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The Chiaroscuro of the Logos. Contradiction C in Severino's Thought between Totality and Unconscious

ABSTRACT: *The aim of this essay is to show how Emanuele Severino's thought engages with exceedances and aporias that involve the logos or original structure. To achieve this goal, the essay is divided into two parts. The first analyses the concept of contradiction C, which introduces the problem of possible exceedances beyond the horizon of the logos. Secondly, the essay examines the peculiarity of Severino's approach by comparing it with *I fondamenti della logica aristotelica* by Guido Calogero, another Italian thinker who addressed the same issue. Overall, we will see how the problem of "before and after the logos" relates, in Severino's thought, to the question of concrete totality and the unconscious.*

KEYWORDS: *Severino, Calogero, Contradiction C, Totality, Unconscious.*

1. Introduction*

The expression "before and after the logos" contains within itself a multiplicity of problems. One among others is that of possible exceedances or aporias that reveal the blind spots of what we define as logos, thus showing its finitude. Assuming this declination of the problem, this essay aims to explore Severino's resolution of it. First, we will examine how this issue arises and develops within Emanuele Severino's thought. Through this analysis, we will demonstrate that what lies before and after the logos, according to Severino, is the "concrete totality" – a whole that encompasses all things, beyond which nothing exists. This concept, as we will clarify, is in a certain sense equivalent to that of "unconscious"; thus, for Severino, what precedes and follows the logos is the unconscious¹.

This thesis will be presented by dividing the essay in two phases. In the first, we will analyse the concept of "contradiction C", which introduces the problem of exceedances with respect to the horizon of the logos (paragraphs 2 and 3). Then, we will examine the peculiarity of Severino's approach by comparing it with another Italian author who tackled the same issue (paragraphs 4 and 5). We will therefore

* All translations of the passages mentioned by Severino or Calogero are ours.

1 As we will see, "precede" and "follow" are to be understood here in a logical, ontological and temporal sense.

refer to *I fondamenti della logica aristotelica* by Guido Calogero. Since we are dealing with a highly polysemic term such as *logos*, each time we will specify the sense in which we interpret it in the author concerned.

2. Chiaroscuro and Contradiction C

Before examining what lies before and after the *logos*, it is essential to define what *logos* itself is. In this essay, we interpret *logos* as what Severino refers to in his writings as the “original structure of being” or “destiny”.

What is destiny? Destiny is the concrete articulation of the thing’s identity with itself. It is what Severino calls the “structure of necessity”, an undeniable onto-logical² articulation. This articulation is *ontological* because it is not merely a logical-formal structure imposed on being from the outside. Rather, it is the *immanent* structure of every being, of everything. From a blade of grass to an angel, from the most ordinary to the most sublime entities, the original structure defines the fundamental “grammar” of being³.

To introduce our problem, we can argue that this structure is realised in the affirmation of the incontrovertible: the identity of each being with itself, which simultaneously includes its difference from everything else. I am what I am, I am identical to myself and, *at the same time*, I am distinct from everything that is different from me: from the sofa on which I now sit, from the lights I see before me, as well as from all the events of the past and those yet to come. And just as this applies to me, so it applies to everything else.

Moreover, the original structure is an *undeniable* articulation. It is an undeniable articulation since its negation is self-contradictory – it is, in essence, self-negation. The Severinian *logos* embodies the sense of necessity precisely because it never succumbs to its own negation. On the contrary, it demonstrates concretely that any attempt to deny it is inherently self-contradictory⁴.

Destiny, therefore, represents the ultimate form of stability, as its very name suggests. In Italian, *destiny* translates to *destino*. The word *de-stino* derives from the root *sta*, which conveys the idea of *sta*-bility, *sta*-nding, and undeniability. The prefix *de-* functions as an intensifier, further reinforcing this notion of stability. In this sense, destiny is the maximally stable – the *logos* as a structure that cannot be denied. Thus, the Severinian *logos* is the concrete affirmation of the uncontradictory⁵. It is the uncontradictory in that it shows that the claim to deny it is self-contradictory. In this sense, destiny is the original negation of contradiction.

2 In the twofold sense of ontological and logical.

3 The first reference on this point is Severino 1981. However, the expression “destiny” appears in Severino 1980.

4 This point is elaborated by Severino by deepening the Aristotelian figure of the *elenchos*. Severino discusses this issue in different places throughout his work. However, a particularly elaborated discussion is present in Severino 1982, 40-58.

5 On this point see Severino 1980, 131.

And yet, Severino argues that this structure is, at the same time, *contradictory*. The very sense of necessity – the maximally stable content whose negation is self-denying – is itself contradictory⁶. However, the contradiction inherent in destiny holds a *peculiar* status compared to other contradictions⁷. For this reason, Severino designates the contradiction intrinsic to the original structure as “contradiction C”. Examining this issue will lead us to the problem of what lies *before and after the logos* in Severino’s thought. Let us now explore the meaning of “contradiction C”, which some interpreters have aptly renamed “the wound of the foundation”⁸.

We do not have the space here to elaborate in detail on the articulation of contradiction C. For the purpose of this essay, however, we can refer to the new introduction to *La struttura originaria*, where Severino concisely outlines this concept by building upon the insights developed in several chapters of the work.

Severino begins by introducing the concept of “constant”. A constant of any given determination is another determination whose appearance is necessarily implied by the appearance of the first. In *La struttura originaria*, Severino demonstrates that the “whole” – that is, the concrete totality – is constant of any determination. This follows from the very structure of the incontrovertible, which we briefly outlined earlier. To summarize: A is not not-A. Therefore, the appearance of A implies the appearance of the *negation* of non-A. Insofar as it implies the appearance of the negation of non-A, A also *indirectly* implies the appearance of all that is other than itself (non-A). Since A and non-A together constitute the whole, the appearance of A therefore implies the appearance of the whole, or the concrete totality.

Now, if totality is the constant of every being, it must also be the constant of the original structure, or destiny. As a constant of the original structure, totality is a content whose appearance is necessary for the original structure itself to appear. It is precisely at this point that the contradiction inherent in the original structure emerges: the concrete totality never appears in its entirety. What appears is always a part, never the whole as such – the whole that encompasses all beings and beyond which nothing exists. Because totality does not fully appear, the original structure lacks one of the determinations it necessarily implies. In other words, the original structure itself appears in a *contradictory* manner.

Schematically, the conceptual articulation that leads to contradiction C can be outlined as follows:

1. Given a determination x, constant of x is a determination y whose appearance is necessarily implied by the appearance of x;
2. The concrete totality is a constant of the original structure;

⁶ See, for example, Severino 1981, 71.

⁷ It is not possible here to fully elaborate the distinction between “contradiction C” and “normal contradiction” in Severino’s thought. For a discussion of this point, see Severino 1981, 71-76.

⁸ We refer to Dal Sasso 2015.

3. The concrete totality does not appear as such but only *partially*;
4. Therefore, the original structure is contradictory⁹.

The original structure is what it is only if the concrete totality appears. However, since the concrete totality does not appear, the original is not what it is: “Contradiction C of the original consists in this, that since the original is [...] what it is [...] only in its bond with the Totality [...], in the isolation of the original from the Totality (i. e. in the non-manifestation of the Totality in the original) the original is not the original”¹⁰. This is the essence of contradiction C, a contradiction so radical that makes the original different from itself. But the consequences are even more profound. Indeed, the original is the fundamental structure of every being. Therefore, insofar as the fundamental structure of every being is contradictory, every being is contradictory. The aporetic nature of the original “infects” all things and events that appear: every being is itself contradictory because of contradiction C.

Before moving on, we must step back and clarify what it means that the whole does not appear. This should not be understood as an abstract part-whole dualism. Severino is not suggesting that the whole simply hides itself, as if it were located in some mysterious realm *beyond* or *separate* from the partial perspectives that constitute our lives. Such an interpretation would itself be problematic, as it would reduce the whole to just another *part*, that part given *beyond* the other parts¹¹. Severino makes this point explicit, noting that the hidden totality “together progressively unveils itself – precisely because it progressively unveils itself, it hides itself, and vice versa”¹². This introduces the concept of *process*, which corresponds to the authentic sense of becoming and time. The concealment of totality is therefore not a simple and contradictory act of hiding; rather, it is a more complex dynamic: a concealment that is simultaneously a revelation, a partial manifestation. In other words, what is at stake is a *processual* and *progressive* unveiling, which, precisely as such, also conceals the very totality that is being revealed. Contradiction C is, so to speak, this light that is intrinsically and inseparably bound to obscurity. This chiaroscuro, caused by the only partial appearance of totality, is the contradiction at the heart of the original, of the logos.

Let us take a step further. As we have seen, contradiction C is determined by the fact that the whole does not appear. Consequently, the progressive emergence of new beings corresponds to the gradual *sublation* of this contradiction. That is, becoming and time, in their most authentic sense, constitute the manifestation of increasingly broader dimensions of being, of totality itself. In this sense, contradiction C is a contradiction that undergoes a progressive reduction.

9 For a more detailed discussion of contradiction C, we refer directly to Severino’s work. On the concept of constants see Severino 1981, 283-333; on the second point, see Severino 1981, 407-455; to conclude, on the third one see Severino 1982, 173-176.

10 Severino 1981, 73.

11 Something similar to Hegel’s criticism of the *schlechte Unendlichkeit* as the infinite beyond the finite. See Hegel 1969, 149-166.

12 Severino 1981, 73.

This point raises a fundamental question: can contradiction C ultimately be resolved? Severino's answer to this question is *negative*. The original is destined to remain a *partial* appearance of the totality. In this sense, Severino argues that the original is only a *formal* or *abstract* sublation of the contradiction rather than its concrete resolution. This point becomes clearer when considering the relationship between the part and the whole. The part is such insofar as it is part *of the whole*, that is, insofar as it is a component of the whole that is the concrete and definitive sublation of contradiction. However, the part is the part and *not the whole*; therefore, the part is distinct from the concrete sublation of the contradiction to which it belongs. In this sense, the part (the original as it lacks the totality) can be defined as a only *partial* or *formal* sublation of the contradiction. Now, we have seen that time corresponds to the progressive sublation of the contradiction. As new beings appear, larger and larger volumes of the totality appear and thus the difference between part and whole decreases. Severino's thesis, however, is that the difference between part and whole cannot be eliminated. Although it is destined to be reduced infinitely, the contradiction C nevertheless cannot be completely eliminated¹³.

3. Totality and Unconscious

In the previous paragraph, we examined the emergence of contradiction C as a consequence of the difference between the whole and the original. In Severino's work, this difference becomes increasingly explicit until the totality is determined as the *unconscious* of the original, its deepest truth. Let us therefore proceed to examine how this difference evolves in Severino's writings, in order to more clearly identify what lies before and after the logos.

In the texts following *La struttura originaria*, Severino's terminology undergoes a significant shift. With regard to our discussion, two new expressions emerge: "finite appearing" and "infinite appearing". To clarify this distinction, let us consider a "perceptual" example. Imagine being inside a town. In this situation, one experiences the various streets that make it up, as well as other particular places such as squares, shops and so on. Ours would therefore always be a *finite* and *limited* experience: we would experience the *parts* that make up the town, never the town *as such*. Now, suppose instead that one were observing the town from a distant vantage point, far enough to take in its entirety. In this case, one would be able to perceive the town *as a whole*, grasping not only its individual elements but also the network of relations that connect them – those relations that, immersed within the town, remained concealed.

This difference in perspective closely parallels Severino's distinction between finite and infinite appearing. The infinite, akin to the whole discussed in *La struttura originaria*, is that beyond which nothing exists. However, the infinite (the town in

13 This idea has only been stated here. For a demonstration of this, see Dal Sasso 2009.

its entirety) is not separate from the finite (streets, squares, shops). Rather, it represents the manifestation of the finite within the totality of its relations with all the other beings that constitute the whole.

We have established that contradiction C is given by the non-manifestation of the entire. Recasting the issue in the terms now introduced, we can express it as follows: contradiction C emerges because the infinite, or the concrete totality, appears only *partially* within the finite. Furthermore, we know that the finitude of appearing decreases in a processual manner. As more beings emerge within the horizon of the original structure or logos, the volume of contradiction becomes increasingly attenuated. However, this process is destined to continue *infinitely*. The finite appearance will *never* be able to fully encompass the totality in its *absolute infinitude*, that is, the infinite as infinite, rather than as a mere partial manifestation. In this sense, the fullest meaning of the infinite is that which will never appear within the finite. As Severino states in *Destino della necessità*: “the complete and total appearance of the All maintains itself, in relation to the circle of the appearance of destiny, in the shadow of non-appearance”¹⁴. Since the whole remains within the “shadow of non-appearance” and is destined to persist in this concealed state, totality constitutes the *unconscious* of the finite and of the part. This means that the concrete totality – that which remains beyond finite appearance – is ultimately the unconscious of the original structure, of the logos: “The authentic and original meaning of the “unconscious”, the “depth”, and the latent is the infinite appearance of the Whole, insofar as it remains, outside the circle of appearance, in the shadow of non-appearance”¹⁵. The unconscious, therefore, is not so much an intrinsic characteristic of the infinite considered *in itself*. Rather, it is a characteristic proper to the infinite in its *relationship* with the finite, insofar as there is an ineliminable difference between the two.

The infinite cannot appear within the finite circle of appearance; given this impossibility, an ineliminable divergence arises between the two that differentiates the whole from the part. Thus differentiated, the entire constitutes the unreachable unconscious of the part¹⁶. The finite has its deepest truth in the whole, which represents the complete sublation of contradiction C. However, this whole is destined to remain forever beyond the finite horizon. The part, therefore, finds its constitutive and deepest truth in an unconscious that is, by its very nature, unattainable. The theme of contradiction C thus leads to the recognition of the finitude of the logos: it affirms the impossibility of identifying itself to the whole, just as the conscious can never be fully reconciled with the unconscious.

At this point we can articulate Severino’s solution to the main problem of our essay. If the authentic form of the logos is the original, then *before and after* the logos lies totality in its fullness, the all-encompassing wholeness that is equivalent to the solution of the contradiction. Yet, insofar as totality is destined never to appear

14 Severino 1980, 427.

15 Severino 1980, 429. On the different declinations of the unconscious in Emanuele Severino’s thought see Pulli 2022.

16 On the role of this difference and the relationship with Heidegger, see Valagussa 2013.

within the finite circle of appearance, it is the unconscious. Thus, for Severino, before and after the logos lies the unconscious of the logos. *Before*, because totality can be understood as the deepest past of the logos, that which it *always already* is. The unconscious of the logos is the logos in its utmost fullness, its constitutive truth. In this sense, it is the concrete identity of the logos with itself, its essence in its most literal sense: *to ti ên einai* (τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι), “the what it was to be”, its eternal past. *After*, because the unconscious is, from the perspective of finite appearing, an unreachable *future*. This future acts as the asymptotic horizon that orients the process of sublation of the contradiction. And yet, the unconscious is such insofar as it is *yet to come*, a tomorrow that is, paradoxically, also the most abyssal yesterday of the logos and, consequently, of all that exists.

The given *scenario* is almost aporetic. We observed how Severino defines the problem of possible exceedances with respect to the logos through contradiction C. However, the development of this problem turns out to be paradoxical, as the before and after of the logos coincide. The before of the logos, what it always already is, is at the same time its unattainable future. “Become who you are”: Nietzsche’s famous phrase could be ascribed to Severino’s logos, which is immersed in a perpetual effort to reach its deepest unconscious, what it authentically is.

Our initial purpose was to define the logos and then determine its possible exceedances (before and after). However, retrospectively, we must reformulate the meaning of the path we have taken. Upon closer examination, we reached the exceedance of the logos by starting from its internal aporia, from the “wound of the foundation”. In this sense, the exceedance does not derive from the possibility of determining the logos, but rather from the impossibility of doing so, from its very nature of not being what it is (contradiction C). Thus, *before* and *after* are not abstractly separate terms from the logos, but rather they emerge together with its aporia and indeterminacy¹⁷.

4. Calogero and the Difference between Noetic and Dianoetic

After having focused on Severino’s philosophy, we will dedicate this paragraph to the thought of Guido Calogero. More specifically, we will focus on his work entitled *I fondamenti della logica aristotelica*. As is well known, this is a text discussed by Severino himself, expressing a series of problems that would involve it on a theoretical as well as hermeneutical level¹⁸. However, we will discuss *I fondamenti*

17 Several essays of Massimo Donà have emphasised this aspect: see Donà 2023. The core of Donà’s critique of Severino concerns the “aporia of nothingness”. This aporia arises from the contradiction inherent in the positive signification of absolute nothingness. Severino affirms that, by virtue of the solution of this aporia, it is possible to preserve the *difference* between being and nothing; by contrast, in criticizing Severino’s solution, Donà aims to highlight the original *indistinction* between being and nothing, positive and negative. On Severino’s solution to the aporia, see Severino 1981, pp. 209-233; on Donà’s critique, see Donà 2008, pp. 180-205.

18 See Severino 2005, 143-173.

della logica aristotelica from a different perspective than Severino. We will let the text interact with the problem of this essay (before and after the logos), showing how it is declined in the terms of the binomial constituted by the noetic and the dianoetic. To conclude, in the next paragraph we will compare Calogero's position with that of Severino, illustrating how the recent Italian thought presents two different solutions to the problem at hand¹⁹.

Before we begin, it is again necessary to determine more specifically what we mean by logos in this different context. It is Calogero himself who points out that "logos" is in fact a polysemic term²⁰. It has numerous meanings in the Greek language, as well as in the texts of Aristotle discussed by Calogero in this work. In line with the problem posed by this essay, we will drop the polysemy of this term by focusing only on the duality between the noetic and the dianoetic²¹. More specifically, the horizon of the logos will be assumed as a *relational* horizon corresponding to the dianoetic dimension. We will therefore build our argument by referring to the logos as "judgement", i.e. as a synthesis of subject and predicate. In this sense, to ask what there is before and after the logos according to Calogero is to ask in what terms there is an ulteriority to the dianoetic horizon.

Let us therefore see what the noetic-dianoetic polarity consists of. The thesis of *I fondamenti della logica aristotelica* is that in Aristotle there is a tension between two logics: noetic and dianoetic logic. The first can generally be defined as the logic of pure apperception, i.e. of an intuition in which there is an immediate identity of subject and object. The second, on the other hand, is the logic of the judgement, in which the multiplicity and difference proper to the synthesis of subject and predicate are introduced. Furthermore, between the two logics there would be a relationship of *foundation*: that is, the noetic logic *grounds* and makes possible the dianoetic logic. These two logics coexist in Aristotle's texts, but sometimes come to be confused in a way that is, in Calogero's opinion, problematic.

This thesis can be understood by referring to various areas of Aristotle's philosophy. At the metaphysical level, for example, the noetic level would correspond to the status of the *synolon* (σύνολον) as the concrete unity of matter and form, real and ideal. By contrast, the dianoetic level is equivalent to the relation of substance to its accidents, a merely extrinsic link that traces the predicative link proper to judgement (subject and predicate). The absolute unity proper to the *synolon* and the determinate individual or *tode ti* (τόδε τί) would thus be contrasted by the extrinsic juxtaposition of substance and accidents.

A further sphere in which this thesis would be realised is the *gnoseological* one. According to Calogero, the noetic level is given in the activity proper to the *nous*.

19 We do not intend here to carry out a theoretical comparison between the thought of Calogero and that of Severino. Rather, our aim is simply to highlight how these two authors arrive at *different* solutions regarding the problem addressed in our essay: before and after the *logos*.

20 See Calogero 1968, 127-131.

21 In this respect, our operation is arbitrary and does not render full justice to Calogero's text. However, we hope that this arbitrariness is considered justifiable in light of the problem discussed.

It consists in pure intuition, an intellectual apperception to be understood as a radically unitary act. Indeed, such intuition corresponds to the absolute identity of the subject and the object, of the intellect with its intuited determination. It is a profoundly unitary act, to the point of excluding any kind of multiplicity: “The activity of the nous is indeed pure intuition or intellectual apperception [...], which for its own sake admits no multiplicity in itself”²². The dianoetic level corresponds instead precisely to the *dianoia*, to judgement as the union or division of unitary elements in a predicative synthesis. If the noetic level is radically unitary, the dianoetic level instead corresponds to the multiplicity and difference proper of the relationship between subject and predicate²³.

However, Calogero’s thesis does not merely assert the presence of a duality. As anticipated, Calogero states that the relationship between the noetic and dianoetic is equivalent to a *foundation*: the noetic is the *ground* of the dianoetic. Moreover, this relationship of foundation is somehow equivalent to the position of a real *hierarchy* between the two terms in play. The noetic is thought of as the foundation of the dianoetic; however, the latter at the same time also has an *inferior* value to the noetic.

The hierarchical aspect of the Calogorian thesis is also emphasised in many ways. Particularly relevant given its explicitness is the case of the gnoseological sphere. We have seen how, on the gnoseological level, the noetic-dianoetic duality corresponds to that of pure apperception and judgement. Recalling a passage from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* in which it is argued that the predicative synthesis is in the *dianoia* and not in things²⁴, Calogero argues that the dianoetic connection would consist in a *subjectivistic* alteration of the real. The nous, on the contrary, is able to adapt itself perfectly to its object, without any alteration. Therefore, judgement represents “a form of knowledge inferior to that of the intellect”²⁵.

Furthermore, in order to highlight in what sense the noetic is not only *superior* to the dianoetic, but at the same time *grounds* it, we can refer to the position of this duality in relation to the logical principles. This is an important point, not only for Calogero’s argument, but also because it involves a plexus that concerns Severino’s philosophy. Calogero argues that the counterpart of the difference between noetic and dianoetic is given, at the level of the logical principles, in the relationship between the “principle of determination” and the “principle of contradiction”. Let us consider this point more precisely.

The principle of determination states precisely the *determinacy* of the object apprehended. By “determination” is to be understood the fact that the object is this and not that, this and nothing other from what it is. “The supreme law of the highest form of cognition, that is, of the intellect, is therefore that its apperception is a determinate apperception, i.e. that such a determination cannot be valid as

22 Calogero 1968, 16.

23 According to Calogero, the duality of noetic and dianoetic is also present in the Aristotelian conception of truth. On this point, see directly Calogero 1968, 19-35.

24 Aristotle 1991, 2: 88 (1027 b 31-33).

25 Calogero 1968, 16.

other than what it is, in the very act of its apperception”²⁶. The principle of contradiction, on the other hand, operates at the dianoetic level: once the noetic unity of the determinate *tode ti* has been split into the dianoetic duality of substance and accidents, the field is prepared for the principle of contradiction. It states that “the activity of judgement, constituting itself as affirmation or negation, cannot in the same act pose itself as negation or affirmation”²⁷. Once opened the structure of judgement, the principle of contradiction affirms the impossibility of predicating B and non-B of A in the same act.

Calogero emphasises the foundational relationship that exists between the principle of determination and contradiction in various ways. In this essay we limit ourselves to the relevant case concerning the elenctic foundation of the principle of contradiction. This is a reference to the fourth book of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. Here it is stated that the principle of contradiction, being a supreme principle, cannot be demonstrated in an ordinary way. That is, it cannot be demonstrated by relying on further principles – otherwise it would not be a first and supreme principle. Therefore, the principle can only be proved by *elenchos*, i.e. by refutation of the contradictory hypothesis. This means that I do not prove the principle (P) by reference to something other than the principle. Rather, I prove the principle by showing that the negation of the principle (non-P) is self-contradictory. At this point the foundation becomes clear. In fact, the Aristotelian clause for proving that non-P is contradictory is that non-P is a *determinate* content. Since the demonstration of P requires the introduction of the principle of determination, Calogero can claim that P is itself grounded on the latter²⁸. In summary, the dianoetic logical principle is thus grounded on the noetic principle of determination.

Calogero’s thesis is richer and more nuanced than what we have set out in this paragraph. However, the synthetic framework we have defined is sufficient to formulate a response to the problem of this essay. According to our assumption, the plane of the logos is that of the dianoia; therefore, we can state that before and after the logos for Calogero there is the noetic. Another way of framing the question is that of the relationship between immediacy (noetic) and mediation or relation (dianoetic). What is inexhaustible in the relational logos is the pure immediacy of the noetic level. It is not, however, a matter of mere otherness. Rather, as we have seen, the noetic immediate *grounds* and *makes possible* the relational horizon of the logos. Moreover, Calogero’s thesis also provides for a real *hierarchy* of the two terms. The noetic that exceeds the logos, in fact, also has a *higher* intrinsic value than the dianoetic.

26 Calogero 1968, 38. Severino criticises this point. He argues that positing the determination as the negation of its own negation is already judgement. Therefore, there would be no more original and immediate noetic level than the dianoetic one. On this point, see Severino 2005, 172-173.

27 Calogero 1968, 39.

28 On this point, see more generally Calogero 1968, 44-45.

5. Between Severino and Calogero

Once we have briefly outlined the relationship between noetic and dianoetic logic in Calogero, we can develop the anticipated comparison with Severino. The aim is to show, by contrast with another important author of the recent Italian tradition, the peculiarity of Severino's approach to the problem "before and after the logos". We will start from a point common to the two authors, and then highlight two important differences.

The common point is that, for both Severino and Calogero, what exceeds the boundaries of the logos can be defined as the *immediate*. Immediate is as much the unconscious of Severino's finite appearance as the noetic level identified by Calogero. However, this analogy conceals a first radical difference that separates the Severinian solution from the Calogerian one. Severino's immediacy in fact has the traits proper to the relational totality, in which everything is connected to everything else. That is, it is not at all something external or resistant to the linguistic and rational mediation of the logos²⁹. It is not a matter of a positive immediacy, which somehow escapes the overly logical mediations of conceptual knowledge. It is rather a matter of the immediacy proper to the absolute mediation, the immediacy that is such insofar as it is *not mediated* by anything since it is thought in its absoluteness. Beyond the logos for Severino is given its unconscious, the concrete totality beyond which there is nothing. It is therefore the absolute, such insofar as it is freed from any relation to anything else. As such, the absolute is *not mediated* by anything and can therefore be defined as not-mediated, as the immediate³⁰. This does not therefore mean that it rejects mediation, quite the contrary. In Severino, immediacy is the immediacy of mediation itself, the immediacy proper to the concrete totality which, being the relation of every being to every other, is immediate insofar as it has nothing else outside itself.

The nature of Calogero's immediacy, on the other hand, is quite different. It has the traits of a simple and pure immediacy insofar as it is devoid of all multiplicity and mediation. That is, the noetic is a radically unitary immediacy, to the point of excluding all multiplicity and mediation from itself. In this sense, for Calogero too, beyond the logos there is the immediate, but an immediate quite different from Severino's declination. It is not the immediacy exhibited by absolute mediation, but the immediacy *beyond* mediation. That is, it is not the immediacy of Severino's unconscious, constituted by the relational totality in which everything is connected to everything. Rather, Calogero's immediacy is the pure and simple immediacy that has no multiplicity in itself.

29 Although language as such constitutes a not insignificant problem for Severino's philosophy. On this point, see Severino 1992.

30 This does not mean that this is the only sense of immediacy present in Severino. In Severino 1981, for example, he distinguishes L-immediacy and F-immediacy, or logical immediacy and phenomenological immediacy.

It is at this point relevant to observe how, interacting with the problem of before and after the logos, the philosophies of Severino and Calogero place us before two radically *antithetical* conceptions of immediacy³¹. Indeed, we might even say that Severino's thought claims to exhibit the very *impossibility* of immediacy as conceived by Calogero³². In fact, a self-contradictory gesture is originally present. A simple immediacy, i.e. one that is such by *excluding* mediation, is originally *in relation* to that mediation which it excludes in order to be what it is. The excluding term originally *includes* the excluded in itself in order to be able to determine itself as such. Therefore, the conclusion Severino would draw is that, insofar as such an immediacy would be originally mediated, the option followed by Calogero turns out to be self-contradictory³³.

In this essay we do not intend to address the tricky issues called into question by Severino's objection to Calogero's immediacy. Rather, we may consider it sufficient to have shown a peculiarity of Severino's thought with reference to an author within the same historical context.

A further point we can raise about our comparison concerns the status of the principle of non-contradiction. Modulating the question with regard to possible exceedances with respect to the logos, we might ask whether setting the problem "before and after the logos" is equivalent to singling out something other than the realm of the uncontradictory. Even with respect to this question Severino and Calogero come up with radically different answers.

For Severino, the answer to the question is *negative*. Destiny and the original for Severino are the attempt to bring to the utmost coherence what the philosophical tradition has referred to as the "principle of non-contradiction". It is true that we have defined Severino's unconscious as that which lies *beyond* the original and, therefore, beyond the principle of non-contradiction. However, we have also stated that the relationship between the unconscious and the finite is not one of total independence, quite the contrary. In a sentence, we could say that the unconscious of the logos is not the simply other than the logos, but rather its concrete understanding. By "concrete understanding" we mean the maximum unfolding of the logos, the infinite horizon in which it is given

31 A theoretical mapping of the multiple facets of immediacy, while not explicitly including Calogero and Severino, is carried out by Arndt 2013.

32 Strictly speaking, Calogero's immediacy is equivalent to what Severino calls the "abstract concept of the abstract". On the concrete-abstract dialectic in Severino, see Severino 1981, 41-47.

33 In my opinion, when Calogero intended to distance himself from the "dialectic of yes and no" he wanted to defend himself precisely against such an objection. It remains to be discussed, however, whether he succeeded or not. The reference is to Calogero 1968, XV. However, it is relevant to note how a recent trend in Italian philosophy is defined precisely according to the intention to escape such an objection. I am referring to Tarca 1993, Tarca 2001 and Adinolfi 2008. More specifically, Tarca identifies an ontological level irreducible to the reciprocity of the negative determination of beings in accordance with the principle *omnis determinatio est negatio*. Tarca affirms the distinction between being as difference (or positivity) and being as negation (negation of non-being). Consequently, he opens up a horizon in virtue of which the transition to the negative determination of meanings (A is *not* non-A) is only *possible* and not necessary.

the totality of the relations of everything to everything. If what lies beyond the original incontrovertible is thus its concrete position, it is therefore not possible to think of a true exceedance to the horizon of the incontrovertible. On the contrary, the exceedance that is present in Severino's philosophy refers rather to the *maximally* incontrovertible, that term which is nevertheless destined to remain hidden with respect to the finite circle of appearance.

Calogero's answer is completely different. As we have seen in the previous section, the principle of non-contradiction is in fact situated on the level of the dianoetic logic. For this reason, it is in turn grounded in a further logical principle, which is the noetic principle of determination. What is defined is thus an explicitly different horizon from Severino's. In Calogero, we have the position of a true exceedance to the horizon of the uncontradictory. For Severino, the difference is entirely internal to the uncontradictory. That is, the difference is between the partial and total appearance of the uncontradictory, not between the logic of non-contradiction and something *other* than it. On the other hand, according to Calogero the difference between the noetic and the dianoetic relativizes the horizon of the uncontradictory to a level *grounded* by the noetic and *inferior* to it³⁴.

6. Conclusion

In this essay we have demonstrated in what terms the problem of “before and after the logos” is developed in Emanuele Severino's philosophy. We have first of all seen how this is expressed in the terms proper to contradiction C. The latter is an internal aporia within the logos of destiny that refers to the ineliminable difference between the finite and totality. Insofar as it is inaccessible to the horizon of the finite, totality constitutes the unconscious of the finite appearance of destiny. Secondly, we have shown the peculiarity of Severino's solution through a brief comparison with the thought of Guido Calogero. In this case too, the problem of our essay was defined in terms of a difference, that between noetic and dianoetic logic. If the meaning of this difference in Calogero is a transcendence of the logic of non-contradiction in favour of the noetic level, this is not the case in Severino's philosophy. Indeed, although he refers to a difference between the finite and the infinite, the horizon of the uncontradictory cannot be transcended in Severino's thought. As we suggested in the title of this essay, the difference between finite and infinite is rather to be interpreted as a constitutive “chiaroscuro” of the logos. The light by which the thing appears is the same as that which is enveloped in the darkness of the unconscious.

34 It is not by chance, therefore, that the noetic logic, insofar as subtracted from the realm of non-contradiction, has been interpreted as a “logic of art and fantasy”. The reference is to Donà 2024, 47. On the developments of noetic logic in the aesthetic sphere, starting with a series of problems that we have dealt with in this essay, see Ricciotti 2023.

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