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Opening Note

by Giulio Goggi

Emanuele Severino is increasingly recognized as one of the most remarkable and challenging thinkers of the twentieth century. He invites us to re-think about the Foundation of the manifold determinations, pointing out that what Parmenides said of pure Being («wherefore Justice loosens not her fetters to allow it to be born or perish, but holds it fast», Fr. 7/8) must be affirmed of every being, of every determinate positivity.

The growing international interest in the Severino's thought is testified by the attention that the philosopher Graham Priest dedicated to him (see «Eternity and Contradiction» n. 2 and n. 4) and by discovering that Martin Heidegger meditated upon what Severino wrote in the 1950s and 1960s (see «Eternity and Contradiction» n. 5 and n. 6).

On 22 January 2022 a Symposium was held: "The Other Side of Italian Thought: Emanuele Severino", organized by Giulio Goggi, Federico Perelda, Damiano Sacco, Ines Testoni, in cooperation with FISSPA University of Padua, the Istituto Italiano di Cultura di Berlino and the Italienzentrum of the Freie Universität Berlin.

The present issue contains contributions by scholars who spoke at this important Symposium, with thematic insights ranging from ontology to psychology, from philosophy of mind to science and philosophy of science, in the light of Severino's indication.

The Philosophy of the Future: The Relevance of Severino's Metaphilosophy Today

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In the article, we aim at understanding the metaphilosophical implications of Emanuele Severino's concept of philosophy, asking what contribution it can offer to solving the question concerning the scope, form and consequent legitimation of philosophy as a discipline, which occupied the philosophical discourse with more and more urgency over the last few years.

Keywords:

Metaphilosophy, Philosophy, Metaphysics, Truth, Finitude

In this contribution, we intend to deal with Emanuele Severino's thought from a metaphilosophical perspective. In other words, we will focus on what understanding of philosophy underlies Severino's work. Through this investigation, we aim at highlighting what we would like to call the "radical untimeliness" of Severino's (meta)philosophy.

When speaking of "untimeliness" here, our main reference is the Nietzschean concept of "untimeliness". In the Preface to the second of the *Untimely Meditations* "On the Usefulness and Abuse of History for Life", Nietzsche states that his point of view is "untimely" insofar as he tries "to look afresh at something of which our time is rightly proud (...) as being injurious to it, a defect and deficiency in it" (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 60).

Nietzsche's target in that text was the historicist culture typical of his era. In a much similar way, Severino's thought is "untimely", because it is rooted in an antagonism towards two essential aspects of our time, which are today otherwise looked upon with pride.

Namely, Severino denounces:

a) the idea that our time has finally freed itself from the need of an absolute, eternal and immutable truth, and

b) the idea that the only truth of which it would make sense to speak would be the truth of modern science, and that, therefore, philosophy itself should conform to this truth in order to claim a legitimate existence as a discipline in our epoch.

Severino identifies these two aspects as characteristic of our time and offers a critique of contemporary philosophy as an expression of these two elements. Thus, he offers an alternative understanding of philosophy, which overcomes these convictions and is therefore different for the philosophy of the time and is rather a philosophy "of the future". In the article, we aim at understanding the metaphilosophical implications of Severino's conception, asking what contribution it can offer to solving what we call the "metaphilosophical question". By this notion, we mean to identify the question concerning the scope, form and consequent legitimation

of philosophy as a discipline, which occupied the philosophical discourse with more and more urgency over the last few years. In order to do this, we will proceed in three steps:

In the first paragraph, we will present and explore the phenomenon that we call the “metaphilosophical question” and present some of the responses offered by different philosophical traditions to this problem.

In the second paragraph, we will present Severino’s conception of philosophy.

In the last paragraph, we will contrast Severino’s position with contemporary responses to the “metaphilosophical question” in order to assess its “untimeliness” and relevance for today’s metaphilosophical inquiry.

1. The metaphilosophical question and its relevance today

Firstly, we need to clarify our methodological premises and approach, and define what we mean by adopting a “metaphilosophical perspective”.

Metaphilosophy is the discipline that aims to clarify the nature of philosophy, its methods, its scope and its applications.

In a way, the metaphilosophical question of “what is philosophy” has always been an inseparable component of philosophical inquiry. The very practice of philosophy, in fact, always entails a peculiar self-reflexivity: since there is no universal definition of philosophy, which determines its object and methodology ahead of its practice, every philosophy is always and structurally called to account for itself and define its discursive form, its aims and its objects (on this, see for example Hegel, 2010, §1). In this sense, philosophy progresses and articulates itself in a much different way than scientific knowledge. Each natural science, once established as a discipline through a shared definition of its object and methodology, develops linearly according to a logic whereby the most recent knowledge absorbs the previous one, expanding it under the same methodological premises. Instead, precisely because the discipline of philosophy as such never presents itself as something already given and established once and for all, philosophical knowledge enjoys a much different relationship to its history (and its future): progress in philosophy is much less linear and its definition is always dependent on the understanding of philosophy one is choosing to work with (Rorty, 2009, pp. 313-394 and 1989, pp. 96-140).

The self-reflexivity peculiar of philosophical practice also explains the paradoxical phenomenon, typical of the study of philosophy, whereby we

see radically different discursive practices, inquiries and styles defining themselves as philosophical. Since these are not simply different ways of articulating the same content, but rather embodiments of different ways of conceiving the nature, the task and the ends of philosophy itself, these different “philosophies” do not even recognize each other as philosophy. What today is called the *Great Divide* between analytic and continental philosophy is only one of the articulations – and perhaps not even the most significant one – of this intrinsic plurality of philosophical practice (for a study of this phenomenon with reference to the specific case of metaphysics, see Zimmermann, 2004. For a comment on the *Great Divide* and possible interactions between continental and analytic philosophy see also Nuzzo, 2010 and Glendinning, 2021).

Despite its being intrinsic and inseparable from the practice of philosophy itself, metaphilosophy has become an established discipline within philosophical inquiry only over the last few years (Miolli, 2017; 2022, Corti, Illetterati, Miolli, 2018). This phenomenon has been paired with an overall increase in attention and awareness towards the self-reflexive need of philosophical inquiry to justify and define itself in its making within contemporary philosophy in general.

The increased sensibility to the problem is perhaps also a sign that the metaphilosophical question has an urgency which is peculiar of our time. The fact that philosophy today so acutely feels the need to clarify and define its practice can also be read as the expression of a crisis rooted in the diminished or even lacking recognition of its relevance as a discipline. As a matter of fact, in any scientific field the need for meta-reflection on the discipline’s own nature, scope, and methodology emerges most urgently when the set of practices, discursive modes and institutional placements defining that discipline lose their relevance: either they are in tension with recent discoveries that they cannot accommodate, or the (social, cultural, scientific) function they served is extinguished or fulfilled differently (Kuhn, 1996; Rorty, 2009). In this sense, it is legitimate to think that contemporary philosophy’s aggravated need to clarify its scope and nature and to give a (new) definition of itself signals that philosophy no longer feels its function and necessity recognized. In this sense, it is not surprising that one of the books that have generated the most interest and discussion in philosophy over the last few years is Timothy Williamson’s *The Philosophy of Philosophy*. In many ways, the premises of the book confirm the intertwining of metaphilosophical questioning and the crisis of philosophy. Williamson himself writes that the idea of the book stemmed from the

perception of a lack of shared direction and definition within contemporary philosophy: according to Williamson, contemporary philosophy lacks an adequate image of itself, a clear vision of its objectives and practice. To contrast this phenomenon, the book aims at producing an image of philosophy that can “*do it justice*” (Williamson, 2022, p. ix).

The problem applies both on a theoretical, “internal” level, concerning the object and form of philosophy, but also on an “external” and public level, concerning the relevance and function of philosophy in contemporary society. Philosophers find themselves spread between different departments (especially in Anglophone universities, being divided between cultural studies, sociology, literary studies, etc.), and, while they struggle to define what discursive practices count as philosophical research and what do not, they find it harder and harder to legitimate the need of public funding for philosophical research (on this, see Rorty, 2001 and Redding, 2013).

One main factor in the exacerbation of the metaphilosophical problem today has been the progressive specialization of different disciplinary fields and the progressive advancement and shaping of scientific knowledge. While philosophy was first born in an epoch in which science and philosophy were part of the same inquiry, and this interconnection continued to obtain until the Scientific Revolution and even up until the Romantic Age, now philosophy is radically distinct from scientific inquiry. This has, at least *prima facie*, deprived it of its “traditional” object: it is the sciences who now fulfill the function of discovering how the world is made and how it works, and in this endeavor they seem entirely independent of philosophical inputs or reflections. Philosophy today is clearly on the other side of the divide between the “two cultures”, or between *Natur-* und *Geisteswissenschaften* (Snow, 1959; Dilthey, 1922): it is considered a discipline of spirit, closer to literature than to contemporary physics or chemistry.

Another component that complicated the stance of philosophy is the progressive laicization of (Western) society: with established religion being progressively – and with good reason – relegated to a matter of private choice and preference, even more broadly conceived questions of existential meaning struggle to find recognition and legitimation as relevant pursuits for the collective. Under this respect, too, philosophy finds itself deprived of what seemed to have traditionally been its other essential object and function (Rorty, 2009, pp. 129-312).

Reactions to this shift have been several in the last century, resulting in

an astounding variety of definitions of philosophy's scope and form, and it is hard to establish whether this fragmentation is an effect of the "identity crisis" of philosophical knowledge or if it is a factor in its further aggravation.

In this medley of contemporary metaphilosophies, three main models of what philosophy should look like and be about (today) could be distinguished.

1.1 Philosophy as science: varieties of analytic realism

One response to the "metaphilosophical question" has been that of trying to make philosophy into a science.

This tendency has been most characteristic of "analytic" philosophy broadly conceived (on the difficulty of applying the term "analytic" to designate a specific brand of philosophy, see Zimmermann, 2004).

On this understanding, philosophy derives its scientificity from a well-established, predefined methodology and from the agreement with scientific results and with experience.

The understanding of what this methodology and of what this agreement should be vary greatly. As far as methodology is concerned, probably the best-known proposals have been the criterion of verification of meaning elaborated in the Vienna Circle, the criterion of falsification of scientificity proposed by Karl Popper, and Quine's definition of ontological commitment. As far as the agreement with science is concerned, instead, its understanding changes depending on which of the various forms of realism that have characterized English-speaking philosophy in recent years one is willing to consider. These go from the common-sense and metaphysical realism rooted in logical atomism presented by George E. Moore and Bertrand Russell (Moore, 1903 and 1919; Russell, 2009), to the more refined forms of scientific realism presented in the many declinations of naturalism offered from the 1930s to the present day (De Caro, Macarthur, 2008; Nunziante, 2012).

While the criteria of verification and falsification, associated with an image of philosophy as much detached from ontological claims and as much limited to the task of conceptual and semantic clarification as possible have been overcome and are not representative of the (self-)understanding of analytic philosophy anymore, Quine's definition of ontological commitment still constitutes the main reference for mainstream ana-

lytic metaphysics today (Schaffer, 2009; Ney, 2014). Namely, mainstream analytic metaphysics is devoted to the task of defining “what there (really) is”. While the question might seem rather trivial at first (Quine himself replied to it in a very permissivist way: “everything!”, Quine, 1948, p. 21), it is indeed in certain cases quite relevant: do properties exist? Do numbers, or meanings, or relations? Does essence, as opposed to existence, or being, as opposed to beings, exist? Deciding whether these things exist, not only can legitimize (or dismiss) specific philosophical inquiries, but it also can help achieve a better understanding of our theories about reality and their *actual* implications as to how the world is made. For instance, deciding whether being exists, as something separate from existence, can help decide whether Heidegger’s critique of Western metaphysics as “forgetfulness of being” is a meaningful enterprise, or a delusion induced by linguistic ambiguity (Van Inwagen, 2009). Further, asking whether numbers exist, can help us to better understand what mathematics is about and its role in the description of reality provided by other sciences who rely heavily on it, such as physics (Field, 1980; Maddy, 1992).

In approaching all this very different “existence-questions”, contemporary analytic metaphysics relies on Quine’s definition of ontological commitment, attempting to make explicit the quantification domain of different theories relevant to the question at hand. The quantification domain is defined by the entities over which a theory quantifies, or in simpler words, by the entities that a theory needs to consider as existent in order to be true (Quine, 1948, p. 33).

So defined, metaphysics has a double task: on the one hand, it helps defining the best theory amongst competing ones, clarifying which theory quantifies over the smallest number of entities while retaining the biggest explanatory power (Ney, 2014, p. 49); on the other, it shares the natural science’s task of elaborating a description of the world, insofar as it helps clarify what exactly “is there” according to our best available theory. To these two tasks, we could add a third, “metametaphysical” or “preliminary” task: in applying Quinean methodology to its own traditional questions, metaphysics can determine which philosophical interrogations are indeed substantial (that is, which entail actual existence questions) and which are not (that is, which do not entail existence questions or are easily solved through clarification of ontological commitment of the language used). While to the majority of “continental” or “postmodernist” authors and to few authors from within analytic metaphysics itself the abandonment of questions that so deeply characterized the tradition of Western meta-

physics constitutes a substantial loss (more on this in section 1.3), to mainstream analytic metaphysicians this is a fair price to pay to make philosophy “scientific”.

In the metaphilosophical conception offered by contemporary analytic metaphysics, then, philosophy is still conceived, as it was during the so-called “middle period” of analytic philosophy dominated by the Vienna Circle (Simons, 2013), as conceptual clarification through rigorous, pre-defined methodology, but with a stronger realist commitment (Price, 2009). Precisely thanks to its reliance on a clear and “standard” methodology and on scientific theories (and to a significant downsizing and reshaping of its fundamental questions) philosophy can (re)claim its task of being a description of reality, alongside the natural sciences.

1.2 Philosophy “after philosophy”, or postmodernist constructivism

While the analytic tradition reacted to the urgency of the “metaphilosophical problem” by trying to limit and structure philosophical inquiry in order to salvage its “scientific” status, many other philosophers, both in the “continental” and in the English-speaking world, decided to go in the opposite direction, and push philosophy as far away as possible from “scientific” definitions of objectivity, truth and reality. This has been a tendency common to the many forms of postmodernism that have characterized philosophical discourse starting roughly from the second half of the twentieth century. “Postmodernism” is an umbrella term which is as broad in its reach and as problematic to use as a unitary label as the “analytic” one, encompassing “continental” projects going from Foucault’s genealogy to Derrida’s deconstruction, and English-speaking Neo-pragmatist projects going from Nelson Goodman’s to Richard Rorty’s (Aylesworth, 2015). Despite working with very different concepts and terminologies, all these currents share the commitment to deconstruct the understanding of truth and reality which shaped traditional Western philosophical inquiry. Against the tradition, postmodernists argue that there is no universal or objective reality, that truth and meaning do not have a univocal definition, and that therefore the task of philosophy should not be that of uncovering an unchanging and eternal truth, or to isolate the universal elements of individual experience. One of the declinations of postmodernism in which the critique to traditional philosophy’s understanding of truth has been paired with explicit metaphilosophical reflection is the one developed by

Richard Rorty. Rorty's philosophy combined suggestions from the so-called "linguistic turn" of analytic or English-speaking philosophy, from Classical American Pragmatism and from continental thinkers such as Hegel, Heidegger and Derrida to refute the analytic conception of philosophy as "rigorous" and "scientific". As showed by Quine (Quine, 1951), this conception was rooted in a correspondist understanding of truth and meaning: the scientificity and rigorousness of philosophical inquiry was defined, even during the "middle period", with reference to the possibility of verifying the correspondence of determinate propositions or beliefs with experience. Quine criticized the possibility of doing so, showing that meaning could not be defined through analyticity nor through reductionism, and suggesting that, while the correspondence with experience was only possible for a whole theory – or a whole interconnected web of beliefs – distinct concepts and propositions were determined holistically by reciprocal relations happening from within the same theory. Later, Quine further elaborated this intuition claiming that empirical referents in the production of (new) knowledge are always "underdetermined": every new belief is much more informed by the other beliefs we are holding in determining it, than it is informed by empirical data (Quine, 1960). Consequently, with reference to the same empirical evidence radically different beliefs could be formed, depending on which theory the knowing subject is moving from. Quine's formulations gave way to the so-called debate on conceptual schemes, asking whether radically different and mutually exclusive definitions of objectivity and experiences of the world are possible depending on which "conceptual scheme" or set of beliefs one held on to (Glock, 2003). In this context, Donald Davidson suggested that the true implication of Quine's formulations is not that for the same empirical input several different interpretations could be given, but rather that no empirical input could be supposed to be the referent of our theories (Davidson, 1973). Rorty drew a radical metaphilosophical thesis from the anti-realist implications of Quine's and Davidson's formulations: not only the idea of truth and meaning as corresponding to actual, concrete objects in the "mind-independent" world, but also the idea of a universal, unchanging truth is an illusion. If our experience of the world and objectivity is informed by the beliefs and concepts that we use to make sense of it, then it is also likely that such experience and understanding will change over time depending on cultural and historical shifts (Rorty, 2001b, 2009).

Consequently, philosophy should not think of itself as an accurate description of the world, nor as the uncovering of a universal, eternal truth

providing the key to all reality (Rorty, 2009; Rorty, 2011, pp. 19-166). To the contrary, philosophy is, just as any other discursive practice, the expression of a specific moment in history and culture (Rorty, 1989, pp. 3-72). Philosophy's task is not that of discovering "capital-T Truth", but rather that of revealing the contingency of our discursive practices, unmasking the illusion that linguistic or conceptual formulations correspond to a world "out there" and showing their dependence on cultural and historical conditions. As such, philosophy is both a critique and a deconstruction of any realist or correspondentist illusions we might entertain, and the joyous unlocking of more creativity and freedom in our discursive practices. In Rorty's conception, once we get rid of the obsession for truth and reality, and we accept the boundaries of our "human" condition as always linguistically, conceptually, culturally and historically situated, we realize that reality can be our creation: both collectively and individually, we can understand and shape our experience to have it reflect our innermost inclinations (Rorty, 1989, pp. 73-140). According to Rorty, then, philosophy should overcome its own self-image as an inquiry into truth, give up its ambitions of "scientificity" and renounce the possibility of enjoying a clear-cut methodological and disciplinary identification (Rorty, 2001d). Through this "sacrifice", philosophy gains the possibility of having greater social and cultural impact, because it would become a public discursive practice capable of unveiling and influencing the historical and cultural movements of its time (Rorty, 1999, 2009, pp. 357-394, 2011, pp. 167-326).

1.3 Philosophy as (revised) rationalism and monism

A more recent answer to the "metaphilosophical question" comes from further developments of contemporary analytic metaphysics, which aim at retrieving aspects of traditional Western metaphysics that mainstream analytic metaphysics would normally dismiss. In this image, philosophy is neither "scientific" in the sense of analytic metaphysics, nor an expression of human contingency as postmodernism suggested. To the contrary, this view presents philosophy (or metaphysics) as an inquiry into a kind of reality, which is not quite the same as that explored by the natural sciences, at least insofar as the latter is conceived as an object of experience. In this image, philosophy is aimed at uncovering a kind of truth that, although apparently counterintuitive, is actually "truer" and "higher" than the one uncovered by the sciences or common-sense.

The need for the retrieval of such an understanding of philosophical inquiry has emerged in the context of debates on grounding and fundamentality, which showed some inadequacies of Quinean methodology (Schaffer, 2009. See also Correia, Schnieder, 2012). Quinean methodology, in fact, implies a “flat ontology” in which all existent entities – as bound variables over which a theory quantifies – are identified in their isolation and not through their essential reciprocal relations. This understanding can hardly account for relations such as supervenience, in which two relata are modally constrained one by the other in such a way that is essential to their definition and individuation, or emergence, in which a whole is characterized by properties that its parts do not have on their own (Schaffer, 2009). Given this shortcoming of Quinean methodology, authors who consider supervenience, emergence, and other instances of relations that participate in the individuation of their relata as essential aspects of reality (Schaffer, 2010a) tried to update the methodology of metaphysics so that it would be “rigorous” and yet capable of accounting for them. This included the reintroduction and study of notions such as grounding, fundamentality and metaphysical explanation to describe such phenomena, and a reconsideration of the requirement for philosophy to agree with empirical evidence in order to have legitimization as a discipline (Schaffer, 2010a; Della Rocca, 2013; 2021).

This latter aspect is especially visible in recent revivals of monism, encompassing Jonathan Schaffer’s “priority monism”, Terence Horgan and Matjaž Potrč’s “existence monism”, and Michael Della Rocca’s “strict monism” (Schaffer, 2018; Horgan and Potrč, 2009, Della Rocca, 2021, pp. xiii-xxiii). While they constitute radically different positions, all these “new monisms” find their root in the debate on grounding: if entities are not (just) bound variables after all, but their definition entails their reciprocal relations of fundamentality, it becomes possible to treat the totality of things in the world as a whole, and to ask if such a whole entertains an essential relationship to its parts, that could make it “more fundamental” than them (Schaffer, 2018 and 2010a; Della Rocca, 2013). Although on different premises, priority-, essence-, and strict monism all hold that the whole is more fundamental than its parts, or that there is a unitary object, which grounds the multiplicity of things that we normally experience as separate and independent. Contrary to Quinean methodology, whose flat ontology indeed matched the immediate experience of things as separate and independent, monism openly contradicts experience and common-sense, claiming that individual things depend on a unitary, “higher” being

and are in some sense (only) “parts” of it. Nevertheless, monism could claim better agreement with more recent advancements in the sciences: for instance, the idea of an interconnected world seems to be more cogent with theories of quantum entanglement and with Big-Bang cosmology (Schaffer, 2010a and 2010b). On these grounds, especially priority monists and existence monists insist that the “scientificity” of philosophy should be defined through the agreement of philosophy with empirical evidence gained through the sciences, as divorced from the evidence provided by common sense experience. In this, contemporary monism challenges an assumption of the analytic tradition, which saw empirical inquiry and common-sense as intertwined (Schaffer, 2010a and 2010b). Yet, monists disagree on the extent up to which philosophy should detach from common-sense, on the one hand, and on what the goal of philosophy in revealing a truth or a reality “beyond” immediate and human experience should be, on the other. Existence monists insist that there is no possibility of making room for the common-sense illusion that there are individuated particulars as concrete objects and philosophy as ontology or metaphysics should work with an entirely different semantic than common-sense (Horgan and Potrč, 2009 and 2012). Priority monists, instead, insist that, although empirical evidence and philosophical inquiry indeed contradict some of our common-sense intuitions, it is still crucial that monism allows for the individuation of particulars in order to retain explanatory power and interest as a theory (Schaffer, 2018, 2010a and 2010b). Strict monists, instead, disagree with both priority and existence monists as to what the task of philosophy should be, as the uncovering of a metaphysical dimension “beyond” and “more fundamental” than the one uncovered by common-sense experience (Della Rocca, 2021, pp. 219-290). According to Della Rocca, philosophy should indeed have a rigorous methodology, which for him is not a specific semantic (as it is for existence monists) nor the application of a supposedly natural notion of priority as the best description of grounding (as it is for priority monists), but the application of the principle of sufficient reason (Della Rocca, 2013). Yet, Della Rocca claims that precisely the rigorous application of the principle of sufficient reason leads not only to monism, but to the undermining of the very same principle (Della Rocca, 2013, 2010 and 2021, pp. 219-225). Introducing a slightly revised version of Francis H. Bradley’s argument for monism, Della Rocca holds that applying the principle of sufficient reason to the very fact of the existence of things forces us to recognize that things are grounded in their relation of coexistence, and that, then, there is nothing

but this very relation of coexistence. Yet, if there is nothing but the relation and there strictly are no *relata*, it becomes impossible to even identify such relation (Della Rocca, 2013, pp. 8-10). Della Rocca uses this demonstration to hold the more general thesis that philosophical inquiry is based on the principle of sufficient reason, the most efficient tool to achieve intelligibility as the main goal of philosophy. The principle of sufficient reason uncovers that no distinction is truly intelligible nor, therefore, truly real. In debunking the consistency or intelligibility of all distinctions, though, the principle of sufficient reason also debunks itself, insofar as its application indeed requires at least the distinction between ground and grounded (Della Rocca, 2021, pp. 197-218). To Della Rocca, this result does not amount to a refutation of the principle of sufficient reason. To the contrary, the principle of sufficient reason is “a ladder which we climb than throw away” (Della Rocca, 2021, pp. xx. See also Della Rocca, 2021, pp. 219-225 and 2013, pp. 18-20): precisely because it is self-refuting, the principle of sufficient reason helps us “see the world aright”, allowing us to access a “higher” level of reality, “beyond” experience, common-sense, and even intelligibility. Only through continuously reminding ourselves of the self-refuting nature of our intelligibility, we can “peek” and “glimpse” towards this “higher” and “truer” form of being as a unitary, seamless Parmenidean whole (Della Rocca, 2021, pp. 218-225; 291-92). Philosophy then, has a double, and yet interconnected goal according to Della Rocca: showing the self-refuting character of the principle of sufficient reason and intelligibility, on the one hand, and revealing the “joy of self-undermining” entailed in this discovery. In revealing the inherent limitations of intelligibility and language, in fact, not only do we get access to a “truer” plane “beyond” them, but we also become free to see any form of expression or experience as a manifestation of this “higher”, “unitary” level which is (at the bottom of) everything. According to Della Rocca, then, philosophy is not as much about making everything intelligible, but rather about the quasi-mystical uncovering of what is revealed as standing beyond our limited attempts at making experience intelligible. Consequently, philosophy is made in two different forms: while in its “deconstructive” role of revealing the self-refuting character of explanation philosophy has the form of a rigorous, almost “scientific” inquiry through the principle of sufficient reason, in its “constructive” role of uncovering and inducing contemplation of this “higher”, unitary plane, philosophy should either consist of silence or fragments (Della Rocca, 2021, pp. 291-92). In this image, then, philosophy does retain some kind of “scientific” rigor, in the sense

that it is not a dimension of pure “literary” invention and cuts deeper into “mind-independent” reality than any possible declination of “contingency” in postmodernist sense. Yet, it is not an expansion of the results of science and aims at a “higher” or “deeper” plane, precisely for its “rationalist” and strictly apriori vocation. The characteristic component of experience, and namely finitude, is transcended: no individuation, no distinction is ultimately real from the standpoint of the kind of philosophy championed by Della Rocca.

Precisely for this reason, monism seems a relevant and urgent pursuit: being a reflection on the limitedness of our -finite, fallible, human- point of view, it is also a path of “liberation” from it. As such, philosophy fulfils an existential, “therapeutic” aim.

2. Severino’s metaphilosophy

We believe that Severino’s thought could provide crucial insights with respect to how to consider the above presented “metaphilosophies” of our time, and, vice versa, we believe that the encounter with the contemporary “metaphilosophical question” could help highlight some peculiarities of Severino’s thought and appreciate its relevance.

In order to bring our investigation forward, and to understand the relevance as well as the “untimeliness” of Severino’s thought, we now need to ask: what is philosophy for Emanuele Severino?

In order to answer this question, we will consider some texts, trying to encompass the whole arc of Severino’s thought.

2.1 Philosophy as the “inevitable future of humanity”

The first text we are going to consider is a short paper published in 1965 in “Giornale di metafisica” and then included in the collection of essays, *L'essenza del nichilismo* (*The Essence of Nihilism*), originally published in 1972 (Severino, 1995. An English translation of the main parts of the volume is found in Severino, 2016). This essay is especially important for our inquiry because it concisely presents a “metaphilosophical” scheme that is found as an underlying thread in all of Severino’s writings, distinguishing a kind of philosophy proper of the past, one proper of the present and one proper of “the future”.

This short paper, which is entitled “Philosophy in Today’s World” begins with this statement:

“Philosophy is the inevitable future of humanity” (Severino, 1995 p. 135. Our translation. All further quotes in this section are from this same work and our translation, unless specified otherwise)

In saying this, Severino is saying that philosophy is neither anything from the past nor anything from the present. This also means that what Severino is referring to as “philosophy” in this text is not the philosophy of tradition. According to Severino, what the tradition has called philosophy is – if anything – metaphysics, and its inevitable outcome in the present is technique, the structure that governs the contemporary world.

Hoping this would not be too simplistic of a formulation, one could say that metaphysics is, to Severino, a mode of thought that moves within an irreconcilable contradiction: on the one hand, it claims to be *episteme*, a term Severino understands as denoting a firm, stable and eternal knowledge, while on the other hand it moves from the conviction that being is something that can go out of and return to nothing, a conviction that invalidates the very possibility of its object being firm, stable and eternal as it would be required by *episteme*. Metaphysics, therefore, is the *desperate* search for the immutable that can save us from becoming, that can save us from the anguish that is connected to becoming, to the idea that what is will inevitably no longer be. Thus, metaphysics is the desperate search for a sense within a reality that, as dominated by becoming, is the very negation of such sense. In other words, metaphysics claims to grasp the immutable within becoming, thereby considering becoming something consistent enough to be its object of inquiry. Thus, the very immutable metaphysics seeks to grasp is indeed in contradiction with becoming, being’s coming from and returning to nothing, which metaphysics insists to assume as its object. In this sense, metaphysics is Western thought’s major and most radical error.

Precisely for this reason, Severino argues that technique is the coherent, necessary and inevitable outcome of metaphysics. Indeed, from a certain point of view, technique is consistent with the program of metaphysics. While metaphysics claims to think the immutable and at same time still holds fast onto the evidence of becoming, technique somehow solves this tension and contradiction by embracing becoming and by abandoning metaphysics’ commitment to thinking the immutable, or by giving up the

very idea that there is something eternal and immutable. This conviction, that there is nothing eternal and unchangeable, implies that technique can therefore dispose of everything, that it has no limits, that it is able to produce and modify everything, endlessly. The absence of limits of technique cannot even be mitigated or held in check by a discourse that relies on values – be they religious, political or generically cultural – because those values either belong to metaphysics and are therefore overcome and dismissed by technique as its radicalization, or stem from within technique and therefore cannot limit its relentless advancement.

If metaphysics is the philosophy of the past, and technique the philosophy of the present, what kind of philosophy does Severino have in mind as *the inevitable future of humanity*? Under a certain respect, just as technique is the coherent outcome of metaphysics, so philosophy as the *inevitable future of humanity* is the inevitable outcome of technique.

Indeed, Severino says:

“Techne can overcome every limit, but not that consisting in the doubt that everything one is or has can be swept away in an imminent catastrophe. Only the logic of truth – that is, only an absolute and incontrovertible answer to this question – can remove this doubt. And precisely for this reason philosophy, as the locus of truth, is the future of man, who, when he is on the verge of believing himself to be the master of being, will feel, with a strength never before experienced, the need to know the truth of his belief and therefore, first of all, the need to know what truth is” (149).

Philosophy is thus identified here with the locus of truth, that is, with the knowledge of absolute and incontrovertible truth, which is presented at the end of this short paper in these terms:

“To think seriously, that is above every aporia, the impossibility that being is not and to understand being no longer as the pure indeterminate or as a limited dimension, but as the concrete whole of things and events” (pp. 150-151).

Future philosophy, that is, the philosophy that no longer moves within the mistake or contradiction of metaphysics, and that arises from the extreme fulfillment of the dominance of technique, or from the urgency of mitigating the anxiety that “everything one is or has can be swept away in an imminent catastrophe” is therefore a kind of thought which goes back

to think the truth. In order to think the truth, philosophy has to place itself beyond the error of the West, of that line of thinking that attempted to think what is, according to Severino, structurally impossible to think, that is, that non-being is and being is not.

These remarks clarify what we called the “metaphilosophical scheme” underlying Severino’s works: the philosophy of the past is metaphysics as an error of the West; philosophy of the present is technique as a coherent outcome of metaphysics’s contradictions and therefore as the destiny of the West; philosophy as the “inevitable future of humanity” is the thought of truth as the only way out of nihilism which is the necessary result of metaphysics and technique as its radicalization.

Yet - and this is perhaps of some interest for the metaphilosophical perspective we are trying to advance – the distinction between metaphysics and philosophy, which was very sharp in the writings of the ‘60s, seems to be softened in his later writings.

2.2 Philosophy of the past?

The shift from the sharp distinction between metaphysics and philosophy, as forms of thinking respectively from of the past and the future, to a more nuanced use of the two terms, happens in parallel to a progressive modification in the use of the term “philosophy”. The latter goes from being associated to the dimension of future, as we have seen above, to being associated to the dimension of the past, previously identified as metaphysics. Evidence of this is found in a text appeared about 15 years after the essay mentioned above, and namely *Law and Chance* (Severino, 1979. Translated in English in Severino, 2023. All references in this section are to this text and our translation unless noted otherwise).

There we read:

« In the history of the West, the knowledge that has taken upon itself to exhibit *truth* is philosophy: that is, “science” — regarded not in the modern sense, but as *episteme*. According to what the Greek word itself suggests, this is the knowledge whose content is able *to stand*, firmly imposing itself *on* everything that would like to displace it and put it into question. This is the knowledge that, precisely by virtue of its standing, is truth» (Severino 1979, p.13).

This quotation allows us to say something more about Severino's concept of philosophy and perhaps also to highlight some ambiguities in it.

In *Law and Chance*, Severino holds that:

1. Philosophy is science, and as such has the task of showing the truth.
2. Philosophy is science, but in a different sense than that the term has in the modern understanding.
3. The difference between *episteme* (the kind of science philosophy is) and modern science is relative to their respective understanding of truth. Science as *episteme* is the knowledge of a truth that has the characteristics of immutability and incontrovertibility, whereas science in the modern understanding sees truth as always hypothetical, changeable and disputable.

The point on which Severino insists is that science in the modern sense rises from the ashes of science as *episteme*. More precisely, modern science rises from the ashes of *episteme's* understanding of truth as immutable, eternal and incontrovertible. In fact, the *episteme* of the West has had for Severino an antinomian character right from its first apparition. *Episteme* is the attempt to dominate the mutability of the world, or becoming, through reference to the immutable. *Episteme*, that is, assumes becoming as its starting point, thereby contradicting the very idea of immutability for which it strives. If the world was becoming, in fact, no *episteme* would be possible, because if everything becomes, nothing is stable (and, therefore, there is nothing immutable to be striving for as instead *episteme* does). In this sense, the emergence of modern science is the death of philosophy as *episteme*. This death is necessary, because it is a direct consequence of the contradiction that inhabits the very idea of *episteme*. When modern science arises, philosophy is dead, Severino says, because the dream of definitive and incontrovertible truth is dead, too. Philosophy is dead, that is, because through modern science it comes to the full realization of its necessary renunciation of truth, or, of the impossibility to know the truth. And that is why philosophy, in its inherent nihilistic implication, is the condition of possibility of technique and of the domination of science in the contemporary world.

Severino argues that whenever the dream of truth is over, i.e., when one no longer even thinks of truth as stability, immutability and incontrovertibility, truth necessarily becomes synonymous with dominance and power. In other words, if truth as immutability and incontrovertibility is denied,

then truth becomes whatever works, whatever is efficient, which is also what is imposed by force. It is on this basis that the dominance of modern science is affirmed. Thus, we read in *Law and Chance*:

“Modern science, *qua* theoretical and technical structure, is the highest form of power, and therefore of ‘truth’, that exists today on earth.” (Severino 1979, p.14)

The modern world is the world in which truth is translated into the form of the efficient and the functional. And this does not happen, says Severino, only within the world of science. In the contemporary world, the truth that is proper of modern science becomes the model of truth in all spheres of human activity and discourse. The very organization of contemporary society is governed by this idea of truth. What is considered “right” or “good”, on a social and political level, is the same as what is true in the sense of modern science: it is what works, what is exploitable, what is effective and efficient. To make a concrete example: from Severino’s point of view, one could say that what is mostly presented today as the crisis of politics, that is, its inability to govern economic and social processes, is not rooted in a lack of willingness or ability on the side of politics, but rather it is an embodiment of the necessary and inevitable outcome of Western thought, i.e. of an understanding of truth that no longer exists as truth (immutable and incontrovertible), but only as domination. Necessarily, this understanding of truth becomes power also in the form of technical administration.

Further, Severino notes that modern science, in exchanging incontrovertible truth for hypothetical prediction, is always open to the risk of failure (Severino 1979, p. 29). Hence, its understanding of truth as hypothetical, stochastic and controvertible is the form of domination most adequate to the Greek sense of becoming, to the idea that being can come out of and return to nothing (p. 30). Modern science is the most rigorous form of rational understanding of reality as it has been thought by the West, since it explicitly recognizes the impossibility of any immutability and incontrovertibility. It is the most adequate form of reason that can arise from faith in becoming, as it recognizes the impossibility of the immutable, or the impossibility of truth, turning truth into a hypothesis, or something essentially and structurally questionable. Modern science is the most rigorous and coherent form of rationality in the West because it “controls, dominates and grounds the abyss of becoming” (p. 15).

In considering all the previous remarks from a metaphilosophical point of view, one could detect a certain ambiguity permeating Severino's concept of philosophy.

On the one hand, philosophy is identified with metaphysics, or with the ambition to know an immutable truth within a horizon that denies it, that is within the horizon of becoming. In this sense, philosophy is dead because, as technique reveals, it entails an insurmountable contradiction.

On the other hand, however, philosophy is not dead, since the necessity of knowing the immutable is still recognized by Severino as the "inevitable future of humanity".

This sort of ambiguity is further emphasized in Severino's great book on Nietzsche (Severino, 1999). There Severino argues that Nietzsche, together with Leopardi and Gentile, represents the peak of the Western philosophical tradition, or the point at which this tradition reaches its own limit and is consequently forced to look beyond itself.

The book begins with the following statement:

«In its *essence*, contemporary philosophy is the *inevitable* destruction of the philosophical tradition and of the entire tradition of the West» (Severino, 1999, p. 15. Our translation)

In a somehow Wittgensteinian fashion, Severino seems to hold here that the task of contemporary philosophy is to destroy philosophy itself.

Contemporary philosophy, says Severino, inevitably destroys the Western tradition because it attempts to get out of its folly, which consists, as we have seen, in the belief in becoming, and in the possibility of truth within a horizon which is the very negation of the stability which is constitutive of truth itself. To overcome this folly, contemporary philosophy renounces to *episteme*, to the very possibility of a stable and eternal truth, or, in Severino's eyes, to truth as such. In the renunciation of truth, contemporary philosophy finally conforms to the Greek sense of being as becoming and ends up destroying itself.

2.3 Philosophy as the future?

Based on our survey of Severino's work, we can now isolate three different meanings of philosophy:

1. Philosophy as Metaphysics: Philosophy as the epistemic claim to expound an eternal and incontrovertible truth within a horizon that in fact makes it impossible to think of an eternal and incontrovertible truth in rigorous terms, i.e., within an horizon assuming the consistency of becoming.
2. Contemporary Philosophy: Philosophy as criticism of metaphysics' claim for an immutable truth, and as demonstration of the impossibility of truth within the conception of being as becoming.
3. Future Philosophy: Philosophy as the discourse of truth.

We can conclude that Severino's answer to the "metaphilosophical problem" is that philosophy should abandon both its traditional form as metaphysics, or as search for eternity within becoming, and its contemporary form as an expression of technique, as a form of denial of the possibility for truth and as a celebration of endless, unstoppable becoming. Instead, philosophy should finally become philosophy as "the inevitable future of humanity". This metaphilosophical requirement takes two different shapes. On the one hand, "new" or "future" philosophy should entail a critique of past understandings of philosophical inquiry as metaphysics or technique. On the other, the philosophy of the future should take a positive form beyond these very understandings that it aims to overcome. Yet, it is hard to find a clear description of the latter positive dimension in Severino's works. In speaking of philosophy as "the inevitable future of humanity", Severino offers a new, alternative vision of philosophical practice. Such vision, Severino says, does not prescribe anything "but glimpses the inevitable path that the world actually travels below the 'Paths of Night' along which the will to power believes it is pushing it" (Severino, 1995, p. 64). Philosophy as "the inevitable future of humanity", then, cannot be positively articulated; it is excluded by its very nature that we could prescribe what form and methodology characterize this form of inquiry. The only way it can be grasped is through its critical dimension. According to Severino, in fact, philosophy as such can only be witnessed, and namely through the refusal of alienation and violence. These are negative connotations. Despite being somewhat lacking – and maybe necessarily so – in the positive articulation of what form philosophy should have as "the inevitable future of humanity", Severino seem very clear in what not only its object of inquiry but also its aim should be. Precisely from the latter, philosophy gains its legitimation as meaningful enterprise for the collective

and as science, although this entails a revision of what modernity calls science and a return to the more traditional understanding of the term as *episteme*. As amply demonstrated above, the philosophy of the future should have truth as the immutable and eternal as its object. In other words, philosophy as the “inevitable future of humanity” is an inquiry into, or at least a contemplation of the inevitable truth of the eternity of being, of being’s impossibility to not be, to start and cease to be, to become. This contemplation serves philosophy’s aim and is precisely what makes it a meaningful, relevant pursuit for humanity. Being a revelation of this truth, philosophy indeed fulfils its aspiration to be ‘salvific’. As Severino says, this aim has characterized the philosophy and human expression in the whole course of the Western tradition: myth, metaphysics, philosophy, technique and philosophy as the “inevitable future of humanity” are all attempts at salvation from death. They all share the common aspiration to give meaning to the experience of pain and death and to exorcise the fear of death. According to Severino, myth and the philosophy of the tradition indeed fail in this task because they have been immersed in error, believing in becoming, thinking that being is not and non-being is, and failing to see the eternity of every being. Only philosophy as the way of truth, or the way that appreciates the eternity of being, is the one that can save humanity from the anguish of death.

3. Severino and the “metaphilosophical question”

We have left to consider how Severino’s conception of philosophy can help respond to today’s “metaphilosophical question”. In order to do this, we will consider some possible interactions between Severino’s answer and the other contemporary metaphilosophical suggestions presented in section 1.

3.1 The untimeliness of Severino’s thought

Under several respects, Severino’s reply to the “metaphilosophical question” is untimely in the positive and Nietzschean sense highlighted in the introduction. Indeed, Severino’s reflections can help identify aspects that, albeit proudly championed by contemporary metaphilosophical understandings, are problematic. Namely, Severino offers a radical and convincing critique of both the understanding of philosophy as having to conform

to the standard of (modern) science, which characterized analytic philosophy, and the understanding of philosophy as expression of (human) contingency, offered by postmodernism.

Concerning the contemporary attempt at making philosophy “scientific” which characterizes analytic philosophy and mainstream analytic metaphysics, Severino helps to see how the necessity to conform to the methodology and rigor identified with science is not an absolute necessity, because the truth of science is not the only possible truth. Further, partially in line with contemporary monists, Severino insists that conforming to the truth of science, both under a methodological and a substantial perspective, leads philosophy to lose its own identity and scope, which was more clearly stated in the tradition: philosophy is indeed about uncovering some “mind-independent” truth and reality, but this truth is not to be found in a description and systematization of our experience, as an experience of becoming and finitude. Rather, precisely the questions that contemporary mainstream analytic metaphysics would discard as “linguistic nonsense”, are those defining philosophy, because they ask about a dimension laying “beyond” experience and finitude and which, in grounding finitude, it could also redeem it and save it from itself.

Concerning the metaphilosophical understanding offered by postmodernism, Severino’s thought allows us to recognize this attempt as an expression of technique, and to criticize it as such. More precisely, Severino helps us to see the delusion of salvation of which postmodernist thought has fallen victim: just like technique, postmodernist philosophy tries to find salvation in the very rejection of the possibility of eternal, universal truth and embraces the endless repetition of becoming. Everything is nothing but contingency, and this bittersweet exaltation of finitude and mortality becomes a promise of salvation in itself: since there is no higher meaning, within becoming and finitude we can at least enjoy the freedom of free invention and expression. Recognizing this as an expression of technique, Severino helps us to see how the freedom promised by postmodernism remains abstract. On the existential plane, it does not truly satisfy the need for salvation that gave rise to the need for philosophy. On the political plane, the postmodernist understanding of truth as “whatever works” serves the worse kind of domination and power, and it therefore does not yield any true revolution nor liberation.

3.2 The timeliness of Severino's thought

On the other hand, confronting Severino's work with contemporary answers to the "metaphysical question" also serves to raise some concerns with respect to Severino's own answer to it. Indeed, this comparison reveals that Severino's understanding of philosophy might have more in common with contemporary metaphilosophies than Severino himself would like to admit. Just like Rorty and Della Rocca, Severino has the problem of providing a positive articulation of the philosophy of the future, or of the kind of philosophy that is the only true philosophy and the only true answer to the need for salvation from finitude and mortality. For all three the characterization of this new or future philosophy remains played in the negative, that is, only through a definition of what future philosophy is not: for Rorty, "future" philosophy is philosophy liberated from the illusion of capital-T truth; for Della Rocca, "future" philosophy is philosophy liberated from the illusion of intelligibility and explanation; for Severino, "future" philosophy is philosophy liberated from the folly of the West or the illusion of the consistency of becoming. Being always determined with retrospective reference to the mistake from which it had liberated itself, the philosophy of the future seems on these accounts to be stuck in the past, or to at least always have a foot in it (a brilliant version of this criticism with respect to postmodernism is found in Maker, 1994, pp. 179-198).

The specific way in which Severino frames the difference between past and present philosophy, though, helps raise a specific metaphilosophical question relevant not only for Severino's work, but also for the contemporary debate on analytic metaphysics and monism. According to Severino, philosophy was born as an attempt to dominate becoming through the immutable, and precisely from the experience of becoming came the fear of death philosophy was born to mend. But if we overcome faith in becoming, have we also overcome the need for philosophy? Is the philosophy of the future the end of philosophy in the achievement of peace, in the overcoming of the fear of death, once and for all?

These questions, nevertheless, are crucial to understand what the legitimate task of philosophy should be today: should philosophy work towards its own demise and "end itself" in revealing the path to an eternal salvation? Is it a "ladder" we should climb and throw away as fast as possible? Or could there be more substance to philosophical inquiry? Could there be a philosophy not only *of* the future, but *in* the future?

3.3 What future for philosophy (or what philosophy for the future)?

To try and reply to these questions and as a way of conclusion to this essay, we would like to consider some reflections from Franz Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption* in order to better understand what the "salvation" that Severino associated with the most characteristic task of philosophy could amount to. Much alike Severino, Rosenzweig held that the entire Western philosophical tradition is a deceptive attempt to heal and soothe the deepest wound that afflicts humans, namely the awareness of their being destined to death.

"From death, it is from the fear of death that all cognition of the All begins. Philosophy has the audacity to cast off the fear of the earthly, to remove from death its poisonous sting, from Hades his pestilential breath." (Rosenzweig, 2005, p. 9. All references in this section to this text unless otherwise noted)

According to Rosenzweig, philosophy deludes mortals into thinking it can cure them of their own mortality. Despite all its attempts, though, philosophy is ineffective in the face of the individual's fear of death:

"That the fear of death knows nothing of such a separation in body and soul, that it yells I, I, I and wants to hear nothing about a deflection of the fear onto a mere "body"—matters little to philosophy."

[...]

"For man does not at all want to escape from some chain; he wants to stay, he wants—to live." (p. 9)

According to Rosenzweig, philosophy has been deceptive and vacuous in its attempt to take the weight of death away from the mortal, because it sought to "think away" finitude, claiming that it is eludible as opposed to some non-finite, non-becoming "beyond". And yet, it is precisely the very finitude that philosophy tried to exorcise and suppress, that which humans asked to be made meaningful. Thus, one could say that, if philosophy wants to be "salvific" in the sense of being able to address and ease the mortals' fear of death, it needs to focus on the very experience of finitude that triggers and substantiates this fear, instead of dismissing and denying its consistency. Under this respect, Severino's thought fares just as badly as the philosophy of the tradition. Severino's philosophy as a path of truth, as the

path of the eternity of being, leaves no room for the finite, for the experience that the finite makes of itself as finite. Precisely for this reason, perhaps, he had a hard time providing a positive description of philosophy as the “inevitable future of humanity”: without any finitude to account for anymore, there might not be any possibility for philosophy – or humanity, for that matter – either. This is a problem for Della Rocca and existence monists, too (Schaffer, 2018). The rigor of Severino’s metaphilosophical reflections helps us see that there is no easy way to make philosophy a philosophy of finitude, showing that postmodernist attempts to concentrate on the experience of finitude fail in giving it true, satisfying and “salvific” meaning, and why the path of a *pensiero debole* is therefore not the one to follow. Yet, much in line with the latest debates within contemporary monism, the confrontation with Severino’s thought might show us that precisely the question of how to make sense and truly account of finitude as finitude, without diluting it in a seamless absolute nor exalting it as something independent and standing in itself, is the true question of a philosophy *of* the future and *in* the future. In other words, philosophy should not claim to save the finite from itself, but rather attempt to recognize it for what it is; that is, to recognize that finitude is not what *prevents* existence from being truly and authentically itself, but rather what allows existence to truly and authentically be what it is. Precisely through this inquiry, philosophy would be able to open a horizon of “salvation” in which humans are not “dissolved” as finite, little things, but rather are called to live up to the awareness of being finite and confirmed and reassured in their existence by it. Precisely through the awareness of being finite, in fact, a dimension of responsibility in the most authentic and radical sense of the term is awakened: in knowing that we are finite, we are in the position to take charge of who we are, being and living the finitude that we are to the fullest.

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Severino. Eternity of Being and Finite

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First of all must be recognized the speculative force of Severino's proposal of a monistic and eternal being, concept that stands out as a successful attempt to take leave of historicism and idealism. The finite appearing of appearance is effectively rooted in the immutable eternity of being. The question that arises is nonetheless, in my opinion, whether by this one has given adequate reason for the finite as such, in its finiteness and difference and not only in its belonging to the immutable.

Keywords:

Beyond Idealism and Metaphysic, Eternity of Being, Appearing of Finite, Interpretation

1.

First of all I would like to thank you for this invitation. It is a pleasure for me to be here for the second time and to have the opportunity to speak again about an Italian philosopher.

This invitation is also a special honour for me, because, as I must confess, I am not an expert on Severino's philosophy, but only a reader of his works. About ten years ago, and this is perhaps at the origin of the invitation, I had called Severino for a five-days seminar of the *Scuola di alta formazione filosofica*, and I had edited his lectures in a book, which was intended to be a self-presentation of his thought. And our seminar is precisely an introduction to Severino's philosophy, to a philosophy, that is well known in Italy, but is nevertheless quite unknown abroad.

I will divide my intervention into three parts. In the first one I will try to place Severino, especially in the years of his intellectual formation, in the Italian cultural or philosophical atmosphere of that time, in the second one I will dwell on some important turning points of his thought for me and then, in the third one, I will conclude with some short notes related to my personal way of understanding philosophy and therefore to the salient differences that distinguish me from Severino.

In order to introduce Severino's thought It is perhaps useful trying to describe the situation of Italian philosophy immediately after the end of the Second World War. It was a time of renewal after decades in which historicism and idealism (first of all Gentile's philosophy) have been, almost officially, also for their support to fascism, dominant. There was no lack of alternative voices, but they had been largely overwhelmed by the official academic culture of an idealistic stamp, which even in the non-politically aligned authors contained strong traces of historicism. Even an author like Gramsci, although in his alternative philosophy, could not avoid a close confrontation with the dominant historicism. And also at the Catholic University of Milan, in which the official philosophy was neothomism,

could you notice how important idealism was. The issue was in fact to reconcile Christian philosophy and modernity (i.e. historicism and idealism) without falling in the immanentism of Modernism. In Catholic circles, the greatest danger was identified with the application of the principle of immanence to the religious and theological terrain, while the purely idealistic philosophies of a secular matrix, precisely because of their reluctance to engage directly with the religious terrain, were taken as testimony to the spirit of the times, susceptible nevertheless to corrections and additions. After the war Gustavo Bontadini, who was the great maestro of Severino, tried for example a rigorous metaphysical path, in which philosophical task was a rational knowledge of being, supported by the principle of non-contradiction (or law of contradiction). A modern neo-Thomism is recognisable by its ability to integrate the demands of modernity into a more comprehensive metaphysical horizon, so thought Bontadini and with him most of the neo-thomist philosophers.

Severino grew up at this school and was early recognized as the best pupil of Bontadini. But in 1970 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith ruled that Severino's philosophical ideas were not compatible with Christianity as the basis of Severino's belief in «the eternity of all being» eliminates the possibility of a Creator God.

This short and schematic reconstruction deserves some comments. First of all we must recognize that the intention of a new confrontation with contemporary philosophy, beyond idealism and historicism could be said for the entire philosophy of the second post-war period. Even the years between the two wars, as we have just said, had already known a conspicuous series of alternatives to neo-idealism, but, also for political reasons, neo-idealism had turned out to be dominant and had represented a sort of lid on a pot that was boiling.

We can mention between the Catholics Augusto Guzzo, who developed an original form of Christian idealism, inspired to Augustin, or Carlo Mazzantini, who supported a form of metaphysical humanism in the tradition of a continuity between Greece and Christianity (and Del Noce was a pupil of Mazzantini), or Michele Federico Sciacca, with his spiritualistic metaphysic of integrality, or the personalism of Luigi Stefanini or the Thomism of Amato Masnovo. And between the philosophers, whose orientation was not a Christian one, you can remember the names of Piero Martinetti, Nicola Abbagnano, Luigi Bobbio, Antonio Banfi, Enzo Paci. As you see, between the two world wars there have been a lot of philosophers – most of them had an important role after the end of Second world

war too – who professed a philosophy different from idealism. Never the less, they remained for a long time minority. Only after the war there could be a decisive turning point and certainly Severino belongs in this sense entirely to the renewal of Italian philosophy (which thus experienced a phenomenological, hermeneutic, spiritualistic, metaphysical, neo-Marxist flowering and also a new interest for the human sciences). One could not understand the post-war turnaround, which suddenly erased dependence on idealism, if not for the fact that it made use of strands that had already been in operation, albeit under the surface. It takes place like the awakening from a long sleep and sometimes preserves, without consciousness, traces of dreams already dreamt.

The second observation is that, in this climate, Severino, in a certain sense continuing an element of his own school of origin, became the exponent of a radical metaphysical return to classicism. The contemporary philosophy that was closest to him, from Heidegger to Carnap, is taken as a springboard for a return to the origin, for a radicalism that uses the principle of Bontadini's incontrovertibility as a sword that cuts the Gordian knot of ambiguities and half-reforms of post-war philosophy and of the whole history of philosophy. Here, too, we could observe that the operation initiated by Severino takes to its extreme consequences an orientation that was present in the school of Milan, that of considering the history of philosophy as a substantially unitary whole, even in the variety and even in the opposition of the individual philosophies, and of seeing in Aristotelianism the foundation of a perennial metaphysics. Severino maintains the idea of a unity of philosophy, but turns it upside down in the direction of a madness that ultimately consigns being to appearance.

In presenting his book I used the image of the nonexistent knight (*Il cavaliere inesistente*) of Italo Calvino's memory, Agilulfo, to outline what seems to me a salient feature of his philosophy, which is precisely, as in the figure of Agilulfo, perfection. Not mixing with the inaccuracies and vulgarities of the body and life (which are satirical portrayed in his servant Gurdulù), he is, even in battle, unattainable in his perfection. We can surely remember the first pages of this roman, when Charles the Great, while reviewing his troops, is interdicted in front of this enigmatic figure, which arouses admiration, astonishes and has no equal. Everything in him runs to perfection. Severino's thought is a sort of inexorable Occam's razor that goes back to the beginnings of western philosophy, unmasking its infidelities and restores being in its perfection. (In his eyes, I fear, we are all educated Gurdulù).

In this sense, however, Severino is suddenly devoid of interlocutors and, despite his many students, without a possible prosecution. The almost religious qualification of Maestro, somebody one must listen to, is well suited to him (and you can find sometimes, mixed with the rigor and dryness of logical argumentation, also vaguely oracular expressions). Sure, a discussion with him is possible, it is also suited, but it is not a dialogue. Venerable and terrible as Parmenides, even in the exquisite trait of his distinguished human kindness, he is far from the midwifery of Socrates (an aristocratic trait, tempered in him by courtesy, that remains in his scholars, as you can see for example with Cacciari).

2.

But let us now venture into some of the themes of his philosophy that seem most stimulating to me.

Precisely because we are now using English, the dominant language of an analytical philosophy that conceives philosophizing as writing on a blackboard that contains only the words that are written on it, it is for me interesting to underline, in opposition to this orientation, the intense relationship that Severino has with the history of philosophy. In him there is not only a privileged relationship with the greats of classicism (Parmenides and Aristotle *in primis*) but an incessant dialogue with subsequent developments, from Thomas to Descartes, up to Leopardi, Gentile, Husserl and Heidegger and even the neo-positivism. In the whole development of philosophy you can read the history of the West. As he writes: «The history of the West is a metaphysical experiment» (*The essence of Nihilism*, p. 149). Which one? «The assenting to the non-being of being» (ib. 207). But «in affirming that being is not – in assenting to the not-being of being – metaphysics affirms that the not-Nothing is nothing» (ib. 207) and has needed therefore, in its seeking for reasons, a privileged (divine) being, exempt from birth and death, something perfect and eternal.

In great parallelism to this thought philosophy has invented the notion of truth as something hitherto unheard of, as something that stands above all variations and mutability. A great thought that cannot simply be dismissed, but which is nevertheless, similarly to God, destined to die. And it is destined to do so on the basis of an internal logic, whereby truth, which is what is, is configured as power and therefore also at the same time as prediction and destruction. Truth, in short, by defining being, also in-

roduces non-being, becoming, and indeed makes this an entity: to use Severino's expression, it gives rise to an entification of nothingness. This is the origin of the oppositions that have lacerated philosophy over the centuries, the oppositions between being and nothingness, between being and becoming, and the oscillation between one and the other, already in Parmenides, between day and night, being and nothingness. Nothingness thus constantly accompanies the history of being. As he writes (and we are compelled to think also to his Maestro, Bontadini): «In this history, the mammoth attempt to construct an incontrovertible and infallible knowing is, in its hidden essence, the very attempt to posit, incontrovertibly and infallibly, the nothingness of being» (ib. 295).

One can glimpse in Severino's entire procedure a subterranean duplicity through which he, on the one hand, describes the fatal vicissitude of a philosophy that forgets being and, on the other, continues to hold on to the deepest, though forgotten, matrix of thought. Metaphysics is in fact in its origin the thought of the whole - and to this it is always necessary to refer again - even if then metaphysics has become an alienation absenting to the not being of being (s. 207). Metaphysics is that alienation which makes man become a mortal (s. 235), metaphysics is forgetting that immediate certainty that is contained in the affirmation that being is.

The opposition of being and nothingness, which runs through history and which Plato believed he could resolve in terms of otherness and diversity, is a poison from whose destructive power one can only escape by recognizing that everything is, that also nothingness is, and that calling it nothing is a blunt weapon, which ends up turning against those who use it. This is not the way to get to the bottom of what appears and disappears, because the logically inevitable consequence is that being itself, which is no longer the whole and can transform itself into something else, becomes nothing, as the «fatal» (Severino's word, s. ib. 40) Platonic solution has shown us.

How to escape from this madness, from this will to become something else what is, that is to make it become nothing? By evading that interpretation that describes the phenomenological evidence of the occurrence of phenomena in terms of becoming. Certainly, phenomena enter and leave the perception of the consciousness of us mortals. And this is what Severino calls phenomenological evidence. But calling it becoming is a (false) interpretation, which assumes that the appearance of appearance is a transition from being to non-being. We are not dealing with becoming but with appearing, suggests Severino. «Appearing is not appearance, appearances

too, like realities, appear» (ib. 170). And the appearance of appearing appears and disappears, as, we might say, the light of a flashing light appears and disappears alternately, without therefore becoming nothing or coming to be something again.

Severino's entire discourse, with a logical move that is both elegant and stringent, plunges the history of the West into nothingness and reads it as a succession of interpretations – i.e. expressions of the will to power - that impose a meaning on that changing vicissitude of experience that they themselves have previously consigned to the senselessness (madness) of becoming.

We can try to say otherwise: Parmenides has the greatness of having thought of being (and for this we must return to Parmenides) but, like a cracked apple, has also placed next to being the non-being of doxa. He has made the mistake of thinking of being as something without determinations and not as the whole of the differences where even the nothing, not abstractly entified, manifests a positivity because it belongs to the whole, where the becoming turns out to be apparition of the immutable.

In this way, however, Parmenides admitted the existence of a being that is not, a pure appearance. This phantom of nothingness, recluse in the corner of appearance, however, threatens the incontrovertible consistency of being, that is, the immediate perception that being is and the equally immediate perception that non-being is not because of the immediate incontrovertible contradiction on the basis of which it is assumed. Severino is a tenacious opponent of mediations! A knot is cut, not untied, because in this way it becomes more and more tangled. And as he notes, a dialectical thinking is nothing else than the pure expression of becoming. Moreover, it gives rise to the desire, an act of the will and not of reason, to explain how non-being can come from being (exemplary in this sense is the Jewish-Christian idea of creation). An extreme and unsuccessful attempt to remove the contradiction that has been introduced.

The history of the West is then a history of nihilism: a nihilism first introduced and then removed by a philosophizing that departs from myth, but does not reach Philosophy, that necessary and joyful thinking that is not produced by any particular philosopher, but which manifests itself to those who do not make the mistake of evading it. You can hear the voice of Spinoza, even if Severino judges not radical enough the great Jewish Philosopher (Spinoza undertakes to demonstrate the existence of a Being that necessarily exists: an erroneous attempt, because, as we know, that being is, is an immediate evidence, s. 193).

3.

We find ourselves in the presence of a fascinating philosophical alternative. It points to a 'path of the day' in which, even in the disappearance of death, a Joy shines forth. It is a monistic vision, at times also approached to Spinoza (although Severino, as we have just seen, denies such a reference), which must, however, admit an immanent duality within itself. Being is eternal, but its appearing (which is not appearance) appears and disappears. Appearance is certainly saved in the eternity of being, but neither the appearance nor the disappearance of that appearance is saved.

We, philosophers of chiaroscuro, marked by hermeneutics (and among Severino's pupils many, I remember one for all, Mario Ruggenini, have taken this road, while others, like Carmelo Vigna, have found refuge in a renewed minimal metaphysics) would like, in one sense, less and, in another sense, more than Severino. We want less, because we do not move from the idea of an incontrovertible truth and we believe even less that it is the logical stringency that ensures it. We think that the interpretation, as interpretation of the truth, is not a product of will, an expression of the will to power, but an act of freedom that at the same time finds and invents the right way to tell the truth, without therefore claiming a possess of it. Truth is a being which is existing only in interpretation and interpretation is existing only in the claim to tap in the being of truth.

But we want even more, because we would like not only to inscribe what is manifested in the eternal and immutable truth of being that is, we would like to understand not only the belonging of appearance to being, but also to grasp what the appearing of appearance consists of, what its sense and meaning is, or in other words we should like to understand the finite in its finiteness and not only in its belonging to the immutable. We are looking for meaning and consistency of difference and we are not content to take note of the deferral of the difference from an eternal, which is always. And in doing this, time - a great theme that Severino systematically treats with suspicion, not to say that he rejects - seems to me an inescapable issue, in its tense unfolding of a relationship between finite and infinite.

Luca Illetterati has provided us with an insightful reconstruction of Severino's thought which - and it is interesting to underline this - finally culminates in an evaluation that, probably coming from other philosophical matrices, converges with what I have tried to suggest. But before focusing on these conclusions, I would like to underline the two central aspects of his exposition: the notions of meta-philosophy and truth. I do this

starting from my hermeneutic perspective (the Turin school of Pareyson), a perspective that has been trivialized by Vattimo in the form of debolism, but which is on the contrary an attempt to get to the bottom of the task of philosophy.

Meta-philosophy – he suggests – means that philosophy is not a method, it is not the application of a more or less rational procedure to an object, but it is a form of knowledge that is questioned and reconfigured in the very act of confronting its object. The many philosophies are the search for the most appropriate way to come to terms with this question.

Truth, therefore, – can neither – Illetterati underlines – be trivialized, reduced, dismissed, nor stiffened in a form that continues to think of truth as a possession that is removed from all consummation: a kind of insured real estate investment. Truth is only given in the form of interpretation. However, we must also say that interpretation does not occur where there is a renunciation of stating a proposition as capable of telling the truth.

Now here comes the final point that shows my convergence with Illetterati, but also the debt we owe to Severino. Severino, in fact, has held high the question of truth and in doing so has overshadowed the finiteness of the finite. We, on the other hand, seem to agree on the urgency of talking about this finiteness. Perhaps, but it is more a question than an observation, what we differ on is that in thinking about this finite. Illetterati accentuates the theme of death, but for me, in its dramatic nature, death cannot be elevated to a foundation, but on the contrary, it is a barrier, an obstacle, something against which we collide. Finiteness cannot be thought of with a sleight of hand that transforms this barrier (objective) into a limit (still controlled) by the finite. Death must be thought of starting from life and not vice versa. But then the finite must also be thought of in its relationship, tension with the non-finite and perhaps metaphysically and religiously, in its tension with the infinite.

Exactly this form of tense relation is the reason of my interest for the theme of time. Time has an unstable character: it is always and never. If we use Severino's vocabulary, time is an appearing which is not only appearance, because it is the form in which we have experience of being. Time and being stay in a relationship, that I found symbolized in the biblical account of Jacob's struggle with the Angel. This tense relationship is, for us finite beings, the only way to conceive the relation between finite and infinite.

In my notion of being I am certainly distant from Severino, but the distance often allows to perceive even better the greatness of another thought

and provokes at the same time the comparison and the challenge of a discussion. We can any more discuss with Severino, so we have a double task: let his writings speak with respect and attention and make them part of our discourse, as a provocation and testimony of one who has sought the path of the day.

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Beyond Alienation: Severino's Removal of Pathological Contradiction

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Based on a significant reflection by Emanuele Severino on contemporary philosophy (i.e. Severino, 1996), this article explores the concept of "alienation" and its evolution from Hegelian theory to psychology/psychiatry and social science studies. The purpose of this article is to highlight the continuity between certain assumptions of Severino's original framework and the comprehensibility of diagnostic aspects inherent to the state of alienation, particularly in cases of schizophrenic spectrum disorders. Severino was a philosopher who presented the most radical understanding of alienation, in line with the concept of nihilism and involving the identification of "being" in relation to its absolute other – that is, "nothingness". The fundamental aim of this manuscript is to proceed along a path of investigation that considers Severino's thought as the foundation of the epistemology of a new science: one that does not start from the fideistic assumption of the oscillation between nothing and being.

Keywords:

Alienation, Nihilism, Originary Structure of Truth, Contradiction, Dysfunctional Communication, Schizophrenic Spectrum Disorders

Beyond alienation: Severino's removal of pathological contradiction

The concept of alienation underwent a significant decline following the end of the 20th century, until its revival in the context of studies on the centrality of Karl Marx's theories, which cannot be considered outdated because of and despite the Soviet totalitarianism. Rahel Jaeggi's (2014) contribution is of particular importance in this context. She sought to re-activate the discussion around the Hegelian–Marxian key concepts to understand the reasons for the contemporary era's malaise and inability to respond in a nonoppressive manner to the needs of humanity. Her timely phenomenological analysis rekindled interest in this concept but did not resolve the fundamental problem inherent to the reasons why alienation risks to be an obsolete concept. The difficulty consists in the fact that philosophical, epistemological and psychological reflections seem not to be able to exhaustively explain why alienation is an error that can be avoided and corrected. In this article, a proposal for a resolution is presented based on the fundamental contributions of Emanuele Severino.

The concept of “alienation”, a term that comes from the Latin word “alienus”, meaning “other”, can be found in the philosophical, sociopolitical and psychological/psychiatric fields; it indicates the estrangement of someone from something or a condition of division of the subject from him/herself. It substantially indicates the separation of subjects and objects that belong together. At its root, this idea refers to a range of cultural, social and/or psychological pathologies involving a self (that can be a person but not necessarily) and an other. Since the separation between a subject and object does not necessarily appear problematic, all related theories focus on making sense of such an estrangement and provide reasons for why this issue is of particular importance, why the separation is challenging, why such a relationship should not be severed and why a reintegration of the divided parts is required. The fields of philosophy, political sciences

and psychology/psychiatry consist of different explanations for all these questions, but their intertwined lines of reasoning fundamentally try to intercept the incongruence of separation and determine the difficulties underlying connectedness.

According to Severino (1982/2015), the nihilism that characterizes the entirety of Western thought and its prephilosophical and mythological precursors forms the essence of the very meaning of alienation. From his point of view, all the explanations of this concept in various fields of knowledge are basically identical and undermined by a pervasive error: nihilism. In the present article, some cornerstones that characterize the discussion on alienation are introduced and connected with the constituent elements of Severino's originary structure of truth (OST). In particular, they are developed based on considerations of the relationship between psychology and psychiatry, along with the sociopolitical analysis that Severino offered in his work *La filosofia dai Greci al nostro tempo: La filosofia contemporanea [Philosophy from the Greeks to our time: Contemporary Philosophy]* (Severino, 1996). In the chapter "Scienze umane e decline dell'episteme", paragraph "Psichiatria e psicologia" [Psychiatry and psychology], the philosopher has stated the following:

Contemporary psychiatry and psychology [...] accentuate their [...] relationship with philosophy and the human sciences. And this is a phenomenon that can also be seen [...] in all areas of modern science [...]. Marxism, phenomenology and existentialism determine to a considerable extent a large part of contemporary psychiatry and psychology. It is an influence that explains the progressive affirmation of the various forms of 'social psychology': for example [...] the progressive replacement of the medical model, which aims to cure illness by acting on the individual, with the 'sociological model' of illness, which aims to establish the extent to which society or the specific social environment in which the individual lives is responsible for his pathological state. In this perspective, the conviction takes hold that the real sick person is not the individual, but the society in which he or she lives, and that the disease of society is capitalist alienation (R. Laing, D. Cooper, F. Basaglia). Thus a true anti-psychiatric attitude takes hold within psychiatric-psychological research, which rejects any technical-therapeutic intervention of the psychiatrist on the patient, based on the conviction that true therapy can only have a political-philosophical meaning, i.e. it is therapy that transforms society (and thus transforms

that same psychiatric therapy that in a more or less conscious way is the mouthpiece of social interests and privileges. (Severino, 1996, pp. 442-3).

Assuming that the psychological and social sciences are increasingly intertwined with and find their critical foundation in philosophy, the aim of the present article is to show the inescapable empirical and heuristic value of Severino's thought in explaining psychological and sociopolitical phenomena, even with respect to the most basic categories of thought concerning alienation. The final objective is to add to previous studies that recognized Severino's thoughts as providing a potential foundation for a new scientific sociopsychological epistemology aimed at liberating people from the anguish of alienation (Testoni, 2019; Testoni et al., 2017; Testoni et al., 2015; Testoni, 2021).

Alienation of philosophy and sociopolitical thought

The philosophical area focusing on alienation pertains especially to German idealism and the left-Hegelian movement. Within the idealistic system of thought, alienation is an event involved in the development of the spirit that divides and objectifies itself, finally returning to itself in a synthesis. This was particularly the perspective put forward by Georg W. F. Hegel (1807), from whose theory the dialectic concerning the spirit/nature/history's evolution has been derived: the alienation of the spirit ("Enttäusserung", "Entfremdung") becomes the other, specifically as nature in space and as history in time. However, *Enttäusserung* is also the process of idea formation and then of self-consciousness because the spirit remains itself even when it denies and objectifies itself. *Geist* is the subject that conquers the positive solution through the "determined negation" of alienation ("Aufhebung"), restoring the original form of self-unity. Almost all systematic forms of reflection on alienation are rooted in Hegel's theory.

The left-Hegelian movement immanentized the idea of alienation by applying it to concrete human beings – rather than to the spirit – and their class divisions and history of liberation from ideologies that maintain the social oppression of weaker classes. Feuerbach was the first philosopher to assume the Hegelian concept of alienation and subsequently decline it in a sociopolitical question (Feuerbach, 1948). He regarded the *Geist* as a mere philosophical idea produced by human beings, who constitute the

true subject, and then applied the split concept of consciousness to a radical critique of Christianity. As Sigmund Freud (1927) similarly stated in the following century, religion is an instrument of alienation that keeps poorer classes in a state of subordination to those of higher status because it extrapolates the essential characteristics of human beings and attributes them to a fantastic entity, God, who thus becomes the ideal subject for humanity to depend on. According to Feuerbach, this inversion is the essence of alienation, which philosophy aims to show by restoring to humans what authentically pertains to them.

However, according to Feuerbach (1948), Hegel's logic is similar to theology because the spirit corresponds to human thought outside concrete thinking subjects. "To abstract" means "to extract/pull out" or "to alienate". Thus, because of their abstractions, Hegelian philosophy and religion have been founded on the same alienating operation (Feuerbach, 1948).

Marx's ideas concerning alienation were greatly influenced by Feuerbachian critical writings. The philosopher took over the immanentization of Hegel's absolute concepts by bringing them back to real subjects, particularly by replacing the parallel idea of the metaphysical concept of state with the idea of a society composed of real human beings who are alienated and desubjectivized by their work. The concept of alienation was then extended to the concrete conditions of the oppressed classes. In *Contribution of Hegel's Critique of Right: Introduction* (1843, CW, vol 3, p. 175), Marx stated that religion is the "opium of the people". In Christianity, humans in concrete poverty are valued in religious heaven as a sovereign entity. However, the faith of the oppressed in this representation is functional in bourgeois society, wherein formal equality corresponds to real inequality. In contemporary society, individuals are free only in an abstract, non-real way. The working class is dominated by productive processes, with activities that are mentally and/or physically debilitating, and workers, separated by their products and production processes under the effect of illusion, sell their power to capitalists. This is the alienation of workers that results, on the one hand, in "dispossession/accumulation" dynamics (objects produced being destined for the capitalists who accumulate them and not for the workers) and, on the other hand, in workers' "de-humanization" (consumption of their life and spirit for the benefit of capitalists' richness and well-being) (Marx, 1844).

Based on the Marxian perspective, the Frankfurt School founded the critical theory of society and developed the idea of dehumanization. The

theory's main concept is desubjectification, which is operated not so much and not only by religions but, rather, by the manipulation of individuals through mass media ("culture industry") (Adorno, 1966). According to the Frankfurt School, individuals in contemporary culture are reduced to collective standards of behaviours through dynamics of persuasion that transform society into a mass of homologated individuals, functioning towards the needs of mass-production industries. Critical reflection (negative dialectics) thus takes on the task of demystifying mass ideology by shedding light on social conditioning (Adorno, 1966). In the diagnosis of Herbert Marcuse presented in *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), individuals in advanced capitalist societies seem to be happy in their conditioned relationships because they identify themselves with their alienating circumstances, thus gaining satisfaction. From his perspective, a small number of individuals in modern consumer societies are empowered to conditionate the perception of freedom by providing masses of individuals with opportunities to buy their well-being and personal happiness. In this state of "unfreedom", consumers behave irrationally by working more than necessary to fulfil real basic needs, ignoring the psychologically destructive effects and the waste and environmental damage it causes (Marcuse, 1964).

Alienation from a psychological–psychiatric point of view

Psychological and psychiatric studies assume the reduction of any metaphysical dimension to the concrete state of individuals. Then, dissociative phenomenology is produced when the original subject becomes the object, and the objectivized self that is separated from the original self is inherent in patients with a specific biography and bodily health conditions. The aim of psychological and psychiatric discussion is to offer explanatory accounts defining the possible theoretical and empirical solutions that permit the reintegration of the separated parts of patients who cannot behave normally and who have dysfunctional intimate and social relationships (Black et al., 2014). Thus, mental alienation implies that an individual has become separated from him/herself and the world.

This kind of disturbance is typical of schizophrenic spectrum pathologies. The term "schizophrenia", derived from the Greek words *σχιζειν* (*schizein*: splitting) and *φρήν* (*phr n*: mind), was coined by Eugen Bleuler (1911) and indicates the separation of mental functions. Bleuler (1911) also nosologically introduced a specific feature of schizophrenia, namely am-

bivalence, which indicates an emotional cognitive state in which contradictory ideas and feelings/emotions are directed towards an object. This is one of the most interesting symptoms on which the incomprehensible behaviours of people suffering from schizophrenic disorders depend. The most important studies that have attempted to decode this symptom and recognize its causes originated in the fields of psychology and psychiatry and were inspired by the contributions of the Frankfurt School. Various concepts of alienation and self-estrangement have been considered to explain internal schizoid states with observable symptoms and external socioeconomic divisions. Political psychology arose from the Frankfurt School and Erich Fromm, with the aim of reversing Adorno's critical dialectic and resolving Marcuse's sociological diagnosis by drawing from the psychological dimension. Studies from this perspective have sought to locate the matrices of alienation in the social dynamics of relationships and communication, revealing how individuals are unconsciously influenced by the forces of power and thus alienated from themselves.

This critical discussion on alienation emerged after a focus on the extreme harms associated with lobotomy, electroconvulsive treatment and insulin shock therapy, and among its ranks were important scholars such as Thomas Szasz, Ronald D. Laing, Franco Basaglia, Silvano Arieti and David Cooper. Others influenced by this wave were Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari and Erving Goffman, who stand out in importance in the research area inherent to dehumanizing theories that aimed to normalize people suffering from certain forms of alienation. These scholars considered psychiatric treatments to be more damaging than helpful to patients. In line with this position, Umberto Galimberti (1999) in *Psiche e techne: L'uomo nell'età della tecnica* [*Psyche And Techne: Man In The Age Of Technique*] highlighted the connection between anxiety and alienation. Specifically, he identified the basis of the alienation and anguish produced by exorbitant amounts of work and stress among contemporary humans as resulting from modern society's demands for indefinite technical development. Human beings living in the most technologically advanced societies are ensnared in an increasingly asphyxiating spiral of production that leaves them unable to give meaning to their daily endeavours. The lack of individual existential purposes leads to alienation and the exponential growth of lifetimes devoted to the production of functional artefacts for the development of global production and technology.

In this regard, Jürgen Habermas (1981) emphasized the role of language and suggested that alienation originates from the distortion of moral

debate by dominating market forces and economic power. This kind of distortion results in alienation being extracted from the broader socio-economic context and the resulting pain and problems being attributed to individual abnormalities or failure to adjust. Habermas's reflections developed under the influence of the antipsychiatry movement and were closely connected to the Frankfurt School's perspective.

The importance of communication and information processing was also the focus of another approach that was strongly influenced by and, in turn, influenced the antipsychiatry and Frankfurt School movements: that of the Palo Alto School, which takes its name from the Californian locality where the Mental Research Institute, a centre for research and psychological therapy, is located. Research in this area primarily emphasizes dysfunctional communication or information that conceals substantial contradictions within itself and occurs within vertical relationships. These contradictions are concealed by ambiguity and ambivalence, which are not immediately recognizable and make it impossible for subordinate individuals to understand the authentic thoughts and aims of persons with power over them.

Attention to the problem of dysfunctional communication and information processing was ignited by Gregory Bateson (Bateson et al., 1956). The anthropologist introduced the "double bind theory", according to which contradictions are considered the origins of schizophrenia and post-traumatic stress disorder. A double bind is a dilemma in which an individual (or group) receives two or more contradictory messages. In scenarios involving a differentiation of power or status, this can be dramatically distressing: it generates a situation in which a successful response to one message results in a failed response to the other (and vice versa), so the subordinate person responding will automatically be perceived as being in the wrong, no matter how they respond. Since this contradiction is concealed by ambivalence and ambiguity, the double bind prevents the person from resolving the underlying dilemma or opting out of the situation. This type of communication takes place in a scenario where individuals in power seek to maintain the status quo by keeping their subordinates in a state of disorientation.

At the political level, the most classic example of this kind of contradiction, involving a mix of ambivalence and mystification, is that of Hitler praising peace in *Mein Kampf* (see Testoni, 2021). At the psychological level, dysfunctional communication in a family can potentially lead to schizophrenia among the children (Watzlawick et al., 2011). Individuals

with mental disorders, which may have originally stemmed from contradictory intimate and social relationships, can experience deep existential alienation within their communities due to other people's, and potentially their own, negative attitudes towards them and result in dysfunctional behaviour involving continuous attempts to adapt to an essentially hostile environment. This wide area of research on communication contradictions has revealed that, in today's consumerist society, individuals are estranged from their sense of self due to the repressive injunction to be happy; such an injunction does not allow room for the recognition of alienation and could be seen as an expression of alienation itself (Habermas, 1981).

As Severino (1996) indicated in his reading of contemporary philosophy, the concept of alienation, interesting as it is, runs the risk of being insubstantial since relations are no longer considered necessary. With the decline of metaphysics – particularly the aspect of metaphysics that Severino defined as 'epistemic' and was aimed at demonstrating the necessity of connections between the parts of a whole or totality – contemporary epistemology considered all relations to be merely probable and thus fundamentally linked to chance and entropy (i.e. Prigogine, 1978); in addition, scientific knowledge has been historically determined as fallible (i.e. Popper, 1959). On the basis of this assumption, which came to light in its entirety with the most radical coherence of the idea of contingency developed philosophically by Nietzsche and Leopardi (Severino, 1996, 1999) and assumed by the hard sciences, no integral unity of any subject is necessary.

However, thanks to Severino's indication, the theme of alienation once again gained importance and became valuable in the psychological–psychiatric sphere to understand common ways of reasoning as well as the extreme sense of suffering that nihilism entails and that manifests in mental disorders. In fact, the solution to the concept of alienation can be obtained from an awareness of the substantial dynamics arising from nihilist contradictions.

The substantial madness of Western thought and its solution

Ronald D. Laing was an influential psychiatrist in the area of psychological research that emphasized the role of contradictions in schizophrenia. In line with the antipsychiatry movement and the Frankfurt School and Palo

Alto School's course of research, the psychiatrist argued that problematic families and socioeconomic oppression can cause alienation or "ontological insecurity" in individuals (Laing, 1967). Going against how mainstream psychiatry and society diagnosed alienation disorders, he stated that schizophrenic symptoms could be considered adaptations to dysfunctional environments (Laing, 1967).

Emanuele Severino, in his work *Techne: Le radici della violenza* [*Techne. The roots of violence*], paragraph II "segreto della follia" ["The secret of madness"], quoted Ronald Laing (Severino, 1979, pp. 283–4), as given below. In the lines preceding this quote, Severino reported what Laing (1959), in *The divided self. Study of existential psychiatry*, wrote about one of his patients with schizophrenia, who jokingly began to perceive the dissolution of her own identity, which then merged with the trees in a forest to the point that she could no longer return to herself.

The game consists in pretending to 'disappear', to leave 'empty' the place one occupies on earth, 'blending in' with what is around; it consists in pretending no longer to be there ('and I would no longer be there'). Then the game becomes serious: the little girl in the park ends up convincing herself that she is 'blending in' with the world around her and 'no longer being there'. But when this happens to her, anguish over the nothingness she sees herself becoming also sets in. 'Then I call myself by name many times, as if to make myself come back'. The little girl in the park becomes an irredeemable psychotic when, despite every effort, she can no longer 'make herself come back' into existence and remains there in nothingness. [...] This is not an isolated case. Psychological and psychiatric analyses record a large number of cases in which the sick person is convinced of 'not being there any more', like the little girl in the park, or of never having been (since childhood, his parents 'treated him as if he were not there'), or of not being himself, but another person, or a thing - stone, fire, wood, ornament. Even in cases where the sick person identifies himself with something else (person or object), he has reduced himself to a nothingness.

Indeed, many schizophrenic spectrum disorders present similar symptoms. For example, the so-called "Cotard's Syndrome" is characterized by an inability to perceive oneself, and patients interpret their emotions as being dead. In such cases, anguish is expressed along with anhedonia, which corresponds to the feeling of annihilation. The Capgras delusion presents

the conviction that a close individual (a friend, family member or pet) has been replaced by an identical impostor. For both these expressions of psychological imbalance, the difficulty lies in clearly defining why these persons are “alienated”.

Severino considered the schizophrenic woman described by Laing a prototypical example of the madness of all Westerners, as they had inhabited the nonsensical perspective of nihilism. As the philosopher indicated, at the basis of the possibility of understanding any statement, there is a reference to the abysmal difference between truth and error (Severino, 1982/2015). Madness is the negation of truth, and alienation is the expression of an error. Based on *La struttura originaria* [*The originary structure*] (1981) and *Essenza del nichilismo* (1982, *The essence of nihilism*, 2015), it is possible to recognize the very first axes that permit one to understand the essence of alienation as an error that can only be recognised by the truth. The concept of truth proposed by Severino refers precisely to the incontrovertible, the structure of which shows the self-contradicting and self-negating nature of statements that want to deny the true assertion. The OST and, more precisely, the “originary structure of the destiny of truth” are based on the “originary foundation” of the eternity of being, which involves four axes on which the identity of being with it/oneself and not with nothing is pivoted.

In the first axis, the foundation of the originary structure of truth over arguments that seek to negate truth occurs through the *élenchos* – the argumentative dynamic that shows the self-negation of erroneous (folly) content. *Élenchos* is based on the undeniable fundamental opposition of the positive (affirmation) and negative (negation). This first axis is related to the second axis, which involves the principle of noncontradiction (PNC; or the law of contradiction) (Aristotle): for all propositions p , it is impossible for both p and not p to be true; symbolically “ $\sim(p \cdot \sim p)$ ”, in which \sim means “not” and “ \cdot ” means “and”. In the chapter “Returning to Parmenides” in *The Essence of Nihilism* (1982/2015), Severino reiterated the incontrovertible assertion that being is not and cannot be nothingness and that nothingness is not and cannot be being. In discussing Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* IV, Gamma, 3–6, he affirmed that without the PNC, we cannot know anything that we do know. In other words, if I affirm that being is being, I am not affirming that being is not being, or that being is nothing.

The first two axes imply the following axial elements:

The third axis presents the principle of identity: $A = A$; every being is

identical to itself, or “ $(\forall x) (x=x)$ ”, in which \forall means “for every” or simply that “A is A”. Another formulation of the principle, derived from the basic form just defined, asserts that if a propositional function F is true of an individual variable x, then F is indeed true of x; symbolically $F(x) \supset F(x)$, in which \supset means “formally implies”. In sum, being is being.

The fourth axis involves the principle of the excluded middle (or third) (PEM): either p or $\sim p$ must be true, with no third or middle true proposition between them; symbolically, “ $p \vee \sim p$ ”, in which “ \vee ” means “or”. This implies that, between affirmation and negation, there is no third proposition.

Then, eternity means that it is necessary that each being be and be as it is ($A \equiv A$). It is impossible for any being not to be ($\sim[p \cdot \sim p]$). Everything that appears is not nothing but a being and thus eternally itself. Everything that appears is and is forever, since whatever is cannot come into being from nothingness or cease to be by falling into nothingness. “Appearing” means entering into the horizon of experience. Nihilistic alienation is the identification of a being to its negation – that is, to nothingness. Since nothing is not being, beings cannot turn into nothingness, and nothing cannot really turn into beings. Any faith in considering beings as oscillating between nothingness and being involves the alienation of being.

The second, third and fourth axes of the OST can be applied to the concept of psychic alienation in a similar way. Severe psychological/psychiatric disorders begin to be recognized when a person no longer identifies him/herself and others, when s/he confuses him/herself and others with something else (e.g. “I am not myself; I am a tree.” “My mother is a chair.”) or when s/he is unable to differentiate affirmation and negation (e.g. “Maria is my mother; Maria is not my mother.” “Antonio is my brother; Antonio is not my brother.”) and keep them separate (e.g. “I do not know whether Maria is my mother.” “I do not know whether Antonio is my brother.”). These three aspects are all reducible to basic conceptions: “I do not exist”; “a part of me does not exist”; “my mother Maria does not exist”; “my brother Antonio does not exist”.

Alienation is the clearest expression of betrayal. Indeed, Severino has shown how each of the founding traits of the concept of truth belongs to the history of Western thought as well as how Western thought has betrayed its own intentions and failed to manage these principles. Westerners want to truly understand the sense of being and of reality but, to the contrary, are unable to respect all the fundamental axes of truth. The basis of betrayal lies in the claim that the appearance of “becoming” in the world

amounts to the appearance of the annihilation of beings that become. Nihilistic alienation that characterizes the entire history of Western thought considers beings to be more or less destined for annihilation. The conviction that becoming, seen as inherent to contingent beings, exists in the oscillation between being and nothing assumes that there is a time when being is nothing; it *simpliciter* assumes that A is not A, affirming and negating that A is A.

Faith in becoming – that is, the belief that beings that inhabit experience oscillate between being and nothingness – is a fundamental error. The impossibility of the existence of a time in which beings that appear are “not yet” or “no longer” is the foundation of the impossibility of creation and annihilation; “it is impossible” means that the claim that “a being is not” negates the OST structure. More specifically, it is a negation of the opposition between the positive and the negative and would mean affirming that a being is “other” than itself. Alienation consists of the negation of the fundamental principles of any logical assertion: the principles of identity, noncontradiction and the third excluded. This implicit negation is the basis of the auto-negation that the *élenchos* of the OST explicitly describe.

Further, another axis can be added, one that involves the scientific observation of phenomena and it is inherent to the way in which humans observe and interpret facts. In *Legge e caso* (1979; *Law and Chance*, 2022) Severino added an “Introduction” to his translation of Carnap’s *Der Logische Aufbau der Welt* and discussion of Carnap’s philosophy. The strict analysis of the logical positivist position that is inherent in what appears was a significant task, which Severino undertook precisely to analyse one of the most coherent manifestations of contemporary thought. This rigorous analysis shows that while Severino’s concept of “appearing” was radical, it was also so cogent that it could be assumed by the most thorough neopositivist thinkers. In fact, the most severe observation of everything appears indicates that it is impossible to say that one can observe an act of creation and an act of annihilation. It is absolutely impossible to say that “nothingness” appears.

Conclusion

What Marxism, the Frankfurt School, antipsychiatry and the Palo Alto School succeed in clueing in is that a process of social alienation underlies the madness of individuals, which is based on an erroneous faith that mys-

tifies the meaning of what it really is. However, their analysis fails to authentically explain what this erroneous faith is based on – what the most authentic and radical form of alienation consists of – which Hegel himself failed to identify. For this reason, the concept of alienation has declined substantially in recent years. Today, however, it is possible to resume this path of reflection and free the inhabitants of the West, who believe they are annihilable and, therefore, that their being can be nothing from the oppression of anxiety.

Severino has shown that, contrary to Western philosophic assumptions, no becoming appears in the sense of the appearance of the annihilation or the becoming *ex nihilo* of beings. Therefore, it is incorrect to say that Severino's perspective denies experience and that claiming the eternity of every being amounts to denying the manifold display of appearance. On the contrary, Severino contended that the content that actually appears in no way testifies to the annihilation and creation of beings. Believing that the scenario in which we are immersed testifies that creation and annihilation are hallucinated by alienating faith. To consider the "becoming" testified by experience as the coming from or returning to nothingness is thus the content of madness.

Furthermore, the philosopher's theory affirms that humans suffer because of what they believe they are; if they believe they are mortal (i.e. annihilable), their suffering can only be extreme and incurable. The anguish of the contemporary period is due to the fact that humans think that they are totally annihilable or are convinced that they are nothing. Since this thought is at the basis of any reasoning, everything loses sense, and the anguish that arises is terrifying. However, appearance and experience cannot attest to the fact that what no longer belongs or what does not yet belong to experience has become nothing or remains nothing. Thus, it must be the case that every variation in the world is the beginning of the appearance of eternal beings.

Knowing all this is not the same as not knowing it, simply because of the undeniable and logical understanding of the concept of "eternity".

Feeling alienated due to the anguish and fear of being nothing? What about eternity?

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Every Child Is a Severino Scholar The Stubborn Persistence of the Past and the Contradiction of Being Born in Time

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A child is afraid that the witch of Snow White may continue to exist even in death. Another child looks at the picture of her parents before she was born and cannot believe that she did not exist at that time. A third child (Emanuele Severino, ten years old) argues with his brother that because God is omnipotent, He does not need to be overbearing (*i.e.*, to transcend Himself and become Other than what He is). These three stories show a common thread, namely, they challenge – in ways that are both childish and profound – the very notion of becoming. They also show that reality is not “whole”. It can be understood as succession or co-presence of different temporal cuts in the shapes of images (Bergson), planes of immanence (Deleuze and Guattari) or totalities of appearing (Severino). The question is the statute of the shift that allows the transition from one totality of appearing to the next one – without forgetting that the shift is itself a totality (a non-nothing).

Keywords:

Bergson, Deleuze, Freud, Guattari, Heidegger, Righi, Severino

Three smart children

These three very short stories are taken from everyday life. Because the first one will acquire its meaning only at the end of this paper, I must rely on the readers' patience and on their willingness to follow my argument. It goes like this: a father reads *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* to his eight-year-old son who is about to fall asleep. When the story is over, the son asks his father to take away the book. Why, the father asks. Because the witch might get out of the book, the son explains. The father reassures him that the witch is dead. Yes, the witch is dead, the son says, but the page where the witch is alive is still there.

My second story expands (I hope not to the point of becoming too fictional) a small episode I came across in a very interesting recent paper on Severino by Andrea Righi (Righi 2023, forthcoming). I admit that I owe so much to Righi's insights that this article reads as a commentary on Righi's almost as much as it is a commentary on Severino's. I had the chance to read Righi's piece when it was in manuscript form and to discuss it with him. I hope therefore that what looks like appropriation will be understood as an ongoing discussion. At any rate, here's the second story: A young girl is looking at a picture of her mother and father taken before she was born. The girl asks: Where was I when the picture was taken? Her parents casually remark: You did not exist back then. The response triggers various degrees of disbelief in the child. She thinks that her parents are mad. How can it be that "she did not exist"? To her, Righi says, the very idea of her non-existence is inconceivable, "for the child attachment to life admits no exceptions; it is tailored on what Deleuze would call the 'unity of life and thought'."

True. However, I think that in this instance it is wise to put Deleuze aside (for now, at least) and go back to Parmenides, where the unity of life and thought is superseded by the unity of Being and Thinking, "for being and thinking are one and the same" ("to gar auto noein estin te kai einai")

or, as Heidegger would put it, “That, namely the same, is both becoming-aware (thinking) and Being” (Heidegger 2006, p. 36)¹.

The third story is told by Severino himself in his autobiography, *Il mio ricordo degli eterni* (My memory of the eternal). It is the example chosen by Righi, and the one I would have chosen myself if Righi had not come first:

I was about ten and my brother was talking to me about my school-work. At a certain point he asked me: “Can God be overbearing (*prepotente*)?” I answered him – and this is the oldest phrase I remember saying, “No, because if He is omnipotent (*onnipotente*) He does not need to be overbearing” (Severino 2011, p. 170)².

It is the first sentence that Severino remembers having pronounced, and it really sounds like destiny. It depicts God like a being (whom Severino will later replace with “Being”) whose absolute power lies in not having to negate its omnipotence by trespassing it. Righi observes that this is not a moral but a logical statement, “one that is typical for children of this age, who are almost invariably visceral logicians”. I would add that they are visceral theologians, too – an inclination that nonetheless exposes them to the same paradoxes of omnipotence that the shrewd theologians of old knew all too well. Sure, an omnipotent God does not need to transcend Himself. The need to transcend would negate His own omnipotence and put the deity in contradiction with itself. There is a remarkable difference, however, between a God who does not need transcendence and a God who *cannot* transcend Himself. Because, if that were the case, we could not say that God is omnipotent. And the old quip attributed to St. Peter Damian would come back to haunt us: can God create a boulder so heavy that He Himself cannot lift it? If He can, He is not omnipotent because He cannot lift it; if He can’t – because the boulder is too heavy even for him – He’s also not omnipotent.

This is just the popular version of the paradox. Peter Damian’s actual argument goes further than that: Can God restore virginity to a woman

1 “Das Selbe nämlich ist vernehmen (Denken) sowohl als auch Sein”. Heidegger 2006, p. 36.

2 “Ero sui dieci anni e mio fratello parlava con me dei miei compiti di scuola. A un certo punto mi chiese: «Può Dio essere prepotente?». Gli risposi – ed è questa la frase più antica che ricordo di aver pronunciato: «No, perché se è onnipotente non ha bisogno di essere prepotente». Severino 2011, p. 170 (my translation).

who has lost it? In other words, can God *change the past*? Peter Damian seems to believe that He can, and to back up God's absolute omnipotence he also appears to be ready to throw away the principle of non-contradiction (*De omnipotentia divina*, 611D–612B). Or maybe not, or not entirely. His approach is nuanced and does not amount to a “viscerally” logical statement (he's not a child anymore). God can restore virginity to a woman who has lost it without changing or annihilating all the events that brought her to lose her virginity in the first place *if it is good to do so*, because God is about Goodness rather than Being-ness and because suspension of logic and nature is what miracles are about (Resnick 1992).

Damian is no less ambiguous about the possibility that God can undo what has been done or bring about that what it is, is not. Saving God's omnipotence and the principle of non-contradiction at the same time and under the same respect is indeed a complex task that we will leave to him and his fellow theologians to debate for all eternity. What matters to us is that in Severino's early statement about God not needing to transcend Himself we find the thread that connects our stories.

A slice of the Real

The first story evokes a past that refuses to be dead and gone. The second story deals with a present that does not recognize the existence of a “different” past (a past that does include the present “present”, that is). The third story implies that God's omnipotence is co-substantial to His “internal” immanence. Because immanence is “all” that He is and all that He can and needs to be, He cannot become “other” than what He is. He cannot *change*. And we assume that if He cannot change, He can change neither the past nor the future, since both are “in” Him.

The reason for this limitation to God's omnipotence (which, by the way, may be a limitation according to Peter Damian but not according to Severino) must be understood in its own terms. It's not really a matter of “changing the past”; it has never been. We need a better understanding of what “past” is. Even if you think, like Jay Gatsby, that you can repeat the past and therefore change the outcome of the present, you end up changing the present only to the extent that the past that you want to repeat exists *as past* only in the present. The past was not actually past the moment it happened. It was the present of back then. Therefore, it lacked the hallmark—of being past—that the present lays on it retrospectively. By the

same token, the moment the future realizes the premises laid out in the present, it is no longer future, and it lacks the hallmark—of being in the future—laid on it in the present and by our present judgment.

The past never returns the way it was and never altogether because there is no place and no time from and to which it could possibly return. A time machine will never be invented because the past does not stand as an unconnected entity; it is not a location you can go back to. What is never gone and remains “missing” in the present and out of our hands, is precisely the “unpastness” of the past, the past’s *always-present event*, which is entirely hidden from us for the simple reason that we can only interpret as “past” the signs the past sends us through its “monuments”, which we decipher in our present. Because such a conceptualization happens in the here and now, the past *as past* only exists here and now, for those of us who think of it. Approximately, the same line of reasoning applies to the future.

Let’s put it this way. If we could take a picture of the whole universe in a specific instant of *X* duration, and if we could discern in that picture each thing that is actually happening, not unlike the vision haunting Jorge Luis Borges in *The Aleph* (Borges 1979, pp. 3-17), we would not see “the world”, because the world (the world of *metaxy* that we inherited from Plato) is made of both visible and invisible things, of beings and ideas, of the past that is no more and the future that is not yet. To quote loosely from Hilary Putnam’s stance on internal realism, “the world” is made up of the world and of all our descriptions of the world—which means that the cyclical attempts of well-intentioned philosophers to move back to absolute metaphysical realism are doomed to fail insofar as they do not break the Platonic mold (Putnam 1990, pp. 261-262).

So, what would we see instead? A slice of the Real, of “the” Being in all its messiness, and without the reassuring barriers of the symbolic order. When Severino speaks of the totality of appearing, we must think of something along these lines. A perceivable approximation of Severino’s Being would be a synchronic picture of the totality of appearances that appears in the moment the picture is taken, plus the picture itself, whoever or whatever is taking the picture and whoever is watching it. Possibly, it would be something akin to the synchronic vision of Rome that appeared to Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontent* (Freud 1961, p. 16, one of the few texts by Freud that Severino actually quotes), plus Freud himself writing the book in his studio, plus us reading the book, plus the whole universe that surrounds us while we are reading the book.

What we have just described is a veritable *plan d'immanence*. The question that immediately arises is, if immanence is all that there is and nothing transcends it, how can we make statements about it? How can we even know that we are included in it? Don't we need an external observer telling us that we cannot be the external observers of ourselves? Such questions always take on an air of annoying formalism, and it is easy to answer with an equally annoying anti-formalist empiricism (do I have to wait for an alien to tell me that I am a human being?). We need to find an exit, possibly intersecting immanence and transcendence in a way that will not create an addendum to the history of metaphysics (a metaphysics of *presence* rather than immanence, which in the history of philosophy is really nothing new). Or maybe, for the time being, we can be content with Deleuze's and Guattari's observation that the plane of immanence is neither a concept nor a method. It is the "image of thought" and, to be precise, a moving image: "the horizon itself that is in movement" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, pp. 37-38) or, to stay closer to Severino's idiom, the horizon of the totality of appearing (without forgetting that in Deleuze and Guattari what we have is a *mouvant* totality of appearing while in Severino we have totalities of appearing constantly superseding each other).

What puzzles the young child watching a picture of her mother and father before she was born is that the image does not seem to be moving at all (moving in time, that is). The child, to quote Righi, has no problem in admitting a before and an after, but it is simply impossible for her to think about the being of her non-being. It's even more than that: the picture implicitly asks the girl to conceptualize not just the being of her non-being, but the very essence of nothingness. It's not that the little girl doesn't believe in time. It is that she is a radical Parmenidean who has faith in the unity of being and thinking – her thinking, obviously, without the contribution of which (without whose *presence*) there is no being.

Bergson, the philosopher of creation and becoming, is quite remote from Severino, yet when Bergson in *Matter and Memory* writes that matter is "an aggregate of images" and "more than that which the idealist calls a representation, but less than that which the realist calls a thing", he says precisely that reality can be perceived only as a slice, a temporal cut in the fabric of the world (Bergson 1911, p. vii). In other words, reality is a picture – because it is likely that Bergson was thinking of photography. And a picture is not a Platonic idea; it is absolute yet casual, undisputable yet contingent – but in fact imbued with necessity, because the network of spatial dispositions and temporal coordinates among the elements of the

taken image are now absolute in their “unpastness”. The picture will decay. Those dispositions and coordinates (like the page that contains the witch) will not. Maybe in the picture the future father was looking at the future mother. That look happened, and then it was over. But the fact “that it happened” still happens. The picture is a fragment of the Real. To the extent that it is real, every picture is also eternal. The temporal cut it captured was an event, and events do not change. They do not even “exist” the way an object does (the event of the picture is not the picture).

Obviously, Bergson is aware that fixed images are at the opposite pole of the movement of reality. A picture is a compromised experience as it cuts away the becoming, the *durée* (although Severino would not be “moved” by such objection). No, events do not move, yet they are not young Severino’s God and therefore allow changes, *differences*, or differentiations to happen. The child is one of these differentiations³.

What the unconscious wants

Appropriately, Righi refers to Wittgenstein’s *Notebooks 1914-1916*: “Can one negate a *picture*? No. And in this lies the difference between picture and proposition. [...] I can only deny that the picture is right, but the *picture* I cannot deny” (note of November 26, 1914, Wittgenstein 1961, p. 33e). Adding to Righi’s commentary of Wittgenstein (there are no negative pictures; no picture can tell me that “it’s not raining”), I would say that pictures can be used to *demonstrate* a negative (“You told me that yesterday it was raining but this picture was taken yesterday – the date on my phone says so – and it shows a sunny day”) but it cannot be used to *construct* a negative (the *meaning* of the picture is *not* that it wasn’t raining). A cartoon I saw once in a newspaper’s funny pages showed an angry mother asking her children, “Who broke the vase?” and the children answering, “Not me!” while the grinning ghost of a child with “Not me” written all over his romper was leaving the scene. In a similar fashion, the girl who is confronted with a negative event of “not-being” in the picture must choose between saying, “This is the picture of my mother and father when I did not exist” or, “This is the picture of my mother, father, and not-me”. In time, she will

3 For similarities and differences in Bergson’s and Severino’s critique of contingency see Ronchi 2017, pp. 75-93.

realize that her not-being in the picture is an eternal truth as much as her parents being there. In time, she will also realize that the meeting of her parents was the consequence of a chance connection whose outcome is the eternal truth that she is.

The library scene in *Interstellar* (Christopher Nolan, 2014) is a good visual analogy of this cut in the fabric of time, with movement added to it. Every moment Murphy Cooper spends in the library of her house is forever “present” in the space-time continuum that Joseph Cooper (her father) “visits” from another continuum. In Severino’s universe, however, Joseph Cooper would not be able to move freely back and forth in time—from a position outside the daughter’s continuum—and instruct his daughter to stay in the room and wait for his messages, which come in the shape of books that he pushes out of the shelves and on to the floor from the “other side” of the library. The father would be in a continuum alongside his daughter’s continuum, close yet incapable of interacting with it.

Interaction among *continua* is not possible, yet the problem still unresolved is the shift from one totality of appearance (one continuum) to the next one. Every totality of appearance or plane of immanence is akin to a picture of the world, and every picture – because it is an isolated picture and not *the* picture of all totalities (there cannot be such thing, since no one could *take* that picture) – is surrounded by the threshold that separates it from the others, and that threshold is *nothing*, for *nothing* separates the *continua* and they are separated by *nothing*. Since every shift is a totality in-itself (and every totality is in fact a continuum because we don’t know how much it lasts, we don’t know its *durée*), we risk infinite regression, or Zeno’s paradox all over again. The shift from one totality to the next is “natural” and as smooth as a billiard mat, provided we do not try to conceptualize it. The moment we attempt to grasp it “logically”, its *durée* gets divided into half, half of the half, half of the half of the half, etc., and we are Achilles never reaching the turtle in the next totality (here I follow the suggestion in Sini 2009, p. 88).

In other words, how can the witch still be a threat from her page in the past (from her continuum) if the *continua* are essentially separated? Moreover, the young girl is worried for the opposite reason, because she begins to realize that there is a continuum in her parents’ life that is “lost” to any interaction with her continuum. The persistence of the past seems mired in too many contradictions. We must sharpen our understanding of continuity if we want to find the key to the infinite multiplication of totalities and *continua*.

As Severino observes in *Destino della necessità*, “the history of the mortals is the history of the image”; that is, the history of what has had prominence in the image, what has stood out (Severino 1980, p. 503)⁴. But the unconscious of the mortals has no image, there is no “image of the world” in the unconscious, and the unconscious is destiny. (It goes without saying that Severino’s notion of unconscious is ontological rather than psychoanalytical; all the same, a psychoanalytical implication, as we will see, must be reintroduced.) All the isolated images of the world that occupy, make up, or sum up the totality of appearing in the eyes of mortals have no counterpart in the unconscious. Outside the Cartesian and post-Cartesian image of the world that has been adopted by western modernity there is “nothing” except other images of the world – all competing for the dominion of the Earth – which reject each other and are the “nothing” of each other. Yes, but what does the unconscious want, given that “it” does not care about an image of the world? For what dominion is the unconscious fighting?

The unconscious want only one thing, *i.e.*, the denial (the end) of the conflict between isolation (the condition of the individual being) and destiny (where the *principium individuationis* has no role)– for any other goal would be another partial image of the world, another isolation. The unconscious can only want the “sunset” (as Severino says) of isolation, *i.e.*, the sunset of the image of the world, which is another way to say that the unconscious is pure, unlimited, infinite desire for the fulfillment of destiny (the end of the separate *continua*) and the joy that such outcome will bring (joy is Severino’s term, and also one of the key words – *chara* – in Paul’s *Letter to the Romans*).

That may be Severino’s idea of Paradise, which is strangely personal and impersonal at the same time. Personal, because in the fulfillment of destiny the little girl will be “reunited” with her parents even in the picture where “she did not exist”. Impersonal, because there can be neither “she” nor “her parents” when and where (if there is a “when” and a “where”) every isolation is overcome.

Severino would probably say – in his theodicy-without-God – that joy is already here, it’s not an event that will take place somewhere in the future. We are just too “isolated” to perceive it and live in it. This is material

4 “In questo senso, la storia del mortale è storia dell’immagine, ossia è storia di ciò cui l’immagine ha dato rilievo”. Severino 1980, p. 503.

for another discussion. It is true, however, that science has come to Severino's help as far as the age of the "image of the world" is concerned – by dismantling it, that is. The question that science asks of us today is, do we still live in the age of the image of the world – meaning the modern age in which humans, endowed with *cogito*, have given themselves the chance to frame and "represent" the totality of the world before them in one comprehensive image? As for quantum physics, the answer seems to be no.

Quantum physics does not provide an image of the world, and the knowledge it proposes is neither anthropocentric nor objectifiable, nor, in the Platonic or Cartesian sense, visible. Sure, Max Planck spoke at length, in 1932, of the "so-called physical world image" (Planck 1946, p. 52) but then he immediately specified that it was "merely an intellectual structure" and even arbitrary to a certain extent. "The world image contains no observable magnitudes at all; all that it contains is symbols. More than this: It invariably contains certain components having no immediate meaning as applied to the world of the senses nor indeed any meaning at all" (Planck 1936, p. 54). The advantage of such world image "consists in the fact that it permits a strict determinism to be carried through" (Planck 1936, p. 54). Ninety years have gone by, and an image of the world that accounts for what has been called the "Einstein separability" between different entities is less and less sustainable. In quantum physics we no longer deal with the world as a correlative of experience, much less as *Umwelt*, and the quantum language is not translatable from its own mathematics into a "mortal language" except at the cost of gross reductions or mystifications. The isolation of the competing images of the world makes no sense in this context. Here is where Severino finds company: not just the old eternalism of J.M.E. McTaggart, but also Julian Barbour's negation of time and Gerhard 't Hooft's determinism (Scardigli et al. 2019). And the number of epistemologists and scientists who are very doubtful that time flows endlessly from the past into the future seems to have been growing in the last decades.

The season of the witch

Back to the father who reads *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* to his eight-year-old son preparing to sleep. As we said, after the story is over, the son recommends that his father take the book away. Why, the father asks. Because the witch could come out of that book, the son replies. But the witch

is dead, his father reassures him. Yes, the witch is dead, the son replies, but the page where the witch is alive is still there.

In the arrow of time (if time is an arrow, which, as we said, is now debatable), the page with the witch has passed and cannot return. But the boy is not afraid that the witch may return; he is afraid that the witch might *stay*, that the witch *might not go away*. For even if the past disappears from the horizon of appearing, the relations and coordinates (the configurations, the interconnections, the networks) that each moment establishes in each of its single snapshots (Severino would call it totality of appearing, C.S. Peirce would call it “sheet of assertion”, Sini would call it “world-sheet”, maybe Deleuze would call it plane of immanence, and Wittgenstein would call it “fact”) cannot fall out of Being. The witch is not alive, but the configuration that unites the witch to her page (where the word cannot be separated from the image) is an event that has nothing to do with time; it is the non-being-past of its being-past. True, it may happen one day that no one is able to interpret the “fact” anymore and the “fact” goes out once and for all from the horizon of appearing. But it will not cease to be non-past, nor will its event cease, even if the page is torn. And like the old Furies of Aeschylus for whom Athena found a place in a maze of caves under the Acropolis, the forgotten event will find refuge in the unconscious, perhaps it will turn into a trauma that will never be acknowledged except as a symptom or a revealing slip of the tongue. The child is right, the witch is gone but the page is still there, it is better to keep the book in a safe place.

If that is the case, however, the entire notion of a destined eternal joy must be rethought. Joy springs eternal in Severino, but so does trauma in Freud. You cannot separate one from the other. Joy deletes the isolation of the mortals, but trauma has never been isolated in the first place. It does not belong to the ego of the mortals; it operates outside the coordinates of space and time. The ego assumes that the location of trauma is in the past, but in fact trauma dwells in its own continuum that *does* interact with the ego's continuum. Because there is eternity in joy as there is eternity in trauma, the end of isolation can only signal the moment when the horizon of appearing will accept trauma by adopting Prospero's words, “This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine”. Until that moment comes, Being needs therapy too.

For the unconscious of the mortals is the unconscious of Being itself. It does not belong to us because it is not “us”. We are the unconscious of Being. Being knows nothing of us and we know nothing of it. But the un-

conscious of Being is not somewhere else, it is in *us*, on the surface of our language. We cannot reach it by introspection, by delving deep into our conscience, because it is the hidden side of each utterance we speak, it resides in everything that remains unsaid or implied in what we say; it's the event of our language. It doesn't matter that the witch exists only as a written text. Because she is made of language, there is enough of it to make her a dangerous presence.

The major question of post-metaphysics is no longer Leibnitz's "Why is there something instead of nothing?" The new question goes back to the early philosophical dilemma of the One and the Many: why are there many things instead of One, namely Being? And who and what are we, asking such question? Not *quid aliquis*, but *quid nos*. We are the disturbance of Being, the splitting of Being, the Being having nightmares about the witch, we are the trauma, we are the witch. And yet Being *needs* splitting, or the temptation to reinstate a metaphysics of presence would be too strong. It is because we have an unconscious, an immanent unconscious that presses against our transcendent, intentional mind that Being is alive. This is how we can rethink the Parmenidean identity of Being and thinking, and this is how the little girl can say to her parents, I've always been there, not in the picture with you, *but outside of every picture*. At the same time, this is how the witch can say, I'll always be with you, but only from inside my page. Without the unconscious that circulates in our language, Being would just be an informal blob. Without the unconscious, which is on the tip of our tongue, Being would have no "place" to stay.

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The Secret of the World

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In the net of nihilism, the becoming of the world shows itself as becoming nothing and from nothing. The root of the isolated earth. But the isolated earth is not totally other than destiny: it is its distortion. Thus the secret of the world consists in the removal – not by a will (man’s or God’s) – of this alteration. First, what remains is the appearing and disappearing of the eternal.

Keywords:

Ontology, Destiny, Nihilism, Nothing, Becoming, Pure and Isolated Earth

1. Being in the *problem* – never having anything but hypotheses, conjectures, probabilities – is now the sign and expression, even for common sense, of the category that tends to dominate today: the becoming. Again and always understood ontologically, starting with the Greeks as undeniable phenomenological evidence consisting in the oscillation of things between being and nothing.

There is nothing new in this regard – Emanuele Severino teaches us – , except that in two thousand five hundred years this category has had a formidable history, and from a marginal and accidental dimension, external to the immutable God, it has irresistibly imposed itself – it is the overall meaning of the post Hegel – as a *single* category . For close coherence, the becoming has devoured every eternal which is not the becoming itself. If something becomes (it begins and ceases to be, emerging from its nothingness and returning to it), it is necessary to recognize that *everything* becomes. In fact, the eternal Being (God), anticipating and preserving within itself the essence of the becomings, would prevent them from really coming out of nowhere and returning there, consequently making what is considered very certain and evident, a mere appearance and indeed an impossibility.

Philosophy has long celebrated the «lack of foundation», reducing itself to *rhetoric* .

The rose blooms without a reason, quoting the catholic poet Silesius. The nihilistic reading of this verse, consistent with its own Greek premises, intends it as an expression of the dominion of Chance (= Becoming = Chaos). Indeed, in the most consequential form of nihilism, becoming presents itself by now as the «natural» successor of God: Dionysus, Nietzsche calls him: the dark terminus of the procession of the gods of metaphysics.

Here then it can well be argued, consistently with the premises (= the evidence of the becoming), that things happen *because they happen* : their why is the very absence of a «why» distinct from *happening* itself, therefore

entirely random. Being whole is but an accidental event. The principle of sufficient reason is thus overturned.

The «truth» therefore consists in the same original experience of becoming nothing and from nothing, hence it is *absolutely certain that everything is uncertain* .

2. Is everything clear then? Not at all!

It is at this point that Severino's thought makes itself feel with a truly unique speculative power.

The extreme coherence of the aforementioned reversal – which for Severino takes place first of all with Leopardi, then with Nietzsche and Gentile – is in fact an expression, according to the Italian philosopher, of the extreme coherence of *erring*, and that is of thinking – that is to say *living* – further away from the truth, as it is radically contradictory.

Mind you: we do not err because we contradict ourselves, but we contradict ourselves because we err: because we find ourselves explicitly denying what is implicitly presupposed.

What is denied when one contradicts oneself? The heart of the «originary structure», Severino explains: the transcendental predicate. Which consists in *being oneself / not being the other from oneself* on the part of each being. Therefore also of the negation itself – which is then immediate self-negation.

Where the denial of *being oneself / not being the other* is the same persuasion of the existence of becoming other. In fact something becomes something else – what is more evident? – insofar as it becomes *identical to the other* and therefore, having become one, *it is the other* .

As the omnipresent basis of every belief and therefore of common sense itself as well as of the most profound metaphysics, the faith in becoming something else is unmasked by Severino as the extreme madness. Paradoxically protected by the deepest care with which Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, IV) masterfully exposes the great theme of *bebaiotote arché* or *principium firmissimum* (the p. n. c.), conceived in fact *in synthesis* with the «evidence» of becoming something else. Whose contradiction, the p. n. c. – paradox of paradoxes – ends up to express the rhythm: it is necessary that the being is *when it is*, and it is not – the being, the not nothing! – *when it is not*.

It has been said that being oneself / not being the other (free from co-existence with becoming other), a necessary predicate of everything, is the condition of erring itself (which is in fact self and nothing else). That,

whose denial is self-denial: the incontrovertible truth, which Severino calls *destiny*, to indicate What absolutely «is» (the *de* of destiny is an intensifier).

Free from the madness that distorts its meaning, the true evidence of becoming, integrated by a not sick *Logos*, is presented as *the appearance and disappearance of the eternal*s. This is Severino's formidable theoretical revolution, explicitly exposed in the memorable «Return to Parmenides» (in *The Essence of Nihilism*, 1982)

And everything is eternal, every not-nothing. Whose salvation does not come by will from outside, but from its very essence and nature.

3. Destiny is very complicated in its truly “frightening” theorematic consequences, but very simple at the base (axiomatic). Namely: A equals A. Except to clarify below that it is not a question of two A *separated from* each other (consequently one different from the other), but *originally* united. What both the subject and the predicate consist of: identity of the identical ones.

The being itself, being other than its own other is therefore the undeniable «destiny» of everything, against which every objection arises a priori. Since the latter, the more it wants to be firm in opposition to destiny, the more it will not intend to give up being itself and nothing else. Which is precisely the heart of destiny!

Severino writes: «The secret of our civilization is revealed [...] the enigma of the world is dissolved when it appears that there can be no time in which things [...] are nothing, and when therefore it appears that they – all, from the most humble to the greatest [...] – they are all ungenerable, incorruptible, immutable, eternal. What we call the «becoming of the world» is therefore the appearance and disappearance of the eternal» (*The Failed Patricide*, 1985, p. 138)

In other words, it is a matter of meditating on the implication between the being self of the being and the eternity of the being – «the golden implication», as Severino calls it in *Dike* (2015, p. 95).

This is how it sounds exposed in full: to be oneself, that is not to become other, that is not to be other than oneself, that is not to be absolutely other (nothing), that is to be eternal. (Where each «that is» expresses the analytical character of the implications and therefore the internal mediations of the «originary structure» as concrete immediacy).

4. Furthermore, the testimony of destiny currently coexists with its apparently victorious denial, that is with a world of thoughts and works that express its opposite. In other words, it is a matter of the civilization of technology (and of political economy), in which the persuasion in (making) become something else is at its maximum.

A dimension meditated for a long time by Heidegger, but essentially misunderstood, insofar as he opposes the «calculating thought» of technoscience with the «meditating thought», consisting above all in «letting be». And what does it allow to be *but the Madness of becoming something else?* The basis and transcendental guarantee of all violence. Where it would be a matter of unmasking its essential impossibility. The content of Madness is impossible, but there exists mad faith in it: if there is no mistake, erring exists and indeed nowadays it appears triumphant world wide. Thus Plato's Republic turns out to be the opposite of a philosopher's utopia, with his head in the clouds!

Let us ask: is *erring* (nihilism) destined to decline? *Destiny of Necessity* (1980) ends with this question. *The Glory* (2001) and *Passing Beyond* (2007) show the necessity for its overcoming and the advent of the «saving land» (from pain and death – believed and experienced as real). Thus unfolding the (infinite) story of Joy “after” the (finished) story of Pain.

Moreover, the earth isolated from the destiny of truth is not totally other than destiny itself. As shown in *Death and the Earth* (2011) it is rather the *distortion* of the content of destiny as the appearance of the «pure earth», whereby this – the earth not isolated from destiny –, caught in the net of Madness, shows itself and it seems to the diseased eye like a stick in water: broken.

And «being broken» is my «being human», anguished towards the becoming nothing of what is most dear to me. And yet, since it is necessary that every isolated tract of the earth is isolation of a non-isolated being of the earth, it follows that every mortal being, quoting Severino, corresponds to a «god» («we” are “gods” who show themselves as « men»»: *Death and the earth*, cit., p. 332) and to the transcendental ego of idealistic derivation, the ego of destiny: *the eternal circle of the appearance of the eternal*s. This is what ultimately «man» is made of.

Thus not only “death”: 1. does not overwhelm us by annihilating us; 2. not only it happens within our being I of destiny, but 3. Also it opens up that infinite path that has always and will constitute the deepest unconscious of every “human being».

Severino writes: «It is not the newborns who await death, but the dead

who await their birth, that is the arrival of the land that saves» (*Passing Beyond*, cit., p. 694) .

Stated more precisely: *true death is the totality of the isolated earth* . So that, Severino continues, «the sky, the waters, the sun, the moon, the living beings, the Gods and the God of the isolated earth belong to death. They too, all of them, are the dead. Even when mortals are dazzled by their splendor» (*ibid.* p. 695) .

Therefore the secret of the «world» does not lie in being it the *maximum* (however painful it may be), which, in anguish, we are afraid of losing, thus reducing ourselves to a minimum and indeed nothing; rather it is the *minimum*, beyond whose false «lights» (but who despises error despises the truth) there is not the darkness of the Night of nothing, but a Light – and infinite correlative «spectacles» – unexpected and un hoped by deadly.

What Christianity – foreshadowing in the fog of error – has always meant as *itinerarium mentis infinitum in Deo*.

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The Identity and Eternity of Every Being

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

Keywords:

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

I. Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

they are possible to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which is possible not to be at some time is not. Therefore, if everything is possible not to be, then at one time there could have been nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist only begins to exist by something already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence—which is absurd [since being is present in experience]. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary¹ (*Summa theol.* I, q. 2, a. 3).

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

By *cause of itself* I understand that whose essence involves existence; or, that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing² (*Ethica*, I, Def. 1).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

VIII. The supervening of eternals

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

2. A response to Parmenides – regarded as the philosopher according to whom there is no truth to the appearing of becoming – had already been provided by Aristotle. The latter noted that, even if becoming were mere appearance, it would still exist, precisely as that *appearance* which we experience (see *Physics*, VIII, 3, 254 a 27-30). Popper states that the world described by the theory of relativity – a theory which in his view bears a strong Parmenidean imprint – is like a film reel, with each being in the world representing a still: the stills coexist and all of them are already real; it is only the screening that creates the illusion of change³. But our consciousness – Popper notes – is something real, since the change that is produced in our consciousness, and which we experience, is certainly something real:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Meta-Physika

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The concrete relationship between *tà phusiká* and *tà metà tà phusiká* is here investigated in relation to Emanuele Severino's enquiry into the originary structure of the truth of being. The question of that relationship is linked to some of the principal elements of Severino's enquiry: the abstraction of appearing from the appearing of appearing, the abstraction of the will from the world and from the contents willed by the will, and, precisely, the abstraction of *tà phusiká* from *tà metà tà phusiká*.

Keywords:

Emanuele Severino, Physics, Metaphysics, Originary Structure

1. Tà Phusiká and tà Metà tà Phusiká

The question of the concrete relation between *tà phusiká* and *tà metà tà phusiká* may be argued to lie at the heart of Severino's reflection. The question concerning this relation is the question of whether those beings that immediately appear, and appear as *becoming* (*phúsis*, *tà phusiká*), effectively constitute the *totality* of beings that are — or whether, on the contrary, any positive determinacy (*tà metà tà phusiká*) may be argued to lie beyond the immediate presence of what presently and manifestly appears.

This question appears to drive Severino's own reflection (from an earliest time onwards)¹, as well as, consistently, the earliest enquiry of philosophy as accounted for by Severino himself. This consonance is certainly not incidental, and testifies to the internal consistency of Severino's reflection. That is to say, on the one hand, Severino makes his own what he regards as the essential question of philosophy throughout the history of the West; and, conversely, he reads the history of Western philosophy as ensuing from what appears to him as the most essential question. (In Hegelian terms, it might be said that it is no accident that the element that drives the unfolding of the *Phenomenology* should coincide with the element that lies at the heart of the *Logic* — granted that the terms “phenomenology” and “logic” come to assume an unprecedented meaning as part of Severino's reflection, and so does that “element”, i.e. that contradiction, that lies at the heart of both that “phenomenology” and that “logic”).

Insofar as the enquiry of philosophy turns to, and addresses, the Whole — the totality of beings — it cannot avoid asking the question of the relationship between *tà phusiká* and *tà metà tà phusiká*: that is to say, the en-

1 One may for instance refer to the essay “Aristotle and Classical Metaphysics” (Severino, 1958; 2005), as well as to *La struttura originaria*, Chap. XIII (Severino 1981) and *The Essence of Nihilism* (Severino, 2016).

quiry of philosophy must ask whether the totality of beings that are immediately present constitutes the totality *simpliciter* of being itself, or whether any positive determinacy exceeds this immediately present totality. The enquiry of philosophy must ask this question even when, with the Pre-Socratics — and, arguably, after the different “destructions” and “deconstructions” of metaphysics and of its history — it asserts that there is *no* dimension of being that exceeds the manifest becoming of the world. In this instance, the enquiry of philosophy concludes that *phúsis* itself — the ever-changing (*phúo*) dimension of what appears and is manifest (*pháinesthai*) — coincides with the totality of being (**b^huH-*, from which *phúo*, *phúsis*, *pháinesthai*, *phôs*, etc. constituting one of the Indo-European roots of “being”). The pre-Socratics, accordingly, insofar as they regard the becoming of the world as constituting the totality of the *kósmos* (i.e. of *phúsis*) — are then *phusikoi* (Aristotle, *Physics*, 184b 17). (“And yet”, Severino argues, “from the standpoint of these ‘physicists’, who did not suspect the existence of any reality beyond that of the world, enquiring into the world did not mean confining themselves to a consideration of a particular dimension of the whole, but it meant exhibiting the very concrete content or the very all-encompassing determination of the whole itself. Hence, they set out precisely to enquire into the principles of *all things*. This means that they addressed the notion of totality *qua* totality — albeit thinking that the world itself was that totality; in this respect, they have not been physicists, but metaphysicians”; Severino, 1981, p. 532). Analogously, at the other end of the history of Western metaphysics, Nietzsche’s “faithfulness to the earth” (“I beseech you, my brothers, *remain faithful to the earth* and do not believe those who speak to you of extraterrestrial hopes!”), Nietzsche, 2006, p. 6) constitutes precisely a refutation of every metaphysical dimension; this very refutation coincides with the “physics” of the creators, i.e. the ones who have left metaphysics behind (§ 335 of the *The Gay Science*, titled “Long live physics!”, states: “We must become *physicists* in order to be creators — while hitherto all valuations and ideals have been built on *ignorance* of physics or in *contradiction* to it. So, long live physics!” Nietzsche, 2001, p. 189).

The question of the concrete relation between *tà phusiká* and *tà metá tà phusiká* is then confronted by Severino as *the* question to be addressed by the enquiry of philosophy. According to Severino, the originary truth of being contains — and must contain — within itself the answer to that question. The entirety of *La struttura originaria* moves towards that answer — an answer that is reached in the last chapter of that work. In fact, Sev-

erino notes (*La struttura originaria*, Chap. XI), the appearing of that question must itself appear together with its answer: for the very answer to the question of the concrete relation between *tà phusiká* and *tà metà tà phusiká* constitutes a positive determinacy that *does not* appear, as of yet, as part of the totality of what is immediately present, and it is therefore a determinacy that *exceeds* that dimension (the dimension of *tà phusiká*) — thus already answering the question of whether *tà phusiká* coincides with the totality *simpliciter* of being. This is the case *even if* “what exceeds the immediate is only the verification that nothing exceeds the immediate” (Severino, 1981, p. 475). This argument, however, only provides a positive and yet indeterminate answer to the question of the concrete relation between *tà phusiká* and *tà metà tà phusiká*, for the — possibly complex — *content* of the determinacy that exceeds the dimension of *tà phusiká* still remains to be determined. This is the task of the last chapter of *La struttura originaria*.

The title of Chapter XIII of *La struttura originaria* reads: “Originary Metaphysics” [*La metafisica originaria*]. That is to say, the result towards which the entirety of *La struttura originaria* moves is the determination of the *originary* dimension that — originarily — exceeds the dimension of what is immediately present and becoming. In other words, the fundamental result of *La struttura originaria* is the determination of the *originary* meta-physical dimension (“*metafisica originaria*”) that exceeds the present and becoming dimension of *tà phusiká*. The title of Paragraph 21 of Chapter XIII of *La struttura originaria* reads: “L-Immediacy of the Assertion that a Positive Determinacy Exceeds the Totality of the F-Immediate”². Severino writes:

The concrete positing of the L-immediacy of the following proposition is thus achieved: “A positive determinacy exceeds the totality of the F-immediate” — a positing that so far had only been indeterminately anticipated. Accordingly: the originary structure is determined as the assertion that the immutable whole exceeds the totality of the F-immediate — that is, it exceeds the originary structure itself (insofar as every element of the originary is a moment of the totality of the F-immediate). In this respect, the originary struc-

2 “L-immediacy” and “F-immediacy” indicate, respectively, Severino’s notions of logical and phenomenological immediacy.

ture constitutes the concrete and originary opening of metaphysical knowledge. (Severino, 1981, p. 545).

This positive determinacy is the eternity of the concrete totality of being — of each and every being: *tà metà tà phusiká*. What is present, and is present as “becoming”, may appear *only* insofar as the concrete structure of the Whole *does not* coincide with the immediate totality of what presently appears as becoming. There exists a dimension (*tà metà tà phusiká*) that exceeds, includes and makes possible the becoming of the world (*tà phusiká*) (“The immutable is not simply *that without which* the becoming of reality is not, but it is *that by virtue of which* that reality is”, Severino, 1981, p. 553).

Let us quote the entirety of Paragraph 30 of Chapter XIII of *La struttura originaria*, titled “The Nature of the Relation between the Immutable and Becoming”:

The totality of the F-immediate, and, more generally, the totality of becoming beings, *is* only insofar as the immutable whole is: asserting that only the horizon of becoming is — that is, asserting that the totality of becoming coincides with the totality of being — entails asserting that being is not; the horizon of becoming, thus understood (that is, as a positive determinacy that *is* even if the immutable is not) is self-contradictory, and it is therefore nothing. The horizon of becoming — namely, of everything that presently becomes, may become or may have become — can therefore be only insofar as the immutable whole is. (*ibid.*).

(Granted that it has already been established that “this immutability does not pertain to this or to that being, but to *every* being”, *ibid.*, p. 547). Originary meta-physics is then the dimension of being that originally exceeds the dimension of immediately present being.

Phenomenology

While the concrete foundation of the relationship between *tà phusiká* and *tà metà tà phusiká* may not be discussed in detail here, let us briefly present the way in which, according to Severino, that relationship determines, in a most essential way, the unfolding of the history of the West (that is, let us leave aside for now the question of the “logic” of the relationship be-

tween *tà phusiká* and *tà metà tà phusiká*, and let us take up that of its “phenomenology”).

As already remarked, philosophy consists, since its inception, in that form of thinking and questioning that turns to the Whole. However, insofar as the totality of what is immediately present, manifest and becoming is taken to coincide with the Whole itself, philosophy consists in a form of “physics” or “cosmology”: that is to say, the enquiry into the truth of the Whole coincides with the enquiry into that dimension of being that becomes and that is immediately present in its becoming. This is the fundamental stance that appears to characterise both the philosophical enquiry of the Pre-Socratics (namely, the philosophical enquiry that precedes the positing of a dimension of being that exceeds the dimension of *phúsis*) and the philosophical enquiry that follows the “destruction” of the dimension of being that exceeds the dimension of *phúsis* (the “destruction of the immutables”). In both instances, philosophy comes to coincide with a (generalised) form of physics or cosmology: namely, with a determination of the order (*kósmos*) of the cosmos — i.e. of the manifest and becoming totality of beings. These two moments of the history of philosophy, however, essentially differ from one another; they do so precisely insofar as, in one of them, humans have not yet experienced the remedy of philosophy “proper” (the remedy of the *epístème* or “meta-physics”), while, in the other one — having experienced that remedy — they *know* that this remedy is in fact worse than the ill and the danger that were supposed to be remedied. That danger is the danger of annihilation, and that ill is the ill of the anxiety induced by that annihilation.

The domain of *phúsis* immediately appears to humans in its becoming: human beings themselves, in fact, coincide precisely with the appearing of that dimension. That is to say, the site of the appearing of *phúsis* — of *tà phusiká* — is abstracted (i.e. abstractly separated) from *phúsis* itself (or, equivalently, the site of the “appearing” of *phúsis* is abstractly separated from the site of its “being”). Humans thus bear witness to the becoming of *phúsis*: namely, to the becoming of *every* being and *every* thing. Accordingly, humans infer that they, themselves — as the site of the appearing of that becoming — are destined to become, and perish away. The appearing of the danger of their own annihilation is accompanied by an abyssal form of anxiety.

That annihilation becomes irreversible the very moment humans accomplish and achieve (or, rather, believe to accomplish and achieve) their abstraction from *phúsis*. For, as Severino recalls, in the age of myths, hu-

mans still perceive themselves and their actions as being part of the Whole: in this respect, their perishing does not strictly speaking constitute an annihilation (the cyclic structure of time marking the possibility of their return). As soon as their abstraction from the totality of *phúsis* is complete, however, their annihilation becomes irreversible; as soon as they invoke the ontological meaning of being and nothingness (precisely insofar as they believe that they are *not* the Whole), they also invoke the ontological meaning of becoming, which consists in a transition from being to nothingness and from nothingness to being. Thus, by invoking the ontological meaning of being and nothingness in order to abstract themselves from the immediately present becoming of *phúsis*, humans are delivered over to a final and irreversible annihilation. The constantly imminent danger of this annihilation is accompanied by a constantly immanent anxiety. (“There exists a — historical, or even just ‘ideal’ — place where the Greek invocation of becoming brings about the most extreme form of anxiety: the anxiety induced by nothingness — the nothingness to which humans and things fall prey.” Severino, 1992, p. 128).

That is to say, in order to have power, the human will must abstract itself from the Whole by which it feels limited and constrained. It is only insofar as the will abstracts itself from the Whole through the invocation of the ontological meaning of being and nothingness, of identity and difference, that it is *free*: it is free from the Whole, insofar as “the will *is* the will and it is *not* the Whole”, and it is a *free* will insofar as it may bring into being what is not (“We see that the principle of what will be [*archè tôn esoménon*] lies in deliberating and doing something [*kai apò tou bouleúesthai kai apò tou praxai ti*], and we see that, in general, in things that are not always actual, there is the possibility of being and of not being [*tò dunatòn einai kai mé*]”; *De Interpretatione*, 19a 8). And yet, it is precisely insofar as the will invokes the ontological meaning of being and nothingness in order to acquire an “ontological” power that the will itself is swept over by the ontological meaning of its own becoming and annihilation.

Confronted with their own irreversible annihilation, humans come to posit a dimension of being that exceeds the becoming of *phúsis* — the becoming of the manifest *phainesthai* — and which is thus *metà-phúsis*. This is the dimension of being from which what appears originates, and into which, after disappearing, it returns (*ex hōn dè he génesis esti tois oúsi, kai tèn phtoràn eis taúta gínesthai*, Anaximander, fr. 1). Insofar as this dimension exceeds the immediate and becoming appearing of *phúsis*, it is immutable and non-becoming: “Meta-physics is equivalent, precisely, to the

episteme that, starting with *phúsis* – namely, with the self-evidence of becoming – moves beyond becoming by invoking the dimension of the immutables” (Severino 2023, p.18). According to Severino, the history of philosophy, *qua* history of meta-physics, consists precisely in the positing of the different forms taken by these immutable beings. The immutable beings, Severino writes, include “the god of the Greek-Christian tradition, the god of modern immanentism, the natural order and the natural law, the natural good and the natural beauty, the immortal soul of human beings, the authority and the teachings of the ‘Son of God’ and of the Church, the authority of the master, of the monarch and of the State, the relations of production in the capitalist economy, the moral law, the determinism of nature, the dialectic rationality of history, the irreversibility of time, and communist society as outcome of the class struggle.” (Severino, 2023, p. 9).

Philosophy posits this dimension of being beyond the manifest becoming of *phúsis* in order to contain and remedy the anxiety induced by becoming: that is, in order to safeguard a dimension of being in which humans may (at least partially) be saved. Humans, however, find within themselves a power that resembles the creative and innovatory power of the becoming of *phúsis*: the power of the will. (And yet, humans do not see that they partake of the same creative and original power of *phúsis* precisely because they originarily and concretely belong within *phúsis* itself. The will sees that it contains a principle of *phúsis* inside itself — i.e. an *archè kinéseos kai metabolês*, Aristotle, *Physics*, 200b 12 — but, rather than seeing in this principle a residue of its impossible abstraction from *phúsis*, it believes to have power and control over this principle: that is, over its own freedom). Humans identify with that power, and begin to perceive as oppressive everything that could constrain or restrain the freedom of that power: namely, everything that, in being immutable, could resist the creative and destructive power of the will. Insofar as every immutable being — posited by philosophy in order to remedy the anxiety induced by becoming — limits the power of the will, it limits the will to power; insofar as every immutable being does *not* become, it negates becoming itself — and, therefore, the will: the will must therefore refute and negate every immutable being. According to Severino, the last two centuries have borne witness to the destruction of every immutable being and of every form of meta-physics.

As a result, humans have thus had to find a new remedy against the anxiety induced by the becoming of *phúsis* — a becoming that always threatens to sweep them away from existence. Humans have therefore

turned to the Apparatus of science and technics. That is to say, after trying the epistemic-theological Apparatus, or the “remedy of truth”, they have turned to “the remedy of untruth” (“Any possible remedy cannot but be an apparatus of truth or an apparatus of untruth”, Severino, 1992, p. 55). Accordingly, humans have come to refute every limit to the power of the will, and they have set out to indefinitely increase that power through the means at their disposal³. The scientifico-technological Apparatus consists in the endeavour to indefinitely increase the power of the will — and, in particular, to indefinitely increase the power of the will to defend itself from the annihilating danger of becoming. The will thus leaves behind the epistemic power of the immutable beings, and relies only on its own power to set up barriers against the destructive force of becoming. It therefore aims to indefinitely increase its own power to set up those barriers, and thus create a domain in which it may feel safe from the danger of becoming. (Insofar as the will of the scientifico-technological Apparatus consists in a deployment of the power to *set up* barriers against the destructive power of becoming, that will and that Apparatus may be said to constitute a form of *Ge-stell*, albeit in a radically different sense from the one discussed by Heidegger in e.g. *Die Frage nach der Technik*). The scientifico-technological apparatus thus aims to extend the domain in which it may feel safe from the danger of becoming, and to indefinitely increase its power to preserve and extend that domain.

In the age of Technics, philosophy, *qua* remedy against the danger of becoming, comes to constitute an enquiry into the conditions of possibility for an indefinite increase in the power of the will. Insofar as the condition of possibility of that indefinite increase is the destruction of every meta-physical dimension, philosophy consists first of all in a “theory” (namely, a “seeing”) of the “necessity” of that destruction (a “necessity”, however, that presupposes the ontological separation of the will from the Whole, as well as the resulting ontological meaning of becoming). Philosophy and the Apparatus of science and Technics thus come to have the same goal: to ensure the theoretical and practical realisation of the salvation of the will — a realisation that first of all entails a destruction of every immutable being that could threaten to limit the power of the will. Phi-

3 The shift from the epistemic-theological Apparatus to the scientifico-technological one entails an essential shift in the structure of predictions operated by that very Apparatus, see (Severino, 2023).

losophy, science, and Technics come to represent different aspects of the same endeavour, and move towards the theoretical and practical unification of their procedures.

Logic

The dialectical unfolding of the contradiction of *tà phusiká* and *tà metá tà phusiká* may not result in a reconciliation or supersession of that contradiction: that is to say, the will may never come to have power over the totality of *phúsis*, and thus definitively be safe from the danger of its own annihilation. For, regardless of how far the will may succeed in extending the domain over which it believes to exert its power, the will is always and necessarily abstracted from its own willing what it wills. That is to say, the will may will a certain content, but it may not, at the same time, will to will it (Schopenhauer already writes: “According to the empirical concept of freedom we can say ‘I am free, if I can *do what I will*’, and there, in this ‘what I will’, freedom is already decided. But now, given that we are enquiring about the freedom of *willing* itself, this question would accordingly frame itself thus: ‘Can you also *will* what you will? [*Kannst du auch wollen, was du willst?*]’”, “On the Freedom of the Will”, Schopenhauer, 2009, p. 34)⁴. Regardless of how far the will may succeed in expanding the dimension of what can become part of its content (namely, of what it can will) — and even if the will were (to believe) to be able to will the very totality of the whole — the will would nevertheless be unable to will its own willing what it wills.

The will is thus always powerless in relation to what remains outside of its control, and this domain always includes at least the will’s very self-will. This residual and external dimension, however, comes to constitute the utmost danger for the will, for it threatens an irreversible annihilation of everything that the will believes to have secured. This danger is all the more threatening the more the will believes to have extended the domain over which it can exert its power: for the more the will believes to have obtained

4 This is due to the very structure of abstraction, according to which the abstract is always abstracted from its own abstraction or abstract-being (i.e. a being is abstracted from its own being, identity is abstracted from its self-identity, etc.): and the will is abstracted from its self-will.

and secured, the more it is liable to lose. Accordingly, Severino argues, every increase in the safety obtained by the will coincides with an increase in the danger and anxiety of irreversibly losing it (“Every increase in happiness constitutes, at the same time, an incubation of this extreme form of anxiety”, Severino, 1992, p. 55). In particular, once humans will have believed to be safe from the possibility of their own annihilation or death, that anxiety will come to exceed its present form: for, once the will should believe to be safe from death itself, there would arise a danger and an anxiety over the annihilation not only of the “life” of the will, but of the very “immortality” that the will should believe to have secured. According to Severino, the will still needs to confront the abyss of the terror of losing not only its “life”, but its very “immortality”. (And, therefore, the will still needs to confront the abyss of willing — i.e. of believing to will — a form of “suicide” that would entail relinquishing not only its “life, but its very “immortality”).

This “dialectic” of history — driven by the contradiction between the dimension of “*phúsis*” and that of “*metà-phúsis*” — however, *presupposes* the ontological abstraction of the will from the Whole, and the ontological meaning of becoming that results from it. That is to say, that dialectic (namely, that contradiction) presupposes the very *self*-contradiction of a will that is, on the one hand, *metà-phúsis*, insofar as it is abstracted from *phúsis*, and, on the other hand, it is itself (or it includes) a principle of creative and free becoming — i.e. of *phúsis*. Concurrently, that dialectic presupposes the very *self*-contradiction of a *phúsis* that is both a site of becoming, *and*, as a whole, a totality that does not become (i.e. that it is *metà-phúsis*). The contradiction that drives the “dialectic” of history thus presupposes the very *self*-contradiction of its two abstract moments (which are self-contradictory precisely insofar as they are abstract). That is to say, that dialectic presupposes the ontological abstraction of the will from the Whole: an abstraction that results in the two abstract and self-contradictory notions of *tà phusiká* and *tà metà tà phusiká*.

Returning to the relation between “logic” and “phenomenology”, it follows from these “phenomenological” considerations that there can be no future reconciliation of the originary abstraction of the will from the totality of *phúsis*: that is, there can be no future reconciliation of the originary contradiction between *phúsis* and the will *qua* dimension that is (at least provisionally) *metà-phúsis*. The impossibility of this reconciliation pertains to the “structure” or “logic” of the concrete relation between *tà phusiká* and *tà metà tà phusiká*. For, in fact, what is first of all impossible is not that

reconciliation, but the very originary abstraction of the will from the concrete totality of the Whole — an abstraction that constitutes the originary meaning of impossibility. The contradiction between *tà phusiká* and *tà metà tà phusiká* may not be reconciled at the end point of any “historical” or “phenomenological” development because that contradiction *may not* appear as part of the concrete Whole itself. Severino shows that it is only insofar as that contradiction is *originarily* negated in and by the concrete Whole that it may abstractly appear: that is to say, that it may appear to be abstracted from its own negation (see e.g. Severino 2005). Every abstraction is originarily negated in and by the Whole, and it may abstractly appear only insofar as it has been abstracted — “isolated” — from that negation (in the same way in which the contradiction “the circle is square” may appear only insofar as “the circle” is *not* “square”, for, if “the circle” were “square”, that contradiction would not be a contradiction, but an identity). Therefore, what appears, according to Severino, is *not* the “history” of the separation and reconciliation of *tà phusiká* and *tà metà tà phusiká*, but the “history” of the *belief* in — or the *will* of — that separation. The content of that belief and of that will is originarily negated (for that content is nothing, error, *nihil absolutum*) and may not appear, but that belief or that will (*qua* “positive meaning of nothingness”) can and does appear (*qua* erring). The history of the concrete relationship between *tà phusiká* and *tà metà tà phusiká* is therefore the history of the *belief* in their separation (the history of “nihilism”, or the history of the “isolated earth”) — a history that comes to an end with the end of the appearing of that belief (and not with the end of that impossible separation).

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As abstractly separated from one another, *phúsis* and the will (namely, the phenomenon and its *pháinesthai*; abstract appearing and abstract appearing of appearing) coincide with the abstract notions of *tà phusiká* and *tà metà tà phusiká*. The *concrete* structure of the abstraction of *tà phusiká* and *tà metà tà phusiká* — i.e. the “originary structure” — determines the abstract appearing of both *tà phusiká* and *tà metà tà phusiká*. Elsewhere, we aim to identify “originary metaphysics” with the *concrete* structure of classical *metaphysica generalis*, and the abstractions of *tà phusiká* (“*cosmologia rationalis*”), *tà metà tà phusiká* (“*psychologia rationalis*”), and their contradictory identity (“*theologia rationalis*”) with the three abstract domains of

classical *metaphysica specialis*. (“This unyielding iris of appearing is thus a structure, in the sense that it is the appearing of the appearing of appearing. But these three *are the same* appearing [...]” Severino, 1981, p. 92). The project (*Metà-Phusiká*) thus opens up of relating the structure of the abstraction of concreteness to the necessary determinations of the abstract appearing of the world (*kósmos*), of the will (*psuché*), and of their abstract contradiction (*theós*). The three originary abstractions, however, are not the unconditioned ideas of Kant’s Transcendental Dialectic: a “*focus imaginarius*” (Kant 1998, A 644/B 672) “hypostatized” by reason as an unconditioned element at the end of a sequence of conditioned experiences. (Accordingly, Kant could find no “transition” [*Übergang*] from the Metaphysical Foundations to Physics [*Übergang von den Metaphysischen Anfangsgründen der Naturwissenschaft zur Physik*], as he sought at length after his Critiques; Kant 1993). Rather, the originary identity of *tà phusiká*, *tà metà tà phusiká* and their identity consists in that originary “moment (*Augenblick*) in which the shores of physics and metaphysics make contact with each other (*Styx interfusa*)” (Kant, 1938, p. 487). The originary identity of *tà phusiká*, *tà metà tà phusiká* and their identity (“*This iris which coincides with present and actual appearing [...] The fixed iris in which the eternal spectacle of Necessity comes to light; Severino, 1981, p. 92*) thus coincides with that originary meta-physics whose abstraction into *tà phusiká* and *tà metà tà phusiká* represents the originary meaning of impossibility — i.e. that originary meta-physics that constitutes the singular meaning of present appearing (i.e. the meaning of meaning, the presence of presence, the appearing of appearing).

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Determinism and Free Will

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In this article I would like to discuss some of the issues that Emanuele Severino raises in *Law and Chance*, which have a direct connection with Physics, and in particular with the foundations of Quantum Mechanics.

Some years ago (in 2017), I organized a workshop where the two main keynote speakers were Emanuele Severino and Gerard 't Hooft (theoretical physicist, Nobel laureate in 1999). The conceptual reasons that led us to organize this encounter can be found in the research line of 't Hooft, who aims to provide quantum mechanics with a deterministic foundation. His program seeks to bring this theory back under the umbrella of the most stringent determinism, a goal pursued by Einstein during the last decades of his life. On the other hand, Severino has built up an ontological vision that radically denies any reality to the becoming, a point of view which is often associated with the strict deterministic conception of reality supported by Einstein and Spinoza. Thus, Severino and 't Hooft appeared to be somehow the natural (philosophical) interlocutors for each other.

Keywords:

Becoming, Free Will, Determinism, Quantum Mechanics, Bell's Inequality

1. Becoming

In Severino's vision, "becoming" (understood as the coming out of and the return to nothing of things) does not exist, namely, is not an element of reality. Becoming, far from being the most obvious, trivial, and undeniable evidence of the world, is indeed a theory, that is, just one 'interpretation' of events, among the many possible interpretations. Indeed, Severino thinks that the interpretation of becoming, manifested since the Greek origins of Western thought, as an oscillation of things between being and nothing, is just a «very stubborn illusion», a misinterpretation of events. These words sound surprisingly similar to those used by Einstein to describe "time" in a letter to the sister of his beloved friend Michele Besso. With his philosophical research, Severino aimed to provide a foundation for the eternity of beings, the eternity of each single entity, of each single event. This vision is undeniably similar to the vision proposed by General Relativity (GR), in which all events, past, present, and future, have since always coexisted (and will do so forever), as eternally remaining points on the space-time manifold.

In the realm of Physics, the threat for this vision usually comes from the very heart of the other great theoretical construction of 20th century, namely from Quantum Mechanics (QM). Here, in fact, the General Relativistic point of view clashes against Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, according to which the future is not strictly determined by the present, and the present is not strictly determined by the past, because there is a non-eliminable role played by chance in generating even the elementary events.

Physics, at least from the days of Maxwell and Boltzmann, has been accustomed to using probabilistic laws to describe complex events, when only certain macroscopic observables are relevant, and when it is more than reasonable to average over certain (microscopic) degrees of freedom. Then probability and chance are naturally expected to play an important role.

The novelty in the standard formulation of Quantum Mechanics was that even the elementary single event, the absolutely simple event (think for example of the emission of a photon by an electron in an atom, or the decay of a neutron) happens “by pure chance”, not controlled by any microscopic variable/law (hidden variables), or, told in other words, the event happens without *a cause*. On the contrary, in the deterministic interpretation that ‘t Hooft proposes, Quantum Mechanics is brought back to the most complete, strict, Einsteinian determinism. ‘t Hooft’s vision is thus somehow close to Severino’s idea of the eternity of every single event, of the non-existence of becoming (where “becoming” is understood, since the Greeks to today, as the random emergence of events from nothing).

2. Cellular Automaton

An important motivation of the ‘t Hooft program, is precisely the fact that, once a greater conceptual homogeneity between QM and GR has been obtained (particularly as regard the ideas of causality and time), then the much coveted goal of a unified theory of all physical phenomena would certainly become closer.

The possibility, as shown by ‘t Hooft, of describing a cellular automaton, which is a perfectly classical and deterministic system, by using the mathematical language of Quantum Mechanics, inevitably suggests that, perhaps, even the much more complicated system we observe, namely the physical world, so well described by that sophisticated quantum field theory called the Standard Model, may in fact be nothing but a very complicated but deterministic cellular automaton.

3. Influential Metaphysics

Severino’s ontology could perhaps be considered as a kind of «influential metaphysics” of General Relativity, just to use a Popper’s expression. Severino could even seem to be in some respects stricter than Einstein when he establishes the eternity of every being, even if he usually emphasizes the different conceptual origins of the two logical structures. However, the common features and the intrinsic coherence make it tempting to overlook the different origins of the two pictures, and instead to point at the

similarities. It is also true that the scope and the terms of the two frameworks differ so much, that the existence of some common language between the two structures appears to be almost miraculous.

4. Single event in QM

It is well known that at least two of the founding fathers of QM, Einstein and Schroedinger, put forward critical insights into various aspects of the quantum theory. Although these insights have generated research for about now 90 years, many aspects of those problems remain without a shared consensus in the scientific community. Let us here recall just a few of these points:

- a) For Einstein, QM is not a theory of the single event. The fact that the theory has such a radically statistical structure, prevents predictions about individual events (except for certain special cases). To quote Einstein: «The wave function does not describe, in any way, the condition of ‘a’ single system» (A. Einstein, *Physics and Reality*, 1936).
- b) In the famous EPR article (1935), Einstein claims to have demonstrated the «incompleteness» of Quantum Mechanics: there are elements of the physical reality that are not described, or captured, by the Quantum wave function.
- c) Along the same lines, in the same year, Schroedinger launches another important idea in the form of his famous “cat paradox”. If we follow the standard interpretation of QM, in fact, we are forced to say that before a direct observation (‘measure’) has been performed, the cat closed in a box should be considered both alive and dead at the same time! Just as the radioactive atom (which controls the life of the feline through a clever mechanism) would result in a linear superposition of the decayed and non-decayed states, before observation.
- d) For both Einstein and Schroedinger, the statistical character of QM, although it captures a description of reality to which each future model should be compared, is not a good foundation upon which to build a theory able to describe single events (rather than just statistical sets of events). Exactly as, according to Einstein, «the Newtonian laws of point particle mechanics could not be inferred from thermodynamics» (*Physics and Reality*, 1936).

Einstein and Schroedinger's attitude towards the successful Quantum Theory resembles what the young Einstein, influenced by Mach, expressed with regard to the fundamental concepts of absolute space and time elaborated by Newton: «The prodigious success of his doctrine [Newtonian mechanics] obscured [for two centuries] the critical investigation of its foundations» (Herbert Spencer Lecture, Oxford 1933).

5. Free Will (Theorem)

An important topic in the foundations of quantum mechanics directly involves the concept of free will, a concept which might seem to be linked, at a first sight, to very concrete legal or social problems, rather than to the foundations of a quite abstract physical theory.

In fact, one of the most debated (and paradoxical) results of quantum research in recent years is the so-called Free Will Theorem. This proceeds roughly as follows. The authors, Conway and Kochen, give a formal definition of free will, which makes it possible to «quantify» the degree of «free will» possessed by a particular entity. Then, they analyze a Bell-type experiment (involving electron spin or photon spin/helicity), and demonstrate that, on the basis of commonly accepted quantum mechanical principles, the observed electron (photon) must have the same degree of «free will» as the observer who performs the experiment.

The paradoxical and astonishing aspect of this conclusion is evident. How could an elementary particle (elementary, therefore without structure) have the same degree of free will as the human being who observes it? The real purpose of the theorem thus appears to be to highlight the paradoxical aspects of Quantum Theory, quite like the “Schroedinger cat” experiment.

For some, the content of the Free Will Theorem is even tautological. Indeed, if the world is completely deterministic, then neither the electron nor the observer have any free will, because everything is completely predetermined. On the other hand, if we admit that the observer has free will, then the world is not completely deterministic, and we pay the price of seeing the electron exhibiting a kind of indeterminacy, a «freedom» of choice, almost qualifiable as «its own free will».

6. Bell's Inequality

Bell's inequality is the most frequently invoked argument against the possibility of building deterministic and local models of quantum phenomena. The vast majority of physicists believes that the lengthy debate triggered by Einstein's criticism in the 1930s has been definitively closed in favor of a non-deterministic interpretation of QM, since the appearance of Bell's theorem in 1964. The supporters of a return to determinism are often viewed as people far away from the mainstream of scientific research. Nevertheless, some of the most original thinkers of our days, including 't Hooft, Penrose, Ghirardi, and others, have questioned various aspects of the standard Copenhagen interpretation of QM. And Bell's inequality plays a key role in favor of the standard interpretation.

Bell's inequalities are obeyed by any theory (with hidden variables) that is deterministic and local, and are violated by quantum mechanics, and by the observed quantum correlations. This is the standard argument that excludes a priori all local deterministic models of quantum phenomena involving hidden variables, since, as said, they obey Bell's inequalities, while QM and experimental results violate them. As a consequence, most people renounce to the deterministic local models in favor of quantum indeterminacy.

However, the importance of the hypothesis of «measurement independence» in demonstrating the theorem was already very clear to John Bell himself, and subsequently to other scientists like Shimony, Clauser, Horn, and others. This hypothesis can be linked to the «free will» of the observer who performs, or supervise, the measure; that is to say, linked to the freedom of the observer who arbitrarily chooses the orientation of the polarizing filters used in the measurement. The crucial role played by this apparently innocent and obvious hypothesis was pointed out by John Bell in an explicit sentence: «If free will does not exist, then the deduction of the Bell inequalities is not valid.»

In other words, the hypothesis of free will, or the “obvious” assumption of observer's freedom of choice, is essential to prove the Bell's inequalities.

The use of the free will postulate (or equivalent assertions) to prove Bell's inequalities is confirmed also by the most recent formulations of such ideas (see, for example, Brukner, Costa, Pikovski, Zych, «Bell Theorem for Temporal Order», arxiv:1708.00248). So, Bell's theorem and its (indirect) support for QM may appear as a kind of projection of the «obvious» hypothesis of attributing «free will» to human beings. Although it

is not the only working model, Quantum Mechanics appears instead under the weird light of being the model that fulfills our (natural) desire to attribute free will to humans! One could almost say, in this subtle and specific sense, that QM is a «projection» of the human mind, caused by the dogma, which sounds typically Ptolemaic, of maintaining to humans the property of free will. These ideas are in line also with the Free Will Theorem, whose authors suggest (given a mathematical definition of free will) that if Quantum Mechanics is true, then the electron and its (human) observer should have exactly the same degree of “freedom of choice”: a clearly absurd situation.

7. Measurement independence

Summarizing, the «hidden», and apparently trivial, hypothesis behind Bell’s inequality, the so called «measurement independence», is closely related to the possibility of attributing “freedom of choice” to the observer who performs, or supervises, the measure. Somehow, since humans want to have free will, they must therefore also attribute it to elementary particles. A fully deterministic description of the (micro) world would automatically imply a negation of human free will. From this prospective, Quantum Mechanics looks almost like a “choice”. Humans want to have free will, so they naturally have to choose QM (which somehow guarantees it) over other models. Different models are discarded essentially because they are deterministic (and non-local), although they could in principle work (such as Bohmian mechanics, for example, at least in the non-relativistic regime).

Quite recently (2010-2019), Michael Hall (Canberra) has clearly shown that, provided the «measurement independence» hypothesis is relaxed “a bit” (for the definition of “a bit”, see the Hall’s papers), then it is possible to build local and deterministic models able to perfectly mimic the experimentally observed quantum correlations.

8. Conclusion

The considerations exposed in Law and Chance certainly help to illuminate the (so I would call them) “Severinian” aspects of this situation: hu-

humans “want”, “believe”, and “choose” to have “free will”. So, somehow humans «choose» the world to be indeterminate in order to preserve their supposed “freedom of choice”; they «choose» a world that is «becoming» (indeterminism) in order to better manipulate it. In this above-mentioned sense, the usual non-deterministic interpretation of QM looks rather like a «projection» of our mind. In Severino’s words, “the will-to-power ‘wants’ the ‘becoming’ to exist, wants things to come out of nothing without a cause (randomly), in order to maximize the possibility of manipulating them”. In some way, it wants standard interpretation of Quantum Mechanics to be the only proper representation of the physical world.

Finally, I should also add that, the prevalence of a non-deterministic vision in the standard interpretation of quantum mechanics is described in «Law and Chance» as one of the many results of the more general course of Western philosophical thinking, over the last two centuries. The progressive destruction of immutable, operated by the “faith in the reality of becoming”, which secretly moves, according to Severino, the entire history of Western thought.

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The Concept of Mind and its Relationship with the Body and Consciousness: a Perspective from Severino's Indication

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Science conceives the mind as any object of reality to be studied and characterized and hence the age-old problem of the relationship with the body: the body-mind problem. According to a Severinian philosophical perspective, the mind is instead a meaning that appears and not only appears but constitutes itself the dimension in which things appear. The paper aims to clarify the body-mind relationship in the light of Severino's indication.

Keywords:

Severino, Transcendental Appearing, Mind, Consciousness, Body-Mind Problem.

The scientist works by assuming that all things he studies can be isolated from the surrounding reality and that, once isolated, he can quantify the cause-effect relationships between determinations (Severino, 1992).

This cognitive method does not change when the mind is the subject of his analysis: if you want to investigate what the mind is, its nature, you have to look at it and study it as you would all other things.

The mind to be investigated is thus for science one thing among things: on the one hand there is the dimension of mental meaning and on the other the dimension of natural meaning, i.e. the world as it presents itself in knowledge, and these two dimensions are compared in a relationship to be defined and characterized (Severino, 2016).

Mental meaning and natural meanings are therefore separated but every being is such because it is the same as itself and appears as such. If it does not appear with its own identity, it would not be. Therefore, mental and natural meanings share this appearance which is the presupposition and the original condition of their being.

Showing that appearing stands behind and includes the mental and the natural meaning emphasizes their phenomenological foundation. Appearing is a complex that is constituted not only in relation to the showing of the single thing (empirical appearing) but it is a being itself that appears in appearing, i.e. it has itself as its content, which is the same as saying that it has a transcendental nature (Severino, 1980).

Mental and natural meanings therefore appear as semantic volumes (empirical appearing of single things) on the background of what shows its very appearance (transcendental appearing) (Severino, 1980, 1982, 2006).

This appearing that transcends any partial dimension is the basis on which we can affirm everything that concretely manifests itself (mental and natural). Therefore, what manifests itself is a thought, in its most radical meaning, the mind, as actuality of the thoughts that appear, is this transcendental appearing that is the place where things, the body and its attributes primarily appear, and its fundamental trait is the persistence of

what manifests itself. And permanence does not become, it remains in fact, but this does not prevent its content from showing itself in successive and different forms.

The mind accepts the process of becoming since things, by becoming, enter and leave it, therefore the mind shows only a partiality of the being of things, therefore the mind is not the concrete appearing of beings, that is, it is not the infinite appearing, it's not the infinite self of destiny. Thus the mind is ultimately constituted in something original which is the original concreteness of being, the destiny of truth.

The appearance of the actual totality, the mental meaning is therefore also something formal, abstract, as part of the totality that proceeds towards its concreteness, that is, towards the fullness of its content; the mental, as the authentic awareness of meaning, is therefore the finite self of destiny (Severino, 1980; Stanzani Maserati, 2021). This mental position represents its limit, but it is also its opening as the maximum current manifestation of the surpassable reality, «horizon of the totality of what appears (and therefore as the horizon in which the determinations arrive and take leave of those that become)» (Severino, 1982, p. 98).

Now, those who keep sight of the conceptions that neurology and neuropsychology have of the mental are induced to wonder: if the mind is this all-encompassing and unsurpassable dimension of the appearance of things, then what is that mental that before I thought of as juxtaposed with the natural? And what is that natural whose nature is inseparable from the mental in which it appears?

The answer to these questions marks the radical distance from the analytical concepts of the mind and leads directly to the identification of the matter: the body-mind problem.

Mind is this actual appearing of the things that become and that appear as empirical singularities within this all-encompassing circle that is the mental. Therefore, all the appurtenances of the conscious, the subconscious, the unconscious, the body and its addictions belong to the mind.

The mental meaning, which is traditionally juxtaposed with the natural, is not the mind but the conscience, that is to say the conscious position of the mental, which is part of the mental itself. When we talk about part here, it is clear that we are not referring to a spatial concept but to a meaning that appears with the things themselves. The natural counterpart par excellence is the body, a perceptive opening on reality. On the one hand the conscience, on the other the body, both objects of the mental.

Finally, it is evident that even the body cannot be conceived as a mere,

albeit complicated, biological machine, i.e. a soma, a thing among things, but as a perceptive opening, living matter that relates to the psychic, conscious or unconscious. What makes this body originally conscious is in fact its meaning, that is its being.

Consciousness is therefore the conscious position of the meaning, that is, of the sense of the multiplicity of the individual things that appear and the body is this perceptive opening that, when conscious, appears as a conscious semantic opening, as immediate understanding of reality. For reality to be its true self, there must be perceptual openness to the world (body) and things of the world must show themselves consciously in their meaning (consciousness).

The body-mind problem is therefore more properly called the body-consciousness problem as these are the two semantic references to which one turns in philosophical and scientific discussion. It should also be considered that this body and this consciousness are together individuality, becoming specification of an identity.

Consciousness and body therefore face each other juxtaposed in a relationship full of questions. Who causes whom? The problem here becomes thorny because the cause-effect principle referred to this system determines an irremediable separation between those – almost all thinkers and scientists – who believe that the body causes consciousness in some way and those who, vice versa, affirm the domination of consciousness over the body. Those who support the first thesis are prompted sooner or later to make their thinking more complex in order to avoid irreconcilable contradictions, but there is no doubt that the dominant thought in neuroscience assumes the causal determination of the body on consciousness.

So let's try to dispel the doubt. Every affirmation about the statehood of things is based on the things themselves, that is, on their being. Everything is first of all itself, identity, being that appears as such and also the body-consciousness problem is a unity that appears in its identity. I can recognize this identity immediately as a totality that is a subjective experience or mediatively, that is, following a cognitive investigation.

Specifically, everything is not only primarily itself as it immediately appears but can be further investigated by means of a cognitive investigation which is of a psychological type when it refers to the analysis of subjective-qualitative data, or of a naturalistic-scientific type when it refers to the analysis of objective-quantitative data, and therefore, in both cases, to the meaning of the part.

To put it even more formally: everything is at first something identical

to itself appearing in its phenomenological specificity (i.e. immediately), but it is also something that can be delineated on a cognitive level as quality and quantity, analysed according to an appropriate method of investigation, psychological and scientific (i.e. mediatively).

I have a coin in my hand that is immediately shown to me in its entirety but I can also analyse its two sides by specifically investigating its characteristics. The challenge of thinking is to keep these differences together by distinguishing them without separating them, that is, without conceiving them as opposed to each other with the need to add explanations without concrete meaning to the relationship that they already have with each other.

Let us now try to identify these concepts in the problem of the body-consciousness relationship. We have only one coin in our hands: one side is the subjectivity of experience, its phenomenology, the entirety of the conscious experience, the other is its objectivity, quantitative, biological but also psychic as it is co-present with the organic processes.

When neuroscience investigates and quantifies the biology of the nervous system, of the cerebral cortex with the whole procession of molecules that participate in cellular life, it defines the biological meaning of consciousness, that is, the mediated meaning, as well as psychology, in parallel, describes the psychic meaning of consciousness. The biological meaning and psychic meaning of consciousness are present together and are both on the same side of the coin, they are both revealed by a cognitive investigation.

Now, moving to the other side of the coin, the body also has an immediate meaning which is what presents itself as a conscious phenomenon and therefore subjectivity, a global meaning of the body (immediate conscious presence of my body).

Both these meanings, the two sides of the coin (immediate meaning and mediated meaning of the body-consciousness unity) are in turn included in the supramodal meaning of the identity of the body-consciousness unity so that indicating the conscious meaning of the body (what is immediately present to me of my body) or the corporeal-psychic meaning of consciousness (neurobiology of conscious experience), is to indicate the same thing in different semantic but not ontological respects (Stanzani Maserati, 2016, 2021).

What is most important to take into consideration here is that all this is possible only if the concept of mind is held firm as the actual appearing of beings. Otherwise, how could we speak of consciousness and body, con-

consciousness and unconscious and their respective relationships if they did not appear? The sides of the coin can be grasped in their unity only if there is a space of meaning within which they can show themselves: the mind.

The prominence of this conceptuality thus allows us to disregard the principle of cause-effect, that generates many aporias: in the act of investigating the consciousness-body system, the same is said whether it is spoken in phenomenological terms, that is, consciousness, or whether we speak in neurobiological and therefore strictly corporeal terms. Winning the challenge therefore consists in keeping the two elements together, under a single glance, without having to relate them to each other except for what they already are.

In conclusion, neuroscience should not look with suspicion at the philosophical discourse, which makes the scientist aware of what he is doing and the experimental datum concrete in terms of full meaning.

The path taken by neuroscience will contribute more and more to the clarification of the nature of consciousness and its relationship with the brain if, however, it always keeps in sight the context within which it operates, without disregarding that conceptual cognitive horizon that includes originally each of its new acquisitions. Finally, every work of the neuroscientist appears in a new light under the steady gaze that sees the standing of identity and the concrete constitution of the original mind.

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