

Emanuele Severino
A Testimony of the Language that Testifies to Destiny
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Abstract

This essay contributes to further introducing the English-speaking world to one of the most challenging and radical thinkers of the 20th century, Emanuele Severino. Recent years have seen an increasing number of translations of Severino's works, as well as different critical contributions concerning Severino's thought. This essay presents the principal traits of the 'testimony of the destiny of necessity', and situates them in the context of the philosophical tradition in which this testimony appears. In so doing, this essay introduces the principal axes along which Severino's philosophical thought can be unfolded, which include the questions of the incontrovertible truth of being, the contradiction of becoming, the essence and history of nihilism, and the relation between being and eternity.

1. *Introduction*

The last century has seen countless philosophies testify to the impossibility of attesting or bearing witness to an unconditional notion of truth: to *the* unconditional and incontrovertible notion of the truth of everything that is. Accordingly, these voices have attested to the very impossibility of delivering a testimony of the incontrovertible truth of being — a statement that appears to be intuitively connected to the impossibility of delivering an incontrovertibly true testimony. At the same time, however, the *content* that is testified to by these voices appears to bear relevance for *the conditions of possibility* of these testimonies themselves, as well as for the conditions of possibility of the notion of testimony itself. Which is to say that the conditions for the possibility of testimony in general, and of these testimonies in particular, appear to be called into question by virtue of the content of these very testimonies. In other words, and according to a most familiar sceptical theme, the question is raised as to how, or why, one should trust a testimony that renders the truth of testimony altogether impossible. But then, again, not trusting these sceptical testimonies would entail, precisely, the possibility of trusting testimonies *tout court* — including the sceptical ones.

Beside this most immemorial aporia, which evidently cannot be resolved in this framework, the question remains as to the conditions for the possibility of the very appearing of these testimonies. Namely, regardless of the infinite hermeneutical dimension that each of these testimonies contains — for each of these testimonies can be read according to infinitely different singular contexts, translational paradigms, hermeneutical horizons, etc. — and regardless of their own

aporetic character, these testimonies *do* appear: for if they did not, neither would the manifold aporias and interpretative dimensions that they give rise to.

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The work of Emanuele Severino sets out from these considerations in order to enquire into the conditions that make it ‘possible’ for these aporias and contradictions to appear’. Severino asks the following question: what must the originary structure of everything that is, and appears, be like – what must the originary structure of being be – *in order for* these aporias and contradictions to arise and to appear in their aporetic character? Or, and this will turn out to be the same question, can something like the originary structure of truth – of the truth of anything that is, the truth of being – be testified to?

Emanuele Severino’s work attests to the originary structure of the concrete totality of being within which the aporias and contradictions of truth and testimony – and of the truth of testimony and the testimony of truth – first appear. Following Severino along this path, it will gradually become apparent that the domain of contradiction is not restricted to a few selected instances, but rather extends unconstrained across *the whole* plane of linguistic signification, covering each and every corner of a landscape that has always had, in truth, a completely different meaning. Under the cover of the contradiction that encompasses the totality of linguistic signification, there has in fact always been nothing – or, rather, nothingness itself has always coincided with the meaning of this cover itself. The whole of linguistic signification has *one* positive meaning: the meaning of nothingness. The contradiction – everything – means: nothing.

And yet, at the same time, the essence of nihilism that is seen to pervade every aspect of the life of humans can, and does, appear – Severino testifies – only in accordance with the originary structure of the truth of being. The truth of being is, Severino continues, *the incontrovertible* –that the negation of which is self-negating. As the testimony of the truth of being unfolds, Severino comes to bear witness to one of the most crucial determinations of this truth and this testimony: testifying to the originary structure of the incontrovertible, Severino argues, is equivalent to testifying to the originary structure of the destiny of necessity. As this implication first appears, Severino comes to refer to his work as ‘the language that testifies to destiny’ (*il linguaggio che testimonia il destino*).¹

In what follows, the principal traits of the language that testifies to destiny are introduced, and the conditions of possibility – or, rather, the conditions of necessity – for the language that bears witness to the destiny of necessity are presented. As the (infinitely many) determinations of the truth of being all belong originally together in the incontrovertible, it becomes clear that the language that testifies to destiny is unable synchronically to present this concrete totality, and can

¹ Emanuele Severino, *Destino della necessità: Kata to chreon* (Milan: Adelphi, 1980).

only unfold the determinations one by one, abstracting them from the whole to which they belong. Abstracted – ‘isolated’ – in this way, the determinations of the truth of being no longer possess their unique and singular trait of incontrovertibility: the language that testifies to destiny necessarily mistranslates the untranslatable, and thus errs. But even when it errs, the language that testifies to destiny errs according to the destiny of necessity – and errs in a way that is irreconcilable with the error of the languages that do not testify to the truth of being.

2. *The Language that Testifies to the Destiny of Necessity*

It is at this point necessary to provide a testimony of the language that testifies to destiny – i.e. to give an account of Emanuele Severino’s philosophical thought.² Emanuele Severino (1929–2020) belongs to, and at the same time well exceeds, the philosophical tradition that may be traced back to Gustavo Bontadini and Giovanni Gentile – a tradition of 20th century Italian philosophy that, for the most part, has not enjoyed significant attention or been widely promulgated outside of the cultural borders of Italy.³ Severino studies at the University of Pavia with Bontadini, one of the principal exponents of Italian neo-scholasticism, who advances a return to classical metaphysics informed by the developments of post-Kantian philosophy. Bontadini’s philosophical endeavour indeed takes place against the backdrop offered by the work of one of his, and later Severino’s, most decisive references – Giovanni Gentile. Gentile, one of the two key figures of Italian (neo-)idealism (the other one being Benedetto Croce, from whom Gentile comes to be separated by an irremediable philosophical and political distance), identifies in Hegel’s philosophy, and in particular in the essence of the Hegelian dialectics, the remnants of a ‘naturalistic’ (that is: presuppositional, non-idealist) philosophical stance. Leading the Hegelian system to its own self-coherence and accomplishment, according to Gentile, entails considering thinking as real, and actual, only insofar as it is a *pure act* (*atto puro*): a purely present and actual thinking that does not presuppose anything outside of the act in which it realises itself (‘Actual Idealism’ [*Attualismo*]).

With this philosophical background, and profoundly influenced by the thought of Martin Heidegger (which is the focus of his dissertation with Bontadini,

² If, on the one hand, a testimony of the language that testifies to destiny is (and can only be) a controvertible interpretation – for it is only an interpretation that this testimony is an ‘account’ of the ‘philosophical thought’ of ‘Emanuele Severino’ – in what follows the relationship between the language that testifies to destiny and the present testimony will be clarified.

³ See in particular Gustavo Bontadini, *Conversazioni di metafisica* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1971); Gustavo Bontadini, *Metafisica e deellenizzazione* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1975); Giovanni Gentile, *Sistema di logica come teoria del conoscere* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1955); Giovanni Gentile, *Teoria generale dello spirito come atto puro* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1959).

*Heidegger e la metafisica*⁴), Severino proceeds to advance one of the most untimely and challenging philosophical proposals of the last century. In addition to Heidegger's own testimonies,⁵ the singular nature of Severino's philosophical thought is attested by the dispute that takes place in the 1960s between the philosopher and the Catholic Church. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (the body that in 1908 takes over from the Office of the Inquisition the task of defending and promulgating the Catholic doctrine) subjects Severino and his work to an investigation reminiscent of some most eminent precedents. At the end of the inquiry, Severino leaves his professorship at the Catholic University of Milan, to which he had been invited, and his philosophical thought is declared by the Congregation to be radically incompatible with the message and the teaching of the Christian faith. Leading the investigation is Father Cornelio Fabro, a crucial figure of 20th century Thomism, who concludes in his report for the Congregation (included in the *Acta Apostolicae*): 'Severino has critiqued the very ground of the conception of God's transcendence and the tenets of Christianity like arguably no atheism or heresy has ever done before.'⁶

As early as 1958, Severino publishes the text that will serve as the background wherein all his subsequent writings receive their sense and their meaning, *La struttura originaria* (The Originary Structure).⁷ If *La struttura originaria* is the text that provides the background for the appearing of Severino's later writings, the 'originary structure' that is mentioned for the first time in that text constitutes the background (*sfondo*) for the appearing of everything that appears *tout court*. The originary structure is the structure of the truth of everything that is and appears, namely the structure of the truth of being. The originary structure is the incontrovertible: that whose negation is self-negating. Or, the originary structure is the incontrovertible self-being of everything that is – the impossibility for any being to be other than itself.

⁴ Emanuele Severino, *Heidegger e la metafisica* (Milan: Adelphi, 1994).

⁵ The recent archival discovery by Friedrich-Wilhelm Von Herrmann and Francesco Alfieri of Heidegger's fragments on Severino's work has called for a new assessment of his knowledge of the latter, as is also testified to by Fritz Heidegger and Heinrich Heidegger: Giulio Goggi and Ines Testoni, eds., *Heidegger nel pensiero di Severino*, (Padova: Padova University Press, 2019). In the 1973 Zähringen Seminar, Heidegger explicitly refers to Severino's essay, 'Returning to Parmenides', in which the thesis of the eternity of all beings is first put forth; Martin Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, trans. Andrew Mitchell, François Raffoul (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 77.

⁶ Emanuele Severino, *Il mio ricordo degli eterni* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2011), 98–99. Translations from the Italian are mine throughout.

⁷ 'La struttura originaria remains to this day the ground where all my writings receive their very own meaning', Emanuele Severino, *La struttura originaria* (Milan: Adelphi, 1981), 13. Concerning the translation of the Italian term 'originario', see: Damiano Sacco, 'The Translation of Destiny, and The Destiny of Translation', in Emanuele Severino, *Law and Chance*, ed. Giulio Goggi, Damiano Sacco, Ines Testoni, trans. Damiano Sacco (London: Bloomsbury, 2023).

In ‘Returning to Parmenides’ (1964) and in the ‘Postscript’ (1965),⁸ Severino sets forth the most challenging implication of the originary structure of the truth of being: the eternity of all beings. Since becoming – the being-other of what is – contradicts the truth of being, every being must be eternal. Every being – this firewood, these ashes, this thought, this fear – is eternal; to be means to be eternal. The becoming of beings cannot appear; what experience attests to is the appearing and disappearing of the eternal beings.

Over the course of six decades, Severino unfolds the testimony of the truth of being. One of the most crucial advances made by this testimony consists in the attestation of the necessity with which the appearing and disappearing of the eternal beings is to take place. The originary structure entails the necessity of destiny, as first testified to in *Destino della necessità* (The Destiny of Necessity) (1980).⁹ Henceforth, Severino refers to his work and philosophical project as to ‘the language that testifies to destiny’. From 1980 to 2020 (*Testimoniando il destino* is published in 2019),¹⁰ this testimony explores the determinations of the destiny of necessity, and in so doing continues to attest to the fate of humans – ‘mortals’, ‘the inhabitants of time’, persuaded of the ‘folly’: the nothingness of everything.

2.1 *The Originary Structure of the Truth of Being*

It is then first necessary to delineate the principal traits of the testimony of destiny and of the language that presents this testimony. The testimony of destiny is the testimony of the incontrovertible, the destiny of necessity. The incontrovertible – what appears at first to be the ‘content’ of the testimony – is that away from which it is not possible to turn (*contra-vertere*). That it is not possible to turn away from the incontrovertible means that it is the ubiquitous background (*sfondo*) that precedes every turning: wherever one turns, one is always turning within the background offered by the incontrovertible.

The incontrovertible is: that whose negation is self-negating; that whose negation, in negating itself, cannot be. That which cannot be negated is that which cannot be different from itself: the truth of being is *the self-being of being itself*. The originary structure of the truth of being is the ‘structure’ of being that allows every being-that-is to be itself. A being’s being-other (than itself) would presuppose, precisely, the very being that is being negated, and whose negation thereby negates itself: ‘The originary structure is the meaning whose negation is self-negating. It is the appearing of beings, and of the impossibility that a being, *qua* being – namely, every being – not be’.¹¹

⁸ Emanuele Severino, *The Essence of Nihilism*, ed. Alessandro Carrera and Ines Testoni, trans. Giacomo Donis (London: Verso, 2016).

⁹ Severino, *Destino della necessità*.

¹⁰ Emanuele Severino, *Testimoniando il destino* (Milan: Adelphi, 2019).

¹¹ Severino, *La struttura originaria*, 72.

Equivalently, the testimony in question attests that what is *not* incontrovertible – namely: what is controvertible, or what is said to be other than itself – *cannot* be. The controvertible is not; the controvertible is nothing. As such, the language that testifies to destiny asserts that every testimony, every language that is not incontrovertible, testifies to this very nothingness – where to testify to nothingness itself is altogether different from not testifying to anything. In what follows, it will become clear that, according to the language that testifies to destiny, every language that has ever been spoken has always and only testified to this nothingness – and this includes the very language that testifies to destiny.¹²

2.2 *Becoming, Contradiction, Eternity*

After the publication of *La Struttura Originaria* (1958), Severino unfolds the implications and determinations of the originary structure of the truth of being. A few of the most essential ones appear already in the essays, ‘Returning to Parmenides’ (1964) and in its ‘Postscript’ (1965), later collected in *The Essence of Nihilism* (1972).¹³

According to Severino, the truth of being, the self-being of being, has always been subjected to an essential negotiation – a negotiation that has attempted to reconcile the firmest principle (*bebaiotáte tón archôn pasôn*, *Metaphysics*: 1006a5¹⁴) with the originary self-evidence of the becoming of every being. As soon as the truth of being emerges with Parmenides – who could hold it in view only at the cost of sacrificing the becoming and the multiplicity of all beings – according to Severino, this truth is immediately renounced in order to uphold the most originary self-evidence: that of the becoming of every being. If Parmenides can

¹² It is not possible here to address the secondary literature and the critical perspectives that have originated from Severino’s philosophical proposal. For a comprehensive overview, see: Giulio Goggi, *Emanuele Severino* (Vatican: Lateran University Press, 2015).

¹³ *The Essence of Nihilism* is Severino’s first and, to date, only book to have been translated into English (see, however, the edited collection, Emanuele Severino, *Nihilism and Destiny*, ed. Nicoletta Cusano (Milan: Mimesis International, 2016)). The translations of *Legge e caso* and *Oltre il linguaggio* are forthcoming in 2023; Emanuele Severino, *Legge e caso* (Milan: Adelphi, 1979); Emanuele Severino, *Oltre il linguaggio* (Milan: Adelphi, 1992); Emanuele Severino, *Law and Chance*, ed. Giulio Goggi, Damiano Sacco, Ines Testoni, trans. Damiano Sacco (London: Bloomsbury, 2023); Emanuele Severino, *Beyond Language*, ed. Giulio Goggi, Damiano Sacco, Ines Testoni, trans. Damiano Sacco (London: Bloomsbury, 2023). The thesis of the eternity of all beings is first prefigured in the essay, ‘La metafisica classica e aristotele’ (1956), now collected in Emanuele Severino, *Fondamento della contraddizione* (Milan: Adelphi, 2005). An excerpt from the essay appeared in English in *Philosophy Today* already in 1958, see: Emanuele Severino, ‘Aristotle and Classical Metaphysics’, *Philosophy Today* 2:2 (1958), 71–82.

¹⁴ Quotations from Aristotle and Plato are given directly in the text, following the complete English editions of their works, see Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

affirm the truth and eternity of being only by excluding the multiplicity of difference (the multiplicity of the different beings), Plato's attempt at saving the appearance of becoming and the multiplicity of beings – at saving the phenomena, *sózein tà phainόμενα* – aims to reintroduce difference within being. This is the content of Plato's seminal 'parricide', the inaugural act of Western tradition, where the failure to testify to the truth of being can first explicitly be attested. In the *Sophist*, the visitor from Elea tells Theaetetus: 'We're going to have to subject father Parmenides' saying to further examination, and insist by brute force both that *what is not* somehow is, and then again that *what is* somehow is not' (*Sophist*, 241d).¹⁵ But neither demoting the world of experience to the illusion of *doxa* (Parmenides) nor disavowing the firmest principle (Plato) can be part of the testimony of the truth of being.

Plato's parricide testifies to the essence of the history of nihilism: beings become, and, in becoming, *something* of what they are must turn into nothing, for otherwise they would remain the same. The tradition of the West conceives of becoming as an emergence from and a return to nothingness. Severino writes:

Indeed, if the thing from which becoming begins, and which is swept away by becoming, did not turn into nothing, that thing would remain self-identical, and there would be no becoming-other. [...] And if the other of the thing, with which the thing becomes identical, did not issue from nothingness, that very other would already be together with the thing – and, once again, there would be no becoming-other of the thing.¹⁶

But, according to the truth of being, believing that something can, and does, turn into nothingness (which is necessary for anything to become anything else) entails stating that there exists a time in which what-is is not – and vice versa, that there exists a time in which what-is-not is. Aristotle's formulation of the principle of non-contradiction in *De Interpretatione* reads: 'What is, necessarily is, when it is; and what is not, necessarily is not, when it is not' (*De Interpretatione*, 19a24). But if it is admitted that there exists a time in which every being-that-is is not, the testimony of nihilism, in trusting the most originary self-evidence of becoming, *attests that everything that is is in fact nothing*. This, according to Severino, is the true essence of the history of what he names 'the folly', the history of nihilism: the conviction or persuasion that what-is is nothing. According to the language that testifies to destiny, nihilism is neither a consequence of the 'fable' of the true world nor a result of the forgetting of the question of being. Nihilism means: willing or believing everything that is to be nothing – *nihil*, the content of the contradiction.

¹⁵ See also: Emanuele Severino, *Il parricidio mancato* (Milan: Adelphi, 1985).

¹⁶ Severino, *Oltre il linguaggio*, 23-24.

Returning to Parmenides entails, on the contrary, returning to the site of the parricide and upholding *both* the truth of *logos* (the firmest principle) and the truth of appearing (the *phainesthai* of becoming):

Returning to Parmenides means repeating the ‘parricide’ – without, in so doing, being at fault before the truth of being: repeating the foundation of multiplicity [...] by asserting *of every being*, and of the *concrete totality* of all beings, what Parmenides has asserted of being itself: ‘It is impossible that it not be’.¹⁷

From these premises, Severino draws the most challenging implication of the truth of being: which is to say, *the eternity of all beings*. Every being – this book, this thought, this fear – is eternal: it is forever saved from ‘the assault of nothingness’.¹⁸ In the same way in which the sun does not turn into nothing when it sets over the horizon, so *every being* that leaves the horizon of appearing does not, as a result, turn into nothing. Severino writes:

If it cannot be thought of being (of every being and of all being) that it is not, then it cannot be thought of being (of every being and of all being) that it becomes. For if being were to become, it would not be – it would not be, that is, before its birth and after its corruption. Thus, *all being* is immutable. It neither issues from nothingness nor returns to it. It is eternal.¹⁹

If ‘Returning to Parmenides’ contains the ‘abyssal’ claim of the eternity of all beings, the nihilist conception of becoming – nihilist in that, once again, it entails that *something*, of what becomes, must turn into nothing; that a being should coincide with nothing – is overcome in the ‘Postscript’ (1965). Severino concludes that the birth and corruption of beings (their emergence from and return to nothingness) is not only impossible according to the truth of being, but it cannot be – *and it is not* – a part of the content of experience. Experience does not, and cannot, attest to the annihilation of beings, for the *disappearing* of a being does not, and cannot, attest to its becoming-nothing. Severino draws together all the theoretical elements advanced up until that moment, and asks once again: what is the ‘veritable’ [*veritativa*] configuration of becoming that does not contradict the truth of being? The answer, which concludes this first part of Severino’s enquiry, determines that becoming consists of *the appearing and disappearing* of the eternal beings. In the ‘Postscript’, Severino writes:

¹⁷ Emanuele Severino, *Essenza del nichilismo* (Milan: Adelphi, 1982), 315. (Note: the essay ‘Risposta ai critici’ is not included in the English translation of *Essenza del nichilismo*).

¹⁸ Severino, *The Essence of Nihilism*, 46.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

For indeed, appearing *does not attest* to the opposite of what is demanded by the *logos*. The *logos* demands the immutability of being – it demands, that is, that being not be nothing, and thus not issue from and not return to nothingness – and appearing, *in its truth, does not attest* that being does so. [...] The becoming that appears is not the birth and death of being, but rather its appearing and disappearing. Becoming is the process of the revelation of the immutable beings.²⁰

As part of the truth of being, becoming coincides with the appearing and disappearing of the eternal. Severino's reflection appears here in its irreducible untimeliness. An untimeliness that is due, first of all, to the break that it establishes with the tradition of the history of nihilism, according to which being is believed to be (in) time, wherein it issues from and returns to nothingness. Time itself is (thought to be) the very medium that allows the impossible coincidence of the being-that-is and the being-that-is-not. Humans, Severino argues, insofar as they are 'the inhabitants of time', are mortal – but, crucially, they are mortal *because* they believe that becoming, and every birth and death associated with it, are instances of an impossible emergence from and return to nothingness: 'Humans', Severino writes, 'are not mortal because they are born and die; rather, they are born and die because they are mortal.'²¹ Secondly, but perhaps primarily, Severino's meditation appears irreducibly untimely because it attempts to think the untimeliness and eternity of every being: its being always and forever saved from the assault of nothingness.

2.3 *The History of Nihilism: The 'Folly'*

According to Severino, the entirety of the history of the West – a history that, insofar as it results in the global domination accomplished by Western civilisation, turns every other history into its own prehistory – is immersed in the essence of nihilism, and thereby coincides with the history of nihilism. This is the history of the 'folly', the belief that there is a time in which *every* being, insofar as it becomes, is not – that is to say, the belief according to which *every* being, *qua* being-that-is, is not: is nothing. This belief represents the unconscious of every unconscious dimension, the essential alienation that grounds and underlies every other alienation or separation (from god, nature, truth, the moral conscience, the ownership of the means of production, etc.).

At the origin of the history of the 'folly', the feeling experienced upon encountering the appearing of phenomena – Severino argues – is not one of wonder (*thaûma*: *Theaetetus*, 155 c-d, *Metaphysics*, 982 b12-13), but rather one of a most abyssal dread and terror caused by the becoming of the existent: namely,

²⁰ Ibid., 109-112.

²¹ Ibid., 253.

by its always imminent annihilation. Confronted with the incessant assault of nothingness, humans resort to the invocation of an immutable being that would be able to escape the ruin of becoming ('the being always safe' [*phûsis aei sozoméne*], *Metaphysics*, 983 b13). The sequence of immutable beings invoked by the West in order to be saved from the annihilation of becoming is the sequence of the gods of the West.

In the last two centuries, the history of the invocation of the immutable beings becomes the history of their destruction. The tradition, however, enacts this most essential destruction – Heidegger's *Destruktion*, Nietzsche's *Götzen-Dämmerung*, Hegel's *Erinnerung* and *Unruhe des Geistes* – without being aware of the *necessity* of its taking place. For, indeed, according to Severino, the destruction of the immutable beings is rendered necessary by the very becoming that has prompted the invocation of these beings, and which, sooner or later, must necessarily overthrow everything – including, eventually, all the gods and 'immutable' beings of the West. The West, however – Severino continues – cannot see the essential necessity of the destruction of the immutable beings (only Nietzsche, Leopardi, Gentile, and perhaps a few others, Severino argues, can see that, *given* the becoming of the world, the fall of the gods of the West must necessarily follow). In any case, the West may not become aware of the essential alienation of nihilism, outside of which *every* being is forever safe in the eternity of being. Even the language that testifies to this alienation must remain an alienated language, a language that is part of the 'folly'.

The faith in the becoming of the world is, ultimately, a form of *will* – the will for a being to be other than itself (which is to say, for a being to be nothing); and, conversely, every will is a form of faith, for it is the *controvertible* assertion of a certain content. According to Severino, every form of will is a form of the will to power: the will that wills the becoming-other of all beings – the will that can have power over beings precisely insofar as it can create, transform, and destroy them. Every form of will, action and production is a form of *poiesis* – namely the failed attempt at creating, destroying or transforming a being: 'Everything that is responsible for creating something out of nothing is a kind of *poiesis*' (*Symposium*, 205b–c; *Sophist*, 219b, 265b). The essence of the history of nihilism comes to thus coincide with the essence of the history of technics (for 'the productions of every *téchne* are a kind of *poiesis*', *Symposium*, 205c). The age of technics, in particular, is the age that follows the destruction of the immutable beings – the age in which it is believed that beings are subjected to an unconstrained becoming, operated by the forces that have freed themselves from the constraints of the immutable beings. Severino testifies to the essential alliance that exists between the philosophies that carry out the destruction of the immutable beings and the unfolding of the age of technics: for it is only because every obstacle to the irruption of becoming has been

removed that the *poiesis* of technics knows no limits.²² And it is only because every obstacle to the irruption of becoming has been removed that violence knows no limits: for violence (*bía*) is precisely the (failed) production, destruction, and transformation of any being (the formula of the parricide, as already quoted, reads: ‘We are going to have *to insist by brute force* [*biázesthai*] both that *what is not* somehow is, and then again that *what is* somehow is not’, *Sophist*, 241d).²³

2.4 Appendix: The Aporia of Becoming and the Critique of Heidegger

An essential aporia – which, however, presents a certain technical complexity – is presented in this appendix. Its resolution introduces further determinations of the testimony of the truth of being, and allows the introduction of Severino’s critique of Heidegger.

The eternal being of the firewood enters the circle of appearing (the circle of appearing is the site in which the content of appearing appears; the site that, in welcoming all becoming, does not itself become: ‘it is the totality of the beings that appear, it is appearing, insofar as its content is everything that appears’).²⁴ That is to say, the firewood appears. The eternal firewood leaves the circle of appearing: the firewood disappears. The eternal being of the ashes enters the circle of appearing: the ashes appear.

‘The inhabitants of time’ – the inhabitants of the ‘isolated earth’: namely, that part of the appearing content (the *earth*) that, within the history of the folly, is *isolated* from the truth of destiny – promptly reply: it is then to be objected that, according to the very logic to which Severino resorts, it is now *the appearing* of the firewood that turns into nothing when the firewood disappears. The problem has simply been transferred to a different level, but in no way has it been resolved.

Some of the most crucial determinations of the language that testifies to destiny emerge at this juncture. First, it is to be remarked that ‘the isolated earth’ *wants* to raise this objection – it *believes* that the content of this objection is what it (the isolated earth) wants it to be. But the isolated earth cannot know, or show, the incontrovertible character of the content of its objection – for otherwise it would not be, precisely, *isolated* from the truth of being (this aspect will be expanded on in the next section). Second: even if the language that testifies to destiny were not

²² See Emanuele Severino, *La tendenza fondamentale del nostro tempo* (Milan: Adelphi, 1988); Emanuele Severino, *Il destino della tecnica* (Milan: BUR Rizzoli, 2009); Emanuele Severino, *Capitalismo senza futuro* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2012).

²³ Emanuele Severino, *Ontologia e violenza: Lezioni milanesi*, ed. Nicoletta Cusano (Milan: Mimesis, 2019).

²⁴ Severino, *Destino della necessità*, p. 140. The circle of appearing, as the site that welcomes the appearing of everything that appears, does not itself begin to appear or disappear (whereas the relation between a being that begins to appear and the circle of appearing is a being that itself begins to appear).

able successfully to address this or other seeming aporias and contradictions, this very inability would in no way be able to shake the unwavering stance of the originary structure. The originary structure is that whose negation is self-negating; or: every negation of the originary structure is utterly unable to stand. If the solution to a seeming aporia does not appear in the originary circle of appearing (that is, it does not appear in the circle in which the language that testifies to destiny appears), the absence of this solution cannot possibly entail that the aporia constitutes a negation of the originary structure. For, once again, every negation of the originary structure is self-negating, and therefore utterly unable to stand. *Every* attempt at negating the originary structure is only seemingly such an attempt, for it is in fact self-negating and can itself appear *only* according to, and by presupposing, all the determinations of the originary structure. Every attempt at refuting (*elénchein*) what is presupposed by the attempt itself must be self-defeating.²⁵

Notwithstanding this, the language that testifies to the destiny of necessity does attest to the resolution of the aporia that seems to afflict the originary structure. Once again, when the *eternal* firewood leaves the circle of appearing, the isolated earth objects: granted, its being has been saved, but it is now its appearing that has turned into nothing. According to Severino, the aporia arises in separating – ‘*isolating*’ – the appearing of the firewood from the appearing of this very appearing.²⁶ On the contrary, the appearing itself of the firewood appears, but the appearing of the firewood and the appearing of this appearing are not two different beings. The appearing of the firewood appears, but this does not add anything to the appearing of the firewood; the appearing of the appearing of the firewood is the same eternal being as the appearing of the firewood. The eternal firewood enters the circle of appearing: the firewood appears; it appears that the firewood appears; the appearing of the firewood appears – these three statements say one and the same thing. When the firewood leaves the circle of appearing, its appearing *no longer appears* – but it is, *qua eternal being*, also saved in the eternity of being. One is then not to ask whether *the appearing* of this latter eternal being turns into nothing (namely, whether the appearing of the appearing of the firewood turns into nothing), for it is not a being that is separated from the appearing of the firewood.²⁷

²⁵ It is most apparent that the originary structure stands in an essential relation to the Aristotelian *élenchos*: ‘Returning to Parmenides’ shows that the *élenchos* is an instantiation of the fundamental opposition between being and non-being (the positive and the negative) that appears in the originary structure.

²⁶ Severino, *The Essence of Nihilism*, 121–23.

²⁷ Since the appearing of the appearing of the firewood is the appearing of the firewood, there is no *regressus ad infinitum* whereby the appearing of the appearing of... of the firewood would turn into nothing. To this extent, it can be affirmed that the appearing of the destiny of necessity is a form of ‘consciousness of self-consciousness’ (Severino, *The Essence of Nihilism*, 256–58), wherein, once again, consciousness, self-consciousness and the consciousness of self-consciousness are not three separated beings. The ‘isolated earth’, on the contrary, separates – *abstracts, isolates* – the moments that in the originary structure of being are immediately

It is at this juncture that Severino can include Heidegger's thinking in the history of nihilism. For, in the Heideggerian framework, what happens to the presence of a being – to its appearing – once a being is no longer present (once it no longer appears)? The most essential tenet of the thinking of being (*das Denken des Seins*) is that presence (*das Anwesen*) is *not* itself something present (*das Anwesende*) – in accordance with the principle which affirms that being (*das Sein*) 'is' not an ontic being (*das Seiende*). But if the presence of what is present is not itself present (if the appearing of what appears does not itself appear), the language that testifies to destiny can assert that, according to the thinking of being, when a being is no longer present – namely: when a being leaves the region of unconcealment (*Un-verborgenheit, Lichtung*) – something is lost. When a being returns to concealment, it is its very being-unconcealed (its unconcealment, its presence or appearing) that is lost: it turns into nothing. One cannot repeat, as in the case of the language that testifies to destiny, that it simply disappears, because the thinking of being categorically denies that presence is present, that unconcealment is unconcealed, that appearing appears. And neither can it be stated that presence or being is really 'nothing', and that thereby no annihilation takes place. For if being and 'nothing' are the same (*das Selbe*), and presence is 'nothing present', Heidegger also repeatedly states that in no way is this nothing a *nihil absolutum*.²⁸ But then, Severino argues, when a being leaves the region of unconcealment, what becomes of its very being unconcealed – of its appearing – remains unaccounted for. How can the appearing of what appears (which is argued *not* to be a *nihil absolutum*) turn into nothing once that being returns into concealment?²⁹ For Severino the only solution is for every being (including that being that is the appearing of a being) to have always been saved in the eternity of being: 'Becoming is possible only if *everything* is eternal'.³⁰

3. *Further Determinations of the Truth of Being*

In order to elucidate the relationship between the truth of being and the language that attempts to testify to it, it will be necessary to introduce some further determinations of this truth and of this language.

identified. The relationship between this triadic structure and the belonging-together of the abstract moments in Hegel's dialectics cannot be confronted here, but it represents one of the most crucial traits of Severino's conceptual apparatus.

²⁸ Heidegger writes: 'To be sure, this nothing is not the *nihil absolutum* [*Allerdings ist dieses Nichts nicht das nihil absolutum*]', Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

²⁹ Emanuele Severino, *Dike* (Milan: Adelphi, 2015), 31, 75 ff.; Emanuele Severino, *Oltrepassare* (Milan: Adelphi, 2007), 152-55.

³⁰ Severino, *Oltrepassare*, 18.

3.1 *Language and Isolation: Will, Faith, Doubt*

Once again, the truth of the destiny of necessity is the incontrovertible self-being of every being that is. It follows that every *abstract* part of what is – where abstract means: isolated, abstracted, extracted from the concrete totality – *is not*, for it is other than itself as connected to the concrete whole. As such, every abstract part of the concrete totality of being is nothing.

The firewood appears (according to Severino: the eternal firewood appears). The ‘isolated earth’³¹ states: ‘The firewood appears’. Severino argues that in order for language to designate the firewood by means of the word ‘firewood’, the firewood itself must first be abstracted (isolated) from the totality in which it appears; concurrently, the sign, the written or spoken mark that designates the firewood, must also have been isolated from the totality in which it appears so as to function as an ideal unity that designates the firewood. Only as such abstractions can the sign and the designated be linked to one another. Severino writes:

The interpretive will and the will that wills that something should be a sign of something else belong to the will that separates the earth from the irrefutability of destiny. On this foundation, the West conceives of the earth as a secure region, as part of which things issue from nothingness and return to it.³²

At the same time, it is impossible for the relation through which the sign designates the thing to be incontrovertible. Only the concrete is incontrovertible: the abstract parts are nothing, and as such they cannot be; the faith in their existence is the conviction or persuasion that grounds the essence of the history of nihilism. Humans can only *will* that the sign should designate the thing; they can only *believe* what they will and they can only will what they believe. But since what they will is an abstraction (i.e. the impossible), what they will is, in truth, nothingness itself.

Humans are nevertheless convinced of what they say. They are convinced that they say what they will to say and that they say what they believe they are saying. But no matter what they say, they never say the incontrovertible: when they state that the firewood burns, they can be certain neither of what they say nor of what they will to say.³³ Whenever they speak, even when they say that God does not exist or that everything can be doubted, an infinitely more abyssal doubt inhabits their speech. Humans state: ‘the firewood burns’, ‘God does not exist’, ‘I cannot doubt that I am doubting’; and yet, at the same time, each of these utterances can be doubted or negated, for it is not incontrovertible. The hyperbolic doubt itself,

³¹ The ‘isolated earth’ is that part of the appearing content (the *earth*) that, within the history of the folly, is *isolated* from the truth of destiny. See Appendix 2.4.

³² Severino, *Oltre il linguaggio*, 156.

³³ ‘*Voler dire*’, in Italian, means both ‘to will to say’ and ‘to mean’.

in doubting everything, does not doubt its own being-doubt: but how can the hyperbolic doubt be certain that it *is* doubting? How can it be certain that it doubts what it wills to doubt? The isolated earth can only *believe* what it says; it can only *will* that what it says should mean what it is believed to mean. But every will is just a faith so long as it remains a controvertible will. Humans say what they will and they will what they say; but they cannot know whether they *do* say what they will to say and whether they *do* will what they say they will.³⁴

What is willed, what is believed, is the controvertible; but the controvertible cannot be the incontrovertible – what is. What humans say, no matter the language that they speak, is always something other than what is; what humans say, no matter the language that they speak, is always nothing: nothingness itself. Every speech, every text, every system of signs that human beings have used to communicate has always communicated this nothingness. And saying this nothingness is, once again, altogether different from not saying anything – in the same way that stating ‘the circle is square’ is altogether different from not stating anything.

No language and no testimony can rid itself of the doubt that inhabits it: the transcendental doubt that prevents it from being incontrovertibly certain of what it says and what it testifies to. At the same time, all languages and all testimonies cannot but *will* (and therefore *believe*) to have rid themselves of this transcendental doubt – for otherwise they would not be able to utter a single word. Every human testimony isolates itself from this transcendental doubt, and in so doing it testifies to the controvertible: nothingness itself.³⁵

3.2. *The Ground of Contradiction*

The content of the contradiction cannot appear, for otherwise nothingness itself would appear.³⁶ If the isolated earth, namely everything that appears in the history of nihilism, is the appearing of this nothingness itself, there must then be a place where this contradiction is negated.³⁷ As it is necessary for the circle *not* to be square in order for the contradiction ‘the circle is square’ to appear, *so* it is necessary that the contradiction of the isolated earth be negated for the isolated

³⁴ See Severino, *Destino della necessità*, 387 ff.

³⁵ Emanuele Severino, *La morte e la terra* (Milan: Adelphi, 2011), 265 ff, 371 ff.

³⁶ The content of the contradiction, nothingness itself, cannot appear – for precisely it is nothing. However, the contradiction itself, or contradicting oneself, can, and must, appear. This is what Severino refers to as the ‘positive meaning of nothingness’. The meaning ‘nothingness’ is the self-contradictory meaning: the being-meaningful of what is meaningless. The two moments of the contradiction are: the meaningless and the being-meaningful of the meaningless; this latter moment appears. (In other words, the contradiction, ‘the circle is square’ appears, but nothingness itself, the content of the contradiction – the being-square of the circle – does not). See Severino, *La struttura originaria*, 209 ff; Emanuele Severino, *Intorno al senso del nulla* (Milan: Adelphi, 2013).

³⁷ The isolated earth is the appearing of the *positive* meaning of nothingness.

earth to appear.³⁸ This is what Severino refers to as the foundation or the ground of contradiction.³⁹

The contradiction cannot however be negated *within* the isolated earth itself, for otherwise truth would appear within the domain of untruth. This is however impossible: if truth were to appear in the domain of untruth, the latter would instead be the domain of truth, i.e. the domain in which what is true appears.⁴⁰ It is therefore necessary for the negation of the contradiction of the isolated earth to appear in a different place. *The destiny of necessity is the site where the truth of being negates the contradiction of the isolated earth.*

Conversely, it *is* possible for the isolated earth, and therefore also for the language that testifies to destiny, to appear (as negated) within the truth of being. In other words, it *is* possible, and therefore necessary, for untruth to appear within the domain of truth, precisely as the truth of its own untruth – as the nothingness that being is not.

3.3. *The Necessary Possibility of a Testimony of the Destiny of Necessity*

Severino's work attempts to testify to the truth of the destiny of necessity. And yet, this very testimony must, according to Severino's own admission, be part of the 'isolated earth'. If the attempt at testifying to the truth of being must, *of necessity*, fail to do so, this entails that the testimony of the destiny of necessity must, as a result, testify to something other than this destiny itself (which, as such, is 'the untestifiable'). But, once again, the destiny of necessity is that which cannot be other than itself; therefore, the language that testifies to destiny must testify to what every language spoken by human beings testifies to: nothingness itself, that which is other than what is.

Let us take stock of some preliminary aspects of every theory of alienation. Namely: every testimony of alienation (be that ideological, theological, ontological, etc.) from a certain domain of truth must be able to give an account of its own conditions of possibility. Which is to say that every testimony that attests to a certain domain of alienation from truth must *either* set itself outside the alienated domain – for the testimony, in order to testify to the alienation successfully, *cannot* itself be alienated; *or*, particularly if the testimony is asserting the alienation of the totality of a domain, it must give an account of the conditions of its own possibility – of the possibility of a testimony of truth within a domain that is precisely alienated from

³⁸ Equivalently, the difference between two beings must be presupposed in order to be negated and produce a contradiction: for if the difference is not given in the first place, it is not a contradiction that appears, but rather an identity. See Emanuele Severino, *Tautótēs* (Milan: Adelphi, 1995).

³⁹ See Severino, *Fondamento della contraddizione*.

⁴⁰ See Severino, *Dike*, 169 ff.

truth itself. Let us then address the question of the conditions of possibility of a testimony of the truth of being within the alienated domain of the isolated earth.

With the appearing of the language that testifies to destiny, the truth of being does not appear within the untruth of the isolated earth. The language that testifies to destiny, like all of the languages spoken by mortals, testifies to nothingness itself. Severino is in this respect unambiguous:

The testimony of destiny (the mortal language that arises in the circle of appearing as the pedestal upon which destiny is placed) is a mortal language not only because the words to which it gives an unheard-of meaning are *mortal* words – but, fundamentally, because *it gives a meaning* to its words. ‘Giving a meaning’ means *deciding* that certain events are the pedestal and the image of a meaning.⁴¹

The language that testifies to destiny is then, on the one hand, one of the languages of human beings (of ‘mortals’): namely the failed attempt to make destiny other than it is, i.e. to turn destiny into something designated by means of a sign. At the same time, however, the testimony of destiny negates, in its content, the very possibility of its own linguistic performance, and therefore it negates what it itself is. As such it stands out uniquely among all the mortal languages of mortals:

The alteration of destiny accomplished by the language that testifies to it differs from the alteration that asserts the becoming-other of beings. This latter assertion not only *is* (like that language) a will to make things become other, but it also *asserts* their becoming-other, and hence *asserts* what it itself *is*. On the other hand, the testimony of destiny *is* indeed a will to make destiny, as a being, become other, but it *negates* the becoming-other of beings, and hence *negates* what it itself is.⁴²

The language that bears witness to the destiny of necessity cannot speak the truth of being, for it remains an abstraction and a designation (the conviction or persuasion of having made something become other than it is). As such, Severino’s testimony says nothingness itself, like all human languages. And yet, whereas all of the languages of mortals claim to say something but end up saying nothing (i.e. they end up saying nothingness itself), the language that bears witness to destiny testifies to its own alienation, to its own speaking nothingness itself. In other words, it utters *its alienation* in alienated terms, which is altogether different from uttering *the alienated* in alienated terms.

It is indeed possible for the alienated notion of the alienation to appear within the alienated domain itself, for it does so in alienated terms. When the

⁴¹ Severino, *Destino della necessità*, 547.

⁴² Severino, *La morte e la terra*, 128.

essence of nihilism, the contradiction, and the saying-nothingness-itself of every language are attested to by the language that testifies to destiny, this testimony can only take place in alienated terms. Even though it cannot say the truth of its untruth, for that would constitute an appearing of truth within the domain of untruth, the language that testifies to destiny is the only alienated testimony *of alienation itself* – and, as such it occupies a singular place in the domain of truth.

3.4. Appendix: The Topology of Truth

The language that testifies to destiny thus stands in a non-trivial topological relation with the domain of truth. What is designated and therefore abstracted by a mortal language shares a ‘segment of identity’ with the truth of being: this identity obtains between a certain being *qua* separated from the determinations of the isolated earth and the same being, in the destiny of necessity, *qua* distinct from the totality of determinations that pertain to it. In other words, as part of the concrete totality of being, every being has a meaning that (infinitely) differs from the one it exhibits as part of the alienated domain of untruth (as part of the isolated earth); nevertheless, these two meanings must share a certain identical meaning (a certain ‘segment of identity’), for, otherwise, that abstract meaning would actually be abstracted from the concrete (and this abstraction constitutes precisely the originary meaning of impossibility). The singular difference that specifies the language that testifies to destiny among all human languages is then given by the singular segment of identity that is shared by the destiny of necessity and the language that testifies to it – i.e. that is shared by destiny regarded as unsayable and by destiny regarded as designated: this segment of identity is different from the one that is shared by the destiny of necessity and any other language.⁴³

It is then also possible to gain more insight into the relationship between the language that testifies to destiny and the testimonies of that very language (such as the present one). For, indeed if it is only a controvertible interpretation that a testimony should be a testimony *of* the language that testifies to destiny – or an ‘account’ of the ‘philosophical thought’ of ‘Emanuele Severino’ – insofar as a testimony shares with the language that testifies to destiny the singular segment of identity that is shared by that language and by the destiny of necessity, that testimony of the language that testifies to destiny comes to share that same segment with the destiny of necessity: and it therefore comes itself to be a testimony of the destiny of necessity. Equivalently, insofar as a testimony testifies to its own alienated nature (*qua* empirical or abstract testimony), and testifies to the incontrovertible determinations of the originary structure testified to by the language that testifies to destiny, that testimony does not simply testify to the language that testifies to the destiny of necessity, but testifies to the destiny of necessity itself. That testimony

⁴³ See e.g. Severino, *La morte e la terra*, 121 ff; Severino, *Testimoniando il destino*, 227 ff, 338 ff.

and the language that testifies to destiny thus *testify together*, and share the same segment of identity with the destiny of necessity (a segment of identity that is, nevertheless, connected to and enclosed within an infinite series of differences, insofar as the two testimonies differ in the natural language in which they are expressed, the empirical person that utters them, and the material signs that comprise them, etc.). Among other determinations of the originary structure, the language that testifies to the destiny of necessity testifies to the necessary appearing of the age in which the peoples of the earth come to speak the language that testifies to destiny: that is, it testifies to the necessary appearing of a community of testimonies to the destiny of necessity.⁴⁴

4. *The Destiny of Necessity: A Testimony that Bears Witness to Itself*

The destiny of necessity – the totality of being: the totality of what is – appears to itself, and in this appearing testifies to its own truth. That the destiny of necessity appears ‘to’ itself means that the destiny of necessity bears witness to itself: it appears to itself and it appears that it appears to itself – it gives a testimony to itself and it attests to this very testimony. That the destiny of necessity testifies to its own truth means that it attests to its own self-being – to the self-being of being itself.

The language that testifies to the destiny of necessity unfolds the testimony of the truth of being. This testimony, interpreted by the isolated earth as the unity of Emanuele Severino’s works, ‘appears in the gaze of the destiny of necessity’ (*nello sguardo del destino*): which is to say, the eternal beings that constitute this testimony appear one after the other. As part of the isolated earth, the language that testifies to destiny differs from both the truth of being and from the ‘mortal’ languages that testify to the originary self-evidence of becoming. As it unfolds, the testimony of destiny attests to the implications of the originary structure – the self-being of being itself: that the negation of which is self-negating. Accordingly, it testifies to the necessary fate of the isolated earth and the necessary determinations of the destiny of necessity.

It testifies to the first attestation of the ontological meaning of becoming in Greece, and to the emergence of the *epistème*, the immutable dimension of being that makes becoming itself possible. It testifies to the reversal of the action of becoming on the immutable itself, and to the twilight of all idols; to the domination of the will to power that wills and believes itself able to produce and transform every being; to the holding sway of the age of technics, in which the will to power believes itself to have all beings at its disposal.

It testifies to the violence of the history of the folly – the violence that wills the impossible: that something be other than itself. It testifies to the heights that the violence of the folly reaches in the age of technics, and to the secret alliance

⁴⁴ See Emanuele Severino, *Storia, gioia* (Milan: Adelphi, 2016).

between the philosophies that want to accomplish the destruction of the immutable beings *and* the essence of technics itself – an essence that requires the complete availability of all entities for being and non-being.⁴⁵

It testifies to the paradise of technics, the age in which technics will believe itself to have eliminated all pains and sorrows, including that which it believes to be the pain and sorrow of death. It testifies to the realisation that the paradise of technics is not the incontrovertible, and to the terror that belongs to the immanent (and constantly imminent) possibility of losing this controvertible paradise.

The language that testifies to destiny bears witness to the necessity of an end to the earth's isolation from the truth of being.⁴⁶

It bears witness to the necessary coming to pass of the epoch in which peoples come to speak the language that testifies to the destiny of necessity – the epoch that prepares for the coming of the earth that saves: the earth that appears after the isolation of the earth has come to an end. It bears witness to the link between death and the coming to pass of the earth that saves.

It bears witness to the Glory (*la Gloria*) of the earth that appears after the end of the isolation from the truth of destiny, and to the infinite path that parts ways with the path of Night. It bears witness to the eternal being of every entity that has always been saved from the possibility of turning into nothing, and which belongs to the infinite and eternal self-appearing of the concrete totality of being: the Joy (*la Gioia*).

The language that bears witness to the destiny of necessity testifies to all of this according to the originary structure of the truth of being: the self-being of being – that the negation of which is self-negating.

* * *

⁴⁵ In the tradition inaugurated by the parricide, this essence is *epamphoterízein*, the oscillation between being and nothingness. See Severino, *Destino della necessità*, 19 ff.

⁴⁶ This crucial step forward takes place with Emanuele Severino, *La Gloria* (Milan: Adelphi, 2001).

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