Eternity & Contradiction
Journal of Fundamental Ontology

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Opening Note
by Giulio Goggi

The foundation of the *eternity* of the being as being – Severino states – is the necessity for the being to be identical with itself.

But the variation of the content of experience – and therefore the *temporality* connected to the succession of events – is something that appears, and what appears is undeniable, precisely because it appears. In this context, the authentic meaning of "time" is the supervening of eternal beings (and of their own appearing) within the eternal horizon of appearing.

Since everything is eternal, it is necessary that what begins and ceases to appear also *exists* before it begins to appear and after it ceases to appear; and it is therefore necessary to affirm that what is eternal are *not only* present beings, *but also* past and future ones:

> This day is (eternal), even when what now appears as the past was the present and when what now appears as the future will be the present; in turn, past and future beings are (eternal), in the concreteness that pertains to them when they have been and will be the present, even when this day appears. If this concreteness of theirs differs from what appears of them when this day appears [...] this means that, in the past and future appearing together with this day, this concreteness of theirs has (respectively) disappeared and not yet appeared.[1]

The present is eternal even when the past and future appear; and past and future are eternal even when the present appears:

> Every being is at all times, in the sense that although it does not appear at all times, it coexists with what progressively appears in time, which is to say at all times.[2]

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[1] Severino, Emanuele. (2015). *Dike* [*Justice*]. Milan: Adelphi, p. 139.
[2] *Ivi*, p. 140.

Eternity & Contradiction. Journal of Fundamental Ontology
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5

Severino calls "infinite appearing" the totality of beings, which leaves nothing outside itself. And such totality includes in itself the eternal, complete unfolding of beings that supervene in the finite dimensions of appearing.

There are all the conditions for a comparison with the contemporary analytical philosophy of time. We started doing it.

Introduction

by Emiliano Boccardi, Giulio Goggi & Federico Perelda

This special issue is devoted to examining and comparing the foundational core of Emanuele Severino's thought with trends in analytic metaphysical thinking. We will return to this shortly; however, first, it is appropriate to provide some introductory notes on Emanuele Severino's ontology.

Emanuele Severino, a distinguished Italian philosopher of the 20th century, is deeply rooted in the continental philosophical tradition, drawing significant influence from neo-scholasticism and neo-idealism. While the continental tradition encompasses a diverse array of perspectives, it is generally characterized by a prevailing skepticism towards metaphysics and a belief in the impossibility of achieving absolute, undeniable truths through philosophy.

Severino, however, markedly diverges from these common continental themes. He emerges as an unconventional figure, a unique presence that stands in sharp contrast to the dominant currents of thought. His philosophical endeavors are characterized by the pursuit of bold and contrarian ideas, setting him apart as a singular voice in the philosophical landscape.

He focused his philosophical thought on some radical and counter-current theses:

1. The centrality of the question of being as such, in a way that refers to ancient and even pre-Socratic thought. The question of being was also at the center of Heidegger's thought, but in his case with an anti-metaphysical intent and with the outcome of resolving or dissolving it in the question of language, also arriving at positions of ineffability or poetic thought, etc.

2. Around being, there exist undeniable purely rational, synthetic a-priori truths which pertain to fundamental ontology, including:

3. The fundamental thesis that everything is eternal and necessary. With this, Severino clearly diverges from the continental choir that supports the historicity and contingency of all things and truths. He also distances himself from the grand metaphysical tradition, which has never theorized the eternity of being as being.

This special issue focuses on the third point, which is of crucial importance for Severino. For although Severino's thought is broad and articulate, it depends entirely on what he significantly calls the ‹golden implication›, i.e., the thesis that the undeniable self-identity of every entity implies the eternity of it, or, put differently, that absolute becoming is impossible because it turns out to be contradictory.

"When this lamp is no more"! Will people never wake up to the meaning of this phrase, and of the countless analogous phrases that they think can be constructed? Just as the phrase "when the sky is cloudy" includes the affirmation "the sky is cloudy," so the phrase "when this lamp is nothing" includes the affirmation "this lamp is nothing" (albeit referring to a different situation from the present one, a situation in which one recognizes that this lamp is not a Nothing). [...] Envisioning a time ("when this lamp is nothing") when something becomes nothing, therefore, means envisioning a time when Being (i.e., not-Nothing) is identified with Nothing: the time of the absurd. (*The Essence of Nihilism*, pp. 86-88).

Furthermore, as is often the case, Severino's theses on the metaphysics of time also have significant implications for the metaphysics of modality. In this context, the *eternity* of all things implies the *necessity* of all things and events. Given these considerations, it is evident that Severino's philosophical stance is not readily subsumable under the conventional understanding of the continental tradition.

The ambition of the special issue is to scrutinize Severino's ontology through the lens of analytic metaphysics. The contributors examine Severino's thesis in light of analytic thought, exploring whether his eternalist ontology might find a place within classifications such as eternalism, and whether his arguments hold parallels with those in analytic debates. In addressing the definitional challenges inherent in the presentist versus non-presentist debate, a recent development in contemporary analytic philosophy suggests reorienting the discussion towards a dichotomy between two divergent philosophical positions: transientism and permanentism. This reorientation, emerging in recent scholarly discourse, marks a notable shift in focus from the ontological commitments of presentism and eternalism,

which are primarily concerned with the existential status of entities, to the temporal dynamics of existence as articulated by transientism and permanentism. Transientism, in this newly framed debate, asserts the temporal commencement and cessation of entities, positing that entities can both emerge into and depart from existence. In stark contrast, permanentism upholds the notion of the perpetual existence of entities, maintaining that all entities invariably exist.

This collection serves as a forum for situating Emanuele Severino's profound insights on the ontology of time within the analytic tradition. Through a series of critical examinations, the contributors engage with Severino's eternalist (or permanentist) perspective, juxtaposing it against current analytic debates concerning the nature and structure of temporal reality. They endeavor to bridge the philosophical divide, exploring how Severino's arguments for the unchangeability and permanence of being can be reconciled or contrasted with contemporary theories of time – such as the B-theory of time, the Moving Spotlight Theory, and A.N. Prior's temporal logic. In doing so, this issue illuminates the potential resonances and dissonances between Severino's thought and analytic philosophy, seeking to bring clarity to the profound implications his eternalist ontology has for our understanding of temporal existence. The collection stands as an intellectual inquiry into whether Severino's vision of an immutable ontological framework can coexist with the transient, dynamic, and complex landscape that the analytic tradition often portrays, thus enriching the philosophical discourse with a renewed examination of time's metaphysical underpinnings.

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Giorgio Lando examines the congruences and divergences in the metaphysical conceptions of permanence and necessity as found in the philosophies of Williamson and Severino. Lando notes that both philosophers advocate for the permanent and necessary existence of entities. However, their conceptions diverge sharply when it comes to the reality of facts and their truth-making roles. Williamson's view renders facts contingent and incompatible with necessitism and permanentism, while Severino incorporates them as necessary and permanent. Lando also contrasts these views with Wittgenstein's and Karofsky's stances, noting that while Wittgenstein acknowledges the contingency of facts, Karofsky aligns with Severino on their necessity but not their permanence. This analysis illuminates the nuanced differences within the broader debate on necessitism and permanentism, suggesting fruitful areas for further inquiry.

Ernesto Graziani and Francesco Orilia's work explores the parallels between Emanuele Severino's reflections on being and non-being and the analytic metaphysics of time, despite apparent differences in language and theoretical backgrounds. The Authors engage with Severino's conception of the eternity of being – the Parmenidean view – and contrast it with the notion of temporal being – the Nihilistic view. This comparison extends to debates within analytic philosophy regarding the nature of time, including discussions on temporal passage and the existence of temporal entities. They suggest that Severino's perspective might be analogous to a form of eternalism within the framework of B-theory, marking a significant intersection with contemporary analytic debates on time's ontology.

Claudio Calosi's paper affirms that permanentism aligns with Severino's view of eternal existence, where entities neither emerge into being nor vanish into nonexistence. Calosi confronts the paradox of entities ceasing to exist, a notion he deems an «absurd time.» He proposes a nuanced reformulation within permanentism that differentiates «existence» from «existence-at-a-region,» suggesting a more sophisticated approach to understanding Severino's eternal being within the permanentist ontology.

Marco Simionato's paper investigates the Moving Spotlight Theory (MST) in the context of Emanuele Severino's «La Gloria,» proposing that Severino's concept of eternal presentness can enrich the understanding of MST. It explores the compatibility of Severino's thought with MST's temporal logic, aiming to formalize the philosophical narrative into a coherent model that encapsulates the dynamism of presentness. This work seeks to extend the metaphorical concept within MST to a more literal framework, providing a fresh interpretation of Severino's philosophy through the lens of temporal ontology.

Emanuele Rossanese's work scrutinizes A.N. Prior's temporal logic as a foundational framework to articulate the structure of time and becoming. This paper illustrates how Prior's logic rigorously encapsulates our everyday experience and linguistic expression of time's passage. Rossanese argues that any philosophical inquiry into the nature of becoming must integrate our subjective experience with objective physical theory. Despite the potential for scientific theories to disregard the concept of becoming, our perception of time's flow remains, necessitating a logical structure, like Prior's, to express this enduring human experience.

Oreste Fiocco's paper grapples with the concept of existence, challenging the idea that existence is a tangible «thing» or a quality. He engages in a philosophical inquiry into whether reality is ontologically fixed or transient. Fiocco proposes that existence is not an entity and that reality is not a static collection of things, but is instead subject to temporal differentiation. This leads to the conclusion that reality is inherently transient, consisting of a plurality of distinct moments and entities that contribute to the ever-changing tapestry of existence.

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As we present this collection of critical examinations, it is fitting to extend an invitation to our readers: to engage, to critique, and to converse with the wealth of ideas presented within this special issue. The contributions herein do not merely stand as isolated expositions of Emanuele Severino's philosophy; they represent a collective endeavor to weave his eternalist ontology into the rich tapestry of contemporary analytic philosophy of time.

Excerpts from *The Essence of Nihilism*
(Verso, London-New York, 2016)

Emanuele Severino

12

Eternity & Contradiction. Journal of Fundamental Ontology
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I - Returning to Parmenides

1. The Setting of the Meaning of Being

[...] Being is, while Nothing is-not (*Esti gar einai, meden d'ouk estin*, Fr. 6, v. 1-2). The words, which return in various guises throughout the poem, are always the same. Yet the great secret lies in the plain statement that "Being is, while Nothing is-not." Here, what is indicated is not simply a property of Being – albeit the fundamental one – but rather its very *meaning*: Being *is* that which is opposed to Nothing, it is this very opposing. The opposition of the positive and negative is the grand theme of metaphysics, but in Parmenides it lived with an infinite pregnancy that metaphysical thought no longer knows how to penetrate. Parmenides' "simple" opposition between Being (understood as what-is) and Nothing (understood as what-is-not) is, in fact, ambiguous; and this ambiguity gave rise to the prolific development of concepts that led Plato and Aristotle to their reflections on the positive and negative. "Ambiguous," we say, because the "simple opposition" can be understood (as, indeed, it was always to be understood) as a law – the supreme law – that governs Being, but that does so – and *here* we are at the heart of the labyrinth – only *as long as* Being is. "As long as Being is": the ambiguity has already become fatal. The meaning of Being has already set. But at sunset, as Plato well knew, shadows become particularly prominent and true to life. Where, then, is the ambiguity? Being is opposed to Nothing; but it is clear that such an opposition is possible only if, and only when, Being *is*; because, if it is-not, it is nothing and so is opposed to nothing. This discourse of the setting of the meaning of Being finds its strictest and most explicit formulation in Aristotle's *Liber de Interpretatione*: "Being necessarily is, when it is; and non-Being necessarily is-not, when it is-not. Nevertheless, it is not of necessity that all Being is, nor that all non-Being is-not. That

everything that is necessarily is, when it is, is not the same as being purely and simply of necessity. The same must be said as regards non-Being" (19a 23-7). In this clear light of the setting sun, Parmenides' words themselves cannot but appear equivocal: "Being is": yes, but *when* it is; "non-Being is-not": yes, but *when* it is-not. Let us not confuse the necessity that Being is, *when it is* (*to on einai ex anankes ote estin*), with the necessity *sempliciter* that Being is (*to aplos einai ex anankes*); nor the necessity that non-Being is not, *when it is not*, with the necessity *simpliciter* that non-Being (the things that are-not) is-not! Parmenides failed to see this distinction.

Yet in this discourse the meaning of Being has already been lost: the very clarity of the discourse itself testifies that the break is irremediable. For the struggle between Being and Nothing is not like those fought in ancient days, when armies made war by day, while at night the enemy leaders drank together in their tents – enemies, therefore, *if* and *when* they were on the battlefield. This was possible because, besides being enemies, they were also men. Being, however, is such an enemy of Nothing that even by night it does not lay down its arms: for if it did so, it would be stripped not of its armor, but of its very flesh. Let us look, then, at this Being, which is *when* it is. By day it is the enemy of Nothing: when it is (when by day it is on the field), it is opposed to Nothing; and Aristotle calls this opposition *pason bebaiotate arché, principium firmissimum*, "principle of noncontradiction" – that principle to which everyone (even the most obstinate antimetaphysician) in the end, more or less explicitly, assents. But then night falls: when Being is-not (when it has left the field), then it is no longer opposed to Nothing – because it has itself become a Nothing. Yet it is still governed by the *principium firmissimum*, because, when Being is-not, it is-not. Being's noncontradictoriness seems to be safeguarded – in the very act in which it is most radically and insidiously denied.

For this nighttime Being, this Being that has left the field, is the Being that has left *Being*. But what, then, *is* it? In the phrase "when Being is-not," *what is the meaning of the word "Being"?* If we maintain that, when Being is-not, Being has become nothing, why do we continue to say "when Being is-not," instead of saying "when *Nothing* is-not"? But there is no difference whatsoever between a Being that is-not and a Nothing that is-not. And yet, we will not let the phrase "when Nothing is-not" replace the phrase "when Being is-not." We are unwilling to do so, because – despite the betrayal that is being perpetrated – we still intend to maintain that Being is not Nothing, the positive is not the negative. *But then* – and if there is a moment when the benumbed and torpid meaning of Being is to be roused, these words

might be the occasion – *"Being that is-not" when it is not, is nothing other than Being made identical to Nothing, "Being that is Nothing" the positive that is negative. "Being is-not" means precisely that "Being is Nothing," that "the positive is the negative."* Thinking "when Being is-not" – thinking, that is, the time of its not being – means thinking the time when *Being is Nothing*, the time of the nocturnal intrigue of Being and Nothing. That which the opposition of Being and Nothing rejects is precisely a time when Being is-not, a time when the positive is the negative.

"A time when Being is-not": in the failure to realize that assenting to the image of a time when Being is-not, one assents to the idea that the positive is the negative, Being itself has been brought to setting. What does "is" mean in the phrase "Being is," if not that Being "is not Nothing"? "Is" means "fights off Nothing," "conquers Nothing," "dominates Nothing"; it is the energy by which Being towers above Nothing. "Being is" means "Being is not Nothing"; saying that Being is-not means saying that Being is Nothing. 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 noncontradiction" 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. This *principium firmissimum* shuts the stable door after the horse has bolted. It is a judge who, guilty himself of more serious crimes, punishes misdemeanors which are not only unimportant, but which, in the end, no one really intended to commit.

The way of belief, which attends upon truth (*Peithous esti keleuthos [Aletheiei gar opedei]*, Parmenides, Fr. 2, 4), posits instead that "Being is and may not not-be" (*opos estin te kai os ouk esti me einai*, Fr. 2, 3), and not-Being is-not "and not-Being shall never be forced to be" (*ou gar mepote touto damei einai me eonta*, Fr. 7, 1). This way diverges and departs from the path of night, "unfathomable" and "impassable" (*panapeuthea*), on which "Being is-not and necessarily is-not" (*os ouk estin te kai os chreón esti me einai*, Fr. 2, 5). But after Parmenides the impassable path was the sole route left to

Western philosophy. What could be more plausible than positing Being in time, where – necessarily – it sometimes is, and sometimes is-not?

2. The Occasions and the Form of the Setting (Western Metaphysics Is a Physics)

But for Parmenides, Being is not the differences that are manifest in the appearing of the world: the manifold determinations that appear are all merely "names" (*pant'onoma*). Parmenides, therefore, also bears the primary responsibility for the *setting* of Being. Since differences are not Being – since "red," "house," "sea" are not synonymous with "Being," i.e., with "the energy that repulses Nothing" – differences are not-Being, they are very much Nothing, which opinion (*doxa*) calls by many names. Thus the no-longer or the not-yet being of differences is no longer something that occurs on the impassable path: if "red" – say, the red color of this surface – is not "Being," then the phrase "when red (or when this red) is-not" no longer conveys a "sick" conception of Being,for it is now taken to be synonymous with the phrase "when not-Being is-not."

The Platonic distinction between not-Being as *contrary* to (*enantion*) Being, and not-Being as *other* than (*eteron*) Being, has been as fatal for Western thought as it has been essential and indispensable. For this distinction, which brings differences assuredly and definitively into *Being*, continues (just as Parmenides did) to leave them in *time*. But then, one must "set out" – and the way is yet to be concluded – in *search* of that Being which is outside of time.

Differences have to be taken back into Being, because if "red," "house," "sea" are not synonymous with "Being" – and this is unshakable! – they do not mean "nothing" either (i.e., they are not Being – and in this sense they are not Being – but, at the same time, they do not mean "nothing," but rather "house," "sea," etc.). And if "red" does not mean "nothing" (or: if this red is not meaningful as "nothing," i.e., if its way of being meaningful differs from the way in which Nothing is meaningful), then Being must be predicated of it; it must, that is, be said that it is a repulsing of Nothing, that it is the energy that negates the negative. Being, accordingly, becomes the predicate of that which is *different* from it, not of that which is *contrary* to it: so that now the affirmation that not-Being (i.e., a determination) is, no longer means that the negative is the positive. Parmenidean Being has become the predicate of all determinations; rarefied positivity becomes the self-determining of the positive, the positivity of the determinate; no lon-

ger pure Being, but Being as synthesis (of essence – a determination – and existence – the "is"), Being as *on*, as Aristotle was later to call it.

Once differences (determinations) have been taken back into Being, Being – at least worldly Being – comes to be seen as that which, originally, can, and indeed must, not-be (at times, in time). For Parmenides differences are outside being, and therefore it appears legitimate that they not-be, i.e., that there be a time when they are-not (indeed, for Parmenides the time when they are is taken to be illusory). Plato, on the other hand, ineluctably shows that differences belong to Being; with the result that Being is presented as that which is-not: at least to the extent that the great stage of the world attests the coming-on and the going-off of determinations, and so attests the times when they are-not. Differences have been taken back into Being, but they continue to be thought just as Parmenides thought them: as something that can not-be, or as something of which it may be said "when it is-not." But in this way it is forgotten, once and for all, that Parmenides could allow determinations to not-be, precisely because he understood them *as not-Being*.

And so the occasion of the forgetting of the meaning of Being is provided by the Platonic-Aristotelian deepening of that very meaning. The irruption of differences into the area of Being draws attention to itself to such an extent that the very whole of the positive, or Being as such, comes to be originally conceived after the manner of worldly Being (after the manner, that is, of Being whose supervening and vanishing appears). But, it should be noted, this assertion has nothing to do with the threadbare accusations of physicism or of empiricism that have been raised against Aristotelian metaphysics. Aristotelian Being *qua* Being (*on e on*) is, unquestionably, *the transcendental*, i.e., the identity and unity *of the totality* of the manifold, just as Thales' water was intended to be. In this sense, not only is Aristotle not a "physicist," but neither was Thales. The determinations of Being *qua* Being belong, as we have said, to Being, not insofar as it is determined in a specific way (say, as sensible Being), but insofar as it is *Being*; that is, insofar as it is determinate positivity. Therefore, such determinations belong *to any* Being, they occupy the whole and do not stop at this or that particular dimension of it; and Being's transcendentality consists in this very occupation (in, that is, this overabundance with respect to the partial zones of which it is predicated and which, indeed, it fills).

In another sense, however, Aristotle must indeed be called a "physicist." But in this sense it must also be said that, after Parmenides, *all* Western metaphysics is a physics. Yet, once again, by this we mean

something completely different from the analogous Heideggerian assertion. The irruption of the differences of the manifold into the area of Being led to a conception of the whole of the positive – or the positive as such – after the manner of the empirical positive (here lies the "physicism") *not because* after Parmenides metaphysical thought was unable to keep the whole explicitly in view, but because with the idea of Being that was to take shape after Parmenides, Being was seen as that which is, when it is, and which is-not, when it is-not (according, that is, to what one had occasion to observe regarding the differences that manifest themselves in experience). This idea, accordingly, left Being free to be or to not-be, and projected upon *all* Being observations made about the differences that had irrupted into Being; differences, indeed, that now are, but earlier were-not, and later, once again, will not-be.

Ontology, in this way, can no longer see *Being* – and Being, as such, is Being-that-is; and so this task has devolved to rational theology, which sets out on its wayward adventures. Contemporary Neoscholasticism has pointed out, quite rightly, that in Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics, rational theology springs directly from ontology itself: the very "reasons" for Being *qua* Being – it is said – lead to the affirmation of immutable Being (Being-that-is). But, as we have seen, ontology is forced to go further, in order to recover that which it has lost and which, moreover, constitutes the original "reason" for Being. Ontology sets out from an evirated Being which has "loosened its bonds" with Being (the Justice of Being, said Parmenides, does not unlock her fetters – *chalasasa pedesin*, Fr. 8, 14); its point of departure is a positive that is negative, and in its obtuseness to the meaning of Being it goes in search of that which it was unable to find within itself. That which it will find – immutable Being – is based on the most radical absurdity: namely, on the identification of the positive and the negative! And, to this day, all neoscholastic and neoclassical philosophies remain in this absurdity, though – unlike the other schools of contemporary thought – they do have the merit of explicitly undertaking to safeguard the opposition of the positive and the negative; to safeguard, that is, the non contradictoriness of Being.

In this sense, then, we have to say that after Parmenides all Western metaphysics is a physics: because if the idea of Being upon which it is built does in fact think Being as the positive that is opposed to Nothing, it *also* thinks Being as something that exercises such opposition *only when* Being is. And so, it thinks *Being* as that which may not-be (!) (which may be *Nothing*), according to what befalls the differences that manifestly come-to-be.

If our age is to be the time of a return to the sources of the meaning of Being, we must be ready to receive the irruption of the differences of the manifold into the area of Being. This is the moment of greatest risk, since it means returning to the watershed where the truth of Being was originally diverted, and this time going down the other side, from where the true spectacle of Being is contemplated. To be ready to receive the irruption of differences! Differences – incontrovertibly manifest, no less than their supervenience and disappearance. The horizon of the manifestation of Being (the horizon of *phainesthai*) today opens up anew, at the end of a long process, cleansed of any naturalistic presupposition. (This purification constitutes one of the most significant episodes to unfold *within* the forgottenness of the meaning of Being.) That which manifests itself is not a subjective or "phenomenal" image of Being, but Being itself, which refers back to things just as they are in themselves. But, for this very reason, the ontological torpor of philosophies that today hold fast to and, indeed, purify the ancient concept of *phainesthai* is even greater and more pernicious. If Being is understood as that which stands beyond thought, the reason for the setting of the meaning of Being is clearer: Being sets because people have turned their backs on it. But the setting becomes all the more incurable and definitive the longer Being stands, in broad daylight, right before men's eyes, while they neither see its face nor grasp its meaning.

But then, if that which is disclosed is Being, is it not therewith incontrovertibly attested that Being is-not (when it is-not), and that therefore it is subject to the process of time? Does not experience attest precisely the opposite of what is prohibited by the truth of Being? And must not one begin, therefore, with that very neutralized Being (that Being which is opposed to Nothing only when it is, but which as such is indifferent to its being or not being) in which only the theological development of ontology has been able to discern immutable Being?

To this, we must immediately reply that if the aporia which has been presented here cannot, at present, be resolved, this does not mean that one may avoid it by abandoning the truth of Being and reproposing that concept of Being as indifference (to Being and not-Being) which to date has been the mainstay of Western ontology. One should, instead, take note of the radical aporia in which thought would find itself, torn between two equally intransigent calls: one should, then, take note of the reality of the absurd. But is the aporia really insoluble?

3. The Truth of Being

Being, then, is not a totality devoid of the determinations of the manifold (as Parmenides held it to be), but rather the totality of differences, the area outside of which there is nothing, or nothing of which it can be said that it is not a Nothing. Being is the whole of the positive. And precisely insofar as there is consciousness of the whole (our discourse is witness to such consciousness), all manifest determinations – this sheet of paper, this pen, this room, these trees and mountains I see outside my window, things perceived in the past, fantasies, expectations, wishes, and all the objects that are present – appear as inscribed within the perimeter of the whole. Any determination is a determinate positivity, a determinate imposing on Nothing: determinate Being (being) [*essere determinato* {*ente*}]. This pen, for example, is not a Nothing, and therefore we say it is a Being; but it is a Being determined in such-and-such a way: this shape, this length, this weight, this color. When we say "this pen," this is what we mean. But – and here is the crux of the matter – if we say that this pen is-not, when it is-not, we are saying that this positive is negative. "Is" (exists) means "is not nothing"; and therefore "is not" means "is nothing." But – the rejoinder – this pen is-not, precisely when it has become nothing! When it is nothing, it is nothing! Language, however, in saying that a pen is-not, does not say that *Nothing* is-not; it says, quite precisely, that a *pen* is-not, i.e., does not exist. Indeed, it is *of* the great mass of "nonexistent" things (and, as things, they are determinate somethings) that one says, "they are-not." When a pen is nothing, it is, unquestionably, nothing. But what occurs when a pen is nothing? What does "when a pen is nothing" mean? It means by *no* means "when Nothing is nothing," but rather "when *a pen* – i.e., that positive, that Being that is determined in that specific way – is nothing"; it means, that is, "when Being (this Being) is nothing." Metaphysicians – the very men, that is, who claim to safeguard the positivity of the positive – have forgotten no less than this: that Nothing can be predicated only of Nothing; that "is not" can be said only of Nothing; that if the subject of a proposition is not Nothing, but is *any* determination whatsoever, then the predicate is "is," and is never "is not." The truth of Being uncovered by Parmenides is unshaken even after the Platonic "parricide" (which was the only deepening of the meaning of Being to be achieved by metaphysics after Parmenides); unshaken, that is, even when Being came to be thought not as "pure" Being which leaves determinations outside itself, but rather as concrete Being – as, that is, the positivity of determinations.

Therefore, 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 was nothing, it was *not*; if it should return to nothingness, it would *not* be (*Ei gar egent, ouk esti out ei pote mellei esesthai*, Parmenides, Fr. 8, 20). Parmenides posits the immutability of Being by means of this *single* consideration, which touches the very foundations of Being's truth: if Being comes-to-be (if it is generated, if it perishes) it *is not* (*ouk esti*). And this must be said of Being *as such*; whether, that is, it be considered as the totality of the positive, or as a plain and ordinary thing such as this pen. The young Socrates deserved reproach because he thought there could be no ideas of insignificant things (the hairs of one's beard...): which means, for us, that any thing, no matter how insignificant, if a thing, is eternal. This sheet of paper, this pen, this room, these colors and sounds and shades and shadows of things and of the mind are eternal – "eternal" in the essential sense attributed by the Greeks to *aion*: "that it is" (without limitations) [...]

4. Forgottenness of the Meaning of Being in Any Attempted "Demonstration" of Necessary Being

The most dramatic aspect of this situation is that now thought *looks* for "necessary Being," attempting to *demonstrate* it. Does a necessary Being exist? A Being, that is, of which it cannot be said that it is-not? The torpor of the meaning of Being leads one to question that which is the basis of any saying and thus also of any questioning. If one were to search for a noncontradictory Being and undertake to prove its existence, if one were to ask oneself, "Does a noncontradictory Being exist?," metaphysics would be outraged – and rightly so! Asking whether noncontradictory Being exists means in fact admitting the possibility that it not-exist, the possibility, that is, that Being may be contradictory. But the noncontradictoriness of Being is original, immediate knowing which, as such, does not tolerate even the possibility – the supposition – of its negation; for such a possibility implies the negation of that immediacy and originality [*originariet*à]. But what occurs when one *looks* for necessary Being? When one asks if it exists? When one attempts to demonstrate it? *Here* metaphysics (throughout the course of its history) has never been outraged – though it has had good reason to be! It began, instead, to seek what was right before its eyes. It sought, and is still seeking, necessary Being – which it has never been able to find, since it looks into the distance instead of looking close at hand. Seeking necessary Being means seeking the Being of which it cannot be said – in

any circumstance, at any moment – "it is-not" ("it has gone away from – it might leave – it has not yet entered – existence"). But *here* is the great barbarity of thought – here, in asking, "Does a Being that cannot be said to not be exist?," "Does a Being-that-is exist?" For with this one is asking, "Does a positive that is not the negative exist?" – one is *asking whether* the positive is negative and, in the asking, one admits the possibility that such is the case. Asking whether necessary Being exists means affirming Being's contradictoriness, its identity with Nothing.

And the *demonstration* of a necessary Being seeks and presumes to find a middle that joins the negation of the negative to the positive. "Being is not not Being" (nor, indeed, is it a not-existing): the predicate, here, is the negation of the negative ("not-not-Being"), and as such it belongs *per se*, immediately, to the subject (Being). Affirming a middle between subject and predicate means not seeing the originality of this predication; it means, that is, problematicizing the very immediacy of truth and thus denying it. The demonstration of the immediate is not only a *petitio principii*, but is *negation* of the immediate, for if one feels the need of a middle, this means that the predicate is seen as something that, *as such*, can belong, or not-belong, to the subject; and if such is the case, then the negative is seen as something that, as such, can be identified with the positive (as, indeed, it can not-be so identified: but here we are interested in considering the circumstance in which the identity of Being and Nothing is allowed to subsist). Demonstrating that the positive is not negative means beginning with the identification of the positive and the negative. But in the proposition "Being is not not-Being," one denies not only that in certain cases the positive is negative: the negation is transcendental, i.e., it concerns the positive as such. So this *same* proposition also excludes the not-being of Being; it excludes, that is, any situation about which it can be said that Being is-not (and such a situation is *time*, in relation to which one mistakenly thinks it can be said, "When Being is-not"). So this proposition – which expresses the original truth of Being – excludes the existence of an unnecessary Being. Demonstrating that a necessary Being exists means demonstrating that Being is not not-Being, and thus beginning with the identification of Being and not-Being.

Thomas Aquinas sets forth five ways in which one can prove there is a God. In the third way, the existence of a necessary Being is proved as follows:

> If everything need not be, once upon a time there was nothing. But if that were true there would be nothing even now, because something that does not exist can only be brought into being by something already existing. So that

if nothing was in being nothing could be brought into being, and nothing would be in being now, which contradicts observation. (*Si omnia sunt possibilia non esse, aliquando nihil fuit in rebus. Sed si hoc est verum, etiam nunc nihil esset: quia quod non est, non incipit esse, nisi per aliquid quod est; si igitur nihil fuit ens, impossibile fuit quod aliquid inciperet esse, et sic modo nihil esset: quod patet esse falsum.*) [Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I, q. 2, a. 3]

If everything were contingent, there would be a time (*aliquando*) when there was nothing. We do not intend, here, to discuss the correctness of this reasoning, but rather the *circumstance* (common to *all* metaphysics after Parmenides) in which the absurd (i.e., the identification of the positive and the negative) stands right before one's eyes and yet is not recognized as such. Likewise the affirmation *itself* that "*aliquando nihil fuit in rebus*," or that "*nihil fuit ens*" (the affirmation, i.e., that Being is-not), is not seen to be absurd, but rather the *consequence* that stems from it; namely, the fact that even now nothing would exist, which is false (and it is unquestionably false) since Being is present in experience. And this consequence follows from the aforementioned affirmation of the strength of the principle that "*quod non est, non incipit esse nisi per aliquid quod est.*" Contemporary Neoscholasticism sees in this principle the foundation of classical metaphysics: *ex nihilo nihil*. This is correct, if by "classical metaphysics" one means that first phase of the setting of the meaning of Being, beginning after Parmenides and ending with medieval metaphysics – a setting which had already begun within the Eleatic school itself, with Melissus. He, not Parmenides, is the father of Western metaphysics; with Melissus begins that *betrayal* of Being by which metaphysics has come to dominate common consciousness, which deems it perfectly natural that things are-not (i.e., supervene and vanish). It is true that, especially today, one points to the yawning abyss separating the metaphysical ontological outlook (the classical one in particular) for which nothing really begins and ends but everything has always existed in the divine substance, from the attitude of modern man, who does not contemplate or imagine Being, but produces and increases it. On the one hand, the contemplation of God; on the other, the practical construction of God. Yet this distinction is made from the standpoint of he who has already left the truth of Being behind. Contemporary praxism is rooted in post-Parmenidean ontology, for which Being, *qua* Being, is indifferent to existing or not-existing, and for which, therefore, one must go in search of a demonstration of necessary Being. To the extent, then, that one is not convinced of the value of the demonstration, one is left with that ontology – that notion of Being (common to Melissus, Aristotle, Hegel, Marx,

Heidegger) – which allows one to affirm that Being is not an object of contemplation, but of an infinite praxis. Unquestionably, also for classical metaphysics the affirmation that the whole may be increased is an absurdity; yet this absurdity is ascertained within an ontology (an understanding of Being) that itself represents the most serious breach of the noncontradictoriness of Being. In classical metaphysics only an echo of the truth of Being emerges: there remain the *results*, the mere façade of an edifice which is not only bereft of foundations, but which has deliberately been undermined. Satisfaction at the agreement about "results" is the greatest disservice that can be rendered to philosophy; for, in philosophy, not only do results count only for the way in which they are attained, but their very meanings vary according to the various ways of attaining them. Agreement about results is, in fact, agreement about different things, and is therefore disagreement. The malicious complacency which says that, after all, immutable Being exists no less for Parmenides than it does for Scholastic metaphysics, and the immutable lacks no positivity whatsoever, does nothing other than confirm the impoverishment of philosophy in our time.

From Melissus on, classical metaphysics has founded the immutability of Being (and so, *da capo*, necessary Being) upon the principle of *ex nihilo nihil*. However, this is *not* – as Bontadini would have it – Parmenides' principle, but belongs to that "classical metaphysics" which bears the primary responsibility for the forgottenness of the truth of Being. Melissus's Fragment 1 states: "Whatever was always was and always will be. If in fact it was born, before being born it must necessarily have been nothing; now, if it was nothing, nothing could have been born from Nothing, in no way" (*Aei en o ti en kai aei estai. Ei gar egeneto, anankaion esti prin genesthai einai meden. Ei toinun meden en oudama an genoito ouden ek medenos*). In these words, Western metaphysics finds the model from which it has never been able to break free – words in which the meaning of Being has already grown torpid: a torpor that is different from the one with which Aristotle was to reproach Melissus, because it is the very one that envelops Aristotelian metaphysics as well. For this torpid meaning, the *absurd* is that – if Being is-not (and, if it is generated, before being generated it must unquestionably not-be) – something is generated from Nothing. This torpid meaning is not even startled by the situation in which *Being is-not* (*to on einai meden*). The darkness has already grown so thick that one no longer feels ill at ease in using the very words that indicate the *essence* of the absurd: Being is nothing. If I ask a metaphysician whether Being is nothing, "Good heavens, no!" will be his reply. But then, he has no difficulty whatsoever in

admitting straightaway that Being is-not (*to on einai meden*), when, indeed, the situation presents itself in which Being (assuming it is generated) is-not (before being generated).

For Melissus and his countless legions of followers, the affirmation that Being is-not – which is to say, the affirmation that Being is nothing – *as such* does not yet contain those elements that would lead to its rejection: something else is needed. But Parmenides' discourse ends right here – it needs nothing else: Being is not born and does not die, because otherwise it is-not (before its birth and after its death). Melissus is no longer aware of the impossibility that Being not-be (that is, he no longer recognizes the identity between the statement that Being is-not and the statement that Being is nothing). Thus he comes to exclude the generation of Being not simply on the basis of the principle that, if it were to be generated, before being generated it would be nothing, but by *adding* that, if it were nothing, nothing could be generated from Nothing (*ouden ek medenos*). Classical texts have generally treated this proposition as something immediately evident. With the realization that it, too, must be further radicalized (but the perspective remains that of Melissus), the point of arrival is still the opposition between Being and Nothing: affirming that Nothing generates Being means attributing positivity to Nothing, which means, in turn, identifying it with Being.

[...]

II - Returning to Parmenides (Postscript)

Recapitulation: the Unity and Separation of Being and Being. The Eternity of Every Being and the "Parricide."

[...] If it cannot be thought of *Being* (of all and of every Being) that it is-not, then it cannot be thought of *Being* (of all, of every Being) that it *becomes*. For if Being were to become, it would not be – before its birth and after its corruption. Thus *all* Being is immutable: neither issuing from, nor returning to, nothingness, *Being* is eternal.

The strength of this inexorable course springs wholly from its matrix: Being is. The fate of truth entirely depends on the meaning that one gives to the intertwining of these two words. Where "Being" stands for everything that is not nothing: nature and language, appearance and reality, facts and ideal essences, the human and the divine ...; and "is" indicates *esse*, existence, Parmenides' *estin*. If "Being" is the *eon* of Parmenides – which after Plato

came to include the totality of determinations or differences: the totality of whatever is not nothing – *estin* means just this not-being-nothing. "Is" – existence, *esse* – *is* not being a Nothing: that something "is" means primarily that it is not a Nothing, i.e., that it manages to keep to itself without dissolving into nothingness. Existence, then, in the sense of *ex-sistere* – in the sense, that is, of a managing to constitute itself by coming out into the light – is only a particular mode of existence in the transcendental sense, i.e., as the negation of Nothing. And, in general, the plurality of modes of existence is nothing other than a plurality of the modes of not being nothing; so that the plurality of determinations or differences of Being is itself nothing other than the plurality of modes of existence, and any single determination is a unique mode of existence. *Here*, then, we are already at the heart of Being's intertwining with its "is." This lamp which is illuminating my desk as I write is a determination of Being – it is a determinate mode of not being nothing. But there is unquestionably a distinction here between the determinateness and its not being nothing: this determinateness is that which is not nothing, and, for this very reason, it is distinct from its not being a Nothing, just as that-which-determines (i.e., the determinateness) is distinct from that which it determines (i.e., the not-being-a-Nothing). But does this distinction not amount, perhaps, to an accidental relation between this lamp and its not being a Nothing? Alienated reason is quick to affirm the relation's accidentality: when this lamp is destroyed, it will be nothing; the remembrance – the "intelligible essence" – of the thing destroyed will remain, but that which is effectively destroyed (namely this concrete lamp, as opposed to the lamp remembered or to its intelligible essence) will become a Nothing, will be no more.

   "When this lamp is no more"! Will people never wake up to the *meaning* of this phrase, and of the countless analogous phrases that they think can be constructed? Just as the phrase "when the sky is cloudy" includes the affirmation "the sky is cloudy," so the phrase "when this lamp is nothing" includes the affirmation "this lamp is nothing" (albeit referring to a different situation from the present one, a situation in which one recognizes that this lamp is not a Nothing). And yet, this affirmation is the unfathomable absurd – it is the identification of the positive (i.e., of that positive which is this lamp) and the negative, of Being and Nothing. Since this lamp is this lamp, and as such is meaningful, not only is Nothing, *in fact*, not predicated of it, but such a predication is *impossible* – given that the supreme law of Being is the opposition of the positive and the negative. The great deviation of dawning truth has led to a paradox: the very element of Parmenides' discourse whose sacrifice was demanded by the truth

of Being is, instead, held fast. Was not the Platonic "parricide" the great – and the only – step forward after Parmenides? Was not Being then to be understood as the positivity of the determinate, and no longer as the pure indeterminate? Parmenides could say, "this lamp is nothing," because for him determinations stood outside the confines of Being and as such were indeed a Nothing whose positivity was merely illusory. The Platonic parricide, however, should have *prohibited* the positing of the determinate as a Nothing, for the determinate had been brought within the confines of Being. (And therefore it should have delivered determinate Being from time – since, in time, Being – and, now, also determinate Being – becomes nothing.) But this did not occur; and Western thought drew away from the living truth discovered by Parmenides, taking with it from Parmenides thought that which ought instead to have perished.

When this lamp has been destroyed, and thus annulled, is there *something* of the lamp that becomes nothing, or does *nothing* of the lamp become nothing? In the latter case, if *everything* were to remain what it is, there would be no destruction. If alienated reason wants to detach the determination from its not being a Nothing (i.e., from its existence) – if it wants to render accidental, or merely factual, the relation between a determination and its not being a Nothing – then it is compelled to recognize that, when the lamp comes-to-be or is destroyed, everything in the lamp cannot remain what it was, and that therefore *something* of the lamp must now be no more. The objection has been raised that this annulment is the *de facto* no-longer-existing of an essence that nonetheless, as an abstract intelligible essence, eternally endures. But then – even in this way one admits *something* that, with the annulment, has become nothing: namely, the *de facto* existence of the lamp. (Indeed, if not even this *de facto* existence were to become a Nothing, then it would be unthinkable that something, which in *no* way has become nothing, has been annulled.) Now either one holds that there is nothing (i.e., no determination) that becomes, or can become, nothing, or one holds that, in the annulment of a determination, there is something that becomes nothing and, having become nothing, is nothing. Clearly, the first belief cannot be that of alienated reason, which strives to posit as a simple fact the not-being a-Nothing predicated of the determination (a simple fact, therefore, which is seen as that which can also not be predicated of it). The second conviction expresses the utter *forgottenness* of truth – because that very *something*, which has to become nothing when a determination, such as this lamp, is destroyed – that something as such, is a not-Nothing. Envisioning a time ("when this lamp is nothing") when

something becomes nothing, therefore, means envisioning a time when Being (i.e., not-Nothing) is identified with Nothing: the time of the absurd.

Not being a Nothing is predicated of this lamp insofar as it is this lamp, and therefore this lamp (or any factor or element that constitutes it) *cannot* become nothing, i.e., cannot be nothing. And vice versa: if, when this lamp has been destroyed, *something* becomes nothing, and is thus nothing (and something *must* become nothing, if one is to maintain that the lamp has been destroyed), then Being (i.e., that negation of Nothing which is this something) is identified with Nothing. Not being a Nothing cannot therefore be understood as simply belonging *de facto* to the determination (since otherwise, when the *de facto* predication ceases, that very identification of Being and Nothing would occur), but must rather be understood as that which is predicated of the determination as *such* (and which therefore cannot not be predicated of it).

The spurious subtlety of alienated reason thinks it can oppose the positive to the negative and, at the same time, affirm that Being is-not (when it is-not). But if the "is" (the existing, the *esse*) of a determination is its not-being-nothing, then thinking – of any determination whatsoever – that it is-not means thinking that it is nothing; it means denying the very opposition of Being and Nothing that was to have been safeguarded. Existence, therefore, is predicated of *every* determination of the positive precisely insofar as it is a *determination*; wherefore positing any determination whatsoever without positing it as existent is inadmissible.

It should, moreover, be noted that the "ontological argument" for the existence of God reflects one of the most typical aspects of the forgottenness of the truth of Being. On the one hand, the argument states that existence belongs, *per se*, only *to a certain determination* (the perfect being) – and belongs to it, therefore, not insofar as it is a *determination* (be it real or ideal, factual or essential), but rather insofar as it is *that* determination which it is. On the other hand, existence here is not taken in its transcendental sense, i.e., as pure not being-a-Nothing, but is understood as *that particular mode* of existence which is existence *in rerum natura* (or extramental being); and the determination, of which existence is predicated, is understood as intelligible essence, belonging to that ideal or mental order which is to be transcended. Therefore, the ontological argument consists in the attempt to establish a connection between two different modes of existence (between, that is, the ideal and the real). For the truth of Being, however, it is not a question of going from an ideal to a real order, but rather of recognizing that *every* order (ideal or real, illusory or true, factual or necessary) is a positivity,

i.e., is a not-being-a-Nothing, and as such it cannot befall it to not-be, and therefore it is eternal, immutable, imperishable: the ideal as ideal, the real as real, the illusory and the true as illusory and true, the factual and the necessary as factual and necessary. It is not a question, then, of establishing an implication between two different modes of existence, but rather of positing the existence (in the transcendental sense) of *every* mode of existence (for every such mode is a determination of the positive). *Everything* is eternal, according to its own distinctive mode of existence. And so everything that appears (this lamp, the sky, the things and processes of experience) – everything whose mode of existence is testified to in Appearing – is also eternal. Just as everything that does not appear – if it exists – is eternal, according to its own distinctive mode of existence. [...]

(Thomas Aquinas, *De ente et essentia*, Ch. IV). As Aquinas says:

> Whatever is not of the understood content of an essence or quiddity is something which comes from without and makes a composition with the essence, because no essence can be understood without the things which are parts of it. Now, every essence or quiddity can be understood without anything being understood about its existence. For I can understand what a man is, or what a phoenix is, and yet not know whether they have existence in the real world. It is clear, therefore, that existence is other than essence or quiddity, unless perhaps there exists a thing whose quiddity is its existence. [Thomas Aquinas, *De ente et essentia*, cap. IV]

In this celebrated theorem the abstract separation of Being and the determination (i.e., of *esse* and *essentia*) is formulated in the most explicit way possible: "every essence or quiddity can be understood without anything being understood about its existence" (*omnis autem essentia potest intelligi sine hoc quod intelligatur aliquid de esse suo*). And those contemporary Thomists who reject the truth of Being do so on the basis of this very theorem. Yet if we are to awaken from the great sleep of reason, the touchstone is right *here*: here is the *watershed* of Being: "and the decision on these matters rests here: it *is* or it is not" (*e de krisis peri touton en toid estin; estin e ouk estin.* Parmenides, Fr. 8, 15-16). Is or is not the determination nothing? "*Homo*," "*phoenix*," "Socrates," "this bone or this flesh" (*hoc os vel haec caro*) – are they or are they not nothing? To repeat in *truth* the great step beyond Parmenides – to take it, that is, without being ensnared by the Platonic mystification – we have to say that the determination refuses to be a Nothing *insofar as it is a determination*; so that not being a Nothing is predicated of the determination *as such*, and therefore is a predicate that can never be

separated from it. "Every essence or quiddity can be understood without anything being understood about its existence" (*Omnis essentia vel quidditas non potest intelligi sine hoc quod intelligatur aliquid de esse suo*) – *unless*, that is, one thinks its not being a Nothing, and *thus* its *esse*, its existence. Where – be it noted! – existence, which *is* of the understood content of an essence or quiddity (*est de intellectu quidditatis vel essentiae*), is not a certain *modality* of existence, but is *existence as such* – is *esse* in its transcendental sense, i.e., as pure not-being-nothing. Aquinas *on the contrary* thinks he can demonstrate that *Being* is not of the understood content of essence (*esse non est de intellectu quidditatis*) by pointing out that it is possible to think what "*homo*" is and nevertheless ignore whether he has existence in the real world (*ignorare an esse habeat in rerum natura*). But in this way he loses sight of the transcendental aspect of *esse* and reduces it to "*esse in rerum natura*," i.e., to a particular modality of existence. For, in thinking "*phoenix*," it is clearly problematic if this fabulous bird is to have the same mode of Being as this lamp, and which allows the lamp to be touched, looked at, held in one's hand: it is problematic if it is to have *that mode* of Being which, if you will, may be posited as a mode of "*esse in rerum natura*" (just as this lamp's assuming a modality of existence different from the one that is actually manifest is also problematic). And in this sense it is by no means false to affirm that *esse* – understood, however, as this *modality* of *esse!* – "is *not* of the understood content of an essence or quiddity" (*non est de intellectu quidditatis vel essentiae*). But while the implication between an essence and *a particular modality* of its existence (different from the one that it actually possesses) is indeed problematic, there is no problem whatsoever with the implication between essence (in the sense of *any* essence or determination *whatsoever*: unreal or real, incorporeal or corporeal ...) and pure existence, i.e., existence in its transcendental sense. To the extent that this fabulous bird appears, and according to the modality of its appearing – and it indeed must appear, if "we can understand what a Phoenix is" (*possumus intelligere quid est Phoenix*) – to this extent and according to this modality it is not a Nothing, and this not being a Nothing is immediately (*per se*) predicated of it, in virtue of (*per*) its being a *what* that is in some way meaningful. Just as, to the extent that this lamp appears, and according to the modality of its appearing, it must immediately be affirmed of this lamp, as such, that it is not – nor can it become – a Nothing.

A Permanent Being

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The paper first argues that *Permanentism* appropriately captures a sense of eternity that underwrites the most crucial aspects of Severino's notion of an eternal being, namely that nothing ever comes into existence and nothing ever disappears into nothingness. From a permanentist perspective Severino worries that positing things that disappears into nothingness as it were, requires envisioning a "time of the absurd" as he puts it: a time where something becomes nothing. The paper then goes on to suggest a way of reformulating such claims that is available within a truly permanentist framework. Such a way relies on a distinction between the notions of *existence* and *existence-at-a-region*.

Keywords:
Eternity, Permanentism, Omnipresence, Sempiternality, Existence, Existence-at

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31

I swear I think now that every thing without
exception has an eternal soul! [...]
I swear I think there is nothing but immortality!

W. Whitman, *To Think of Time*

1. Being: Eternal, Immutable, Necessary

Being is *eternal*. Being is *necessary*. Being is *immutable*. These are three broad (distinct) theses that, in a sense to be detailed below, Severino endorses in *Returning to Parmenides*.[3] Interestingly enough some of the claims are sometimes run together in the literature.[4] For example, here is Priest:

> Severino's thought revolves around the Neo-Parmenidean claim that there is no change; and so, in particular, if something exists it has always existed and will always exist (Priest, 2020: 42).

It seems that one could, at least in principle, hold that (i) e.g., change is only change with respect to (facts about) incompatible properties, and (ii) existence is not a property. In such a case, eternity and immutability would be distinct. Indeed, I will – in due course – resort to the somewhat orthodox quantificational view of existence, which is usually paired with the view that existence is not a (first-order) property. Furthermore, I will argue that eternity and immutability correspond to distinct theses in contemporary analytic metaphysics. This is reason enough, I contend, to keep them distinct.

In the light of this distinction, this paper mostly focuses on the eternity of being. However, along the way, it touches – albeit briefly – on its immutabil-

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[3] Re-printed in Severino (2016).

[4] Indeed, Severino himself, as we shall see, sometimes runs them together.

ity and necessity as well. Let me be upfront. The paper presents neither an exegesis, nor an interpretation of Severino's work. Nor it contains a criticism of it – but it does say something that can be interpreted as such. Let alone a defense –but it contains something that could be used in such a defense. Rather it is an exploration, and to some extent development, of some broad theses that Severino discusses and defends in the light of contemporary analytic metaphysics and philosophical logic. To some, perhaps many, this sounds as anathema. To this I simply respond that sometimes we need anathema.[5]

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. I suggest that there is a particular way to capture eternity that underwrites the most crucial aspects of Severino's notion of an eternal being, namely that nothing ever comes into existence and nothing ever disappears into nothingness. It has been suggested that this is just what in contemporary metaphysics of time is called *Eternalism*. I think this is not quite right. It is rather *Permanentism* (§3).[6] From a permanentist perspective Severino worries that positing things that disappears into nothingness as it were, requires envisioning a "time of the absurd" as he puts it: a time where something becomes nothing. I suggest a way of reformulating such claims that is available within a truly permanentist framework. It relies on a distinction between the notions of *existence* and the notion of *existence-at-a-region*. As we shall see, I will relate the latter notion to that of *location* (§4). Before we venture into the details we need a scaffolding (§2).

2. A Scaffold

I will work with first-order logic with two primitive standard Priorean tense operators H ("always in the past") and G ("always in the future"). In terms of H and G we can define other tense operators, namely P ("sometimes in the past"), F ("sometimes in the future"), A ("always"), and S ("sometimes"):[7]

(D.1) $P(\varphi) \equiv \neg H \neg (\varphi)$ SOMETIMES IN THE PAST

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[5] To quote one of the greats:

In this world the poet is anathema, the thinker a fool, the artist an escapist, the man of vision a criminal (H. Miller, *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*).

Failed poets. Aren't we all?

[6] Though, as we shall see, it may be argued that *Eternalism* is necessary (but not sufficient) to underwrite some sense of *immutability* of being.

[7] I follow closely Correia and Rosenkranz (2018).

(D.2) $F(\varphi) \equiv \neg G\neg(\varphi)$ SOMETIMES IN THE FUTURE
(D.3) $A(\varphi) \equiv H(\varphi) \wedge \varphi \wedge G(\varphi)$ ALWAYS
(D.4) $S(\varphi) \equiv P(\varphi) \vee \varphi \vee F(\varphi)$ SOMETIMES

I assume that the tense operators above underwrite principles and rules of standard tense logic. To this we need to add special predicates. I will use I for *being an instant of time*, and $\prec$ for the relation of *absolute temporal precedence*. I assume that $\prec$ induces a total strict order over the domain of instants.[8] I will abuse notation and use (at least sometimes) t_i terms to refer to instants. Not to over-engineer things, I take a *temporal region* (T) to be a mereological fusion of instants.[9] This immediately entails:[10]

(P.1) $I(x) \rightarrow T(x)$ INSTANTS ARE TEMPORAL

For the sake of completeness let me say that I assume, with Correia and Rosenkranz (2018), that temporal regions are always temporal regions:

(P.2) $T(x) \rightarrow A(T(x))$ ALWAYS A TIME

To all this we need to add other special predicates – primitive and defined. The first one is simple identity = in terms of which we define the "existence predicate" E as usual – where a stands for an arbitrary term, be it a name or a variable:

(D.5) $E(a) \equiv \exists x(a = x)$ EXISTENCE

I will also employ two-place notion(s) of location. There are different such notions in the literature, the following four being arguably the most cited ones:[11]

Exact location (@): x is exactly located at region y iff x has (or has-at-y) exactly the same shape and size as y and stands (or stands-at-y) in all the same spatial or spatiotemporal relations to other entities as does y.

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[8] Thus we will ignore relativistic complications. Note that the strict order assumption rules out different topologies of time.
[9] For an introduction to mereology see Cotnoir and Varzi (2021).
[10] Formulas are intended to be universally closed.
[11] See e.g., Parsons (2007) and Gilmore (2018).

Weak location ($@_o$): *x* is weakly located at region *y* iff *y* is not completely free of *x*.

Entire location ($@_<$): *x* is entirely located at region *y* iff *x* lies within *y*.

Pervasive location ($@_>$): *x* is pervasively located at *y* iff *x* completely fills region *y*.

Note that the ones above are supposed to provide informal glosses, not definitions of the relevant notions. Usually, one takes one primitive to be defined implicitly by some given set of axioms and then provides definitions of other notions in term of that primitive. We do not need to enter details of definability here. What we need is that the four notions stand in the logical relations depicted in Fig. 1 below, entailment going upward along the lines:
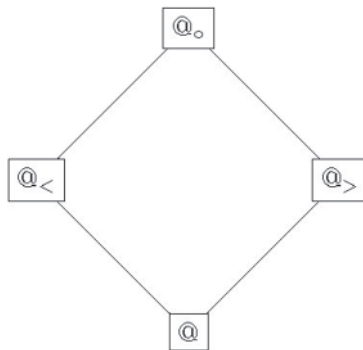
Figure 1: Locational Relations

That is, exact location is the logically strongest notion, and weak location is the logically weakest one. Now, I did not impose any restriction on what could go in the first or second argument places of any locative relation. In general, I take this to be the correct way to proceed. Location is very general if not completely *formal* in the e.g., Husserlian sense of belonging to formal ontology.[12] But for the purpose of the paper we may as well assume that the second argument place is a temporal region – $@_i$ is any of the locative relations $\{@, @_<, @_>, @_o\}$:

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[12] For an argument in favor of its *formality* see Simons (2004).

(P.3) $x@_i y \rightarrow T(y)$ 　　　　　　　　　　Second Argument Time

In these terms it is now possible to define the notion of "existing-at-(a time)-t" E_t as follows:

(D.6) $E_t(x) \equiv E(x) \wedge x@_o t$ 　　　　　　Existence-at-t

There are several things to note about the definition above. First, it uses the weakest locational notion. Second, it entails that everything that exists at an instant is at least weakly located at that instant. In other words. In the case of time, existence entails location. One may be skeptical of such entailment for the particular case of time,[13] or more generally for the notion of "existing-at-a-region".[14] That is, one may be skeptical of the following general definition:

(D.7) $E_r(x) \equiv E(x) \wedge x@_o r$ 　　　　　　Existence-at-r

where r is a suitable region that belongs to different manifolds, including but (perhaps) not limited to space, time, spacetime, modal space, quality space, logical space and so on. I grant that the plausibility of defining existence at a region in terms of location might depend on the *kind* of region we are dealing with. In the case of time, it seems plausible but I cannot defend the claim here. If one does not want to define existence-at-a-time in locative terms then one needs to assume it as yet another primitive and then regiment it axiomatically. For my part, in what follows I will stick to Definition 6.

3. Eternity as Permanence

Everything is ready to discuss Severino's claim that being is eternal. It is instructive to quote Severino directly. In the *Postscript* to *Returning to Parmenides* he writes:

> For if Being were to *become*, it would not be – before its birth and after its corruption. Thus all Being is immutable: *neither issuing from, nor returning to, nothingness, Being is eternal* (Severino, 2016: 94, italics added).

As I anticipated, Severino here seems to conflate immutability and eternity, whereas I think we should keep them distinct – I will argue for this

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[13] See e.g., Fine (2006) and Costa (2017).
[14] See e.g., Cawling and Cray (2017).

claim shortly. In any case, it seems clear that eternity is the negation of *becoming*, in that nothing comes into existence – issues from nothingness in Severino's own words – and nothing goes out of existence – returns to nothingness in his words. This, I contend, is the key. My suggestion is that this is actually what, following Williamson (2013), is known as *Permanentism*:

(D.8) $A(\forall x A(E(x)))$ Permanentism

In plain English, Permanentism is the view that always, everything always exist. In other words, whatever exists never begins to exist nor ceases to exist. This seems exactly what Severino is claiming. Here is a slighlty different yet related argument. Permanentism is usually contrasted with *Temporaryism*:

(D.9) $S(\exists x S(\neg E(x)))$ Temporaryism

Indeed Permanentism is equivalent to the negation of Temporaryism. Temporaryism is the claim that sometimes there is something that sometimes does not exist. It seems clear that this is exactly what Severino wants to exclude when he talks about the *eternity of every being* in the very subtitle of the *Postscript* to *Returning to Parmendes*. This can be made even more striking by looking at *Transientism*:[15]

(D.10) $S(\exists x P (\neg E(x))) \wedge S(\exists x F (\neg E(x)))$ Transientism

Transientism entails Temporarysm. In effect each of its conjuncts by itself entails it. To see this consider the first conjunct. It says that sometimes, there is an x such that, in the past, x fails to exist. But given that $P(\varphi)$ entails $S(\varphi)$ by the definitions we set out in §2, that conjunct entails that sometimes, there is an x such that sometimes, x fails to exist – which is Temporarysm.[16] But the converse does not hold. This is best appreciated by looking at the so-called Growing Block theory of Time (GBT).[17] According to the GBT the following holds: $A(\forall x G(E(x)))$. In other terms, whatever exists at some time never fails to exist at later times. This means that according to GBT, the second conjunct of Transientism is false, and therefore Transientism itself is false. But GBT is compatible with the truth of Temporarysm. In effect, it is better understood as a particular variant of Temporarysm. Transientism is

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[15] See Deasy (2019).
[16] The argument for the second conjunct is exactly similar.
[17] See Correia and Rosenkranz (2018).

then strictly stronger than Temporarysm. And Transientism, as Deasy (2019: 296) rightly points out, literally says that sometimes, there is something that was nothing, and sometimes, there is something that will be nothing. Once again. This is exactly Severino's polemical target. In the light of this, it seems safely to conclude that Severino's thesis about the eternity of being is really captured by Permanentism.

Interestingly, this is not *Eternalism* as it might be suggested. To see this consider the following argument. Let me start by introducing, following Correia and Rosenkranz (2018), the "Truth simpliciter" operator T. Then, something similar to permanentism, *Staticism* can be introduced, admitting of propositional quantification:

(D.11) $A(\forall p A(T(p) \rightarrow A(T(p))))$ STATICISM

Staticism is basically the claim that whatever is true never changes its truth value. Suppose now that one endorses the view that true propositions represent obtaining facts. Then, it follows from Staticism that whatever fact obtains never change. Correia and Rosenkranz show that, given plausible assumptions about T, Staticism entails Permanentism. The converse however does not hold. Here is an informal argument. Existence facts do not exhaust all the facts. Permanentism simply says that existence facts never change. But it does not entail that whatever fact obtains never change. There might be facts about what is present (as in e.g., the moving spotlight theory), or about what is concrete (as in e.g., Williamson's own version of Permanentism) or in general about what is F that do indeed change. Eternalism is better characterized as the combination of Staticism and Permanentism.[18] Thus, one could be a permanentist – and thus subscribe to the eternity of being – without being a staticist – thus allowing for relevant changes in Being. Such a philosopher would not be an eternalist. As a matter of fact, Severino also endorses that there is no change in being. He seems therefore to endorse Staticism as well. I submit that Staticism is indeed at least *necessary* for the *Immutability* of being.[19] If this is on the right track – and remember, I do not lay any claim that this provides a faithful exegesis of Severino – it delivers two significant conclusions. First, *eternity* and *immutability* are indeed distinct. Second, *eternity* follows from *immutability* but not the other way round.

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[18] See e.g., Correia and Rosenkranz (2018: 15).

[19] Whether it is also *sufficient* depends, I am afraid, on details about the metaphysics of persistence and change one subscribes to.

3. Eternity, Sempiternality, Omnipresence

Severino goes on to write that affirmations such as "the entity x is no more" are contradictory, impossible, absurd:

> "When this lamp is no more"! Will people never wake up to the meaning of this phrase, and of the countless analogous phrases that they think can be constructed? Just as the phrase "when the sky is cloudy" includes the affirmation "the sky is cloudy", so the phrase "when this lamp is nothing" includes the affirmation "this lamp is nothing" (albeit referring to a different situation from the present one, a situation in which one recognizes that this lamp is not a Nothing). And yet, this affirmation is the unfathomable absurd – it is the identification of the positive (i.e., of that positive which is this lamp) and the negative, of Being and Nothing. Since this lamp is this lamp, and as such is meaningful, not only is Nothing, in fact, not predicated of it, but such a predication is impossible [...] Envisioning a time ("when this lamp is nothing") when something becomes nothing, therefore, means envisioning a time when Being (i.e., not-Nothing) is identified with Nothing: the time of the absurd (Severino, 2016: 87-88).

Suppose we endorse Permanentism. Do we say something absurd – as Severino would have it –when we claim of a particular being x that it is no more, or it is not yet? We do seem to make such claims. Now, we make absurd claims all the time, but not this time. At least as long as we understand correctly what we claim. To foreshadow, the key here is the distinction we made in §2 between existence and existence-at. Or so I am about to argue. Naturally, when we claim that e.g., "the lamp is no more", we cannot be claiming, as permanentists, that the lamp went out of existence. That might not be literally absurd, but it is surely *incompatible* with Permanentism. The same applies for some x that is not yet (and then is). We cannot be claiming that x comes into existence. What are we claiming then? My suggestion is that we are making claims about existence-at-times and not about existence. And these claims about existence-at-times are perfectly compatible with Permanentism. Let us see the argument in detail. I suggest the following characterizations of "x is no more", and "x is not yet" – when "uttered" at t:

(D.12) $NM_t(x) \equiv \neg E_t(x) \wedge \exists t_1(t_1 < t \wedge E_{t_1}(x))$ No More (at t)

(D.13) $NY_t(x) \equiv \neg E_t(x) \wedge \exists t_1(t < t_1 \wedge E_{t_1}(x))$ Not Yet (at t)

Informally, x is no more (at t) iff it does not exist-at-t but there is a preceding instant t_1 such that x exists-at-t_1. Conversely, x is not yet (at t) iff it does not exist-at-t but there is a later instant t_1 such that x exists-at-t_1. Crucially, here "existence-at-t" is what we have defined in Definition 6. It should not be difficult to see that this is compatible with Permanentism. This is because Definition 6 contains a conjunction. Permanentism entails that the first conjunct is always true. Hence, the second conjunct in $\neg E_t(x)$ must fail. It follows that we are making, at the bottom, a locational claim: in both cases when we claim that something does not exist-at-t, as permanentists, we are claiming that it is not weakly located at t. Severino would probably regard this as misguided for he writes:

> The real danger lies in [...] admitting that Being is *in time* (Severino, 2016: 38-39)

Rather than this being a danger, I submit, this is *a resource*. Indeed let me define yet another notion, that of *sempiternality* (S):

(D.14) $S(x) \equiv \forall t(x@_{\circ}t)$ Sᴇᴍᴘɪᴛᴇʀɴᴀʟɪᴛʏ

Roughly, something is sempiternal iff it is *omnipresent in time*. Indeed, the claim of *omnipresence* can be derived if only the following, very plausible Monotonicity Principle is assumed – where $\sqsubseteq$ stands for parthood:

(P.4) $x@_{\circ}y \wedge y \sqsubseteq z \rightarrow x@_{\circ}z$ Mᴏɴᴏᴛᴏɴɪᴄɪᴛʏ ᴏғ @$_{\circ}$

Monotonicity simply says that if something is weakly located at a region it is weakly located at every super-region of such region. If that holds, then Sempiternality entails Omnipresence in time (O^t):

(D.15) $O^t(x) \equiv \forall y(T(y) \rightarrow x@_{\circ}y)$ Oᴍɴɪᴘʀᴇꜱᴇɴᴄᴇ

The upshot of the argument is that every being can be eternal without being sempiternal. And when we claim that things are no more or not yet we do not claim – as permanentists – that they are *not eternal*. Rather we claim that they are *not sempiternal*. In the presence of Monotonicity, we claim (equivalently) that they are not (temporally) omnipresent.

What about the *necessity* of Being? It is tempting to suggest that we could run the very same arguments. Unfortunately things are less straightforward

than it might appear. Surely, there are modal counterparts of Permanentism and Temporarysm, namely *Necessitism* and *Contingentism* respectively:

(D.16) $\Box(\forall x\Box(E(x)))$ NECESSITISM

(D.17) $\Diamond(\exists x\Diamond(\neg E(x)))$ CONTINGENTISM

But to run the very same arguments one needs also to subscribe to the thesis that "existence at-(possible world) w" can be defined as:

(D.18) $E_w(x) \equiv E(x) \wedge x@_\circ w$ EXISTENCE-AT-w

Furthermore one also needs to argue that Necessitism does not entail Omnipresence in modal space.[20] Both seem to me substantive claims that need to be argued on independent grounds. And this calls for future work. Such work is not yet, but fortunately – as we saw – this does not mean that it doesn't exist. Be that as it may, we may now sum up the results of the paper in a single sentence:

Being may be permanent but it needs not be sempiternal.

Acknowledgments

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Existence Is No Thing: Existence, Fixity and Transience

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Considering whether existence, i.e., being, is a thing might seem like the height of aimless metaphysical chin stroking. However, the issue—specifically, whether existence is a quality—is significant, bearing on how reality, this all-encompassing totality, is. On one view, reality at large is ontologically fixed, the sum total of things does not (and cannot) vary; on another view, reality is ontologically transient, the sum total of things varies. I first show that if existence is a thing, that reality is ontologically fixed follows. So I consider whether existence is indeed a thing. I demonstrate that "it" could not be: existence is no existent. I then discuss what it is to exist, given existence is nothing at all. I maintain there are no grounds for the view that reality is ontologically fixed. I argue, from the irrefragable basis of temporal differentiation—the world going from *thus...* to *as so*—that reality is ontologically transient. I consider some objections to ontological transience and conclude by considering the key to understanding the overall structure in reality and what it reveals about how very inconstant all this is.

Keywords:
Existence, Ontology, Time, Change, Transience, Permanence

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43

1. Introduction

Some thing exists. If by 'thing' here, one means simply *existent* or *being* or *entity* (I use these terms interchangeably) this claim is not only patent but incontrovertible. One's merely considering the claim demonstrates its truth; any attempt to deny it would be incoherent.

If some thing exists, one might inquire *how* it does, wondering not how it *came to be*, but how it *exists at all*, that is, *what it is to exist*. Perhaps a thing exists by engaging in some activity—*being*, i.e., *existing*—or by bearing some quality—*existence*; perhaps a thing exists by some other means entirely or by no means at all. Reflecting on these first suggestions raises the question of whether existence (or existing) is itself a being, a thing of some category or other, that makes things exist in virtue of their relation to it.

Considering whether existence is a thing might seem like the height of aimless metaphysical chin stroking. Seemingly very little could hang on such an abstruse matter. However, the issue—specifically, whether existence is a quality—arises in connection to so-called *ontological arguments* for the existence of God, arguments that purport to show that God in fact exists merely by reflecting on what God is supposed to be (such as, a being than which no greater can be conceived or a supremely perfect entity). The issue also arises in the context of trying to determine what is expressed by existential claims, such as *the Susquehanna River exists* and negative existentials, such as *Harry Potter does not exist* or *Elizabeth Fry no longer exists*. The latter are perplexing, insofar as they seem to refer to something in order to affirm that that thing lacks existence and so is nothing at all (and, a fortiori, is no referent). Yet whether existence is a thing is actually far more significant than these niche considerations indicate.

Whether existence is a thing bears on how *reality*—the *world*, this all-encompassing totality—is. More specifically, the ontological status of ex-

istence per se bears on the general structure in reality, not only on how extensive this structure is, but on how it can vary. On one view, reality at large is *ontologically fixed*: the sum total of things does not (and cannot) vary. No thing ever comes to be or ceases to be simpliciter; thus, if a thing is ever part of reality, every relation it bears is borne ceaselessly. On this view, all that is, at any point, is, collectively, an invariable ontological monolith. On another view, reality is *ontologically transient*: the sum total of things varies. A thing might come to be in reality that was in no sense there or something might entirely cease to be, standing in no relation to anything whatsoever. On this latter view, all that is might be distinct from one point to another.

   Many philosophers hold that reality is ontologically fixed. In this paper, I first show that if existence is a thing—a quality that makes something be by bearing it—that reality is ontologically fixed follows. So I consider whether existence is indeed a thing. I demonstrate that "it" could not be; existence is no existent. I then discuss what it is to exist, that is, what a thing is, given that existence is nothing at all and, hence, to be in reality is not to bear some special quality. Although to hold that reality is ontologically fixed on grounds that require existence to be a thing is misguided, one might believe there are nevertheless other grounds for this view. I maintain there could not be. I argue, from the irrefragable basis of *temporal differentiation*—the world going from *thus*... to *as so*—that reality is ontologically transient. After considering some objections to ontological transience, I conclude by considering the key to understanding the overall structure in reality and what it reveals about how very inconstant all this is.

2. Existence and Ontological Fixity

The issue of what it is to be bears on literally every single thing. Its generality makes discerning a strategy for illuminating the issue difficult. Likewise, the abstractness of the views of ontological fixity and ontological transience makes elusive grounds for deciding between the two. I believe that insight into the overall structure in reality—and into each thing and these incompatible views of being, as well—can be acquired in light of some of the constraints on inquiry itself, certain conditions that make any inquiry possible.

2.1 What is given in confronting reality

As observed at the outset, something existing is incontrovertible. Reality, the world, is not empty. In fact, in confronting reality, one engages a *diverse*

array: a green bit here, a brown bit there, something or other spherical, rectangularity, a pleasant aroma, a dull roar, a clank, an itch, smoothness, some anxiety, resolve, etc. What exactly makes up this diversity is not important here. What is, though, is the diversity. It indicates that there is, in reality, *more than one thing*; for although a thing can be complex, involving different beings as parts, no single thing is diverse per se. That there is in reality distinct things is as indisputable as the existence of something or other. Try to dispute the diversity in the world. The very effort to do so, to hold some whatnot at critical distance to question it, demonstrates some of the diversity at issue. This diversity in reality reveals that the world comprises things standing in relations. These things in relations (the relations themselves things)[21] is the *structure* in reality.

That reality is now, at this moment, diverse is manifest. If one confronts reality again... now, at this distinct moment, one finds it diverse—but in a different way. The former phenomenon is diversity at a moment, the latter is diversity through moments. Call this latter phenomenon, the world going from *thus*, at one moment, to *as so*, at a distinct one, *temporal differentiation*. This phenomenon, like diversity at a moment, is indisputable. Merely considering it to dispute it requires the phenomenon, even if the only difference from now... to now is an intensified scrutiny of reality; moreover, any marshalling of putative grounds against the phenomenon requires and demonstrates it. Experiencing temporal differentiation illustrates a distinct, more restrictive phenomenon that depends on temporal differentiation, to wit, *change*. Change occurs when a certain thing is one way at one moment and an incompatible way at another moment. This phenomenon, too, is beyond dispute. One witnesses the world now... and now, experiencing some mental difference between the two moments. To disabuse one that they themselves underwent no change requires that they consider grounds, accept them, revise their understanding of the world or their experiences of it; but all this, of course, requires change. This phenomenon, with temporal differentiation, show that reality is, by some means, *inconstant*: things differ between moments or, more generally, what is so differs from one moment to another.

These phenomena—diversity, temporal differentiation, change (and, with the last two, inconstancy)—are *given* in that they are present merely in confronting reality. They are prior to any conceptualization and, hence, theorizing about the world. They are pre-conceptual (and pre-theoretical)

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[21] Or simply *related things*, if one wishes to remain neutral on the issue of whether relations themselves exist.

in that they are verifiable prior to any discriminating of and classifying of things in order to provide theories of those specific things and their relations. As such, the phenomena are preconditions of one theorizing—or engaging in *any* activity—with respect to any thing at all. They are, then, among the formal constraints on inquiry, conditions that must be in place for inquiry to take place at all, and so must be compatible with any true theory.

I introduce these phenomena because they are pivotal not only to understanding what it is to be (as discussed in §3), but also to determining which view of reality, ontological fixity or ontological transience, is correct (as discussed in §4). However, here, in order to clarify the view, I want to show that ontological fixity is not obviously incompatible with any of the phenomena. The (ontological) fixity of reality is consistent with the diverse world being significantly inconstant.

Proponents of the ontological fixity of reality accept that there are many moments, indeed, infinitely many. All these and everything that exists at them are equally real. This diverse structure is supposed to be able to provide an account of temporal differentiation. If this phenomenon demands merely distinct moments—reality now... and reality now—the supposition is not farfetched. (Though whether a satisfactory account of temporal differentiation can be given simply in terms of distinct moments is a matter examined in §4 below.) Change requires that a thing exist at (or through) distinct moments bearing incompatible properties. The view of reality on which it is ontologically fixed certainly has the means to accommodate this phenomenon.[22] So this view seems compatible with the unquestionable data that reality is inconstant. Note, furthermore, the view seems compatible with another seeming datum, to wit, that things do not *always exist* in the sense of existing *at every moment*. If reality is ontologically fixed, things never come into being or cease to be *simpliciter*; nevertheless, a thing might come to be relative to a given moment, m_1, in that m_1 is the first (or earliest) ceaselessly-existing moment at which that thing is permanently in reality and cease to be relative to a moment, m_2, in that m_2 is the last (or latest) ceaselessly-existing moment at which that thing is permanently in reality.

Thus, the view that reality is ontologically fixed is not obviously incompatible with some of the formal constraints on inquiry—though, again, whether it is actually compatible remains to be seen. At this point, I want to consider the view in more detail, for it is not only plausible, but ineluc-

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[22] I set aside here any concerns regarding the so-called *problem of temporary intrinsics*. The modern locus classicus of this putative problem can be found at Lewis 1986: 202-204.

table, on a certain account of what it is to exist that many philosophers take for granted.

2.2 A Parmenidean route to ontological fixity

The issues here regarding existence and the ontological fixity or transience of reality are profound, arising at the roots of Western thought. They are of such significance that they follow the course of Western philosophy down all its main branches, playing prominent roles in discussions within the Scholastic, Continental and Anglo-American traditions. The written source of these perennial issues is a fragment of a poem by Parmenides in which he contends that there are considerations that show that "being, it is ungenerated and indestructible,/whole, of one kind and unwavering, and complete."[23] When one understands being aright, difficult questions have clear answers: "How might what is then perish? How might it come into being?/For if it came into being it is not, nor is it if it is ever going to be./ Thus generation is quenched and perishing unheard of."[24]

These enigmatic lines and the view of reality they outline become comprehensible, even compelling, with a single assumption about being, namely, that *being is itself a thing*. Being is not assumed to be a substance, a non-qualitative entity like a tree or watering can, one that bears qualities but does not qualify others; rather, it is assumed to be a quality, an entity that qualifies another, in that it contributes to how the latter is by standing in some relation to it. This assumption and another, closely related, to wit, that *one thing can make another thing be* are the key to understanding the allure of ontological fixity. Here I critically examine a few illustrative discussions of Parmenidean themes that purport to show reality is ontologically fixed. The discussions come from different traditions and are chosen for their explicitness. Their congruence indicates the elemental significance of Parmenidean considerations.

Emanuele Severino, the eminent 20th-century Italian philosopher, regards all of Western philosophy as vitiated for failing to appreciate the insight of Parmenides. Although he disagrees with Parmenides that being is uniform ("of one kind")—Severino accepts that reality comprises many things, regarding this as the only correct modification of Parmenides' views—[25] he

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[23] Barnes 1987: 134.

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] See Severino 1972/2016: 45. Thus, Severino accepts the "Platonic 'parricide'" from *The Sophist*. See, as well, Severino 1972/2016: 87, 152-153.

accepts as the guiding insight into reality and, hence, to all metaphysical inquiry that there can be no generation (i.e., coming to be simpliciter) or annihilation (i.e., ceasing to be simpliciter). His argument for this momentous conclusion is not elaborate. Indeed, Severino maintains the conclusion turns on merely appreciating *what existence is*. This appreciation, with a principle of non-contradiction, suffices, according to Severino, to show that reality is ontologically fixed.

Severino believes the key to understanding existence is contained within Parmenides' statement that "Being is, while Nothing is-not." This statement indicates "not simply a property of Being... but rather its very *meaning*: Being *is* that which is opposed to Nothing, it is this very opposing."[26] If being has a property, it must be some thing (likewise, if being "*is*", it must be some thing). By 'meaning' here, I believe Severino is characterizing the *purpose* or *function* of this thing, being (i.e., existence): it opposes nothingness. It is the thing by which anything is at all. The being of a thing is, therefore, an existent that plays some explanatory role in accounting for how that thing is. As such, being is a quality, the quality whereby a thing is something rather than nothing. In virtue of this quality, a given thing is ontologically positive, in opposition to the negativity of nothingness.

If this is what being is and how a thing exists, Severino thinks that things cannot cease to be simpliciter (or come to be simpliciter). To maintain otherwise is inconsistent. Thus:

> Any determination [i.e., a thing, a distinct contribution to reality] is a determinate positivity, a determinate imposing on Nothing: determinate Being... This pen, for example, is not a Nothing, and therefore we say it is a Being; but it is a Being determined in such-and-such a way: this shape, this length, this weight, this color. When we say 'this pen', this is what we mean. But—and here is the crux of the matter—if we say that this pen is-not, when it is-not, we are saying that this positive is negative.[27]

This is contradictory. Similarly: "'Is' (exists) means 'is not nothing'; and therefore 'is not' means 'is nothing'... But what occurs when a pen is nothing? What does 'when a pen is nothing' mean? It means by *no* means 'when Nothing is nothing,' but rather 'when *a pen*—i.e., that positive, that Being that is determined in that specific way—is nothing'; it means, that is, 'when Being (this Being) is nothing.'"[28] This, too, is contradictory.

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[26] Severino 1972/2016: 36. Italics in original.
[27] Severino 1972/2016: 44. Italics in original.
[28] *Ibid*. Italics in original.

Elsewhere, Severino makes essentially the same argument:

"When this lamp is no more"! Will people never wake up to the *meaning* of this phrase, and of the countless analogous phrases that they think can be constructed?... [T]he phrase "when this lamp is nothing" includes the affirmation "this lamp is nothing" (albeit referring to a different situation from the present one, a situation in which one recognizes that this lamp is not a Nothing). And yet, this affirmation is the unfathomable absurd—it is the identification of the positive (i.e., of that positive which is the lamp) and the negative, of Being and Nothing. Since this lamp is this lamp, and as such is meaningful, not only is Nothing, *in fact*, not predicated of it, but such a predication is *impossible*—given that the supreme law of Being is the opposition of the positive and the negative.[29]

Severino speaks of the meaning of existence (i.e., being), yet also of the meaning of phrases using 'is', linguistic items that express something about existence. His talk of linguistic meaning and of what one says and of predication suggests that the issues here are semantic. This is misleading. The issues do not concern primarily how one *speaks* of being, that is, how one aptly represents the world—what is *true*—but how things in the world are in themselves—what is *so*. Considerations in the same spirit as Severino's, but strictly ontological, explicitly about things, provide even more compelling argument for ontological fixity, simply on the basis of what being is supposed here to be.

Thus, consider any thing. In order for that thing to be what it is, regardless of what exactly it is, it must oppose nothingness; it must be a "determinate positivity". It must exist and so bear the quality of existence. Crucial, then, not just to the existence of that thing, but to that thing being *what* it is and, hence, to being *the very thing* it is, is that it bear the quality of existence. That very thing could not fail to bear this quality (and so be). Existing, that is, being—opposing nothingness—is as important to that thing being what it is and to being the very thing it is as any more distinctive quality. Take, for example, this sample of water. Plausibly, this water must be composed of H_2O molecules. It could not be water and, a fortiori, *this* water without such composition. But no less important to it being water (or this water) is its being something, some determinate positivity opposing nothingness. What enables this water to oppose nothing is existing and it exists (one is assuming here) in virtue of bearing the quality of existence. This very sample of water failing to exist is, therefore, impossible; no more possible than it failing to be composed of H_2O molecules.

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[29] Severino 1972/2016: 86. Italics in original.

There is, of course, nothing special about this water. To suppose, then, that a thing, any thing at all, might fail to exist is not to recognize fully what it is qua (existing) thing. As a "determinate positivity" it must bear the quality of existence. Any thing that might fail to exist is not properly opposed to being in the first place and so is nothing at all. Consequently, every thing must exist and any "thing" that fails to could not be. Reality is ontologically fixed.

Everything, simply given what it is, must exist, so each thing is essentially existent. In other words, every thing is a necessary existent. That Severino regards things in this way is clear from the exasperation he conveys when considering the attempts in the history of Western philosophy to prove the existence of a necessary being:

> *Here* [when one considers whether there is a necessary being] metaphysics (throughout the course of its history) has never been outraged—though it has good reason to be!...Seeking necessary Being means seeking the Being of which it cannot be said—in any circumstance, at any moment—"it is-not" ("it has gone away from—it might leave—it has not yet entered—existence"). But *here* is the great barbarity of thought—here, in asking, "Does a Being that cannot be said to not-be exist?," "Does a Being-that-is exist?" For with this one is asking, "Does a positive that is not the negative exist?"— one is *asking whether* the positive is negative and, in the asking, one admits the possibility that such is the case. Asking whether necessary Being exists means affirming Being's contradictoriness, its identity with Nothing.[30]

To affirm the contradictoriness of any thing, including being itself, is clearly mistaken. So if one takes existence to be a thing, to wit, the quality whereby a thing is something rather than nothing, that every thing is necessary—and, consequently, no thing could cease to be simpliciter or come to be simpliciter (for it could not fail to exist prior to its existing)—follows. The ontological fixity of reality follows merely from what existence is supposed to be.

This conclusion is corroborated by other, closely related, considerations. If existence were a quality, what coming to be (simpliciter) or ceasing to be (simpliciter) would be is the gain or loss of a quality. In other words, generation or annihilation would be a *change* in the very thing that comes to be or ceases to be. Such change, however, is impossible.

If what it is to exist is to bear the quality of existence, then in order for some "thing" to come to be simpliciter, that is, come to be when "it" was in no sense part of reality, that "thing" must come to bear the quality of existence. However, if that "thing" did not (yet) bear this quality, "it" would

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[30] Severino 1972/2016: 50. Italics in original.

not be anything at all and so could not bear the quality—nor could "it", nothing at all, ever bear it. So "it" could not come to be. Moreover, if ceasing to be (simpliciter) is change and, hence, requires the loss of the quality of existence, no thing could ever change in this way. Change requires that one and the same thing have incompatible properties at distinct moments. If a thing exists, that is, bears the quality of existence, at moment m_1, in order for it to change its ontological status, it must bear an incompatible quality (or lose existence) at a distinct moment, m_2. Yet regardless of how it is at m_2, it nevertheless bears existence at m_1. Even if it—per impossibile, given the above argument for the necessary existence of each thing from simply the quality of existence per se—lost the quality of existence at m_2, it would nonetheless bear it at m_1 and so not cease to be simpliciter. Therefore, nothing can ever come to be (simpliciter) or cease to be (simpliciter) via change.

These considerations underlie the sort of argument that Aristotle attributes to "the first of those who studied philosophy",[31] who held that "none of the things that are either comes to be or passes out of existence, because what comes to be must do so either from what is or from what is not, both of which are impossible. For what is cannot come to be (because it *is* already), and from what is not nothing could have come to be (because something must be underlying)."[32] Despite its claim that no thing could pass out of existence, this argument addresses only the (im)possibility of things coming to be simpliciter. But, as just argued, if ceasing to be simpliciter requires changing by losing the quality of existence, such change is, in fact, impossible.

Aristotle does not embrace the conclusion(s) of this argument. A.N. Prior, however, does. In considering a version of the argument (one that strikes the claim about passing out of existence), Prior states: "The argument seems to me conclusive..."[33] Prior accepts that in order for something to come to be, that very thing must go from not existing, not bearing the quality of existence, to existing, bearing this quality. He accepts, then, that a difference in ontological status must come via change—and yet it cannot.

As Prior notes, these considerations show not only that something cannot come into or go out of existence simpliciter, they also show that a thing

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[31] Presumably, Aristotle is referring to Parmenides and his followers, for he goes on to say that those who used this argument so "exaggerated" its consequences that they "went so far as to deny even the existence of the plurality of things maintaining that only what is itself is". (*Physics* 191a32-33).

[32] *Physics* 191a27-31. Emphasis in original.

[33] Prior 1967: 139. Prior goes on to observe what I noted above: that although, on this view, nothing can come to be simpliciter, this is consistent with a thing *starting* to be, i.e., coming to be relative to a given moment (namely, the first or earliest at which it permanently exists).

cannot be wholly *generated*, brought into existence simpliciter, nor *annihilated*, made to cease to be simpliciter, by means of the agency of some other thing. Prior discusses this in connection to an argument considered (but not endorsed) by Aquinas that objects to the possibility of God creating a thing from nothing.[34] The argument, however, generalizes to apply to mundane creators: a parent begetting a child, a carpenter building a house, etc. If being brought into existence (simpliciter) requires one to confer the quality of existence on what is generated, that thing must already exist in order to come to bear this quality. Thus, the thing must bear existence prior to bearing existence. This is incoherent and so impossible. Yet if a thing in no sense exists, it is not and cannot be there to receive the quality of existence. Similarly, a thing cannot be annihilated by another—if annihilation requires the removal of the quality of existence. For if a thing exists at moment, *m*, there is nothing an agent can do in any subsequent moment to remove the quality of existence that thing bears at *m*. Hence, one cannot make it cease to be simpliciter.

If existence is itself a thing, namely, the quality whereby a thing is something rather than nothing, then, arguably, nothing can come to be or cease to be simpliciter *simply given what existence is*. This is corroborated when one recognizes that nothing per se could come to be or cease to be simpliciter via change—if existence is a quality—and, furthermore, nothing could be (absolutely) generated or annihilated by the act of any agent. Therefore, on this account of what existence is, ontological fixity is not only plausible, but ineluctable.

3. Existence Is No Thing, but Things Exist Nonetheless

If being, i.e., existence, is a thing, a quality the bearing of which makes something be, the ontological fixity of reality follows. Whether existence is indeed a thing, however, is not obvious. Philosophers have taken different views of the matter. Thus, insofar as one is interested in existence, how things in the world are in general and how exactly the world is inconstant, one should examine whether existence is itself a thing.

So consider now whether existence is a thing. This is a difficult question, for its abstruseness makes seeing how it might be answered unclear. Some philosophers try to answer it by examining language. Thus, just like one may say *Campbell wonders* or *Basil is wondering*, one may say *Campbell exists* or

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[34] Aquinas, *De Potentia Dei*, Q. 3, Art. 1, Obj, 17. See Prior 1967: 139-140 for discussion.

Basil is existing. The grammatical similarities and assumptions about what is being said in the first two sentences might lead one to accept that the verb 'to exist' expresses a condition that a thing can have by doing in a particular way or by bearing some quality. Then again, considering negative existentials, such as *Harry Potter does not exist* or *Elizabeth Fry no longer exists*, leads some to deny that existence is a quality. Were it one, the grammatical form of these claims seems to indicate that the quality is denied of "things" (such as Harry Potter and Elizabeth Fry) that, consequently, are nothing at all and so, paradoxically, are not there to be referred to or characterized. Reflecting on such negative existentials leads some philosophers, most famously Frege and Russell, to maintain that the logical form of such claims (and most simple existential ones, as well) is not as it appears. Typical existential claims, positive or negative, are not about non-qualitative, individual things, but about the qualities or concepts of such and whether these qualities have instances (or the concepts are empty).[35] An existential claim is true if the relevant quality is instantiated; a negative existential claim is true if the relevant quality is not instantiated. Existence is, then, a "second-order" quality, a quality of qualities. Yet others, notably Moore, considering existential claims, concludes that there appear to be no good grounds for maintaining that existence is not a quality of familiar, non-qualitative things, such as tigers.[36]

Even this very brief discussion shows that linguistic considerations are not conclusive regarding the question of what existence is. In fact, I think such considerations are wholly idle in this connection. Any claim used to represent the world, as is an existential or negative existential one, can be interpreted in ever so many ways. How to interpret the claim in a given context is either stipulated, in which case it can provide no insight into how the world is independently of the claim, or it is interpreted in light of the subject matter the claim is supposed to have. In this latter case, apt suppositions concerning what thing(s) the claim is about and how the claim characterizes that thing depend on what things are in the world and how they are. In short, reality constrains language—rather than vice versa—and so, in order to best interpret one's claims about reality, one must have some prior understanding of the things herein that is not primarily linguistic. Therefore, insight into what existence is or, for that matter, what any (non-linguistic) thing is must come by engaging the world directly and not by reflecting on language and how it is used.

To determine whether existence is itself a thing, one must direct one's

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[35] See Russell 1905, 1918/1985 and Frege 1893/1903/2013.
[36] See Moore 1936.

attention to the world, to the things in this all-encompassing totality. Some eminent philosophers have done just this. Hume concludes that existence is not a quality of anything, for there is no impression nor idea one might have of it (and, hence, "it" is nothing at all): "The idea of existence... is the very same with the idea of what we conceive to be existent. To reflect on any thing simply, and to reflect on it as existent, are nothing different from each other."[37] Likewise, Kant concludes: "*Being* is obviously not a real predicate, [i.e., quality]."[38] The basis of this conclusion is the observation that "[W]hen I think a thing, through whichever and however many predicates [i.e., qualities] I like (even in its thoroughgoing determination), not the least bit gets added to the thing when I posit in addition that this thing *is*."[39]

Both Hume and Kant seem to assume that were existence a quality it would be discernible merely by reflecting on things or, at least, that some evidence of its being would necessarily be found by regarding things in different ways, that is, by considering the qualities they actually have or might. However, this strategy for determining whether some quality is in fact present is mistaken. One cannot think of a thing without regarding it as self-identical or as an object of thought, and so thinking of something as self-identical or as an object of thought might seem to be no different than simply reflecting on that thing per se. Yet it does not follow that being self-identical or being an object of thought are not qualities. Moreover, when one thinks of a crimson thing as red or of water as H_2O, nothing obvious "gets added to" that crimson thing or to that water. Being red and being composed of H_2O molecules are, nevertheless, uncontroversially qualities. Failing to "add to" something in thought is, then, no indication that a putative quality is not actually a quality. This undermines the more general point that Kant attempts to make with respect to existence and its seeming insignificance in thought. If existence is in fact a quality, then, plausibly (in light of the discussion in the preceding section), it is had essentially by each thing. This would account for why its addition is superfluous in thought.

Linguistic considerations, as well as those concerning how things present in thought are, then, at best, inconclusive with respect to the question of whether existence is a thing. If this question is to be answered conclusively, one must use other means.

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[37] Hume 1739-1740/2007: 1.2.6.
[38] Kant 1781/1998: A598/B626. Emphasis in original.
[39] *Ibid*: A600/B628. Emphasis in original.

3.1 Why existence is nothing at all

I believe that demonstrating existence is nothing at all is straightforward—merely by considering what existence is supposed to be were it a thing. Existence is supposed to be a quality the bearing of which makes something be. The category of existence, i.e., quality, is actually irrelevant here. What is crucial is that existence, *e*, is supposed to be *the (or a) thing whereby any thing is something rather than nothing*, whereby a thing is in reality at all.

But no thing could be like this. If *e* were not itself a thing, if it were nothing at all, it could play no explanatory role in accounting for the existence of other things. So *e* must be a thing (given what it is supposed to do). However, if *e* is a thing, it must stand in some relation to the thing whereby any thing is something rather than nothing, namely, *e*. *e* must, then, stand in some relation to itself to make itself be. In order to stand in this (or any) relation, though, *e* must (first) exist. Therefore, for *e* to exist at all requires, as a prerequisite of its own existence, *e*; *e* must be *prior* to itself. Yet no thing could be prior to itself.

Note that the priority here is not (merely) *temporal*; the relevant sense of priority is *ontological*, in that one thing is supposed to be ontologically prior to another when the existence of the former is a condition of the existence of the latter, that is, when the former is necessary to make (concurrently) the latter exist. If the operative sense of priority were simply temporal, then one might maintain that *e* is a necessary existent, one that has always been and, hence, has always been there to make things—including itself—be. But *e* is supposed to be the thing whereby any thing is in the world at all, and so the priority here is taken to be explanatory and, hence, ontological. Given what *e* is supposed to be, *e* must be ontologically prior to *everything*, including itself. As just observed, however, nothing can be prior to itself. Therefore, *e* is impossible.

If one is unconvinced by the foregoing argument or supposes that *e*, the putative quality of existence, is somehow special and does not itself require being made to exist, even as it makes every other thing be, there are more general consideration that show the *e* cannot exist. These considerations also demonstrate the impossibility of ontological priority—and so show that there are no "levels of reality", no hierarchy with respect to being. The argument for this profound and significant conclusion is surprisingly simple: if one thing were to make another thing be, the latter must stand in some relation to the former. However, in order for anything to stand in any relation or to bear any quality whatsoever, that thing must (first) be.

Therefore, it cannot be by standing in some relation—*making be*, *realization*, *actualization*, *supervenience*, *grounding* or any other so-called *building relation*—that a thing exists in the first place. Since a thing cannot exist and, a fortiori, stand in a relation without being what it is, being how it is essentially, being the very thing it is and being the same thing as itself, no thing can account for how another is what it is or how it is essentially or for its individuation or identity. On this basis, I argue elsewhere that *each thing is fundamental*.[40] There can be no entity that makes another be simpliciter. Hence, if existence is supposed to be such a thing, there is no such thing as existence.

If existence is no thing—if there is no quality in virtue of which a thing is at all—then there is no thing that makes something positive in opposition to the negativity of nothingness. There is, furthermore, no quality that each thing has essentially that makes that thing exist necessarily. If existence is no thing, no quality, then coming to be does not require some change in what comes to exist, to wit, coming to bear existence, and ceasing to be does not require the loss of the quality of existence. Similarly, bringing something into existence does not require an agent to confer this quality on some thing; nor does destroying a thing require one to remove this quality. Therefore, all Parmenidean grounds for taking reality to be ontologically fixed are refuted. Bearing the quality of existence or standing in some relation to a thing that makes it be is not how a thing exists. Insofar as one is interested in what it is to exist, some other account is needed.[41]

3.2 What it is to exist

Any account of *thing* in general—an account of what any thing whatsoever is—is bound to be circular for every account must be given in terms of some thing or other. Nevertheless, an account of *thing* can be insightful if it is presented in the appropriate context. One must find a context that makes no presupposition about things, lest it beg some question about what it is to exist and thereby undermine the wholly general account being sought, and yet is nonetheless able to illuminate everything whatsoever. Such a context is available, I submit, by confronting reality, this encompassing

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[40] See Fiocco 2019. In this connection, see Fiocco 2021, as well.

[41] There is some irony here. Severino critiques Western philosophy—indeed, all of Western civilization—on the grounds that its practitioners have erroneously reified *nothingness* and so accept ceasing to be simpliciter as possible. This is, according to Severino, the essence of an injurious *nihilism*. However, if I am correct, Severino's critique and, hence, philosophy is based entirely on the error of reifying *being*.

totality, merely as the *impetus to inquiry*, that is, by engaging whatever it is that encompasses one—be it inner or outer, mental or material, subjective or objective, etc.—without taking any thing for granted regarding the whatnot one is engaging. One simply confronts whatever, without trying to conceptualize or otherwise classify it.

This unconceptualized and, hence, unconditional, unqualified confrontation with reality presents a diverse array (of whatnot). Such diversity, a lack of uniformity, is a sine qua non of inquiry, for all inquiry must involve at least some difference between inquirer and object of inquiry. This given diversity is, as noted above, indisputably there; "it" can serve as the basis of understanding what it is to exist and, furthermore, what a thing is. Thus, to exist is to be amidst this all-encompassing diverse array: to be alike or unlike (for one's engagement is to be without qualification) any bit of this. What a thing is is something that contributes to this diversity, a constraint that is the ontological basis of an at least partial explanation for how reality—*all this*—is diverse in the precise way it is.

In order for something, viz., some thing, to contribute to reality, it must be some way(s) or other. In other words, a thing is a natured entity that provides some constraint on this incontrovertible diversity. A *thing* is a *natured entity*. This is circular, but not vacuous, for the world at large provides a context in which it is not only meaningful, but discriminating. Things, each of which is fundamental, contribute in virtue of how each is to making this all-encompassing totality just as it is. Existing, then, does not involve something that makes a thing be, that puts or holds a thing in reality. Rather, to exist is simply to be amidst *all this*. The object of any inquiry is herein and so then are the means of accounting for every phenomenon.

4. Temporal Differentiation and Ontological Transience

If existence were a thing, the world would be fixed with respect to being, an ontological monolith. Existence, however, is no thing—despite things existing. Still, this leaves open the question of whether reality is ontologically fixed or transient. A Parmenidean route to ontological fixity is closed, but that does not mean there is no other. I maintain there are conclusive grounds, from an irrefragable basis, for the ontological transience of reality. These grounds are given merely in confronting reality... *twice*.

4.1 Temporal differentiation is incompatible with ontological fixity

Consider again temporal differentiation. This is the phenomenon of the world going from *thus…* to *as so* (here I demonstrate, at two moments, the distinct precise ways the totality encompassing one is). One encounters temporal differentiation when one confronts the world…and confronts it again experiencing any difference. A feature of the experience of this phenomenon is the vivid salience of one moment (and the things threat) to the exclusion of all others: one experiences vividly only *this* moment… then one experiences vividly only *this* one. As discussed above, temporal differentiation, like the diversity in the world, is indisputable. Any attempt to dispute the phenomenon not only requires it, but demonstrates it. There is no account of temporal differentiation and one's experience of it compatible with the ontological fixity of reality. On this basis, I conclude that the world is ontologically transient.

Temporal differentiation is central to modern discussions of the metaphysics of time. The phenomenon cannot be credibly denied and, indeed, no one denies it. The primary bone of contention regarding the world in time is what structure it has, that is, what things it must include, to account for temporal differentiation. There are two general views of this structure. On the first, adopted by so-called B-theorists, tenseless theorists, eternalists, et al., there is no distinctively temporal difference (in terms of, say, monadic temporal qualities) between one moment and another when the world goes from being *thus* to *as so*. In other words, the world in time is *ontologically homogeneous* with respect to temporal differentiation. On the second general view of the structure in temporal reality, adopted by so-called A-theorists, tensed theorists, passage theorists, moving spotlight theorists, growing block theorists, presentists et al., there is some distinctively temporal difference—either qualitative or more significantly ontological—between one moment and another when the world goes from being *thus* to *as so*. Thus, with respect to temporal differentiation, the world in time is *ontologically heterogeneous*.

I argue elsewhere that the first general class of views, on which temporal reality is ontologically homogeneous, cannot provide a satisfactory account of one's experience of the world in time and, hence, of temporal differentiation.[42] On this general view, there are (infinitely) many moments of time, all of which are equally real—as is anything that exists at any moment—and none of which bears any peculiarly temporal distinction. Consequently, on

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[42] See Fiocco, forthcoming.

this view, one is equally real at any moment one ever exists.[43] One should expect, then, to experience the world as strikingly as one now does at any moment one exists (and is conscious). Of course, though, one never experiences more than a single moment as vividly salient. The view of temporal reality on which it is ontologically homogeneous, however, simply does not have the means to account for why one only ever experiences a unique moment—one that excludes any other—despite one being no less real at ever so many equally-real moments. Were this the correct account of the world in time, seemingly one's experience at any moment would be some sort of bewildering hodgepodge of many moments (all those at which one is no less real and conscious!). But, obviously, this is not one's experience. Moreover, this general view cannot account for the crucial transition that one experiences repeatedly via temporal differentiation: reality going from *this* moment... to *this* one. Temporal differentiation requires other than just distinct, equally-real moments; it requires some means of accounting for the transition from one moment to the next. Accounting for this transition requires a temporally relevant distinction between moments, some quality (or difference) that explains why first one moment is salient, then another one is. Yet any such distinction is baldly inconsistent with the view that the world in time is ontologically homogeneous.

Temporal reality is, therefore, not ontologically homogeneous. This conclusion shows something important about the world and its structure. It does not itself, however, shed light on the key ontological question of concern here, namely, whether reality is ontologically fixed or transient. Although one can infer, from the world in time not being ontologically homogeneous, that it is heterogeneous, and so there is some (distinctly temporal) difference between the moment when the world is *thus*... and the one when it is *as so*, this difference might be merely qualitative, i.e., some difference between equally-real moments with respect to a temporal quality such as pastness, presentness or futurity. Such differences might be compatible with no thing ever coming to be or ceasing to be simpliciter and, hence, with the world being ontologically fixed.

The general view that the world in time is ontologically heterogeneous subsumes specific theories according to which the difference between the moment when the world is *thus* and the moment when it is *as so* is merely qualitative, pertaining to some temporal quality (or qualities). This general

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[43] One has, at least, a real temporal part or stage at any number of moments. This suffices for the present argument.

view also subsumes specific theories according to which the difference between the relevant moments is more significantly ontological, such as one existing as the other does not. Consider the former theories. On some of these, what is supposed to account for the vivid salience of a unique moment or the crucial transition of one moment to the next with respect to temporal differentiation is a difference in the distinctively temporal qualities borne by (equally real) moments: one moment is present as the next is future, then the latter is present as the former is past, etc. Such views, involving the so-called *passage of time*, are incoherent. Equally real moments bearing incompatible properties yield irremediably contradiction. The bases of this incoherence was first noticed and discussed, albeit not perspicuously, by McTaggart.[44]

In light of these problems, other philosophers have proposed theories on which manifest temporal phenomena are accounted for not in terms of qualitative differences among moments per se, but in terms of qualitative differences among all the things that exist at a given moment. On so-called *moving spotlight* theories, the vivid salience of a unique moment is accounted for by all the things at that moment being a certain way; the crucial transition between moments is accounted for by means of systematic changes in the qualities of all the things at those distinct moments.[45] Such theories are also incoherent. If the permanently existing things at a moment, m_1, are made vividly salient by some unique quality they all share and then the permanently existing things at a distinct moment, m_2, are made vividly salient by this unique quality, then the things at m_1 must come to lack the quality. Thus, such theories require things to undergo change at a single moment: A thing is one way at m_1, and (then?) an incompatible way *at* m_1! Such synchronous change is impossible.

If temporal differentiation cannot be coherently accounted for in terms of qualitative differences among permanently existing moments per se, nor in terms of qualitative differences among all the (permanently existing) things at such moments, this incontrovertible phenomenon of the world going from *thus...* to *as so* cannot be accounted for by merely qualitative differences in temporal reality. The ontological heterogeneity in the world in time involves more significant ontological differences, to wit, differences with respect to *what exists* when the world goes from *thus...* to *as so*. Reality is, therefore, ontologically transient. The foregoing considerations provide insight into the extent of this transience and so reveal the exact structure of temporal reality.

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[44] See McTaggart 1908.

[45] For two examples of such theories, see Sullivan 2012 and Cameron 2015.

There are theories of the structure of the world in time that involve both distinctively temporal qualitative difference and ontological transience. Thus, on so-called *growing block* theories, moments (and things that exist at them) can come into existence simpliciter, but once they do, they permanently remain part of the world.[46] On such theories, this moment, now, bears the unique quality of being the (absolute) latest moment. There are also so-called *shrinking tree* theories, according to which moments (and things that exist at them) can cease to be simpliciter.[47] This moment, now, bears the quality of being the (absolute) earliest moment. Every state of affairs that could eventuate from the things that exist at this moment exists (just as real) at some moment subsequent to it. Yet as this moment, now, ceases to be simpliciter and a distinct moment comes to be the unique earliest moment, many possible future states of affairs (and the moments at which they exist) cease to be simpliciter. The foregoing considerations, however, refute both sorts of theory. If some moment, m_1, (permanently) exists as the current final moment (i.e., the latest one), then when a distinct moment comes to bear this unique quality, then m_1 must exist yet without being the final moment. This is a contradiction. If no moment per se bears any distinctive temporal quality, but all the things that exist at it do, such as existing at the final moment, then all these things must undergo synchronous change when a new moment comes to be simpliciter as the final moment—but such change is impossible. Similar considerations show, mutatis mutandis, that shrinking tree theories are incoherent, as well.

What this shows is that the ontological differences required by temporal differentiation are more significant—they involve no distinctively temporal qualitative differences at all. There is this moment, now. When the world goes from *thus...* to *as so*, the moment demonstrated by 'thus' ceases to be simpliciter and a novel moment—with the world *as so*—comes to be simpliciter. In an instant, this moment ceases entirely to be and a novel moment becomes absolutely. Through this continuous ontological transience of moments, temporal things, i.e., entities that exist at moments, can either change (or simply persist), come to be simpliciter or cease to be simpliciter. This ontological transience of moments is, therefore, the basis of all inconstancy in the temporal world.[48]

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[46] For a classic example of such a theory, see Broad 1923.

[47] For an example of such a theory, see McCall 1994.

[48] I argue elsewhere that things can come to be simpliciter *atemporally*, that is, absolutely come to be *outside of time*. See Fiocco 2014.

4.2 Objections to ontological transience

An incontrovertible phenomenon, temporal differentiation—the world going from *thus* to *as so*—is the basis for cogent argument that reality is ontologically transient. Timothy Williamson, however, argues, on completely different grounds, that everything (in space and time, at least) exists necessarily and, hence, reality is ontologically fixed. Williamson's argument is a challenge to my conclusion, so I consider it here.

Williamson's argument that every thing exists necessarily is straightforward. Consider any thing, *x*. Williamson maintains: (1) Necessarily, if *x* does not exist, then the proposition that *x* does not exist is true; (2) Necessarily, if the proposition that *x* does not exist is true, then the proposition that *x* does not exist exists; (3) Necessarily, if the proposition that *x* does not exist exists then *x* exists. These claims together entail (4) Necessarily, if *x* does not exist, then *x* exists. (4), of course, is a contradiction. The nonexistence of *x* leads necessarily to a contradiction, so *x* necessarily existing follows.[49] This argument is wholly general, so any existent exists necessarily: nothing could come to be simpliciter—were it possible it would (already) have to exist—nor could any thing cease to be simpliciter, for that thing could not fail to be. Reality, therefore, is ontologically fixed.

This ontological fixity is more extreme than the phenomenon I characterize above. The latter is consistent with a thing starting to be, that is, with there being an earliest moment at which it exists (permanently); the former is not. Williamson's argument for such fixity is indeed straightforward. I take (1) and (2) above to be undeniable and the argument to be clearly valid. Nevertheless, it is not sound. (3), viz., Necessarily, if the proposition that *x* does not exist exists, then *x* exists, is false.

On so-called Russellian views of propositions, a singular referring expression contributes its referent to the proposition expressed by any sentence in which it occurs. On such a view, any sentence including 'x' (which one may assume is a singular referring expression) expresses a proposition that literally has *x*, the referent of 'x', as a constituent. Plausibly, that proposition could not be the very proposition it is without that crucial constituent; having x as a part is, again plausibly, essential to the proposition. Therefore, that proposition could not exist in the absence of *x*. On such a Russellian view, then, (3) is compelling. There are, though, other views of propositions. On these, a proposition represents its subject matter not by having that thing as a (literal) constituent of

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[49] See Williamson 2002: §1. I have generalized the argument.

it, but by some other means, such as by including a Fregean sense that determines that thing.

In considering this latter sort of proposition, Williamson maintains "[H]ow could something be [for example,] the proposition that that dog is barking in circumstances in which that dog does not exist? For to be the proposition that that dog is barking is to have a certain relation to that dog, which requires there to be such an item as that dog to which to have the relation."[50] Thus, Williamson is presuming that in order for a proposition to be the very proposition it is, it must stand in some relation to a distinct thing (viz., its ostensible subject matter). But this is incorrect. As argued above, no thing is made to be the very thing it is in virtue of standing in some relation. Each thing just is the very thing it is. In this case, each proposition just is the abstract, non-linguistic representational entity it is and so represents as it does. If there are, as there certainly seem to be, propositions that represent things that do not exist, these propositions are the ones they are without the aid of those non-existent things. Therefore, (3) above is false and Williamson's argument is undermined, presenting no grounds for the necessary existence of each thing nor, consequently, for the ontological fixity of reality.

I maintain that there is a great deal of ontological transience in the world. In fact, there is, with respect to moments, continuous absolute becoming, i.e., coming to be simpliciter, and absolute annihilation, i.e., ceasing to be simpliciter. This transience in the world in time accounts for temporal differentiation and, thus, for change and for the coming to be and ceasing to be simpliciter of mundane things (such as persons, desks, trees, etc.). The structure in temporal reality includes but a single, instantaneous moment, with all the things that exist at it; then this moment, now, is replaced, momentarily, by a novel one. This view—call it *momentary transientism* or *transient presentism*—on which there is literally nothing in temporal reality to the past, nor to the future, is open to a number of objections (for example, truth-making concerns regarding the lack of structure in what is supposed to precede this moment, now). I address these adequately, I believe, elsewhere.[51] Here, I consider just one objection that is particularly relevant, for it turns on the absolute becoming of what comes to be.

Lisa Leininger argues that anyone who, like I, holds that there is nothing subsequent to this moment, now, must contend with what she calls the

[50] Williamson 2002: 241.
[51] See Fiocco, forthcoming.

coordination problem: "in the absence of a connection between what exists and the unreal future, [one] must, but cannot, explain how each new slice of reality that comes into existence preserves the regular nature of the world."[52] Since one cannot, according to Leininger, account for the manifest regularity in the world if what is subsequent to any moment comes to be simpliciter, one must accept that there is no such absolute becoming and, hence, reality is ontologically fixed (at least with respect to what succeeds this moment, now).

There is an adequate response to this putative problem consistent with the coming to be simpliciter of moments and more familiar things. Each thing is fundamental; each is what it is and is essentially as it is simply given that it exists. How a thing interacts with others is determined by what it is and the capacities things of that kind have. Many things have essentially the capacity to persist, that is, to exist at distinct moments. When this moment, now, ceases to be simpliciter, replaced by a novel moment that becomes absolutely, many of the things that existed at the former now exist at the latter. How they interact now is determined, as always, by what they are and the capacities they have. These persisting things and their capacities, therefore, account for the continued regularity in reality.

One who takes the coordination problem seriously, however, might demand some explanation for how a thing persists, that is, some account of how a thing is identical from one moment to another that is not (yet) in the world. Such a demand is misguided. There is nothing that accounts for how a thing is itself, either at a moment or across moments. The identity of a thing, like its existence, is not susceptible to explanation.[53] Another concern one might have about my proposed response to the coordination problem is that the capacities of things cannot suffice to account for the continued regularity in the world—indeed, Leininger explicitly argues that they cannot.[54] But Leininger's argument turns on the possibility of *interference*, of something intervening between when an entity with a certain capacity is stimulated in the relevant way and when that capacity manifests as is supposedly required, so that it does not actually manifest in that (supposedly) required way. There are, though, accounts of capacities that foreclose such interference, on which the presence of the relevant stimulating conditions *necessitates* the relevant manifestations. Such an account is, admittedly, controversial, yet I believe it is correct.[55] Given such capacities,

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[52] Leininger 2021: 216.
[53] See Fiocco 2021.
[54] *Ibid*: 225
[55] For an example of this sort of account, one in terms of *powers* that necessitate their

and the persistence of things, regularity in a world in which things come to be simpliciter follows.

5. Conclusion

Recently, there has been discussion regarding how to characterize debates concerning the way things exist and the structure of the world in time. Some contend that debate about whether everything is present or whether there are also non-present things should be rejected in favor of debate concerning whether the world is ontologically transient or fixed;[56] others hold that maintaining a distinction between these debates is desirable, for conflating them forfeits valuable insight.[57] These debates can seem purely academic, with little of substance to resolve them. There is, however, a familiar, incontrovertible phenomenon that not only makes clear the worldly impetus for the debates, but provides the means of resolving them all at once. (With such resolution, how the debates ought to be characterized becomes less of an issue.)

The key to understanding both the structure in temporal reality and the way things exist, that is, how the structure in reality more generally can vary, is the phenomenon of temporal differentiation: the world going from *thus...* to *as so*. By examining this phenomenon, one can ascertain there is no more to the world in time than this moment, now (and the things that exist at it) and that things can cease to be and come to be simpliciter, in other words, that the world is ontologically transient. To appreciate these conclusions, indeed, even to acquire them, one must confront the diversity in reality and so consider the things herein. Doing so reveals what a thing is, namely, a natured entity that contributes to the totality encompassing one being precisely as it is, viz., *thus*. Each such thing is fundamental, it just is. Consequently, existence, a putative quality in virtue of which a thing is at all, is no thing. But neither is the world. This all-encompassing totality does

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manifestations, see Williams 2019: §6.4. Williams regards powers as fundamental capacities had by basic entities and distinguishes such powers from *dispositions*, the apparent capacities had by non-fundamental "midsized objects". Dispositions, which can be interfered with, are not real powers—though they are the means of "rough and ready accounts of how things tend to occur in the world"[*Ibid*: 143.] I, of course, reject the sort of hierarchical ontology Williams accepts, and so take all capacities to be fundamental and, consequently, to necessitate their manifestations.

[56] See, for example, Deasy 2019.

[57] See, for example, Cameron 2016.

not contribute to reality; rather, reality is simply all the things there are. As such, the world is not a unity, but a plurality, the plurality of every thing.

If the world is no thing per se, "it" bears no qualities and, a fortiori, does not change. Nevertheless, reality is continuously different. The inconstancy one experiences, via temporal differentiation, demonstrates the world, this comprehensive plurality, is distinct at each moment. One is always part of—literally—a new world. No new world is fashioned wholly anew, from nothing, for many things persist. Even when a thing comes to be simpliciter, it has a source in what is. No thing comes from nothing. Each thing in time comes from something in time and can do so because of the advent of a new moment. Each new moment, in turn, comes from time, a thing which itself exists necessarily.[58, 59]

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[58] Or so I argue elsewhere. See Fiocco, forthcoming.

[59] I would like to thank my friend and colleague, Jeff Helmreich, for helpful discussion of this paper and for the written comments on it he provided.

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Facts for Necessitists and Permanentists

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Both Williamson and Severino are committed to the thesis that whatever exists permanently and necessarily exists. They, therefore, need an account of the reality of becoming and contingency. This paper compares their approaches, with a focus on the role played in them by facts. According to Williamson, it is contingent how necessary entities are. Consequently, his metaphysics is incompatible with the existence of truth-making entities, such as facts. In contrast, Severino also admits permanent and necessary truth-making facts, which are about specific times. Severino explains the reality of becoming differently: things – including facts – do not begin or cease to exist but appear and disappear. Some reality is also attributed to contingency, inasmuch as some features of appearance (the background) are necessary in an especially strong way, while others (the variants) are necessary only in a more general way. To further situate Severino's account with respect to analytic metaphysics, two other versions of permanentism and necessitism are also involved in the comparison, namely the early Wittgenstein's theory of objects and facts and Karofsky's so-called necessitarianism.

Keywords:
Facts, Necessitism, Permanentism, Williamson, Wittgenstein

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69

1. Introduction

A recurrent theme in Emanuele Severino's works, and in particular in those more directly connected to *Ritornare a Parmenide* (1964) and collected in *Essenza del nichilismo* (1982), is that nothing begins to be and nothing ceases to be and that whatever is necessarily is. Being is, therefore, permanent and necessary. The being here at stake includes (but – as we are going to see – is not exhausted by) what in contemporary analytic metaphysics is called "existence."[60] Thus, according to Severino, everything that exists necessarily and permanently exists.

Severino saw this thesis as revolutionary with respect to the entire tradition of Western metaphysics. This tradition was under the perduring influx of Plato, who, in the misguided hope of accounting for the reality of becoming in front of Parmenides' denial of it, ended up construing becoming as a succession of entities entering into being (*i.e.*, beginning to exist) and exiting from being (*i.e.*, ceasing to exist).[61] Aristotle would also be to blame. For example, in a passage of the *De interpretatione* (19a 23-27), discussed at length by Severino in *Ritornare a Parmenide*, Aristotle would reduce the *de re* necessity of existence (according to which everything necessarily exists) to the trivial *de dicto* theses that necessarily whatever exists exists, and that necessarily whatever does not exist does not exist.[62] Severino expects his revolution to clash with Western civilization's entire spirit, with many consequences also concerning our practical attitude towards it.[63]

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[60] This is especially clear in the first pages of the *Poscritto* (1965). See in particular Severino (1982, 99-100). All the page numbers for specific passages of the essays collected in *Essenza del nichilismo* refer to the (partial) English translation, except in those cases where the referenced essay is not included in the English translation. These cases are explicitly signaled.

[61] This is a recurrent topic in several of Severino's writings. See, for example, Severino (1967, sec. 4).

[62] See Severino (1982, 57).

[63] These consequences are, for example, at the center stage in Severino (1968a).

In front of this short presentation, any reader more familiar with contemporary analytic metaphysics than with Severino's writings risks thinking that Severino's revolution has been an enormous success and ended up being accepted in the philosophical mainstream. Indeed, one of the most influential works in this field published in the last decade is *Modal Logic as Metaphysics* by Timothy Williamson (2013), which is an extended defense of the thesis that necessarily everything is necessarily identical to something, that is, in the formalism of quantified modal logic:

$$\Box\forall x\Box\exists y\, x=y$$

This is the formulation of Williamson's *necessitism*. Despite some qualms on the part of Williamson about the ambiguity of the concept of existence[64] and under the assumption that existence is expressed in the logical language by the particular/existential quantifier "∃," necessitism can also be expressed by saying that necessarily everything necessarily exists.[65]

While Williamson's focus in the book is on necessity, he also emphasizes that the theses and most of the arguments in support of them could be transposed to the temporal sphere, thereby leading to *permanentism*, according to which at every time everything is such that at every time there is something identical to it, or – in terms of existence – that always everything always exists.[66]

In the first chapter of his influential book, Williamson also refers to some historical antecedents of his theses, such as Ibn Sīnā's metaphysical treatises and Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Williamson, who writes only some decades after Severino and is plausibly utterly unaware of Severino's thought, does not qualify his necessitism and permanentism as revolutionary. He indeed contrasts them with the contingentism (the thesis that it is possible that something is such that it is possible that nothing is identical to it) and temporaryism (the thesis that sometimes something is such that sometimes nothing is identical to it) of many influential twentieth-century logicians and metaphysicians, such as Arthur Prior, Saul Kripke, and Robert Stalnaker. However, Williamson does not claim that his stances are in stark contrast with Western metaphysics in general, let alone with Western civilization.

The purpose of this paper is to compare Williamson's and Severino's varieties of necessitism and permanentism and to suggest that, some similarities

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[64] See, for example, Williamson (2013, 18–20).
[65] A similar formulation was assumed in Williamson (2002).
[66] Williamson (2013, 4).

notwithstanding, they diverge from each other in some pivotal respects, mostly connected with the role of truth-making facts, and in particular with those whose existence should necessitate *contingent* truths, such as "Sunak is the UK's Prime Minister in 2023".

In a nutshell, in this paper, I show that Williamson's approach is incompatible with the existence of truth-making facts, while Severino is explicitly committed to their necessary existence. Consequently, Williamson and Severino sharply disagree about the reality of contingency and becoming and how to make them in some way compatible with necessitism and permanentism.

To further situate Severino's account with respect to metaphysics in the analytic tradition, I also compare it with two other accounts, both committed to the necessary existence of at least some entities and also to the existence of facts. They are the theory of objects and facts of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922) and the necessitarianism of Amy Karofsky (2021). Both substantially diverge from Severino's and Williamson's accounts. At the end of the day, Severino's account will come out relatively easily and fruitfully comparable, yet interestingly different with respect to all the varieties of analytic necessitism and permanentism discussed in this paper.

To unify and simplify the terminology, Williamson's terms "necessitism" and "permanentism" (as well as the respective adjectives) are employed throughout the paper. They thus refer, respectively, to the *family* of theses according to which existence is in some way necessary; and to the *family* of theses according to which existence is in some way permanent or eternal. Thus, they are used not only in analyzing Williamson's specific theses but also when Severino's theses and others are under discussion.

The paper is structured as follows. In §2, I introduce Williamson's necessitism and permanentism, with a focus on those aspects that can be usefully compared with Severino's approach, and I subsequently focus on the inadmissibility of facts and truth-makers in the resulting metaphysics and on Williamson's account of the reality of contingency and becoming. §3 discusses the different status of facts and truth-makers and the consequently different account of the reality of becoming in Severino's metaphysics. §4 discusses the relation between Severino's facts and time, a delicate issue that has to be clarified in order to make sense of Severino's thesis that every fact is permanent. §5 focuses on Severino's account of contingency, particularly as regards Severino's concept of factuality and the so-called "variants" of appearance. §6 compares Severino's and Williamson's approaches with Wittgenstein's theory of objects and facts in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, whereas §7 draws the comparison with the views recently defended in *A*

Case for Necessitarianism by Karofsky (2021), according to which absolutely nothing about the world could have been otherwise in any way, whatsoever. Finally, §8 draws some conclusions.

2. No Truth-Making Facts in Williamson's Higher-Order Necessitism

The above quoted primary formulation of Williamson's necessitism (□∀x□∃yx=y) tells that it is a non-contingent matter what individuals there are. According to an influential tradition in twentieth-century analytic metaphysics, whose most quoted point of reference is Quine (1948), the existence of something is expressed by the particular/existential quantifier "∃" in formulas that, in order to be well-formed, also include at least one predicate. When this predicate is the identity predicate "=" and the resulting syntactical form is that of the formula above, the naked existence of something (not qualified in any way since everything is identical to itself) is expressed.

The quantifiers are here unrestricted *first-order* quantifiers and thus concern whatever is in the domain of first-order logic. Williamson has defended first-order necessitism in several works (1998, 1999, 2002, 2013) on the basis of various arguments. For example, in Williamson (2002), he argued that, for any entity, the proposition that this entity does not exist cannot be true in a possible world without that entity existing in that same world. Thus, for any entity, the proposition that it does not exist is false in every world and is, therefore, necessarily false. Everything necessarily exists.

In the most mature and extended defense of his necessitism (2013), Williamson goes much further than first-order necessitism and adopts so-called *uniform necessitism*,[67] which adopts the corresponding theses also for higher-order quantifiers, which bind variables occupying the syntactic position of first-level predicates (second-order quantifiers), the position of sentences (propositional quantifiers), or even the positions of higher-level predicates, logical connectives, operators, first-order quantifiers themselves, and so forth. Williamson thinks that higher-order quantifiers are very useful in metaphysics, where metaphysicians often want to say something general about what predicates, quantifiers, or – say – modal operators stand for.

Once the language of logic is so extended, necessitism is preferable to contingentism at every level. Thus, if capital letters are employed for vari-

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[67] This label is employed in Skiba (2022, 1).

ables of a certain higher order and higher-order identity (≡) is introduced for that order,[68] the following principle holds:

$$\Box \forall X \Box \exists Y X \equiv Y$$

It may be controversial what the values of higher-order variables are, but, for reasons we skip over for the sake of brevity, Williamson thinks that they are intensionally individuated entities, such as properties and relations, in the case of variables occupying the position of first-level predicates, bound by second-order quantifiers (Williamson 2013, secs. 5.7–5.9). Thus, in Williamson's metaphysics, properties and relations exist as necessarily as individuals.

Indeed, a central argument in favor of first-order necessitism (Williamson 2013, ch. 6) hinges on second-order necessitism. In a nutshell, second-order logic needs a comprehension principle that establishes what properties there are, and the simplest and most desirable principle of comprehension roughly says that, for every open formula "φx," there is the property λx (φx) instantiated by what satisfies the formula. As a consequence, there are also the so-called haecceities. A haecceity is the property of being identical to a specific individual, such as the property of being identical to Severino. Given the open formula "$x = Severino$," the principle of comprehension warrants that there is the haecceity of Severino, λx ($x = Severino$). The principle of comprehension is a true logical principle and is, therefore, necessarily true. Thus, the haecceity of Severino – the property of being identical to Severino – necessarily exists.

Williamson contends that first-order contingentism (*i.e.*, the opposite of first-order necessitism, according to which it is possible that some individual is such that possibly no individual is identical to it) is unable to explain how the haecceity of Severino "locks onto" Severino (Williamson 2013, 269ff). Consider a putative possible scenario in which the property of being identical to Severino exists, but Severino fails to exist: it is not clear how the former manages to be – so to say – about Severino, if Severino in that scenario does not exist. Thus, while, for example, Plantinga (1974) thought that haecceities necessarily exist whereas individuals contingently exist, Williamson thinks that second-order necessitism leads to first-order necessitism and that, in general, uniform necessitism enjoys the theoretical virtue of simplicity, in comparison with hybrid forms that mix necessitism at certain orders and contingentism at others.[69]

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[68] This is discussed in Williamson (2013, ch. 6, §1) and fully articulated in Dorr (2016).
[69] Skiba (2022) has recently defended hybrid contingentism.

What entities there are is uniformly necessary at every order, but *how things are* is not such. In a quantified statement, the domain of a quantifier is *what* we speak about, but then the whole sentence says *how* what we speak about is. Some sentences are true, some others false. Among true sentences, some are necessarily true (such as "2 + 2 = 4" and "∀x□∃yx=y"), while many others (such as "Emanuele Severino is the author of *Ritornare a Parmenide*" and "at least one human being is higher than 2 meters and 10 centimeters") are contingently true.

The values of variables in true quantifications *of any order* necessarily exist, but this must be made compatible with the contingency of many truths about them. This entails that there are no truth-makers for these truths, and the title of a section of *Modal Logic as Metaphysics* is precisely "No truthmakers" (Williamson 2013, sec. 8.3). The truth-maker principle according to which every truth is made true by some things is incompatible with Williamson's necessitism. Truth-makers are entities whose existence necessitates the truth of sentences. If every truth has a truth-maker, then these entities (as any other entity) necessarily exist. They necessitate the truth of which they are truth-makers. Thus, every truth is a necessary truth, and we end up with the following "disastrous schema," which "drags us from the non-contingency of being to the non-contingency of truth" (Williamson 2013, 393):

$$\alpha \to \Box\alpha$$

Thus, "given that the language contains contingent truths, [the truth-maker principle] is inconsistent with necessitism" (*ibid.*). Actually, the inconsistency does not depend on truth-maker maximalism, that is, on the thesis that every contingent truth has a truth-maker.[70] A single contingent truth with a truth-maker already clashes with necessitism.

According to Williamson, a prejudice favoring first-order quantification and existence makes the truth-maker principle unduly attractive. In a scenario where a sentence is true, there should be *something* different with respect to a scenario where that sentence is false. This something has to be an individual of some kind (a fact or a trope: two popular candidates to the role of truth-makers), if only quantification in the syntactic position of names is considered. However, there are alternatives that avoid the contrast with necessitism and deflate all the emphasis on truth-makers. In particular, the *something* could correspond to quantification in sentence position.

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[70] This is important since truth-maker maximalism is not endorsed even by many supporters of truth-making, including the seminal Mulligan, Simons, and Smith (1984), where the principle is restricted to atomic truths.

While Williamson considers various hypotheses about the interpretation of quantification in sentence position (401-402), let us assume for simplicity that the values of the sentential variables are propositions. The resulting truth-maker principle will then and uncontroversially say that, for any contingent truth, there is a proposition such that necessarily, if it is true, then the sentence is true (399):

$$\alpha \rightarrow \exists P \, (P \wedge \square \, (P \rightarrow \alpha))$$

These propositions are allowed to be necessary existents in a uniform necessitist perspective without impacting on the contingency of truths. They are not truth-makers since their existence does not make themselves or the sentences true. Still, they are the *something* connected to the truth of sentences in the best form of the principle that – when wrongly formulated in terms of quantification in name position – leads to postulating facts or tropes in the role of truth-makers. The contingency of truth is thus preserved and made compatible with the necessity of existence.

There is another important aspect in Williamson's necessitist account of the reality of contingency. Some necessary existents are neither concrete nor abstract. They are not abstract since they are not numbers, sets, or other prototypically abstract entities that cannot occupy regions of spacetime; and they are not concrete since, as a matter of fact, they do not occupy any region of spacetime, even if they could. *Concreteness* is, for Williamson, the feature of what occupies spacetime. So-called mere *possibilia* – such as the possible son of Wittgenstein – are possibly concrete entities (they would occupy regions of spacetime in scenarios where Wittgenstein had a son). This means contingency also concerns a specific way in which necessarily existents are: their contingent concreteness.

In all his works on necessitism, Williamson is rather dismissive of a radical form of necessitarianism (I borrow this label from Karofsky (2021), to which I return in §7), according to which also how things are – and not only what exists – is necessary: Williamson's reasons in support of necessitism (including the two arguments sketched above, stemming respectively from negative existential propositions and the comprehension principle of second-order logic) do not support a radical form of necessitarianism according to which also how things are is necessary.[71]

It should be underlined that this approach forbids the existence of some categories of entities, such as facts, that could also serve other theoretical

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[71] Necessitarianism is, in particular, criticized in Williamson (2013, sec. 8.4).

purposes independent of truth-making.[72] Two examples: in philosophy of mind, Searle (1983) believes that facts play a pivotal role in the best account of intentionality; in epistemology, Hossack (2007) deems facts to be the best candidates to the role of objects of knowledge. Williamson's necessitism is incompatible with these theories about intentionality and knowledge, and this lack of neutrality with respect to seemingly independent philosophical debates can be considered a theoretical cost.

While in this paper I shall mainly focus on facts, the case of tropes is analogous: at least in the extant versions of the theory of tropes, tropes exist only if it is true that a certain individual has a certain property. Thus, the whiteness of snow exists if and only if the snow is white. Perhaps one could devise a necessitist theory of tropes in which tropes behave analogously to merely possible individuals so that – say – the blackness of snow exists but is not concrete; and would be concrete in a scenario in which snow is black. I am not aware of any trope theory of this kind, in which, in any case, tropes would not be truth-makers, that is, they would not be such that their existence makes sentences true (their concreteness would play this role).

Williamson's necessitism is incompatible with the existence of *truth-making* tropes, while – analogously to facts – the commitment to this kind of tropes is not exclusively motivated by the truth-maker principle.[73] Some theorists expect tropes to be involved in causality, inasmuch as – say – it is the particular temperature of a specific portion of water that causes its boiling and not the universal it shares with other portions of water at the same temperature.[74] Tropes are also often thought to be the primary objects of our perceptions: when I am in perceptual contact with a green leaf, I do never see a leaf in its entirety, and this is perhaps a reason to think that the leaf is not the object of my perception; I also do not see the universal greenness, which is not located exclusively there. According to Lowe (2008) and Mulligan, Simons, and Smith (1984, 306), among others, the objects of perception are tropes, namely the particular greenness of the leaf I am in perceptual contact with. Tropes have also been attributed a role in semantics, such as referents of nominalizations that are not sensibly taken to refer to

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[72] See Mulligan and Correia (2021) for an overview of the metaphysics of facts and Betti (2015) for an in-depth analysis of the motivations for the existence of facts, albeit from a skeptical perspective.

[73] Maurin (2023) and Allen (2016, ch. 3) are two overviews of the contemporary debate about tropes.

[74] This role of trope is, for example, at center stage in Campbell (1990).

universals, e.g., "Giorgio's height."[75] Williamson's necessitism is incompatible with all this, and, again, this lack of neutrality with respect to seemingly independent debates can count as a theoretical cost.

These costs do not translate into self-standing objections to Williamson's necessitism since it is controversial whether facts (and tropes) exist and that they are the best candidates for the theoretical roles sketched above. Williamson could even contend that if there are solid arguments in favor of necessitism, then we obtain a welcome simplification of several debates, because the option of involving truth-making entities in these debates gets excluded because of their incompatibility with an independently well-supported doctrine. The reason why I focus on this incompatibility is that it is a significant difference between, on the one hand, Williamson's necessitism and, on the other hand, Severino's necessitism and also Wittgenstein's and Karofsky's approaches, which – as we will see in §§6-7 – all admit the existence of facts.

This whole picture is developed in *Modal Logic as Metaphysics*, focusing on the modal sphere, *i.e.*, on the *necessary* existence of entities, *contingent* truths, and the *contingent* concreteness of entities. However, Williamson explicitly maintains that many of his theses and arguments "have parallels for the temporal dispute between permanentism and temporaryism" (Williamson 2013, 4). They could thus be transposed to the temporal sphere, thereby coming to concern the *permanent* existence of entities, *temporary* truths, and the *temporary* concreteness of entities. The reality of becoming is also easily accounted for, given that sentences are allowed to change truth value not only from one possible scenario to another but also from one time to another.

3. Facts in Severino's Necessitism

According to Severino, being is not born and does not die, because otherwise it is not. The simple hypothesis that what is is not leads to an unacceptable contradiction. The hypothesis that something, which is, is not is so unacceptable that the status of the principle of excluded middle is, according to Severino, thereby jeopardized: "The principle of the excluded middle becomes an explicit declaration of the possibility of the not-being of Being" (Severino 1982, 75), because, given a true "*p*," according to which some-

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[75] This is only one among many semantic roles attributed to tropes in several works of Friederike Moltmann, including (2003), (2009), and (2013, ch. 2).

thing is, "$p \lor \neg p$" includes as the second disjunct the hypothesis that what is is not; and this simple hypothesis is unacceptable, even within a logical construction such as a disjunction.

Being is a form of positivity and is radically incompatible with negativity in the temporal and modal dimensions: "This tree is a positive, and as such it is and it cannot befall it to not-be, and so it is eternal. And, as eternal, it dwells in the hospitable house of Being" (Severino 1982, 97). Thus, whatever is permanently and necessarily is.

Severino writes that "it cannot be thought of *Being* (of all and of every Being) that it is-not" (Severino 1982, 99) and thereby asserts that permanence and necessity concern the entire realm of being, both collectively and distributively. Collectively since for Severino the whole reality ("all Being," "tutto l'essere" in Italian) permanently and necessarily is; and distributively ("every Being," "ogni essere" in Italian) since every single, particular entity permanently and necessarily is.

The distributive aspect of Severino's necessitism is radical and concerns every entity without any category limitation. Severino resolutely opposes any restriction of permanence and necessity to entities of some category. He traces back to Plato the idea that only universals or ideas permanently and necessarily exist (Severino 1982, 67); and to ancient and medieval ontological and cosmological arguments for the (permanent and necessary) existence of God the idea that only God permanently and necessarily exists (Severino 1982, 70-71). In both cases, metaphysicians end up looking for a constant and reliable source of positivity (for example, something that is always and necessarily actual, without which nothing could pass from potentiality to actuality). They have this need precisely because they have admitted the contingency and temporariness of particular beings in the first place, in the misbegotten attempt to account for the reality of becoming in terms of particular entities entering and exiting the realm of being. Without this initial mistake, there is no reason to attribute a special temporal or modal status to universals or God. They are as permanent and necessary as everything else.

In order to draw the comparison with Williamson, removing some minor conceptual or terminological discrepancies is important. Severino usually does not underline the difference between predicative uses of the verb "to be," which express that something is in a certain way (as in "the apple *is* green"), and existential uses, which express the existence of something and could be replaced by the verb "to exist" (as in "God *is*").

However, this should not be mistaken for unawareness of this pivotal distinction, which Severino occasionally discusses, particularly where, in

his *Risposta ai critici* (1968b), he answers to some objections on the part of Enrico Berti. The controversy concerns the passage mentioned above of Aristotle's *De interpretatione*. John Ackrill translates it in English as follows: "What is, necessarily is, when it is; and what is not, necessarily is not, when it is not" (19a 23-27). As we said in the introduction, Severino (1964) had interpreted this passage as the admission that the necessity of being is merely *de dicto*: necessarily, what is is; and necessarily, what is not is not. *Contra* Aristotle, Severino maintains that also *de re* necessity (as well as permanence) concerns being: whatever is permanently and necessarily is. *Contra* Severino, Berti (1966) had objected that Aristotle's passage only concerns being in a certain way, and not existence, so, in that passage, Aristotle is only affirming the *de dicto* permanent and necessary truth of the principle of non-contradiction without expressing any thesis about existence at all.

In his *Risposta ai critici* (1968b), Severino shows full awareness of the distinction and insists that, in any case, both existence and being in a certain way are *de re* permanent and necessary (Severino 1982, 308-11).[76] In doing so, he clearly suggests that any being in a certain way corresponds to the existence of something: the apple is green if and only if the apple's greenness (a *trope* in the jargon of contemporary English-speaking metaphysics) exists; the apple is green if and only if the *fact* (Severino explicitly admits a category of facts, as we will see) that the apple is green exists. Severino emphasizes that permanence and necessity concern both levels: existence and being in some particular way. According to Williamson, it instead concerns only existence, as it is expressed by the particular/existential quantifier "∃" of any order.

While, in his controversy with Berti about Aristotle, Severino shows awareness of the distinction between existence and predicative being, he had not drawn explicitly the distinction in his extensive, positive discussion about the permanence and necessity of being in the previous *Ritorno a Parmenide* (1964). This, however, cohered with the spirit of his approach, open to an abundance of truth-making entities: for every instance of predicative being – that is, for every case in which a particular is in a certain way or some particulars are related in a certain way – *something exists*, and this something is often characterized in Severino's writings as a fact. In the jargon of contemporary analytic metaphysics, these entities

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[76] Severino (1968b) has been later included in Severino (1982) but not in its English translation. Thus, the page numbers (in this case and the subsequent references to the *Risposta ai critici*) refer to the original text of Severino (1982) in Italian. The translations of the quoted excerpts from the *Risposta ai critici* are mine.

are truth-makers of seemingly contingent truths. As such, if they are not banned from the ontology as they should be according to Williamson, then their necessary existence entails that those truths are necessary and not contingent. Thus, it lacked importance to underline the distinction between necessary existence and necessary being in a certain way since, at the end of the day, every instance of being in a certain way corresponds to a necessary existent – and necessary existence was at the center stage already in *Ritornare a Parmenide*.

As regards facts, in the initial pages of the *Poscritto*, published in 1965, Severino includes facts in the following list of what "Being" stands for and is therefore permanent and necessary according to Parmenides and Parmenideans like himself: "'Being' stands for everything that is not nothing: nature and language, appearance and reality, facts and ideal essences, the human and the divine" (Severino 1982, 99).

The above list may seem heterogeneous and cryptic. However, other passages in Severino's works make clear that Severino is committed to facts as truth-making structured entities, similar to those of Armstrong (1997), and in particular composed of one or more particulars and exactly one property or one relation. This is again especially evident in the dialectics with Berti in the *Risposta ai critici*. Berti (1966) had observed that an instance of the above-discussed Aristotelian principle (necessarily, what is is) is that necessarily a white thing is white, and that this is perfectly compatible with the possibility that this thing is not white. Berti had maintained that it is *only a fact* that this thing is white. Severino strongly disagrees with Berti: the fact that this thing is white cannot begin or cease to exist. From this viewpoint, the being/existence of facts is on a par with the being/existence of the entities within facts (particulars, properties, relations), namely permanent and necessary.

Severino writes, as a comment to Berti's hypothesis that the fact that this thing is white is contingent: "When this thing, that is now white, ceases to be white, what happens to this-white-thing?" (Severino 1982, 310). This-white-thing would stop existing. It would exit from the realm of being, in contrast with the radical, unrestricted thesis that everything permanently exists. Given that everything permanently exists, even this-white-thing – even the fact that this thing is white – permanently (and necessarily) exists. Severino qualifies this fact as a specific synthesis, that is, a synthesis of the particular thing and of the property of whiteness, and the hypothesis that "the synthesis has become a nothing" is rejected (*ibid.*). On account of his claim that this synthesis becomes a nothing, Berti is qualified as a nihilist, that is, as a philosopher who follows the prevailing line in Western meta-

physics of considering becoming as a process in which things begin and cease to exist (Severino 1982, 310, fn. 44). Severino coherently concludes that, if a certain thing is white, then it is permanently and necessarily white: "this white thing, as any other determination of being, is eternal: it cannot fail to be; thus, there cannot be any time in which it wasn't yet white or in which it is not white anymore" (Severino 1982, 311, fn. 44).

One can wonder whether it is possible to reconcile in any form a position of this kind with the reality of becoming, but Severino thinks that this can be done. We have seen in §2 that an aspect of Williamson's account is the distinction between existence as expressed by the particular/existential quantifier on the one hand and concreteness as occupation of spacetime on the other. When Socrates dies, he continues to exist but stops occupying a region of spacetime. In a possible scenario when my parents did not meet, I exist but do not occupy any region of spacetime.

Severino's account is focused on something other than the abstract/concrete distinction.[77] Becoming – for particulars, essences, facts, and whatever necessarily and permanently is and yet participates in the becoming – consists in appearing and disappearing, in entering the realm of appearance and later exiting it:

> The Becoming that appears is not the birth and the death of Being, but rather its appearing and disappearing. Becoming is the process of the revelation of the immutable. [...] The *becoming* of Being that is the content of Appearing does *not* appear as an issuing from and a returning to nothingness on the part of Being, but rather as an appearing and disappearing *of Being*, and thus as an appearing and disappearing of that which is, i.e., of the immutable, which eternally *is*, even when it has not yet appeared and even when it has disappeared. (Severino 1982, 118-19).

As Severino clarifies some pages later in the *Poscritto*, the events of appearing and disappearing are also permanent and necessary beings. The temporal succession of these events concerning appearance is a fact and, as such, is also permanent and necessary, given that facts are admitted in Severino's ontology and are as permanent and necessary as everything else: "appearing is a predicate that *necessarily* belongs to things that appear" (Severino 1982, 128).

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[77] Severino qualifies as concrete the totality of the permanent and necessary being (the entire universe, in all its history), while any part of it is abstract inasmuch as it is considered without the context. Thus, Severino's concept of concreteness differs from Williamson's and is primarily epistemic. See, for example, Severino (1982, 133-34).

Thus, when Socrates was born, he began to appear; when he died, he stopped appearing; but Socrates permanently and necessarily exists, and also the events of his birth and death and thus the events of beginning to appear and of stopping appearing, as well as their temporal succession, all permanently and necessarily exist. When a thing becomes white, the above-mentioned truth-making synthesis/fact dubbed by Severino "this-white-thing" begins to appear (but existed also beforehand because it is as permanent and necessary as everything else).

At every time, there is the totality of what appears (particulars, facts, properties, and other categories of entities), and this totality is the *transcendental event*, "the horizon of all that appears"; to begin to appear is tantamount to becoming part of the transcendental event. The transcendental event is also eternal, and it is not even possible to suppose that it is not (Severino 1982, 99).

The Kantian term "transcendental," while never explicitly defined in these works, suggests that the subject involved in these appearances is not an empirical human subject to which the various particulars or facts appear. The transcendental event is not always perceived by some empirical subjects but is at the disposal of the human subjects that are there (necessarily, as everything else) to perceive them. What belongs to the transcendental event is available to perception, even if nobody actually perceives it.

This availability to the perception of what is not actually perceived cannot be the mere possibility to be perceived because everything (every being, every not being, including those concerning appearance and appearance) is necessary. Thus, it presumably consists simply in its belonging to a certain time in the necessary succession of times: this gives it features that are compatible with perception at that time, even if it is not actually perceived and therefore cannot be perceived.

4. Facts and Time in Severino

To complete Severino's account of becoming and illustrate his account of contingency, it is important to discuss two aspects for which clear and decisive textual evidence is lacking in Severino's works. They are both important to obtain an overall compelling picture that does not fly in the face of evident data concerning becoming and contingency and can be fruitfully compared with metaphysics in the analytic tradition to which Williamson belongs.

The first aspect, discussed in this section, concerns the relation between *time* and permanently existing truth-making facts. I am not aware of any

direct evidence in Severino's writing that directly supports the solution I will suggest on his behalf; but the solution maximizes the coherence of Severino's approach while avoiding committing it to utterly implausible consequences. The second aspect is discussed in the next section (§5) and concerns modal distinctions among (all equally necessarily existing) facts and is supported by some sparse Severino's claims.

As regards the first aspect, a truth-making fact (say, the fact that Sunak is the UK's prime minister, or the fact that this leaf is green) permanently, always exists. Severino does never draw from this the absurd conclusion that Sunak is *eternally* the UK's prime minister or that at no time the leaf is not yet green or becomes yellow. Thus, it is charitable to interpret Severino's account of becoming as presupposing an understanding of facts such that this absurd consequence does not follow.

This can be done by hypothesizing that times are components of facts. If times are components of facts – components that are, for brevity, sometimes left implicit in their denominations – the absurd consequence does not follow. The fact that Sunak is the UK's prime minister is thus more adequately described by denoting it in a way that explicitly indicates an instant or a time span; for example, with the denoting phrase "the fact that Sunak is the UK's prime minister in July 2023". The fact at stake makes true the sentence in the present tense "Sunak is the UK's prime minister" uttered during that month; and – to make another example, among the various one could consider – this same fact also makes true the sentence in the past tense "Sunak was the UK's prime minister in June 2023" uttered at a later time. The fact and all the truth-making relations eternally and necessarily exist. They existed also when Churchill was the UK's prime minister, and they will exist when the United Kingdom eventually ceases to exist. What is eternal is a fact that concerns not only Sunak and British politics but also a specific time. The fact about the leaf will also be more explicitly denominated with a denoting phrase such as "the fact that this leaf is green on 20 July 2023"; it permanently exists and always concerns that specific day.

There is nothing peculiar in this understanding of facts. While I have yet to learn of any explicit theory of facts developed in combination with permanentism, truth-makers are, in general, expected to make true also utterances and beliefs concerning specific times. For this reason a time is often considered part of their identity. In §6, we will see that this happens, for example, in the theory of facts of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. The same holds for tropes (such as the leave's particular greenness), which have been thought, for example, by Keith Campbell to be momentary in the sense that

they are properties had by a specific individual at a certain time: tropes "have a local habitation, a single, circumscribed place in space-time" (Campbell 1990, 53).[78] Once facts are put in the context of Severino's permanentism, they cannot be momentary in the sense of existing for a single moment (because, for a permanentist, everything exists at every time), but they can nonetheless concern a single time by having it among its constituents.

5. Modal Distinctions among Severino's Facts

Every fact is permanent and necessary. By construing facts as concerning specific times and having them as constituents, it is possible to make sense of the permanence of facts concerning material entities that patently have different properties and relations at different times. What about modal distinctions among different facts? The fact that the sum of 2 and 3 is 5 can be expected to enjoy a different modal status with respect to the fact that the leaf is green, even once the latter is made specific to a certain time. An essentialist could even think that there is a difference in modal status between – say – the fact that Socrates is a man in a certain day of 401 BC, on the one hand, and the facts that Socrates is a philosopher in that same day and that he is the husband of Xanthippe in that same day, on the other.

Williamson's necessitism is admittedly incompatible with truth-making entities such as facts. Nevertheless, it has an easy time accounting for the modal distinctions between the truths at stake since they do not concern what entities exist but how they are. Severino's approach instead contends that everything is necessary, and this includes both what entities exist and how these entities are, even considering that truth-making entities (whose necessary existence necessitates that entities are in a certain way) are admitted in the ontology. This *prima facie* leaves no space for modal distinctions. Temporal becoming does not entail modal distinctions either, given that – as we have seen in §4 – everything that concerns appearance and the variability of the transcendental event is necessary.

However, in Severino's works, it is possible to find at least *two* mutually coherent traces of modal distinctions drawn within the unrestricted realm of the necessary and permanent being. *First*, in the *Risposta ai critici* (Severino 1968b), there is a list of "imperishable" and "immutable" entities, which includes what is "factual and necessary" (Severino 1982, 67). According to

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[78] Some trope theorists disagree. For example, Ehring (1998) contends, against Campbell, that some tropes can persist.

Severino, all that is factual is (as everything else) also necessary. Thus, in a footnote, Severino feels the need to explain why the phrase "factual and necessary" is not redundant by analyzing the distinction between "factual" and "necessary." He writes:

> Here it is important to make clear that the 'factual' is not what is, but could not be; but is what whose non-being is actually excluded only by the consideration that a positive cannot fail to be; while the non-existence of the 'necessary' is excluded not only by this consideration, but also by other considerations about a self-contradiction in the non-existence of what is said to be 'necessary'; this self-contradiction goes beyond the fundamental self-contradiction of the non-being of being. However, it is now clear that this distinction between 'factual' and 'necessary' is internal to the necessity that bears a primary speculative value. (Severino 1982, 67, fn. 3)

Thus, in the unrestricted realm of the necessary$_1$ (the sense of 'necessary' "that bears a primary speculative value"), the mere factual can still be distinguished from the necessary$_2$, which enjoys a less speculatively valuable variety of necessity. The hypothesis that what is necessary$_2$ fails to exist is self-contradictory, not only in the general sense in which being and not-being are mutually contradictory, but in a different, more specific sense.

Severino does not say in the above passage what this different form of self-contradiction is. However, it is plausible to hypothesize that a variety of Severino's necessity$_2$ could be logical necessity, where p is logically necessary if and only if ¬p is a logical contradiction or entails a logical contradiction; so, any instance of p→p will be logically necessary or necessary$_2$ since ¬(p→p) entails a contradiction.[79] Other varieties of necessity$_2$ could even be more substantive varieties of objective necessity, such as *metaphysical* or *nomological* necessity. Thus, given the true general principles of metaphysics, p is metaphysically necessary if and only if the conjunction of ¬p and the totality of the true general principles of metaphysics is or entails a contradic-

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[79] The hypothesis is also supported by Severino's discussion of the analytic/synthetic distinction in Severino (1981, ch. 6, sec. 11). I thank Federico Perelda for pointing me towards this passage and making me aware of its importance. In this text Severino claims that the analytic/synthetic distinction operates within the domain of identical judgments. Synthetic judgments are identical judgments whose negation is not immediately self-contradictory, while analytic judgments are identical judgments whose negation is immediately self-contradictory. The distinction is presented in the jargon of Severino's doctrine of judgment and apophansis, which is at the center stage in Severino (1981). The involvement of the analytic/synthetic distinction also complicates the comparison with Williamson, who is rather dismissive of this distinction (Williamson 2006) and keeps it apart from modal concepts.

tion; and, given the scientific laws of nature, p is nomologically necessary if and only if the conjunction of ¬p and the laws of nature is or entails a contradiction. To exemplify, it would be nomologically necessary (a variety of necessity$_2$) that my car does not surpass the velocity of light since the conjunction of the opposite claim and the laws of nature (which include the laws of Einstein's theory of special relativity) entails a contradiction.

In the case of logical necessity, the negation of what is necessary$_2$ is straightforwardly self-contradictory. In the latter case of more substantial objective necessity, the negation of what is necessary$_2$ is not autonomously self-contradictory but primarily contributes to the self-contradiction (the conjunction of it with the principles of metaphysics or the laws of nature is self-contradictory). Thus, within unrestricted necessity$_1$, it is possible to draw subtler modal distinctions on the basis of more standard logical self-contradictions (the negations of these contradictions – or of a conjunct within them – are necessary$_2$).

A *second* trace in Severino's works is found in a distinction within the realm of appearance. Becoming consists of entities entering the realm of appearances, also dubbed "transcendental event." Within this realm, Severino (1965, sec. 6, §8) distinguishes the *background* and the *variants*. The background is "constituted by those meanings whose not-appearing would imply the disappearing of every determination" (Severino 1982, 106, fn. 23), and thus by those features of appearance without which there would be no appearance. Again, whatever concerns appearance is as necessary (necessary$_1$) as anything else, but the hypothesis that these fundamental features that constitute the background are not instantiated by appearance is also self-contradictory in a stricter sense so that the background is also – in the terminology we have introduced above – necessary$_2$.

It can be conjectured that they are more specifically *metaphysically necessary*, if we assume as a general principle of metaphysics that something appears and that the transcendental event is not empty: the conjunction of the negation of the background and this metaphysical principle will then be contradictory, and so the background is metaphysically necessary (necessary$_2$, in one of the varieties we have postulated above), besides being necessary$_1$ as everything else.

Severino's examples of what constitutes the background concern formal and non-contentual aspects of the appearance. He writes: "The fundamental (but not exhaustive) complex of these meanings is formed by meanings such as "Being," "not-Being," "totality," "Appearing" (Severino 1982, 334, fn. 20). As usual, Severino does not pay much attention to the distinction between

existing entities and predicative truths about them, also because it thinks that for any predicative truth there is a truth-making entity. Thus, we can speculate that the background includes the listed entities and truths about them (such as "being is," "being exists," or "particular beings enter and exit the totality of appearances"). In the introduction to the 1981 edition of *La struttura originaria* – the complex treatise that Severino originally published in 1958 and is the breeding ground of many doctrines to be also presented or reworked in later works – Severino also defines the background as "the basic content that appears in the appearance of any content." (Severino 1981, 84).[80]

The variants are all the other contents of appearance. As the following passage illustrates, Severino is open to two alternatives about them:

> [...] the background and the variants may be related in two different ways: 1. the appearing of the background does not necessarily imply the appearing of variants, and thus their appearing is a *fact*; 2. the appearing of the background necessarily implies the appearing of variants. (Severino 1982, 138)

The variants of appearance are the specific contents of what appears at a certain time. The laptop I am seeing and using in writing this paper belongs to the variants since its non-appearance is undoubtedly compatible with something else appearing. In both the hypotheses outlined in the quoted passage (1. and 2.), the variants are necessary$_1$. In hypothesis 2. they are also as necessary$_2$ as the background of appearance (namely – as we have hypothesized – metaphysically necessary) since the background is necessary$_2$ and the background necessitates the variants. In hypothesis 1. the variants are instead merely necessary$_1$, whereas they do not inherit the necessity$_2$ of the background, since the background does not necessitate the variants. In hypothesis 2. the variants are a mere fact, in the sense we have discussed above, since their necessity does not concern the form of appearance and the basic requirements for something appearing but is simply the general necessity$_1$, which is shared with everything else in general.

To sum up, while contending that everything is necessary$_1$, Severino also countenances narrower instances of necessity$_2$. The negations of strictly logical self-contradiction and of what contradicts objective general laws are necessary$_2$, while the realm of the mere factual is necessary$_1$ but not necessary$_2$ (it is contingent$_2$).

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[80] The translation is mine.

6. Facts, Necessitism, and Permanentism in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*

In §§2-5, we have discussed the peculiarities of Severino's and Williamson's respective varieties of permanentism and necessitism and, in particular, how they account for the reality of temporal becoming and modal contingency. We will summarize the main similarities and differences in the conclusion (§8). This section and the following (§§6-7) look to two other extant strains of necessitism/permanentism in the tradition of analytic metaphysics and compare them with Severino's (and Williamson's) doctrines so as to further situate Severino's approach with respect to analytic metaphysics. For the sake of relative brevity, the presentations of these two other strains are quicker.

First, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922), which – as we have seen in §1 –Williamson explicitly mentions as a historical precedent of his necessitism. Wittgenstein is indeed committed – in the words of (Williamson 2013, sec. 8.1) – to a "necessary framework of objects." The simple objects (*Gegenstände* in German) "make up the substance of the world" (*Tractatus* 2.021), and "are what is unalterable and subsistent" (2.0271).[81] No matter how different it is from the actual world, an imagined world shares with the actual world a form, that consists of the objects (2.022-2.023). The imagined worlds of the *Tractatus* are often seen as forerunners of twentieth-century possible worlds semantics.[82] Objects are, in this sense, both permanent and necessary existents (necessary since they are common to each possible/imagined world).

This holds at least if we keep fixed the concept of existence and, thus, apply to the *Tractatus* Williamson's idea (coming from Quine (1948) and for a long time dominant in analytic philosophy) that existence is expressed by the particular/existential quantifier of first-order logic.[83] Indeed, given a true atomic proposition of the *Tractatus*, it is possible to replace any name denoting an object with a variable and bind this variable with a particular/existential quantifier, thereby obtaining a true existential claim concerning that object. Given any false atomic proposition, it is analogously possible to apply a negation to it, replace any name denoting an object with a vari-

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[81] The quoted passages of the *Tractatus* come from the translation of David Pears and Brian McGuinness.

[82] See Copeland (2002) for a historical reconstruction and Armstrong (1989) for a theory of modality inspired by the *Tractatus*.

[83] In §2, we have seen that Williamson extends the Quinean approach from first-order quantifiers to quantifiers of any order.

able, and bind this variable with a particular/existential quantifier, thereby obtaining, also in this case, a true existential claim concerning this object.

States of affairs (*Sachverhalte*) are also a pivotal category of entities in the metaphysics and semantics of the *Tractatus*. They are possible combinations of objects and are pictured by atomic propositions. The possible combinations of objects are determined by the forms or natures of the objects (2.01, 20123, 2.0141), so that the totality of the objects determines the totality of the states of affairs (this totality is the logical space; 2.0124, 2.014). This means that, since objects are permanent and necessary, states of affairs are permanent and necessary too. The *Tractatus* does not countenance any other kind of quantification beyond first-order quantification in the syntactical position of a name. Thus, it is impossible to directly apply Williamson's conception of existence to anything except objects in the metaphysics of the *Tractatus*. Nonetheless, the totality of states of affairs is stable across times and worlds, no matter that they are not possible values of any quantifier in the rigidly delimited language of the *Tractatus*. If less bigoted, more flexible languages (such as Williamson's higher-order languages discussed in §2) are considered, then Wittgenstein's states of affairs come out as necessary existents.

As argued in Frascolla (2021, sec. 4), in the context of the metaphysics of the *Tractatus*, existence can instead be plausibly construed as participation in an *actual fact*. Given that the world is, according to the *Tractatus*, the *totality of the facts* (1.1), existence can be legitimately seen as a form of presence in the world, that is, of participation in one of the facts of which the world is the totality. Given this understanding of existence, objects *are not* necessary existents, since the *Tractatus* explicitly admits the possibility that an object does not participate in any actual fact. In the jargon of the *Tractatus*, an object's logical space can be empty (2.013) so that an object can participate in one or more facts in a world but in no fact in another world .

However, in order to make the metaphysics of the *Tractatus* comparable with Williamson's (and Severino's) theories, it is arguably preferable to hold still the Quine-Williamson understanding of existence in terms of quantification. Under this *proviso*, objects and states of affairs are necessary existents.

Facts are, anyhow, why the necessitism of the *Tractatus* is very different from Williamson's and Severino's varieties. Facts are subsisting states of affairs. Every imagined world – every possible world, in contemporary terms – is a set of facts, that is, of those states of affairs that would subsist if things were in that way. Thus, the domain of facts varies from world to world: it is contingent. Facts are truth-making entities: each of them makes true an

atomic proposition, and contingent molecular propositions are also made true by combinations of the subsistence and non-subsistence of states of affairs (where subsisting states of affairs are facts). The facts of the *Tractatus* have the specific purpose of tracking the contingency. The above-quoted sentence about objects being unalterable and subsistent is also (in its second half) about the changing and unstable configurations of objects, namely the facts: "Objects are what is unalterable and subsistent; their configuration is what is changing and unstable" (2.0271).

Williamson does not admit truth-making facts in its ontology precisely because they are incompatible with necessitism. Severino admits facts in his ontology but contends that they exist necessarily (at least in the sense of necessity$_1$, given the distinctions introduced in §5). The facts of the *Tractatus* are contingent truth-makers, which is a difference with respect to both Williamson and Severino.

One can wonder whether Wittgenstein's permanentism about objects (that are said to be "unalterable" and thus are never altered in time) can also be extended not only to states of affairs but also to facts. Given that facts are said to be "changing and unstable," a negative answer may seem obvious. However, a hint in a different direction comes from the thesis that "space, time, colour (being coloured) are forms of objects" (2.0251). According to the influential phenomenalistic interpretation of the early Wittgenstein's metaphysics in Frascolla (2004), this section means that some objects *are* times. They are repeatable phenomenal qualities, which can be combined with repeatable phenomenal qualities of space and other phenomenal qualities of minimal perceivable items in the realm of a specific sense, such as sight or hearing, similarly to what happens in the system of Goodman (1951). Every combination of a space, a time, and a color[84] could then be a state of affairs in the visual realm of sight. The subject involved in these experiences is not a specific empirical subject but a broadly Kantian transcendental subject. A state of affairs of this kind subsists and is, therefore, a contingent fact, if that location of the visual space is of that color at that time.

This means that times are components of Wittgenstein's facts, are within them, similarly to what we have conjectured about Severino's permanentism in §4. This allows Wittgenstein's facts to be analogously permanent: suppose that, at a certain time t_7, the location s_4 of the visual field of the transcen-

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[84] As Frascolla (2004) clarifies, colors are not objects, according to Wittgenstein, but should be further analyzed in more basic phenomenal qualities. Here, I lay this complication aside for the sake of simplicity.

dental subject is green; if this is the case, then at any time this fact (the fact that s_4 is green at t_7, a fact that is about time t_7 and has time t_7 among its components), exists. In this sense, Wittgenstein's facts are permanent entities, although this consequence is never drawn in the *Tractatus*, which in contrast explicitly claims – as we have seen above – that facts are, unlike objects, "changing and unstable" (2.0271).

7. Karofsky's Necessitarianism

To further situate Severino's necessitism and permanentism in the contemporary analytic debate about these doctrines, it is also helpful to consider the recent *A Case for Necessitarianism* by Amy Karofsky (2021). The blurb on the back cover presents this book as "the first detailed and focused defense of necessitarianism," *i.e.*, "the view that absolutely nothing about the world could have been otherwise in any way whatsoever."

By using a different term, Karofsky explicitly distinguishes *necessitarianism* from Williamson's *necessitism*, according to which necessarily everything is such that necessarily something is identical to it or – more simply – necessarily everything necessarily exists. Karofsky criticizes Williamson for the admission of some contingency, regarding, in particular, how the necessary existents are. The huge theoretical benefits of necessitarianism come, according to Karofsky, only if possibility, actuality, and necessity are extensionally identified at every level.

Karofsky explicitly includes facts among necessary entities, for example, in the following passage:

> Thus, all of the following count as entities: objects, properties, events, facts, states of affairs, laws, propositions, truth-values of propositions, and, in general, anything that is, was, or will be. So, a necessary entity or a necessity is anything that actually exists, occurs, manifests, obtains, holds, is in fact the case, or is true and could not have been otherwise in any way whatsoever. (Karofsky 2021, 2)

There is no need either to follow Williamson in excluding truth-making facts from the ontology or to follow Wittgenstein in endowing facts with the exclusive status of contingent entities. Karofsky (as Severino) countenances necessary truth-making facts and contends that also the truths that are necessitated by the existence of these facts are necessary.

Karofsky's and Severino's approaches also have other striking general similarities, even though Karofsky never mentions Severino. Karofsky

considers Parmenides a forerunner of her necessitarianism, for one thing (Karofsky 2021, 7-9). Moreover, one of the arguments in support of Karofsky's necessitarianism is that there cannot be any unactualized possibility because unactualized possibilities are contradictory (Karofsky 2021, sec. 3.3). Consider a gray cat and try to describe the counterfactual scenario in which it is orange. In this attempt, you end up saying "The cat is orange and not-gray". Given that the cat is gray, nothing stops you at this point from also saying "The cat that is gray is orange and not-gray", which is a contradiction. What you are then expressing is not a possible scenario but a contradictory and thus impossible scenario.

Any attempt to describe a counterfactual scenario ends up describing an impossible scenario. This squares with necessitarianism, according to which any falsity is necessarily false (and so is an impossibility), as much as any truth is necessarily true. There is here an apparent similarity with Severino's idea that the simple hypothesis that what is is not (even if embedded in a more complex logical framework, as we have seen in §3 with respect to the principle of the excluded middle) leads to an unacceptable contradiction.

However, there are also at least two prominent differences. The *first* difference is that Karofsky is an eliminativist about modality. The collapse of necessity, actuality, and possibility with one another is seen as a significant advantage of necessitarianism since it warrants a vast gain in ideological economy (Karofsky 2021, sec. 3.5). Also, the distinctions between different varieties of modalities (logical, metaphysical, nomological, deontic, and so forth) become simply useless, and can be dispensed with (§4.2). All the framework of ways things might be, unactualized possibilities, and possible worlds is expunged from philosophical language for the best, and the expunction is compared to that of phlogiston from science (135).

Karofsky only concedes that it is sometimes appropriate to talk about possibility in order to express a lack of knowledge about actuality ("Possibly it is raining," uttered when the speaker feels a rain-like noise on the roof but is unable to look outside and identify the cause), or about a certain concept ("Possibly an inorganic machine is conscious," uttered when the speaker is exploring the concepts involved and still lacks a complete understanding of them; 136): also in these cases no epistemic modality is expressed but only the lack of knowledge itself. In contrast, as we have seen in §5, Severino offers hints towards the possibility of drawing various interesting modal distinctions – delimiting different varieties of necessity$_2$ – within the unrestricted realm of necessity$_1$.

A *second* difference is that Karofsky is not a permanentist. The collapse

of actuality, necessity, and possibility does not make the universe static.[85] In general, Karofsky thinks that a virtue of necessitarianism is to satisfy a form of naturalistic disdain for modal distinctions, and this naturalistic disdain does not concern the fact that reality continuously changes: it changes, and whatever concerns these changes is as necessary as everything else. Changes concern both the existence of entities (they begin and cease to exist) and how entities are (entities acquire and lose properties, begin to entertain and stop entertaining relations with one another).

In contrast, Williamson is a permanentist, but, as we have seen in §2, his stance only concerns existence and is therefore perfectly compatible with the reality of becoming, where becoming consists of changes in how things are. To repeat, the detachment between the necessity of the existence of entities and the widespread contingency of how entities are requires Williamson to exclude facts and truth-making entities in general from the ontology. Severino is a permanentist too (§4), but this does not make his universe static, if times – as we have conjectured – are components of facts, and eternal, permanent facts concern specific times, so that the fact that the temperature is sweltering in Rome on 23 August 2023 is eternal.

7. Conclusion

The analysis in §§2-5 shows that the most important similarities between Williamson's permanentism and necessitism and Severino's permanentism and necessitism are the following.

a) They agree that absolutely everything necessarily and permanently exists;

b) They agree in introducing a more specific feature that distinguishes what merely exists from what belongs to concrete reality (this feature being concreteness for Williamson and belonging to appearance or to the transcendental event for Severino).

On the other hand, the most important differences are the following.

c) Williamson thinks that necessitism and permanentism are incompatible with the existence of facts and truth-makers in general; on the other hand, Severino explicitly countenances facts as permanent and necessary existents.

d) The reality of becoming and contingency concerns for Williamson how entities are; for Severino, how entities are is permanent and necessary and the reality of becoming concerns the fact that entities (including facts)

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[85] See, in particular, the claim that necessitarianism is compatible with a vast range of philosophical contentions about time at Karofsky (2021, 18, fn. 25).

enter the realm of appearances and go out of it; contingency is real for Severino only for specific modal notions belonging to the sphere of what we have called necessity$_2$, while no contingency$_1$ is admitted.

The approaches of Wittgenstein (§6) and Karofsky (§7) are interestingly different with respect to a)-d). Wittgenstein disagrees with a), insofar as, at least once we lay aside qualms about the peculiar understanding of existence in the *Tractatus*, facts should be classified as contingent existents. As regards b), any object can fail to be a constituent of any fact (its logical space can be empty): its being a constituent of a fact is Wittgenstein's specific feature at stake in b). For what concerns c) and d), contingent facts account for the reality of becoming and contingency, which marks a pivotal difference with respect to both Williamson and Severino.

Karofsky's necessitarianism wholeheartedly endorses a), but only as regards necessity. It instead has no use for b): everything is actual/necessary/possible and no subtler distinction is countenanced or even discussed. Karofsky concurs with Severino about c), as concerns the necessity of facts. Karofsky is not committed to the permanence of facts and permanentism in general. Thus, as regards d), she needs no special account of the reality of becoming. On the other hand, she uncompromisingly denies the reality of contingency.

The comparison between Severino's theses about necessitism, permanentism, and facts and partially analogous theses in the analytic tradition of metaphysics turns out to be rich and interesting. At least for what concerns these topics, there is no evidence of incommensurability or incomparability between Severino and analytic metaphysics. There are some obvious differences in the style and philosophical jargon, as well as in some contextual elements. For example, Severino, among the authors discussed in this paper, pays most attention to the practical consequences of necessitism and permanentism, as regards the role of human beings in the necessary and eternal reality.[86] Moreover, there is an almost total historical separation. Neither Williamson nor Karofsky seem to have any information about Severino's works. On the other hand, Severino's rich historical references hardly include, at least in the essays considered in this paper, any author in the analytic tradition.

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[86] Many of Severino's works discuss these consequences. They are, for example, at center stage in Severino (1968a). Also Williamson's and Karofsky's works include short sections about the consequences of necessitism and necessitarianism in the practical sphere. In mere two pages, Williamson (2013, sec. 1.8) discusses moral problems about birth and death (which, for a necessitist, are not instances of beginning and ceasing to exist). In analogously mere six pages, Karofsky (2021, sec. 4.6) deals with free will and moral responsibility in the context of necessitarianism.

Nonetheless, it is relatively easy to compare the theories, as well as the arguments in support of them. The outcome of the comparison is that Severino's varieties of necessitism and permanentism – in particular as regards the role of facts in them – are not reducible to the other theories we have considered in this paper and surely deserve to be further scrutinized by contemporary necessitists and permanentists (as well as by contingentists and temporaryists, who are interested in a rich and original form of the adversary theories).[87]

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Severino as a Temporarist Static Eternalist

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We distinguish three debates within current analytic philosophy of time: a first one regarding the passage of time, where static and dynamic views oppose each other; a second one concerning the existence or non-existence of temporal entities, where presentism and eternalism are main contenders; a third one about permanence, where the conflict is between permanentism and temporarism. We then consider how Emanuele Severino's Parmenidean view may be related to such debates and argue that it is best viewed as a kind of temporarist static eternalism.

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99

1. Introduction

The reflection on being, non-being, and becoming carried out by Emanuele Severino over a period of more than fifty years seems to have interesting similarities both in themes and arguments with contemporary analytic metaphysics of time. Those similarities may not be easy to spot at a first glance, due to the vast differences in language, theoretical framework, and historical-philosophical background between Severino and analytic thinkers. Bringing them to light therefore requires some effort, and our effort in this contribution is aimed primarily at mapping Severino's metaphysical thesis of the *eternity of being* – to which we shall refer as the *Parmenidean view* – into the views held within contemporary analytic metaphysics of time. In doing so, we also tackle the parallel issue of identifying in analytic terms its opposite view: the view of the *temporality of being*, which Severino claims to have informed all manifestations of western culture after Parmenides – and which we shall refer to as the *nihilistic view*. More specifically, we shall try to match these two views with those formulated within three different, but related, analytic debates: the dynamic time/static time debate, concerning the reality of temporal passage; the debate in temporal ontology, concerning the existence of temporal things outside the present, i.e., in the past or in the future; and the permanentism/temporarism debate, concerning the omnitemporal or temporary existence of the things existing in time. Our only purpose is pointing out those components of the Parmenidean view and the nihilistic view that may be identified with the analytic views about the three aforementioned themes; we shall not consider the arguments adduced by Severino or by analytic philosophers to support their respective views; likewise, we shall entirely disregard further interesting themes related to the nature of time, such as persistence, open future, and free will, where there also seem to be correspondences between Severino and analytic philosophers of time.

Our contribution is organised as follows. In §2 we offer a quick overview of the three above-mentioned debates, describing the central topic and the positions in each. In so doing, we shall aim at an intelligible, though not fully accurate, exposition: there are very tricky definitional issues involved in properly characterising the themes and the positions in those debates, and we shall try to stay away from them as much as possible. In §3 we identify the place of the Parmenidean view within temporal ontology and the permanentism/temporarism debate: we argue that Severino's view amounts to a form of *eternalism*, i.e., roughly, the view that past, present, and future things all exist, and that this view is associated with *temporarism*, i.e., roughly, the view that things do not exist all times. In §4 we compare the Parmenidean view to the views within the debate on the passage of time: we argue that Severino's view is best interpreted as *static*, i.e., as denying that time passes; more specifically, but less confidently, we argue that Severino's view of time qualifies as *B-theoretical*, i.e., as one according to which time, albeit static, features real succession in the form of *later than* relations holding among times. We thus conclude, in §5, that Severino's Parmenidean view is best interpreted as a conjunction of temporarism, eternalism, and the static view of time, probably a B-theoretical one. Our interpretation is based on the following texts from the author, which we deem particularly instructive about his metaphysical views on time: *Ritornare a Parmenide*, *Poscritto*, and *Risposta ai critici*, all included in *Essenza del nichilismo*; *Destino della necessità*, *La legna e la cenere*, and *Tautótēs*.[88]

2. Three debates in the analytic metaphysics of time

A crucial notion, at least according to the authors of this contribution, needed in order to adequately express certain claims and distinctions that are characteristic of the metaphysics of time is that of tenseless predication. Ordinary language predication is typically tensed, i.e., it qualifies the attribute instantiation it expresses (say, of the instantiation of the property of existence) as past ("Socrates existed"), present ("Joe Biden exists"), or future ("A human outpost on Mars will exist"). However, tenseless predication allows to express an attribute instantiation without qualifying it as past, present, or future, or indeed in time at all. Tenseless predication is usually rendered by associating the adverb "tenselessly" to a grammatically present-tensed predication, as in, say, "Socrates tenselessly exists" or "Socrates does

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[88] All translations of the quotes are ours.

not tenselessly exist" (to mean "it is not the case that Socrates tenselessly exists"); for a more streamlined exposition, we express tenseless predication in bold and drop the adverb "tenselessly", writing "Socrates **exists**" to mean "Socrates tenselessly exists" and "Socrates **does** not **exist**" to mean "Socrates does not tenselessly exist". One thing worth noting is that tenseless predication is compatible with the addition of temporal information; hence, it is perfectly meaningful to claim, for instance, "Socrates **exists** at some time in 410 B.C." or "Socrates **exists** in the past" (although these claims are true according to certain theories, and false according to others).[89]

The first debate concerns the reality of the passage of time and is constituted by the contraposition of two main views, the dynamic and the static views of time.[90] According to the *dynamic view of time*, or *A-theory*, there is a metaphysically distinctive property, which may be aptly called *presentness*, that (i) sets apart one single time (together with its content, i.e., what is temporally located at that time) from all other times (and their contents), and (ii) is transient, i.e., it is possessed in succession by all times (and their contents). So, to say that time is dynamic, i.e., that time passes, amounts to saying that what is present is metaphysically special (in some sense), that only one time is present, and that, when a certain time is present, no other time is, although every time is sooner or later present (every time is future at first, then present, and finally past). According to the static view of time, there is no passage of time in the sense described above: there is no such metaphysically distinctive property that one time possesses at the exclusion of all others and that all times possess in succession. The only metaphysically relevant notion of present available within a static theory of time is one *relative to times* and amounts to being located at a certain time: for example, the event consisting in Socrates's drinking hemlock is present at a certain time of 399 B.C. in the sense that it is located at that time. But presentness in this sense is neither exclusive of a single time nor transient. In this sense, the static notion of presentness is analogous to the ordinary notion of spatial presence: every place is present for those spatially located in those places; in the same manner, every time is temporally present for those who are temporally located in those times.[91]

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[89] For more information about tenseless predication see Torrengo (2012) and Graziani & Orilia (2021).

[90] References for the dynamic and the static views of time will be offered below, while describing the specific forms of either.

[91] For the sake of simplicity, we set aside elements from relativistic physics that have been incorporated in certain theories of time. For more information about the impact of modern physics on the philosophy of time see Dainton (2010) and Savitt (2021).

Both the dynamic view and the static view come in various forms. The versions of the dynamic view of time – also called *A-theories* – are distinguished from each other by their ways of specifying the nature of presentness and, correspondingly, of the passage of time, and these differences are tied to temporal ontology, as we shall see in a moment. On the contrary, the differences within the static view concern primarily the ways in which times (and their respective contents) are ordered, and thus do not concern temporal ontology. In this connection, let us distinguish two different ordering of times: B-relational and C-relational. In a *B-relational ordering*, times are related by the B-relation of precedence (or succession): every time is earlier than (or later than) any other time; in a *C-relational ordering*, times are related by the C-relation of temporal betweenness: every time is between two other times. The static view has three forms: the *B-theory*, which takes times to be ordered B-relationally as well as C-relationally; the *C-theory*, or undirected theory of time, which takes times to be ordered only C-relationally; and the *timeless theory*, or unordered theory of time, which takes them to be ordered neither B-relationally nor C-relationally (as will be noted below, the B- and C-relational orderings of times, while essential to some static universes, are not exclusive of them and can be found also in some forms of the dynamic view of time).[92]

The second debate is the one in temporal ontology, which is concerned with the ontic status, i.e., the condition of existence or non-existence, of non-present temporal entities, i.e., past and future ones, for instance: material objects, such as Julius Caesar's body and a future human outpost on Mars; events, such as Ceasar's assassination and the first landing of humans on Mars; times, such as the time at which Caesar died and the time at which the first human foot will touch the surface of Mars. More precisely, the issue at the heart of temporal ontology is whether there **exist** entities that are *temporally located outside the present*, thus *in the past or in the future*. The main positions in the debate are three:

– *classic presentism*: nothing **exists** that is located outside the present (in other terms, only what is located in the present, i.e., what presently exists, **exists**);[93]

– *classic growing block theory*, also knowns as *pastism* or *no-futurism*:

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[92] The B-theory is defended by Russell (1914), Oaklander (1984), Smart (2008), Mellor (1998); the C-theory by Farr (2020); the timeless theory by Barbour (1999).

[93] Classic presentism is defended by Prior (1972), Crisp (2003), Tallant (2009), and Zimmerman (2008).

what existed **exists** and is located in the past, whereas nothing **exists** that is located in the future;[94]

– *eternalism*: what existed **exists** and is located in the past, and what will exist **exists** and is located in the future.

There are also further views, which are intermediate between the ones above:

– *degree presentism*: what existed **exists** and is located in the past, and what will exist **exists** and is located in the future; however, what is located outside the present is less real than the present, in the sense that it lacks those attributes that make things concrete (colour, mass, spatial extension, etc.);[95]

– *dead past growing block theory*: what existed **exists** and is located in the past but lacks mental properties (such as consciousness and sentience), whereas nothing **exists** that is located in the future.[96]

Let us consider, by way of example, two non-present entities, a past event such as Socrates's drinking hemlock, *d*, and a future event such as the first landing of humans on Mars, *l*. According to classic presentism, neither *d* or *l* **exist**, although the former did exist, and the latter will; according to the classic growing block theory, *d* **exists**, whereas *l* **does** not; according to eternalism, both *d* and *l* **exists**; according to degree presentism both *d* and *l* **exist**, but they, and the object involved in them (Socrates, a bowl of hemlock, the humans landing, the spaceship employed), enjoy a lower degree of reality compared to the present; according to the dead past growing block theory, while *l* **does** not **exist** (though it will exist), *d* **exists** but Socrates lacks any mentality.

There are significant conceptual ties connecting the debate on the reality of temporal passage and the one on the ontic status of the non-present, and taking some of these ties into consideration may shed some light on both debates. The static view of time – in all of its forms: B-theoretical, C-theoretical, and timeless – *entails* eternalism: if no time is ever metaphysically different from the others (i.e., never enjoys presentness in the A-theoretical sense), then all times have the same ontic status (since a difference in ontic status would certainly qualify as a metaphysically relevant difference); and since at least one time **exists**, namely the present, then all times **exist**. Unlike the static view, the dynamic one is compatible with all

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[94] The classic growing block theory is defended by Tooley (1997) and Correia & Rosenkranz (2018).

[95] Degree presentism is elaborated by Smith (2002).

[96] The dead past growing block theory is defended by Forrest (2004) and Forbes (2016).

of the ontological theories described: classic presentism, classic growing block theory, eternalism, and the views in between. In fact, all of these views, except for eternalism, are inherently dynamic or A-theoretical (they do not have any static versions). As mentioned previously, the differences between the various A-theories concern primarily their ways of specifying the nature of presentness. In classic presentism, the dynamic property possessed by the present is existence. In the classical growing block theory, it is being the edge of the existent, i.e., the last temporal slice of the world that has come into existence. In the dead past growing block theory, it is being the edge of the existent and the only temporal location (capable of) hosting mentality. In the dynamic, or A-theoretical, form of eternalism, usually called *moving spotlight theory*, the distinctive dynamic property possessed by the present consists in a primitive property of presentness, while past and future times possess, respectively, the primitive properties of pastness and futurity (remember that in eternalism, all times are ontically on a par). Primitive pastness, presentness, and futurity are called *A-properties*, and their instantiations by times, events, and objects *A-facts*.[97] In degree presentism, the dynamic distinctive property of the present consists in the possession of the maximum degree of reality, or existence.

In the dynamic view of time the possession of presentness by times and their contents is essentially transitory, since presentness passes from one time to the next: this is the passage of time. Hence, depending on the distinctive way in which presentness in each form of the A-theory is thought of, the passage of time also takes a distinctive form. This leads us to another theme worth a deeper analysis: how the various theories connect to ontic becoming and its forms.

Broadly understood, *ontic becoming* is the coming into existence and going out of existence of temporal things. Ontic becoming may be seen as having two possible directions: from non-existence to existence, i.e., coming into existence or beginning to exist, and from existence to non-existence, i.e., going out of existence or ceasing to exist. This broad characterisation, however, can be specified in two very different ways: as locational, or time-relative, and as absolute.

Locational, or *time-relative*, *ontic becoming* concerns the temporal locations of things: it happens if a thing that exists *at some time* does not exist *at some other time*, where the locution "at" is understood as expressing the

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[97] The moving spotlight theory is defended by Schlesinger (1980) and Cameron (2015).

temporal location of the entity we are talking about: if something exists at a certain time, then that thing is temporally located at that time (we take this to hold also for the times themselves: each time is located at itself; for example, the time of Socrates's death is temporally located at the time of Socrates's death). This form of becoming is compatible with all views in temporal ontology, whether dynamic or static. For example, Ceasar's crossing of the Rubicon existed at some time of January 10, 49 B.C. but does not exist at some later time; so, it has undergone locational ontic becoming, more specifically, from-existence-to-non-existence locational ontic becoming. Clearly, locational ontic becoming is tracked by the alethic change of present-tensed existential statements (or the proposition they express), e.g., "Dodos presently exist", a sentence that was true in 1598 and is now, in 2023, false. As a consequence, the locational ontic becoming of a thing may be seen also as a change in the extension of the predicate "presently exists", which has that thing as a member at some time and not at some other time. This way of putting things in terms of change of truth values of sentences and extensions of predicates, although a bit concocted, is useful to compare locational ontic becoming to the absolute form of ontic becoming.

Absolute ontic becoming is a much more radical form of ontic becoming and amounts to coming to be a member, and ceasing to be a member, of the ontological domain, and thus of the extension of the predicate "**exists**". Even if it is *now* true that a certain thing **exists**, that thing does not have to exist now; this means that, in general, the fact that an affirmative tenseless existential sentence is true at a time does *not* imply that the thing of which existence is tenselessly predicated exists at that time. Hence, if the ontological domain *now* has a certain thing as its member, that thing need not exist now (although, of course, it may). If, at a certain time, a certain thing has *absolutely ceased to exist*, then it is not simply the case that it no longer exists (which would amount to it having ceased to exist in the locational sense), but more radically that that thing at that time is no longer a member of the ontological domain, i.e., at that time it is no longer true that that entity **exists**, whereas this was true at an earlier time. Analogous considerations apply to the case of things that have *absolutely begun to exist*. So, the absolute ontic becoming of things is tracked by the alethic change of tenseless existential claims about them, such as "Dodos **exist**"; indeed, the very characterisation of absolute ontic becoming in terms of change in content of the ontological domain relies on the ontological domain's having been defined by a tenseless membership condition ("**exists**").

Absolute ontic becoming is essential to all forms of the dynamic view: all of them involve the absolute ontic becoming of entities of one kind or another. In fact, the very passage of time is a form of absolute ontic becoming concerning, at the very least, what might be called *facts of presentness*, i.e., those facts consisting in an entity's being present. In this connection it must be noted that the succession involved in temporal passage – the one we express when saying that a certain time is present and *after that* another time is present – is not, and cannot be, the B-relation of precedence/succession: the fact consisting of the presentness of a certain time and the fact consisting of the presentness of a different time (earlier or later) cannot be in any relation, exactly because times come to be present one by one and thus the ontological domain never jointly includes two facts of presentness of two different times. The succession that constitutes temporal passage is precisely a *process of absolute ontic becoming* whereby, of two entities, one absolutely goes out of existence and the other absolutely comes into existence. We may call this process of succession *dynamic succession*, and say, of two entities partaking in such a process – times, facts of presentness, A-facts, events, etc. – that one *dynamically precedes* or *follows* the other. In sum, whereas all forms of the static view entail the denial of any form of absolute ontic becoming, a crucial aspect of *all* forms of the dynamic view is that they involve absolute ontic becoming with regard to some type or other of entities: times, A-facts, physical events, mental events, concrete things, etc. For example, in classic presentism, entities of all kinds undergo absolute ontic becoming in both directions: future entities absolutely come into existence as they become present and absolutely cease to exist as they become past; in the classic growing block theory, future entities absolutely come into existence as they become present and do not absolutely cease to exist, so that the past constitutes a spatiotemporal block that keeps growing temporally; in the moving spotlight theory, objects (such as chairs, mountains, atoms) and events (someone's fall from a chair, someone's climbing of a mountain, a case of radioactive decay) are immune from absolute ontic becoming, whereas A-facts of presentness absolutely come in and go out of existence. Thus, the two forms of ontic becoming – locational and absolute – are compatible, and the two forms of succession – B-relational and dynamic – are also compatible. In fact, according to all forms of the A-theory except for classic presentism, the world includes both forms of ontic becoming and both forms of succession.

Let us now turn to the third debate, the one between temporarism and permanentism. *Permanentism* is the view that always everything always ex-

ists, though possibly changing from concrete to abstract, or vice versa (for example, Napoleon exists as concrete at all times of his life and as abstract at any other time).[98] We take this to mean that, for every time, all entities that exist at that time also exist at any other time. *Temporarism* is the denial of permanentism, and thus amounts to the view that not all entities that ever existed, or presently exist, or will exist always exist, so that some of them are temporary: they do not always exist. It is of the outmost importance not to confuse or conflate temporal ontology and the permanentism/temporarism debate. Surely enough, both debates concern ontology and more specifically the existence of things in relation to time, but in two very different manners. Temporal ontology is about whether (some or all of) what existed or will exist also ***exists** outside the present*, whereas the temporarism/permanentism debate is about whether all that existed or will exists *always exists* (though at some times in non-concrete form). One way to appreciate differences and similarities between the two debates, and the positions in them, might be by considering the implications of each in connection to ontic becoming in its two forms.

While locational ontic becoming is, as previously noticed, consistent with all positions in temporal ontology, the issue of its reality seems to be at the very heart of the permanentism/temporarism debate, with temporarism affirming it and permanentism denying it. However, what permanentism actually involves about locational ontic becoming should be considered with a bit more attention. Permanentism is supposed not to conflict with our ordinary experience of the world; for this reason, permanentism is associated with the additional view that things, although omnitemporally existing, can undergo a change regarding concreteness and abstractness: what would be interpreted, from the perspective of common sense, as a locational ontic becoming is in reality a mere a locational change from abstractness to concreteness and from concreteness to abstractness. As we see it, however, some locational ontic becoming is implied by this: a thing's having acquired or lost its concreteness at a certain time involves a thing's concreteness having locationally begun to, or ceased, to exist. For example, Julius Caesar and the event of his assassination existed as concrete, and still exist, albeit as abstract and thus as no longer having the kind of properties that made him once perceivable. It would seem plausible to think that the concreteness and the abstractness of an entity are two different entities, although they may inhere in one self-same un-

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[98] See Williamson (2013).

derlying constituent; it would therefore seem that permanentism involves a form of locational ontic becoming after all, namely one about facts of concreteness and abstractness.

Absolute ontic becoming is denied by static (B-theoretical, C-theoretical, and timeless) eternalism, in both directions and with regard to all types of existents, and it is selectively affirmed or denied by the other views in temporal ontology with regard to existents of specific types and in specific directions. Classic presentism admits of absolute ontic becoming in both directions and with respect to any kind of entity; more specifically, in classic presentism, locational ontic becoming and absolute ontic becoming proceed in parallel: since only the present **exists**, whatever begins, or ceases, to presently exist thus enters, or exits, the ontological domain. Non-presentist dynamic theories present us with more complex situations. In the classic growing block theory, times, objects, and ordinary events absolutely begin to exist as they come to be present, but they do not absolutely cease to exist as they cease to be present: they simply become part of the past and remain members of the ontological domain forever. Some entities, however, still absolutely cease to exist by ceasing to be present, such as the fact consisting of a particular time's or event's being the edge of the growing block. For example, while the event of Ceasar's crossing of the Rubicon **exists** (in the past), the fact of its being at the edge of the existent **does** not **exist**: it has ceased to exist not only locationally, but also absolutely. Similar considerations hold for other theories in connection to certain types of entities: A-facts of presentness in the moving spotlight theory, mental events in the dead past growing block theory, the concreteness of things in degree presentism: they undergo absolute ontic becoming, not only locational ontic becoming, and in both directions.

What about absolute ontic becoming within the permanentism/temporarism debate? While temporarism is clearly neutral about the reality or unreality of absolute ontic becoming, permanentism, as we saw, is committed to the denial of the absolute ontic becoming *only* of the things bearing the properties of concreteness and abstractness, whereas their very concreteness and abstractness are *allowed* to absolutely come into and go out of existence: whether or not facts of concreteness and abstractness undergo absolute ontic becoming, and in which direction, depend on how the world is from the point of view of temporal ontology. While static eternalism entails the stability of the whole ontological domain, permanentism *per se* entails the stability across time of only part of the ontological domain.

3. Severino as a temporarist eternalist

How does Severino's view of the eternality of being, the Parmenidean view, and the rival view of the temporality of being, the nihilistic view, fit within the picture we outlined in the previous section? Let us consider first how they fit within the debates in temporal ontology and about permanence.

The Parmenidean and nihilistic views are presented by Severino as concerning first and foremost the nature of ontic becoming (in Severino's terminology, simply *becoming*, *divenire*), rather than the ontic status of the past and the future. While the two topics are obviously inseparable, Severino is more directly concerned with the former. Nihilistic becoming is defined "as the annihilation of being, or as the emerging of being from nothing" (*Poscritto*, p. 85)[99] or, similarly, as "a process in which being at first was not, then arrives, and then again vanishes" (*Ritornare a Parmenide*, p. 28).[100] This view of ontic becoming, according to Severino, inadvertently relies on an identification of being with nothing – whence the label "nihilism" – and lies at the roots of all aspects of western culture after Parmenides. The Parmenidean view is presented as a denial of the reality of nihilistic becoming, namely as the view that "being does not come out of nothing and does not return to nothing" (*Ritornare a Parmenide*, p. 28, *Poscritto*, p. 63),[101] and thus as the affirmation that being is eternal, i.e., that every being or entity (*ente*) is eternal: "Every thing, no matter how contemptible, if it is a thing, is eternal. This sheet of paper, this pen, this room, these colours and sounds and shades and shadows of the things and of the soul are eternal" (*Ritornare a Parmenide*, p. 28).[102]

As they stand, such concise formulations, which with slight differences occur throughout the works by Severino that we have taken into account, are liable to different interpretations. As a first step, even before coming to our main interpretative issue, one may wonder whether these views should be understood as literally regarding the existence *of ordinary things themselves* (such as paper sheets, pens, colours, sounds, etc.) or rather, as one might be tempted to think, the essences of those things. Fortunately, this doubt can

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[99] "[C]ome l'annullamento dell'essere, o come l'emergere dell'essere dal nulla."

[100] "[U]n processo in cui l'essere prima non era, poi sopraggiunge, e poi nuovamente svanisce."

[101] "[L]'essere non esce dal nulla e non ritorna al nulla."

[102] "[O]gni cosa, per quanto spregevole, se è una cosa è eterna. Questo foglio, questa penna, questa stanza, questi colori e suoni e sfumature e ombre delle cose e dell'animo sono eterni."

be easily dispelled. In *Destino della necessità*, Severino makes it clear that his Parmenidean view does not simply state the eternality of the essences of things, but of the very things populating the world. There, after mentioning "the blue sky" as an example of an eternal being, he clarifies as follows (*Destino della necessità*, p. 156):

> And "the blue sky" here is not an expression that indicates the blue sky as universal – and which can therefore refer to blue skies of summer, or winter, of the South and of the North, those of the morning and of midday: "the blue sky" here refers to the blueness of the sky considered in its unrepeatability and singularity – for example, the blue sky that today, a day of May, wraps the forms and the colours of Venice.[103]

The same point is made in *La legna e la cenere* (p. 170), where Severino vigorously rejects the charge that he had silently switched, in some of his works, from his original view of the eternality of the things to the much less radical view of the eternality of the essences of the things. Hence, it is entirely safe to assume that in arguing for the eternality of things, and rejecting the temporality of things, Severino really means what he says.

That being cleared up, we may come to our main interpretative dilemma: are the Parmenidean view and the nihilistic view best interpreted within the temporal ontology debate or the temporarism/permanentism debate? Taken in their ordinary meaning and in isolation from the rest of Severino's theorising, the formulations of the two views would seem to be most aptly interpreted in the terms of the permanentism/temporarism distinction: the nihilistic view would just amount to the affirmation of locational ontic becoming, and thus to temporarism; correspondingly, the Parmenidean view would amount to the denial of locational ontic becoming, and thus to permanentism. So, the eternality of things would amount to their *omnitemporal* existence, i.e., their existence at every time, and the temporality of things to their *temporary* existence, i.e., their existing at some time but not at others. However, as seen in §2, defining the notion of *absolute* ontic becoming is a tricky enterprise; ordinary language does not – or at least does not easily – express the notion of absolute ontic becoming (and the various positions in temporal ontology – which is why there is an ongoing debate on how they should be precisely formulated). Thus, we should concede at

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[103] "E 'il cielo azzurro' non è qui una espressione che indica il cielo azzurro come universale – e che quindi può riferirsi ai cieli azzurri dell'estate, dell'inverno, a quelli del Sud e del Nord, a quelli mattinali e del meriggio: 'il cielo azzurro' si riferisce qui all'azzurrità del cielo, considerata nella sua irripetibilità e singolarità – ad esempio il cielo azzurro che oggi, un giorno di maggio, avvolge le forme e i colori di Venezia."

least the possibility that the Parmenidean and the nihilistic views fall within the domain of temporal ontology. One way to check the viability of this interpretation of the two views is to see how Severino connects them to further themes such as cross-temporal identity and perception.

The crucial indication that this is indeed the correct interpretation comes, in our opinion, from a remark that Severino makes in *Destino della necessità* where he discusses the nature of cross-temporal identity (*Destino della necessità*, p. 182):

> The firewood that precedes the rain, the firewood connected to [simultane-ous with] the rain, and the firewood connected to [simultaneous with] the clouds have something in common which they do not have in common with any other being. These three different are also something identical. [...] The succession, in which the rain first arrives and then the clouds hide the mountains, is thus the permanence of those three being wood. [...] The "permanence" is indeed this continuing to appear of the identical in the succession of the different.[104]

Therefore, the firewood of the first moment (before the rain), the one of the second moment (during the rain), and the one of the third moment (when the sky is cloudy) are three different entities, and despite that they are somehow the same entity. The relevant remark comes after a couple of pages, where Severino writes (p. 184):

> With the arrival of the ash, the prolonged presence of this specific iden-tity that unites those three different beings of wood does not endure. The persistence of this identity extends up to the third of these different wood-beings, but no further.[105]

It is therefore quite clear that, according to Severino, concrete objects, such as pieces of wood, are temporary: as they *appear* to cease to exist in the locational sense, they *really* cease to exist in the locational sense at least. The firewood persists only so long as it is a wood-being; as soon as that wood-being is replaced by an ash-being, that firewood *ceases to exist in the*

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[104] "[L]a legna che precede la pioggia, la legna legata [simultanea] alla pioggia e la legna legata [simultanea] alle nubi hanno qualcosa in comune che non hanno in comune con alcun altro ente. Questi tre diversi sono anche qualcosa di identico. [...] La successione, nella quale sopraggiunge prima la pioggia e poi le nubi che nascondono le montagne, è cioè la permanenza dell'identità di quei tre esser legna. [...] Il 'permanere' è appunto questo continuare ad apparire dell'identico nella successione del diverso."

[105] "Col sopraggiungere della cenere *non resta dunque prolungata la permanenza* di que-sta identità specifica che accomuna quei tre diversi esser legna. La permanenza di questa identità si stende sino al terzo di questi diversi esser-legna, ma non oltre."

locational sense. This shows with a reasonable degree of certainty that Severino espouses a temporarist view, not a permanentist one.

Since the Parmenidean view can be reasonably construed only as amounting to eternalism or permanentism, and we have just seen that it cannot be interpreted in terms of the latter, it follows that it amounts to a temporarist version of the former: what the Parmenidean view denies is not locational ontic becoming, but absolute ontic becoming; what the eternality of the existents amounts to is not their omnitemporality, but their omnitemporal inclusion in the ontological domain, which means that the ontological domain is always the same.

Another indication, a less indirect one, supporting the eternalist interpretation of Severino's position can be drawn from the conjunction of two circumstances. The first finds clear expression in the second sentence of the following excerpt (*Risposta ai critici*, p. 295):

> And the becoming, which appears too, is not the process (creation and annihilation) in which being is at stake, but the process of the appearing and disappearing of beings, that is the process of the manifestation of the eternal (*Ritornare a Parmenide*, pp. 84-90). Hence, the meaning of *Ritornare a Parmenide* was not understood by those who maintain that in it the "denial of experience" is held.[106]

Let us temporarily set aside the issue of what the two processes may actually amount to (something that, as we shall see below, could in turn be clarified by our eternalistic interpretation), and focus instead on the latter claim, which implies that, unlike the original metaphysical view of Parmenides, Severino's Parmenidean view is supposed not to be in conflict with our experience (although it is claimed to be in conflict with common sense), and to disqualify it as illusory. Admittedly, this circumstance *per se* would not allow us to infer that Severino is indeed holding eternalism, since this circumstance is perfectly compatible also with the view that the things that existed or will exist also exist *now* but are for some reason not perceived (perhaps because they are presently non-concrete and thus lacking the sort of properties which would make them in principle perceivable). However, and this is the second circumstance to mention, the Parmenidean view is taken by Severino to concern *all* things that did, do, or will exist, most notably

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[106] "E il divenire, che pure appare, non è il processo (creazione e nientificazione) in cui ne va dell'essere, bensì il processo del comparire e dello sparire degli enti, cioè il processo della manifestazione dell'eterno (*R.P.*, pp. 84-90). Non hanno quindi inteso il significato di *R.P.* quanti ritengono che in esso sia sostenuta la 'negazione dell'esperienza'."

the very episodes of our experiencing the things of the world or, in Severino's terms, *of their appearing* (*Destino della necessità*, p. 137):

> Eternal are not just this paper sheet on which a mortal writes and the light that this lamp spreads around and these sounds that come from the street: eternal is also their being gathered together in the appearing, together with all the things that appear; so eternal is also their belonging to the appearing [...] This paper sheet on which a mortal writes and this diffused light of the lamp and these sound of the street are not only eternal, but they appear eternally.[107]

Hence, every appearance of any thing is eternal and the eternality of every appearance is supposed not to conflict with our experience of the world. This, again, excludes that eternality might be correctly interpreted as omnitemporality, for if it were so, any appearance one once had or will have, is *always* had, i.e., anything that is perceived once would be perceived at every time, and this is clearly not how our experience is like. The only remaining option is to understand the claim that every appearance is eternal in eternalistic terms: every thing that **exists is perceived** by – i.e., **appears** to – someone only at the time at which that thing **exists**, i.e., at which it **is located**. For example, Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon is not presently appearing to anyone in the vicinity of the Rubicon; however, it **is appearing** to those in the vicinity of the Rubicon who **exist** at the same time at which that event **exists**. Hence, assuming that the word "eternal" is employed by Severino without variations in meaning, the claim of the eternality of all beings can be interpreted only as amounting to the claim that past, present and future things – all things that sooner or later exist – **exist** and **are** each **located** at a specific time, the one at which each can in principle be directly experienced.[108]

Severino's position is thus best interpreted as eternalist, rather than permanentist; and, correspondingly, the nihilistic view, the one that Severino attributes to the West, is best interpreted as classic presentism, rather than as temporarism – a position, the latter, which Severino, as noted earlier,

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[107] "Eterni non sono semplicemente questo foglio su cui un mortale scrive e il chiarore che questa lampada diffonde all'intorno e questi suoni che giungono dalla strada: eterno è anche questo loro stare raccolti nell'apparire, insieme a tutte le cose che appaiono; è cioè eterna anche la loro appartenenza all'apparire [...] Questo foglio su cui un mortale scrive e questo chiarore diffuso della lampada e questi suoni della strada non solo sono eterni, ma appaiono eternamente".

[108] For the sake of simplicity, we disregard the fact that all events (barring presumably our own mental states) are always experienced after they have occurred.

instead clearly appears to espouse. Accordingly, claims of the form "when entity *x* exists/does not exist" and the like should be taken, in Severino's language, as actually expressing *inclusion in* and *exclusion from* the ontological domain at a certain time (bear in mind that it is possible, in the eternalist perspective, that the domain at a certain time includes an entity not located at that time).

In sum, Severino's Parmenidean view does not involve a negation of ontic becoming *tout court*, but only in the "non-veritative" (*non-veritativo*, *Poscritto*, p. 86) or "nihilistic" (*Risposta ai critici*, p. 296) interpretation of it: becoming understood *as a process of creation and annihilation*, which we take to correspond to what we called absolute ontic becoming. But then in what sense does Severino admit the reality of ontic becoming? Properly understood, according to Severino, ontic becoming is simply a *process of appearing and disappearing* of the eternally existing things, and in this sense, ontic becoming is perfectly legitimate and compatible with the Parmenidean view. A further element supporting our eternalist interpretation may be seen in the fact that it fits perfectly well with Severino's treatment of the compatibility of his view with human experience and, actually, helps shedding some light on this very treatment. Consider the following excerpt (*Poscritto*, p. 86):

> This object burns and it is replaced by its ash: the appearing does not testify other than a succession of events: the white piece of paper, the approaching of the flame, the flame that grows larger, a smaller piece of paper of a different shape, a thinner flame, an even smaller piece of an even different shape, the ash. Every event is followed by another, in the sense that a latter event begins to appear as the former no longer does. After the last fire, the ash; it means: when the last fire no longer appears, the ash appears. However, that which no longer appears, also no longer exists [= does not tenselessly exists/ is no longer in the ontological domain], is something that the appearing does not reveal. This is something that is *interpreted*: when something, which never appeared, appears, it is said that it has been born and that it was a nothing before; when something disappears and never returns, it is said that it dies and becomes a nothing.[109]

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[109] "Questo corpo brucia e a questo corpo si sostituisce la cenere: l'apparire non attesta altro che una successione di eventi: il pezzo di carta bianco, l'avvicinarsi della fiamma, la fiamma che cresce, un pezzo di carta più piccolo e di forma diversa, una fiamma più esile, un pezzo ancora più piccolo e di forma ancora diversa, la cenere. Ad ogni evento ne succede un altro, nel senso che un secondo evento incomincia ad apparire quando il primo non appare più. Dopo l'ultimo fuoco, la cenere; vuol dire: quando l'ultimo fuoco non appare più, appare la cenere. Ma che ciò, che più non appare, non sia nemmeno più, questo l'apparire non lo rivela. Questo lo si *interpreta* sulla base del modo in cui qualcosa compare e scompare: quan-

According to Severino, of two (temporally non-overlapping) events in succession we can experience only one: when we experience the former, we do not experience the latter; when we experience the latter, we do not experience the former. In brief, we can only experience an event when it happens, not before, not after. Because of such temporal limitations, our experience does not inform us about the ontic status of non-present events and things; in other terms, we are never in the temporal position to check what **does** or **does** not **exist** at other times. Hence, the view that things that ceased to be experienced or still have to be experienced do not **exist** – i.e., classic presentism – cannot be grounded in our experience (in the *appearing of things*); it is an interpretation of our experience and, according to Severino, a mistaken one, for it relies on an identification of being and nothing. Our experience, properly considered, turns out to be perfectly compatible with eternalism and the denial of absolute ontic becoming that goes with it: it is possible that what is no longer or not yet perceived **exists** beyond the temporal borders of our current experience (though it was or will be experienced).

One point worth noticing is that veritative ontic becoming, which Severino conceives of as a mind-dependent process (appearing and disappearing of the entities to the mind), cannot be neatly identified with what we called locational ontic becoming and should presumably be identified rather with the appearance of it to the mind (our experience of it). The issue of the mind-dependent nature of veritative becoming, however, may have some relevance in determining the kind of eternalism – A-, B-, C-theoretical, or timeless – that the Parmenidean view could be associated with. This is the issue we now turn to.

4. Severino as a static eternalist

To establish our eternalist interpretation of Severino's Parmenidean view, we relied on the universal character of it: *all* existents are eternal. It is easy to see that this universality allows us to infer something also about the *kind of eternalism* endorsed by Severino. The view that all past, present, and future entities are eternal (in the sense that it is always the case that each of them **exists** as located at a certain time), is incompatible with any form of absolute ontic becoming, and thus also with the ones characterising the dynamic form of eternalism, namely the absolute ontic becoming

do qualcosa, che non era mai apparso, appare, si dice che nasce e che prima era un niente; quando qualcosa scompare e non fa più ritorno si dice che muore e diventa un niente."

concerning A-facts (instantiations of primitive A-properties of pastness, presentness, and futurity), and degree presentism, namely the absolute ontic becoming concerning facts of the maximal reality (existence) of things. For example, in the moving spotlight theory, the fact consisting of the presentness of Socrates's death did exist but **does** not **exist** (located in the past), so it is not eternal; similarly, in degree presentism, the fact of Socrates being maximally real (existent) did exist but does not **exist** (located in the past). The Parmenidean view, in as much as it involves the eternality of all entities, cannot allow for any such instances of becoming and must therefore correspond to a form of static eternalism. This interpretation is supported also by some positive indication in Severino's works, such as the one offered in the following excerpt (*Destino della necessità*, p. 201):

> If the "past" is what is lived and thought about in the history of the mortal [=how it is conceived according to common sense and the western understanding of it], then the past does not exist; not in the sense that what is past has become nothing by now, but, to the contrary, in the sense that the passing does not exist, it is nothing, and thus there does not exist any being that could become nothing (and thus not even the appearing of the passing exists) [...]. And thus, not even the temporal present and the future exist, as they are correlative terms to the alienated sense of the past.[110]

Here Severino is denying the reality of the notions of past, present, and future in so far as, and only in so far as, they are understood to be inherently tied to a notion of temporal passage understood as involving absolute ontic becoming. Since Severino's claim extends to entities of any kind, and not only to ordinary objects and events, it does not admit of any exception such as A-facts, facts of maximal reality, and the like, which are supposed to undergo absolute ontic becoming. This clearly leaves room only for static eternalism.

While we feel rather safe in qualifying Severino's Parmenidean view as a form of static eternalism, we think it more difficult to establish which more specific kind of static eternalism it is, since we were not able to find clear indication in Severino's work. To address this issue, it is worth focusing on the ontic status of succession and consider what Severino tells us about it.

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[110] "Se il 'passato' è ciò che viene vissuto e pensato nella storia del mortale, allora il passato non esiste; non nel senso che ciò che è passato è ormai divenuto niente, ma, all'opposto, nel senso che il passare non esiste, è niente, e quindi non esiste alcun ente che possa diventare niente (e quindi non esiste neppure l'apparire del passare) [...]. E quindi non esistono nemmeno il presente temporale e il futuro, in quanto termini correlativi al senso alienato del passato."

In our interpretation of the Parmenidean view, succession is taken to be the B-relation *being later than*, so that locational ontic becoming basically amounts to events being in this relation. However, while we thought it unproblematic to assume that succession exists independently of its being experienced, Severino makes it rather clear that veritative ontic becoming is necessarily mind-dependent instead (*Destino della necessità*, p. 104):

> Since the happening (becoming) is not the creation of being, but it is the arrival of being, that is of the eternal, in the appearing, the happening *is*, thus, only in as much as it appears. A becoming "in and of itself", which would not appear, is impossible, i.e., it is a concept of nihilism.[111]

This puzzling excerpt (for us at least) can be interpreted in two main ways. First, it may be interpreted literally as expressing that succession exists only as succession of appearances (hence, only in our experience or mind); and this could be seen as leading to something akin to a C-theoretical or timeless form of eternalism. Against this interpretation, however, there stands at least the fact that the succession of the very appearances of the things is real; so, it would be natural to grant that the events that those appearances represent are also really in succession and the succession of appearances reflects, and is grounded on, the succession of such events. This leads to the second interpretation: it could be the case that Severino, while implicitly admitting the reality of the succession of external events, is reserving the term *becoming* only for the appearance of succession and not for the very succession of the events that appear (which we instead are quite happy to qualify as locational ontic becoming). If this latter interpretation is plausible, then the Parmenidean view is more aptly qualified as a B-theoretical.

5. Conclusion

In this contribution we tried to map Severino's Parmenidean view of the eternality of all things and the opposed nihilistic view into the analytic debate on the nature of time. We argued that the Parmenidean view is best construed as static eternalism, more specifically as B-theoretical eternalism, rather than as permanentism, and that it is in fact conjoined with temporarism, while the nihilistic view is best interpreted as classic presentism, rather than as temporarism.

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[111] "Poiché l'accadimento (il divenire) non è la creazione dell'ente, ma è il sopraggiungere dell'ente, cioè dell'eterno, nell'apparire, l'accadimento *è*, dunque, solamente in quanto appare. Un divenire 'in sé', che non appaia, è impossibile, è cioè un concetto del nichilismo."

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A Brief Note on Prior, Temporal Logic and Becoming

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The aim of this paper is to discuss Prior's temporal logic as a powerful tool to formalize the tensed propositions of our natural language. I will also discuss Prior's temporal logic with respect to our experience of the passage of time. I will finally provide some more general considerations and comments concerning the notion of becoming, both from a common sense and a philosophical perspective.

Keywords:

Absolute Becoming, Arthur Prior, Temporal Logic, Experience of Time, Physical Time

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121

1. Introduction

We perceive time as a stream, as a flow from past to future. We have memories of past events and expectations about future events. Our experience of the passage of time, that is, of *becoming*, seems to be a genuine and important aspect of our notion of time: time passes, and things change over time. According to our common sense, time can be represented by a line with an arrow that points toward the future; and all things change instant after instant – becoming is real to us and we see it every day in our interaction with the environment we live in. However, from a logical and philosophical point of view, the status of becoming is not uncontroversial. Several arguments have been proposed in order to show that becoming is not real [see, for instance, Emery, Markosian and Sullivan (2020) or Savitt (2021)].

Severino (1964, 1982)[112] has proposed an argument in favor of an eternalist account of time and existence, and of the (logical) impossibility of absolute becoming. Severino's argument is spelled in terms of a neo-Parmenidean philosophy and can be reconstructed as follows. Severino considers the status of Being in time and proposes an explanation of why becoming is impossible, or rather only apparent. He defines Being as a manifold that comprehends the totality of all the possible differences. For instance, in this framework a pencil is nothing but a part of the whole Being determined (locally) in a such-and-such way, in a "pencil-way", we could say. As such, the plurality of existence and becoming should be considered as the plurality of the different *modes of existence*, that is, as the plurality of the possible determinations and differences of Being: any single determination is a unique mode of existence. Now, how would it be possible to explain becoming in

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[112] See the English translation in Severino (2016) for the quotations that are discussed in this paper.

this scenario? Severino discusses the example of the destruction of a lamp as an example of a *something* that seems to become a *nothing* (Severino (2016), pp. 11-ff). According to Severino, something that exists cannot finish to exist, because being part of Being, it cannot never become a nothing. He then writes that "Existence, therefore, is predicated of *every* determination of the positive [Being] insofar as it is a *determination*, wherefore positing any determination whatsoever without positing is as existent is inadmissible." (Severino (2016), p. 13) Here it is important to notice that it is possible to consider existence in terms of an *existence token*, that is, the particular mode of existence of that such-and-such determination of Being, which is existence in "rerum natura".[113] Moreover, this notion of existence token should be considered as representing an existence in time, which is a kind of existence that is different from the eternal existence of Being.[114] In fact, Severino considers Being as eternal, immutable and imperishable (exactly as Parmenides did), and comprehends all the possible determinations. Such determinations, in a sense, are eternal too, with respect to their own specific and distinctive modes of existence. Back to the example of the lamp (Severino (2016), pp. 11-ff), Severino claims that the lamp too is eternal, and its mode of existence is "intensified" to an appearing for the period of time between the lamp first appearance and final destruction. In other terms, only Being exists out of time and changeless. Any other object is a different and *localized determination* of the whole. As such, it can experience changes in time, but this kind of change is only apparent. Hence, there is no *absolute becoming*, at least not at the level of the whole Being.[115]

Yet, such an argument seems to rule out the possibility of absolute becoming by means of only a logical and philosophical perspective. I think that such arguments are not eventually compelling by themselves, because they do not take into account two aspects that are worth considering in this debate, and that are particularly important. On the one hand, there is our

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[113] It is also important to notice, however, that in the precedent quotation the term "existence" is considered in its trascendental meaning, namely it means "not to be nothing", and thus it is not limited to the specific kind of existence which is existence in "rerum natura". However, I think that we can consider this specific kind of existence as an example of Severino's claim that is particularly relevant for what is discussed in this paper.

[114] I will discuss in the next section the relevance of the definition of the notion of "existence" for what concerns the debate on the reality/unreality of the becoming.

[115] According to Severino, there is no absolute becoming at all – i.e. as a passage from not-Being to Being. Moreover, Severino claims that there is no absolute becoming neither with respect to the internal structure of Being nor with respect to the level of the single determinations of Being.

experience of the passage of time: things appear to change over time – and such an experience cannot be simply dismissed without an explanation of why we perceive something that does not allegedly exist. On the other hand, there is the physical definition of time and becoming – and I think that our best physical theories need to be taken into account in order to discuss the reality or the unreality of becoming. The literature on these issues is vast,[116] but I have mentioned these two aspects in order to express some doubts on the arguments proposed by Severino. I will come back to this issue in the third section of the paper.

In any case, a kind of similar argument is presented and analyzed also in the first part of Prior (1967), who discusses such an argument as an objection to absolute becoming and to his temporal logic as well. In fact, Prior introduces for the first time a kind of logic that allows us to express propositions that consider in a formal way the passage of time as we perceive it. In particular, this temporal logic introduces a new paradigm for the modal logic of time distinctions between past, present and future. Such logic has been called *tensed logic* or *temporal logic,* and it will be the main issue that I want to discuss in this paper – I will provide also some more general philosophical considerations with respect to the philosophy of time. For what concerns the latter aspect, in fact, it must be noticed that Prior's logic can give some important insights on Prior's conception of the structure and metaphysics of time. For instance, it is possible to note that one of the first motivations that have led Prior to the formulation of temporal logic regards his defense of free will and indeterminism.[117]

The paper is then structured as follows. In the next session, I will introduce Prior's temporal logic and its relevance for the formal expression of our experience of time. In the third section, I will give some comments concerning the status of becoming from a broader perspective, both philosophical and physical.

2. Prior's temporal logic

I think that it would be interesting to start the analysis of Prior's philosophy of time and temporal logic from some general considerations. As said, Prior

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[116] See, for instance, Every, Markosian and Sullivan (2020) for an introduction on the philosophy of time, Le Poidevin (2019) for an introduction on our experience of time, and Savitt (2021) for a discussion of becoming in the context of modern physics.

[117] See, for instance, Copeland (2020) and Goranko and Rumberg (2020).

(1967) discusses some objections to absolute becoming in order to show that they would be objections also against his temporal logic. His analysis starts from Greek philosophy and from Aristotle in particular. Aristotle claimed that when we want to define the *coming to be*, we may have two fundamental cases. On the one hand, we may have something that already exists, but then Aristotle stressed the fact that it is impossible that something that already is comes to be. On the other hand, we may have something that does not exist, but then Aristotle noted that nothing could have come to be from something that does not exists, because it would lack a *substratum.* Prior then discusses also an argument from Aquinas, which goes on the same lines of Aristotle's (see Prior (1967), pp. 139-140). In brief, Prior discusses a series of arguments and cases that show how defining becoming as a coming to be is problematic.

However, Prior suggests also that we must rather consider that *countable things* are made of (or grow from) bits of stuff or from other countable things that are already there in terms of a *constant rearrangements* in various possible ways. That is, there exists something (objects or what Prior simply calls "stuff"), and change – i.e., becoming – is nothing but a rearrangement of what is already existent. Such a scenario seems, *prima facie*, to be somewhat similar to Severino's argument concerning the impossibility of absolute becoming that I have mentioned in the introduction. Both Prior and Severino seem to claim that it is not possible that something starts to exist out of nothing, and that becoming can be conceived as a (perhaps local) rearrangement of something that already exists. However, I think that there are two important differences between these two positions.[118] First of all, while Severino considers the analysis of the becoming within a *monist ontology*, Prior explicitly argues that such a framework is not compelling with respect to the definition of becoming – as we shall see in a while. Second, and perhaps most importantly, Severino considers becoming as *apparent* and not real, while Prior explicitly claims that becoming exists, that is, things really change over time. Moreover, Prior claims that it is a *fact* that we express propositions about things that may have not existed before and that will eventually cease to exist. This aspect of Prior's analysis

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[118] Severino considers becoming with respect to the passage from not-Being to Being, or with respect the so-called "appereance of the *eternals*". The rearrangement of what already exists is considered in the Aristotelian sinthesys of *form* and *material substratum.* However, since Severino argues that also the becoming considered as such a rearrangement is not possible, I think that Severino's and Prior's claims are similar at the end of the day, at least for what concerns the topic of this paper.

is interesting, because it expresses Prior's focus on our experience of the passage of time, and on our way of expressing it in our natural language. In fact, he writes that "The problems of tensed predicate logic all arise from the fact that the things of which we make our predications, the 'values of our variables', include things that have not always existed and/or will not always do so. And this, I think, *is* a fact; it is implausible to claim *either* that the only things that are genuine individuals are 'ultimate simples' which exist throughout time and merely get rearranged in various ways, *or* that there is a single genuine individual (the Universe) which gets John-Smithish of Mary-Brownish in such-and-such regions for such-and-such periods. [...] countable 'things' are made or grow from bits of stuff, or from other countable 'things', that are already there." (Prior (1967), p. 174). This is Prior's philosophical stance, which grounds his temporal logic; and this seems actually very different from what we have said about Severino's analysis of the logical and metaphysical impossibility of absolute becoming.

Prior (1951) introduces for the first time in precise logical terms the idea that I have just considered from a more philosophical point of view, namely the idea that tensed propositions are liable to be true at one time and false at another time. This claim is central in Prior's metaphysics of time and it is at the basis of his work on the formalization of tensed or temporal logic. In fact, Prior writes that "Certainly there are unchanging truths, but there are changing truths also, and it is a pity if logic ignores these, and leaves it [...] to informal 'dialecticians' to study the more 'dynamic' aspect of reality." (Prior (1996a), p. 46) Therefore, a proposition can be true or false depending on the precise time of utterance. Here Prior adopts an idea that can be traced back to Aristotle: propositions concerning past events are determined, while propositions concerning future events are not determined at the time of utterance.[119] Prior writes that "one of the big differences between the past and the future is that once something has become past, it is, as it were, out of reach – once a thing is happened, nothing we can do make it not to have not happen. But the future is to some extent, even though it is only to a very small extent, something we can make ourselves. And this is a distinction which a tenseless logic is unable to express." (Prior (1996b), p. 48)[120]

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[119] See Prior (1953) for a discussion of such a position and its relevance for the debate on indeterminism and free will. The basic idea is that the future is open, and can be represented by a *branching of possibilities*. As such, propositions concerning future events cannot be determined at the moment of utterance.

[120] Prior is also explicit in in claiming that he is not much interested in the physical view of time, at least with respect to the problem of formulating a temporal logic that can capture our experience of time (see Prior (1996b), p. 49).

Prior proposed and then developed his temporal logic in two important books respectively, *Time and Modality* (1957) and *Past, Present and Future* (1967). As mentioned, Prior's starting point is the Aristotelian claim that there are no definite values for propositions concerning contingent future events (see Aristotle, *On Interpretation*, chapter 9). A second important author that influenced Prior's research is Diodorus Chronus with his "Master Argument" concerning the philosophical and logical analysis of *future contingents* ("what will be the case..."). Diodorus Chronus proposed his "Master Argument" in order to provide a response to Aristotle, and it can be briefly reconstructed as follows. Diodorus Chronus maintained that *possible* is equivalent to *necessary,* that is, it is not contingent. The "Master Argument" relies, then, on two fundamental assumptions. First, he assumes that every past truth is necessary. Second, he assumes that the impossible does not follow from the possible (considered as necessary). Hence, Diodorus Chronus concludes from these two assumptions that a proposition is possible if it is either true or will be true. Now, given that – as said – possible is equivalent to necessary, we can claim – *contra* Aristotle – that any (possible) proposition has always a definite value (and perhaps we do not know it only for our epistemic ignorance). Prior tackled this argument in order to defend indeterminism and free will.[121] Finally, a third scholar must be mentioned. In fact, from a more technical, logical perspective, it is important to note the relevance of Łukasiewicz (1920)'s definition of a three-valued logic, which treats the truth values of future contingent statements as undetermined, that is, as neither true nor false. Prior, then, proposed a logical system able to express the propositions of our natural language that concern past, present and future events. The main element of his proposal is the definition of five logical operators that are meant to express tensed propositions. He also provides a formal analysis of a metric tensed logic (see Prior (1967), VI), a definition of a hybrid temporal logic, and a formal system proposed to study a branching time (and, hence, indeterminism). I will not discuss all these aspects of Prior's philosophical and logical research, but I will focus on the aspects that are more relevant to my discussion of temporal logic and our experience of the passage of time.

The temporal operators quantity over moments, that is, *instants of time,* in terms of a *time ordering* with preceding and successive instants. At this point, before I can proceed further, some preliminary remarks are in order. First of all, we need to distinguish between two possible accounts of the

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[121] See, again, Copeland (2020) and Goranko and Rumberg (2020), as well as Prior (1953).

structure of time. On the one hand, we can consider an *instant-based model* of time, where *instants* are taken as primitive and represented by points in a line. In this account, the basic relation is "temporal precedence". The "flow of time" – that is, the passage of time – is then represented formally by non-empty sets of time instants and a binary relation of order "<". On the other hand, we may have an *interval-based model* of time, which takes *periods* of time as primitive, rather than instants. This account can represent the "flow of time" in a way similar to the instant-based model of time. However, in this framework, it is also possible to define two more relations, such as those of *inclusion* and *overlapping* of periods of time. In any case, Prior mainly adopts the instant-based model of time. There is, however, another remark that needs a brief discussion.

As we have seen, Prior stresses the relevance of the use of tensed propositions in the natural language and looks for a precise logical way to formalize it. It is, then, possible to notice that this logical framework aims to capture a temporal structure that is exactly the same as we perceive it, that is, a time that passes, instant after instant, from past to present and then to future. In fact, Prior considered himself an *A-theorist,* using the definition that McTaggart (1908) introduced in his seminal paper. McTaggart's fundamental idea is to consider two possible expressions of time series: (i) the A-series, which defines time in terms of the passage from past, to present and to future, and (ii) the B-series, which defines times as an ordered series of points (which represent instants), with the order relation given by the notion of precedent and successive, or before and later.[122]

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[122] It is, in fact, plausible to claim that only the A-series can represent our experience of time [see, again, Emery, Markosian and Sullivan (2020)]. Imagine, for instance, listening to a musical pattern. We can follow the evolution of the harmony and of the music by giving an order to the notes. We first listen to a note, then a second note and so on: the memory of the first note is indispensable to get the musical structure. Moreover, when listening to a piece of music, and especially if we have some basic (theoretical) knowledge of music, we also have some expectations about the successive note. In a word, we give a *temporal order* from past to future to the succession of the notes that constitutes the music that we are listening. Such a position is called *Retentionalism*, and concerns the phenomenological aspect of our perception of time and of the passage of time in particular [see, for example, Le Poidevin (2019)]. It is, however, possible to resist this conclusion. For instance, it is difficult to define in a clear way when a certain note ends and another note starts – and, hence, it would be difficult to identify a series of definite time instants that can be ordered. Moreover, another problem has been raised, for example, by Boccardi (2018), who claims that states such as "do being past" and "re being present" actually represent *simultaneous* state of affairs, rather than one state that precedes the other. Therefore, it is not possible to consider these two states as representing the passage of time, for – being simultaneous – they could not represent a past event

Be as it may, we can now finally discuss Prior's temporal logic.

As said, Prior introduces some temporal operators in order to formalize the tensed propositions of our natural language. Prior also gave some important contributions with respect to the study of the topology and the structural properties of time from a logical perspective [Prior (1958)], such as the axiomatization of temporal logic for continuous, dense and discrete time [Prior (1962) and (1967)], and – as already mentioned – he also provided a philosophical and logical discussion of indeterminism [Prior (1953)], as we shall see.

In any case, the temporal operators are the following:

1. *P* operators ("it has been the case that");
2. *F* operators ("it will be the case that");
3. The "next" operators *X* (expressing "next time" or "tomorrow");
4. *U* operator (expressing "until");
5. *S* operators (expressing "since").

The most important operators are the first and the second. In fact, *P* operators represent the propositions concerning the past events, while *F* operators represent the propositions concerning the future events. It is also possible to define two more operators, namely the operator *H* and the operator *G*, which represent respectively a *strong past operator* ("it has always been the case") and a *strong future operator* ("it will be always the case"). It is easy to notice that these operators express in a logical structure the basic and fundamental temporal structure of our natural language, by formalizing the way of expressing past and future events, as well as the main important temporal adverbs that we use.

To give a general and very schematic presentation of Prior's temporal logic, we can consider its basic or fundamental elements. First of all, there are *atomic propositions* such as *instant propositions* (but it is also possible to define *world-state propositions*). Second, we should take the standard propositional letters such as *p* and *q* to express propositions. Third, we need variables (*x*, *y*, *z*) for the instants on whose position is possible to quantify. Fourth, we can construct complex formulas with the standard Boolean connectives. Fifth, we can take the standard logical quantifiers over variables

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becoming a present event. This leads Boccardi to claim that only the B-series could be a dynamic series and, hence, ground a notion of becoming. Boccardi, then, subscribes to a "growing block" explanation of the passage of time, where becoming is considered in terms of the different phases of the block, rather than in terms of different events within a single block as it is at any given time [see Boccardi (2018)].

for instants. Then, finally, we can introduce the specific temporal operators that we have mentioned above such as P and F (as well as the others). This logical structure is the core of the temporal logic and allows us to express any tensed proposition of our natural language.

Prior adopts a Kripkean semantics,[123] where it is possible to consider time instants rather than the usual possible worlds of modal logic, and where the *accessibility relation* is given by the relation of temporal precedence.[124] In this formal framework, propositions are evaluated over an instant-based model of time T = < T, < > (where T represents the instants of time and "<" is the temporal precedence relation), which is called *temporal frame*. A set of atomic propositions is, then, represented by a *temporal model,* which is a triple M = < T, <, v >, where T = < T, < > is the temporal frame, "<" is the temporal precedence relation, and "v" is an *evaluation operator* assigning to each atomic proposition the set of instants $V(p)$ contained in T at which the proposition p is considered true. This is the basic and fundamental formal structure of Prior's temporal logic.

Furthermore, Prior discusses McTaggart's two temporal series from the perspective of his temporal logic, and takes the A-series as the proper series captured by the language of the temporal logic, while the B-series can be expressed by the (standard) language of the logic of the first order. One of the most important results that Prior achieved in the analysis temporal logic was to prove that it is always possible to translate the first-order logic into the temporal logic language and *vice versa;* and he actually provided a series of axioms to make this possible translation precise from a formal point of view [see Prior (1967)]. This important logical result entails that the A-series and the B-series are, in a sense, two different, but equivalent ways of expressing our propositions about our experience of time and its structure.

Finally, Prior introduced a *hybrid logic*, which is a propositional temporal logic with elements of a first-order logic, such as a first-order language for the relation "<".[125] This hybrid logic is important in order to have descriptive logic (see Goranko and Rumberg (2020) for a detailed account of Prior's temporal logic and the related logical research, as well as some interesting new developments of temporal logic).[126]

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[123] See Kripke (1963a) and (1963b).
[124] See, again, Goranko and Rumberg (2020).
[125] Such hybrid logic allows also to define the so-called *nominals* (or "clock variables"), which are propositions that are true only at certain instants of time.
[126] See also Dorato (1994), Øhrstrøm and Hastle (1995), and Meyer (2011).

Prior (1967) defines also a *branching-time semantics,* which can express the possibility of an open future and, as such, could be a formal, logical way of representing and therefore expressing indeterminism.

Prior's idea can be represented as follows.

$$— \bullet \ (h_1)$$
$$\bullet — \bullet$$
$$— \bullet \ (h_2)$$

$$(t_1) \qquad (t_2) \qquad (t_3)$$
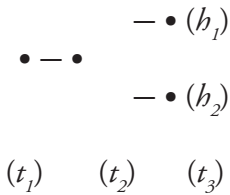
The interpretation of such a branching-time structure is the following. Different histories (also called "chronicles") are supposed to be coincident between the time t_1 and t_2 and then diverge at t_3, where we have a *branching* and the two histories h_1 and h_2 that continue on two different lines (also called *maximal chains* of moments/instants). It is also important to notice that, in this framework, a proposition concerning a certain successive instant is true in some histories and false in others. For instance, it would be possible to utter a proposition at t_2 about some future events at t_3. Of course, this event may happen in the history h_1 and perhaps may not happen in the history h_2. As such, the proposition uttered at t_2 may be true at t_3 according to the history h_1 and false at the same instant t_3 according to the history h_2 – that is, future is open and undetermined! This is of course the essence of genuine indeterminism; and Prior takes it at the basis of his defense of free will (Prior (1953).

If we want to consider also the branching-time semantics, we can interpret Prior's temporal logic as expressing a notion of time with a *treelike structure* with several branches, which is represented by an assignment of variables and temporal operators that in turn satisfy the temporal structure of the logic and its rules.[127]

To conclude this section, it might be stressed once again that Prior's temporal logic is a powerful tool to formalize the tensed propositions that are so important in our natural language. Prior's temporal logic allows to formalize our experience of the passage of time and our way of expressing it; and this is important independently of the reality/unreality of (absolute)

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[127] It is here important to mention two different approaches to this branching-time structure. On the one hand, we have a *Peircean account*, where future truths are considered truths in all possible futures. On the other hand, we have an *Ockhamist account*, where truth is relativized to a time-instant in the tree, but also through a history passing on such an instant. It is also important to note that Prior preferred the first *Peircean account.*

becoming. In other terms, even though metaphysical arguments will eventually lead us to claim that becoming is unreal (as in Severino's argument) – and I am not convinced yet –, Prior's analysis of our natural language and experience of the passage of time will be still fundamental to capture our way of talking about time and about things and events happening in time.

3. Some general considerations on the nature of becoming

Dorato (2005) discusses the status of becoming considering both our experience of time – that is, of the passage of time – and our best physical theories. First of all, it is possible to note that the unreality of future events seems to be a fundamental requirement for the reality of (absolute) becoming, as we have also seen in the previous section on Prior and temporal logic. But, at this point, it is important to clearly define a precise sense of the notion of "existence", in order to have a precise sense of the unreality of future events. In other terms, a precise definition of "existence" must be provided in order to have a clear distinction between existing and non-existing events. As seen, this definition plays an important role also in the context of Severino's argument, which I have briefly reconstructed in the introduction.

We can define two senses of "existence". On the one hand, we have *tensed existence*, which depends on the succession of the instants of time, and then on the distinction between past, present and future. This is the sense of "existence" that is captured by Prior's temporal logic. On the other hand, we have *tenseless existence*, which instead does not depend on these distinction between past, present and future.[128] Dorato claims that both senses are well-grounded and useful and adopts a Carnapian perspective; in fact he writes that: "A pragmatic difference of this kind commands only a linguistic choice, and should not be transformed into a difference about ontological commitments." (Dorato (2005), pp. 6-7)[129] Dorato goes on by claiming that "becoming should not be regarded as the becoming real, determinate, definite or fixed in the present of previously unreal, indeterminate, indefinite or unfixed events." (Dorato (2005), p. 7)

In other terms, it is possible to show that the verb "to exist" manifests a fundamental *polysemy*. Now, we need to distinguish between existing events

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[128] There is also a third definition of "existence", which is "existence simpliciter", which we will not discuss here. This argument has been also developed in Dorato (2006).

[129] Such a quotation goes in the same pragmatical direction as in the case of presentist/eternalist debate with respect to the inter-traducibility of the language of temporal logic and the language of the first order logic. See, again, Dorato (2006).

and non-existing events in order to judge between the two metaphysical accounts of becoming, namely the one where becoming is considered as real and the other where becoming is considered as unreal or apparent, or mind-dependent. However, such a distinction seems impossible, given the polysemy of the notion of "existence". This would entail that the debate on the metaphysical status of becoming might be only a mere *linguistic dispute*. Such a difficulty seems to show that the asymmetry of becoming – that is, the passage of time from past, to present, and to future – should not be grounded on only metaphysical and ontological distinctions, but it has to be analyzed with the help of physics. This is also one of the reasons why we consider Severino's argument not eventually compelling.

I think, then, that it would be interesting to conclude this paper with a brief analysis of how physics can help us to define becoming. For this reason, I will discuss some interesting philosophical and methodological issues that concern the status of becoming in physics.

Dorato (2005) defines different possible notions of becoming: (i) *absolute becoming*; (ii) *relational becoming;* (iii) *temporal becoming* (from an instant t_1 to an instant t_2); (iv) *spatial becoming* (from a spatial location s_1 to a spatial location s_2). What it is important with respect to this paper is the absolute sense of becoming, and, in particular, what concerns the *absolute temporal becoming*. But which are the elements of our ontology that can change in time? Dorato identifies two main alternatives, which depend on our definition of *instant* with respect to the space-time regions. On the one hand, we can consider instants as equivalent to space-time regions, and in this scenario the space-time regions themselves are the things that "become", that is, that change in time. On the other hand, we can consider events as something different from space-time regions. In this second sense, events must be considered as primitive elements of our ontology, which "become" – that is, change in time – on space-time regions, which can in turn be considered as a sort of background manifold.[130] In any case, the fundamental idea is that absolute temporal becoming is nothing but the *happening of events*. According to Newtonian classical mechanics, for instance, all events are ordered in time, that is, any event can happen before, simultaneous or after another event. As such, absolute temporal becoming – that is, the passage of time – can be defined as the successive happening of (simultaneous sets of) events.[131]

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[130] However, it must be noted this interpretation of space-time regions as a background manifold is no longer legitimate in the context of General Relativity.

[131] See Dorato (2005) and Savitt (2021), for what concerns relativistic physics. In any

However, Dorato also notes that physics cannot provide any empirical evidence for the reality of absolute temporal becoming, because it presupposes it, at least insofar as it presupposes an ontology of events – considered as something that cannot but happen.

Moreover, even though physics would eventually provide either an explanation of the becoming or a complete denial of its existence, it must be noted that this would not be sufficient. In fact, if we agree on the fact that "the experience of the passage of time must have a physical/metaphysical counterpart at least as a succession of events mind-independently occurring one after the other" (Dorato (2005), pp. 19-20), it must be stressed that our experience of time depends on this objective fact about the world. Yet, any physical theory that describes or reduces the passage of time to some physical structure, or any physical theory that denies the reality of becoming, should and actually must recover a notion of becoming as the one we have in our experience of the passage of time. Physically speaking, the theory that describes our experience in a physical way (at our physical scale) is classical physics and the classical notion of space and time as, for instance, the notion of space and the notion of time as given by Newton in his *Scholium*. So, any physical theory with a different notion of becoming or that denies becoming, should and must approximate the classical notion of space-time, where becoming is real, that is, where change is real, because events happen in a real succession. Again, then, it is important to note that our experience of the passage of time should be surely considered as an approximation with respect to our best physical theory, but nonetheless it has to be taken into account into our explanation of becoming.

Another interesting element of Dorato's analysis concerns the notion of the arrow of time, that is, the fact that time seems to have a directionality also in physics. Without entering this debate, we want just to mention the fact that "talking about the asymmetry of certain physical processes in time presupposes the reality of a successive coming into being of physical events, i.e., the reality of temporal becoming." (Dorato (2005), pp. 27-28)

A final consideration concerns the Moving Spotlight Theory (MST) of time and of the passage of time. Such a theory is a *dynamical theory* of time, which is an example of an eternalist theory of time, where however becoming is real. On the one hand, then, this theory accepts the idea that

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case, Gödel claimed something along the same lines of the definition that I have stated. In fact, he writes: "The existence of an objective lapse of time [...] means (or, at least, is equivalent to the fact) that reality consists of an infinity of layers of 'now' which come into existence successively." [(Gödel (1949), p. 558 – also quoted in Savitt (2021)].

space-time is a unified manifold, where past, present and future are equally existing – as in a *static theory* of time. On the other hand, however, this theory accepts the reality of the A-properties, that is, the properties that are described by the A-series. In other terms, A-properties are objective and irreducible properties, which are indispensable to describe the notion of the passage of time, thanks to the notion of a *moving present*, from past to future. Unlike the presentism or the "growing block" theory, MST denies that an object may come into or out of existence, while – at the same time – unlike the eternalism and B-series theory, a MST theorist claims that there is a genuine change, that is, a genuine becoming, which cannot be described only in terms of variations of location in the space-time manifold. Of course, this theory of the passage of time has some problems, but I mentioned it to conclude this paper with a theory that seems to give an explanation of the passage of time that considers both the physical and the perceptional (phenomenological) level.[132]

Conclusion

I have discussed Prior's temporal logic with respect to our experience of the passage of time and to our way of expressing it. In fact, we use tensed propositions every day to express our memories of the past and our expectations about the future. The passage of time as a stream that goes from past to future is a profound element of our common sense understanding and perception of time. Prior has the fundamental merit of having filled a gap in logic. By introducing his temporal logic, Prior provided a formal structure to grasp our intuitions and expressions about our experience of time, and of its passage.

I also claimed that it is not possible to discuss the metaphysical status of becoming independently from the analysis of our experience and perception of time, and from an analysis of our best physical theories. On the one hand, in fact, any discussion of the becoming must take into account our experience of it. On the other hand, physics can help us to refine our notions, even though it is always important to consider our intuitive notions of space, time and becoming as approximate notions that are still valid in the limit (of classical physics).

Finally, I think that Prior's temporal logic is important independently from such considerations that concern the philosophical and physical sta-

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[132] See Savitt (2021).

tus of becoming. For, even if physics would eventually deny the reality of becoming, we would still perceive the passage of time the way we do; and, hence, we would need a way of expressing it both in our natural language and in the temporal logic provided by Prior.[133]

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Why the "Spotlight" Moves.
A Moving Spotlight Theory of Time
Based on Emanuele Severino's *La Gloria*

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The aim of this paper is to account for the (metaphorical) movement of the property of being present (or presentness) within the so-called Moving Spotlight Theory (MST). I will be leveraging the key argument by Emanuele Severino's masterpiece, *La Gloria* (2001), according to which it is impossible that a (maximal consistent) state of affairs begins to appear and lasts forever in our experience. After a brief overview of the MST's main tenets (§1.1), I argue that Severino's ontology might be interpreted as a sort of MST (§1.2), following the hint by Federico Perelda (2017). Thereafter, I briefly recall Severino's original argument in his own jargon, also proposing English lexical and conceptual translations of the main Italian phrases (§1.3). Then, I propose both a semi-formalization of Severino's argument (§2.1) and a full formalization by means of temporal logic (§2.2). Finally, I assess all the three versions of the argument, concluding that my formalization might account for the movement of presentness in a non-metaphorical way (§2.3).

Keywords:
Moving Spotlight Theory, Emanuele Severino, Time, Becoming

1. Emanuele Severino's Ontology and the Moving Spotlight Theory

1.1 An Overview on the Moving Spotlight Theory

In the wide panorama of the theories of time,[134] the so-called *Moving Spotlight Theory* (hereinafter: MST) stands out at least for two general reasons. First, it might seem a *metaphorical view* to account for the passage of time, rather than a theory *stricto sensu*: what is the *spotlight* supposed to be? And what does it mean that the spotlight *moves*?[135] Secondly, the MST stands out as it combines the best of the A-theories and the B-theories of time: the typical A-theoretical idea that there is an objectively privileged present time that *constantly changes* (i.e., different items or different instants of time are *progressively* objectively present) with the typical B-theoretical idea that everything *tenselessly exists*, with no restrictions and regardless of its spatio-temporal location.[136] In a nutshell, the MST joins together a Heraclitean dynamic view of time (the *real* passage of time) with a Parmenidean static view of time (the *illusory* passage of time); in other words, the MST combines the Parmenidean "block-like eternal universe" (De Florio-Frigerio-Giordani 2020, p. 114) with the Heraclitean idea of a "moving" present instant (cf. *ivi*). Exactly because of this "hybrid" (and

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[134] For an overview of the main contemporary theories of time, see Emery-Markosian-Sullivan (2020), especially for the typical relevant language, e.g., "A-theory", "B-theory", etc.

[135] Indeed, it is a well-known fact that the first thinker to use a formulation like "moving spotlight" to speak about the flow of time meant it as a metaphor: cf. Broad (1923, p. 59). However, Broad himself rejected the view, leaning towards some kind of Growing Block Theory.

[136] About the notion of *existence* in the MST, see, e.g., De Florio-Frigerio-Giordani (2020), who recap the concept as follows: "(*i*) [it] coincides with the concept of being, (*ii*) is not a concept concerning an activity, and (*iii*) is completely captured by the existential quantifier of first order logic" (p. 117 footnote #3).

thus appealing) nature of the MST, some scholars have recently done "an admirable job of making precise a debate that is often left as mere metaphor" (Sullivan 2016).[137]

Let us begin with Deasy's (2015) definition of the MST, according to which the MST is the conjunction of: (i) *permanentism*, namely the thesis that "it is always the case that everything exists eternally" (2015, p. 2074,); and (ii) one of the key tenet of the A-theories family, namely that "some instant of time is absolutely, non-relatively present" (*ibidem*, p. 2073) – i.e., that there is an objective present. (ii) means that the *absolutely* (i.e., non-relatively) present instant is not merely present *relative to itself* (as in fact every instant is) but that it is present in a "privileged" way against the instants that are located *before* or *after* it. Note that which instant is the absolutely objective present changes: as the flow of time progresses, different instants acquire *progressively* the property of being absolutely present. Indeed, the state of the universe is fixed like a block (given the above-mentioned *permanentism* thesis) *except for* one thing: the property of presentness.[138] In a nutshell, the MST is a form of *dynamical eternalism*. If we speak in metaphorical terms, we might say that the presentness is the *spotlight* that progressively *moves*, *lighting up* one by one the eternally existing items of a block universe. This metaphor is intriguing but philosophically unsatisfactory.

An interesting and useful way to paraphrase the spotlight as such (and to minimize the metaphorical commitment as much as possible) is found in Spolaore-Torrengo's (2021), where they introduce the intrinsic property of *brightness* and link it to the notion of *experiential availability*:

> The time that is 'under the spotlight' possesses an *intrinsic* property that the other times lack. Let us label this property *brightness*. Brightness is an intrinsic feature of times (or, indirectly, of entities located at those times) that is directly tied to their metaphysical status. According to MS [i.e., the moving spotlight account], exactly one time is bright. This time is metaphysically *special* or *privileged* precisely because it is the unique time endowed with brightness. [...] [W]e assume that, if a (conscious) subject has some experience at a time *t*, and *t* is bright, then *t* is experientially available to the subject. In this weak sense, we can say that brightness entails experiential availability. (2021, pp. 2-3).

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[137] In a non-exhaustive manner, I would mention: Cameron (2015), Deasy (2015), Sider (2011, ch.11), Skow (2009; 2015), De-Florio-Frigerio-Giordani (2020), Marques (2020), Spolaore-Torrengo (2020), Correia-Rosenkranz (2020).

[138] About the metaphysical status of this (putative) property, and related issues, see Cameron (2015). Due to space constraints, I will not deal with these issues in this article.

So, the fact that an instant of time t, and all the items located at t, are phenomenologically accessible to those conscious subjects that are located at t means that the instant t has the property of brightness. That is the intuitive idea that the experiences we live at the absolutely objective present (the "real", non-relative *now*) are those experiences we are actually able to access.

Spolaore-Torrengo's (2021) account of the spotlight, especially the entailment between the property of brightness and the notion of experiential availability, will be useful in §1.3 to understand Severino's jargon, as well as in §2.2, where I will develop an argument about the spotlight's movement argument based on Severino (2001).

But, first, I need to evaluate to which extent Severino's ontology might be understood as a sort of MST, as indeed Perelda (2017) wisely suggests, with the caution befitting this kind of philosophical and exegetical comparison.

1.2 In which Sense Severino's Ontology Might Be a Kind of Moving Spotlight Theory

Severino's ontology might be interpreted as a MST if and only if his ontology satisfies (at least) three conditions:[139]

i) His ontology should affirm that, unrestrictedly, all past, present and future objects, properties, and events exist (namely, a sort of *permanentism*, cf. §1.1).

ii) His ontology should affirm that a *proper* subset of those objects, properties, and events, namely, *some but not all entities*, instantiates the (metaphysical or "robust") property of *presentness* or *being present*.

iii) His ontology should affirm that the objects, properties, and events that instantiate the property of presentness *change*.

Condition (i) is quite easily met throughout almost all of Severino's works, at least since *Essenza del Nichilismo* (1982; see also 2016), but already anticipated in his earlier works, e.g., *La metafisica classica e Aristotele* (1956) and mainly in *La struttura originaria* [1958](1981).[140] His permanentism

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[139] I adopt this hermeneutic approach following the definitions of standard MST proposed by Deasy (2015, §1) and Miller (2019, §1).

[140] A finer-grained version of Severino's *permanentism* is in his (1964) and (1965) works, and fully developed in his (1980) book.

can be defined as the thesis according to which, unrestrictedly, each entity *qua talis* eternally and necessarily exists (where <*x* exists> is logically equivalent to <*x* is self-identical>). So, unrestrictedly, for all *x*, necessarily, there is no instant of time at which *x* does not exist. In a nutshell, if there was an instant of time at which *x* does not exist, then there would be an instant of time at which *x* is not self-identical. Indeed, assuming the logical and metaphysical necessity of the law of identity (□∀x(x=x)),[141] and assuming that *existence* is logically equivalent to *self-identity*, then it is impossible that there is an instant of time at which *x* does not exist. We might say that Severino expresses this idea by speaking about the impossible time at which *being*, namely, each and every entity (a positive determination – *il positivo*), is not *itself*, namely, it is identical to *what it is not* or to *nothingness* (the negative – *il negativo*). Consider, e.g., the following excerpt:

> The sunset of [the true meaning of] being befalls thus: endorsing a representation of time according to which being is not [itself], namely, allowing the perpetuation of that idea whereby the positive is [identical to] the negative, without even realizing (Severino 1982, p. 22, translation mine).[142]

The fact that Severino might be considered a permanentist does not entail that he is for the same reasons as other permanentists (like, e.g., Timothy Williamson 2013 – who coined the term) or other eternalists (cf. Emery-Markosian-Sullivan 2020, par. 6 for an overview). However, a comparison between Severino's reason and other eternalists' reasons to claim that – broadly speaking – everything is eternal is beyond the scope of this article.

Condition (ii) is quite easily met as well, especially by appealing to Severino's conception of the so-called "Contradiction-C" ("*Contraddizione-C*"; cf. Severino [1958] 1981, ch. VIII; Id. 1980; and Goggi 2015, pp. 95-101). With this notion, he designates the difference between the *unrestricted* totality of what *exists*, regardless of their appearance to phenomenological experience, and the subset of entities that do *appear* in our experience:

> The [unrestricted] totality [of what exists] [...] *does not appear all at once*, [...] rather, it steps into the light that makes entities appear [in our phenomenological experience]. While stepping into the light, that [unrestricted] totality remains the same, without any kind of change. [...] Only the light that makes entities appear can spotlight those entities without changing

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[141] See Severino [1958](1981) and (1982).

[142] "Il tramonto dell'essere avviene dunque così: nel non avvedersi che, acconsentendo all'immagine di un tempo in cui l'essere non è, si acconsente all'idea che il positivo è il negativo."

them, since it is [...] the *fact* that they appear as they are (Severino 1980, p. 127, translation mine, emphasis added).[143]

Making a moderate exegetical twist to Severino's lexicon, I assume that <*x* appears in our (phenomenological) experience> is logically equivalent to <*x* instantiates the property of presentness>. This is to say, following the evocative Spolaore-Torrengo's (2021) lexicon, <*x* is located at a *bright* instant of time> (cf. §1.1).[144] Therefore, the difference between the unrestricted totality of what exists and the subset of entities that appear in our experience is due to the fact that the latter are "under the spotlight", i.e., they are located at bright instant(s) of time.

The third condition (iii) is more troublesome than the other two because it appeals to the concept of change. *Prima facie,* Severino's ontology does not admit *any* kind of change (cf. 1980): given that *unrestrictedly everything* is *always* self-identical, it is impossible that an entity *ceases* to instantiate the property of presentness, or – conversely – *begins* to instantiate the property of presentness. Similarly, it is impossible that an instant of time begins to be bright or ceases to be bright. According to Severino, indeed, the notion of entity ranges over absolutely anything, including the instantiations or exemplifications of properties. Yet, as we have seen in the case of condition (ii), Severino himself admits that the totality of what exists does not completely appear in our own experience, thus leaving room for a *sui generis* sequentiality of what *progressively* appears to us.

So, it seems that, on the one hand, Severino is forced to concede at least that *something* changes, namely, the fact that some entities either begin or cease to instantiate the property of presentness. On the other hand, he does not allow *any* kind of change since his ontology assumes that *unrestrictedly* everything always exists, thereby meaning that everything is always self-identical, including the above-mentioned facts about the instantiation of presentness.[145]

This is a well-known puzzle of his ontology among Severino's critics, as already pointed out by Bontadini's (1964) objection. Severino did propose a solution to Bontadini's claim that his ontology actually admits a form of

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[143] "Il Tutto [...] non appare tutto insieme [...], ma si inoltra nella luce dell'apparire. Vi si inoltra rimanendo ciò che esso è, inalterabile e immutabile. [...] E solo la luce dell'apparire può posarsi sugli enti senza alterarli, giacché essa è [...] il loro mostrarsi come sono."

[144] Hereinafter, when I use 'experience', I shall mean 'phenomenological experience', namely, our experience considered from a phenomenological standpoint.

[145] Indeed, what Severino's ontology rules out is the possibility of *becoming*, included the possibility of beginning or ceasing to instantiate that peculiar property of presentness.

becoming in his (1965) article, which is further developed in his (1980) work. In a nutshell, he dispels the objection by highlighting that the fact *as such* that an entity begins or ceases to instantiate the property of presentness (in his jargon: "the beginning or ceasing to appear", "*l'iniziare o il cessare di apparire*") is in turn an entity; therefore, that fact *qua talis* is self-identical and always exists. In this way, Severino's ontology at the same time keeps the eternal self-identity (or existence) of unrestrictedly everything *and* accounts for the phenomenological sequence of different items appearing in our experience. I think that Severino's solution is quite controversial, but its full presentation and assessment is not the aim of this article. What I needed to show in this section is that condition (iii) is arguably met by Severino's ontology, as long as we also understand the *change* or *becoming* of an entity exemplifying the property of presentness in that peculiar way according to which the fact *qua talis* of beginning or ceasing to be "under the spotlight" is itself an eternal entity.

To be clearer, we should also note that Severino does not rule out change or becoming *in any sense*. Rather, he rejects (as contradictory) change or becoming understood in the most traditional sense, namely, "becoming something other" ("*diventare altro*"). Yet, this is not the only meaning of change within the philosophical literature. We may speak of change in terms of mere (mind-independent) *sequentiality* (whereas the traditional concept of change as *becoming something other* would be merely mind-dependent). The so-called *R-theory* by Oaklander (2012), for example, fully accounts for (mind-independent) change only appealing to the Russellian primitive notion of temporal relations, like *earlier-than*, *later-than*, and *simultaneous with*: the whole series of entities (objects, properties, events) that unrestrictedly and tenselessly *is* or *exists* (and that we – mind-dependently – mark either as past, present, or future) is intrinsically dynamic *just because* the series we acknowledge is a *sequence* of different events (as Frishhut 2012, p. 18, correctly summarizes). In a nutshell, "For the Russellian [...] the dynamic aspect of time is grounded in a temporal succession or transition from earlier to later temporal items" (Oaklander 2012, p. 7). Here, the formulations "temporal succession" and "transition" do entail ontological commitments to *neither absolute becoming* (like beginning or ceasing to exist), *nor becoming something other* (like "donning and doffling" the properties of *being present*, *being past* or *being future*).

Oaklander's R-theory might be a good candidate to account for Severino's own idea of change or becoming, whereby the Italian philosopher replaces the concept of "becoming something other" ("*diventare altro*")

with the concept of "passing by" ("*oltrepassare*").[146] On the one hand, the concept of *becoming something other* is rejected as contradictory because the *terminus ad quem* (viz., the outcome of becoming) rules out the existence of the *terminus a quo* (the source of becoming), which negates the law of identity itself in its turn (cf. Severino 1995, p. 13). On the other hand, the concept of *passing by* would allow us to speak about change with no contradiction, provided the proposition <*x* becomes *y*> is understood as <*x* is passed by *y*>. This would formally amount to the following conjunction: <*x* (tenselessly) exists> ∧ <*y* (tenselessly) exists> ∧ <*y* is later than *x*>. However, here, my digression to Oaklander's R-theory and its eventual relationship to Severino's concept of *passing by* is merely functional to point out that there are more ways to understand the concept of change than the traditional *becoming something other*, thereby offsetting Bontadini's classic objection.

1.3 The Main Argument of Severino's book *La Gloria*: Preliminary Overview

In the previous subsection, I showed why Severino's philosophical *pars construens* might be read as a MST. Before advancing a formalization of one of the main arguments of Severino's ontology (cf. *infra* §§2.1-2.2), I need to paraphrase some key concepts and introduce, or recall, some conceptual translations among those that have partially already emerged. Those concepts occur in the main argument of Severino's masterpiece *La Gloria* (2001). The conclusion of that argument is that, necessarily, any (maximal) consistent state of affairs (Severino would say: "any certain arrangement of entities", "*una certa configurazione di essenti*") is passed by ("*oltrepassato da*") another (maximal) consistent state of affairs, namely: it is impossible (logically and metaphysically) that a certain (maximal) consistent state of affairs – say S_2 – *begins* to appear *after* another (maximal) consistent state of affairs S_1 *and* that both S_2 and S_1 endure forever.[147] In his original Italian text, the argument runs as follows (I shall provide an English translation below, after some unavoidable lexical and conceptual remarks):

Ciò che incomincia ad apparire non appartiene necessariamente alla dimen-

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[146] Cf. especially Severino (2007), but also (1980) and (2001). The Italian verb is 'oltrepassare'. Henceforward, I will use the English phrase '(to) pass by' or its *ing*-form. Another translation might be the phrase '(to) be replaced by'.

[147] I will return to this relevant point in §2.2, where I propose a formalization of Severino's argument using temporal logic with Prior's temporal operators and an instant-based model of time. In the meantime, you can read the conclusion of the argument as follows: $\forall\varphi\neg(H\neg\varphi \wedge \varphi \wedge G\varphi)$ – or the stronger: $\neg\Diamond\exists\varphi(H\neg\varphi \wedge \varphi \wedge G\varphi)$.

sione senza di cui [...] non può apparire alcun essente. Tale dimensione è [...] lo "sfondo" [...] che accoglie tutto ciò che sopraggiunge e da cui si congeda tutto ciò che passa. [...] Ciò che incomincia ad apparire entra nell'orizzonte dello sfondo, e quindi non può appartenere necessariamente a tale orizzonte, ossia *non può essere* necessariamente unito ad esso *in quanto esso è*, appunto, lo sfondo. [...] Unione necessaria è [...] quella la cui negazione è qualcosa di contraddittorio. Ma allora *è contraddittorio che l'unione necessaria* [...] *incominci*, cioè sia preceduta da un tempo in cui essa non esiste. L'unione è necessaria proprio perché è qualcosa di contraddittorio una qualsiasi situazione in cui tale unione sia inesistente. [...] Se la determinazione che sopraggiunge è inoltrepassabile (cioè non consente il sopraggiungere di alcun'altra determinazione), essa incomincia ad essere connessa necessariamente allo sfondo e alla totalità di ciò che appare. Ma una connessione è necessaria proprio perché non è qualcosa di incominciante (2001, pp. 92-96).

In Severino's (2007), for example, the conclusion of (2001)'s argument is summarized as follows:

[...] [*U*]*n sopraggiungente inoltrepassabile è impossibile*, autocontraddittorio. Pertanto *ogni sopraggiungente è necessariamente oltrepassato* [...] (2007, p. 237, emphasis added)

First, consider the following chart: on the left column I recall Severino's original Italian key terms; on the right column I propose my English translation of them. Below the chart, the reader can find some comments and remarks that try to justify my linguistic choices, as well as some useful paraphrases. Finally, you can read my English translation.

Severino's lexicon	Proposal for an English translation
Essente/Determinazione	*Entity*
Apparire	*Appearing in our experience*[*]
Sfondo [dell'apparire] / Orizzonte dello sfondo [di ciò che appare]	*Horizon of that which (phenomenologically) appears*
Determinazione sopraggiungente	*Entity that begins to appear in our experience*
Unione necessaria / Connessione necessaria	*Necessary relation*
Incominciare ad apparire	*Beginning to appear in our experience*

[*] Ines Testoni and Giulio Goggi read "appearing" ("*apparire*") as "entering the horizon of experience" (see Severino 2023, p. IX). My own reading is in §1.2 of this article.

Oltrepassato [da qualcos'altro]	Passed by [something else]
Inoltrepassabile [da qualcos'altro]	[Logically and ontologically] unable to be passed by [something else]
[Essente] inoltrepassabile	What defies to be passed by [something else]

My translations of "*essente*" and "*apparire*" and their meanings are already exposed in §§1.1-1.2. I would recall, especially, that *appearing in our experience* is logically equivalent to *being located at a bright instant of time*. The meaning of "*oltrepassare*", and therefore the past participle "*oltrepassato*", already occurs in §1.2. Conversely, the meaning of "*inoltrepassabile*" is merely the *negation* of "*oltrepassabile*" (*in-oltrepassabile*, *non-oltrepassabile*), that is, the *negation of the possibility to be passed by something else*. The Italian terms "*incominciare ad apparire*" and "*determinazione sopraggiungente*" are already explained in the chart (notwithstanding that they will become clearer when I formalize Severino's argument through temporal logic in §2.2). Instead, my translation of "*sfondo* [*dell'apparire*]" or "*orizzonte dello sfondo*" need to be paraphrased here, together with "*unione necessaria*".

To understand Severino's (2001) core argument, we need to understand what the above-mentioned "horizon of that which appears" and "necessary relation" refer to.

The horizon is a set of predicates that inhere in each and every entity *qua talis*, e.g., "... *is part of absolutely everything*", "... *is self-identical*", "... *is different from nothingness*", "...*is eternal*", and so on.[148] According to Severino, this set of predicates is the ontological *sine qua non* condition that enables any entity to appear in our experience. Thus, without those (transcendental) predicates, nothing would appear at all.[149]

To understand what Severino means with "*unione necessaria*" or 'necessary relation', we can use a possible world semantics where a proposition

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[148] Albeit with some differences, which I cannot deal with due to space constraints, those predicates might recall the scholastic *transcendentals* like *unum*, *verum*, *bonum*, which inhere in all and every entity *qua talis*. Furthermore, Severino's above-mentioned horizon is not only the set of those predicates, but it is also the set of the meanings involved in those predicates, e.g., "(unrestrictedly) everything", "entity as self-identical", "nothingness", etc. This distinction is too complex to be treated in this article. I leave it for possible future work.

[149] Cf. Severino [1958] (1981), (1980), and (2001). For a helpful and thorough handbook on the entire evolution of Severino's philosophical endeavour, included the relationship between entities and their necessary predicates, cf. Goggi (2015, especially pp. 95-100).

like <Necessarily, φ> is true if and only if φ is true in every possible world. The necessary relation is a relation R between two (or more) items that holds in every possible world or – we might say – at every possible (instant of) time.[150] According to Severino, the negation of a necessary relation R entails a contradiction (cf. 2001, *ibidem*). Given the possible world semantics I assumed before, this is very plausible, indeed: if R did not hold in some possible worlds or at some instants of time, then R would not be necessary. Therefore, R would be *and* would not be a necessary relation, namely, R would hold and would not hold in every possible world or at every instant of time. Since a necessary relation *always* holds, there is no instant of time at which R does not hold: necessarily, R always holds.[151]

With all this lexical and conceptual equipment, I can propose an English translation of Severino's (2001) core argument, as well as its relevant conclusion (whilst my explanation of the full argument is in §2.1, my formalization with temporal logic is in §2.2, and my assessment of both is in §2.3):

> What begins to appear [in our experience] does not necessarily belong to the set without which [...] no entity can appear at all. This set is [...] the "horizon" that embraces any entity that begins to appear [in our experience], as well as [the same "horizon"] from which any entity gets out of ["*si congeda*"]. [...] What begins to appear [in our experience] enters that horizon. Therefore, the former can not *necessarily* [emphasis added] belong to that horizon, namely, it *cannot be* necessarily related to that horizon [...]. The negation of a necessary relation [*unione necessaria*] [...] entails a contradiction. Therefore, *that a necessary relation* [...] *begins* [to obtain or hold], so that there is an [earlier] moment of time at which such a relation does not obtain, *is contradictory*. The relation is necessary exactly because any situation [viz., state of affairs] in which precisely that relation does not exist [viz., does not hold or does not obtain] is an inconsistent situation. [...] If an entity that begins to appear [in our experience] was logically and ontologically unable to be passed by something else (viz., if that entity makes some other entities unable to begin to appear), then that entity would begin to be necessarily related to the horizon and to the totality of what appears. But [that is not possible because] a relation is necessary exactly because it is not something that *begins* [to hold or obtain] (2001, pp. 92-96, translation mine, some emphasis added).

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[150] Indeed, there is a tight connection and a strong similarity between time and modality. For example, cf. Priest (2008, §§ 3.6a-3.6b).

[151] Furthermore, given Severino's *permanentism* (cf. §§1.1-1.2), the *relata* of R exist at every instant of time.

[...] [A]*n entity that begins to appear and that defies to be passed by* [something else] *is a self-contradictory entity* [or an impossible object]. Thus, *necessarily, any entity is passed by* [something else] [...] (2007, p. 237, emphasis added, translation mine).

I would prefer to speak in terms of states of affairs, or maximal consistent states of affairs, when I need to refer to that which is *passed by* or *defies the possibility to be passed by*. Whilst Severino seems conflate different ontological categories deliberately (events, facts, state of affairs, objects, properties, predicates, etc.) by including all of them under the umbrella term "entity" ("*essente*" or "*determinazione*"), I think that my focus on (maximal consistent) states of affairs is a good way to understand Severino's (2001) use of "*configurazione della terra*" (see, e.g., p. 162), which might be read as: 'a certain arrangement of entities that begin to appear in our experience'.

In the next section (§2.1) I summarize and explain Severino's (2001) core argument, and then I propose my formalization using temporal logic (§§2.2-2.3).

2. Why the "Spotlight" Moves: A Formalization of Severino's Main Argument of *La Gloria*

2.1 A Semi-Formalization of Severino's Argument

The main argument of *La Gloria* works as a *reductio ad absurdum*, and it might be represented as follows (the steps that are not clear here, i.e., in my semi-formalization, will become clearer in my formalization in §2.2):

(A1) There is a state of affairs or a maximal consistent state of affairs, M, that (i) *begins* to appear *now* in our experience, *and* that (ii) *defies to be passed by* another different state of affairs or another different maximal consistent state of affairs. [Assumption]

(A1.1) At every instant of time earlier than now, M does not appear in our experience. [By (A1)]

(A2) Necessarily, there is a set of predicates, Q, that inhere in each and every state of affairs *qua talis*. [Assumption]

(A3) Necessarily, if a state of affairs or a maximal consistent state of affairs appears in our experience, then Q appears in our experience. [Assumption]

(A4) Necessarily, if some states of affairs appear in our experience, then the predicates belonging to Q inhere in the components of those states of affairs, as well as in those states of affairs *qua talis*. [By (A2) and (A3)]

(A5) A relation R is necessary if and only if R holds in every possible world and at every instant of time. [By a certain definition of *necessity*]

(A6) If M defies to be passed by another different state of affairs or another different maximal consistent state of affairs, then M begins to be necessarily related (in the form of R) to (unrestrictedly) each and every state of affairs.

(A7) M begins to be necessarily related (in the form of R) to (unrestrictedly) each and every state of affairs. [By (A1) and (A6)]

(A8) If M *begins* to be necessarily related (in the form of R) to (unrestrictedly) each and every state of affairs, then there is a *new* predicate, "... is necessarily related (in the form of R) to M", that belongs to the set Q. [By (A2) and (A6)]

(A9) Q is not Q. [By (A8) and the Zermelo-Fraenkel Set Theory's axiom of extensionality]

Therefore, (A1) is false because it leads to contradiction (A9) [*reductio ad absurdum*].

The first assumption is what is rejected by the *reductio*'s strategy. Assumptions (A2) and (A3) are mainly based on Severino's masterpiece *La struttura originaria* ([1958] 1981),[152] but here I need to merely assume them due to limited space for the sake of brevity. (A5) is based on the definition of necessity in terms of possible worlds, combined with Severino's permanentism (cf. §§1.1-1.2) according to which (unrestrictedly) everything always exists, including the *relata* of R. In my opinion, proposition (A6) is one of the most controversial of the original argument by Severino. Due to limits of space, I cannot assess it here, but I will return to that issue in §§2.2-2.3.

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[152] But see also Severino (1982).

The above semi-formalization of Severino's argument can lead to at least another contradiction, (A11), also used by Severino himself to reject the first assumption:

(A10) There is no instant of time at which *M* does not appear in our experience. [By (A3) and (A8)]

(A11) At every instant of time earlier than now *M* does not appear in our experience *and* there is no instant of time at which *M* does not appear in our experience. [Conjunction Introduction, (A1.1), (A10)]

Therefore, we get another contradiction, (A11), such that *M always and not always* appears in our experience.

Since the assumption of (A1) leads to at least two contradictions (A9, A11), Severino's line rejects that assumption, concluding that it is impossible that a (maximal consistent) state of affairs *begins* to appear *now*, and *defies* to be passed by another different (maximal consistent) state of affairs.

Now, we can either rely on Severino's jargon and his non-formalized argument (cf. *supra* the relevant excerpt) or rely on my just outlined semi-formalized argument. In both cases, there are unclear steps or inferences that might not be valid. I think that a full formalization with temporal logic will help us to adjust our precise assessment of Severino's (2001) argument, as well as provide a contribute to the contemporary discussion about the Moving Spotlight Theory.

2.2 A Formalization of Severino's Argument within an Instant-Based Model of Time

In this subsection, I propose a formalization of Severino's (2001) main argument, appealing to temporal logic.[153] I will deploy the so-called *Tense Logic* system developed by Arthur Prior (cf., e.g., 1957). Whilst the core of Severino's intuition about time is preserved in my proposal, there are relevant differences between my formalization and the original argument. These differences will be considered in §2.3.

Before exposing the formal argument, I briefly introduce the logical devices I need to build the argument itself. First, we need Prior's temporal operators:

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[153] For an overview of temporal logic, see Priest (2008, pp. 49-56), and Goranko-Rumberg (2022).

P: 'It has at some time been the case that...'
F: 'It will at some time been the case that...'
H: 'It has always been the case that...'
G: 'It will always be the case that...'

For example, ***P***φ should be read as: 'It has at some time been the case that φ', where φ is any formula. Past and future operators are interdefinable:

Pφ ↔ ¬***H***¬φ
Hφ ↔ ¬***P***¬φ
Fφ ↔ ¬***G***¬φ
Gφ ↔ ¬***F***¬φ

We also need an instant-based model of time such that

[T]he primitive temporal entities are points in time, *viz. time instants*, and the basic relationship between them (besides equality) is *temporal precedence*. Thus, the flow of time is represented by a non-empty set of time instants *T* with a binary relation of precedence on it [...] (Goranko-Rumberg 2022, par. 2.1).

Furthermore, we need to appeal especially to one among the possible properties of an instant-based model of time,[154] i.e., *reflexivity*: $\forall x(x \prec x)$. As Priest (2008) correctly highlights, *reflexivity* has "little plausibility" (p. 52) because "[it] says that every point in time is later than itself" (*ivi*), or – conversely – that every point in time is earlier than itself (since it is the same point, *x*, that occurs on the left or the right side of the temporal relation). I will return to this issue in §2.3. So far, I need to combine the principle of reflexivity with Prior's temporal operators, obtaining the following (cf. Goranko-Rumberg 2022, parr. 3.2 and 3.6):

(REF) any of ***G***φ→φ, ***H***φ→φ, φ→***F***φ, or φ→***P***φ

(Informally: if it will always be the case that φ, then it is the case that φ; if it has always been the case that φ, then it is the case that φ; if it is the case that φ, then it will at some (instant of) time be the case that φ; or if it is the case that φ, then it has at some (instant of) time been the case that φ.)

Finally, we can introduce the proposition *q*, according to which a certain state of affairs or a maximal consistent state of affairs, *S*, obtains at a bright instant of time:

q: <*S* obtains at a bright instant of time>,

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[154] Cf. Goranko-Rumberg (2022, par. 2.1) for all possible properties of an instant-based model of time.

where the property of *brightness* has been explained in §1.1. As we have seen, the aim of Severino's (2001) argument is to show that it is (logically) impossible (viz., it is contradictory) that a certain arrangement of entities *begins* to appear *and*, thereafter, appears *forever*. In my reading by means of temporal logic, I would paraphrase the content of such (logical) impossibility as follows: a certain state of affairs or maximal consistent state of affairs, *S*, such that (i) *S* obtains now (where "now" denotes the absolute, objective present, bright instant of time), *and* (ii) *S* does not obtain at all earlier (than now) instants of time, *and* (iii) *S* does obtain at all later (than now) instants of time. This idea might be formalized as:

(1) $H\neg q \wedge q \wedge Gq$

Given all these preliminary steps, my formalization of Severino's (2001) main argument – let us call it the "Spotlight Movement Argument" (hereinafter: SMA) – runs as follows:

Spotlight movement argument (SMA)

1) $H\neg q \wedge q \wedge Gq$ [Ass.]
2) Gq [1, Conjunction Elimination]
3) $Gq \rightarrow q$ [2, Reflexivity (REF)]
4) q [2, 3, *Modus Ponens*]
5) $q \rightarrow Pq$ [4, Reflexivity (REF)]
6) Pq [4, 5, *Modus Ponens*]
7) $H\neg q$ [1, Conjunction Elimination]
8) $H\neg q \leftrightarrow \neg Pq$ [by 7, due to interdefinability between P and H]
9) $H\neg q \rightarrow \neg Pq$ [by 8]
10) $\neg Pq$ [7, 9, *Modus Ponens*].
11) $Pq \wedge \neg Pq$ [6, 10, Conjunction Introduction]

Since our assumption (1) leads to contradiction (11), namely, *that* it has at some time been the case that *q and* it has not at some time been the case that *q*, assumption (1) should be rejected by *reductio ad absurdum*. Given what *q* affirms (cf. *supra*), (11) affirms that it has at some time been the case that the state of affairs *S* obtains at a bright instant of time, *and* it has not at some time been the case that the state of affairs *S* obtains at a bright instant of time. Therefore, the assumption (1) is false, *quod erat demonstrandum*.

2.3 Assessment of SMA and Comparison with the Original Argument by Severino

In this subsection, I am going to briefly assess Severino's (2001) original argument and my semi-formalization of it in §2.1, together with my SMA proposal.

First, I would highlight that both Severino's argument and my SMA begin with the same step: the logical point that a certain arrangement of entities (*something*, broadly speaking), which has *never* appeared in our experience, appears *now*, and will thereafter appear *forever*. In Severino's jargon, both arguments start with the hypothesis of an entity or an arrangement of entities that is a "*determinazione sopraggiungente inoltrepassabile*" (cf. 1.3, especially the chart). Moreover, both Severino's argument and the SMA are forms of *reductio ad absurdum*, because they both show that the above-mentioned starting point leads to a contradiction. Finally, both arguments explain *why the spotlight moves*, and just do it by means of logic: Severino's argument accounts for the *sequentiality* of what (progressively) appears by showing that *it is contradictory* to affirm that there might be something that begins to appear *and* last forever in our experience; the SMA accounts for the metaphor of the moving spotlight by showing that assuming that there is *now* an obtaining state of affairs, S, that has never obtained in a bright instant of time *earlier* than now, *and* will obtain at all bright instants of time *later* than now, *leads to a contradiction.* Therefore, it is (logically or metaphysically) *impossible* that a state of affairs *begins* to appear *now* (for the first time), whilst *being unable to be passed by* other states of affairs, namely – in my SMA formalization – whilst *obtaining at every instant of time later than now.*

I think that all of these similarities between the two arguments are enough to say that SMA might be a good interpretation of the core of Severino's (2001) original argument.

Having said that, let us see the specific pros and cons of both arguments, as partially anticipated before. Severino's (2001) original argument (cf. §1.3), as well as its semi-formalization (cf. §2.1) have the following disadvantages. First, the original jargon by Severino, as it is, uses several metaphorical phrases that may be obscure to the newcoming reader. Therefore, an attempt to unpack the metaphor of the moving spotlight by appealing to Severino's jargon could be unsuccessful as far as Severino's jargon is more metaphorical than the MST itself (just think of terms like "*orizzonte dell'apparire*", "*sfondo dell'apparire*", "*sopraggiungente inoltre-passabile*", etc., which, without my previous conceptual translation work, would literally have to be rendered as "horizon of appearing", "background

of appearing", "the overtaking which overcomes", etc.). However, in all fairness to Severino and his commendable philosophical endeavour, we should also notice that all his metaphors are grounded in (partially) non-metaphorical concepts that the experienced connoisseur of his work can easily recognize.[155] Indeed, following the Italian philosopher's explanations, it is possible to (partially) paraphrase his metaphors within a non-metaphorical language.[156] That is exactly what I tried to do in §1.3 and in §2.1. Yet, what has emerged is some metaphysical and logical issues, like a certain category confusion among different ontological concepts due to an unchecked use of "entity". Moreover, some logical inferences are not clear [e.g., the inference of (A6)].

Above all, I find that the main conceptual confusion latent in Severino's argument (metaphors aside) is the following. It seems, on the one hand, that the set of predicates *Q qua talis* necessary relates to each and every state of affairs (that appear in our experience). On the other hand, it seems that *the elements* of *Q*, i.e., the specific predicates that apply to all entities (say, the "transcendentals" of Severino's ontology), necessary relate to each and every state of affairs (that appear in our experience) as well. This leads me to claim a certain amount of confusion between the "horizon of that which appears" *as a set*, and the "horizon" as a term to refer *to the members* of that set.

Finally, what might be the one heavy disadvantage of Severino's argument per se is the strong theoretical commitment (ontological or ideological) to the "horizon of that which appears" itself. My SMA gets away without postulating a set of predicates that inhere in each and every entity.

On the contrary, my SMA appeals to reflexivity, as opposed to Severino's original argument, which, as we have seen, is usually taken to be controversial in the literature. Indeed, in an instant-based model of time, this principle may be taken to affirm that every point in time is later than itself, or – conversely – that every point in time is earlier than itself. How to make sense of this idea? An option could be a sort of Nietzschean "eternal recurrence of the same", or, better, a view of time as a recurring process or a circular time model where also transitivity holds.[157] However, this option does not look like a good representation of either Severino's ontology of

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[155] Usually, the main baseline of Severino's technicism is his early masterpiece *La struttura originaria*, [1958] 1981).

[156] However, no language can completely avoid metaphors, even the most formalized languages, and even more so as translations across different languages are involved.

[157] According to transitivity, $\forall x \forall y \forall z (x \prec y \land y \prec z \rightarrow x \prec z)$. Cf., e.g., Goranko-Rumberg (2022, par.2.1).

time or any MST in general. In fact, both proposals are more committed to the idea of a linear conception of time rather than a circular one.[158] By this consideration, what I did in my SMA is to rephrase the principle of reflexivity in terms of Prior's temporal operators, in the effort to generate the principle (REF). In fact, although (REF) does not affirm self-evident truths, its conditionals seem at least less controversial than the mere idea that an instant of time is earlier (or later) than itself.

By way of conclusion, I would highlight that the main contribution of this article is twofold. First, the paper argues why Emanuele Severino's ontology might be interpreted as a Moving Spotlight Theory (see §§1.1-1.3). Second, and consequently, the paper explains why the spotlight moves (see §2.1-2.3), based on the key argument of Severino's (2001) masterpiece *La Gloria*. (In doing so, I have also proposed a paraphrase of Severino's original jargon through temporal logic). As far as I know, in the contemporary literature about the philosophy of time, there are mainly two works that *explicitly* account for the metaphorical movement of the spotlight, namely, the movement of – broadly speaking – objective presentness, in the most non-metaphorical way possible. The first such contribution is Correia-Rosenkranz (2020): given some plausible tenets, they argue, it would be contradictory to claim that there is a time that is always *objectively* present (cf. *ibidem*, par. 2). The second contribution is Marques (2020), who accounts for the movement of the spotlight in terms of the *flow of our awareness* of our mental states. Both Correia-Rosenkranz's (2020) and Marques' (2020) thesis can potentially be compared to Severino's (2001) argument and to my SMA, given the strong similarities that I cannot assess here, due to space constraints. I hope to get the chance to go on this path in my future work.

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[158] To be fair, Severino's ontology of time involves the concept of "appearing again" ("*riapparire*") as a consequence of the core thesis of *La Gloria*. In a nutshell, if no entity that *begins* to appear in our experience will last forever (in our experience), then even those entities that are nothing but the *absence* of something that earlier has appeared will not last forever *qua* absence. That is, all absences will eventually be passed by as a necessity. Since the absence of *x* ceases to appear (viz., we cease to experience the absence of *x*) once that *x* appears *again*, then – according to Severino – everything will necessarily appear again. For the detailed argument, cf. Severino (2001) and (2007), as well as Goggi (2015, pp. 333-335) for a helpful explanation. A full assessment of this very significant thesis is beyond the scope of this article, but I hope to discuss it elsewhere in the next future.

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