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A Tragedy of Lògos. Rereading Ernesto Grassi's Aesthetics

ABSTRACT: *In this article, we will investigate specific aspects of the concept of lògos in Ernesto Grassi's philosophy. After examining the fundamental theoretical premises of his thought, particularly his metaphysical-ontological approach to the notion of manifestation, as well as their consequences on the aesthetic plane, we will focus on the distinction he draws between demonstrative and indicative lògos. A central point of inquiry will be how Grassi presents indicative lògos as an original and transcendental foundation for the rational structuring of thought and language. This article thus seeks to critically assess his position, clarifying its implications both for theoretical inquiry and for the nature of language, as well as the potential conceptual challenges it entails.*

KEYWORDS: *Grassi, logos, ontology, aesthetics, language.*

“O unser verlorenes / Paradies”

G. Trakl, Psalm

1. The theoretical premises

We first take into consideration a 1936 text titled *The Problem of Lògos*, in which Ernesto Grassi contextualizes the question of the originality of *lógos* within the problematic framework of a fundamental aporia concerning the search for truth, that is, the core of philosophical process. Grassi writes that “philosophical inquiry, from its very beginning, clashes with a fundamental aporia. To search for the truth, whatever it may be, always presupposes a prior unveiling of the truth. If the truth were not somehow already unveiled, we could not search for it”¹. What is truth? If truth is conceived objectivistically, like ‘something’ whose transcendence ‘hides itself’ (understood as that of an object that is not present) its search becomes impossible, as such hiddenness “transcends our possibilities”². At the same time however – and here arises the aporia –, if truth is not hidden but empirically manifest, in this case too the search is impossible, as one cannot search for what

1 Grassi 2011, 371.

2 Grassi 2011, 372.

is already unveiled. The immanent unveiling and the transcendent concealment of truth are thus, for Grassi, linked by a common error, that of considering truth as something ‘given’, as a ‘fact’, and not as a form of manifestation, i.e. as process, as becoming. Only “the process of manifestation contains the possibility of both the veiling and unveiling of the truth”, and thus only the process “is the sole ‘given,’ the sole ‘immediate presence’”³.

What is in question in Grassi’s reflection as it develops here can be summarized then along two axes: 1) the onto-gnoseological problem of the unveiling of truth and, consequently, of the condition of possibility for its inquiry; 2) the overcoming of an objectivistic conception of truth and, therefore, the elaboration of an idea of ‘given’ or ‘fact’ as process or act. Now, what is the concept that link these two dimensions of Being, namely its unveiling and its processuality? It is precisely the concept of *manifestation*. Between manifestation and Being, Grassi says, there is “no distinction whatsoever”: Being must be investigated first and foremost in its manifesting. The manifesting must, in turn, be conceived not in terms of objectification, but as a process that “should already originally unveil Being”⁴. This requires that Being is itself process, that is an act of manifestation: “the original truth cannot be understood as the unveiling of an object, but only as that of a process [...] a manifesting, a self-distinguishing”⁵. And so, to this self-distinguishing and, therefore, to the original self-manifesting, Grassi assigns the name of *lógos*.

Lógos. The term cannot help but evoke in the reader a sense of pure vertigo. Grassi, in fact, does not limit himself using the concept of ‘act’, nor does he settle for circumscribing his reflection to the notion of ‘truth’. Instead, he chooses to align, as if through a kind of ingenious conceptual convergence, all the ontological and epistemological terms at play in his proposal towards a notion (*lògos*) that induces to reconfigure them around a concept which not only crosses epochs and philosophical systems, but also inevitably involves, in the virtuality of its conceptual layers, a dense multiplicity of meanings. These meanings converge into a defined spectrum of sense: “to divide, to distinguish, to bring into unity, these are the various meanings with which we translate *lègein*”. However, within the possible in-

3 Grassi 2011, 376. From a historical-philosophical perspective, it is evident how the problem of the veiling and unveiling of truth is situated within the conceptual coordinates outlined by Heidegger. The conception of truth as veiling-unveiling, and thus as ‘process’, nonetheless approaches, according to Grassi himself, the Heideggerian position to that of the “fundamental achievement of contemporary [at the time] Italian philosophy”, namely the affirmation of the “originality of the act of distinction” (Grassi 2011, 379-380) as expressed by Gentile’s actualism. As Massimo Marassi explains, “the general framework in which Grassi placed Heidegger’s philosophical proposal, that is, within his own formation and Italian culture in general” (in Grassi 2011, 30), consisted more precisely of “that innovative proposal which, in fact, coincided with actualism” (in Grassi 2011, 33). To confirm this interpretation, in a letter to Enrico Castelli Gattinara from November 1928 Grassi explicitly declares: “my work on German philosophy is animated by that acknowledgment of Italian actualism and concretely by Heidegger’s immanentistic ontology. Here, in summary, is my position” (1995, 293).

4 Grassi 2011, 376-377.

5 Grassi 2011, 377.

terpretations of this notion, we must identify at least two intertwined levels: a) the ontological, where the act entails distinguishing and revealing Being, and of course b) the logical. In this second sense *lògos*, Grassi says, it is certainly connected to *lègein* as the “object of traditional logic”; *lègein* “as thought, objectified”, as “truth of judgment, analysed in its elements”, and which “already implies the unveiling of those terms whose ‘connexio’ it expresses”⁶. Nevertheless this mode, according to Grassi, must be radically overcome.

Just as, on the ontological level, a non-processual vision of truth potentially leads to an aporia that paralyzes any attempt to investigate it, the traditional logic, based on the principle of identity and non-contradiction, is founded upon the same conditions. “Traditional logic would thus be a logic of the identical in an objectivistic sense”, which presupposes the “original unveiling of Being as immediate presence”⁷. The principles underlying traditional logic end up interpreting Being in a reductive way, i.e. as immutable and autonomous identity, imposing a halt on the epistemic understanding of the dynamism of Being. In contrast to traditional logic, the author proposes a new conception of identity. On the one hand identity is no longer considered as fixed, but as difference, as relation and process (Being is not an ‘object’ set once and for all, but a movement in which thought and reality co-emerge), and on the other as an act of thought that is co-creative with respect to Being.

“The outcome reached by Grassi’s research at the end of the 1930s – after a patient work of translation between Italian and German philosophy”, as Rita Messori explains, “was therefore the identification of the act of *lògos* as the ontological structure of reality. Reality ‘is’ in the sense that it ‘realizes itself’, in the sense that it unfolds spatiotemporally as processuality of *lègein*”⁸. This approach, influenced by the Gentilian notion of act and the fundamental framework of Heidegger’s ontology, above all the ontological difference between Being and entity, leads Grassi to formulate the idea of a “unity as the foundation of appearance”, of a “process that realizes itself”⁹. Difference and act, in other words, are assembled into a single movement that ‘makes the difference’: a “letting-appear of a multiplicity, of a different that does not exist prior to the act”¹⁰. The pivotal centrality of the notion of manifestation, of appearing as *phàinesthai* of being, thus leads Grassi to the awareness that only by analyzing the modalities through which such manifestation takes place – that is the differentiation of forms that represents the very determination of *lògos* – can a path be opened toward the understanding of that complex unity which, unable to be given constitutively and objectivistically in the form of an ‘in-itself’, of a truth that statically underlies the movement of difference, nonetheless represents its original presupposition. It is here, through this idea of manifestation, that according to Grassi ontology also involves aesthetics.

6 Grassi 2011, 377.

7 Grassi 2011, 378.

8 Messori 2001, 127

9 Grassi 1939, 206 (in Messori 2001, 127)

10 Grassi 1939, 207 (in Messori 2001, 127)

2. The aesthetic turn

Serving as a bridge between the fields under consideration is, first and foremost, an important 1939 work, *Vom Vorrang des Logos*. This text is fundamental for understanding the tense relationship between the theoretical results achieved in the 1930s and the subsequent developments of Grassi's philosophy, when following his careful reading of the Italian humanists and, above all, of Giambattista Vico, the Milanese philosopher would emerge as the original interpreter of a thought grounded in the primordial role of imagination and rhetoric we still recognize.

But what is aesthetics for Grassi? Aesthetics, he writes in 1939, is "the first form of the manifestation of being, and is completely independent from concept, from *lògos* as judgment: it is the original letting-appear, fantasy as the *phàinesthai* of Being"¹¹. Surpassing its traditional characterization as a *gnoseologia inferior* while simultaneously recovering the premise of an aesthetics conceived as a doctrine of sensibility (*àisthesis*), before it becomes a transcendental investigation of the experience of beauty, art and judgment, Grassi embraces an idea of aesthetics as the only dimension truly capable of engaging in an authentic inquiry into manifestation and its foundations. An aesthetics with the highest metaphysical ambition, one that primarily responds to the previous ontological questions and that can give voice not only to the delineation of the forms of reality but also to the foundation of presence, to the letting-happen of difference as it imposes itself in precise forms of sensibility. The determination of Being, the pathetic experience of this determination (*pàthos*), sensibility (*àisthesis*) and expressive activity thus merge into a single movement, which constitutes the very essence of aesthetic inquiry.

What then, at the level of an epistemology rejecting any subjectivistic or objectivistic conception of truth, had presented itself as an attempt to conceive an alternative to a traditional conception of *lògos*, now takes shape within aesthetics as the necessity of reality as free presentation¹². Aesthetic expression, and particularly artistic expression, ceases to be identified as the results of a subjective and fictional representation of the objective. Rather, they become an opening onto it¹³, a movement along the (original) thresholds of objectivity. If we were to condense Grassi's conclusion into a single phrase: the aesthetic dimension is the original appearance, which, as a processual and differential act, manifests itself in a multiplicity of forms.

It is important to grasp the climax that runs through our formulation. To pose the problem of the origin on the one hand and that of the becoming of forms on the other consists for Grassi in posing the same problem. There is no contradiction in affirming that origin manifests itself in the only 'place' where it seems to lose its ontological status, i.e. in the processual becoming that unfolds and differentiates it. Thus, starting from the coincidence between the problem

11 Grassi 1939, 200 (in Messori 2001, 45).

12 Messori effectively speaks of a "free presentation of the necessary" (Messori 2001, 134).

13 A "place of the opening of (upon) truth" (Patella 1992, 163), to use Giuseppe Patella's words.

of origin and the problem of forms, and on the basis of the priority of aesthetics over purely 'logical' discourse, the aesthetic dimension may also be explored following a further meaning¹⁴.

Now, if the ontological question of origin is channeled, through the notion of manifestation, into a dimension capable of accounting for the determination of Being (the pathetic experience of this determination and the expressive-poietic activity), one particular necessity above all leads Grassi to the urgency of articulating this dimension in the realm of language – and primarily in the realm of metaphorical, mythical-poetic language. This necessity transforms the just developed theoretical framework into a comprehensive philosophical discourse on that specific, fundamental and transcendental form of *lógos* that Grassi will identify, until his later works, as the indicative, mythical, poetic, rhetorical *lógos*. Aesthetics, Grassi indeed affirms, is not merely the original letting-appear, then: it is “essentially a ‘naming’ of things, name not as a definition of something that already exists, but as expression, as an activity that, only in naming, manifests the being and its difference, its particularity: expression”¹⁵.

Emerging from an implicit critique of a reductively representational conception of language, Grassi's idea of naming, consequently, is not the assignment of a name to something already given, i.e. a posterior act that merely designates a preexisting entity. On the contrary, naming is the act that brings Being forth, that expresses it in the strongest sense of the term. This is, therefore, an idea of language rooted in a tradition (mainly represented, according to Grassi, by Italian Humanism) alternative to the logical-abstract tradition of classical metaphysics: not *lógos* as an instrument of definition and measurement but as an original expression, a saying that is not a mere recording of a pre-established order but a mythical and *poietic* act, an event of differentiation and individuation. This perspective, which certainly resonates with both contemporary hermeneutics and a certain idea of language, particularly the Heideggerian one, in which language is not a neutral system of signs but the very site where Being unfolds, nonetheless reveals in Grassi the centrality of that indicative and poetic *lògos* which is opposed to the rigidity of rational and demonstrative one. This *lógos* would serve as a *bridge* (the term is Grassi's own) between the purely aesthetic-affective dimension and *lógos*, between language as expression and language as *pàthos*. Through aesthetic reflection, Grassi fully matures the idea that

14 Between the publication of *Vom Vorrang des Lògos* and the works preceding Grassi's writings on imagination, rhetoric, and Italian Humanism (particularly the fundamental 1957 text *Art and Myth*) the shift in this direction is already fully evident: it is art, in its multiple forms, that must capture the philosopher's attention. For Grassi, art represents, at least potentially, the dimension in which the manifestation of forms, and thus also the process of the manifestation of Being, can be grasped in its actual possibilities, according to the range offered by the poetic, a-logical and evocative language of the artist. In this sense, the pathetic dimension of the aesthetic merges with the active dimension of artistic creation, with that *poièin* in which the artist's work actively consists, according to a coexistence of opposing signs whose outcome is not mutual negation, but their interweaving in the constitution of specific artistic expressions.

15 Grassi 1939, 200 (in Messori 2001, 45)

every manifestation is never immediately given but is always already a manifesting that does not exhaust itself in the object. Rather, it realizes itself in a *poietic* gesture.

3. Two kinds of *lògos*

What is then *lògos* as expression, and thus as language? “Our language”, will say Grassi in a famous passage of *The Power of Fantasy*,

is divided into two fundamentally different forms of assertion: the first is demonstrative, probative, and purely rational language. This form has normative value for science; since the objectivity of its assertions is guaranteed by the foundations upon which it rests, it cannot be obscured by subjective opinions. In antiquity, this language was defined as ‘apodictic’, as it indicates (*déiknymi*: I show) something by starting from (*apo-*) foundations. It cannot be tied to time, place, or personality; it is *anti-rhetorical*¹⁶.

Next to rational, apodictic language, there is a second fundamental form of assertion: ‘indicative’ language, purely ‘semantic’. [...] [It] has the capacity to ‘let see’ (*phàinesthai*).¹⁷

Demonstrative, apodictic, rational *lògos*. Indicative, semantic, rhetorical, poetic *lògos*. These are, as well known, fundamental definitions for understanding Grassi’s philosophical trajectory. Definitions that, not by chance, the author of *The Power of Fantasy* will not merely indicate here but will revisit and engage continuously throughout his later work, transforming them into constants to be approached according to a logic of variation. In perfect alignment with what is stated here, Grassi writes in *The Power of Image*, for example, that there is “a *clarity* that is not the result of a *clarification*”¹⁸. Such *clarity* derives from the use of a semantic language, “immediate, indemonstrable, clarifying, purely indicative”, distinct from a rational language, which “acts as a mediator and demonstrates”, enabling clarification and is, therefore, “apodictic”¹⁹. And again, in *Rhetoric as Philosophy*, Grassi will explain how there are elements of the rational process that can have “neither an apodictic-demonstrative structure nor character” but are instead “simply indicative”²⁰.

Now, what does it mean to distinguish a purely scientific-demonstrative *lògos* from an indicative one? Let us begin by stating that Grassi takes up the definition of demonstrative *lògos* above all from its Aristotelian formulations. In the brief essay titled *Rhetoric and Philosophy* (1976), while examining the Aristotelian concept of *pístis*, Grassi states that “proof consists in ‘providing the reason’. Reason becomes evident in connection with deduction, which necessarily starts from

16 Grassi 1990, 49.

17 Grassi 1990, 51.

18 Grassi 1989, 84.

19 Grassi 1989, 84.

20 Grassi 1999, 57.

premises and therefore depends on their validity”²¹. The same argument is taken up again, almost specularly, in *The Power of Image*, following an analysis of the concepts of thesis, axiom and principle (Grassi particularly focuses here on the principle of non-contradiction)²². However, what interests Grassi is not to undertake a comprehensive discussion of logic and its principles, but rather to show how rational discourse – generally understood as apophantic, apodictic, deductive and demonstrative – has in the very formulation of its principles the living example of the necessity to refer to a prior, foundational and archaic *lógos* that acts as the transcendental condition of possibility not so much for the validity of the principles, which is already evidently manifested by their logical indispensability in deduction, but for their indication, their ‘announcement’. “The indication (*semàinein*) [...] thus forms” the “framework within which demonstrations may arise”²³.

Grassi’s well-known argumentation is based on the very notion of principle (*archè*). The principles that ground demonstrative discourse, thereby constituting its necessary condition of possibility as demonstrative discourse, cannot themselves, by definition, be the object of that same demonstrative discourse. If they were, they would not be foundations but founded, since their status as objects of demonstration would in turn require reference to further principles to exist, forcing anyone seeking them into an infinite regress. By definition *archè* must therefore enable demonstration without itself being demonstrable. This fundamental involvement in demonstrative discourse, without being its object, makes the principle not something demonstrated or founded, but self-evident. Its evidence can only be the result of a discourse that is constitutively non-demonstrative, but indicative: of a prior, original, rhetorical, ‘evangelical’ *lógos*. In other words, the principles of demonstration are not demonstrated, they are shown, ‘indicated’. Here lies, for Grassi, what he himself calls “the tragedy of the rationalistic process”²⁴.

This realization represents a starting point, not a conclusion. However, careful attention must be paid to what we mean when, with Grassi, we refer to an original *lógos*, prior to any demonstration. First of all, it is essential to emphasize, in this context, that identifying the indicative *lógos* as non-rational does not at all mean affirming its irrationality. If something is legitimized to distinguish rationality from irrationality, this something can only be rational discourse itself, as it is founded on the very distinction between what is rational and what is not. Therefore, if indicative *lógos* were merely irrational discourse, it would not ground anything but would consist only in an antithesis of rational discourse observed – this is the point – from the perspective of reason itself: it would, by that very logic, be implicated within it. To reason about the irrationality of something, in other words, remains the most ‘reasonable’ discourse. What, then, does it mean to say that indication is prior to demon-

21 Grassi 1992, 103. The Aristotelian passages under consideration here refer to the *Posterior Analytics*, particularly 72a 25 and following.

22 See Grassi 1989, 117-126. Besides *Analytics*, the reference here is, of course, to *Metaphysics*, particularly from 1005a 21 to 1006a 8 and following.

23 Grassi 1989, 84.

24 Grassi 1999, 58.

stration, while not being outside the overall domain of *lógos*? It can mean only one thing: the non-rationality of the indicative *lógos* must be understood not as a form of negation of rational discourse internal to rational discourse, but as a form of pre-rationality. This “pre-” should be assumed primarily as a transcendental dimension, one that broadens the ways in which the *lógos* can be conceived in its entirety.

Here Grassi, saying so, seems to reach a possible stalemate. If, on the one hand, pre-rational *lógos*, appears to have no relevance to theoretical discourse, on the other, it even seems contrary, if not detrimental, to the development of philosophical thought. Both considerations are based on a fundamental assumption: the poetic, mythical dimension is practical and pathetic. It is evident, then, that its intervention in the theoretical discourse, which by its very nature would seem to be purely rational, can only take the form of a dangerous interference capable of undermining its coherence. Philosophy, in fact, should not sophistically depend on its ability to pathetically move the listener, but on the rigor of demonstration and, therefore, on the circularity of proof.

Grassi can then follow at least two paths: he can attempt to deconstruct the reductionist idea of an indicative *lógos* understood as something external to philosophy or he can act on the very definition of philosophical discourse, demonstrating that it cannot be reduced to a mere rational-demonstrative process. Having said that, we must keep in mind that Grassi’s primary objective is not immediately to rescue this kind of *lógos* from the restrictions in which a certain philosophical tradition has confined it, but rather to understand how to escape the aporia of principles that undermines the stability of theoretical-rational discourse as such. To bring relief to what he himself describes as a tragedy of rational *logos*, and to do so by overcoming the rigid dualism between rational and non-rational discourse. If this is the ambition, what then authorizes Grassi to philosophically manipulate that type of *lógos* which seems most opposed to the philosophical one? And again: by identifying this discourse precisely as pre-rational and, consequently, by its very definition, as non-theoretical (if theoretical discourse coincides with rational discourse), how can one arrive at conceiving this indicative *lógos as philosophy*?

Here, not without a certain ironic paradoxicality, we realize that precisely when a high degree is reached in the position asserting the primacy of the indicative *lógos* over *theòresis*, the argumentation seems to rebound from its own purpose. By elevating languages as myth, rhetoric, poetry to the level of a form of pre-rationality (or, we might say, transcendental a-rationality), Grassi certainly seems to have saved them from the accusation of irrationality, but at the cost of distancing them even further from the only possible theoretical discourse, which seems to remain the rational one. Grassi speaks of a tragedy of the rationalistic process, incapable of accounting for its own principles, but it must also be added that there is a tragedy of the indicative process itself, which, whenever it attempts to be philosophical discourse, finds itself excluded from any possibility of *theòresis*.

The only way to escape this potentially destructive impasse is to modify not only the way indicative *lógos* is conceived, but also philosophy itself. Indicative *lógos*

and philosophy can coincide only if they are transfigured into something other than their traditional conception: the indicative dimension of discourse can no longer be understood as a mere external pathetic discourse, or the domain of pure *dóxa*, just as philosophy can no longer be conceived as a mere rational demonstrative discourse, the domain of pure *epistéme*. In other words, if this is the case, what appeared to be a dualism has never been a dualism. Not simply ‘is not’, but ‘has never been’, since the unity of philosophy and indicative *lògos* does not presuppose their distinction: it is not a “subsequent synthesis of *pàthos* and *lògos*, but the original unity of both”²⁵.

4. Conclusion

We thus intend, in this conclusive paragraph, to outline the preliminary lines of a possible critique that could lead to a deeper understanding of the discourse put forth by Grassi and, consequently, of the concepts involved in his philosophical path. Through our summary delineation of the issues at play in what we have identified as three phases of Grassi’s work, we aimed to show how he arrived at the idea of a possible synthesis of *lògos* and *pàthos*, which finds its center in expressive, poetic, and metaphorical discourse. In the overall design of this architecture of thought, the notions of manifestation, unity (and identity) and difference have emerged, testifying to the presence of a higher metaphysical urgency. The philosophical versatility of these notions occurs, in an author like Grassi, in all its strength. Just as ‘manifestation’ denotes the dimension of appearance in ontological terms (whether original or not) and ‘difference’ refers both to the processual unfolding of Being, in analyzing *lògos* as an expressive, nominative and symbolic-linguistic phenomenon it becomes possible to address the question of an original *lògos* capable of letting appear and to shift the relationship between identity and difference from an ontological plane to a purely ‘logical’ one, reframing the issue within the realm of discourse.

Now, if a certain constitution of language, belonging to that prior and foundational *lògos* which is the indicative one, represents for Grassi a possibility of an original synthesis between *lògos* and *pàthos*, this occurs because of a particular ontological modality that constitutes the becoming of language. This is manifestly expressed by Grassi, as he clearly explains in the final pages of *Art and Myth*, through metaphor. Just as on the metaphysical plane being refers to something (Being) that appears as abyssal (*ab-gründung*, as Grassi says)²⁶ with respect to it, on the level of indicative *lògos* and of the relationships established by metaphorical discourse the principle of identity is formally renounced in favor of the primacy of the contemporaneity of identity and difference. Metaphor, through its ingenious mechanism of reference, says and does not say, declares and denies, shows and hides. By affirming something

25 Grassi 1999, 74.

26 See Grassi 1996, 216.

that is also something else, it posits in fact a *one* that is immediately a *multiplicity*. We are thus induced to admit “that multiplicity, in its deepest reality, is a metaphorical being”²⁷. By expanding the narrow plane of rational logic (founded, for instance, on deductive consequentiality, identity and non-contradiction), the possibilities of metaphor, and thus of every metaphorical language, radically broaden the horizon of discourse and therefore of thought, allowing the emergence of forms of meaning that exceed the rigid axiality of rational *lògos*. They open spaces of logical and ontological resonance in which knowledge is constituted through symbolic transfiguration and the coalescence of heterogeneous differences into new configurations of intelligibility. But this *lògos* is entrusted by Grassi, among other things, with one of the most ambitious tasks: that of indicating, of showing those principles (*archàì*) that found the very constitution of rational discourse. This implies that in its capacity to show the principles, the indicative *lògos*, employed for instance by mythical language or aesthetic-artistic expression, can only be situated ‘outside’ the direct action of the principles themselves, because from the moment principles are at stake one is already immediately speaking from the standpoint of demonstration.

But is this really the case? We believe that Grassi’s compelling and evocative position, which he defended until his later works, can at least be challenged by a critical hypothesis. Although it is indeed undeniable that the position of the validity of demonstrative principles requires a more original foundation, provided by Grassi through the idea of an indicative *lògos*, we believe that this position raises a significant theoretical difficulty. From the moment Grassi ‘localizes’ *lògos* in its linguistic, even discursive, specificity, and from the moment the indicative *lògos* emerges as the witness of a plane that is constitutively prior, in a transcendental sense, to rational discourse, which is founded on principles such as identity or non-contradiction, what allows the positing of that original *lògos*? That very ‘wound’, that rupture which splits the unity of *lògos* into a purely dianoetic dimension and another, prior dimension, does it not exist precisely by virtue of a difference that already presupposes the positing of a principle of distinction, namely a logic of non-contradiction? In other words, the moment Grassi asserts that indicative *lògos* is distinct from the demonstrative one, he would already be operating within a conceptual structure grounded in that very principle of differentiation. If, instead, indicative *lògos* were truly original with respect to contradiction itself, it could not be grasped as other than demonstrative logic without falling back into the horizon of logical distinction. In this sense, to be clear, we do not at all intend to claim, with respect to the transcendental plane of indication, the absolute and necessary anteriority of the principle of contradiction – the principle, as a principle, is and remains indicated, ‘shown’. Rather, we intend to affirm that assuming the very position of an indicative dimension of *lògos* based on a discourse about principles (*archàì*) risks destabilizing the entire architecture that supports such a position. Put differently: it would not be possible to establish a distinction between demonstration and indication without this risking to happen immediately from the perspective of demonstration.

27 Grassi 1996, 218.

A possible refutation of this hypothesis would consist in denying that indicative *lògos* and demonstrative *lògos* consist of two distinct orders, instead arguing that it is not demonstration that encompasses indication, but rather that indication constitutes the generative, indistinct background of demonstration, within which logic finds its place. However, even this solution, to which we feel more inclined, presents a difficulty. If indicative *lògos* is that which makes every discourse possible (if *lògos* is, in its absoluteness, indicative), then it cannot be grasped as something determined without losing its original character. In summary: if indicative *lògos* is distinct from demonstrative *lògos*, then the distinction is based on a principle that inevitably brings it closer to contradiction. If instead it is not distinct but simply another way of giving meaning, then it is unclear how it can find anything without at least implicitly resorting to the logic of difference.

But is it really possible to abandon this ‘logicistic’ idea of difference? According to us it is, provided that we first establish an appropriate concept of difference, similar as what Grassi has always done, that is beyond (or, more precisely, prior to) the formal difference instituted by contradiction. If contradiction distinguishes what is from what is not, operating through exclusion, the indicative *lògos* bears witness to a more original difference, an ‘intensive’ difference, neither exclusive nor binary, revealing an alterity that is not entirely other nor entirely identical, but is situated in an ontologically ulterior dimension with respect to discourse. Such a difference is therefore based on an original co-belonging of which contradiction is but a specific formalization.

By uncovering the indemonstrability of principles and postulating a transcendental order of *logos* that lets manifestation appear and authentically bears witness to it, Grassi instead arrives at what, borrowing the words of a thinker he greatly admired, Giambattista Vico, represents the tragedy not of a kind of *lògos*, but of any form of *lògos*: even the very act of imagining (and so of indicating) is nothing more than a weak understanding²⁸. What initially seemed like a tension between two distinct orders of discourse ultimately reveals itself as the dual articulation of a single phenomenon – the manifestation itself and the absolute inevitability of its immediate expression in *lògos* –, a reflection that Grassi had already grasped, perhaps with extraordinary force, in the most evocative, literary pages of *Art and Myth*. Yet, to conceive a truly indicative *lògos* would mean freeing oneself even from any pre-rational or transcendental perspective, maybe rethinking *lògos* as a pure a-symbolic event. However, aware of the difficulty of such an endeavor, only the most radical theoretical position allows one to escape the aporia altogether: if *lògos* can only articulate difference, then what is truly prior is not even *lògos* itself.

28 We refer to a famous passage, taken from the *New Science*: “or’ appena intender si può, affatto immaginar non si può [one can barely understand, one cannot imagine]” (Vico 2012, 919).

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