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# Eternity & Contradiction

## Journal of Fundamental Ontology

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**5** Presentation  
by **Emanuele Severino**

**11** Foreword  
by **Giulio Goggi**

### **First Part - ON THE ORIGINAL STRUCTURE**

**15** **Michele Lenoci**  
Structural Principles in Emanuele Severino's tThought

**33** **Massimo Marassi**  
The Phenomenological Immediacy and its Structure

**43** **Giulio Goggi**  
"Golden ilmplication". The Primary Foundations of the Eternity of Being

### **Second Part - THEORETICAL STUDIES**

**57** **Hervé A. Cavallera**  
The "Salvation" in the Truth in Giovanni Gentile and Emanuele Severino

**77** **Carlo Chiurco**  
Is an Ethics Inspired by the Philosophy of Severino Possible?

**93** **Andrea Possamai**  
Change the Past: Factum Infectum Fieri Nequit and Eternal Return

index

# Emanuele Severino

## Eternity and Contradiction.

### Journal of Fundamental Ontology

The journal *Eternity and Contradiction* is a platform for discussing the central themes of the philosophical thought, especially the one concerning the “truth” about what is known and what is wanted by humans. This theme remains the fundamental one despite those perspectives that intend to obscure it or to prove its irrelevance; and, paradoxically, the fundamental nature of the theme is largely due to the presence of these perspectives.

## Presentation

With different degrees of intensity and rigor the philosophy of the last two centuries refuses the possibility of any absolute and ultimate “truth” that aims to affirm the existence of an Eternal Being beyond history and Time beyond the becoming of the World. Such a refusal means something completely different from considering the theme of “truth” superfluous. Indeed, when it is aimed at solving its own task and when it does not present itself as naive skepticism, this refusal is actually *inevitable*, and it presents itself as the incontrovertible truth.

The two terms that constitute the title of this periodical indicate: in the framework of the philosophical tradition, if the dimension of “Eternity” did not exist, the assertion of the existence of the becoming would be a “contradiction”, that is, a denial of the truth; contemporary philosophy shows instead that, if that dimension *existed*, the world of the becoming would be impossible, that is, the assertion of its existence would be a contradiction. The contrast between supporters and critics of the ultimate truth may become more evident encompassing the opposition between “continental philosophy” and “analytic philosophy”.

Since humans inhabit the Earth, they interpret the world as a becoming. The things of the world are a “becoming something else” (since something becomes only if it becomes other from what it is). Since philosophy inhabits the Earth, it conceives the “thing” as “what is” (“being”) and it defines its becoming something else as a “transition from its not-being to its being” and vice versa. A thing that starts to be was once a not-being, a nothing. It has been a nothing *in so far as* it was not before and it starts to be now; and a thing that ceases to be, returns in its not-being, in its nothingness: *in so far as* it ends and is no more. This is about recognizing that, *proceeding from this meaning* of being a thing, it is inevitable for philosophy to reach the refusal of every absolute and ultimate truth and of every immutable and “divine” Being that presume to constitute the ultimate foundation of things. Such a refusal is inevitable only if it proceeds from that meaning – which progressively dominates not only thoughts but also the deeds of the Western society and, by now, of the entire Planet. (This doesn’t mean that this dominant inevitability is before the eyes of all the protagonists of contemporary philosophy: on the contrary, it must in fact be tracked down in the underground of our times).

The Greek meaning of being a thing dominates the earth; and it is believed to be unquestionable. But why can’t it be discussed?

In this question a dimension unknown to the knowledges appeared throughout the history of human shines through. All the more unknown as this dimension does not present itself as a simple question, but as the *denial* of the dominant meaning of being a thing – and therefore as a denial of that on the basis of which it is inevitable to reach the denial of every incontrovertible truth.

From the point of view of the kinds of knowledge appeared throughout the history of humans, such a dimension is a totally unacceptable paradox, precisely because it questions and denies the meaning of being a thing that dominates the history of the World; that is, it denies what, more or less explicitly, every form of knowledge considers to be the absolutely evident and undeniable truth: the becoming, historical, and temporal nature of the things that manifest themselves: the nature that is asserted from both those who affirm that the eternal exists beyond the becoming, and those who deny such an existence.

Such a dimension might be called “destiny”. Concerning “destiny”, in this introduction, we can only speak in the most indefinite way. (My

essays – and not only them – address it.) However, this word possesses none of the meanings that have been given to it. Destiny is the dimension in which the meaning of the incontrovertible and the incontrovertibility of such a dimension incontrovertibly appear: it is not the faith in its own incontrovertibility. This means that destiny – the denial of faith, that is, of making mistakes – is the manifestation of the *diverging*, by which every single being is not the others and is not its own not-being. The meaning of the incontrovertibility and of the necessity of destiny can be outlined by saying that the diverging of beings is the dimension whose denial denies itself; and this is about recognizing, moving beyond the Western *ethos*, *that precisely because of the diverging of beings from their not-being* it is impossible for any being, any “that which is”, not to be: it is impossible not within the limit of the time in which the being is (as Aristotle thinks instead), but it is impossible *simpliciter*. The being, inasmuch as it is a being, is not in the dimension of time. It can also be said: destiny is the emerging of the necessity for *the being, inasmuch as a being*, to be “eternal”. The implications of such a statement lead very far (far even from any kind of “eternalism” proposed by contemporary philosophy). The “man” we talk about in the earth isolated from destiny is himself the content of a faith. By that, it is meant something essentially more radical than the assertion that human makes mistakes: it is meant that the faith in the existence of the humans of the isolated earth is a mistake, a dream. The whole earth, since it appears isolated from destiny, is the content of the big dream that is “life”, and it is the womb of every faith. (However, since it is a being, the dream itself is an eternal.) The true essence of the human is destiny. It does not belong to any of the inhabitants, human or divine, of the isolated earth. It is, on the contrary, the isolated earth that belongs to the content that appears in destiny; for only in destiny the existence of mistaking, of faith, of dream – i.e. the denial of the destiny of the truth – can incontrovertibly appear.

It has been said that this periodical intends to be a platform to discuss the central themes in the philosophical thought. Also, it is open to the discussion of what we called “destiny” (and to the clarification of what in this introduction can only said in a summary and allusive way).

It should also be noted that “discussing” means affirming a *difference*: between what is discussed and what is opposed to it in several ways. And destiny, as already mentioned, is primarily the emerging of the meaning

that appertains to the *difference* (that is, the difference of those which differ). To discuss destiny and oppose to it is therefore *to differ from it*. And precisely because of this it also means *sharing*, more or less unknowingly, its original trait: the affirmation of difference. In this differing-sharing-what-we-differ-about, and to which we oppose by discussing it, the claim, earlier recalled, of the meaning of the incontrovertible, recurs, that is, the incontrovertible is the dimension whose denial denies itself.

It is necessary to affirm the existence of differences; though not, however, because they appear inside those faith and dream that constitute the earth isolated from destiny – and therefore, lastly, not because *we want* them to be. It is in destiny that the necessity of the difference of those which differ and the necessity of their eternity and of everything it implies, appear: these necessities reveal themselves in destiny, that since forever, beyond the path the inhabitants of the earth inevitably reach, opens out onto the foundation of faith concerning the becoming something else, enveloping it, and onto the denial of every truth and of every immutable Being.

To discuss destiny and oppose to it, and therefore sharing it, is thus only the unconscious *attempt* to share it. For the denial of destiny is one thing, which essentially belongs to itself, as it is the denial of its own denial (and this denial of the destiny is not a simple attempt to deny it); the denial that appears in the earth isolated from destiny is another thing, and if it (contrary to the other denial) makes itself visible to the inhabitants of this earth, nonetheless, as it is a faith, it is just an attempt to be the denial of destiny. An attempt that, however, makes the historical configuration of the denial of destiny more and more concrete.

To live is already to find ourselves among differences – it is, indeed, to believe, have faith, to find ourselves there. Perhaps the oldest difference is the one that our will believes to experience between its desiring and the resistance met by it. Today, technology led by modern science is the strongest way through which our will dominates the differences. However, not even science and technology, despite their conceptual rigor, can pose themselves beyond faith and therefore beyond faith in the existence of differences.

Philosophy, from the beginning, is the will to set us free from faith and hence from myth, which is one of the oldest contents of faith and which for a long time has included in itself and dominated every other kind of faith (and still lingers in many parts of the World). And yet

philosophy maintains the core trait of the pre-philosophical faith in differences: it maintains, indeed, the faith in their becoming something else, in their differentiating from one another, and in the most radical way. Myths narrate cosmogonies, theogonies, metamorphoses: the great manners of becoming something else. Philosophy, however, intends to be the “true” tale. Its greatness resides in having evoked, once and for all, the radical meaning of “truth”. “Truth” is the absolutely incontrovertible that reveals itself. Throughout the history of philosophical thought, it has then been about establishing the meaning of the “absolutely incontrovertible”, the content of which is necessary to affirm that incontrovertibility. And throughout the history of Western society, faith has prevailed over philosophy itself, and inside philosophy itself: besides developing as faith in the *act of differentiating* (becoming something else) of the differences, philosophy has increasingly reinforced itself as *faith* in the incontrovertibility of the manifestation (“testability”, “observability”) of this differentiating.

“Truth” is something that is said with a lot of meanings also because many areas of life present themselves as “truth.” That is why we talk about religious and moral “truth”, about the “truth” of the instincts, of our emotions, of art, about the “truth” of philosophy and science; and, overall, about the truth of the existence of life and earth (as it appears in its being isolated from destiny). However, since these “truths” are not the destiny of truth, they are all controvertible “truths” – as different as their “plausibility” (“probability”, “reasonableness”, conceptual “strength” and “coherence”) and their strength can be; and affirming them is always a faith, even when they have faith in their incontrovertibility. The “more plausible” one is as far from destiny as the “less plausible” one is: infinitely. (This, even though it is indeed inside this infinite distance that nonetheless the destruction of every absolute “truth” and of every immutable Being presents itself as “inevitable” for the contemporary thought).

The language that testifies the destiny of truth is future philosophy; for if in the present its voice is overpowered by those of the earth isolated from destiny, it is nonetheless destined to reveal itself as the language of people. On the other hand, by testifying destiny, the language of the future philosophy addresses the eternal dimension that is not included but – being older than the furthest past – includes the totality of time that is affirmed in the isolated earth.

However, the voices that rise from the isolated earth – the voices that are therefore denials of destiny – make “more and more concrete” the content of destiny *too*. They make more and more concrete, indeed, that denial of destiny that is essentially linked to it, and in this respect, it belongs to it, and thus without which destiny could not be. This means that the discussion concerning destiny is not only the opposition to it; for such a discussion intends to differ from it, shares (that is, is the unconscious attempt to share) the affirmation of the difference that appears in it: such a discussion is at once the enriching of the denial of destiny, thus it is at once the enriching, the realization of it. In this respect, *all* the infinite content of the earth isolated from destiny – the content that is wholly the denial of destiny – makes more and more concrete the denial of destiny and therefore destiny itself, since it is the denial of that denial.

On the other hand, the isolated earth, since it is the original faith, is an interpretation, that is, it is the act of giving meaning to something. However, precisely because it is a “giving”, the incontrovertible necessity of destiny cannot appertain to it, and is therefore *will* to give meaning. It is because of this giving of meaning that, in the isolated earth that appears in destiny, certain events appear as languages and as languages that deny destiny. All the denials of destiny that appear in the isolated earth are therefore contents of the act of interpreting (that is, of the dream) that appears inside destiny (and whose existence is therefore a trait of destiny itself). The events of the isolated earth are interpreted as languages that are its denial precisely because they testify something different from destiny. therefore, the existence of the discussion concerning destiny offered by the isolated earth is something wanted by the act of interpreting (that appears in destiny).

The relationship between destiny and its discussion-denial is extremely more complex (as indeed every trait we referred to so far); however, I hope that now, presenting this periodical created for discussions, the given hints might be enough to introduce to the discussion.

# Foreword

by Giulio Goggi

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**1.** Italian philosophy is gaining more and more attention all over the world. In the context of philosophers who have had and continue to have a significant impact on the Italian philosophical landscape, there is no doubt that the contribution of Emanuele Severino – with regard to issues such as Ontology, Nihilism, Praxis, Language, Science, Technics, Economics... – stands out for the absolute theoretical rigour.

«Eternity and Contradiction. Journal of Fundamental Ontology» is the official publication of the ASES (Associazione di Studi Emanuele Severino – Society for Emanuele Severino Studies). It is characterized by an international research profile and is addressed to anyone who, despite coming from different disciplines and school of thought, wants to open a debate on issues indicated, bearing in mind the “lesson” of the great Italian thinker.

The dialogue with philosophers, theologians, literati, psychologists, scientists, jurists..., already started, continues to animate high-level congresses and seminars, like the one held last year (“At dawn of the eternity. The first 60 years of *“The original structure”*”) with the participation of Graham Priest in dialogue with Severino and the one that was held last June: “Heidegger in the thought of Severino. Metaphysics, Religion, Politics, Economics, Art, Technics”, with the participation of Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann.

In this number, the first part refers to the topic that is at the core of Severino’s thought: it is *the eternity of being implied in the original structure of destiny*, in its structural relationship between phenomenological and logical immediacy. In the second part we have theoretical reflections and studies starting from the theme of the eternity of being *insofar as it is being*.

As the eternity of being is a fundamental issue, it can be useful to consider some aspects of it, although very briefly.

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**2.** The *original structure of destiny* is the appearing of the being itself of being – of its being other than what is other than itself – as that which cannot be denied: “In manifesting itself [...] Being submits itself to the law opposing it to not-Being [...]”. The opposition is the ground in the sense that it is *that without which no* thought and *no* discourse could constitute itself or exist. It grounds its own negation as well:

not [...] in the sense of making it be valid or grounding its value, but rather in the sense that if the negation did not base itself upon the opposition [...] it would not even exist” (Severino, 2016a, p. 62).

In fact, the negation of the opposition is *a determinate being* which opposes itself to its negative: “This determinateness is proper *both* to the negation, considered as a semantic unity with respect to everything that is other than the negation, *and* to the single terms that make up the negation. If the negation does not remain distinct from its other, there is no longer negation; if each term of the negation is not distinct from every other term [...] again there is no negation [...]. In order for to be negation, the negation must be determinate, both with respect to its other, and in the term that constitute it; and therefore it presupposes and is grounded upon that which it denies” (Severino, 2016a, pp. 67-68). Denying its own ground, the negation of the identity/opposition “is a quitting the scene of the word and of thought, a declaring its own nonexistence and its own meaninglessness” (Severino, 2016a, pp. 69-70).

Then, this being itself of being – this undeniable opposition between every being and its other – implies the eternity of being *insofar as such*: in fact, to think that there is a time in which being is nothing means to think of a time in which being is the absolute other from itself, the impossible negation of destiny.

The necessary affirmation of the eternity of being *insofar as it is being* does not exclude the “becoming” of beings, provided that it is correctly understood. In this respect, Severino himself uses a very powerful metaphor: “Think of a simulacrum that spins on itself in front of a light. Every side of the simulacrum has always been, but they all little by little show themselves. Everything that stands before it is and it is impossible that it is not. In this sense it is eternal. What is the variation of the world, then? It is the coming forth of the eternal. Then, only the eternal can become: becoming is the showing and hiding, and whatever can show itself and hide itself is only what *is*” (Severino, 2000, p. 225).

What undeniably appears is not that beings begin to exist and cease to exist, but rather their come forth: their appearing and disappearing in the eternal gaze of destiny.

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**3.** Because every being is eternal, every being is necessarily in relation to every other being and it is significant only in its relation to the totality of other beings. However, the actual appearing is the dimension where beings begin and cease to appear, so that what we originally have is not the concrete meaning of beings and the totality of Being, but it is their abstract formal meaning. Insofar as it is a finite dimension of the appearing of Being, the original structure of the truth is also the original structure of the contradiction: “Because the original meaning is, and means what it is and means, only in its connection with the Everything [...], in the isolation of the original meaning from the Everything (i.e., in the non-manifestation of the concrete Whole in the original meaning), the original meaning is not the original meaning” (Severino, 1981, p. 73)..

Severino names “contradiction C” this constitutive contradicting of the original

structure whose solution is not a future to come, but has always been: the true Being of the finite appearing, and of every determination that appears in it, is the infinite appearing of the determined totality of beings, which is the overcoming of the totality of the contradictions of the finite. The original structure of destiny, whose contradicting is removed not by the negation of its content, but rather by its concrete position, necessarily implies the being of the infinite appearing of destiny, which in the finite circle of appearing manifests itself only abstractly.

The “contradiction C”, determined by the “non appearing” of the concrete totality of being, is the condition of establishing the “normal” form of contradiction, the contradiction whose content is nothing. It is its condition not in the sense that the “non-appearing” of the concreteness of Everything as such implies the error (the original structure of destiny is a finite dimension, but it is not an erring, as it is the original negation of the error), but in the sense that it is only in the finite appearing of Everything that the erring is possible and can “contrast” the truth.

The other condition of establishing the “normal” form of contradiction is the happening of what Severino calls the “isolating persuasion”, i.e., the conviction that the “earth” – that is everything that enters the circle of appearing – is what we certainly have to deal with. Isolated from the truth of Being, the earth is understood as the environment of “becoming other” (the impossible negation of the being itself of being) that the ontological thought interprets as becoming *absolutely other*, that is to say, as becoming nothing and from nothing.

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**4.** In the process that leads from philosophy to the domain of techno-science, nihilism (the persuasion that being is nothing) becomes increasingly fitting to its essence. The earth, conceived as a reality that oscillates between Being and Nothing, is the object of all those forms of the will to power that are under the illusion that they can steer its development, by coordinating means to ends that each time they try to achieve.

“If we want to put it in terms of a stone metaphor”, Severino writes, “I will say that all the things are unscratchable diamonds. However, one of these diamonds is the belief that anything can be scratched. This belief is itself a diamond, because error itself is eternal. Therefore it is not that in reality the ability of transforming Being exists: acting does not exist, what exists is the persuasion that acting exists. The content of error does not exist, erring exists” (Severino, 2000, p. 232).

If acting as such is an erring, if every decision (both the individual’s and the institutions’) is a way of erring, then all the specific forms of acting and deciding – political, economical, religious, ethical, technical-scientific, artistic... – are forms of erring. The language that testifies the destiny of the truth also belongs to the isolating will, but it belongs to it insofar as it is will to tell destiny, not insofar as it concerns the content that is told, which is the appearing of the folly of the “becoming other” of beings.

The present situation is marked by contrast between the truth of Being and the isolating persuasion, contrast that can only appear as denied in the gaze of destiny. If this negation is not yet accompanied by the appearing of the isolated earth as

that which has reached its completion (i.e. as a complete totality), nevertheless the appearing of the isolation of the earth as a “past” is destined to appear. The writings of our philosopher show it clearly: they show that the language that testifies destiny is the beginning of the path that leads to the decline of the isolation of the earth, proceeding beyond it *in indefinitum*.

But before the descending of the will to power, it is also necessary that the language that testifies destiny is spoken, not only by this or that individual, but by all people. After the ages of myth, of philosophical reason, and technological-scientific reason, the coming of an age in which the language that testifies destiny will prevail: “When the time comes [...] when all the people are destined to speak the language that testifies destiny, they cannot free themselves from action, and the action to which they are connected is the action that can only adapt to the ethics of technics [...]. However their testimony of destiny makes their action *different* from their action when such testimony is absent in them [...]. And the action seen as error is different from the action that does not know to be error” (Severino, 2016b, p. 82).

In this context it will be inevitable that the action (and therefore the non-truth) takes on a new face, because acting and knowing of the error of the action is different from acting without knowing of such error.

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**5.** From the above, it emerges that Severino’s discourse is a point of no return for all the forms of thought and action facing the unheard-of meaning that the testimony of the truth of Being has brought into the language. By hosting all the voices that intend to discuss these issues, the journal “Eternity and Contradiction. Journal of Fundamental Ontology” belongs to the dawn of that path that is destined to lead outside the darkness of nihilism.

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# Structural Principles in Emanuele Severino's Thought

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The essay focuses especially on the three structural principles that sustain the entire proceeding of Severino's thought and that refer to and imply one another. The first one is the principle of non-contradiction, in Parmenides' interpretation and not in the Aristotelian interpretation. The second one is given by the statement, of Hegelian and Gentilian origin, according to which every meaning – that is, every being as a signifier – necessarily implies the totality in its concrete and exhaustive content, and vice versa. The third one requires that every being in the earth, which arrives at the horizon of the appearing, is something that must always be overstepped by another being, and so on endlessly.

**Keywords:**

**principle of non-contradiction, élenchos,  
abstract, concrete, totality, crossing**

## Introduction

Before addressing the topic indicated in the title of my speech, I would like to recall briefly, in this auditorium and in this Brescian headquarter of the Cattolica University, some facts from Emanuele Severino's biography, in particular those concerning his teaching activities (this article is the final report of the speech of the author at the conference "At the dawn of eternity", held in Brescia in March 2018).

After his degree in Philosophy, received in 1950 from the University of Pavia, where he had also been a guest of the Almo Collegio Borromeo, presenting his final dissertation concerning Heidegger with his never forgotten Master Gustavo Bontadini, and after becoming a lecturer in Theoretical Philosophy on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February 1952, Emanuele Severino established his lecturing post at the Cattolica University, having received for that purpose the required authorization from the Sacra Congregazione dei Seminari e delle Università (Sacred Congregation of the Seminars and of the Universities) on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 1957.

In the year 1956-57, he already taught a free course in History of Contemporary Philosophy; later, starting from 1957-58, he was assigned to teach History of Contemporary Philosophy and History of Ancient Philosophy for a year at the Faculty of Education and subsequently at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, until, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December 1962 he was called upon to fill the position of full professor of Philosophy at the Faculty of Education, since he turned out second in a set of three in a contest for the teaching of Moral Philosophy launched by the University of Genova.

After he started his work on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 1963, he also taught a class in Moral Philosophy for the degree course of Philosophy at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, while he also taught courses in History of Philosophy, Institutions of Philosophy and Theoretical Philosophy in this Brescian location, when, starting from 1965, the courses of the detached section of the Faculty of Education were initiated. And it is interesting to

remember the judgements that the Council of the Faculty of Education expressed concerning Prof. Severino's activity in two different occasions: with the purpose of accompanying his application for the participation to a competition for a professorship, the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 1961, the Faculty writes a report in which it highlights that "Prof. Severino has surely demonstrated to fully master the subject and to possess remarkable teaching abilities. His contribution to the development of the doctrine that inspires the Faculty itself has converged in a vast series of works [...] and has vigorously resulted not only in his teaching (eliciting the most attentive participation among the students, vibrant debates and fruitful inquiries), but also in the discussions with his colleagues and among the 'Società Italiana per gli Studi Filosofici e religiosi' ('Italian Society for the Study of Philosophy and Religion')".

After the three years probationary period, in view of his confirmatory application as full professor, he receives from the Faculty Council, on the 27<sup>th</sup> January 1966, a statement in which it is attested that "in his extremely broad teaching activity, accompanied by a constant seminar activity that was always conducted with exemplary commitment and with careful attention to the different needs of the different groups of students, Prof. Severino has continued to demonstrate his rare and deep competence in the most diverse fields of the philosophical research. This is confirmed by both the relevant number of final dissertations led by him, which earned excellent marks, and the efficacy and acuity of his relations and correlations during the discussions for the final degree examinations, by both the constant increase in the number of young students around him who have already improved their knowledge in the scientific field, and the relevant interest and fruitful discussions that his teaching and his publications have raised among the students and the professors of the University".

And who was fortunate enough to be able to attend his classes, as the one who is speaking to you right now, for a biennium, between 1966 and 1968, will certainly never forget the rigorous way in which his arguments were presented, the solemn calm of his way of speaking, the clarity that illuminated the depth of his arguments, the supreme and scrupulous command of the logical passages, the attention to take into consideration questions and objections, in order to fully and exhaustively give an account of his own position.

## Logos and dialogue

Emanuele Severino's speculative path for over sixty years develops in an exemplarily coherent and fruitful way: it unravels in a debate with other philosophical perspectives; at the same time, it shows to be able to face and resolve the unresolved matters with innovative turning points, not easily predictable at the beginning, but congruent with the previous path. In particular, the dialogue with the opposite or differing positions becomes unavoidable and inescapable, since only by denying its own negation and by showing that its own negations are resolved in self-denial, the truth can be affirmed in its incontrovertibility and necessity. The presumption to deny it, indeed, would imply a contradiction either because it would be in contrast with other necessarily true propositions, since they belong to the original structure of truth, or because they would be intrinsically contradictory, that is, in contrast with the principle of non-contradiction. Moreover – and this is another point on which Severino methodologically insists – the different negations, as they concretely present themselves in history, or which can anyway be hypothesized, must be identified and refuted: even though the foundation of truth implies that, and is what it is as long as, it manages to resist to any assault and retort any objection, if the single negations weren't refuted and rejected, it would happen that negations that are only illusory could occur and act like actual negations. Severino points out indeed: «but if the truth knows *a priori* that there cannot be a motivation for every possible form of its negation, and that therefore every motivation is illusory, it must indeed show its appearance *concretely*, since otherwise that which counts as illusory motivation acts as an actual motivation» (Severino, 1984, p. 70; see also Severino, 1982, pp. 81-84). It can also be hypothesized (and this concretely happened for a certain period also in Severino's reflection concerning the relationship between the basics of logos and the presumed phenomenological experience of the becoming as the annihilation of the being) that such an assertion, which cannot be denied, contradicts another one, which belongs to the original structure of truth: from this would then result a radical aporia, inside the original structure itself, which cannot certainly be resolved by sacrificing one of the two assertions, but it cannot be accepted either as a synonym of the reality of the absurd. In this case, this is, therefore, about identifying, discovering and removing that element, alien to the original structure of the truth, which, illegitimately assumed as part of it, elicits the lamented aporia, that is, the conflict between two mutually contradictory

propositions, but of which none of them – because of its own nature – could be denied. In particular, such a case occurs actually, and it does not remain in the mere hypothetical level, when the conflict between the law of the logos and the report of the experience concerning the becoming, in its classic interpretation, happened. As long as that extrinsic element will not be refuted, the system of truth, which, as such, in its entirety sets itself as incontrovertible, is only valid in an abstract way and it remains in the aporia and in the problem and therefore, at least to some extent, in the contradiction.

From what has been said it appears that the dialectical dialogue, interpreted like this, is necessary to the truth in order to affirm and defend itself and, therefore, it must be concretely and actually pursued: not for a benevolent personal and subjective sentiment of openness toward the others, but because the truth itself depends on this dialogue, the philosophical position of a single thinker not so much. From this point of view, then, «the logos *is* dialogue, dialogue between the truth and its negation, outside of which the truth does not live» (Severino, 1984, p. 69): the condition of the truth is indeed such that if the incontrovertible foundation guarantees that its negation is defeated as the universality of negation, it is however not defeated in all of its possible individualizations, of which that universality is composed, so that the victory over the negation of the truth at the mere universal level is still an indeterminate victory, in a manner of speaking only potential and abstract.

Since the truth is well-founded, it is known *that* every possible negation is, as such, defeated, but it is not known *how* it is defeated yet; the debate with the different determinations of the negation makes, then, actual that *how* and it finally makes the defence of the truth concrete. It follows that the one who denies the truth or the interlocutor who insists on confuting it, must not be silenced, nor we must rejoice if he/she is weak and little fierce, since «his/her silence is the silence of the truth; since if the truth is not realized as the removal of its negation, it is not realized as the truth either; however, if the negation, the mistake is silent, the removal does not establish itself and the truth does not show its value, that is, it does not reveal itself and *so* it is not realized as the truth» (p. 68). If the adversary is strong and the objection is formulated as solidly and rigorously as possible, its confutation will also achieve a firmer success and the truth will establish itself in a more secure form.

It must be kept in mind that Severino does not interpret the dialectical

dialogue as the expression of single thinkers or of single, individual people: and this for two different kinds of reasons. First of all, during the initial moment of his reflection (before the latest developments), according to Severino, the existence of other individuals besides me is, indeed, only a problem and it is only possible that it can be possible that other people analogous to me exist and that they possess a conscience that is analogous to mine and beliefs perhaps opposite and in contrast with one another. In this sense, *I* find myself in a privileged situation, from the very point of view of the original structure of the truth, since I am aware, besides my behaviour, of my conscience too and my awareness concerning the reality, my feelings, desires and acts of will, whose reliability I am aware of, while concerning the others I am only aware of their external behaviour and it is only possible that to them a conscience analogous to mine is associated. Their beliefs are not immediately present. Hence, the dialogue and the conflict is not between a plurality of individuals, but the objections establish themselves only as propositional contents that presume to deny the original structure: «the philosophies are many [...] but I am the only philosopher, the only philosophizing that is actually real is mine, the only belief is mine» (p.78) and the thesis according to which «“the” philosophy is “my” philosophy» (Severino, 1981, p. 76; see also pp. 119-128) is only apparently paradoxical. Only in the continuation of his reflection, as we shall see, Severino will find not only the possibility, but the necessity that other consciences, apart from the original one are present, when he will demonstrate that, beyond the original circle of the appearing of destiny, an infinite constellation of finite circles of destiny must be considered present, in constant dialogue with one another.

Secondly, then, the affirmation of the truth does not occur because of (and thanks to) the work of a single thinker, that is, of an empirical I, but of the thought as itself, of a transcendental appearing, aware of being self-aware, which includes in itself every empirical appearing as its object. It is to the thought, interpreted like this, that the truth discloses, that is, something manifests itself immediately and the contradiction of the negation of the immediate (logical or phenomenological) manifests itself to it, and not to a specific empirical individual. In this regard, in an article entitled *Hic homo intelligit* (Severino, 1995, pp. 126-136) Severino explicitly criticizes the thesis according to which the subject of the process of knowledge is the man, the concrete human individual, since, when we affirm that “this being thinks”, we cannot mean that the connection between subject and predicate

is analytical and identical: in this case, we would actually say that the thought thinks, that what characterizes and completes this being is only and uniquely the thought, and we would deny, therefore, its individuality as an additional and crucial moment: because of this the aforementioned connection, if it wants to defend the specific subjectivity as linked to the thought must be synthetic; but, if it does not want to only be merely de facto, but needs to be necessary, it could not be given by experience, but it should be demonstrated. Without such a demonstration, saying that necessarily *hic homo intelligit* is just a premise, a hypothesis that lacks immediacy and truth. It must be said that as regards this position Severino has always remained very coherent, with great clarity: what he affirms with truth is not a point of view or a personal position concerning the world and what is real, but in philosophy it has to do with the destiny itself, that is, of what is present in a necessary way and is as such affirmed by a knowledge that is not mere opinion, but it reflects and translates what for the Greeks was called *epistémé*.

### **Non-contradiction and élenchos**

Three are the structural principles that sustain the entire proceeding of his thought and that refer to and imply one another.

The first one is the *principle of non-contradiction*, in Parmenides' interpretation, according to which "the being is and cannot not be" and not in the Aristotelian interpretation, according to which, instead, the being, if and when it is, is opposed to nothingness. This possibility precisely, that the being is not, is banished from Parmenides' formulation, which, therefore, does not entrust the time with the task to settle the contradiction that is intrinsic to the becoming anymore, but it is affirmed that the being can never and under no circumstances identify itself with the nothingness: as a result, it is not possible to say anymore that in the becoming the identification of the being with the nothingness would be avoided because the becoming being is before and is not after, since a being would not be anyway and there would be a moment in which a being would equal to nothing. And Parmenide's formulation impedes exactly this identification, since it simply affirms that the being is and the nothingness is not. Certainly, compared to the original Parmenides' formulation some sort of parricide will however be accomplished by Severino, when he will subsume again the determinations of the being, the platonic *éteiron*, inside the being and he will therefore affirm that those determinations too – since they are

– cannot not be. This way the becoming understood in a nihilistic way – as the affirmation of the coming from nothing or of the ending in nothing by the being (and by the single entities that exist) – is excluded. Equally, even the immediate presence, that can be attested on a phenomenological level, cannot be denied: if the being is immediately present on a phenomenological level, its negation is removed because it would be in contrast with the immediacy of the positive that is present: the immediacy of the presence of the being excludes its negation and it establishes the non-contradictoriness of the being in its patency. When the gnoseological dualism is overcome as an unacceptable premise, the phenomenological level and the logical one coincide in this Archimedean point, in which the immediate is in its concreteness. Here emerges also the link that ties together the non-contradiction principle and the affirmation of the intentional identity between being and thought, with the consequent refusal of a “reality per se”, cloudy for the thought and unknowable.

In defence of this principle there is the *élenchos* – the specific confutative argument that Aristotle develops in the fourth book of his *Metaphysics* – which Severino, precisely in his essay *Ritornare a Parmenide* (*Returning to Parmenides*) (Severino, 1982, pp. 19-61; in particular pp. 40-58), exhaustively and systematically reorganizes in its possible variations and formulations. Apart from the Aristotelian formulations, according to Severino, the principle of non-contradiction affirms the universal opposition of the being and of the nothingness, that is, the opposition of the positive and the negative: the confutation of those who deny such an opposition is developed through two passages with an increasing accuracy and universality of conclusions and results. First of all, it can be observed that the negation of the universal opposition is the affirmation of an individuation of the universal opposition, since that presumed negation – being a certain positive – in order to be that, is opposed to everything that is different from itself, that is, to its not being. At this point it results that the negation of the universal opposition is not refuted as such, but it is refuted in its universality, since at least one specific exemplification of that universal opposition must be admitted. This way it is said that the negation of an individuation is an individuation, and so it cannot achieve its aim. Secondly, it can be observed that not only the negation of the opposition is distinguished from the other-than-self, but even its terms cannot be confused with one another, if the negation of the opposition wants to be such. If indeed I demand to deny the principle, identifying what is different

(positive and negative; being and nothingness; yellow and red; man and trireme), it is necessary that the elements that are different from one another appear and are known as such: otherwise, the opposition would not be denied, instead, a banal identity would be affirmed among elements perceived as not at all different from one another. As a consequence, the identification of the opposites is entirely based on the opposition of the opposites, that is, the opposition of the opposites can be denied only if it is affirmed and therefore its negation is entirely based on its affirmation. The negation of the principle implies exactly the truth of what it wants to deny, that is, of the principle itself, since, in order to deny, it is necessary that the negation is asserted as a negation, and not as an affirmation or something else. This way, we are implicitly compelled to affirm what we explicitly would like to deny, and we are compelled to pose what we would like to eliminate exactly in the act itself and with the intent itself of eliminating it.

These earnings will remain as the analysis and the investigation of the Aristotelian postulate also in the development of the subsequent reflections, even though they will be inserted in a broader context and will undergo a radical reevaluation. The continuation of the reflection will lead to further reiterate that the Aristotelian *élenchos* does not belong to the truth of destiny, but only to the Western *epistème*, considered in its most rigorous role. Since it is isolated from the truth of destiny, the Aristotelian position takes only the form of an alteration of the truth of what is original. Separated from the truth, the language that resounds as similar to the truth, is not the truth, it is instead its alteration and a deviation from it.

The principle of non-contradiction, as it is delineated in that essay, however, even though it affirms the eternity and the immutability of every being, it does not determine yet what the report of the experience concerning the becoming of the single beings is, on a strictly phenomenological and descriptive level. Consequently, it does not imply a specific solution to the problem posed by the becoming yet, when the becoming is intended as in the formulation that traditionally – at least starting from Plato and Aristotle – is given to the matter, that is, the becoming as the passage from nothingness to the being and from the being to nothingness (or from a certain not-being to a certain being and vice versa). At first, a solution like the one glimpsed in an original interpretation of Anassimandro's postulate and proposed in the essay: *La parola di Anassimandro (Anassimandro's word)* (Severino, 1982, pp. 391-411) seemed plausible. In that essay it was affirmed that, even though in the world things are born and die following the order

of time, «the uncontaminated sphere of the divine, where the being is eternally in itself» (p. 408), still remains. As Severino will later note, this «is the extreme attempt to join the testament of the truth of being up with the nihilistic concept of the becoming» (p. 411). Such an hypothesis of a solution is later resumed right at the end of *Ritornare a Parmenide (Returning to Parmenides)*, when, reaffirmed the immutability of the being, in front of the fact of the becoming intended as the annihilation of the being, it is stated that «the being as the being, and therefore the entirety of the being, is; and therefore it is immutable. However, since immutable it hovers over the becoming being, it transcends it» (p. 59). The immutable includes, consequently, all the positive that is in what is in the process of the becoming and transcends it; what is in the process of the becoming, then, is not a nothing, but it does not constitute a novelty for God, in fact it is already rescued besides the eternal. However, this draft of a solution could not hide the underlying grave aporia, determined by the simultaneous presence of two opposite and irreconcilable needs, the thesis of the immutability of the being and the presence of the becoming, and by the awareness that none of them could be sacrificed to the other.

Starting from the *Poscritto (Postscript)* (pp. 63-133), the subsequent reflection – and in this sense the return to Parmenides will be developed in a renewing and actual loyalty – will highlight that the ancient problem of the becoming does not exist and is dissolved not as a consequence of just the application of the first principle, but because of a more adequate reading and interpretation of the phenomenological report, which attests not the annihilation of a being and its rising from nothingness, but only its disappearing and appearing; and together with the being its own appearing is destined to disappear and appear too – not to be annihilated. The experience, correctly read and not interpreted according to the tradition of the Western metaphysics, does not certify the annihilation of the being at all, but only its disappearing; so that the being, which appeared before, does not appear anymore and its appearing too, which appeared before, is not annihilated but is only disappeared. When a being is not present anymore, its being a nothing does not appear at all, but simply that being does not appear anymore. Severino reaffirms later, in numerous and increasingly deep analysis, that in here there is not the risk of an infinite process, since the appearing is not something external and alien to what appears from time to time: if this were the case, since every appearing appears, we would go on infinitely into the series of the new forms of what appears. Instead, the

different moments of what appears coincide, since, when a being appears, the appearing of the being, the appearing of the appearing and the appearing of the appearing of the appearing coincide and, when the being becomes, it disappears and, with it, its appearing and the appearing of the appearing, without the manifestation of any form of annihilation. «The appearing that starts (or ends) has itself as a content, so that the starting to appear structurally excludes the starting to be» (p. 110). This alternation, which is the new face of the becoming that is nihilistic no more, is accomplished inside the total horizon of the appearing, which, since it is transcendental, is not prone to any form of becoming, while it is instead the background that encloses the totality of the beings that appear.

Hence, since, from the correctly read experience, no annihilation of the beings emerges, the problem of a contradiction inherent to the becoming – that is, in the presumed appearing of the annihilation of the being – which would need to be remedied in order to be able to break even with the regulation given by the principle of non-contradiction, is not present anymore. On this substantial point the discussion with Gustavo Bontadini, which, despite not overcoming the radical opposition between the two interlocutors, has allowed both of them to clarify their positions, sharpening the respective arguments and highlighting the essential points of the dissent, will develop for many years. And right thanks to a reading of the experience and of its report, Severino refutes the traditional conception of the becoming, considered nihilistic since it considers indeed proven the evidence of the annihilation of the being. Since the experience does not comment on the destiny of the being that does not appear anymore, the principle of non-contradiction takes over at this point to impose the only possible interpretation, which becomes necessary since it implies the inconsistency of all the other alternatives. As can be seen, the ancient distinction between appearing and being returns here, which in history has had different and opposite declinations, starting from the ancient thinking. Since the gnoseological dualism between the being and the appearing has been overcome, it will not be possible to say anymore that the being is destined not to appear or that it is alien to the appearing (almost as if the being per se would be something that, as such, cannot appear), and vice versa, the appearing will not be an heterogenous or misleading manifestation compared to the being; but instead the appearing will be the splendor of the being, i. e. that to which the being, in its fullness and adequacy, is destined. If the being is immutable and eternal, then, when it does not appear

anymore, it continues to be, so the sequence present in the becoming proves the historicity of the ways in which the immutable manifests itself and, at the same time, the finiteness of the appearing, that is, the proceeding under which the totality appears, without being ever concretely, and fully, given. Hence, if a being appears, it certainly is; while, if it does not appear, not only *it is not possible to say* that it is no more, but *it is necessary to say* that it continues to be, eternal and immutable.

### **Abstract and concrete**

The second structural principle is given by the statement – of Hegelian and Gentilian origin – inspired to the dialectic in its fundamental speculative function, according to which every meaning – that is, every being as a signifier – necessarily implies the totality in its concrete and exhaustive content, just like, inversely, the totality necessarily implies all the single meanings, since it is constituted only in reference to them. On this fundamental point Severino lingers at great length in his *La Struttura Originaria (The Original Structure)* and in his subsequent writings for different reasons: if a specific predicate befits *necessarily* a certain meaning, if the meaning would be considered outside of that relation, it would not be itself anymore and its position would be the position of something different from itself (of a not-self). With this we do not simply want to propose the (rather banal) observation that A, in relation to B, is not A outside that relation, but it is asserted that, if the relation between A and B is necessary, it becomes constitutive of the meaning of A, so that, outside this relation, A is not itself, but something else. In this regard Severino enunciates a series of theorems that outline an organic conception of the reality and a view of the totality as a complex system (Severino, 1984, pp. 186-193). If a being, as immediately significant, is such because it denies everything that is not itself (since, this way, the identity with itself is immediately linked to the distinction-opposition toward what is other from itself), that is, it denies the *totality* of its opposition, then this, the totality, belongs necessarily to the meaning of that being. And this being will not be itself, but it will be denied, if with it it will not be also *concretely* given the totality of the other from itself. And such a thesis will soon pose a grave problem to which we will come back later. *Thus, every being necessarily implies the totality of the beings.* Moreover, a second thesis must be posed: speaking of the totality, if we observe that it necessarily includes a certain being – since otherwise it would not be the totality – this being (just like all the other beings included in the totality)

determines the meaning of the totality, which, therefore, will not be itself anymore if it will not refer concretely to all the beings that belong to it. *The totality implies necessarily every being.* It must be then concluded that every being and every meaning necessarily imply every other being and meaning. *Every being necessarily implies every other being.*

This series of thesis highlights that the main mistake to repel must be found in the affirmation of the independence or of the insularity of a meaning or of a being with regard to all the others. This way Severino resumes the fundamental basis of the Hegelian position and his organicism: he rejects the primacy of the unrelated individual, in its independence from everything else, and he does not accept that the relationship is only secondary and subsequent with regard to the different things that are in relation to one another and that these, therefore, must be assumed. On the contrary: it is only inside the relation that the different signifiers beings are constituted, since each of them is both identical to itself and different from all the others, so that the reference to all the others is intrinsically necessary for every being. Only inside the totality of the system a being is adequately and fully significant. Thus, referring to the part always implies referring to the whole, and vice versa.

The entire context in which a being is inserted contributes therefore to the determination of the being itself and, if that context changes, that being and its meaning change too and are the same no more. And, however, among the different contexts in which that being is placed (and in which it assumes different meanings) there is always an identical moment, which changes in the different contexts and which however allows to say that in each of them it is always present. It must not be thought however that the identical moment subsists separated from the contexts: rather the identity is realized in different ways, depending on the contextual relations in which it is inserted.

Therefore, if a being is posed without posing the totality of the references that constitute it essentially, that being that we would like to pose is not posed and the intention to pose it remains frustrated. We are here in the presence of that contradiction C that in all of Severino's reflection, starting from *La Struttura Originaria (The Original Structure)*, plays a fundamental role that remains unchanged. If it is not taken under consideration and is not understood in its essence and in its function most of the outcomes of Severino's conception are missed. With such contradiction C – here is its peculiarity – a certain content is not posed and in the same time not posed

(as happens in the contradictions as normally intended) and that other fundamental contradiction, because of which the immutability of every being is denied and we give in to the nihilistic conception of the becoming and of the experience (as happens in the Western philosophy), is not posed either, but an inequality is realized between what we intend to pose and what is instead actually posed, between the concrete position we intend to realize and the only formal position that we manage to achieve. With it we demand to affirm a being without posing with it the concrete and infinite totality of the references that constitute it and that give to it its full and adequate meaning. Thus, we come to affirm the finiteness of the I, even when it is in the truth, since it cannot manifest the concrete totality of the being in its absolute fullness: from which results that the finite I of destiny, despite being in the truth, can never align itself with the infinite I of destiny, and it cannot do so because otherwise the finite would be annihilated in the infinite and that being, made of the finite I, would be annihilated. And this is impossible. It follows that the immutable manifests itself only in a processual way, that is, in a finite way: otherwise, the being that is the transcendental appearing would cease to be, that is, the immutable horizon in which the moments of the immutable enter and exit the appearing.

In this context is located the difference between the concrete position of a being and its abstract position, between the concrete position of the totality and its abstract position, since the totality and the original structure are not denied in their truth and essentiality, but they are not shown in their concreteness. The abstract concept of the abstract is the position of something that is not only distinguished from the totality that is essential to it, but of something that is also separated from it. Almost all the aporias are actually born from the fact of considering an element as separated and, at the same time, not separated from a certain constitutive relation. The vice of the abstract intellect, demands indeed that the element, separated, exists per se and that (only) in its separated existing per se it is fully itself; but, at the same time, it considers that element still as a part and not as the totality, because this way only, if it is a part, it can be separated and the work of separation can be accomplished: however, right because of this, that element is not considered as something separate. Such a need for concreteness encourages a logic of identity, according to which, when an equation between things that are different is posed (saying, for example, that A is B), we manage not to say the impossible and not to contradict ourselves, only if A is not intended as a generic A, but precisely as that A that is together with B and, vice versa, B

will not be a generic B, but precisely that B that is destined to be together with A, so that the relation between the two becomes essential and necessary. Those who know Severino's different works, in their progressive speculative development and in their complete and meticulous work and constant refinement, also know with what persistence and with how much difficulty he tries to bring out the fact that, in the case of an identification of things that are different, each element is not the other, while it is destined to enter in a synthesis with the other, precisely because it is what it is. The affirmation of the identification is always accompanied by the position of distinction and of the diversity and it is rather tiring (if not difficult) to make the difference coexist with the identity of what differs, which would not in turn break in additional elements that are different from one another that need to be identified and linked to one another. And here the risk of an endless regression, always glimpsed, might hide.

And, as it has been said just above, this contradiction highlights the finiteness of the finite appearing, in which the concrete totality of the beings does not appear in its absolute fullness; a structural finiteness, since it could never coincide with the infinite, concrete and totally unfolded appearing. Precisely this contradiction and the inequation between finite appearing and infinite appearing of the destiny is the ultimate foundation of the possibility of the nihilistic isolation from destiny. If the finite appearing were the concrete appearing of everything and not only a formal appearing of the totality, the earth could not be isolated and that event that is nihilism could not happen either. At this point, however, the question of why the presence of a finite and only formal appearing of destiny is necessary arises, why we can only approach Joy and not already be in it.

## Crossing

The third principle emerges mostly starting from the volume *La Gloria* (*The Glory*), and is later reaffirmed in *Oltrepassare* (*Crossing*): it requires that every being in the earth, which arrives at the horizon of the appearing, is necessarily not impossible to overstep, but is something that must always be overstepped by another being, and so on endlessly: «something that oversteps that is impossible to overstep is impossible» (Severino, 2007, p. 185). Thanks to this principle not only the possibility (which had always been allowed and justified), but also the necessity that a plurality of finite ways of appearing of the destiny exists will be founded; that is, that there is an

infinite constellation of finite circles of destiny, according to the linguistic formulation assumed in the most recent works. And this is a conclusion that arises from a series of very important reflections. On the one hand, we can ask ourselves why the being, which is the immutable, must appear in a processual way; which means always in a partial and finite form, as we could already observe. On the other hand, the question of in what sense and why this principle will allow us to get out of that form of solipsism, to which Severino appeared necessarily condemned, when – as we saw – it was affirmed that, while the immediate presence attested my conscience, besides my behaviour, this was not the case for the others, so that it had to be concluded that philosophy came to coincide with “my” philosophy.

As regards the first issue, it should be noted that Severino starts, so to speak, from the bottom, that is, from the original circle of the actual appearing; he does not deduce from certain abstract and a priori conditions, which prescind from the actual presence, but he moves from the original point in which that presence is located. And the empirical appearing arrives inside the horizon of the transcendental appearing, which is immobile not only because, since it is a being, it is eternal, but also because it constitutes the ultimate background of the rising and of the setting of every being, the remaining upon which the becoming beings follow one another and which is the condition that allows their following one another, but it is not one of the becoming beings itself. Without the transcendental appearing there would not be the sight of the arrival of the different beings, whose empirical appearing rises and sets. The appearing in a processual way, and therefore the finiteness, is then required both because the arrival demands that something disappears, and the fact that something arrives is attested by the empirical appearing, and because otherwise those beings that are the empirical appearing and the transcendental one, as well as the starting to appear of a certain empirical appearing on the background of the transcendental appearing, would be cancelled in their difference. And since we know that even the empirical appearing, albeit finite, since it is a being it is eternal, it, when it disappears, will continue to appear (and in this case, to be) inside the infinite appearing, in which everything appears in its total concreteness.

We could however ask ourselves if and why elements (every one of them or some of them) that appear in the horizon of the transcendental appearing, although they rise, cannot remain permanent in it and must be crossed, according to the principle that was now recalled: I believe the

reasons are different. If all the positive that arrives were impossible to cross and permanent, the content of the transcendental appearing would move toward the limit of equalling what is totally and fully accomplished in the harmony of everything; but this could never arrive as the result of a process of accomplishment, in which the contradictions of which every moment that arrives in the earth consists are entirely overcome, right because it is partial (Severino, 2001, pp. 91-92). The infinite appearing of everything is originally infinite and total, and it cannot become so, otherwise it would not be that full concrete totality it is. Hence, what arrives must in turn be crossed and it cannot demand to be the ultimate elimination of every contradiction. Moreover, according to Severino, if a content of the empirical appearing were unsurpassable, it would be assimilated to the background, to the immutable field inside which the becoming happens, but which – we know – cannot become, and it therefore cannot undergo increases or additions. The variants, which are in the becoming, would become permanent constants, from a content of the transcendental appearing they would become a moment of it. Certainly, what disappears at the arriving of something else, continues to appear somehow, but indeed as something that is disappeared.

It follows that, then, – and this is the second issue – that even that finite appearing, actual and original, aware of itself as I, cannot be the only form of finite appearing, but it becomes necessary (and not only possible) to admit that «the being that crosses starts to appear inside another I of the destiny, that is, inside a circle of the appearing and on a background different from the original circle and background» (Severino, 2001, p. 185). It becomes necessary then to pose also an infinite constellation of finite circles of the appearing, which is beyond and different from the actual and original appearing, albeit analogous to it: otherwise, the latter, right in its actuality, would be impossible to cross and it would start to belong to the immutable background, which is impossible. At the actual appearing these finite circles appear, but only as abstract, and they do not possess that concreteness the original appearing has for itself.

This way, Severino's reflection gains the foundation of a plurality of finite ways of appearing, analogous to the original one, and manages to conjugate the affirmation that the totality manifests itself in its own absolute and full concreteness and, at the same time, the affirmation of the infinite plurality of the essentially finite prospects, which more and more completely, but never fully, match that infinite appearing.

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# The Phenomenological Immediacy and its Structure

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The present contribution moves from one of the main issues of Severino's *The Original structure*, namely, the relation of co-implication between phenomenological and logical immediacy. In their structural relationship, these two meanings of immediacy constitute the original structure of the appearance of being (*ens*). This structure is characterized by a complex unity, which is articulated into three moments, indicating that something only appears if its appearance appears. The proposal of the present work consists in a comparison of Severino's position with a classical structure of evidence and implication such as that of the transcendental, which is here conceived in a Kantian sense, namely, as the place of the *a priori* conditions according to which the data enter the subject's horizon.

**Keywords:**

**phenomenological immediacy, logical immediacy,  
being, structure, appearing, transcendental**

## 1. Introduction

The presentation of the original structure is equal to the individuation of the essence of ground, that is, the anapodictic structure of knowledge or, alternatively, the dynamic by means of which the multiplicity structurally becomes principality or immediacy (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 107).

*The original structure (La struttura originaria)* begins with a formal definition which represents, however, the aim of determining what characterises the immediacy and, then, the experience as such.

The notion of immediacy explicitly refers to the empirical given. Nevertheless, this notion has to be distinguished from the empirical given; on the one hand, it certainly refers to the appearance of the given, on the other, it states that the appearance of the given cannot be denied. And, of course, the latter feature is not included at all into the empirical given.

Now, these two moments – the phenomenological and logical immediacy – are concretely unified thus constituting the experience of being. From this point of view, both the empirical data and their twofold evidence are secured. Since this original structure names the ground, the ground is already efficacious in the dynamics in which the phenomenological and logical immediacy are intertwined. This originary-ness has, as a *content*, the totality of the experience and it is identical to the unity of the experience; however, from a *formal* point of view, it is identical to the whole being. This is, in a nutshell, the theoretical path we would like to follow.

A first consideration concerns the role of philosophy that, as a manifestation of being as such, is phenomenology, not only as the appearance of something to the subject but also as a manifestation of being in its necessity. Here, we deal with the first stage of the structure of the philosophical understanding given as the synthesis of phenomenology and logic: two distinct constituents that are, however, concretely unified.

It means that a phenomenological given is not what simply shows itself within the horizon of the appearance, but it is what is never separated from the *logos*: “The immediacy of the *nexus* between the meanings (= meaningful

things = the fact that things mean = beings) is put as ‘logical’ immediacy (since the logicity, the *logos*, is the relationship between meanings) and the immediacy of the logicity is called ‘law of noncontradiction’. The immediacy of the *evidence*, that is, the appearance of the various forms of nexuses which hold together the meanings, is called ‘phenomenological’ immediacy” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 17).

In the definition of the content of knowledge, intended as synthesis of the phenomenological and logical appearing, we face a specific notion of truth: truth is construed as the immediate and, from a structural point of view, the apodictical structure of knowledge leads to the immediate without any mediation.

For such reason, the problem of non-truth arises: non-truth is precisely the separation of these two indivisible dimensions.

Given that, the original structure is not something which in turn needs to be grounded by something else; on the contrary, it is itself the essence of ground and, therefore, it belongs to the apodictic understanding, which does not require any demonstration. The structure, in other terms, appears to be an incontrovertible self-manifestation. Along with the first – immediate, original and phenomenological – manifestation, it appears the *logos* too, that is, the principle of the incontrovertibility. The original structure exhibits both the poles of its own immediacy. But what does it mean to maintain that the immediacy is twofold (phenomenological and logical)? What does it mean that in the self-revealing of the being the dimension of the incontrovertibility also comes up and that these two moments together constitute the original structure?

Here, we state that the appearance of everything that immediately appears, entails the presence of the *logos* too. Therefore, we have the following consequences: first, the original judgement is not only the expression of a methodology but it expresses at the same time also a content, that is, a being with all its determinations. Second, the truth of the original structure does not deny the plurality of the determinations but it shows the identity, within the original judgement, of subject and predicate. It does not take for granted something of immediately known which, without the phenomenological-logical interweaving, would be only seemingly known.

That said, we can reach a conclusion already implicit in the occurring terms. The immediacy is a structure which includes phenomenological and logical immediacy. These cannot be intended as successive and distinct moments but as items originally in relation. For this reason, the original structure is the necessity between the semantic fields, both as immediacy of

the evidence of the appearance and as logical relationship between the meanings.

Therefore, if the logical immediacy consists in the non-contradiction of being as such (taken in its totality), the phenomenological immediacy is defined by Severino as “immediacy of the appearing of being that appears, inasmuch being which appears, that is, the appearing of any being that appears, that is the appearing of the totality of being which appears” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 34).

It means that every being is always within the concrete original structure and, therefore, the two regions of the immediacy are characterised by an effective and specific self-exhibition. In any case, everything originally appearing, appears both as a being and as the necessary relation among beings. It is straightforward to identify the relationship between the two levels with the logical dimension of the original; however, since this relationship exists, it must be said that it belongs to the phenomenological level too.

## **2. Phenomenological immediacy and the structure of the appearing**

On the basis of such premises, the phenomenological immediacy cannot be understood simply as the immediate appearing of beings. It is, more radically, an appearing of nexuses where the form of appearing includes not only the beings but also the beings which constitute the various relations. At the same time, the immediacy includes, then, the co-originary-ness of the two regions of the immediacy.

In order for a being to appear, there must be, at the same time, the whole class of the nexuses by means of which any being is necessarily and formally included into a relation. The empirical appearing of any given, of any being, of any state of affairs, is within a horizon which is original and it always remains as such: if something is, it is undeniable that it appears within this structural entanglement of relationships. This class of nexuses is the original grounding, without which any being cannot access into the horizon of the appearing.

This clarification allows us to say that the subject-object dualism, which characterised modern philosophy, is solved and, at the same time, overcome. It is solved because this class of nexuses immediately appears in its own undeniability, in its necessity; therefore, it is not the effect of the relation between subject and object, but it is the undeniable remaining of the identity among being-knowing-meaning. It is overcome as a veritable

horizon, since the original truth of being does not depend on the intentional act but it shows itself as original opposition to its own negation. How is the phenomenological immediacy, that is, the appearing being exhibited? In order for something to be able to self-manifest, no operating presupposition is supposed to be. So, what reveals itself, by excluding a presupposition, is undeniable. The immediacy is, then, another way to characterise the manifestation; the structure of the immediate refers to the totality which belongs to such level of manifestation. This is an undeniable nexus and, therefore, the structure of the genuine appearing coincides with the structure of the immediacy.

The presence of being does not presuppose anything but itself: “The being which is immediately present – the ‘immediate’ as what it occurs into the constitution of the subject of the original judgement or, better, as element of that structure of the senses of the immediacy which constitute the subject of the original subject – is what, in order to be affirmed, does not require (or not presuppose) anything but itself: τὸ δι’ αὐτὸ γινώριμον: *per se notum*” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 143).

It is worth to note that this passage clearly distinguishes the presence of being and the presence of what is present. However, here it is simply stated that being as *per se notum* means that one knows that the being is; in other terms, being states the phenomenological immediacy of a nexus. A further step is required; and it is specified in the following: “When we claim: the being is, *since* the fact that the being is, is *per se notum*, this ‘since’ (the grounding) is not in this case the reason of being of the being (it is not the *since* of the connection between the subject and predicate of the proposition: ‘The being is’), but it is the ‘since’ of the that-being (*dass*): phenomenological immediacy” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 145).

The appearing has therefore a content (hyposyntax) and it is at the same time the horizon in which the being appears (hypersyntax). As background, the structure is original and as unity of a multiplicity, it is a phenomenological and logical complex constituted by determinations related to each other. The determinations are just within the complex and the complex is a unity of a plurality of determinations. The grounding is the impossibility of not-being, immediately appearing without the mediation of anything else: the ground, in order to be ground, must be original and it is original only because it is a structure.

Now, thought is the manifestation of being; this presence of being – which is known in itself – is understood in an immediate way and cannot be subjected to negation. Otherwise, the presence of being would keep close the

not-being intended as not-removed; in other terms, the affirmation of being would not entail its negation to be removed. The negation is actually removed by considering that the affirmation of being does not require any proof or demonstration. The deep meaning of immediacy actually excludes the possibility of a non-being together with being. Namely, it means that the statement “being is” does not need any demonstration: “Greek philosophy has the priceless merit to *reveal* the sense of immediacy. This revealing is not something secondary with respect to the immediacy, but is precisely what makes immediacy valuable as grounding. The immediacy is either grounding inasmuch it is revealed or it is *posed* as immediacy” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 147).

(In this way the difference from Gustavo Bontadini becomes clear: only by eliminating the great contradiction and maintaining the work of the principle of creation’s immobility, philosophy develops and cancels the ongoing contingent determinations. The paths of knowing diverge. And yet, Severino grasps the original structure within the same framework, singling out from contemporary philosophy the conditions to overcome the typical of modern philosophy’s oblivion of the classic, metaphysical thinking.)

Here, one can appreciate the unique function of the phenomenological immediacy since it amounts to the very manifestation of being. However, saying that being is – that is, stating its being given with any chance to negate it – depends on the phenomenology and it is certified by the logos. At this point, the statement “being is” amounts to “it is true that being is, it appears.” Given this distinction, one can maintain that the phenomenological and logical immediacy constitute a structure, the original structure of the appearing: the appearing of these entities can be affirmed only if its appearing has been affirmed. Again: the appearing of the appearing can be affirmed only if its appearing is affirmed. As the structure is a compound of immediacies, so the appearing is a complex unity, a being which is and which denies to not be. The phenomenological moment is already present in the logical moment.

For that, the structure of the appearing is articulated into three levels which constitute the complex unity of the appearing: the appearing of the appearing of the appearing. The three levels mean that something appears only if its appearing appears. The *aporia* stems from that: on one hand the appearing of being belongs to the necessity, on the other it is ungrounded since it chases the necessity without reaching it.

How to avoid the *aporia*? The proposed solution is the following: “The totality of the appearing being originally includes its own appearing (i.e. originally includes that being that is its own appearing), so that the position

of the appearing of the being that appears is *originally* a position of the appearing of such appearing (position of auto-appearing); in other words, the affirmation of the existence of the appearing does not have to look for its grounding in the affirmation of the existence of an appearing (*a*) of the appearing (*a*), where the *a'* appearing is different from *a* appearing of the being. The appearing (*a*) of the being is, originally, at the same time appearing *of itself*, and consequently it does not have to endlessly chase its own Necessity” (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 65).

That requires an explanation of the notions of reflexivity and completeness. The three levels do not mean that the reflection adds to the appearing another appearing; neither it holds the objection that the appearing of the appearing would trigger an infinite regress.

In the first place, if an empirical given is evident, then being appears inasmuch its own appearing appears; in other words, the immediacy of the given is not simple but it belongs to a structured appearing: it always shows a reflexivity. The appearing of being entails the appearing of its appearing.

Secondly, the threefold appearing does not go on endlessly since the three levels constitute an identity. We face a complete evidence of immediacy: the immediacy of a given entails the being self of the given. This immediacy excludes the non correspondence between being and being immediate; therefore, a given is immediate in every time and with reference to itself.

The phenomenological immediacy concretely discloses the structure of the immediate presence of being: it is the already cited threefold appearing structure. This allows to state that the appearing does not concern only the things (the appearing of things) but, more significantly, it is the appearing of the appearing of the things: it is the self-appearing. Therefore, the thought not only is directed towards the manifested things, but it is itself a content which appears. Every content of the appearing of the phenomenological immediacy is, therefore, incontrovertible.

### **3. A possible analogy: the notion of *transcendental***

The analysis of the structure allows for a great quantity of references to the history of philosophy; Severino exploits those works in order to clarify his view and to distinguish it from the others available, for instance, the explicit references to Hegel.

Let us take the following juxtaposition: the appearing is already appearing of the appearing of the appearing as well as the consciousness is already consciousness of the self-consciousness (Severino, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 92). As a matter

of fact, the latter formula allows a better understanding of the former.

I would like to provide another analogy, concerning the classical structure of evidence and entailment: the notion of transcendental. It is worth noticing that, even in this case, there is no equivalence of arguments (Severino would not accept that) but a sort of affinity between discourses. The term “transcendental” is not intended by Severino as a transgeneric notion, that is, the universal which is in any particular. Transcendental is the horizon within which the appearing of all beings appears and the transcendental Ego is the appearing which is conscious that the beings are.

In a first sense, this transcendental appearing is obviously distinct from the empirical appearing of the individual determinations. But there is a second way in which the appearing is transcendental: a given is included in knowledge only if one can exhibit at the same time its condition of possibility; analogously, a given is immediate only if it is included in an immediacy which is necessary. The appearing of beings is within a transcendental and total appearing where beings are forever, they do not begin or stop appearing. Here *transcendental* coincides with the original and necessary horizon in which any being is. Without this relationship, no entity could appear.

One could propose a different, alternative, argument. The transcendental structure indicates everything that is condition of the possibility of the knowledge and together the knowledge of this condition. What is considered as condition is, doubtlessly, identifiable (at least for Kant) as an *a priori* form. Nevertheless, it could be construed in more general terms: in every act of knowledge the totality of experience and its undeniability about the individual state of affairs which appears within the totality is entailed (as its condition). It is a sort of ontological amplification of the transcendental structure which extends and modifies the point of view. Here, the suggestion has a pure heuristic character, but it is useful to take into account two exemplifications, one historical and the other theoretical.

Preliminarily, it is useful to investigate whether the notion of transcendental can be read as the necessary reference of a given (i.e.: an empirical intuition, a state of affairs) to an undeniable horizon in which there is the experience of given. This proposal can be expressed also in Kantian terminology. Let us think about, for instance, the notion of “system” which is the connection of known propositions grounded in a unique principle in order to exclude bunches of known propositions simply aggregated. But a system is not only “the unity of the manifold cognitions under one idea” (Kant, KrV: B 860, tr. 1998, p. 691). Moreover, a system can guarantee the

existence of the totality. The concept of system is, therefore, structural and it does not concern solely the knowledge, but also reality. Kant's example is illuminating: the system is akin to an "animal body" – "whose growth does not add a limb but rather makes each limb stronger and fitter for its end" (Kant, KrV: B 861, tr. 1998, p. 691).

The analogy with the living world suggests that a system must be alive in order to guarantee its own unity; and, by consequence, "the entire system of metaphysics" (Kant, KrV: B 874, tr. 1998, p. 699) is alive since it wants to achieve the essential aims of the reason. The system of metaphysics is an articulated system, not a heap of unconnected parts. The metaphysics is such not because its proper objects are beyond the experience, but because it represents a system that foreknows both "the interconnection [of cognition] based on one principle" (Kant, KrV: B 673, tr. 1998, p. 591), and all the possible objects of experience. Thus, the system denotes an object and, at the same time, its unconditional possibility, that is, its belonging to a given unity of meaning. Reason is the faculty of the unconditional because by gathering everything in a totality, it does not confine itself to the knowledge of what is given, but it pre-emptly the unity of a fundamental connection, that is, the "systematic completeness of all cognition" (Kant, KrV: B 683, tr. 1998, p. 597) of the objects of the experience.

#### **4. Final remarks: the implications of the transcendental reading**

But the historical link to Kant does not exclude a further theoretical in-depth analysis, instead it requires it. One can ask under what conditions an given appearing is also the content of a transcendental knowledge. It must be that the given is the content of an evidence, that is, a given which appears within the horizon of appearing and, moreover, that evidence is necessary. The transcendental structure is the horizon in which something appears and, at the same time, it entails that what is within the appearing must necessarily appear. The transcendental is the immediate which entails the being present as necessary and at the same time the presentness of what is necessary present.

The given which appears in the transcendental structure is known as immediately necessary and therefore the transcendental is a necessarily immediate condition.

The transcendental is, sure, a condition of possibility of the knowledge but it is also the necessary and incontrovertible knowledge of that very condition. At the end of the day, a structure can be said transcendental in so

far as it allows the appearing of the given and its necessity. In that way, the excess of a content about the structure is excluded since every content of the experience appears only within the horizon of presentness which cannot be overcome, since it is the unity of the experience.

In sum, nothing can be given without and beyond the horizon of the transcendental structure, which unconditionally appears. Every being is not contradictory in its appearing and its appearing too is not contradictory. Nevertheless, the transcendental operates by means of categories and, among them, the modal ones. Here the relation between the given which appears and the subject to which the multiplicity appears is not univocal. “Finally, necessity is nothing other than the existence [*Existenz*] that is given by possibility itself” (Kant, KrV: B 111, tr. 1998, p. 215). The transcendental argument could lead, here, to other solutions. Thus, Severino’s philosophy seems to be already outlined from the very beginning of his reflection: “This complicated historic and theoretic development of the philosophical thinking is far from being summed up in a simple act; instead, it needs a movement of adjustment and clarification throughout the time, where what has to be potentially remembered – the classic metaphysics – could be usefully presented in multiple ways that manage to grasp, from different perspectives, its truth. A sort of surveys and probing investigations then take place, which positively contribute to such adjustment, thus leading to the complete illumination of the truth. The following reflections have to take into account such contribution. The investigation is basically constituted by a deduction of the structure of being, by the determination of the deducted structure and by the shift from deduction to determination” (Severino, 1950, p. 385).

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# “Golden Implication”

## The Primary Foundations of the Eternity of Being

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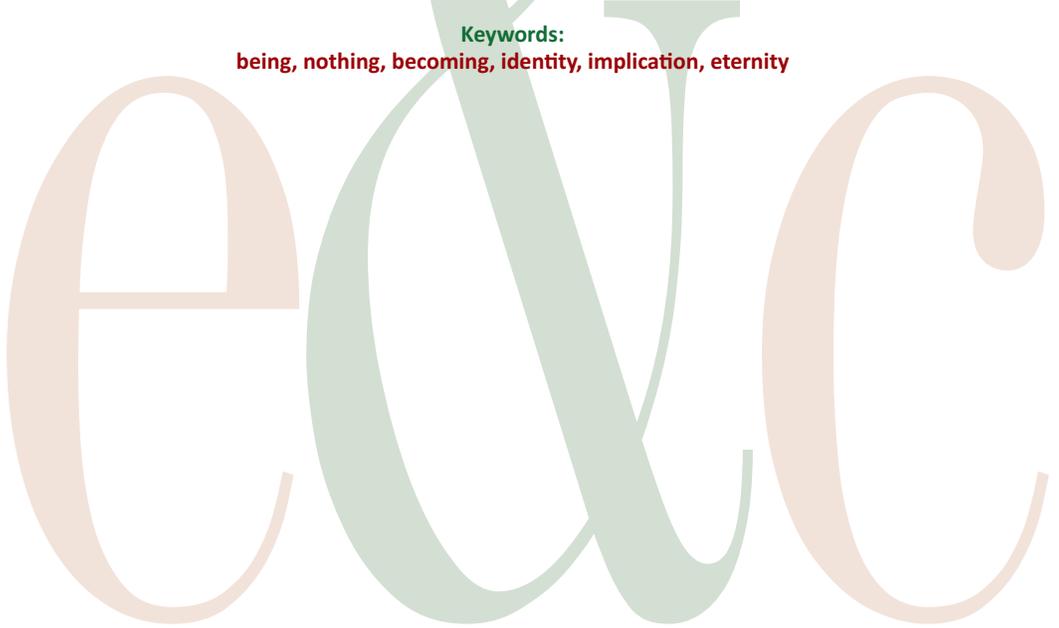
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This essay aims at briefly presenting the numerous ways of indicating the eternity of being, insofar as it is being, in line with what Emanuele Severino has shown in his works. In one of his most recent works, Severino himself has named “golden” the implication of the eternity of being on the part of the being itself of being. Such implication is at the core of his discourse and multiple are the ways of its foundations. If we call “original tautology” the appearing of the being itself of being, we can show that the ways of the golden implication depend on the principle of universal opposition of the positive and the negative – the destiny of thought – which is the law according to which Being shows itself in all of its forms.

**Keywords:**

**being, nothing, becoming, identity, implication, eternity**



## 1. Introduction

The *original structure* is the structure that is not founded on anything else, that is, of what is known through itself. What is not founded in anything else is the appearing of being in the form of identity/non-contradiction, so that we say that each being is identical to itself and it is not other than itself.

In the following I will call “original tautology” the appearing of the being itself of being, its not being other than itself, with explicit reference to Emanuele Severino’s works and the unprecedented sense of identity that they suggest, a sense that is radically different from the way Western thought has conceived of identity.

Plato, Aristotle, Hegel state the necessity of identity. Plato said that not even in a dream we can be convinced that “one thing is other than itself” (*Theaet.*, 190 b-c) and Aristotle shows that it is impossible “to suppose that the same thing is and is not” (*Metaph.*, 1005 b 11-34). Hegel calls “Tautologie” the essence of the dialectical method (cf. *Science of Logic, Introduction*), that is therefore the affirmation of identity.

However, according to the Western tradition, things are engaged in the process of becoming – they are generated and they perish – and this entails the persuasion that the things are essentially “nothing”. In fact, the Western tradition is the failed attempt to think identity: it wants to affirm the identity of beings, but, *precisely because it thinks the becoming of beings*, in its subconscious the Western thought thinks the identity of what is not identical (Being and Nothing), that is, the negation of identity.

Instead, the “original tautology” is the appearing of the identity of each and every being as it implicates in various ways (as we will see) the eternity of all beings. The “golden implication” – concept which is at the core of Emanuele Severino’s writings – is precisely the implication of the eternity of being (of each and every being, of any determination-that-is) on the part of the being itself of being.

## 2. “Identity of the identity with itself” and “élenchos”

1. In order to fine-tune our subject, it can be useful to clarify certain aspects of this discourse that are already present in Severino’s fundamental work *The Original Structure*.

We define “being” as every “that which is”, where “that which” indicates the essence, whereas “is” indicates being a not-nothing on the part of the essence. In *The Essence of Nihilism*, Severino himself explains that the term “essence” is to be considered in its transcendental sense: in fact, “essence” refers to every semantic dimension, to everything that is not nothing. The same applies to “Being” that means being a not-nothing on the part of the totality of whatever is not nothing – and therefore on the part of each determination and of the totality of determinations.

In *The Original Structure*, it is claimed that being is *immediately* a *syntactical constant* of every meaning, and that means that “it is immediately self-contradictory that any determination – that any positivity – is not” (Severino, 1981, p. 499). Of each semantic content (x), and therefore also of the Semantic whole, being ( $\epsilon$ ) is immediately predicated, with this important clarification: essence and existence cannot be presupposed by their synthesis. In fact, being cannot be predicated of an essence that is separated from being; by contrast, it is of the essence that is already originally in synthesis with being ( $x=\epsilon$ ), that being ( $\epsilon$ ) is predicated, and the being that is predicated is precisely the being of the essence ( $\epsilon=x$ ).

I am referring to that concrete formulation of identity that is investigated in chapter III of *The Original Structure*, where it is shown that identity is to be understood as “identity of the identity with itself”. In the case of the existential assessment that we are considering, we will thus obtain the formula:

$$(x=\epsilon)=(\epsilon=x).$$

The subject to which the predicate refers is not the *pure* subject isolated from the predicate, and the predicate is not the *pure* predicate isolated from the subject. Therefore, the “identity” is not the outcome of the thought’s unifying act, which identifies contradictorily the non-identical (the subject and the predicate that are originally separate), rather it is the appearing of the identity of identical, that is, the identity between the synthesis of the subject and the predicate and the synthesis of the predicate and the subject.

2. Also by way of introduction – in order to clarify further parts of the analysis –, it must be pointed out that the original structure is not an arbitrary presupposition.

In other words, it is a matter of understanding *why* the Being's identity with itself must be affirmed and the identity of Being and not-Being cannot be affirmed:

Replying to this question means effecting the *authentic* unconcealment of the truth of Being, which is not a simple saying, but is a saying that has *value*; a saying, that is, capable of superseding [negating] its own negation (and so of superseding any particular form that negation may assume). The affirmation that Being is not not-Being must, unquestionably, be denied as long as its value is not seen. In the meantime, this affirmation is like an invincible sword in the hand of someone who does not know he has an invincible sword: such a swordsman will be struck down at the first encounter. And rightly so: a "truth" that cannot hold its ground is not a truth (Severino, 2016a, p. 59).

The original structure is not simply the appearing of the being itself of being, but to it also essentially belongs the appearing of being itself as that whose negation is self-negation.

This is the topic of the "élenchos", which is the core of the entire discourse. Briefly, it can be formulated as follows: the negation of being itself of being – and therefore the negation of the opposition between any being and what is other than such being – is itself a determinate being which opposes itself to everything that is other than itself. This means that the negation of the being itself of being is founded on what it negates, that is, it negates that without which the negation could not be as such, so that it is a way of saying that includes the declaration of its own non-existence:

The *élenchos* is precisely this ascertainment of this self-supersession of the negation; i.e. the ascertainment that the negation does not exist as *pure* negation – as negation that, in order to constitute itself, has no need to affirm that which it denies. Saying that opposition "cannot" be denied thus means ascertaining that, precisely because the ground of the negation is that which it denies, the negation consists in the negation of itself, in its superseding itself as discourse (Severino, 2016a, pp. 62-63).

And the “original tautology” is not something controvertible, deniable, precisely because it is not separated from the appearing of the “élenchos”: the opposition between every being and its other, and thus also the opposition of every being to nothing, shows itself as the same “breath of thought” (Severino, 2016a, p. 79).

### 3. The identity of essence with existence and the Law of Being

1. We have said that being is predicated of every semantic content and therefore also of the Semantic whole.

Now we add that the logically immediate propositions are such insofar as they relate to the universal formulation of the principle of identity (non-contradiction): we say “A is A” (thus predicating “A” ’s being), not because being identical to itself is “A” ’s prerogative, so that considering “B” we cannot say that “B is B”, but because both “A” and “B” are individualizations of the universal – that is, of Being – to which essentially belongs the being identical to itself. And conversely, Being is identical to itself “not because identity is a property of Being, understood as an abstract or formal universal [...], regardless of the concrete content of this formality, but because Being is the concrete universal [...], namely because the formal element is put in its relation to the specific content” (Severino, 1981, pp. 321-322).

It follows that “A” is not “for itself” identical to itself but “for other”, where this other is the concrete universal that includes “A”. The same applies to “B”:

The L-immediate [logically immediate] identity is thus only the identity of the concrete, and this identity is expressed by the proposition “the whole is the whole”, the whole being precisely Being as concrete universal [...]. On this side, this is the only analytical proposition, or there is no other analytical proposition but this one: in fact, to pose *A* as the individuation of the concrete universal, and pose *B* as the individuation of the concrete universal, means posing the same content, i.e., the concrete universal. This does not mean that *A*’s identity with itself does not differ in any way from *B*’s identity with itself: the two identities are clearly different, but both, as L-immediate identities, essentially imply a term – the universal, the whole – that comprises both identities, so that their concrete meaning is the same (Severino, 1981, pp. 323-324).

Therefore, the proposition “the whole is the whole” (where “whole” is to be understood as the totality of the positive) conveys the same logical immediacy, and it is tantamount to the proposition “Being is”, where “Being” is to be understood as the same semantic whole that in itself includes the totality of the logically immediate connections. The proposition “Being is” – which predicates the being of the concrete universal that is identical to itself – is thus the same principle of identity and non-contradiction. Indeed, such principle has a value that is essentially ontological: it is not only a norm for thought, but it is the law for Being itself.

The meaning of the “original tautology” (the being itself of being) that I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, saying that it implies the eternity of being, is now clearer. *The Original Structure’s* main point emphasizes:

That Being has to be resides in the very meaning of Being; wherefore the principle of non-contradiction expresses not simply the identity of essence with itself (or its difference from other essences), but rather the identity of essence with existence (or the otherness of essence with respect to non-existence). (Severino, 1981, p. 517).

This means that *the identity of the essence with itself* must not be isolated from the *identity of essence and existence*. The identity of essence and existence is to be understood in the sense that “in the meaning of the determination (essence), of which the being (existence) is predicated, the being (the positivity, the existence) of the determination is originally included” (Severino, 1981, p. 517). Essence is in fact different from existence but, as we already know, being different does not mean being separated.

Hence Being’s immutability: to say that Being becomes (that is, that goes from not-Being to Being and vice versa) “means to say that Being is not: it is not, either at the beginning or at the end of becoming. These both in the case that becoming of the whole is becoming [...] of the whole as such, and in the case that becoming of the whole is becoming of one moment or one aspect of the whole [...]. All this can be expressed by saying that Being is eternal” (Severino, 1981, p. 520).

We can sum it up as follows: of the whole of Being, and of one moment of the whole (for instance, this pen, this supervening noise...)

we cannot think that *before they were and after they will not be*. Thinking that Being is generated is the same as thinking that Being is nothing, and the same is to be said if the Being is corrupted: it is nothing at the beginning of becoming and it is nothing at the end of becoming.

To think of Being's birth and death means to think of the time in which being is absolutely other than itself, that is, the negation of that being itself of the being, the negation of which is self-negation.

Everything is eternal. And yet becoming appears. So how are we to understand becoming? Severino writes: "If the impossibility of Being's not-being is not recognized, one will be left without the slightest suspicion that the authentic content of Appearing is radically altered by defining the Becoming that appears as an annulment of Being, or as Being's emerging from nothingness".

In truth, "what appears is not Being's issuing from and returning to nothingness, but rather its appearing and disappearing," therefore, "if Becoming is defined as the process of the revelation of Being [...] then Being's immutability and its Becoming non longer rank as mutually contradictory terms" (Severino, 2016a, pp. 107-112).

2. The Western tradition has not been able to think identity because it has always understood Being as something that is in time:

Aristotle's argument (later to be repeated by Aristotelians and Scholastics past and present) that when Being is, it is, and when Being is-not, it is-not, therefore states that when Being is Nothing, then it is nothing. But in this discourse, then, one fails to see that the real danger that must be avoided lies not in affirming that when Being is nothing, it is Being (and, when Being is Being, it is nothing), but rather in admitting *that Being is nothing*. The real danger lies in assenting to a time *when* Being is not Nothing (i.e., when it is), and a time *when* Being is nothing (i.e. when it is-not), in admitting, that is, that Being *is in time*. In this way, the "principle of non-contradiction" itself becomes the worst form of contradiction: precisely because contradiction is concealed in the very formula that was designed to avoid it and to banish it from Being (Severino, 2016a, pp. 38-39).

If Being is in time, there is a time in which Being is not, in which the positive is the negative: the time of the absurd. However, the "original tautology" – the appearing of the being itself of being –implies the eternity of everything that is, its not being in time, and thus expresses a

sense of identity and non-contradiction that is essentially different from the temporal understanding of Being.

It must be pointed out that the so-called principle of identity and principle of non-contradiction are moments of the logical immediacy: Being is identical to itself because it is not a not-Being, and Being is not a not-Being because it is identical to itself, therefore “a logical priority of one over the other is to be ruled out: the two sides of the principle are immediately connected and thus none of them is something mediated from the other” (Severino, 1981, p. 175).

Being itself of being that is separated (isolated) from its being negation of its own other, is not a being itself. The real meaning of the original tautology is expressed in the universal opposition of positive and negative. Already in *The Essence of Nihilism* Severino conceived of it as the “law of Being [...], 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, 2016a, pp. 64-65).

If Being is the positive, then the negative is the non-positive, i.e., everything that in different ways is other than the positive in question. We understand now that the opposition of Being and Nothing is one of the ways in which the positive is opposed to the negative: “the negative is not simply the pure Nothing (Parmenides), but is also the *other* positive (Plato)” (Severino, 2016a, pp. 46-47). In fact, “the denial of the not-being of Being [...] is an individuation of the universal opposition of the positive and the negative”, because “in the original opposition, every Being (and the totality of Being) turns in a number of directions – it enters into a plurality of relationships” (Severino, 2016a, p. 80), and this plurality of directions or relationships is precisely the plurality of ways according to which every positive is opposed to its negative.

#### **4. The main modes of the golden implication**

The identity of being and its necessary implications are constitutive of the semantic-syntactical horizon that Severino calls “persyntactic field”, where the term “persyntax” means the authentic transcendental, the syntax of all the syntaxes, that is, the set of meanings and relationships that has to necessarily appear in order for every being to appear.

The being itself of being insofar as it is being is the fundamental persyntactic determination, in the sense that all the other persyntactic determinations are traits of the concreteness of the being itself of being.

Among the necessary implications, the most remarkable one – already in *The Original Structure*, but even before then (cf. Severino, 1958) – so much that it deserves the name of “golden” (Severino, 2015, p. 95), is the already pointed out implication between the appearing of the being itself of being and the eternity of every being.

We have found that if Being became – if it was born or if it died – Being would not be: *becoming nothing* and *becoming from nothing* imply a time in which Being is not. It is the “primary” foundation of the eternity of beings. It is called “primary” because it is based on nothing but the original structure, i.e., on the appearing of the incontrovertible original tautology.

In what follows I will briefly mention the other ways of indicating the eternity of being, namely the main modes of the golden implication.

**a)** We have seen that the being itself of being (its being other than what is other than itself, its being other than nothing) is a necessary connection, something that cannot be other than how it is. But a necessary connection is an eternal connection: it is impossible for a time or a situation in which this connection is not to exist because we would have a necessary connection that is not a necessary connection. Therefore “it is *impossible* that any being [that is a being itself, i.e., a necessary connection] begins and ends being itself [...]. This impossibility is the eternity of being insofar as it is being” (Severino, 2015, p. 177).

We have here another formulation of the *golden implication*: another primary path that leads to the same statement (asserting the eternity of being), starting, in this case, by considering the necessity of the original connection.

**b)** If now we look at the “result” of becoming other, we find that in it (in the result) there is not only the other, but there is also the having become other on the part of the being that becomes. For example: in the result of becoming ash on the part of the wood, there is not only the ash, but also the having become ash on the part of the wood, an impossible identification of non-identical.

We can think of avoiding the contradiction by saying that, in the becoming ash on the part of the wood, the wood becomes nothing. However, by saying that, we are doubling the “folly” of becoming other: we end up thinking not only that in the result of becoming, wood is other than itself because it is identical to the other positive, i.e., the ash, but also that the wood is other than itself because it is identical to its absolute other, which is nothing. And for this becoming to happen it is also

necessary that the ash emerge from nothing: at a certain point, nothing becomes ash, so the result of this becoming from nothing is the being ash on the part of nothing.

The first way in which we observe that the beginning and the end of becoming as such imply the identification of being and nothing, is combined with this additional primary foundation of the eternity of being (cf. Severino 1992, First Part, chap. I; 1995, chaps. I and II), which establishes the impossible identity in the *result* of becoming nothing or becoming from nothing. “This, even if in the becoming nothing (or from nothing) the identity of being and nothing is more *primary* than the identity that is present in the *result* of becoming nothing (or from nothing), because [...] becoming from nothing implies a time (the beginning of this becoming) in which the being is still nothing (is identical to nothing) and becoming nothing implies a time (the result of this becoming) in which the being is nothing” (Severino, 2015, p. 138).

By further investigating the structure of becoming, Severino has identified other primary ways of meaning of the eternity of being.

c) Let us consider the process of becoming other on the part of being X. Because this process is not a nothing, but it is a being that is other than X, it follows that, from the beginning, such process is already the having become other on the part of X: “this means that, in the process of becoming other, the being becomes other (the other consisting in the process) when it has not become other yet. At the same time it becomes other (the other that is at the beginning of the process of becoming other) without having become other (the other that should be the result of the process of becoming other). The becoming other is the negation of becoming other” (Severino, 2015, pp. 295-296).

Also this shows that becoming other is something contradictory, because it negates the being itself of being, “where the being that is not itself is precisely the becoming other” (Severino, 2015, p. 296). However the impossibility for every being to become other is the same necessity that every being is eternal.

d) Let us consider now that in the becoming Y on the part of X, it is necessary not only that X becomes Y, but also (syn-chronically) that Y becomes X. If Y did not become X, Y would be separated from X, that could not become Y, “so that a being, becoming other, becomes itself, that is, it does not become other” (Severino, 2015, p. 149. The same remark is found also in Severino 2011, chap. X, par. III).

This is another configuration of the contradictory nature of becoming

other: a being that, in becoming other, does not become its other, is a negation of the being itself of being, and this means that this is “an additional foundation of the necessity of the eternity of every being” (Severino, 2016b, p. 239), an additional primary foundation of the eternity of being insofar as it is being.

e) Finally, let us consider becoming as a transition from potential being to actual being, for example, the becoming where a block of marble is transformed into a statue by an artist. In this case we say that the statue is “potentially” in the block of marble. But its being “potentially” means that the actuality of the specific shape of the statue is still nothing: if at least certain aspects of the statue weren’t still nothing, the statue would already be in actuality and there would be no transition from potentiality to actuality.

Therefore, the becoming from potentiality to actuality is a transition in which something that is still nothing (*nihil absolutum*) becomes a being. And this transition is “a ‘third’ with respect to nothing and being [...]. Because it affirms a ‘third’, and thus it negates the being itself of being, the concept of becoming is self-contradictory, that is, also for this reason becoming [...] is impossible (it is the negation of the being itself of being). The impossibility of becoming is the necessity of not becoming of beings, i.e., the necessity of the eternity of each and every being” (Severino, 2016b, pp. 227-228).

And this is another primary way of the eternity of beings implied in the original structure of the identity.

## 5. An additional foundation of the eternity of being

The golden segment of the persyntax shows in numerous ways its own necessity. The primary path suggested by Severino in his earlier writings – the path that negates the ontological form of becoming other – appears to be “surrounded” by other paths, suggested by our philosopher in his later writings (and summed up for the first time in Severino 2015, Third Part, chap. I). They are primary paths as well because, as we have seen, in them as well the persyntactic determination of the eternity of every being is implied by the appearing of the being itself of being.

There is an additional foundation of the eternity of being that is subordinate to the primary path, a path about which is spoken for the first time in *Dike*. Let us call (e)S the eternity of that certain being which is the original structure, and (e)BB the eternity of being insofar as it is

being. In this additional (but subordinate) path we start with the observation of (e)S – which is asserted on the foundation of (e)BB – and we show that (e)S, insofar as it is distinct from the foundation of (e)BB, implies (e)BB.

The argument can be summed up as follows: the eternal is a rule that anticipates the future and preserves the past. We say that (e)S implies (e)BB because “if beings that become other by coming from nothing and returning to nothing existed, (e)S *would anticipate* their being nothing and it would not let them go through the *nothing* of the past; (e)S would be that Law of the Eternal that presents itself, and necessarily, as the *entification of nothing*” (Severino, 2015, p. 196).

What occurs is a sort of inversion of the underlying trend of contemporary thought, according to which the faith in the existence of becoming implies the affirmation of the non-existence of the immutable: “while in the faith of becoming other the entification of nothing makes impossible the becoming other that in this faith is considered as absolutely undeniable evidence, so that such faith in the becoming arrives at negating each and every Eternal, vice versa (and here is the inversion...) in the implication of (e)BB on the part of (e)S, the negation of becoming other implied by (e)S does not imply the negation of every ‘Eternal’, but it implies, by contrast, the negation of every becoming other, that is, it implies the eternity of every being” (Severino, 2015, p. 198).

## 6. The fundamental semantic-syntactic structure

If now we go back to analyze the original tautology, to summarize and develop what has been said regarding the authentic structure of the identity of being, we find that it is precisely the concrete formulation of the identity – the concrete sense of being itself of being, understood as *identity of the identity with itself* – that implies the eternity of everything that is.

We have said that in the being, i.e., in “that which is”, being ( $\epsilon$ ) is not separated from the essence ( $x$ ), neither is the essence separated from being: it is of every “that which is” that being is predicated, in the form that we already know:  $(x=\epsilon)=(\epsilon=x)$ . And it is precisely of the “being-that-is” that its not being separated from its being identical to itself is affirmed. In formula:

$$[(x=\varepsilon)]=(\varepsilon=x)=[(x=\varepsilon)]=(\varepsilon=x)$$

Severino writes:

But the original and necessary unity of “that which” and its “is” is the *eternity* of “that which” – of every “that which”. And the appearing of such unity is a primary foundation of eternity, additional to that which appears almost since the beginning in my writings [...]. Such additional foundation is not based on the exclusion that the “that which” is nothing – as by contrast the primary foundation of eternity that appears in my earlier writings is – but it is based on the exclusion that the Being of “that which” [...] is the Being of nothing, i.e., it is based on the exclusion that the nothing is (Severino, 2016b, p. 223).

Isolated from its own Being, the being is a nothing of which, at a later stage, the being is affirmed: the isolation of the terms implies that their union is the identification of the non-identicals (cf. Severino, 1995, chap. XIV). But it is impossible that the nothing is.

For example, to say that “this pen is” means to say that this pen is eternally, not only because it is impossible that there is a situation in which being is nothing (as it is already said in *The Original Structure*) but also because it is impossible that the Being of being is the Being of nothing, “even if [...] the exclusion that the ‘that which’ (being) is nothing implies the exclusion that the nothing is being” (Severino, 2016b, p. 223).

And because the being itself of being is structured as “universal opposition of the positive and the negative” – and in the plurality of ways in which every positive is opposed to its own negative, and thus also to nothing, – it is precisely under this fundamental semantic-syntactic structure that the paths of the “golden implication” fall.

## 7. Conclusion

We have seen that the ways of the golden implication are numerous. The language encounters first one way, and then the other: first, in the way suggested by Severino in *The Original Structure*, then in those suggested in later writings.

Because every being is eternal, also the coming forth of being is eternal:

Not even the synthesis between the being that happens and its happening can not-be (that is, be nothing). But in saying that the being that comes into the appearing could have not come into it (or that the being that did not appear could have appeared) – by affirming the “contingency of the appearing” – we say that the being that happens could have not happened, that is, we negate the necessity of the happening. In this way the not-being (that is, the nothingness) of the happening of being is posed as a possibility. The impossibility is regarded as possible (Severino, 1980, p. 98).

Therefore, it is necessary for beings not only to come forth, but also to come forth exactly as they come forth. (The foundation of the necessity of happening consists of numerous paths as well. Cf. Severino, 2015, Third Part, chap. II). And because everything happens by necessity, the succession in the linguistic exposition of the different ways of the foundation of the eternity of being is also necessary. Because there is no chance in the succession of events, it cannot be accidental that the same theory can be demonstrated in different ways.

Moreover, because it is impossible that the different ways of the golden implication are separated one from the other – otherwise they would be separated from the original meaning that implies all the different ways – it can be said that they all belong to the incontrovertible structure of the persyntax, that has always shined before the intellect, and that in the law of the universal opposition of the Positive and the Negative has its radiating core.

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# The “Salvation” in the Truth in Giovanni Gentile and Emanuele Severino

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The theme that connects Giovanni Gentile and Emanuele Severino is the knowledge/participation in the Truth, which, in its characterization as absolute, can be the only way to salvation as a true liberation. Thus at the beginning of the twentieth century, Gentile presents the eternity of the transcendental ego in the dialectic of becoming, which is a constant evolution. In this way he assures in ethics always constituting the non-ephemeral meaning of life and salvation in history. In the second half of the twentieth century Severino, after having identified in the actualism the definitive outcome of the philosophy of becoming, reaffirms the eternity of what is, not being existing but an appearance of an eternal. And yet – and it is the hypothesis of the contribution – the two "messages" of salvation, even in their distance, speak a language that is complemented each other. And they speak it for their being a "recovery" of the eternal or rather the "revelation" of the same.

**Keywords:**

**salvation, truth, sacred, death, eternity, glory**

## 1. Introduction

If one were to focus on some of the characteristics of our age, the first thing to come to their mind would probably be the extraordinary speed of communication, be it voice or image through. The impression might be that of an age in which people live *sub specie instantis* and therefore believe the ephemeral to be the actual truth. These things go indeed mostly this way. Our reality is attached to the contingent and to the fluidity of social media, completely devoted to the lure of technology and to the charm of appearance, whereas public institutions crumble like never before (from family to state) and domestic violence is on the rise. A society with no values nor order, where the line between freedom and libertinism blurs and responsibility is disregarded. Thus are hedonism and relativism outstandingly prosperous. At the same time theoretical and historical disciplines lose their ability to provide a thorough perspective on life and end up being a sterile philological investigation.

From many points of view, Severino's philosophy, ever since the publication of *The original structure* (1958), has been trying to show the untruth of all deciduous things. It has also established itself as a criticism of every philosophical theory of becoming, for the becoming, as it constantly changing and therefore denies itself, is nothing.

As Severino (1981) explains in the Introduction to the new edition,

this structure envelops every specific and particular element of our history, thus being always present; nevertheless, its actual meaning must be understood at a deeper level [...] This level can be reached only by avoiding a journey in the company of the various historical reconstructions proposed by our culture; better yet, by completely avoiding the 'journey' (p. 14).

Again, Severino (1999), states that becoming is

the unity of many determinations [...]. This unity appears to be contradictory when it is isolated from the contradictions existing between some of those determinations and happens to be the unity of the determinations which are not plainly to be seen as contradictory (p. 423).

The idea of becoming is therefore, according to Severino, self-contradictory. In this respect, Severino's thoughts constitute a significant response to the restless flows of our era.

Now, in order to clarify the meaning of Severino's criticism of becoming, it must be kept in mind that philosophy was born great, since it is born, with the Greeks, as an inquiry concerning foundation, which is to say truth. There is no philosophy without the pursuit of truth, of truth as the Absolute. The fact is that Severino – suffice to think about his “contentious” *Returning to Parmenides* (1964, that is now in *The Essence of Nihilism*, 2016, pp. 35-83) – asserts that truth is what already is, thus setting out to radically criticize every philosophy which conceives the be coming as true. “Being neither leaves nor returns to nothingness, is neither born nor dies; there is no time, no situation in which Being is-not. If it should return to nothingness, it would not be” (p. 45). And then,

That which is in time is not something that is possessed by the eternal (precisely because it must be said of everything – and so also of Being that appears in time – that it is eternally); so that the not being of Being that is in time does not disprove that which, moreover, cannot be in any way disproved: that Being in and cannot not be (p. 83).

This is why he was regarded as a nihilist, the opposite being true, because the nihilist is, according to Severino, the one who considers *this* world, with its beginning and its end, a true reality which is bound to cease to be.

There is however one more aspect that deserves attention. Severino was a student of Gustavo Bontadini, the catholic philosopher (an interesting debate between Bontadini and Severino, which, among other things, shows the respect and affection they had for each other, is in Bontadini and Severino (2017) who explained to him the speculative aspects of the most observant Christian tradition, from which Severino was eventually excommunicated (Cf. Severino, 2001a). It “contains the

letters from the years 1961-1970 which tell how the Catholic Church was led to officially declare the opposition between my thought and Christianity” (p. 5).

The influence of a thinker in many respects connected to Gentile is evident: with him, the philosophy of becoming reached its peak, and it was Gentile to whom Severino returned many times in his works.

As Bontadini (1954) wrote (that is now in *Notes of philosophy*, 1996), “Gentile is the philosopher who brought modern era to an end and gave birth to the contemporary age, and this shows the relevance of his work. ‘Gnoseologism’, i.e. the problem of knowledge as the problem of prejudice, was the pivotal point of modern philosophy” (p. 23). And later “what must be pointed out here is the relationship between classical and Christian philosophy and his thought. This reveals, contrary to what is often believed, a positive relationship of theoretical reconciliation rather than irreconcilable opposition” (p. 25).

For this reason, our purpose is to identify the deeper meaning of an intellectual debate which has been going on for decades.

## 2. The issue

Giovanni Gentile and Emanuele Severino face the problem of knowledge—connection to the Absolute in two different times in the history of philosophical tradition. The connecting thread between them is, therefore, participation in the Truth, which, being absolute, is indeed the only way for salvation – inasmuch absolute liberation – for the thinking self acknowledging its transience. Deliverance from both the wandering in the world and the fear of what will be *afterwards*.

Accordingly, at the beginning of the twentieth century Gentile undermines the hegemony of the positivistic idea of truth as a mere biologically determined fact which takes place in mere events. This is achieved by the dialectic of becoming, which is the persistent realization of the eternity of the transcendental Self. Yet ethical life can provide an enduring meaning of life and salvation in history.

In the second half of the twentieth century Severino, also in the light of the reflection on the actualism of some thinkers such as Gustavo Bontadini and Ugo Spirito, after identifying in the actualism itself the definitive outcome of the philosophy of becoming, or rather the dissolution of the existing beings and of the existing things in the becoming, reaffirmed, recovering ancient speculative echoes, the eternity

of what is, being the existence just only the appearing of an eternal, of what already is and can only be.

In fact, over the years the author of this paper has read the philosophy of Gentile and Severino, but also those of Spinoza and Ugo Spirito, as well as answers to a text by Seneca (*Troades*, 397-402 and 407- 408) that has struck him since the early years of high school (a problem that has caught him even earlier in his pre-adolescent disquietude).

Post mortem nihil est ipsaque mors nihil, / velocis spatii meta  
novissima; / spem ponant avidi, solliciti metum: / tempus nos  
avidum devorat et chaos. / Mors individua est, noxia corpori / nec  
parcens animae [...] Quaeris quo iaces post obitum loco? / Quo  
non nata iacent.

In truth, at least for the writer, to do philosophy is to answer this statement. After, really nothing? Can we save ourselves, or will there be another life instead?

In *The world beyond*, Ugo Spirito, in the view of Gentile's reflection on death, pointed out the inadequacy of phenomenal experience. Hence he concluded:

Afterlife remains indeed transcendent due to an unsurpassed dualism of heaven and earth, and we must resist the urge to try to understand it by phenomenologizing the absolute in any way. Nevertheless, despite its still radical alterity, afterlife is at the heart of our lives, for it is the basic problem enclosing it all. And, although the problem is not yet its solution, analysing its main aspects is sufficient to raise hope in pursuit and to save us from that spiritual idleness which leads to indulge facile dogmatisms of faith or scepticism (Spirito, 1948, p. 189. Severino took into account Spirito's investigation, cf. Severino, 1950, pp. 51-54).

Later on, Spirito (1955) stated that the concept of "person" is often associated with the human body, but this has revealed its ephemeral nature bound to vanish with death. Thus, to surrender to death is to surrender to "being nothing" (p. 109). This is the origin of the crisis of the modern man.

The crisis is thus caused by the inability of looking outside ourselves. We are incapable of believing in an *other* as absolute, of having faith in the *idea*. The crisis lies in the hypostasis of the person, in egocentrism and egoism: becoming inward-looking, loving only ourselves directly and being miserable due to the awareness of our limitedness (pp. 129-130).

The result is a metaphysical opening without any individualistic closure.

I am constantly *given* to myself in a stream of ideas which *come to my mind* more or less unexpectedly, bringing me a light whose nature I cannot forebode and of which I become aware at a later stage. The origin of this *stream of ideas* transcends my person and resolves itself in the reality of the whole. My thought is the thought of reality inside me. The reality and I coincide in a single centrality (Spirito, 1971, p. 190. For these aspects of Spirito's philosophy cf. Cavallera, 1988; 2000; 2010a; 2010b).

Thus, Gentile's most brilliant pupil has overcome in his own way every individual finiteness, which is part of a whole where self alone can find a meaning.

In this way, drawing on one of the main themes of actual idealism and its school, between the nineteenth and the twentieth century, Severino gives an extremely new and crucial meaning to the image of salvation, which is enclosed in the eternal manifestation of all being. From this perspective he stands apart from the traditional speculative views, which are typically about what is not preserved (contingency). Yet – and this is the argument of this article – the two salvation “messages” (Gentile's and Severino's ones), although apparently different, complete each other (on the connection between Gentile and Severino cf. De Giovanni, 2013). The similarity lies in the fact that the both attempt to “rescue”, or, rather, to “reveal” the eternal: it might seem paradoxical, but the connection is closer than it may appear to be; better yet, Severino's philosophy cannot be understood without considering his remarks on Gentile's philosophy.

It should be remembered that Severino states that according to Gentile the true reality is not the one which is made, but the one which is still to be done. His thought is therefore a radical support to the truth of technology. “The inevitability of Gentile's thought alone suffices to establish the dominion of technology, i.e. to show that no limits nor

obstacles stand in its way. Contrary to what is usually believed, there is a deep connection between Gentile's thought and technological civilization. This is the reason why Gentile is not bygone time yet. He, along with a few others – who need, by the way, to be *understood* – leads to the twilight of western philosophy, which is the basis for every thought and work of western tradition” (Severino, 2010, pp. 60-61). On the celebration of the centenary of Gentile's birth, Severino wrote that “every ‘ultimate’ truth which differs from the faith in the patency of becoming and therefore from the faith in the identity between the whole and the becoming, is an immutable which anticipates, thus making it impossible, the becoming. [...] To admit a solution for the problematic reality – such are Spirito and Bontadini's views – is to admit the possibility of an ultimate truth (understood as a solution to the problem), namely of the immutable that prevents the becoming and the problem whose obviousness is believed. The belief in this faith requires recognizing in Spirito's “problematic dialecticism” (“situational problematicism” a step backwards from Gentile's “metaphysical dialecticism” (“transcendental problematicism”), where the problem is the content of the solution itself (the becoming, the content of the immutable). Any chance to solve the problem is thus discarded: the chance to reintroduce one of the immutables excluded by the one immutable that is bound to reign in western history: the obviousness of becoming and its consequent awareness, the awareness of the whole as a problem” (Severino, 1977, p. 793).

### 3. The theme of holy in Giovanni Gentile

In addition to being the philosopher of actual idealism, Gentile's works were put in the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (cf. Verucci, 2006. On religion in Gentile's thought, cf. Spirito, 1969, pp. 95-123; Cavallera, 1994, pp. 41-166), because he and his students were the fiercest opponents of neo-scholasticism. During the 1920s and 1930s, it aimed to become, under the guidance of the Rev. Agostino Gemelli and his school, not only the philosophy of Catholicism, but also, after the Lateran Treaty (1929), of the whole Italian State. A wide collection of writings concerning the debate between Gentile and neo-scholastic philosophers was edited by H. A. Cavallera in Gentile (1994). During a speech held in 1922 (*My atheism and the history of Christianity*), Gentile said that “contemporary idealism yields neither to catholic barriers nor

to abstract rationalism. Also, it is the first Italian philosophy to highly praise religion in general, and especially Christianity and Catholicism as a spiritual view of life: that same view which idealism aims to enliven” (p. 183). However, Gentile maintained he was catholic until his death, albeit in his own way (cf. his lecture *My religion*, 1943). Also his family’s life complied following catholic traditions (religious marriage and baptism).

Accordingly, actual idealism can be considered a realization of Catholicism in philosophy, as can be seen from the lecture *Il carattere religioso dell’idealismo italiano* [*The religious character of Italian idealism*] (April 25, 1935) and from the definition of *Religion* (reprinted with the title *Che cos’è la religione* [*What is religion*]) written in 1936 for the *Enciclopedia italiana* [*Italian Encyclopedia*]. The two abovementioned texts and the lecture *My religion* (which is Gentile’s only work unrevised before its publication) can be read in Gentile, *My religion and other writings* (1992). In *My religion* Gentile writes:

Man and God are undoubtedly distinct, yet not separate other than as abstract terms of the living reality, which is the synthesis between God made man and man raised to God by the Grace, when God’s will is made their own (*fiat voluntas tua!*). Without the unity behind this synthesis, there is no Christianity, no absolute religion, which, in one word, is duality, but notwithstanding a unity. The separation or rivalry which some purport to preserve is worse than paganism. In fact, a heathen would believe and have trust in a reconciliation between the natural and the supernatural, between man and God. The man discovering in himself God, and in this way somehow creates God, is not the natural man but the spiritual man; he has entered the realm of the spirit, where he is man and God at once. God is therefore created by itself, not by man. And God became man in Christ (p. 65).

And in the same volume Cavallera states:

We are therefore witnessing, on the one hand, the realization of religion in actual idealism (1935 speech), and, on the other, the recognition, in the historical forms of religion, of the primacy of Catholicism, because (see *Religion*) God is person and the soul is immortal, even though true immortality is the one of spiritual life, not that of the unrelated man, of the individual enclosed in his limitedness. The reaffirmation of actual idealism does not

exclude the connection to Catholicism in its institutional properties. However, the turning point – the conflict between institutional Catholicism and that one realized by actual idealism – is always seen in the light of idealistic supremacy (p. 28).

Now, apart from the competition for the cultural leadership of Italy, for our purposes, the theological debates concern the same root of those endured by Spinoza: the question of the survival of the empirical self (And still, Spinoza's thought can be regarded as one of salvation by the means of *acquiescentia*. Cf. Cavallera, 2014). Gentile, on the one hand, states that the act in act is eternal, and on the other hand, he states the ontic non-existence of the empirical self. This aspect, as for Severino's thought, is the focus of this article.

As Gentile (1916) wrote in the first edition of the *General theory of the spirit as a pure act*, multiplicity as such, abstracted from the activity by which it is established and valued, is not immortal; the One is immortal, for it is the origin of multiplicity which itself cannot be multiplied.

Is the individual mortal or immortal? The Aristotelian individual, as it is conceived by the public imagination, is indeed mortal: that is to say, its immortality is its mortality, since its actuality is in the immortal spirit. But it is mortal as a spiritual act, namely as the individual individuating itself. Immortality's domain is thus in the act inasmuch pure act of the spirit outside which there is nothing but abstraction. If man were not this act and did not feel himself, albeit obscurely, in his immortal essence, he could not live, because he would fall into an absolute practical scepticism [...] The energy which sustains life is the awareness of the divine and of the eternal whereby death and the vanishing of all deciduous things is seen from high up the immortal life (Gentile, 1987, pp. 147-148).

Hence the denial of every mere naturalistic position (p. 226).

This viewpoint recurs in many of his works. In the second book of *System of logic* (1th ed. 1922), Gentile focuses on the fear of death and the unknown.

This same feeling of dread chills the heart of man, whether his thought surpasses life so that he gazes astounded at his dull life and hears the infinite silence which the universe will be for him

once he has no ears to hear its sound, or he moves anxiously backwards towards the infinite silence of nature not yet in motion to create the life enjoyed by man. The same horror and loathing caused by a corpse, which is the most evident annihilation of his being alive (Gentile, 1987, Vols. 2, pp. 197-198).

Confronted with this horror, Gentile reaffirms the immortality of autosynthesis, for it is irreducible to mere individual life.

In conclusion, death is frightening because it does not exist, nor do nature, the past, and dreams. There is the dreaming man, but the dreamed things do not exist. In the same way, death is the denial of thought, but it cannot be actual what is realized through the self-denial of thought. In fact, as we just saw, thought, being infinite, can but be immortal (p. 200).

Gentile (1926) wrote about the eternity of the thinking thought also in *Warnings*

The actual idealist reduces everything to the thought, though such a thought is not the one of man, born of woman, doomed to die, a mere individual member of society, to which he is more or less *quantité négligeable*. [...] This thought is then Thought itself, the universal thought, unique and infinite: a divine thought giving us strength to open our mouths [...]. It must be noted that this Thought, be it called spirit, subject, Self, or whatever it may be called, is not something in itself and for itself, regardless of the multiplicity of the world of the objects, where the thinking activity manifests its creative strength” (Gentile, 1958, pp. 236-237).

It would be worth reading Gentile’s meditations on death, where he goes beyond the finiteness of the subject and gazes at the reality revealed by the *intelligere*, by ascending to a higher plane (on the theme of death cf. Cavallera, 2007, in which many unpublished works on the argument (included) are analyzed).

The thirteenth chapter of *Genesis and Structure of Society* is of unrivalled depth, especially considering it was written during critical moments of Gentile’s life – his son Giovannino, a quite renowned physician, had died on March 30, 1942, and death threats had become

more frequent. Nevertheless, Gentile writes about transcendental society and the immortality of the transcendental self: Gentile's becoming preserves everything, and through preservation it maintains everything. Should this be the case, the empirical self which is dissolved is the deciduous part of the self, not its real substance. The poem outlives the poet, or maybe it does not outlive at all: it remains as potency of being recovered in its founding elements.

What man actually wants, Gentile states, from an eudaimonistic point of view, is not eternity, which has no connection with time, but perpetuity, which is commensurate with time: a desire to live on unlimitedly.

The individual will be there tomorrow as well. The day after too. Always, since this reduced eternity, namely *sempiternity*, is to be truly hoped. If life can continue after the dissolution of the body, there is no reason not to think it cannot carry on unlimitedly. Days, though, hours, every moment passes here, and it will pass there too. Thus, time is not vanquished. And that *other* life, meant as the continuation to this one, and not much different from it (Gentile, 1946, p. 150).

In eternity, time flees, or rather, it is eternalized by the enfolding thought.

A time no more enclosing the thought, nor the thinker nor its whole historically determined being, before and after. It is rather enclosed in a thought whose unfolding amazes the beholder, even though the marvellous eternity of this world has arisen from him and discloses the real world (p. 153).

On the distinction between eternity and perpetuity, Gentile identifies three illusions to which most men succumb: first, believing that the soul, intended as its substance, is immortal; but "separated from its activities, it retreats to an abstract universality and loses every sign of its individuality, therefore losing itself" Ibid., p. 156.; second, believing that the *individual* soul is immortal, "and we forget that the person is self-consciousness and unification; it is no substance, as it is a process, an act in which the synthesis of multiplicity occurs" (p. 156), resulting in an antireligious, immoral and illogic illusion; lastly, believing in another

world conceived as the one we experience, as if it were “a corner of this one” (p. 159). Hence the conclusion which explains the true meaning of immortality.

It is the immortality of the eternal process of the Self existing in its actuation as universality, infinity and therefore immortality. This recurrently causes the abnegation and sacrifice of the *little self* to the *big self*, of the existing reality to the ideal which animates reality and remarks that this immediate existence is not yet being. [...] The immortality of the living man is such as the one of the man living because he continuously dies to himself. By living this way, he moves towards eternity, is rendered immortal (p. 170).

In this way, Gentile reaffirms the end of the empirical self and that the idea of eternity is completely distinct from that of particularity. Actually, this uninterrupted process is strictly speaking a preservation and a *trasumanar* altogether. Multiplicity commits immortal life to eternity. Immortal life does not belong completely to multiplicity, but rather to eternity, to which it grants life inasmuch as eternal. It is the immortality of the *egregie cose*, which are not only heroic enterprises or intellectual works, but also that same love we feel for our beloved, for our children, that love which makes us act selflessly and constructively; that which grants the individual as such the possibility to escape from particularity and to universalize itself in this life, a man among men. It is a very subtle paragraph which can be easily misunderstood from a strictly religious point of view. *Resurrexit, non est hic*. Gentile, despite his being officially excluded by the Catholic Church due to his works, reaffirming its act in act does not cancel the manifestation of the self, because eternity lies in this manifestation of the world. In this universalization (on this aspect, cf. Cavallera, 1991) process particularity proves universal maintaining the point of view of multiplicity.

#### 4. Earth and Joy in Emanuele Severino

Severino explores the fundamental thought developed in his *La struttura originaria* in other crucial works, analysing deeply the meaning of existence as *being*.

An essential work to understand the meaning of his speculation is *Destiny of necessity* (1980). If we cannot escape destiny, truth is the necessary saying. “Truth is the destiny of the Whole” (p. 124), and will

is *appearing*: “it is the appearing of something which belongs to the world dreamt by the alienation of truth. This world is the isolated earth, the result visible inside the *isolation of the earth*” (p. 573). The existence of the deciduous is therefore established in the context of the isolation of the earth, but what is considered deciduous is nothing but the appearing itself. Appearing is necessary, because it is the manifestation of destiny. At the same time though it is contingent, for it is conceived in the context of the isolation of the earth.

Finite appearing is the infinite appearing of the Whole (the appearing of destiny is the appearing of destiny in its entirety), and still the Whole *does not appear* in the circle of destiny’s appearing. Its infinite appearing is enlightened in the unconscious of this circle, which is surrounded by the shadows of the non-appearing of the infinite enlightenment of the Whole. It is therefore the circle (or the entwined circles) of the Whole’s finite appearing. The Whole, overcoming all the contradictions of reality, is Joy (p. 594).

Joy is outside the isolated earth, and, at the same time, it is the overcoming of its loneliness, since it does not belong to the shadow of appearing. “In Joy, the deciduous has always been past” (p. 597). It is the awareness that inside the infinite appearing of the Whole, which encloses finite appearing, lies the manifestation of the whole destiny, which can but be Glory.

Destiny can but be the one of the whole, because it is the incontrovertible manifestation of being. Since it is the manifestation of the totality and eternity of being, it can but be the revelation of the necessity of what is determined. Hence, the circle of the appearing of destiny can only manifest its limitedness (Severino, 2001, p. 27).

Later on, Severino explains that

the isolated earth is a segment of the infinite manifestation of the earth. The isolated earths, gathered in every circle, are the manifestation of the essence of totality; that is to say, the disclosure of becoming, the progressive manifestation of that eternal which is the isolation of the earth. [...] Nor does the

infinite appearing occur. Besides being the appearing of the manifestation of the isolated earth, it is the infinite unfolding of Glory of a constellation of circles (p. 551).

In this regard, Severino's philosophy is one of salvation. This theme is crucial in *The Death and the Earth* (2011). According to Severino, the isolated earth is brought to completion by the death of empirical will, because, after it, no more determinations of the isolated earth occur.

The eternal, which is the contrasted background of the isolated earth, wanes and reaches completion; the eternal, now a background without contrast, begins to appear. In this waning and beginning to appear, the permanence of what is identical in both configurations and in every other background configuration appears (p. 413).

Between death and the appearance of Joy, there cannot be any intermediate being, for it would belong to the earth, but, after death, the earth cannot occur anymore. Therefore

death is the extreme imminence of the union in every circle of pure and isolated earths and of earth that saves. In the imminence, that splendor of Joy is still, motionless, time does not flow because nothing arrives (no eternal) (p. 414).

Accordingly, approaching death means approaching Joy (salvation in truth), and the isolated earth wanes. In this way, the destination of being *this* appears.

The destination is the appearing necessity of Glory (that is to say, of the necessity for the saving earth to occur properly in every circle of destiny), and therefore of the Glory of Joy, that is to say, of the infinite ways in which the real Whole of beings endlessly manifests itself (p. 425).

The self is the eternal appearing of destiny, whose splendour, according to Severino, is simultaneously the splendour of its destination, towards the Glory of Joy. It is indeed a great and bright manifestation of immense power of salvific light.

The endless isolated earths of the infinite constellation of the finite circles of destiny are a part of the Whole, and it is necessary that the totality of those earths be overcome through the advent of the saving earth. Then, the infinite traces left by the Whole in this totality need to be deciphered so that the infinite reality of the whole can appear in the infinite constellation of circles (p. 426).

The self, through death, manifests the incontrovertibility of being inasmuch being, namely its eternity, and that Joy “is what every self of the finite circles of destiny actually *is*” (p. 536). (For a punctual analysis of Severino’s thought, see Goggi, 2015. See also Cusano, 2011; Spanio (ed.), 2014. Cf. finally Severino & Scola, 2014).

Existence, as Severino (2016) states in *History, Joy* is a continuous self-deception, because the characteristic of the mortal as such is the will to live “established on the belief that things are becoming *per se*” (p. 47). However, present age – an age of technoscience following the age of reason, preceded itself by the age of myth – is established on the certainty of a future which can but reveal its deep contradictions, while technoscience is curbed by the power of tradition, which intends to evoke the ontological meaning of becoming *something else*. “Being inferior to tradition, the age of technology is self-contradictory, because technology cannot be what it aspires to be, that is, an infinite growth of power” (p. 59). This, within the logic of western thought, is shown by the limitedness of the empirical self (death).

It is inevitable that fear overshadows the paradise of technology turning it into its opposite, whence it is evident that every glimmer of happiness is to be lost. Extreme power knows it is powerlessness. This is the contradiction of the age of technology (p. 63).

The will to power is therefore the characteristic of the isolated earth, as defined by Severino, of man’s life and, accordingly, of ethics, of which it is an aspect “requiring us to overcome ourselves. In fact, once we reach the good, we must continue living in it and thus overcome ourselves” (p. 81). For this reason, technology has proved to be the most rigorous form of mistake. Technology, understood as a faith in a better future, carries *doubt* with it. Faith recognizes it as an indissoluble presence.

Severino’s analysis of doubt is indeed incisive.

Since doubt belongs to the isolated earth, it is itself a faith, whose existence is possible just because, like every other faith, is founded on the deepest doubt. Were the *regressus in indefinitum* unavoidable, [...] the fundament of the existence of faith would be postponed indefinitely (p. 112).

The destiny of man is beyond the isolated earth. In fact, “faith, will, pain, the normal contradiction in which we believe when we are in the isolated earth, doubt, death, all wane along with the wane of the isolated earth” (p. 125). Actually

the appearing of destiny is a characteristic of destiny, and, at once, the *essence* of man. It is not what is called “man” within the isolated earth, the mortal. Man is, in his essence, i. e. the circle of destiny, the eternal manifestation of the Whole – of Joy [...]. Every man is this manifestation, one of the true infinite lights [...]. However, in the essence of man, the Whole appears as the infinite which does not reveal itself in all its aspects, it reveals itself *in itself*. The essence of man is the *finite* manifestation of the Whole (p. 140).

Therefore, the finite lies on the infinite road to Joy.

This implies the permanence of the Contradiction as it coexists unfolded in circles. This means that, within the finite circle, pain still exists.

This dark background persists endlessly, as much as Glory and the Joy of Glory, to which the circles of pain are destined too, unfold. It persists endlessly in the *circles of Joy* as well. Yet, it never appears alone, for when it does, it is accompanied by the great wings of salvation (p. 161).

By doing so, Severino confirms the inevitability of pain as intrinsic to finiteness. Outside finiteness lies the sense of plenitude of the Whole.

Mortals want to ‘communicate’ and ‘understand each other’, but they cannot get what they want as long as the *conflict* between destiny and the isolated earth remains. What they think they are obtaining while talking with the intention to communicate and be understood is different from what they are saying and meaning. Every conversation (agreement, disagreement, peace,

war, love, hate) is inevitably ambiguous. As the conflict dissolves, the intention of which language consists dissolves too: along with verticality, 'Good Friday', the saving 'Easter' of the world, Joy, appears, and the circles of destiny, which always overcame our mortal being, have no need to communicate nor to be understood, for they are completely clear to one another (p. 179).

With his very peculiar language, Severino grasps the presence of the Contradiction – which preserves everything, since everything is clear to one another – within the manifestation of the Whole, within the Joy of Glory. The overcoming happens under an absolute light, preserving it all without any will. One could say that, according to Severino, the foundation of the human, and, as such, of pain and joy, of the contingency aspiring to immutability, lies within *will*. Walking away from will means entering the saving earth.

In this case, the finite manifestation of the infinite is, according to Severino, the preservation of multiplicity within eternity: beings are eternal.

## 5. Salvation in truth

Thus, with an extremely refined dialectic, the saving image of the great philosophical discourse returns.

The speculative discourse is, above all, an answer to the question: what will become of us afterwards? Or, to better say, what will happen afterwards? What is the *afterwards*? Man knows more than any other thing that he must die, as he has seen the others around him die; yet, of course, he does not want to die. Many religions provide a hope of salvation. Christianity in particular assures the resurrection of the body. However, many questions have been raised throughout history: which body will be resurrected? A young body or an old one? Will once living people be able to meet again *somewhere* after their death? Many answers have been given for these questions (on the concept of Heaven, see Bernheim & Stravides, 1994). It appears to be clear that the first idea to come to our mind is that of the *other world* as a continuation to this one, as a way to preserve our affections. This, however, is a *human* simplification which does not consider the process of *indiamento* (Cf. Dante, *Paradiso*, IV, 28) guaranteed by Christian religion. The philosopher cannot accept the idea of a *sui generis* reproduction of this

world, knowing that the empirical self as such cannot understand what is by nature the denial of the empirical.

In this way, within the same Christian tradition, albeit following two different paths, Gentile and Severino return to the theme of *appearing*, which is to say of existence. Both sense the fragility of every immortality appearing in time and space. Nevertheless, both succeed in saving multiplicity through its negation: Gentile does so by the means of the universalization process (Dante's *trasumanar*. "Trasumanar significar per verba / non si porà", *Paradiso*, I, 70-71), Severino through the advent of the "saving earth", which is the denial of will and therefore of mere particularity. Philosophy, when it is not reduced to philosophical philology, can still get to the core of things, and for this we owe it a debt.

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# Is an Ethics Inspired by the Philosophy of Severino Possible?

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This paper deals with the possibility to outline some ethical notions that may be consistent with the main tenets of the philosophy of Emanuele Severino. By exploring the notion of “plural transcendental” that lays at the core of Carmelo Vigna’s “ethics of recognition”, the argument infers that, if the structure of transcendental reality implies the original presence of a relationship of mutual recognition between at least two transcendental consciousnesses, then to violate the other-ness of the Other becomes impossible, otherwise no transcendental consciousness would self-disclose ever. Yet relationships cannot be “good” or “evil”, otherwise relationships where mutual recognition is actually denied would actually exist. The original plurality of transcendental consciousnesses perfectly mirrors the actual meaning of «the true spectacle of Being» as «the irruption of differences».

**Keywords:**

**ethics, recognition, transcendental, consciousness, otherness, nihilism**

## 1. Introduction

My paper investigates whether it is possible to formulate an ethical theory that can be considered soundly founded on the principles of the philosophy of Emanuele Severino, or at least does not contradict them. Such task does not amount to establish a general ethical theory inspired by his thought – an *ethica more severiniano demonstrata*. While the latter is a far more ambitious project, here I will humbly content myself to try to demonstrate that *some* ethical notions actually *can* be formulated without contradict the philosophy of Severino. More specifically, the interesting ethical theory formulated by Carmelo Vigna, if read from a Severinian perspective, can precisely provide such ground. As a consequence, even if I am well aware that the subject of the difficult relation between the philosophy of Severino and ethics has been approached several times during the years, with some interesting theoretical proposals trying to overcome the contradiction seemingly embedded in agency itself according to his philosophical thought (see for instance Brianese, 2013 and Candiotta & Sangiorgio, 2013), I choose to focus solely on this comparison.

However, this still happens to be a titanic task, even an impossible one, given that, in the perspective of Severino, from the ontological point of view ethics can occur only *as* a form of the alienation of the actual meaning of being, while historically it occurs *within* this alienation. Otherwise said, ethics seems to be *not* conceivable outside the dimension that not only marks Western civilization *per se*, but also lies as its foundation: the belief according to which being, inasmuch as being, is nothing, given that all Western interpretations of coming-to-be and passing-away consider these processes as, respectively, the generation of being from, and its return to, nothing:

When thought affirms the possibility that something (i.e., a not-Nothing) not-be, and thus that it acquire and lose its being, it

affirms that not-Nothing is nothing – it posits the identity of Being and Nothing. For indeed, it is not of a *Nothing* that thought affirms that it is not, and so is nothing – no, it affirms this of a *not-Nothing*, and thus of *something* that, as such, is Being (Severino, 2016, p. 155).

The fundamental notion of metaphysics is that being, *as such*, is nothing (Severino, 2016, p. 207).

Indeed, both the main question of ethics – “what are the actions that define me as such?”, a question that could generate other ones such as “what defines me as an agent?”, “what is agency about?” – and morality – “what actions are right/wrong?”, a question that in turn ushers in the problem of the definition of moral values, i.e. of the meaning of good, evil, justice, and so on – imply at least implicitly the belief in the existence of boundaries, which should not be trespassed, lest being may suffer a diminution whatsoever.

From the Severinian perspective, the domains of ethics and morality seem incapable to avoid the accusation of fostering nihilism. As for moral values, they invariably come as a sort of either “super-evaluation” or “under-appreciation” of being. If, speaking of something or someone, I consider it/him as good, such predicament comes as a sort of enhancement of the existing reality, of which is predicated, a sort of “over-being”; the contrary, of course, occurs with the predicate “evil”, which makes the reality, of which is predicated, appear as being “less”, a sort of “under-being”. Moral values, in short, presuppose not only that being may change, that it may grow or diminish, but also that such fluctuation actually occurs – as it happens in Augustine’s classical theory about the meaning of evil. As for ethics, the notion of agency questions the stability of being in an even more general way, because the former would not even be considered possible were the latter not be subject to any change: *if* agency exists, as it does, then being *must* be changeable, and open *per se* to a possible *complete* manipulation by the agent. In other words, being can either be destroyed or produced entirely, or, even if not *all* of it is destroyed or produced (i.e., in case something or even most of it remains), still any change occurred or carried out on it *must* actually *destroy* something, no matter how small or irrelevant, in order to be really effectual, otherwise we wouldn’t even consider it as a change: were being to remain *identical* to itself, received wisdom goes, then it would simply

have not undergone any change at all (see Severino, 1982, pp. 311-312). (Another possible objection goes like that: if nothing changes, given that everything is eternal, contrarian predicaments would then co-exist within the same subject, i.e. Socrates would be at the same time “young” and “old”: see Severino, 2016, p. 184, note 15, and also Severino, 1982, pp. 303-305). Finally, also the fundamental question of “ethics” as it is lay down by Heidegger, revolving, as it happens, around the definition of what human agency essentially is – i.e. the relation between human agency and man’s very essence – turns out to be formulated in nihilistic terms. Indeed, if, for Heidegger, the question about truly authentic agency – the one that uplifts the *Dasein* from the ontic dimension to the ontological one – becomes the place where the *Dasein* puts its very being at stake, this can only mean that the *meaning* of human existence is so radically put into question, that it could *also* be completely nullified – as a matter of fact, it is precisely such possibility that makes this question so important and valuable. The text of *Sein und Zeit* provides many references. First, the being of *Dasein* is described as something that is *essentially* always at stake – being constantly at stake actually belonging to the very *essence* of the *Dasein* as its most proper characteristic – from the very introduction of its notion in par. 9: «Das Seiende, dem es in seinem Sein um dieses selbst geht, verhält sich zu seinem Sein als seiner eigensten Möglichkeit. Dasein *ist* je seine Möglichkeit» (Heidegger, 1967, p. 42). But it is only in the liminal experiences of fear and above all death, that the *Dasein* feels the limit, which marks its essential relation with authenticity:

Nur Seiendes, dem es in seinem Sein um dieses selbst geht, kann sich fürchten. Das Fürchten erschließt dieses Seiende in seiner Gefährdung, in der Überlassenheit an es selbst (Heidegger, 1967, par. 30, p. 141)

Mit dem Tod steht sich das Dasein selbst in seinem *eigensten* Seinkönnen bevor. In dieser Möglichkeit geht es dem Dasein um sein In-der-Welt-sein schlechthin. Sein Tod ist die Möglichkeit des Nicht-mehr-dasein-könnens. [...] Der Tod ist die Möglichkeit der schlechthinigen Daseinsunmöglichkeit. So enthüllt sich der *Tod* als die *eigenste, unbezügliche, unüberholbare Möglichkeit*» (Heidegger, 1967, par. 50, p. 250).

The origin of such possibility – notably, that the Dasein is essentially always at stake – must be tracked back to Husserl’s phenomenology, for which, being impossible to decide whether being exists independently from manifesting itself, only manifest being, i.e. being manifesting itself in and as experience, may be the object of science. Heidegger stretches the conclusions of his master to their limits, by asserting that, of every being manifesting itself, is impossible to state whether it still is, when is not manifested any further (see Severino, 1989, pp. 293-314, especially pp. 301-307).

However, if it is not possible from the perspective of Western ethical tradition to draw conclusions that do not contradict the principles of Severino’s philosophy, it remains to be seen whether the other way round is feasible – that is to say, whether it is possible to rethink ethics, partially or completely, from those very principles. It is my personal conviction that an ethical theorization in particular, known as “ethics of recognition” and first proposed by the Italian scholar Carmelo Vigna, is suitable to become a form of ethics that complies with the «truth of being», as it has been outlined by Severino in more than sixty years of research and countless essays and treaties. My attempt is therefore absolutely not systematic, nor it raises any claim to completeness or exhaustivity, since there could be also other ethical theories that could fit into the main structure of Severino’s philosophy. Still, if an ethical theory whatsoever can be judged to be in conformity with this philosophy, the received wisdom, according to which ethics is *per se* necessarily nihilistic, and not just as a necessary consequence of the *history* of Western nihilism (even if such history is, in turn, ontologically necessary and not simply a fact), will not be tenable any further.

## 2. Encountering the transcendental

Ethics of recognition, as it has been theorized by Vigna, is founded on a nexus between a theoretical dimension and a practical one, where the latter comes as the self-disclosure of the former in the domain of factually experienced reality. In Vigna’s neo-idealistic perspective, reality is founded upon transcendental consciousness, which in turn is the “subjectivation of significance” – meant as, literally, the process of becoming-a-subject undergone by significance. From an “objective” perspective, significance *per se* is the transcendental horizon that makes every *determined* significance possible, just as the ontological difference

between being and every determined or individual being is made possible (i.e. thinkable) by the former. Every significance is entirely “objective” when considered as such, but becomes “subjective” when it is considered in relation with thinking activity, which poses and comprehends it: indeed, being and significance can hardly be found outside thinking activity conceiving them, every entity existing only if it is thought. But if we stop looking at significance in a purely objective way, and begin to relate it to thinking activity, without which it wouldn’t even exist – namely, given that significance is not *found*, as naturalistic realism believes, but coincides with the process of thinking itself – then being, understood as a transcendental horizon, becomes a transcendental *consciousness*.

All this, of course, belongs to the realm of the well-established tenets of idealistic philosophy, to which Vigna adds a very interesting theoretical corollary nonetheless. For idealism generally sees transcendental consciousness as belonging to the realm of self-manifest truths: nothing can be thought without previously admitting the existence of thinking in general, just as every determined significance presupposes the existence of significance *per se*. In addition to that, the transcendental nature of consciousness, as well as its many synonyms (such as being, thought, significance *per se*...), must be understood as essentially *open*: to claim that being (or significance) *per se* makes every determined being (or significance) possible, amounts to state that no determined being or significance may semantically match the width of transcendental significance.

Vigna often addresses transcendental realities in terms of «horizon», a term he always employs with reference to the category of Whole-ness, or totality: therefore, «horizon» may mean the whole of being, of reality, of significance, of thought, as for example in Vigna, 2016, p. 159: «The Origin consists of the synthesis between thought and what is immediately given to it. But thought immediately leans over its immediate content. Its horizon is the Whole of reality, since neither it does point to *this* or *that* content, nor to what entirely differs from every possible current content, that is from *any* possible given content». The sum of all possible determined beings or significances – those that were, are, and will be, plus all those that remain forever in the domain of pure potentiality – is *never* capable to match the semantical span of the transcendental significance «being», i.e. of transcendental significance *per se*. Transcendental significance is *actual totality*, whereas determined

totality is simply the sum of all determined beings/significances, real and possible. As said before, when I do not simply consider significance as something that stands before my intellect, distinct from thinking activity, but in close connection with the latter, then significance becomes consciousness: as a consequence, the actual totality of transcendental significance, considered from a “subjective” perspective, is transcendental consciousness, which enjoys the same absolutely open nature described before. This neo-idealistic structure is, of course, perfectly known also to Severino, forming a necessary element of his philosophy, and it is masterly epitomized in the sentence found in Severino, 2016, p. 159: «Man is the eternal appearing of the truth of Being». Other formulations of it may be found *ivi*, p. 172 («The “I” is this eternal place where worlds are born»), and p. 189; Severino, 2016, p. 211 («Not only is man eternal, like every being, but he is also the locus in which the eternal eternally manifests itself»), and p. 259 («“I” means: “This eternal self-reflection of Appearing, in whose truth Being has always dwelled”»).

### 3. Investigating transcendental “open-ness”: Vigna’s ethical theorization

Vigna’s argument precisely tries to investigate the nature of such “open-ness” of the transcendental, which comes as a necessary predicament of every transcendental reality. Idealistic philosophy does not pay much attention to such “open-ness”, considering it an essentially *immediate* predicament of the transcendental. Vigna, on the contrary, tries to resolve this residual naturalism – in the eyes of idealistic perspective, every belief in immediate-ness is potentially a form of naturalism, and must be put at test whether it can be overcome as such – by stating that such “open-ness” is not merely accessory, but comes as a *structure* – a nexus – that, like everything else, is itself the result of a mediation, a process. If this is the case, then the “open-ness” that marks transcendental as such must have a “purpose”. Vigna determines such “purpose” in this way: transcendental consciousness is “open” – it is a semantic «horizon» – because there is at least *another* transcendental consciousness beside it. The disclosure of consciousness may actually happen only as, and by means of, a reciprocal disclosing process with another (potential) consciousness. After rejecting all the possible alternatives for the determination of this other transcendental reality that originally stands

around transcendental subjectivity, such as God, the Whole, being, other transcendental meanings, and finally the I itself (see Vigna, 2015, pp. 37-42), Vigna concludes that it can only be

the immediate experience of an *actual transcendental reality* that is originally *different* from transcendental intentionality meant as an element of the structure of the Origin. In it, I experience someone else, but as another *subjectivity*, and not simply as a behaviour, which is similar or equivalent to that experience of the transcendental, which I call mine (Vigna, 2015, p. 42).

This amounts to a major shift in the conception of at least one of the main tenets of idealistic philosophy, because it turns the self-evident nature of transcendental consciousness from solipsistic or purely self-referent to something that rests on the existence of a plurality of actual transcendental consciousnesses. (Indeed, the “open-ness” of transcendental consciousness is synonymic with its self-evidence. Everything claiming to be transcendental – be it being itself or thought – is also universal. In the given examples, this implies that nothing neither can, respectively, exist nor be thought outside of them. But the universal is self-evident by necessity: being the Whole of reality, in order to deny it we must presuppose it.)

Such plural transcendentalism – which should not be confused with a plurality of transcendentals: see note at the end of this paragraph – is a theoretical condition that necessarily implies consequences both theoretical *and* practical. As for the theoretical consequence, since my transcendental consciousness is “open” because there is at least another one beside it, the nature of such plurality remains to be properly understood. Were it simply an *Urfakt*, then it would not be necessary: in this case, a transcendental consciousness *would* be such, simply because it so *happens*, i.e. because transcendental consciousnesses simply self-disclose themselves together – a merely *factual* necessity, not an ontological one. On the contrary, plural transcendentalism acquires a real necessary status when the “open-ness” of my consciousness does not simply imply the pure *fact* of the existence of another transcendental consciousnesses, but the presence of a transcendental consciousness *that recognizes me as such* (i.e. as a transcendental consciousness too): «The definition of the (actual) object of being’s becoming-visible as transcendental makes the self-disclosure of consciousness thinkable,

because it establishes an essential equation at the level of *intentionality*» (Vigna, 2015, p. 47).

The “open-ness” of a transcendental nature, as we said, is such, that it cannot be satisfied by any determined totality. Still, it is an “open-ness” awaiting to find something or someone *au pair* with it, such as only *another* transcendental consciousness can be. If there would *not* be at least another transcendental reality – another transcendental consciousness – capable to match it, my transcendental consciousness would not self-disclose itself, letting the whole world appear in such self-disclosure. Thus, Vigna’s theory distances itself from the solipsism of the self-evident Self, so typical of modern philosophy, as well as idealism and phenomenology, replacing it with a *plural* evidence of *more Selves*.

*Note.* In no way does plural transcendentalism amount to a plurality of transcendentals. More universals cannot co-exist, since the universal is transcendental, spanning over actual totality, the Whole of reality. When Vigna says there are “many” transcendental consciousnesses, such plurality is not merely formal, still all of these consciousnesses remain one and the same in the *structure* of their transcendental nature – not, of course, in the contents they disclose in each structures. See Vigna, 2015, pp. 49-50: «Inter-subjectivity, which the Origin consists of, somehow coincides with Heraclitus’ “common speech”. It should not be understood as if the Origin is a multitude, because this would imply that, as a consequence, we should explore the possible forms, by which such multitude convenes together. On the contrary, here accordance is part of the Origin itself, because the original inter-subjective condition – which is the original object of theoretical speculation – is the articulation of the constants that are part of the transcendental becoming-visible of being. Such constants must necessarily be found within every individual identification of the becoming-visible of being, i.e. in every individual “human being”.»

#### **4. Enacting mutual recognition**

If the theoretical consequence of plural transcendentalism revolves around the *mutual* nature of the recognition enacted by both transcendental consciousnesses, its *practical* consequence sheds light on the *concrete* meaning of such *mutual recognition*, which cannot remain purely theoretical in terms of a mere shared notion, but must involve a deeper sort of communion. As we saw, a transcendental consciousness

never simply “becomes aware” of the *ursprünglich* presence of another beside it, but it rather *actively recognizes it as another transcendental reality*, whose transcendental nature matches its own. Given that i) the presence of another transcendental consciousness is the necessary condition in order that a transcendental consciousness may self-disclose itself as such; and that ii) such presence is never simply perceived, but always *recognized*, we could then infer that this recognition (of the other transcendental consciousness) is the essential mediation in order that (every) transcendental consciousness may recognize (and self-disclose) itself. It is precisely the extent of this recognition that is not purely theoretical: by originally recognizing me (and not simply becoming aware of me) as a transcendental reality, the other consciousness concretely recognizes me as I actually am *and* it opens itself up to me; and, such recognition being originally mutual, this means that I originally recognize the other consciousness as it is too, *and* I open myself up to it. Otherwise said, not only is the relation between two transcendental consciousnesses original, but it also originally is a relation of mutual recognition between them as they are, a recognition that in turn, being *actual* and not only theoretical in terms of a shared pure notion, is a mutual welcoming the Other in his/her other-ness. It is, in short, an actual *relationship*:

The synthesis of the two necessities (the original *and* immediate object of intentional relation must be real *and* transcendental) may be found in inter-subjective relation as revealing the authentic features of the structure of the Origin (Vigna, 2015, p. 48).

All transcendentals are, first and foremost, nothing but inter-subjective relation *itself*. Beauty is, before anything else, the beauty of a human face seen by a human gaze; good is, before anything else, a good person loving a good person (that is to say, good is, before anything else, a love relationship) (Vigna, 2015, p. 62).

Such relationship is theoretical and ethical-practical at the same time: «While Scholastic ontology characterized the Origin in terms of “there is something”, the characterization of the original “something” as “someone”, on the one hand, remains within the domain of theoretics [...], but, on the other, transforms theoretics [...]. Properly speaking, it

“curves” the whole domain of the Origin, making it inter-subjective itself» (Vigna, 2015, p. 48). It is theoretical, because transcendental nature, as said, always comes as plural, and ethical-practical, because such plurality is always a shared one, and recognized as such. If the transcendental nature of my consciousness, in order to be, presupposes at least another transcendental consciousness beside it; if this plurality is not simply factual, but is an *ursprünglich* mutual recognition; then such mutual recognition, revolving as it does around the shared transcendental nature of the (at least) two consciousnesses involved, necessarily comes with ethical consequences attached, the most notable among them being the impossibility to manipulate other consciousnesses because of their very other-ness. Indeed, in their original mutual recognition, both transcendental consciousnesses not only mutually open themselves up to each other, but they do *unconditionally* so. If my transcendental consciousness cannot self-disclose itself as such, thus disclosing the world in it, without the actual original (*ursprünglich*) presence of the other recognising consciousness(es) beside it, then manipulating other consciousness(es), as well as objectualizing them, amounts to not recognise that very transcendental nature of theirs – a recognition that is instead necessary for my own transcendental consciousness in order to self-disclose itself and blossom. This also brushes off the very possibility of the aporia, according to which a transcendental consciousness, i.e. an actual totality, cannot meet another actual totality as such, without making it a particular content, that is without objectivating, particularizing it (indeed, if something is contained within a horizon, what is contained cannot be in turn a horizon. If it were a horizon as such, it could be not distinguished from the original horizon). The mutual opening-up between two transcendental consciousnesses must be transcendental as well:

Subjectivity, which *exerts* intentionality, stands as a transcendental horizon that cannot be crossed (to imagine so is contradictory, because it would amount to think something as the object of intentionality, which would nevertheless be positioned outside the domain of intentionality itself). Yet the subjectivity, which finds itself as the *object* of intentionality, is just as transcendental, because it appears as meta-determined or “beyond thematization” (it is indeed a subject and not an object, not even an intellectual one). These two horizons *must* therefore *coincide*. Only their

*content* may differ, just as it actually does, as experience (even common experience) richly shows (Vigna, 2015, p. 57).

But to recognise another transcendental consciousness as such – a recognition that, as said, is always reciprocal – simply means, in Vigna’s eyes, that the theoretical *relation* between the two becomes a good *relationship* among them at the practical level – that is, a relation of love or friendship. By embedding the ontological necessity of relationships within the necessary overall ontological structure of transcendental consciousness and significance *per se*, Vigna has achieved the remarkable success of binding together the theoretical and the practical spheres in a way that highlights, on the one hand, how the fundament of reality is a *nexus*, and, on the other, the exemplaristic nature of such nexus, for reality as a whole too consists of a nexus between *lógos* and experience – a basic tenet of Severino’s philosophy since *La struttura originaria* [*The Original Structure*] (see Severino, 1981, pp. 16-17).

## 5. A Severinian critique to Vigna

The problem of Vigna’s theorization resides in its being a *closed* structure, since it is adamant in denying ethical status to all relationships that either are not based on mutual recognition, nor manifest it – in other words, it excludes all relationships that cannot be deemed ethically good. The weak point in Vigna’s argument – which is very sophisticated, often elegant in its subtlety – lies precisely in the definition of “ethically good relationships”, since the latter, in the eyes of the author, are simply *presupposed* to be the ones that can be usually inferred from perspectives such as naturalism or common sense, like heterosexual marriage or camaraderie male friendship. By adopting this stance, Vigna falls back into the usual frame of limit-bound Western traditional ethics, which, while actively trying to define ethical boundaries that should not be trespassed, reformulate – in Severino’s view – the essential nihilistic attitude embedded in Western ontology.

If we try instead to read Vigna’s ethics of recognition within the perspective of the most authentic feature of the «true spectacle of Being» as it has been formulated by Severino, namely «the irruption of differences» (Severino, 2016, p. 43), i.e. that *all* beings are originally eternal, we must draw the conclusion that a distinction such as that proposed by Vigna, between relationships of reciprocal recognition (or

good relationships) and relationships based on manipulation (or evil, ethically unacceptable relationships) – shortly, the sort of distinction typically found in Western ethics – is no longer tenable. Should we accept the actual existence of a violation whatsoever of mutual recognition, we would then be bound to accept also the factual existence of violence, and also of its pre-condition (the possibility of actual annihilation of being) as well as its effects (the reality of actual annihilation of being). Violence, on the contrary, may exist only as a pure form deprived of actual content, which in fact is the actual meaning of non-being as opposed to being. Non-being (meaning here absolute nothingness) must indeed signify *something*, otherwise the very truth of being would disappear: given that being is essentially opposed to nothing – it actually consists of such opposition, – if nothing does not mean anything, then such opposition i.e. being itself does not exist. Still, even if nothing must signify something, it must signify that very “something” that, indeed, is pure nothingness itself, *nihil absolutum*. The solution consists precisely in saying that the meaning “nothing” is a pure form, actually deprived of real content (which is the *nihil absolutum*: see Severino, 1981, p. 209 and ff.).

This leads us, of course, to the thorny issue of defining the nature of the horrors and devastations inflicted by humans upon themselves or the biosphere, which the original impossibility of violence set by «truth of being» makes *not* look as abominable acts – something practical reflection, as well as common sense, may find deeply repulsive to accept. Yet extreme coherence with the principles of Severino’s philosophy forces us to admit that everything appearing – according to the usual ethical perspective – as a *violation* of mutual recognition, like all forms of interaction apparently deprived of every minimal ethical connotation, such as sadism, brutality, or open cruelty, are actually attempts to deny the truth – inscribed in the very self-disclosure process of transcendental consciousness – that *there is no such thing as relationships that actually deny or violate mutual recognition*. If the «truth of being» brings forth «the original watershed of all determinations», then even the spectacles of violence, death and destruction are eternal, just like every other being:

The abuse carried upon Earth is the root of all fault. (Still, this should not be taken as a claim about man’s “responsibility”). The original fault is the strife between the earth and the truth of being. But earth’s abuse is eternal, like any other being. It *shows* itself at

the beginning of human history. Equally eternal is therefore also all we deem “mistake”, “evil”, “fault”, “sorrow” – that is to say, all the avatars of contradiction – just as eternal is also the overcoming of all the avatars of contradiction (Severino, 1982, p. 305).

However, what they – or we – *believe* they are, the *purpose* they – or we – think they serve – that is, to actually annihilate other beings, thus heralding the fundamental tenet of nihilism, according to which being is *per se* nothing – is originally impossible. They – “evil” relationships, all forms of relationships that actively pursue “evil” – are explicitly manifest violence, just as “good” relationships do so implicitly, because they all are issued from *will*, which is the origin of alienation:

If violence is the will, which desires what is impossible; and if will essentially consists in desiring that a being becomes something-other-than-itself; then – given that becoming something-other-than-itself is impossible, because the impossible is, first and foremost, to be other-than-itself – will is *per se* the desire of what is impossible: otherwise said, will is *per se* violence. The devastation brought over man and the earth is violence’s visible form; compassion, love, tolerance are its hidden forms (Severino, 1992, p. 26).

## 6. Only (relations of) recognition actually exist

Seen from the perspective of the «truth of being», on the contrary, all forms of relationship are *per se* but pure manifestations of mutual recognition. This recognition, in turn, precisely recognizes being as something not subject to any change at all, not even the slightest form of manipulation. From a caress given to a child given because of love (“good” will) to the needless destruction of an entire city out of pure criminal cruelty (“evil” will), being remains eternal and impermeable to any mutation. The furious ideological rage of the Nazis, desiring the annihilation of the entire Jewish nation, only reaffirms the impossibility to annihilate the Other in its other-ness. Moreover, such desire for destruction would actually never exist, were the other-ness of the Other *not* being *original*, i.e. *transcendental* – actually, what allows the transcendental consciousness of the torturer to open up.

The annihilation task is a Sisyphean one, since it is impossible to accomplish. The torturer must double his efforts precisely because the

annihilating acts inflicted on the victim seem *never annihilating enough* – it looks as if they always bring actual annihilation within reach, moving always a step further towards it, yet never fully accomplishing it. Indeed, no effort whatsoever, not even an induced mass extinction of mankind as a whole, will ever suffice to annihilate being. Thus, all the forms, in which violent behaviour articulates itself, actually witness only the impossibility to deny «the truth of being» – just like any other being. Otherwise said, the attempt to actually generate and perform acts that deny mutual recognition, absolutely or partially, only leads to the result that such acts actually *are* relationships where the Other is recognized in its other-ness, and fully so, precisely because the perennial search for even more systematic and furious ways to erase such other-ness invariably end up only confirming it – they presuppose what they try to deny, in the very moment they attempt to deny it. No action can deny the *actual* existence of relationships of mutual recognition, because these are the *only ones* «the truth of being» permits to occur. This, of course, implies that expressing moral judgements of value by stating the difference between good and evil relationships – between relationships that do affirm mutual recognition, and those that do not – is intrinsically nihilistic.

## 7. Conclusion: towards a Severinian “proto-ethics”

In conclusion, we can state that it is possible to claim that some ethical notions may be outlined according to the principles of Severino’s philosophy. Such notions are definitely rudimental – indeed they rather constitute a sort of proto-ethics, far less a fully articulated one, – consisting only of what could be arguably described as ethics’ very essential principle of mutual recognition of the Other’s original other-ness. Yet such principle has been recognized in its sound ontological consistency and, above all, necessity. This, in turn, allows such mutual recognition to be understood as the translation into “subjective” terms of the ontological *Ursprünglichkeit* of all differences (Severino’s original «irruption of differences»). Finally, such mutual recognition is also constitutive of the mediation, in which every identity originally consists – in the sense that it is less an *element of it*, than a *moment in it*.

Such proto-ethics states that every act that denies the other-ness of the Other, by manipulating, objectivating, or destroying it, is originally impossible, thus denying the very possibility of evil. Still, good makes no

sense anymore too: whenever a relationship of mutual recognition occurs between two beings (be they two humans, a human and an animal, a human and an object, and so on), such event is simply a self-manifestation of «the truth of being» – in other words, of the one and only spectacle that may actually eternally happen. There is no “value” in it, nor can we infer from it a given set of moral values, some “tables of the law”. Indeed, the mere thought of giving directions to human agency presupposes the possibility to do wrong, that is to deny «the truth of being» by damaging or destroying being by setting or changing the course of events – all necessarily impossible alternatives. That there can be no evil, violence being originally impossible, means there can be no good either from an equally original perspective. Therefore, such proto-ethics, given its equanimous attitude towards all sorts of acts, be they “good” or “violent” – and even towards violence itself, since «It appears that, if violence exists, it cannot be the will, which desires what is possible, but it must be the will that desires the *impossible*» (Severino, 1992, p. 19), – and its equally equanimous rejection of every attempt to distinguish between “good” and “evil”, as they would superimpose value judgements over being, would definitely be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to be enacted in practice. Moreover, it also structures itself as a sort of immediate *overcoming of ethics* – at least as ethics has always been imagined throughout the history of Western philosophy, i.e. the history of nihilism. However, the analogy between the structure of mutual recognition, with its original implication of a plural transcendental, and the structure of «the truth of being» is real: both witness the original primacy – hence, the eternity – of the Many, «the original watershed of all determinations».

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# Change the Past: Factum Infectum Fieri Nequit and Eternal Return

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The purpose of this article is to show how a classic topic as the possibility to change the past, which is part of the contemporary debate as well, can be faced and rethought by some of Emanuele Severino's theoretical reflections. Thanks to this approach, it has been possible to understand the underlying reasons for the ambitious to change the past and why a goal like this one seems so hard to hit. Moreover, there will be the opportunity to figure out which is the best philosophical proposal, within the history of philosophy, in terms of coherence to achieve it. The outcome of this work is going to illustrate how the ambition to change the past is impossible as built on a nihilistic assumption.

**Keywords:**

**past, immutable, eternal return, identity, changing, becoming**

## 1. Introduction: being able to change the past

Being able to change the past is probably one of the most common desire, dream or fantasy for the humankind. It is easy to understand looking at the literature fields, both contemporary and science fiction, or the philosophical debate as well. Commonly, there is the attitude to think about the possible past alteration as something on the edge between reality and imagination. The reason for it lies in the fact that the content of what we would change is unchangeable, unmodifiable namely something already passed. There are not many examples of what we could call “unchangeable” since it is not easy to think about something which has a specific structure such as to not change or become. Probably, the reason for this difficulty is attributable to the lack of things with these characteristics. Moreover, if we retrieve the concepts of the philosophical debate within the last century, these examples become less and less more. One unchangeable example is fundable and it is still very healthy even though the contemporary philosophical reflection has destroyed the majority of these elements. This unchangeable is right the past. An event, a thing, and in general anything flew away is considered really unchangeable by all, intellectuals or not. Something already happened or realised is done and is not longer part of the present. That is why it is considered a past and as such, there is not any power, directed by a willingness or not, able to change it, and for that reason, we call it “unchangeable” or “immutable”. This past unchangeability can be summarised by this traditional expression: *factum infectum fieri nequit*. From the ancient time the past unavailability to any kind of change was quite clear. Indeed, Aristotle illustrated it clearly in his *Nicomachean Ethics*:

Choice is not concerned with what has happened already: for example, no one chooses to have sacked Troy; for neither does one deliberate about what has happened in the past, but about what

still lies in the future and may happen or not; what has happened cannot be made not to have happened. Hence Agathon is right in saying: «This only is denied even to God, The power to make what has been done undone» (VI, 1139b).

However, although the past is being described with this untouchable halo, there are relevant number of attempts throughout the history to reconsider its structure and unchangeability from both the scientific and philosophical perspectives in the contemporaneity. After all, the desire to change the past will never be setting and it is expecting that these attempts, even just in theory, would be made. If we look at the theoretical tradition, for instance, there are lots of cases. One example is present on the medieval age when were discussed the problem of the godlike omnipotence limits (Boulnois, 1994). Alternatively, more recently, the neoidealistic concept of the past as a creation from the spirit, or the hermeneutic principle by with any historical reconstruction is only hypothetical; we can also think about some interpretations of the relativity theory in the modern physic (Davies, 1995) and there are also plenty of hypothesis around the possibility of time travels (Torrengo, 2011). We are going to refer to the reflections on the past and its structure considering a great contemporary philosopher, Emanuele Severino, in order to try to investigate the human desire we explained before. Severino's account, in our opinion, will be revelatory to understand the real reasons underlying this problem, its core role within the contemporary debate and the possibility to evaluate correctly the conclusions achieved so far.

## 2. The unchangeables' fallen

On Severino's works, we will find the explanation of what is called the true essence of the philosophy in our era, namely the willingness to deny any possible unchangeable trying to stop the becoming. The becoming is considered the supreme evidence and it is structured as the movement between being and nothingness. This passage has always been assumed as absolutely true and clear by those Severino had called nihilists fully believers in this supreme evidence. This has assumed always more coherence until today where it is the Western's soul and of the entire world as well. As long as true that the becoming faith has never been questioned from nihilists or mortals, calling humans by Severino, only

due to the time carry out this supreme evidence has got more awareness and intensity. On one side, anyone would ever be so crazy to state that being can become nothingness and *vice-versa*. On the other side, Western's unconscious works exactly in this way thinking that "being is nothingness and nothingness is being" is the supreme evidence and this is what happens in the becoming process. Each mortal tried to create restrictions to the becoming because none has been able to see its real essence. Staying on the surface, humans believed to change the becoming in a non-nihilistic perspective, giving it a different structure with limitations being the unchangeable as a guarantee of its non-contradictory. All these endeavours had failed since they did not understand the becoming's deep meaning. These restrictions fell under the power of the becoming. Indeed, if the becoming is meant as the only and supreme evidence, regardless of understating its nihilistic effect, anything which tries to stop it will be overwhelmed because any limitations cannot exist anymore since they have not let the becoming being what it really is. The unchangeables appeared during the Western's history are examples of restrictions such as God, eternal truths, scientific knowledge, past immutability, and so on. All are destined to be fought and probably beaten as a limitation of the being process in its nihilistic conception, so Severino (1999) writes:

According to the essential voice of the contemporary philosophy, the "truth" which cannot exist is the one is demanding to stay over the becoming of the world; given that the becoming existence is the only unchangeable truth, and this is the ground of the invincible demonstration by means the contemporary approach zforces to deny each unchangeable, namely every God and every immutable past (p. 23).

Clearly, it is impossible to believe that the being can nullify itself and vice versa, but this is the way followed by mortals, the nihilistic way, which is the one they believed to undertake. According to the false evidence of becoming, the powerness that comes from it is focused on destroying each eternal and unchangeable item. This will, in fact, is nothing else than the faith to the possibility that things can nullify themselves. Even if it is not one of the purposes of this article to retrieve all the Severino's think aspects, it is necessary to clarify why God and the past as unchangeables represent an obstacle for the becoming and why

earlier or later they must be challenged and possibly overwhelmed. Severino (2011) on this subject says:

[...] Western's God (and also any other God is assuming the same ontological-theological pattern) is the *entification* of what is still nothingness which is specific of the future, and of what is almost nothingness that is particular of the past (brings forward the being of what, on the contrary, is still a nothingness and keeps the being of what is almost nothingness). God makes entity the nothingness because he is the Law that mastering the time totality fills each gap presents into the nothingness which is specific of the future and the past. Thus, it makes impossible those becoming that is the supreme evidence undeniable and incontrovertible both for the Western tradition and its destruction (p.162).

God is the One who has the full and sure knowledge about everything that was, is and will be, regardless of the fact that at this moment what He knows does not exist in the act. What becomes cannot come completely from the nothingness whereas, if known by God, it cannot be nothing. In fact, it is impossible to know something that is nothing because either it is something, but in this case, it is not coming from the nothingness, or it is nothing, whereby it cannot be known as long as knowing something which is nothing is the same of knowing nothing. The godlike knowledge already knows in advance what it will create through the ideas, but the real products are *ex nihilo*. The becoming in its fullness cannot accept an eternal knowledge which can forecast it in some way. The becoming process must be always unpredictable to be coherent since no one can forecast what will come out from the nothingness, for the reason that it is something that comes from the nothingness where there are no things. God creates the world from its being nothing (*ex nihilo sui*), as he creates the other from himself, insofar he cannot have a glance inside this nothingness, as long as it does not contain anything. For this reason, God too is threatened from the unpredictability that comes from the nothingness, and Severino (2011) insists:

In fact, inside God producer all the entities are contended in advance (either though he is the demiurge who sees the totality of "ideas" having them inside himself since he is seeing them or if he is the creator that has them inside in any sense). For this side, they

are produced *ex Deo*. However, there is a second side. If they were nothing, the totality of what God produces would already be in God, insofar he will have no need to produce them. Then, they would not be something produced as well. For this reason – as long as what is not produced (yet) are, in God, a nothingness – they are, as such, produced *ex nihilo*: God can produce them because, in him, they are nothing. Now, since the entities produced are *ex Deo*, God cannot be afraid of his own creation's action: he knows and dominates it completely. Nonetheless, as long as the produced entities are *ex nihilo* (they are created from their being nothing since they are still only in God), what will be producing from this nothingness, which is in God, is totally unpredictable not only by the mortals but also to God's omniscience. If the nothingness of what will be a creature – insofar that is in God and that it is necessary which was being known by God – is not apparent, the nothingness is not a dimension penetrable going in it would be possible to see in advance what will come out from it. Hence, it is God's omnipotence itself which is threatened by this unpredictability. Due to this unpredictability, God cannot be the Omniscient and Omnipotent (pp. 226-227).

God's omnipotence and omniscience cannot compete with the becoming nihilistic coherence which calls into question not only the powers of Western and Christian God (and to all the religions as well) but also the past unchangeability as a limit that must be overcome. Going back to the topic stated at the beginning, the past necessity is a limitation for the becoming as long as there is always something, namely the past, which forecast the coming from nothingness, remaining untouched from the changing. The past, being a dimension not subjected to the changing as it is not present anymore, represents an unchangeable which is always stopping the complete coming from nothing of the being and in some ways, it gathers all the being already become nothing through the flow of time. Implicitly, mortals give the reason for this past double structure. On one hand, they believe everything passing away will get the nothingness. On the other hand, humans state what has been of what it is now nothing cannot disappear, but it will last forever. The past becomes what before that in some way it is present in each later and it is influencing the origin which would be unpredictable. To overcome the insurmountable limit represented by the past, there is only one way: transforming itself in something which can

be changed as the content of the will of power. Since one of the most important characteristics distinguishing the past from the present is the impossibility to change the past depending on the will of power or the becoming, it will be necessarily able to get the hands on it as well. It is mandatory to destroy the impossibility of past changeableness. For this reason Severino (1980) claims:

The Western, indeed, is also the overcoming of past elusiveness and unreachability; it is the will to realise this overcoming. Within this over falling in the difference between the past and the present, namely also the past becomes a present. In the nihilistic glance, in fact, the past is what has become unchangeable – an unchangeable that results more resistant than the others Western unchangeables –but, due to this, is unavoidable that it shows itself like what the nihilistic coherence aims to destroy, based on the becoming evidence. As well as unavoidable the destruction of an unchangeable goal, under which the becoming is forced to follow and from which it is then made impossible as authentic becoming (namely as something that comes out from nothing). Hence it is unavoidable the destruction of past unchangeability – the destruction of its impossibility to be different anymore from how it is, – to which the becoming and the history must always relate and adequate to. It is not simply matter of being free from the existent order, which is called «liberation from the past» because that order has existed since long ago: it is a more radical liberation, namely the liberation from the being-been of what had been, of what had been but it is not anymore: the liberation from the fact that a certain order had been and, being-been, is by now a necessity that had been in that way (p. 202).

It essentially matters of destroying those we summarised briefly with *factum infectum fieri nequit*. This represents what is still under the idea that it existed what had existed. However, even if what has become past is no longer existing, this does not mean that its being-been is nullified. The *factum infectum fieri nequit* is nothing but the eternal being-been of those order that will be forever. According to Severino, this is the way to intend all the attempts appeared during the contemporary age to overcome past's unchangeability. They try to make the past available to be manipulated as well as the other unchangeables to transform the *factum infectum fieri nequit* into a *factum infectum fieri quit*. Severino (1980) writes:

To nihilism's eyes, the past seems, on one side, as what is become nothing, and, on the other side, as what is existed following a certain order: this order is becoming nothing. However, the being-been of the order has not become nothingness yet. In the Western's history, this being-been of the order seems to be, at first, as an absolute immutability, the *factum infectum fieri nequit* immutability. The nihilism coherence, since pushes to destroy all the unchangeables (among which we find also the determinism embedded into Einstein's relativity theory) projects the destruction of the past immutability, by means of projecting a situation where the *factum infectum fieri quit* (pp. 202-203).

### 3. The *factum infectum fieri nequit* irremovability

Among these chances to change the past, it is possible to find one which is, according to Severino, the most coherent and effective: Nietzsche's eternal return. Severino gives an interpretation of Nietzsche's account, which is really controversial, but it is considered as the extreme effort to destroy one of the most resistant unchangeables, namely the past. The past is what already happened and escapes from the will to power. Thus, the will must find a way to take it over. This way cannot be the same one which simply considers the past as a present; so, it does not matter of change the past in the same way it is possible to modify the present time. I have the power the changing now how the objects in front of me are disposed of, but I cannot change their past pattern. For this reason, many theories about potential ways to think and make the past changeable have been completely unmakeable. The will must want the past as it has always been wanted, so it must want reversely everything wanted. Severino (1999) gives the following illustration on this topic:

A processing will of the past keeps going to have in front of it *what* she transforms and from what tries to stay away leaving it in its being definitely been what had been, as something not wanted in front of the will. The will is not powerless in relation to the past only if she continues – and eternally – to will it in the same way she wanted it; and only her, in the infinite past, has continued eternally to will it. The will capability to will backward everything she had wanted cannot be also the will to make not happened what happened, so it cannot be the will to replace the *factum infectum fieri nequit* with *factum infectum fieri potest*. This

replacing would bring it to the nullification of the past, and as such to the nullification of the becoming, namely the nullification of what is, contrarily, the supreme evidence. The past nullification has nothing to deal with the will capability to will backward the past because the nullification of the past is the nullification of this capability simultaneously. A will ables to make not happened what happened is not a powerful will, or particularly capable to change the past, but it is a will that nullifies herself, nullifying the becoming her lets flow and pass (p. 249).

It does not matter of retrieving the past to satisfy a hedonistic pleasure. The real power is to will it eternally and exactly how it has been wanted. The act of recreating the past, when completed, becomes something past as well, growing the being-been dimension. That is why neither the godlike omnipotence nor Gentile's idealism, as Severino highlighted, can have a real effect on the possibility to destroy the past unchangeability (Severino, 1999). The will would fight a losing battle which would not do anything else than confirming and extending the being-been dimension at the expense of the power of will and of becoming that will be more restricted. The possibility to change the being-been is then the problem core and it is also very clear from both the medieval question around the godlike omnipotence and Nietzsche's eternal return account. Again, why is the past unchangeability a so strong enemy to overwhelm? In some way, we have already explained the reasons behind its power. However, now we are going to illustrate it clearer, showing the *factum infectum fieri nequit's* real effect. According to Severino, we can start from a simple example in order to highlight the truthiness of this account. Let us assume that we want to move an object, such as a lamp, from its position to another one on its left. To represent it, we can indicate it as mL (m = movement, l = left, L = lamp). What does it mean to change the past in relation to our example, then? To answer, we should find out if it is possible or not to move L, which is the lamp before its move to the left, in another way from how we did it. Changing the past means, following the example, to be able to make a different movement of L and not of mL, as long as mL is the present and L is the past after the movement is done. To think a different L's movement, for instance to the right, means to think a mR or, which is the same, a non-mL. However, if it is possible to move differently L, there would be a contradictory situation where L has been moved simultaneously to one direction and to the other: there would be an

impossible coexistence of both mL and non-mL. The lamp would and would not have been moved to the left at the same time, let us assume to the right in order to have mL = mL, which infringes the non-contradiction principle. At this point, there are other attempts to try to avoid the contradiction, but also these, as we will see, will be wrong. Indeed, if we say that there are any contradictions to state both mL and non-mL as long as they are not happening on the same time, but, let us assume, one before and one after, we are not doing anything else than denying to non-mL the status of alternative past from mL. The reason for it is that if non-mL would be a movement which occurs after mL's one, neither L being-been nor mL unchangeability will be denied. Simply, the lamp would have been moved before to the left and then to the right, but the being-been of these movements, will not be modified. Another option could be to state that to the movement to non-mL of L corresponds mL's nullifying in order to avoid the contradiction where both are together: mL and non-mL. L would be moved to non-mL and simultaneously mL would be nullified, and the past would be modified then. The problem here is related to mL's nullification because, during its implementation, non-mL leaves untouched mL's being-been. As such, there is again a contradictory situation with a time coexistence of both mL and non-mL. In fact, non-mL's being which should be the same as mL's not being would stay together with mL's being-been. There would be again a situation where before would happen mL and then non-mL, but this, as we illustrated, is not enough to state the past changeability. The last chances available seem to be those which believe not only mL is nullified by the arrival of non-mL, but also mL being-been is nullified due to non-mL coming. Alternatively, there is the option which thinks that mL is never existed when non-mL occurs. Both are impossible as well and indeed Severino (2011) states:

To will the transformation of the past L in non-mL would necessary, insofar, not only the nullification of mL, but the nullification of mL's being-been as well, namely it would be necessary the impossible. Being the impossible the fact that mL's being-been becomes the not being-been of mL and therefore the being-been of mL would not be the being-been of mL. (Since the *factum infectum fieri nequit* is thought outside the destiny structure, it is, as the others traditional logical-ontological principles, the *faith* that the entity is not other from itself). Finally, it is impossible that, due to the will to transform the past

of L in non-mLL, it must believe that mLL had never been. Indeed, if mLL appeared on the isolated earth (if it is truthiness of the destiny that it appeared on the dream of isolated earth) is a contradiction to believe that it had never been; if, instead, mLL has never appeared, the will to transform L in non-mLL is not then a will the past (L) because L is a proper past since before that in non-mLL had transformed in a certain way – for instance in mLL, which is a being-been compared to non-mLL (pp. 286-287).

This illustrates how it is impossible to will the past, as to think of changing it. It is just possible to deceive of being able to change it. The demonstration stated before shows how the past and presence difference is necessary and how it is impossible for the will to transform the past as she believes to change the present. According to Severino, the *factum infectum fieri nequit* is part of logical-ontological traditional principles even if within a nihilistic faith to the becoming-other of things. It ensures the past unchangeability based on the non-contradiction law. Nietzsche's eternal return, on the other hand, is not directly against the law as long as it does not aim to make nothingness what was, whereby, with a different account, it tries to make what has been as wanted in the exact way it has been, forever.

#### **4. The eternal return unstopability**

To outline a little bit more how Severino's account describes the eternal return capability to rise as the effective action of taking control on the past by the will, it is important to explain how the past seems to the majority of the people. The past is always considered as something which nullifies both itself and its content on one side and, on the other side, as ongoing in its image. When an event becomes the past its content nullifies itself, but the remembering of it stays as existent on the memory. The remembering is not the past, but only a faded picture of it, which is something and not nothingness since it is remembered. The memory is then the continuing into being of the passed picture, even if the past is so far nullified. That is why normally it looks impossible to think that the will is able to get the hands on the past as long as it is already nothing. The ambitious of eternal return, the superman's will of power, as described by Nietzsche, must be outlined as the capability to will

eternally the real existence of the past content in order to take it out from the nothingness where it is gone. The will achieves its top level on the eternal return and it must throw out the past from the nothingness it stays as past to have it in its real form. In this perspective, Nietzsche does not differ from the common view of the past as the process where the content is nullified and the image of its continued existence. Moreover, if we want to understand what is the result of going into the nothingness by the being, we will discover that it is nothing else than the being-been of being. Any being as long as it is passed becomes a being which being-been. The being-been is the past of the present being and that is why Nietzsche is in line with the Western's thought. Normally, the will believes to have power only on the present, so on the being not on the past which is the being-been. Nevertheless, it is exactly what the will tries to do in order to change the past. The real power on the past is not to make it different from what it is or to create it again in a different manner. The real power is to want it again exactly how it has been eternally to make it eternally wanted. In this instance, then, Nietzsche's eternal return must be read: to transform "what was" into "what I wanted that was". As Severino (1999) says:

The power on the entity totality by the will that wants the eternal return is superior also than the God's omnipotence because also this one [...] cannot do anything on a past that appears as already solidified in its being-been what it had been – God's omnipotence cannot has no power if we expect those absurd form of power which wants to make *infectum* the *factum* (and, as we already said, it is surely not this absurd that the extreme power of the eternal return will believes to realise), but in the sense that God's omnipotence, once something has been produced and made a *factum* by it, the omnipotence has no more power on it. The supreme power on the *factum* does not consist on modifying, creating or recreating it, but on willing it in the same way it has been wanted, namely in the infinite return of the will that wanted it, and therefore in the infinite return of all the things which had been wanted, and they are the totality of the things. Only if the wanted is wanted in this manner, it does not establish as an eternal which makes powerless the will and impossible the becoming. It is, indeed, this supreme form of power to be *necessary* required by the becoming evidence (pp. 394-395).

The highest form of power belongs to the eternal return. The will which wants the eternal return of all the things is not following the logic says that to have power on the past you must be able to change it. The becoming has no longer an unchangeable eternal which determines it in advance having a nullifying effect. It has an eternal wanted beforehand, that being wanted, it is not escaping from the will and, apparently, from the becoming. In Nietzsche's eternal return there is not an immediate contrast between his perspective and the *factum infectum fieri nequit* since the latter seems too strong to be overwhelmed to the former. Thus, Nietzsche's account gets around this obstacle trying to want eternally the past without changing it. This is the only way to attempt a power extension of the will on the past. Generally, the will is a little bit ambiguous in relation to the past because she must want eternally each content she wants, but she must also not want anymore what she wants in order to want also all the others wanted which build the will becoming. Only the eternal return seems to overcome the contradiction insofar if the will wants eternally again everything she wanted, this will without differences allows that herself, in the future, do not leave what was being-been in the way it had been, but she will want it again eternally. Future and past will be eternally wanted anyway, even if the will can, at some point, stop to want what she wants. There will never be a future eternally future or a past eternally past which can escape from the will making the becoming impossible. According to the becoming coherence, only the eternal return can set itself as unchangeable as long as the past does not rise as an insurmountable limit.

## **5. Over the eternal return and the *factum infectum fieri nequit***

Nietzsche's proposal, read by Severino, is so very interesting because he makes the past depending on the will which wants it eternally and, in this way, she makes it changeable under a certain perspective, reaching the goal where lots of other proposals failed. However, it is necessary to highlight how behind this perspective, there are still several issues. The eternal return will believe to have power on the past insofar she wants it exactly how it is, but in this way, she is confirming again its unchangeable structure. Both the will which beliefs to be able to act on the things and the becoming will find their selves crushed again under the weight of the same doctrine they used to obtain the strongest power. The eternal return of all the things is itself an eternal as such it includes a limitation for the

becoming, indeed, as eternal never become other. The becoming achieved the maximum power through the eternal return, but from this eternal has been cancelled. The eternal return, in fact, anticipates and establishes in advance the future, damaging the news that can appear thanks to the becoming because everything that will happen, there would be happened already always. The past unchangeability is not only untouched from the eternal return, but it is also influencing the future itself. The will would be free within its will, but the actions she does are eternally the same ones, and they will appear again infinite times. The will which wants to be free from the past unchangeability ends to be a slave of its willing always the same things. Moreover, the major issue, Severino highlighted, is that the eternal return is not an ordinary result which depends on a specific point of view, whereas it is the necessary outcome which comes from the radical attempt to make the becoming totally consistent with itself. For this reason, the difficulties encountered during the explanation mentioned before are not due to the eternal return, but because of the contradictory of the becoming itself. The true problem lies in the becoming and only in a second time on the instance which can try to express best its essence, for this reason Severino (1999) writes:

The becoming process implies necessarily the non-becoming, namely the denial of itself. That means the becoming is a contradictory concept in itself. Assuming the eternal – being it eternity – is a concept implies the denial of those difference between being and nothingness that establishes the original structure of Western's thinking and in its fulfilled meaning requires that something is not its other. The eternal return of everything anticipates and establishes in advance the totality of the future. It defeats the becoming in a more radical way than God's eternity, because the fact that God exists is the fundamental illusion of the metaphysical thinking; but that the eternal return exists is an imperative necessity, required by the same essence of the becoming (p. 414).

If the problem, following Severino, is present on the becoming itself, which consequences should we draw on the way of thinking the past and the possibility that it could be changed? The identification between being and nothingness is the contradiction inherent to the becoming as long as it is usually considered by the mortals. Thus, our way of thinking

the past should firstly make it free from this contradictory status. We saw how commonly when an event becomes past, it is linked to its nullification and how of this being-been will remain only its remember. However, now, according to what we said so far, the question is: under which fundament we can claim that what seems past for our memory is only a picture of something that is nothing now? If the past became nothing, we cannot say that an image of it appears. Indeed, a remembrance of something which is nothing could not appear. The remembrance is something, but if we say that it remembers a nothingness, we are saying nothing else that it is not remembering (which means that you are remembering the nothingness, obviously). Furthermore, we would state that the remembrance is not remembering anything. To remember nothing is the same of not remembering. Clearly, if the past would really be a process where the things are going into the nothingness, remembers and memory would not have any content. It is impossible to remember what is nothing because there would be nothing to remember. Refusing these conclusions, we could answer to these considerations stating that it is not correct to say: the remembrance is a remembering of nothingness, but it is a remembering of the being-been of something which is now a nothingness. The remembrance is not dealing with the current and proper being of an event, but with its being-been and since the being-been is not a nothingness, it is impossible to state that the remembrance is based on the nothingness. Actually, it is exactly on this point that Severino stresses, claiming that this approach identifies the entity nullification which becomes past with its positive being-been, and, moreover, it is impossible to see the contradiction embedded on saying that something, whatever it is, from being becomes nothing during the passage from the present to the past. The being cannot identify itself with the nothingness; thus, if something is, exists, it cannot become nothing. If we would still believe it, we should explain how it is possible that something which becomes nothing keeps its being-been, or its not being nothing. The being-been of something, now in the present moment, matches with its being nothing, insofar if it would not be nothing, it will be still present and not something past. It would be so and not a being-been (or something no more present). Severino (2011) gives the following illustration of his position:

It is impossible that what had been would be, when and because it had been – namely when and because is nothing, – an entity;

thus, like it is impossible that a squared circle would be a circle. It is possible to believe that it is, only if we divide its being circle of its being square; so it is of the circle, divided in this way, that is not contradictory saying that is circle [...] However, claiming this, we are not referring to a consistent unit in the entity which would be the squared-circle, but we are referring to a circle *and* to a square, and if now we identify those unity with this duality, it is possible to deceive to be able to claim without contradiction that a squared circle is a circle. Similarly, it is impossible to state that what had *been* had been (when and because it had been) an entity. In fact, what had been is an entity-that-*had-been* (when and because it had been) an entity because what *had been* an entity-that-is-nothing. Therefore, as long as it is an entity which had become nothing, it is an entity which is nothing. But it is impossible that an entity-that-is-nothing would be an entity (when and because it *had been*), only if we divide its being entity from its being nothing, and it is claimed of its being entity that is an entity. Not even there, insofar, we are referring to the entity-that-is-nothing unity, but we are referring to the entity *and* the nothing; and if, at this point, we identify those unity with this duality, it is possible to deceive to be able to claim without contradiction that the entity-that-is-nothing, *namely* the entity-that-*had-been*, is an entity. Therefore, it is impossible that the remembrance remembers what had been and it is now nothing (pp. 527-528).

Only an existent can appear in the remembrance, something being and it is not nothing. However, the scenario where something can become a nothingness is the impossible which is never realising. Thus, the past cannot match with the nullifying of entities, so the being-been cannot have any existence if it matches with the nullifying of something. For the same reason, changing the past is something impossible. Indeed, if changing the past brings about the fact that something which had been, was not being or, in other words, that something which cannot not be a nothingness nullifies itself. That is why the possibility to change the past is impossible since it matches with the idea to make nothing the being. Changing the past, essentially, is impossible in so far as it is the same of making nothingness something that is (Severino (1995) wrote a lot on the contradiction of becoming nothingness and also on the becoming something different from itself). Being and nothingness cannot be identified and on this crucial concept of Severino's account,

our claims must be reorganised. That something that had been, cannot not being-been it is true only if being and nothing are not identified. The *factum infectum fieri nequit*, insofar, should be understood correctly through a logic where the past does not match with the nullifying process. Severino illustrates how the being-been if implying the nothingness of the being, has no reason to exist as a concept. Further, it would be correct not to say: “that what was being cannot not being-been”, but “that what it is, cannot not being”. What it is, staying always on the being, cannot becoming nothingness, it will always be what it is, eternally. The *factum infectum fieri nequit* not seems to find a secure place into Severino’s approach. On the contrary, it would stay embedded in a nihilistic’s logic where the being goes to the nothingness and vice versa. Precisely, in our opinion, the *factum infectum fieri nequit* would not be denied but rethought better. It shows the impossibility of becoming other in and of the past thanks to its foundation on the non-contradiction principle. Thus, if it would be reinterpreted in a non-nihilistic perspective, we will find it expressed in different ways. For instance, the “what was being cannot not being-been” can be replaced by “what had appeared, cannot not being appeared”. The non-nihilistic becoming, stated by Severino, as appearing and disappearing of entities, would do a step back to leave another figure of the *factum infectum fieri nequit* which is non-nihilistic as well. What had appeared cannot not be appeared: “*quod apparuit nequit non apparuisse*”. The eternal return should be correctly understood as the eternal staying into the being of everything that exists, appears or not appears. It cannot exist as continuous and cyclical in and out from the being to the nothingness and vice versa. What it remains eternally into the being. On the eternity of entities and the consequences of it, we must send back to Severino’s works, since here it is important to conclude highlighting how the topic around the possibility to change the past can be placed in a specific philosophical context as emblematic demonstration of the essence presents on the ground of the contemporary debate. The radicalisation of the becoming nihilistic conception forces to think about the fallen of each unchangeable and the past as one of those. What stated so far, thanks to Severino’s account, shows also the impossibility of a project where the becoming would be intended in a nihilistic way as the ambitious to be able to change the past.

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