its own difference from the latter: thus, only in the *impersonal* sense can we say that the truth can be distinguished from opinion.

In discussing the concepts of "positive" and "negative" we have thus come to attribute to the realm of the *opinable* first their semantic autonomy, then their difference and finally their opposition. We have then conferred to the realm of the opinable a full power over all differences (including that between truth and opinion).

Finally, we have had to attribute to this realm – exclusively – the possession of consciousness, with everything which follows from it. In comparing such a complex and paradoxical scenario to the ordinary way of seeing, someone who has always taken for granted that positive and negative are determinate concepts only insofar as they semantically different or

"mutually negative" – hence opposed by virtue of the relation of mutual contradiction – should be puzzled and feel greater doubts about her assumptions. An idea that has traditionally taken root in those who shared such a belief is that the ontic difference and the semantic opposition between positive and negative are no more than different faces of the truth itself and (at least for a part of them) that the only way in which such an idea could be called into question would be by challenging the mutual negation between "Being" and "Nothingness". In fact, considering "Being" and "Nothingness" as opposite or mutually negative means making Nothingness into Being (or "ontologizing it"; cf. Sasso 1987: 52ff.). After all, those who consider this opposition problematic presuppose as unavoidable the idea that Nothingness is *a negative* (as its linguistic form obliges us to consider it), so that it is *opposite* to Being *as an object* of the negation which it (=Nothingness) is necessarily subjected by *its* opposite (=Being).

Ultimately, then, the dogmatic assumption on which the *opposition* through mutual contradiction of "positive" and "negative" is based is the idea that the negation must necessarily have an object, in order to be what it is and must be (a negation). What is implicit in this assumption and is considered obvious and indisputable, is the universally shared conviction that if the negation did not have an object it would not deny anything and therefore would not be a denial at all. But are "not denying anything" and "denying (the) Nothingness" the same thing? If we want to call into question a persuasion so widespread and accepted – by trying to show how it actually resolves into a simple prejudice – we should proceed from the question above in order to take the final step in our journey of exploration.

4. Absolute negation and double negation: the truth of the meanings attributed to the terms "positive" and "negative" is that their negation is not a relationship but a 'sense'

If we wish to endorse Spinoza's thesis and accept the saying he made famous, according to which *negatio determinatio est*, we must recognize that A is determined only through the negation of *not-A*. And, reciprocally, *not-A* is determined only through A (as *not-not-A*). This elementary exemplification of the Spinozian saying tells us two things. Let us start from the first. If, in order to determine something, it is necessary to include it with-

in the context of a negation, then *A* taken by itself cannot be determined. To express the same concept with different (and perhaps more precise) words, the simple identity (without the non-contradiction) does not possess any determinacy. In fact, even if we think that *A* already possesses a specific meaning (as for Aristotle, cf. *De Int*. 3, 16b9-21), in order to say what it means without limiting ourselves to crudely and tautologically repeating the name ("*A* is *A*" or "*A* means *A*"), we must declare, first of all, what *A* is not ("*A* is not *not-A*"), since simply listing all of *A*'s positive characteristics cannot provide anything but a reiteration of the problem. Suppose that *A* is "man". By saying that "man is an animal endowed with reason", will we really have defined man?

Yes, but only subject to the condition that the terms making up the predicate of this judgment are in turn *already* determined. Consequently, the real *punctum saliens* of the question is: "how is a meaning primally determined"? Now, if "determined" is the same as "circumscribed", "delimited", "defined" etc., it seems that we can define the determinacy of a meaning – not unlike that of a territory – only by tracing a borderline between its semantic scope and all that is "outside" of this area: therefore, only by "excluding" and then by "distinguishing"; so, ultimately, once again by *denying*, precisely by denying *the other* than what you want to define, or rather by denying that this *is* that. Yet there is something faltering in the analogy between "determining" and "delimiting". The analogy is unsatisfactory, at least, if we go in search of an *primal* determination. What is unsatisfactory is that if we determine *A* through the negation of *not-A* we are *presupposing* the very determinacy of *A*: how, otherwise, could we give a definite meaning to the expression "*not-A*"? In fact, all we find that is determinate or determinable in this expression is simply *A*. Could we perhaps "translate" the *nomen infinitum not-A* into some of its almost infinite semantic contents, for example into B, in order to escape from the *petitio*? Well, does saying that "A is not B" serve to determine (albeit still very approximately) *A*? Only if B is known (that is, already determined). But what if it is not? Clearly, this question can be repeated as many times as the infinite semantic contents of *not-A*. As a consequence, it is necessary to identify, speculatively, a meaning or at least an primal semantic kernel that is *primally determined*. However, if the newly established law is valid for *all* meanings, the search for an "primal meaning" would seem to consist of an unnecessarily Sisyphean task. We are ultimately supposed to individuate a meaning which gets semantically determined through negation – a negation through which our meaning gets its own content – but where such a

determination does not require a further reference to some new content in need of an analogous process of determination. Nevertheless, here is the difficulty, since, as we have seen, *any* meaning is by definition in need of being determined through the process referred to above. However, a requirement like the one just expressed can be satisfied in two different ways: either a) according to its literal provision, by referring to something already determined and whose determination does not further depend on a process like the one just described, or b) by not referring to anything else at all. On a closer inspection, however, these two modalities boil down to one, insofar as the first, i.e. the reference to something already determined without need to refer to anything else, is equivalent to the second, which therefore remains the only possibility.

But how could a meaning ever draw its own determination without referring to something else, that is, without *denying* something different and further? Determining without denying (explicitly or at least implicitly) is, we have seen, impossible (*contra*, Tarca 2016: 48-54). But is denying without denying *something* equally impossible? It is, but only if we pretend that the concept of negation to which we have been tenaciously faithful for centuries, is beyond question: according to such a conception, negation is a *relationship* between the subject and the denied *object*. We should then ask: what if this concept was not undoubted? What if we could challenge the conviction that in order to deny we necessarily need to deny an *object*, or *something*, namely, a '*being*'? But there is a most evident example about which our conviction can be challenged: it is the most primal and radical among all negations we could appeal to, which is the negation of Nothingness by (the) Being. It is precisely for this negation that the most convinced advocates of the traditional (and up to now almost exclusive) concept of "denial" search for a treatment and for a way out of the puzzle it poses: but there simply cannot be a solution to the puzzle, insofar as they are stuck with the meaning which is usually attributed to the concept of negation. According to the latter, denial is a relationship, this relationship is translated into a judgment, in this judgment something figures as a subject and *something* figures as an *object* of negation. All this appears to be established. But what if (the) Nothingness itself is denied? How can Nothingness be one part of a relationship, the object of a refusal? In this case it would mean that *Nothingness* is, in fact, *something*, since it would be the *object* of the negation. As a consequence, nothingness cannot be denied, because if we try to deny it we end up denying *something that is* rather than Nothingness, and (the) Being cannot certainly deny itself. Therefore, Nothingness itself

cannot be denied because what we would deny – if we tried – would be the Being rather than Nothingness, and Being cannot deny itself. Therefore, if Being cannot deny Nothingness insofar as in so doing it would deny itself, then within Being no negation can be expressed; as a result, Being cannot even determine itself. But in this way the entire edifice of Western thought, having been constructed on the basis of this sort of negation (or on the basis of the principle of consistency and determinacy), would thereby crumble. Moreover, in order to hold all this, it is necessary to admit that the ideas a) of the impossibility that Being denies Being (the "something", namely, itself) and b) of nothingness as being *something* have already gained full citizenship within the logical horizon to which the set of these topics refers.

Perhaps our examination of the question concerning the relationship between "positive" and "negative" has now lead us to a point where we can hazard a hypothesis: the denial of Nothingness by Being cannot be associated with those ordinary negatives that seem to consist of a relationship in which something 'turns against' something else. Such ordinary negations are negations of "something" with respect to "something" and therefore are furnished with an "object". How then must this new negation be conceived? As a negation without an object. But how can an objectless denial continue to be a negation? To address this question, let us try to overturn it, so that we get the following question: how can a denial directed to an object be a (true) negation? And the answer to this question must be that it cannot. The reason why it cannot already emerged when, right at the beginning of this contribution, we examined the relationship of reciprocity between "positive" and "negative" interpreted according to the traditionally accepted semantics of the respective concepts as *two connected* but *distinct* meanings. In this case, we would have a single relationship (and therefore only one difference, since the difference is precisely the relationship that connects the two meanings) but we would believe, however, that we have two negatives rather than one. In fact, we believe that we get the negation of the negative by the positive, and then also the negation of the positive by the negative. Therefore, we believe we have *one* difference and *one* relationship but *two* negations. Now, since in this perspective each negation is a relationship and a difference, following to its end the logic that governs this traditional interpretation of the link between positive and negative we would find ourselves oscillating between the hypothesis that the difference between them is *one* and the hypothesis that they are *two*, without being able to explain how *one* difference can differentiate rather

than identify the different *contents*, and how two differences can make the case that the differing contents involved are two and not four. We then understand – on the basis of this reasoning – that if the negation must be thought according to its own truth it cannot be a relationship. We also come to realize that even what holds between "positive" and "negative" cannot be a relation. In other words, in order for the denial to be (and to be thought of as) a genuine negation, it must not have an object to which it relates. At the end, not only can the absolute negation – the negation of Nothingness by the Being – not have an object, and in fact does not have one (indeed Nothingness is not an object), but by not having it and so by not being a relationship at all, it reveals itself as the only true and possible negation.

Let us now consider all the consequences of such a result. In the first place, if Nothingness is not the object of absolute negation, Nothingness cannot be a negative: if it is not an object, or something, or an entity, it cannot deny or exclude something from itself, which is to say that it cannot deny Being. Since it is absolutely indeterminate and indeterminable, the Nothingness that figures in the absolute negation *cannot* deny anything, nor *should* it deny anything. It is therefore merely *denied* rather than being a negative. Secondly, we must say that positive and negative, far from being autonomous and independent meanings, are not even distinct but connected meanings: they are, to be precise, one and only one meaning: what ('of' it) we call positivity and what we call negativity do not represent anything other than its internal articulation, namely, the expression of a "vector sense": this is a "vector sense" which belongs to the negation as such and makes negation what it really is and must be, that is to say: an irreversible and non-reflective act.

An apparently easy objection could almost immediately be made to the consequences we have just drawn from our complex exploration of the semantics of this pair of meanings (positive/negative): perhaps these statements come to defeat themselves as soon as they are made, insofar as by stating them we have to say that Nothingness "cannot deny", "cannot exclude anything" and there "is not a negative"? Such an objection would be pertinent and irresistible if the Nothingness was (or could be) the subject of these negations. But as Nothingness is not the object of the absolute negation, so 'it' cannot be the subject of any negation (and, in general, of any action): the *term* we use to evoke its role as 'what is merely denied' in the absolute negation, can be at most the *grammatical subject* of all the negations that we have right enunciated, but the *logical subject* of

these negations is Being. It is Being, in truth, that denies that Nothingness can deny, exclude, be negative, etc. How many negatives intervene in this statement? Once again, we must make a distinction: from the point of view of language we have three negatives: Being negates (first negation) that *Not-Being* (second negation) can *deny* (third negation); but from the point of view of the truth, we just have one negation. In other words, linguistically (grammatically, formally) Nothingness is a negation, or a negative, or something that denies. But semantically, Nothingness is only what is negated, that is, it is a linguistic component of the means by which Being makes explicit its meaning (a strictly semantic analysis of Being) as an absolute negation – it is a vector of meaning, an oriented space of truth to be understood as determination of determinacy, as incontrovertibility.

Now, we have pointed out that the negations are two-fold or three-fold under the linguistic profile while there is only one negation under the semantic profile: this fact indicates that from a semantic point of view the negation of Nothingness survives, as a negation, to the mutual annihilation of the negation that denies another negation (the one morphologically represented by Nothingness itself or by its linguistic negating role) and that double negation does not result in a simple and pure affirmation. In other words, Nothingness is not, except morphologically, a negation. The affirmation of Being and the negation of not-Being are connected but not the same thing. Affirming Being and denying Nothingness are not two acts but one: although, insofar as this act is oriented and so is meaningful, it is not reducible to simple affirmation: affirming and denying are like the concave and the convex of a curved space in which concavity and convexity are only the expression of the vector orientation represented by its curvature (cf. Visentin 2015, 452-463). We can therefore summarize the meaning that we attribute to the positive/negative nexus in the following terms: positive and negative are nothing but the vector expression of the sense in which truth as the negation of Nothingness by Being consists of; this is the semantic equivalent of what the convexity and concavity represent – in figurative terms – with respect to the curvature of a curved space.

5. The mutual opposition of "positive" and "negative" as the ultimate root of the ontology expressed in *La struttura originaria*

Among philosophers (and philosophical currents of thought) Emanuele Severino bases the entire complex of his ontological reflection on the principle of non-contradiction with the greatest insistence, radicalism and speculative penetration: he interprets such a principle as expressive of the absolute opposition between Being and not-Being, between positivity and negativity. The opposing character conferred by Severino to the relationship of negation between Being and not-Being stands out in the complex, articulated and sophisticated analysis that he performs in the fourth chapter of *La struttura originaria* (Severino 1958, 1981²) about the aporia – primally exposed by Plato in the *Sophist* – concerning the concept of Nothingness: here he aims at showing that there is a way out to the aporia, through a correct deepening of the real semantic value of the concept at stake. This treatment would make it possible to eliminate the obstacle thus interposed to any attempt to consistently think of the negation of not-Being by Being (that is, precisely the negation in which the very principle of coherence consists).

First of all, we need to draw attention to the preliminary recognition of the aporetic nature of this negation (the basis for the possibility of facing the issue from the perspective of overcoming the logical/semantic difficulty: a difficulty which otherwise would inhibit the ability to understand and even conceive this principle in incontrovertible terms).

Severino states the aporia in a form that effectively sums up the reason underlying it: "precisely because we exclude that Being is not-Being, in order for this exclusion to subsist, Nothingness is *posited*, is *present*, and therefore *is*"; then he points out that someone tried to solve the difficulty through the distinction between "sense" and "meaning" introduced by Frege in his essay of the same title (Frege 1892). In this regard, Severino notes that even if we want to apply this distinction to Nothingness (by assigning to the term that designates it a *sense* but not a *meaning*), the aporia would come up again «about the absence of meaning of the term "Nothingness"» (Severino 1958: 86ff.; 1981²: 210ff.) With this observation, Severino means to point out that even to deny that the term "Nothingness" has a meaning it is necessary to attribute a meaning to it. The remark is correct, both because the application of the difference between sense and meaning introduced by Frege does not concern Nothingness (nor does it

concern non-contradiction: Frege only deals with identity) and because the problem cannot be solved by attributing to Nothingness a sense: anything that is attributed to Nothingness makes it into the (positive) subject of the very attribution and, therefore, into a not-nothingness. But Frege's distinction is philosophically (and not only logically) of fundamental importance: correctly adopted, it can illuminate the problem of absolute negation with a new and disconcerting light. However, Severino is not aware of this because his attention is entirely captured by the idea of the impossibility of evading the issue of Nothingness.

The thesis by which Severino sets up his solution of the Platonic aporia is the following: «the presentation of nothingness does not attest that "Nothingness" means "to be", but that "Nothingness", as signifying as Nothingness, is». To support and explain this thesis, Severino adds: «The positivity of signifying is in contradiction with the very content of this signifying, which, precisely, signifies as absolute negativity» (Severino 1958: 88; 1982²: 213 [my translation]). In other words, Severino does not put into question at all the fact that the term "Nothingness" should have a meaning (i.e. that it must mean something for itself) and that its meaning must be a consistent meaning (whose inconsistency lies only in *the fact of being a meaning*, not in *the meaning it represents*, i.e. in *what is meant by it*, we could say it lies in its formal Being, not in its objective Being). And what the term "nothingness" designates as a meaning is "absolute negativity", therefore something absolutely opposite to Being (which is absolute positivity). Here this is not about examining the proposed "solution" of the difficulty which Severino develops in this chapter of his major work, but rather about understanding the consequences – in relation to the system of his thought – of attributing to Nothingness a meaning and even a consistent meaning. Now, it is not hazardous to suppose that the whole philosophy of Severino, starting from its most paradoxical aspects (the eternity and immutability of the Being, of every being) depends on the following conviction: that Nothingness is negative and that it opposes itself, as a consistent meaning, to the consistent meaning "Being" (in the same way in which the latter is opposed to the first). In fact it is such a conviction that allows him to imagine Being as a totality of entities, each of which *implies all* of the others – the present, past and future ones – because, in order to be determined in an absolute sense (*omnimode*) and therefore to show itself as true (or to show its truth) it must oppose itself to all other entities (to each of them). But once such a premise is posited, it becomes inevitable to derive the admission that if the entities were not

all simultaneously present, none of them would have the slightest chance of being true. Each of them is the negative of all the others, each of them is together positive and negative (but under different respects: A is affirmative of itself and negative of B, B is affirmative of itself and negative of A). What would happen if the respects under which positivity and negativity are ascribed to the same meaning were the same? This would immediately produce a contradiction, since from this perspective the "positive" and the "negative" are semantically distinct and incompatible concepts. Thus, Being is affirmative of itself and negative of not-Being. The principle of identity and that of non-contradiction, therefore, are presented as the abstract sides "of the concreteness of the principle", as two aspects of it that are distinct but inextricably linked. In all this, however, the negative ends up playing two roles that are not perfectly coincident: in one respect, it is the opposite of the positive, in another respect it is complementary to it. The relation of opposition and that of complementarity are, however, different relationships: the terms that compose the first are conceivable even outside their relational nexus (we can very well represent white without black), while each of those that constitute the second cannot be thought of one without the other on pain of giving rise to a contradiction. Severino's ontology is based on a universal relationship of complementarity: each entity is complementary to the totality of the others. Nonetheless, Severino believes that the "positive" and the "negative" are semantically opposite concepts: indeed, if this was not the case, the aporia would emerge from their separation rather than from their synthesis. In thinking that they are *both* complementary and opposite, Severino is certainly in line with a long-lasting philosophical tradition. In fact, if – even in the light of the considerations made in the first four paragraphs of this contribution – we wanted to bring back the complementarity of "positive" and "negative" (on the one hand) and their opposition (on the other hand) to two distinct principles, we would have to say that the "positive" and the "negative" are complementary in light of the principle of non-contradiction and that they are opposed on the basis of that of the excluded third or middle. Therefore, admitting that – as Aristotle himself suggests (see above) – these principles are the corollary of each other, there should be no conflict between the complementarity and the opposition of "positive" and "negative" either. In this regard, Severino is clear: «In general, we can say that the abstract concept of the principles of identity, non-contradiction, excluded third allows a dialectical interpretation of these principles of the type proposed by Hegel in his *Logic*, being clear that the criticism of Hegel to these princi-

ples refers only to their abstract concept» (Severino 1958: 58; 1981²: 178 [my translation]). Consequently, as he considers the "positive" and the "negative" as complementary and opposite at the same time (but not in the same respect), Severino shows that he is, in reality, much more Aristotelian than Parmenidean.

Let us now conclude, at least provisionally, our considerations. It is possible to portray *La struttura originaria* as the last (at least chronologically) and more radical defence of Aristotelian metaphysics against the metaphysics of Hegel, a defence which led Severino to the point of correcting Aristotle himself for not having recognized that the complementarity of positive and negative had to embrace the totality of the entities together with their coexistence and infinite permanence). Such a defence is all the more effective as much as it aims at showing how Hegel's dialectic does not intend to turn against Aristotle's logic but only against its intellectualistic (i.e. abstract) interpretation, since for Severino the Hegelian dialectical unity of the opposites is nothing but the Aristotelian complementarity of positive and negative. From this perspective, the philosophy expressed by Severino's thought, starting from *La struttura originaria*, is perhaps the most complete and articulated synthesis of all the possibilities to which the development of Western metaphysics has given rise or is able to give place. When pushed to its extreme coherence, this perspective comes to be reversed into its opposite, that is, into the most complete and total reabsorption of the manifold entities into the one Being, until the absolute extinction of their multiplicity and differences. It is this ultimate consequence, usually not even glimpsed, that makes paradoxically appropriate the subsumption of Severino's ultra-metaphysical and hyper-Aristotelian thought into the ambit of neo-Eleaticism. From the perspective of the latter, however – to the eyes of an ontic consciousness able to draw from its own disillusion the strength to renounce the truth of itself in order to protect the truth of being – all the things that metaphysics had united come to be divided again: Being and entities, the complementarity and opposition of positive and negative, the principle of non-contradiction and the principle of the exclusion of the medium, truth and opinion.

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"Something is not": being, time and nothingness between Severino's thought and free logics

CLAUDIO ANTONIO TESTI
Istituto Filosofico di Studi Tomistici di Modena
claudio.testi1967@gmail.com

In this article I will propose the following thesis: Severino's demonstration of contradictoriness of the Becoming in an Aristotelian Thomistic sense (ATB) is not an-hypothetically demonstrated, but depends on a linguistic assumption, that is on the use of a specific language; but this assumption is not necessary because it will be demonstrated the existence of another language which is able to speak about the becoming in an Aristotelian Thomistic sense with no contradictions.

The argumentation I am going to propose can thus be synthetized:

– If we use Severino's language (SL), then (ATB) will result contradictory;
– If we use a different language, which I will call FLL, then ATB will not result contradictory;
– Therefore, if we can demonstrate the second passage, we shall say that Severino's analysis of the Becoming is not an-hypothetical, because the employ of SL is not necessary, since another different language, FLL, which can alternatively be used in that analysis, actually exists.

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Introduction

It was a great honour and a real pleasure for me to attend the Symposium "At the dawn of eternity", held in Brescia in 2018, which celebrated the thinker I personally consider as not only one of the greatest contemporary philosophers, but also one of the friendliest and most exquisite men I have ever met.

Some years ago, Professor Severino granted me the privilege of a written debate on *Divus Thomas* that unfolded throughout five "thrusts" (Testi 2001, 2002, 2006; Severino 2001, 2004):

Concerning this "skirmish", we can point out that:

– the first two "thrusts" succeeded in clearing some ambiguities, misunderstandings and incidental issues. I am not embarrassed now to acknowledge that, at that time, I made some mistakes which Professor Severino patiently showed me as great teachers do, thus motivating me to meditate his whole work more deeply;

– the other "thrusts" have instead focused on a theoretical kernel which nowadays, in my humble opinion, is still unanswered, despite the latest Severino's works (2001b, 2007, 2011, 2019), since it concerns the critique of the Becoming in the Aristotelian-Thomistic sense that Severino elaborated in his first production.

I am now therefore going to re-propose this theoretical question in its essential formulation, in order to better highlight the issue. I will consequently avoid redundant bibliographical references and technical formalizations, already available in the a.m. writings.

The argumentation I am going to propose can thus be synthetized:

– Definition of the terms: the Becoming is considered in its Aristotelian-Thomistic sense (ATB), as the process in which something is first and later it is not, or first is not and later it is. We can analyse this Becoming

by employing two different languages that determine two different results:

I. If we use Severino's language (SL), then (ATB) will result contradictory;
II. If we use a different language, which I will call FLL, then ATB will not result contradictory;
III. Therefore, if we can demonstrate the second passage (II), we shall say that Severino's analysis of the Becoming is not an-hypothetical, because the use of SL is not necessary, as another different language, FLL, exists and can be used in that same analysis.

I. Analysis of the Aristotelian-Thomistic Becoming with Severino's Language

I am now going to demonstrate the first passage (I) by taking into consideration the following text, where Severino asks some questions and gives answers concerning the example of an amphora made in the 20th century of which not all existed in the 19th century, and specifically the "unity" U of the amphora did not exist ("unity" is meant as what keeps all materials composing the amphora together: see Severino E., *Destiny of Necessity*, Adelphi, Milan, 1980, 25):

> "But, did *all* that constitutes this amphora existing in the 20th century [SP] already exist in the 19th century [Q1]?
> And if all did not already exist [A1] (otherwise, this amphora would have already existed in the 19th century), was what still did not exist [i.e. U] a "*being*" [Q2]?
> And if it could not be it [A2], shall not we say [A3] that, *in so far as it did not exist,* this non-being *was nothingness*? [Q3]
> And, as a matter of fact, this amphora is not nothingness (my critic admits that too, Testi 2001, 107) [SP];
> thus, by claiming the existence of a time when this amphora does not exist, Western thought asserts the existence of a time when what is not nothingness, it is nothingness [C]" (Severino 2001, 90).

We are now going to analyse the text by explicitly splitting it into:
– a starting point (SP),

- three questions-answers (Q1, Q2, Q3; A1, A2, A3)
- and a conclusion (C),

which I have already put in square brackets in the a.m. passage as follows:

- Starting point (SP): it is stated that this amphora made in the 20th century and all its constituents, its unity U included, is an *ens* ('being" in the text) and therefore it is not nothingness.
- Question 1 (Q1): *Did all constituents of this amphora existing in the 20th century already exist in the 19th century?*
- Answer 1: Severino's answer to this question is "no" (A1), because at least the unity U of this existing amphora was not supposed to exist.
- Question 2 (Q2): Was U, which did not yet exist in the 19th century, a "being"?
- Answer 2 (A2): the answer to this question is negative again.
- Question 3 (Q3): *In so far as it did not exist, was U nothingness?*
- Answer 3 (A3): here the answer is "yes", hence U was nothingness.
- Conclusion (C): since we had said (SP) that this amphora and everything that constitutes it (its unity U included) is not nothingness, it is claimed a time where *U, which is not nothingness (SP) is nothingness (A3)* and this is contradictory.

Therefore, if we analyse ATB with SL, we are bound to conclude that the Becoming in the Aristotelian-Thomistic sense is contradictory.

II. Analysis of the Aristotelian-Thomistic Becoming with a Language based on Free Logics

FLL Language

We are now going to analyse the Becoming by using FLL language based on Lesniewski's ontology, which allows to speak also about something which does not exist (and in this sense it is a *free logic*).

As previously mentioned, I wish to avoid heavy formalizations, preferring to illustrate in a semi-formal way the "philosophical" structure of such language, which is based on four fundamental distinctions: the copula and the three names: "*ens*", "in t-time" and "nothingness".

- Def 1: "… is … " (see Testi 2001, 96, Axiom 1 for a complete formalization): it is the copula, that is a propositional functor which, when saturated by two nouns (the 'subject' on its left, the 'predicate' on its

right) constitutes an enunciation (a linguistic sequence that can be true or false), which will be true if and only if ('$\Leftrightarrow$') the subject is an existing being (e.g. "Socrates") included in the predicate (e.g. "man"), otherwise that is false. In semi-formal terms:

$$\text{S is P} \Leftrightarrow (\text{S is an existing being } and \text{ S is included in P})$$

It is worth noting that this definition of '… is …' does not imply that what we are talking about actually exists. In fact, Def 1 will be true not only if the subject is an existing being included in the predicate (e.g.: 'S' = 'Socrates'; 'P' = 'Man'), but also if the subject does not actually exist (e.g. 'S' = 'Cheshire Cat'; 'P' = 'Cat'). As a matter of fact, the Cheshire Cat does not exist (consequently it is false that 'Cheshire Cat is an existing being'), hence the proposition on the right of $\Leftrightarrow$ is false (since one of its constituents is false) and the sentence 'Cheshire Cat is a cat' will be false as well; however, the whole Def 1 remains true because, being a bi-implication, it is true also when both its 'sides' are false.

– Def 2: "*ens*" or "being" (see Testi 2001, 98, Definition 1) is a name that can be said of any subject you can speak about through the copula (either you can say something about it or you can refer it to something)

$$\text{S is an ens} \Leftrightarrow \text{for some P, S is P}$$

– Def 3: "in-t-time" (see Testi 2002, 168) is a name (in a logical sense) that can be said of a subject having a certain temporal determination t, utterly similar to the name "in-the-place-l". Hence, the following sentences (composed of a subject-name, the copula and a predicate-name) are true:
                        'this book is in-this-room'
                        'this book is in-2019-time'

– Def 4: "Nothingness" (see Testi 2001, 100, Definition 3): it is a name that can be said of a subject if and only if this is itself and (meanwhile) it is not itself:

$$\text{S is Nothingness} \Leftrightarrow (\text{S is S } and \text{ S is not S})$$

This way we can define Nothingness, but we shall never say that "something *is* Nothing', because it would immediately imply the contradiction

on the left of the definition Def 4 (see Testi 2001, 100, Theorem 4). It is to be noted that, in that regard, Severino comments that thus "Nothingness is defined using exactly a trait of my [his] analysis" (Severino 2001, 88: see Severino 1981 ch. 4 for the distinction between 'Nothingness', here signified by the definiendum in Def 4, and the 'positive meaning of Nothingness' here outlined through all Def 4).

The Becoming and the FLL language

We shall now see what is going to happen if we carry out the analysis of the amphora's Becoming (*supra*) by using FLL language.

– Starting Point (SP): it is obviously the same, that is: it is stated that this amphora made in the 20th century and all it is constituted of, is an *ens*, therefore it is not nothingness. If it is so, both following sentences prove to be true:
  – "this amphora is in-the-20th-century": in fact, we have the single name "this amphora" for which the temporal determination "in – the- 20th-century" (Def 3) is true, hence their connection through the copula (Def 1) will be true;
  – "this amphora is an *ens*": in fact, there is a predicate (the name "in-the-20th-century") which can be said of "this amphora" (Def 2).

Consequently, and for the same logical reasons, since U is a part of the amphora which actually exists, namely "the unity of this amphora", the propositions:
  – "U is in the 20th century",
  – "U is an *ens*"
will be true.

– Question 1 (Q1): *Did all component parts of this amphora existing in the 20th century already exist in the 19th century?*
– Answer 1: FLL (as LS) will give a negative answer to this question, in fact the sentence "U is in-the-19th-century" is false (the noun 'in-the-19th-century' *does not* include 'U', hence the proposition formulated with the copula will be false: Def 1). Consequently, the negation:
  – "U is not in-the-19th-century"
will be true.

– Question 2 (Q2): *Was U, which did not exist in the 19ᵗʰ century, a being?*
– Answer 2: this is the crucial point because, while SL gave a negative answer, if we use FLL we have to answer *positively*, or better, we shall have to reaffirm that "U is an *ens*" (because something about U can be said, i.e. that it is in-the-20ᵗʰ-century: SP, Def 2), and that "U is not in-the-19ᵗʰ-century" (Q1). This because in FLL '*ens*' (or 'being') does not have any temporal meaning, because in FLL the positivity of an *ens* X ("X is an *ens*": Def 2) can be clearly distinguished by its being in a certain time or not (Def 3).

– Question 3 (Q3): *In so far as it did not exist, was U nothingness?*
– Answer 3: here again, since in FLL we distinguish between being, in-t-time and nothingness, we shall have to answer negatively (unlike SL), hence we shall say that "U is not Nothingness" (in fact, it is a being: SP, Def 4), despite "U is not in-the19ᵗʰ-century".

– Conclusion: by using FLL we can speak about the Becoming in Aristotelian-Thomistic sense (something is first and later it is not, or first is not and later it is) without contradictions. In fact, all the following sentences prove to be true:
  – "U is not in-the 19ᵗʰ-century" (A2, that is: U first is not);
  – "U is in-the-20ᵗʰ-century" (SP, that is: U later is);
  – "U exists" (SP);
  – "U is not Nothingness" (A3, Q3).

And consequently the following propositions are also true:
  – "this amphora is not in-the-19ᵗʰ-century" (follows from A2, that is: this amphora first is not);
  – "this amphora is in-the-20ᵗʰ-century" (SP, that is: this amphora later is);
  – "this amphora exists" (SP);
  – "this amphora is not Nothingness" (follows from SP, A3, Q3).

III. Quod erat demonstrandum

Since using FLL it is possible to speak about ATB without contradiction (II), it follows that Severino's demonstration of contradictoriness of ATB (I) it is not an-hypothetically demonstrated, but depends on a linguistic

assumption that is the use of SL; but this assumption is not necessary because it has been demonstrated the existence of another language FLL (II) which is able to speak about ATB with no contradictions.

Clarification

In order to better clarify the sense of the a.m. argumentation, I would like to point out that, when I use the expression "Severino's language" I do keep in mind the following remark Severino made about the negative answer A2:

> "it is [not Severino's thought, but] the Western thought, to which Thomas belongs too and whom my critic considers himself to be a disciple of, that replies with a "No" (Severino 2004, 159)

But the point is that in his works Emanuele Severino *de facto* employs a language with a certain logical structure (SL, which does not properly specify '*ens*' and 'being-in-t-time') and it is through this language that he infers the contradiction in ATB. Moreover, this indistinctness between "*ens*" and "being-in-t-time" also appears when Severino, in the same text, expresses his famous theorem on the eternity of everything:

> "the answer to that question, according to the argumentation developed in my works, would be instead that, since it is impossible that what *is not nothingness* is nothingness, it is thus impossible that any *being is not* – since any being is therefore eternal – and also this amphora, in each of its aspects [including U], *is in every time*, even though it *does not* manifest itself *in every time*" (Severino 2004, 159, emphasis added).

To my view, this passage shows very clearly how Severino infers from the concepts of 'nothingness', 'being' and from the impossibility that 'any being is not', that any being is eternal, and therefore it exists "in every time".

But, strictly speaking, from "it is impossible that x is not" we can only infer that "x is" and not also that "x is in every time", i.e. that "x is eternal"! Indeed, if we employ FLL, that is, if we keep the theoretical distinction between the positivity of the *ens* and temporality as fixed, Severino's inferences do not follow [*supra*]. These ones have the same theoretical value of

an inference that from "it is impossible that x is not", infers that "x is in every place", i.e. that "x is omnipresent". So, if in the above passage we replace 'eternal' with 'omnipresent' and 'time' with 'place', it is easier to understand that '*ens*' and 'being-in-a-place' are disconnected being the following proposition obviously false: "Since it is impossible that *what is not nothingness* is nothingness, it is therefore impossible that any *being is not* – since any being is thus *omnipresent* – and also this amphora, in each of its aspects [including U], *is in every place*, even though it does not manifest itself *in every place*".

Conclusion and future developments

At the end of this article, and in order to highlight my deep and sincere admiration towards Severino and his speculation, I wish to add some final remarks.

Severino represents an unavoidable theoretical peak in philosophy, especially within classic and Thomistic philosophy, therefore we have to speak about a *pre* and *post* Severino. His analyses are both solid and rigorous, as much as such a hard subject can allow, and some sarcastic criticism towards his theories are only due to a misunderstanding (and often even to utter ignorance) of his works.

In the light of my argumentation, the "relativization" of Severino's theories implies meanwhile an absolute appreciation of their value. In fact, by demonstrating the exactness and deductive correctness of these inferences, it is also proved that *each* language that does not adequately distinguish between '*ens*', 'time' and 'nothingness', it necessarily implies the contradictoriness of the Becoming in the Aristotelian Thomistic sense, and therefore the nihilism (thinking the *ens* as nothing).

In fact, the traits of the a.m. SL language are also shared by many philosophers who would like to "get out" from Severino's criticism by calling upon the traditional formulations of *actus-potentia* and being-essence distinctions, as if Severino did not know about them!

But *post* Severino, in order to propose nowadays these distinctions without running the risk of falling into contradictions, we have to reformulate them starting from a language endowed with an accurate formal structure. This seems the only way that will enable us to keep off the contradictory cliffs that can be found in some of the formulations of the Becoming in the Aristotelian Thomistic sense.
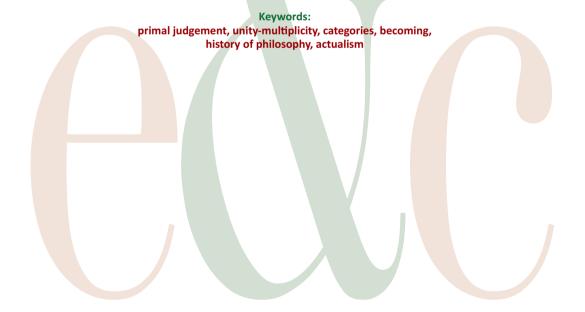
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The primal judgement and the unity-multiplicity of the categories

MATTIA CARDENAS

Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, Ca' Foscari University of Venice

mattia.cardenas@unive.it

The paper intends to examine the meaning that the concept of "history of philosophy" assumes within the philosophy of Emanuele Severino. If the idealistic identity of philosophy and history of philosophy – that is, the unity-multiplicity of categories – has already progressively undergone a process of de-legitimization up to the total negation of the theoretical nature of philosophical historiography in the extrinsic historical-philological purpose, this is now to understand if, and in what ways, it is possible to rediscover, in light of the 'primal structure' indicated by the Severinian writings, the development of philosophy as *actuality*.

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1. Introduction

The issue that we intend to examine does not concern the interpretation that Severino provides of the entire Western philosophy – whose structure, as the *history of nihilism*, is articulated in terms of *epistéme* and *anti-epistéme* (the latter corresponding to the philosophy of the last two centuries) – but it regards the problem if, in light of the opening of the primal meaning witnessed by the Severinian writings, the concept of "history of philosophy" must be considered a self-contradictory content or if, by virtue of it, it can be re-semantized to such an extent to subtract the historical process of philosophy from the accidentality of pure empirical reconstruction, in order to elevate it to an *actuality* that, far from being interpreted as a series of *in tempore* segments, has rather to do, as Hegelian idealism did not fail to emphasize, with "what is eternally present" (*mit ewig Gegenwärtigem*) (Hegel, 1973, p. 205)

2. The primal meaning and philosophies as contradictions

It has been opportunely pointed out, especially within the Italian neoidealistic school, that every philosophy not only produces its history of philosophy but it *is* a peculiar history of philosophy. Given the multiplicity of conceptions that have been historically appointed to philosophy and consequently to its development, and above all, given the complexity (aporetic at times) of reconciling the individuality inherent in the historical-empirical dynamic with the universality of the philosophical discourse, the idea of 'history of philosophy' has been mostly neglected and variously regarded as *problem*, when thematized.

This intrinsic problematic seems to be sharpened in reference to the unheard-of sense that emerges in the Severinian writings, where the absolute *standing* of it (of what is indicated in his writings as *Destiny*) consists

of the immediate self-denial of (personal) negative, since it involves what it intends to deny. With this wording we are already beyond the "residual nihilism" still present in *The Primal Structure* (henceforth *PS*), since, in this work, truth foresees its own development.

Already, in a text prior to this fundamental work, Severino argues that for the very position of the system (philosophy) it is necessary to understand the deduction of the entire-historical philosophy, so that the dialectical circle for which it is only constituted the system can produce the *overcoming* of historical actuality (of philosophies) as well as is it possible to conceive the system only through the history of philosophy as the development of the dialectic series.

Regardless of this circularity, Severino states, there would be nothing but an unrelated multiplicity of *probably* philosophical positions (Severino, 1952, p. 292). In *PS* (chap. I, § 4) it is pointed out that the *eternal* foundation, that is of the primal structure, coincides with its *historicizing* (Severino, 1981², p.113). It means that the *value* of the foundation – its standing, its firmness as a foundation – cannot fail to imply the concrete of its negation. It is by virtue of the *development of the negation* that the foundation is like this: in this sense it is essential to affirm the unity of phenomenology (the history of philosophy) and science (the philosophical system).

The matter is reaffirmed and enriched by Severino also in his book, *Studies in philosophy of praxis* (henceforth *SFP*), where the truth is recognized facing a precarious situation, a *state of grace*, given its alternation with the non-truth. In order for truth to be *actual*, it is necessary to reiterate indefinitely the path that leads to it, which is to say that truth can only be in the *dialogue* that truth constitutes with its negation (Severino, 1984, pp. 69-70). To make it clear: in this framework of primal structure, dialogue does not refer to any reciprocity, because if the truth can understand the error it is certainly not the error which can understand the truth. The dialogic nature of truth exclusively consists in this: that for its affirmation over negation it must be perpetually recreated (*immer wieder*).

Against this we can object – and this objection finds full expression in the historical-explanatory story of Italian neo-idealism and in the lucid pages of Benedetto Croce – that the error, the negative, assumed in a dialectical value would involve a vision of the history of philosophy as a *phenomenology of error*, where the error would be as a function of the organic system of truth: as initial moments, philosophies would be destined to reveal themselves in the only development of truth; but that truth can be re-

alized, materialized, through error it would be nothing but an abuse of the logical element (*panlogism*). If the truth cannot be in any way affected by the error, then the error is not to be considered the opposite of truth, but a distinction with respect to it. History, Croce observes, must be considered contemporary or actual only in the sense of its absolute positivity, absolute value. Instead, moving from the teaching of Giovanni Gentile, Severino claims that truth (the foundation) foresees a development, in the peculiar sense that, through denial, the truth becomes concrete, is 'strengthened', held firm: where *A* – the truth – always remains the same (as that it could not be otherwise) but through the overcoming of the error is conconfirmed, strengthened (*A²*). The originary is therefore such in the measure in which it includes all its individuations, that is, if it includes as negatively transcended all its negations, if it includes as one that has already removed all its negation *elenctice*. The negative, the error, is then *placed as removed*; and "it is in this firmness – reaffirms Severino – that the foundation is always the same" (Severino, 1981², p.113; Severino, 1984, p. 78). Concretely speaking, therefore, there is no plurality of philosophies (or categories), but the only *primal philosophy*, "mine". The negations are placed in the originary, conceived as the removal of every negation and if it is permissible to talk about a multiplicity of philosophies it is only so far as they are a content, already removed, of "my" philosophy, of that the only actual or primal philosophizing that is *mine;* if, therefore, the primal structure is the very authenticity of philosophizing that has always *exceeded* ("taken away", "won") every philosophy that has historically appeared or will have to happen (Severino, 1984, p. 79) it cannot fail to place itself as primal opening of truth and also as development of the same truth as a condition of that *hypothesis* of philosophizing others with respect to the imposition of *my* philosophy (or primal philosophy):

> There are other philosophers which think differently from me: it can be an absolute truth only because my philosophy is the primal openness and the development of absolute truth. That is, I can get to know that others think differently from me, only by exercising the absolute truth of my thinking; so that the act that lets me know of the existence of different and opposite convictions of mine is the very act that places the disvalue of these different convictions (Severino, 1984, p. 79).

Starting from the essays contained in *The Essence of Nihilism* (henceforth *EN*), aimed at emancipating themselves from the 'residual nihilism'

still belonging to the previous reflection, the truth, precisely as a everlasting background to appearing, is no longer understood in dialogue with the untruth, but it appears eternally, it does not come or go, since it is understood as distinct from the language that bears witness to it. It can be said that truth alternates with untruth as a truth *witnessed* by language, which is precisely other from the truth (*Destiny*). As Severino himself pointed out, by redirecting the pages of *SFP*, it is the relationship between *truth* and *language that testifies* to keep it precariously. It is therefore in no way possible to support a convergence between truth and the various forms of Western thought, to be understood now as concrete identifications of nihilism. Thus the history of philosophy becomes the history of nihilism. Opened up the authentic meaning of the originary, every philosophy - every category - is and must be recognized as a *contradiction*, insofar as it is inevitably the bearer of an alienated sense of truth as an expression of that *faith* of *becoming* of which the truth (*Destiny*) it is the peremptory negation. In this framework, philosophies are contradictions because they are substantially *epistéme*, or a knowledge that is based on a self-contradictory meaning such as that of becoming nihilistically understood. The *Destiny* of necessity, as a negation of every possibility to *become something else*, and therefore as a negation of all historicity, cannot be considered as the synthesis of the philosophies that have progressively followed one another; it cannot even be understood as the 'concrete' synthesis of the philosophies that have been posed abstractly along the historical course, as the current idealism of Giovanni Gentile believes and, as has also been seen, supported by Severino in *PS* and *SFP*. With *The Essence of Nihilism* and with the developments consequent to it, the Destiny of necessity is not the last word of philosophy, it is not the *logos* that gathers all the *logoi* of the history of philosophy. It is rather the primal word that establishes and allows contradiction – it is what allows philosophies to be realized as such, to be realized as contradictions. There is no longer the idea present in *PS*, for which the 'history of philosophy' is 'history of the foundation', where the primal structure would become the first and last word in the history of philosophy, of that word that would come at the end after the *series* of denials that allow the truth to emerge concretely. For Severino the idea that one category – let us think, for example, of Platonic thought – has said 'abstractly' the truth, that is *Destiny*, is to be rejected. In light of this it is essential to make the distinction between the *form* and *content* of each philosophy: it is one thing the "saying" in what the philosophy of Plato consists – it is another that its positive means; its contradictory content, on the other hand.

Which *content* each category, every philosophy, is contradiction, because, according to the Severinian language, it is isolation of the *Earth* from *Destiny*; but as a *form*, as a 'saying', it is a positive meaning and as such refers to the primal (to the *Destiny* of necessity) and cannot fail to postpone it, otherwise it would not be a saying but a nothing and as no-nothing is necessarily part of the primal structure of truth, understood as a concrete totality that includes the totality of meanings, of every non-nothing. In the light of the primal opening of meaning, not only did the history of nihilism necessarily appear, but it also had to appear in a specific *order*. An order that is witnessed by the *coherence* of the error, that is to say by the coherence of the incoherence (of nihilism), as an event that, beginning with the *epistéme*, could not but reach, for Severino, its inevitable sunset. On par with any meaning, even the error, not being exposed to *epamphoterizein* (to becoming something else) is eternal, so that the history of philosophy as the history of nihilism is in inevitably contradiction (every certain philosophy is contradiction) but as a contradiction it necessarily refers back to *Destiny* as its foundation.

3. The unity-multiplicity of the categories

With respect to what has been said about the distinction between *form* and *content* of every philosophy that can be infered from the Severinian discourse, we must ask ourselves, as a last resort, if the concept of the history of philosophy (and thus of *tout court* history) can be subtracted to his nihilistic interpretation, if it is traced back, in the wake of the Gentile teaching, to the *actuality* of his production. By virtue of the actuality of thinking, that is, of appearing, the whole historical-philosophical intertwining can be understood as the one of categories that have *always* been retained in the present. We are referring to a circle where the 'primal saying' is a perennial repeating, and taking up the categories that we historically say they belong to Plato, Aristotle and so on. In this regard, that category which is, for example, Plato's philosophy is one of the ways of the appearance of the everlasting, since there can be no content that has not already been surrounded by the conscience or by the primal philosophy (from "my" philosophy). Recalling the language of *PS*, philosophies can be understood as modalities of the *hyposyntax* allowed by the *persyntax*, that is they can be understood as *variants* of the *constant*. Thereby, to make it clear, we do not mean that the history of philosophy has abstractly said

what *Destiny* says, since – of course – if we assume, as Severino indicates, the concept of philosophy (as of *epistéme*) as a stance in the regards of being, then philosophy has always revealed itself as a denial of *Destiny* in that it has thought, lived and expressed the being in a contradictory way, that is, moving from a wrong interpretation of the phenomenological protocol. We can therefore agree *with* Severino in distinguishing the *form* and *content* of philosophies; but if one assumes philosophy as a content that is *immediately* related to appearing – so that *everything* is philosophy, as Gentile's actualism rightly argues – if, in other words, we mean philosophy as the same being that it appears, then it seems legitimate to affirm, proceeding *beyond* Severino, that with regard to the concept of the history of philosophy we have rather to do with a series of categories that are no longer negations of the primal, but *modalities* of the everlasting, modality of the actuality of history. It may be added that the actuality of philosophy – its being *contemporary* – coincides not only with the *indefiniteness* of philosophy, but also with what is defined in the Severinian writings as the *infinite appearance*. Everything is part of the primal knowledge, everything is contained in the primal judgment, so that within the intrascendible horizon of the actuality of thought, the multiplicity of philosophies is inevitably organized *in unitatem* (Gentile, 2003[3], p. 263). If, from what has been said, it is true that every meaning – every non-nothing – cannot be isolated from the *act* of meaning, the *eternal* meaning enriches itself perpetually, determining itself, that is to say, manifesting itself historically. Where – let it be noted – by saying *history* we do not allude to any ontological difference, but to a purely phenomenological *difference*, such as to allow the perennial enrichment of the primal judgment. From this it is possible to consider the actual indefinitiveness of philosophy, that is the unfolding of the primal saying as a unity-multiplicity of the categories. Only within the transcendental horizon of actuality it is therefore possible to propose a concept of the history of philosophy that is not a negation of philosophy, but an expression of the inseparable unity of *theorein* and *historein*.

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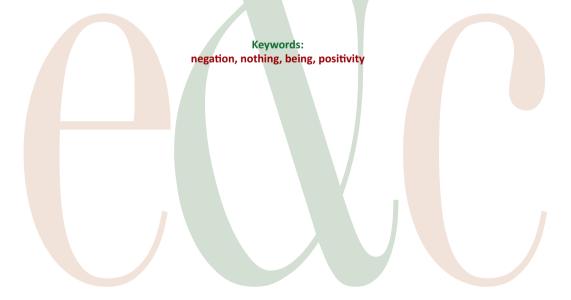
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The problem of negation in the primal structure

MARCO VASILE
Graduate student, Università degli Studi di Salerno
marvas73@gmail.com

In the primal structure the negation is not only the formal constituent of the determinacy of any being but it is a being itself, that must be negatively determined. This means that the primal structure affirms the meaningfulness of such a proposition: "the *not* is not the other-than-the-*not*". This article shows that in the primal structure an abyssal thesis seems to be demonstrable: 'the *not* is the *nothing*', that affirms that the negation semantically equals to the nothingness. The demonstration actually exploits an ambiguity between the verbal negation of being 'is not' and the different-from-the-'is'. The logical-linguistic solution of this ambiguity is essentially inadmissible in the primal structure. At the same time, it seems that within it the difference between the two senses of the negation of the 'is' remains ultimately without a syntactic foundation.
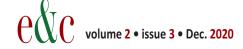
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1. Introduction

«How few understand the "negation" and how rarely even they compre-
hend it»: these words by Martin Heidegger (2007, p. 189) are the most ap-
propriate way to introduce the subject of the present work. The «primal
structure» is thought by Emanuele Severino as the syntactic structure of
the totality of the positive: «that without which no being could appear and
in accordance with which every being is» (Severino, 2001, p. 420). In the
primal structure *negation* is the heart of the most radical affirmation of the
positivity of the being, for it is precisely because «each being is the nega-
tion of what it is not» (Severino, 1995, p. 137) that, according to Severino,
everything can not become and *therefore* is eternal. Anything *is* a negation:
the thought of Severino is the philosophical place where the «tremendous
power of the negative» (Hegel) is such that the "negative", in the widest
sense of the word, is co-extensive to the positive.

An abyssal proposition (NN) *seems* to be formally derivable within the
"borders" of the primal structure: '[the] *not* is the nothing', that is the as-
sertion of the *identity* of the negation to the nothing or, in other words, the
assertion of the *nothingness* of the negation. The foundation of NN will
prove to be fallacious according to an "ordinary" conception of negation
(here we could even assume the failing of this demonstration as the defin-
ing carachteristic of an "ordinary" conception of negation). At the same
time the *problem* that will prove to be worthy to be investigated is *wheter
or not* that demonstration can be invalidated *coherently with* the concep-
tion of negation in force in the primal structure.

2. The nothingness of negation

NN involves two fundamental concepts, falling in the two traditional do-
mains of "logic" and "metaphysics": respectively, that of negation and that

of the nothing. Therefore to affirm the identity between negation and the nothing is to say that these domains overlap in the regions of those two concepts: precisely the overlapping that completely suppresses the possibility of the most paradigmatic "logic" elimination of metaphysics performed in the past century by analytic philosophy.

The semantical identity between the 'not' and the nothing does not entail the "nullification" of the negation, since in the primal structure the nothing itself is a *positivity*: that positivity constituted by the contradiction «for which the positivity of this meaning is contradicted by the absolute negativity of the meaningful content» (Severino, 1981, p. 213); in fact, for Severino each being is a concrete instance of the ontological "scheme" 'x is' (where the 'is' is what Severino calls «formal being» and the variable 'x' can be replaced by any determinacy) and the nothing is the *only* value of the variable x that reduces the ontological "scheme" to a self-contradiction. However the overlapping of negation and nothing would not happen without devastating consequences, looming just over the 'is'. In the primal structure, as we'll se below, the 'is not', namely the negation of being, is identical to the nothing. If negation (the 'not') is identical to the nothing *too*, both the 'not' and the negation of being 'is not' are identical to the nothing and so there is *no* semantical difference between them. Whatever happened to the 'is'? (this identity between the 'not' and the 'is not' is not only entailed by NN but is the key passage of NN's proof too; see paragraph no. 4).

The philosophical meaning of NN can be understood by letting it to dialogue with two radical theoretical thoughts. One is the famous thesis by Martin Heidegger (2001, p. 44), according to which it is not the case that there is «the nothing [das Nichts] only because there is the *not* [das Nicht], i.e. the negation» but «the nothing is more primal than the *not* and negation». Heidegger's argument makes use of the power of revealing the «being in its totaliy», that the nothing would hold. The other theory, able to dialogue still more closely with NN, is that of the «pure positive» elaborated by Luigi Vero Tarca. The negation is the authentic «undeniable» formulated by philosophy, as only the negation is necessarily repeated by *its* negation (the revealing of this necessity constitutes the essence of the "elenchos"), but for the *same* reason it reveals to be self-contradictory: «the contrary of the negative, i.e. the negative of the negative, is in turn negative» (Tarca, 2016, p. 140). The essential consequence is that «the negation is the null-determination in the sense of the determination that is null: the negation is [the] nothing» (Tarca, 2001, p. 488).

Both Heidegger's and Tarca's theses entail that negation *doesn't* come "before" the nothing. This is precisely the essential image of the relationship between negation and the nothing that they share with NN.

3. The 'not' is a being

The theoretical "atmosphere" that surrounds the demonstration of the nothingness of negation is given by the semantical status that negation holds in the primal structure. Here the negation belongs essentially to the form of any being, since any being is determined only as negation of what it is not. However – and this is the essential issue of the problem – negation *doesn't* remain out from the totality of the beings that are *negatively* determined. In fact, in the primal structure the negation *itself* falls completely under negative determination; negation is *a being* that, like any other being, is *negatively* determined. This means that the primal structure says the *not* of the 'not': the 'not' *too* is a being and therefore is negation of what is not the 'not', i.e. of what is other-than-the-'not'.

Lightly forcing the meaning in which the word is used in the logical literature, the condition held by negation in the primal structure can be called "impredicative", in the sense that it contains this circularity: the determination of any being is founded on the concept of negation, but at the same time the 'not' itself is a being and therefore must be *negatively* determined. The "impredicative" status of negation is essentially alien to the theories of negation elaborated by contemporary logical thought. For Frege (1960) the negation – althought it gives a concrete contribution to the characterization of the sense of the sentence in which its sign occurs – is an *unsaturated* entity that is «needing completion» for to constitute a complete sense. In not-p negation is the unsatured part – an entity with the "form" 'not-(…)' – that must be fulfilled by the thought expressed by p. Consequently the thought expressed by non-p is analyzed by Frege as the combination between two parts, of which one, negation, is essentially characterized by a «need of completion». In the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* by Wittgenstein, in opposition with Frege's conception of the «logical constants», negation loses any denotative-referential status and is completely excluded from the domain of sense: «the sign "~" corresponds to nothing in reality» (prop. 4.0621). For Wittgenstein, negation is nothing but an «operation», that is performed *on* propositions *without* being included *in* the domain of the sense. These two theories are not compatible

each other but they implicitly agree in *not* ackowledging the status of "complete" meaning for negation.

The comparison between Frege's and Severino's conceptions of negation is really illuminating. For the two thinkers, negation of a "content" is an entity with the nature of a synthesis between two parts, but for Frege, contrary to Severino, «the two components […] are quite different in kind and contribute quite differently towards the formation of the whole. One completes, the other is completed. And it is by this completion that the whole is kept together» (1960, p. 132). Frege will push this conception to its logical limits when he will write that «it is natural to suppose that, for logic in general, combination into a whole always comes about by the saturation of something unsaturated» (1984, p. 390). Instead, in the primal structure the constitution of negation of something as a synthesis between two parts does *not* entail that the connection must be thought, in obedience to the chemical metaphor inspiring Frege's conception, as a «combination» produced by a phenomenon of «saturation». In the primal structure relations bewteen meanings are not combinations.

4. The formal structure of NN's proof

The essence of what said above is that the primal structure demands the meaningfulness of such a proposition: 'the *not* is not what is not the *not*', that asserts that, like any other being, the being in which negation consists is different from all the other beings. Among the beings that are different from negation there is the 'is': far to have the status of a linguistic entity (the «copula»), in the primal structure the 'is' *is* a being itself. 'the *not* is not the *is*': it's this proposition (gained, as we'll see, by a semantical analysis of the 'is not') to provide the starting point of NN's proof.

In the following we'll expose the "formal structure" of NN's proof. We will do this without submitting to the "soveraignty" of formal logic. This distancing from formal logic has nothing to do with a (weak) proclamation in the name of "continental" philosophy but is essentially demanded by the subject itself of our investigation. In the intention of Severino, the primal structure *is not* an axiomatic system constructed in the domain of the "signs". Not to take this intention seriously would mean a great lack of critical spirit.

The formal structure of NN's proof is constituted by three premises (P1, P2, P3) that support the conclusion. It can be schematized as follows:

- P1: the 'not' is not the 'is' (that is, the negation has a different meaning from the 'is');
- P2: the 'not' is the 'is not' (that is, the negation has the same meaning of the negation of the 'is');
- P3: the 'is not' is identical to the nothing (that is, the negation of the 'is' has the same meaning of the nothing);
- therefore NN: the 'not' is *identical* to the nothing.

5. The foundations of premises

Both P1 and P3 are explicitly stated by Severino in his works. They arise from fundamental determinations of the primal structure as structure of the totality. In the primal structure the negation of the 'is' (that is expressed in the Italian and English language by respectively the linguistic expressions 'non è' and 'is not') holds the semantical status of a complex meaning composed of two parts or moments: the 'not' and the 'is'. Each of those two parts *is not* the other: «The 'is not' is a complex meaning [...] whose parts are the 'not' and the 'is', that, concretely understood, are [...] a) the 'not' that is not the 'is' and b) the 'is' that is not the 'not'» (Severino, 2011, p. 242). The first premise (P1) of the proof of NN is precisely the affirmation in a): the 'not' is not the 'is'.

Last premise P3 springs out from the necessity, stated by Severino, that in any occurence the 'is not' is equivalent to the 'is nothing', i.e. to the affirmation of the nothingness; both in the "existential" ('x is not') and in the predicative ('x is not y') contexts, when we deny the being we are *affirming* the nothingness: «The 'is not' (or not being) is (therefore means) the nothing» (2013, p. 140).

Instead P2 is definitely the responsible of the fallacy that, as the perspective of the "ordinary" logical thought can immediately recognize, affects the demonstration. The proof schematized above is logically valid, of course; the problem concerns the truth of P2. Let's see how P2 comes out. In the primal structure, Aristotle's theory of negation is rejected. Negation of a predicate R is *unconditionally equivalent* to the affirmation of the "negative" predicate not-R: 'is not R' *means* 'is not-R' (e.g. 'the stone is not the table' means 'the stone is the not-table'), where the hyphen makes the difference, for it signals that we are now in front of an *affirmation* of a negative "term". With Severino's words: «The being is [...] *the* synthesis [that] can not be trascendend by the 'not', but it is the trascending of the 'not'

(which is why it never gives a 'non è' [i.e. a negation of being] that may not be translated into a 'è non' [i.e. an affirmation of being a negation]» (1999, pp. 163-164)». Here we won't investigate deeper the foundation of the attribution, to the being, of an invincible syntactic power to trascend negation. What interests us here is that, by this "rule of translation", the "negative" proposition 'the *not* is not the *is*' can be translated into the *affirmation* that the 'not' *is* the negation of the 'is'. By interpreting the negation of the 'is', in the "negative" predicate-position, as meaning the 'is not', we obtain P2. Now the proof of NN is given: since (P3) the 'is not' is identical to the nothing, what the proposition comes to assert is that the 'not' is the nothing.

6. The 'not' is the 'is not'

It's easy to recognize that the derivation of P2, so crucial for NN's proof, exploits a semantical ambiguity affecting the "negation of the *is*": that between the verbal negation of the 'is', whose we make use to deny that something is something ('… is not…'), and the *different* from the 'is' ('… not-*is*'), i.e. the *different* from that specific meaning in which the 'is' consists. The foundation of P2 is successfull only if the "negative" term, produced by translating the proposition '*not* is not *is*' into the affirmation of being the "negation of the *is*", is interpreted *as* meaning the 'is not'. This is precisely the confusion that must be avoided. In fact, the logical form of the "negative" term in the predicate-position must be distinguished from that of the verbal negation of the 'is'. The "negative" term in the predicate position is constituted by the 'not-*is*': its meaning, differently from the 'is not', is that of a concrete instance of an abstract scheme 'not-x' for x='is'.

The "phenomenon" of the ambiguity between the two senses (verbal and not verbal) of negation of the 'is' does not depend on the grammar rules of historical languages, although they can influence the linguistic visibiliy of the "phenomenon" by regulating in opposite ways the reciprocal syntactic positions of the negator and of the copula (e.g. the Italian language says 'non è', while the English says 'is not'). This ambiguity can be easily dissolved in an "ordinary" logical context, where the difference between denying the being and affirming the different-from-the-'is' is obviously, as we will see more deeply below, a matter of use/mention distinction. The problem that the next paragraphs will try to investigate is *wheter or not* the primal structure can actually solve that ambiguity in order to es-

cape the formal derivation of P2 inside its logical space and, *consequently*, of the nothingness of negation.

7. The ambiguity between the 'is not' and the 'not-*is*'

The starting premise of NN's proof asserts: the 'not' is not the 'is'. The proposition resulting by translating denial [of being the 'is'] into affirmation [of being the negation of the 'is'] will have necessarily this logical form: 'the *not* is *N(not,is)*', where N(not,is) is the "negative" predicate produced by the "absorption" of the negation into the semantic field of the predicate. The semantical ambiguity exploited by NN's proof concerns precisely the determination of the logical meaning of N(not,is).

As seen above, the interpretation of N(not,is) *as* meaning the 'is not' is the key passage of NN's proof. This interpretation is a misunderstanding of the "negative" term, based on the confusion between the two difference senses of the negation of the 'is': 'is not' and 'not-*is*'. In fact, neither the 'is not' means the different-from-the-'is' (i.e. the meaning 'not-*is*') nor it means the position of being of the 'not'. In other terms, neither the instance of the abstract scheme 'not-x' for x='is', nor the instance of the abstract scheme 'is x' for x='not' can equal the "verbal" negation of the 'is'. The 'is not' is *that* sense of negation of the 'is' that can not result by replacing a variable in an appropriate "open formula".

The proof of the nothingness of negation fails in the primal structure only if the distinction between the two senses of the negation of the 'is' is preserved by the translation of the negation of being into an affirmation of being a negation. It's precisely the preservation of that distinction, to become highly problematic in the primal structure, because of the "pressure" exerted by that translation on the proposition '*not* is not *is*'. Therefore the problem concerns precisely the actual possibility *for the primal structure* to preserve the distinction between the two sense of the negation of the 'is'. In the primal structure the 'is not' is a complex meaning constituted by the semantic synthesis between the two different meanings 'is' and 'not'. In the same way, the different-from-the-'is' (not-x, for x='is') and the being-the-'not' (is x, for x='not') are, in the primal structure, semantical synthesis constituted by a connection between the 'is' and the 'not'. *The same* is true for the 'is not'. In the primal structure all these complex meanings share the status of syntheses between the same semantic parts. *How* can the primal structure affirm the distinction between the 'is not' and those other

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two meanings? This question is philosophically imperative. Since in the primal structure the 'is not' equals the nothing, the collapse of the distinction between the 'is not' and the '*not*-is' would mean the inability to distinguish the different-from-the-*is* from the absolute negation of being. In this way the primal structure would be unable to accept a positivity *other than* the meaning 'is'. The 'is' would establish its eremitic realm inside the primal structure and the possibility to affirm the plurality of beings would vanish.

8.   Can the primal structure solve the problem?

The logic-linguistic thought can easily solve the ambiguity that is produced by the proposition '*not* is not *is*' once the denial is translated into an affirmation. Infact the standard solution here is obviously provided by the *use/mention* distinction: while in the 'is not' the 'is' and the 'not' are *used,* in the positions of the subject and of the nominal part of the predicate they are *mentioned*; consequently in the proposition '*not* is not the *is*', that speaks *of* the 'is' and of the 'not', the two different occurrences of the 'is' and of the 'not' give respectively rise to two *different* meanings. Infact in the first occurence of the 'not' (where the 'not' occupies the position of the subject), no denial is performed, as well as no affirmation of being is performed in the second occurence of the 'is' (where the 'is' is in the position of the predicate). Consequently the translation of the denial of the being into an affirmation can not riproduce the 'is not' in the field of the predicate, because what the negation *not* is applied to, once imported in that field, is the 'is' in the role of a *mentioned* meaning: that is to say, in the second occurence the 'is' does not play the function of copula but is a symbol whose *denotation* is constituted by the meaning of the copula.

   Instead in the primal structure, where the 'is not' is a complex meaning constituted by the semantic connection between two parts, in the two different occurences of the 'is' and of the 'not' the *same* meanings do appear. Surely in the primal structure the meanings don't remain the "same" when their context changes. Nevertheless, the 'is' that occupies the position of the nominal predicate is *precisely* one of the two parts that compose the complex meaning 'is not' (and the same is true for the 'not' regarding the position of predicate). On the other hand in the primal structure the 'not' (like the 'is' and any other being) can be self-identical only on the basis of the proposition that affirms its being different-from-the-other: the propo-

sition '[the] *not* is not the other-than-the-*not*' expresses the self-identity precisely of *that* 'not' that, together with the 'is', composes the 'is not'.

It's already clear that the use/mention distinction can not find any place in the primal structure. In it propositions like 'the *not* is not the other-than-the-*not*' (or even our proposition '[the] *not* is not [the] *is*'), in which something is affirmed *of* the 'not', *are not* distributed over a logical-syntactic "level" different from that on which "normal" propositions like 'the house is not the man' rest. In few words, mentioning "devices" are not admitted in the primal structure and there are no language/metalanguage distinctions. The next paragraph will try to investigate, deeper in its foundation, the "heterodox" condition in which the primal structure puts the negation, and to clarify the essential reason why the use-mention difference's theory must be totally refused in it.

9. The "primal" nominalization of the meanings

In the primal structure the 'not' is a determined being itself, belonging to the totality of the negatively determined beings. The negative determination of any being includes the concept of negation, but at the same time the 'not' is a being itself and therefore must be *negatively* determined. This configures exactly that kind of logical situations that could not be accepted *simpliciter* by the dominant logical thought. Since the primal structure aims to be the syntactic structure of *totality*, typings and logical hiearchies of variables can not be accepted in it. Everything is a being, i.e. a that-which-is. This means that everything, in its concreteness and determinacy, is an individual instance of the scheme 'x is', where x is an "absolute" variable, free to range over the totality of being without any restriction of its domain. The 'not' is one of the possible values of the "absolute" ontological variable.

We can say that in the primal structure anything, without any particular condition to be satisfied, is primally "nominalized". This is true of negation itself, since the 'not' too, regardless of what makes it different from a "substance" in the aristotelic sense of a table or a stone, can replace the ontological variable. In the primal structure the problem of the corrispondence between meanings and entities is primally solved in a positive way. With the words of Quine, the «gulf between meaning and naming» (1948/1949, p. 28) is primally filled. The "bridge" that ensures the corrispondence between entities and meanings is constituted by the *identity*

that Severino intrepidly establishes between meaning something and being something: «In its widest meaning, the term 'meaning' refers to every anything, that is to any being» (2013, p. 107); and again: «All is a meaning […]. The being has not a meaning: it *is* a meaning» (2007, p. 366).

In the primal structure the negation is *primally* nominalized. This needs now an important clarification in order to avoid dangerous misunderstandings. The primal nominalization of the meanings that articulate the totality *is not* a linguistic procedure, like that of the "mentioning", that entails a modification of the meaning. By occupying the position of subject, the 'not' does *not* undergo a modification of its meaning but, by contrast, is (primally) allowed to be the meaning which it is. The primality of nominalization of the meanings is precisely what is definitely denied by Edmund Husserl in his theory of the «distinction between indipendent and non-indipendent meanings»: «[…] meanings of any category, even syncategorematic forms like *and*, can be put into the subject-position otherwise occupied by substantival meanings. If one looks closely, one sees that this happens by a *modification of meaning* […]. If we say '*And* is a conjunction', the nuance of meaning normally corresponding to the word 'and' is not put into the position of subject: this is occupied by an indipendent meaning directed to the word *and* …» (2001, p. 64). The *primality* of the occupation of the subject-position for any meaning entails the denial of any «modification of meaning».

10. Three attempts of solution

Although the ambiguity between the two senses of negation of the 'is' is not explicitly signaled by Severino, three attempts of solution, more or less indirect, can be traced in his works. Two of them try to exploit, in diffent ways, the circumstance of the semantical identity between the 'is not' and the nothing. The other evokes the (supposed) difference of the kinds of meanings respectively contained in the structure of the 'is not' and in that of the 'not-*is*'.

a) Severino is deeply aware that the primal structure seems to encounter a problem when it tries to determine the semantical structure of the 'is not'. In fact, in the primal structure the meaning 'is not' appears to be complex and simple *at the same time*. It is a complex meaning, since, as previously stated, the primal structure thinks the 'is not' as a synthesis between the 'is' and the 'not'. More surprisingly, for the primal structure the

'is not' *can not* be a complex meaning and therefore is *simple*. The essential reason for this impossibiliy is that, if determined as an entity composed of parts, the 'is not' necessarily falls under the contradictory (and infamous) concept of a whole that contains itself as its part. This is explained very clearly by Severino: «it is necessary that each of the two parts of the 'is not' (the 'is' and the 'not') *is not* the other. Therefore it is necessary that the 'is not' includes itself as its part [...]» (2013, p. 125).

The foundation of the contradictory inclusion of the 'is not' (or 'not being') in its (supposed) parts, each of which *is not* the other, rests in the fact that for Severino not being something equals *being* a not being (and therefore an 'is not') – an equation that brings us back to the "translation" from which P2 springs out. The solution of the aporetic situation produced by the "primal" determination of the semantical structure of the 'is not' (that reveals to be both a complex and a not-complex meaning) consists in *accepting* this contradiction *through* its complete re-absorption into the fundamental contradiction of the nothing. The possibility for this solution is given precisely by P3, namely the identity between the 'is not' and the nothing: «Since the nothing is a self-contradicting meaning, the situation in which the 'is not' reveals to be a complex meaning that includes itself as its part [...] is not a new aporia of the nothing, but *a further contradiction of the nothing as meaning*» (2013, p. 143).

It is natural, now, to wonder whether it would be possible, for to *solve* the problem of the ambigous relationship between the two senses of the negation of the 'is', to renunce to any attempt of giving a foundation of the distinction between those two senses, by *letting* them be identical to each other and discharging this contradiction *on* the nothing, that (as Severino says) is semantically identical to the 'is not'. Instead, the application of this kind of solution to this case would be catastrophic for the ontology of the primal structure. In fact, *if* we let the 'is not' and the 'not-*is*' be identical each other, then there happens to the 'not-*is*', i.e. to the different-from-the-'is', what is true for the 'is not': to be identical to the nothing. But, as already seen above (no. 7), *if* the primal structure can not track down a distinction between the different-from-the-'is' and the nothing, the onto-logical space for the affirmation of plurality of the beings disappears from it.

b) There is a passage from *Crossing*, in which Severino seems to implicitly attempt a foundation of the difference between the two senses of the negation of the 'is': «The meaning 'not' that occures in the 'is not' and in the 'not-x' is simple too [...] The 'is not' is the synthesis of those two sim-

ple meanings [i.e. of the 'is' and of the 'not']; the 'not-x' is the synthesis of a simple meaning [i.e. of the 'not'] and of x (that or is complex or is such as its semantical simplicity is only a matter of fact» (2007, pp. 328-329). As seen above, the essential character of simple meanings is that their analysis is self-contradictory: the whole would be included *in* its (supposed) parts. The 'not' is this kind of meaning since «if it were complex it would be constituted by moments that […] would *not* be the other than itself, therefore the 'not' would already occur in the synthesis in which the 'not' should consist» (2007, p. 329). Instead, Severino says, for the x occuring in the 'not-x' it can not be excluded that an analysis would reveal an "hidden" semantical complexity.

It would seem right to conclude that the difference between the 'is not' and the 'not-x' ultimately rests over the semantical status of *both* the constituents of the 'is not' as *simple* meanings, differently from the 'not-x'. Instead, this conclusion would circularly assume what should indipendently reveal, namely that in the primal structure the 'is not' can not result from replacing the variable x by *precisely* the "semantical value" constituted by the 'is', that is a simple meaning.

c) The 'is not' semantically equals the nothing (premise P3). This is not true for the 'not-*is*': the nothingness is only *one* possibility for to be different from a certain meaning (here the 'is'). Why not take this circumstance as an immediate semantical foundation of the difference between the two senses of the negation of the 'is' in the primal structure?

The problem of this semantical foundation is that it fails to be reflected in the *syntax* of the proposition '*not* is not the *is*', once this "negative" proposition is translated into the "affirmative" proposition '*not* is N(not,is)'. The 'is not', being *identical* to the nothing, is different from the 'not-*is*', that means the different-from-the'is'. On the other hand the 'not' is not the 'is'. *Why* should the 'not' in the semantical field of the "negative" predicate N(not,is) not *reconstitute* the meaning 'is not'? The semantical foundation of the difference between the 'is not' and 'not-is' does not provide an answer to *this* question. If the semantical difference between the 'is not' and the 'not-is' is not reflected in the *syntax* of those complex meanings, the impossibiliy of the reconstitution of the 'is not' in the predicate-position remains without a foundation. And for the primal structure this means to be exposed to the possibility that the negation appears identical to the nothing.

11. Beyond "signicity". Conclusions

The proposition '*not* is not the *is*' comes out from the deepest kernel of the primal structure. It affirms that the 'not' and the 'is', that are precisely the two parts of the complex meaning 'is not' consisting in the negation of being, are different from each other. In the two occurences of the 'not' and of the 'is' the primal structure can not recognize a different «logical syntactic application» (Wittgenstein, prop. 3.327), and that is, for each of them, two «different symbols» (Wittgenstein, prop. 3.323) in the signs. The fundamental reason for this is given by the primal "nominalization" of the ''is' and of the 'not'. Their positions, respectively, in the field of the subject and of the predicate, are *not* the result of a linguistic procedure performed on, and through, signes: they express an primal necessity for the self-identity of the negation

In the primal structure the concept of 'sign' and the "signicity" themselves (i.e. the general condition of being-a-sign) entails a negation of the self-identity of being. Reversing Heidegger's criticism against the conception of language centered in the designative function of the word, Severino affirms that «the language is will: will that something be sign of something. Therefore the language too exists only as faith to be able to turn something into a sign, and something else into its denotation» (2019, p. 231): the language is a form of *negation* of the self-identity of being and consequently belongs to the essence of nihilism. In the primal structure the disclosure of world, that according to Heidegger is performed by the primal essence of language, is entirely attributed to the «appearing»: «the thing is the meaning, therefore the being», but «it is necessary that the thing ultimately appears as thing and not as a thing itself surrounded by the word» (Severino, 1992, pp. 235-244). The thing is ultimately «beyond the language».

The constituents of the proposition '*not* is not the *is*' are ultimately meanings that have left the "segnicity" *beyond themselves*. In the primal structure the solution of the ambiguity of the negation of the 'is' can not have a linguistic-segnic foundation. The primal structure seems to hide the reason why the proposition '*not* is not the *is*' should escape the conclusion that negation appears identical to the nothing. Should we say that the problematic nature exhibited by the negation of the 'is' is the trace of the bright affirmation of positivity of all the things that shines in the heart of the primal structure?

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