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# ETERNITY BETWEEN A NOVEL THEOLOGY AND A NEW SCIENCE

## FROM GIORDANO BRUNO TO EMANUELE SEVERINO

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### Abstract

The article presents the continuity between two Italian thinkers who have undergone a Catholic Inquisition process: the modern Giordano Bruno and the contemporary Emanuele Severino. The aim of this essay is not to make a comparison between the two philosophers but rather to study how the former passed the baton through history to Severino, in a way that was useful in refunding the relationships between Theology and Science. In particular, it describes how Severino completed what Bruno had only sketched. The ideas of eternity are discussed with respect to God, and they are related to the contraposition between Metaphysics and contemporary thought, from which the conflict between Theology and Science was derived in modernity, particularly after the immolation of Bruno. The article aims to address a number of aspects that unify many elements of Italian philosophy and the reasons why the Catholic Inquisition had to fight against it. The overall focus is on the originality of Severino and considers his philosophy as the basis of a possible ‘paradigm shift’ for both Theology and Science. The theoretical treatise shows how Severino’s indication of eternity can solve many aspects of the clash between Theology and Science, substantially refunding both of them.

*Keywords:* Giordano Bruno, Emanuele Severino, eternity, nihilism, paradigm shift

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### 1. Introduction

Thomas Sören Hoffmann reflected on the history of Italian thought and showed how it is the oldest productive history able to boast its own coherent native line, composed of philosophers who are not rooted in foreign approaches. In the work *Philosophie in Italien. Eine Einführung in 20 Porträts* [1] he describes such thinkers, beginning with Marsilio Ficino, continuing with Pico della Mirandola, Tommaso Campanella, Machiavelli and Galileo Galilei,

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dwelling on Giordano Bruno, and finally reaching Emanuele Severino. Indeed, in the last decade, Italian thought has enjoyed increasing international success, particularly in the field of political philosophy. However, the present essay highlights its importance in the theoretical area with respect to the relationship between knowledge about the world and God. Indeed, Hoffmann interprets Severino as a metaphysician and presents the essence of his thought as if he were Bruno: “Everything is full of being” (*Alles ist voll von Sein*) [2]. This understanding is quite appealing; however, it is substantially incorrect because if Bruno can be considered as a metaphysician *sui generis*, on the contrary, Severino is a philosopher who radically clarifies why Metaphysics has necessarily collapsed and then why it is impossible today to assume the metaphysical theoretical structure as irrefutable truth [3]. This article aims to address several aspects that typify the Italian philosophical tradition and the reason for which the Catholic Inquisition fought against it. The overall focus is on the originality of Severino and considers his philosophy as the basis of a possible ‘paradigm shift’ [4] for both Theology and Science. That which unifies Bruno and Severino is the confutation of the opposition between God and world and, in particular, the denial of an essential ontological difference between the former and the latter. Besides, unlike Bruno, Severino was able to explain why and show that the fundamental pivot for such an explanation consists of the necessary relationship between eternity and truth. The aim of this article is not to compare the two thinkers but rather to recognize the contemporary complete realization of the latent *fil rouge*, which has characterized the history of the Italian thought.

## 2. The Inquisition process against Giordano Bruno

Giordano (Filippo) Bruno, byname Il Nolano, (born 1548, Nola, near Naples; died 1600, Rome) was an Italian philosopher famous for his cosmological theories, which conceptually extended the Copernican model through the idea that the Universe is infinite and might have no centre. His life story is taken in the period described by Thomas Kuhn [5] as exemplifying a paradigm shift in Science - the great scientific revolution that took place with the passage from the Ptolemaic to the Copernican perspective to explain the geometries of the Cosmos. His major metaphysical work *On the Infinite Universe and Worlds (De l'Infinito Universo et Mondi)* [6] refuted the traditional cosmology of Aristotle, while not only accepting but also going beyond Nicolaus Copernicus's hypothesis that the Sun, rather than the Earth, is the centre of our world. Indeed, his perspective prefigured modern cosmic theory, reshaping Metrodorus of Chios and Epicurus's concepts of infinite worlds and questioning the prevailing geocentric system. He argued that the Sun is simply one star among others and that no star or planet can be called the centre of the universe [7, 8].

Giordano Bruno is one of the most famous victims of the Catholic Inquisition, a violent political instrument which had an exponential growth after the Protestant Reformation by the *Contrareformatio* (Counter-Reformation). The Inquisition was a system of structures within the Catholic Church aimed at eradicating heretics and unbelievers, and to convert Jewish and Muslim people to Christianity. It was started in France in the twelfth century to combat the religious dissent of Cathars and Waldensians. By the mid-sixteenth century, especially the Italian and Spanish Inquisition turned their scope toward the general population. Most of the prosecutions during this period involved blasphemy and sorcery, hiring numerous salaried officials, and appointing thousands of ‘lay familiares’ who reported and investigated suspected heretics in their towns or villages. Reinforced by the Council of Trent, which repudiated the pluralism of the Renaissance and forced religious institutions to be stricter, improving discipline and giving bishops greater power to supervise all aspects of religious and civil life, it was supported by the ‘Index librorum prohibitorum’ (‘List of Prohibited Books’). Indeed, among the tasks of the Holy Inquisition there was above all the power for the suppression of books containing heretical propositions. In 1593, Bruno was tried for heresy and blasphemy, found guilty, and then condemned to be burned at the stake in Rome’s Campo de’ Fiori on 17 February 1600 and, in the same year, his ‘opera omnia’ (‘all his works’) was banned [9]. Historians agree that his heresy trial was not a response to his astronomical views but rather to his philosophical standpoint [10, 11]. From the perspective of the Church, heresy was seen as an infectious disease, functioning through a small number of individuals with very large numbers of social contacts. Therefore, the aim of the Inquisition was to protect the faith by preventing the faithful from being placed in difficulty by reading the deviant Bruno’s writings and by meeting him and listening to his speeches. However, this kind of violent solution cannot stop the history of thought and its evolution, so in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the tragedy of Il Nolano gained significant fame, particularly because the philosopher was considered a martyr for freedom of Science [12, 13] and all his work has not been erased from history but rather has become a symbol for the fight against any form of fascist ideology that suppresses critical thinking [14, 15].

Actually, Bruno was neither a scientist nor an astronomer, and he used Copernicus’s system in a metaphysical way - the theme of *On the Infinite Universe and Worlds*, further developed in *The Ash Wednesday Supper* (*La Cena de Le Ceneri*) [16], did not present a scientific perspective but rather a new philosophical perspective against the Aristotelian–Thomistic one. Nevertheless, the problem was not simply astronomical. In a certain way, Bruno proposed the Einsteinian perspective, which negates that there is an absolute, dominant point from which the Universe can be observed. Exactly three centuries later, Einstein argued for the opposite of Earth or heliocentric astronomical models: there can be no vantage point and no absolute present by which God can hierarchize the geography or the history of the Universe. In the London trilogy, Il Nolano clearly explains the concept of infinity, which corresponds to what God

understood as the universal intellect (*'mens super omnia'*) and the mind being present in all things (*'mens insita omnibus'*) - that is, the intrinsic meaning of every part of the Universe, without any particular time-space position. In this sense, God is both absolutely transcendent with respect to nature - and therefore, as for intellect itself, unknowable - and the cosmos or nature itself (*'Deus sive natura'*), which is accessible to the human mind in this form. For these reasons, as Adam Frank underlined, Bruno's persecution cannot be seen solely in light of the war between Science and religion because the problem is ontological and not only physical-astronomical [17]. In fact, in the third opera written in London *Concerning the Cause, Principle, and One (De la Causa, Principio et Uno* [DCPU]) [18], Bruno exposed his basic physical idea, according to which form and matter are intrinsically coessential and constituting the One (*'Uno'*) - that is God who is both *'natura naturans'*, source of life and cause of nature, and *'natura naturata'* or as being of all entities. He therefore did not understand God as being the creator of the cosmos and nature; on the contrary, nature and the cosmos are manifestations of the being in which God consists: "*L'universo è in nessuna e in tutte le parti; e si dà luogo a una eccellente contemplazione della divinità*" (The Universe is in none and in all parts; and it gives rise to an excellent contemplation of the divinity) [18, p. 16]. Together, this means that the negation of the creation was the fundamental reason for the Inquisition's condemnation [9, p. 51-55], but it was not the only one.

However, Bruno was not very clear in explaining the foundation of this negation. Despite trying to delineate a correspondence between the Parmenidean being One and God, he was not able to explain why the creation is impossible and what the sense of the constant transformation of the nature and of the cosmos is. As Severino [3, p. 1069-1082] points out, in his London trilogy, Bruno on the one hand speaks of the *'first principle'* to indicate a universal principle, understood as *'fundamental matter'* (substantial cause), which is also the *'first form'* (essential cause); on the other hand, he uses it to illustrate the *'first cause,'* which is universal, and corresponds in this way to Aristotle's idea of *'first and finally efficient'*. Indeed, Bruno's immanentism establishes that the Universe is in God and God is in everything in the Universe (*stochéion* [στοιχείον] and *arché* [ἀρχή]), as the pre-Socratic philosophers and Aristotle depicted. This means that the unitary *'Soul of the World'* (*Anima Mundi*), which determines everything, remains metaphysical in a Neoplatonic sense, where the One as the original and final cause corresponds to the great demiurgic figure that shapes the universal forms. Indeed, Neoplatonism structured his viewpoint, and his theological ideas in particular, as is evident in dialogues II and III of Theophilus in DCPU, where it is affirmed that the first universal principle corresponds to what theologians call God. However, as Severino underlines [3, p. 1069-1082], he who shapes nature is the Demiurge, and this figure in Neoplatonic Gnosticism is the opposed, and opposes the absolute God. This means that Il Nolano absolutized the figure of the Demiurge by eliminating that of the Absolute Being.

Besides, this theoretical operation allowed Bruno to sacralise scientific observation, understood as authentic contemplation of God, and to hypothesize scenarios that differed from those described by classical Aristotelian metaphysics as a way to realistically know God [19, 20]. In this sense, he would have found a new way to unify Theology and Science, rather than generating an irreducible opposition between them.

His idea of God, derived from the Neoplatonic matrix, that it is not only the cause of the Universe but also its immanent expression, was exactly what the Catholic Church had been severely condemning since its origin - in particular, the idea of the Demiurge. Gnosis and Gnostic Christianity (e.g. Marcion, Valentine and Basilides) were considered dangerously heretical. Bruno belonged to the intense rebirth of Gnosticism in the fifteenth century, which was due to the resumption of Hermeticism in the period of Humanism, starting with Marsilio Ficino and improved by Pico della Mirandola. The Catholic Church has fought the various ideas preached by Gnosticism with weapons of thought as well as those of swords and fire, from the first seven Catholic Councils (Nicaea, 325; Constantinople 1, 381; Ephesus, 431; Chalcedon, 451; Constantinople 2, 553; Constantinople 3, 680-681; Nicaea 2, 787), the confutations of Bonaventure against Joachim of Flower, and the extermination of the Cathars, which was ordered by Pope Innocent III and resulted in millions of deaths, to the execution of Bruno and beyond. Furthermore, Bruno's absolutization of the demiurgic figure and elimination of a God, understood as an absolute being uncontaminated by the becoming of the world, made his Neo-Platonism even more dangerous than that which had already been condemned in the past. In this sense, Il Nolano could only be subjected to Catholic persecution. However, these are not the only fundamental reasons for his execution. Furthermore, Emanuele Severino is not Gnostic, and his condemnation is linked to his rigorous logic ontology, which does not permit any form of irrational and axiomatic belief.

### **3. The Inquisition process against Emanuele Severino**

After Bruno, the Catholic Church continued until the contemporary age to condemn and censor the thinking of philosophers and scientists who did not respect its theological assumptions. This was the fate of Emanuele Severino. Actually, the restoration of the Pope as the ruler of the Papal States in 1814 meant that in Italy the activity of the Papal States Inquisition continued until the mid-nineteenth century. In 1908 the name of the Inquisition became 'The Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office', which in 1965 further changed to 'Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith', and is retained to the present day.

In contrast to Bruno, the condemnation of Severino was not because of a possible gnostic, hermetic, or scientific matrix but because of the denial of the ontological difference between God and the world, which Il Nolano had only eristically argued. Indeed, Emanuele Severino is one of the most important contemporary philosophers. He graduated from the University of Pavia in 1950 with Gustavo Bontadini. His degree thesis, entitled *Heidegger and Metaphysics*,

defended the idea that the German philosopher was a metaphysician. He obtained free teaching in theoretical philosophy the following year, and in the academic years 1953-4, he was appointed Professor of History of Contemporary Philosophy and History of Ancient Philosophy at the Catholic University of Milan. In those years, after the predominance of Italian neo-idealism, a significant interest in phenomenology, existentialism, logical empiricism, pragmatism, and Marxism was developing both in Europe and the United States. However, this did not influence the philosopher in any way. From the very first moment of his production, he wanted to radically understand why, after Nietzsche, it could be said that God is dead and what Heidegger's metaphysics was therefore trying to save. To do this, he immediately abandoned both Nietzsche and Heidegger in order to find in Parmenides the initial pivot from which to start the history of Philosophy afresh. To avoid facing, once again, the nihilism that characterizes the entire history of Philosophy, which was substantially unable to indicate in a very true way the absolute being, and despite the growing success of the neo-positivistic and the postmodern epistemologies, Severino's reflections consciously developed in the opposite direction compared to all contemporary philosophers. His analysis proceeded through a vigorous critique of Metaphysics and of reductionist neopositivism and the weakness characterizing the form, which contemporary thought regarded as the means for overcoming the traditional idea of truth.

Indeed, nihilism is the fundamental error of traditional and contemporary thought because both are persuaded that Being suffers from submitting to the tyranny of time. The basis of this conviction is faith in the becoming of beings, which is believed to be an oscillation between Being and nothingness, such that everything can be reduced to a product of contingency: faith in becoming, assumed as oscillation between Being and nothing, is the basis of nihilism, which - from Severino's perspective - founded both Metaphysics, contemporary thought and Science.

Severino indicated in an irrefutable way (a very true way) the necessary eternity of any single being, affirming that everything exists forever, and everything is eternal. The concept of eternity inheres to both the entities and to the horizon where the entities appear. The theoretical structure of the irrefutable indication of eternity ("*necessario esser sé dell'essente che appare*" [the necessary being-self of the being that appears]) is the core of his thought and was first developed by *La struttura originaria* (*The original structure*) [21]. In the 1960s this early and definite perspective caused a reaction from the Church in a similar way to Bruno. In fact, Monsignor Carlo Colombo, president of the founding body of the Catholic University, tried to impede the publication of the subsequent work *Studi di filosofia della prassi* (*Studies of philosophy of practice*) [22]. However, the book was published thanks to Monsignor Francesco Olgiati, founder of the Catholic University, together with Father Agostino Gemelli of the Catholic University. In 1963, Severino was called as full professor to the chair of Philosophy of the same Catholic University. In 1964 and 1965, he published the essays *Ritornare a Parmenide* (*Return to*

*Parmenides*) [23] and the *Poscritto (Postscript)* [24], making even more explicit the speculative core of the *La struttura originaria (The original Structure)* [21]. In these works, he provoked much discussion, first in the philosophical field and then among the professors of Philosophy of the Catholic University. In 1966, the Sacred Congregatio pro Institutione Catholica, whose prefect was Cardinal Gabriel-Maria Garrone, then the Sacred Congregatio pro Doctrina Fidei (SCDF; former Holy Office), decided to put the philosopher's ideas on trial. At the end of 1969, Cardinal Franjo Šeper, prefect of the SCDF, sent Severino the name of the experts in charge of examining his writings: Father Professor Cornelio Fabro, Father Professor Johannes B. Lotz, and Father Professor Enrico Nicoletti. The latter, who was highly esteemed by Paul Ricoeur after having studied Severino's thought, decided to abandon the cassock and the role of referee. The theologian Professor Father Karl Rahner was proposed as an expert substitute, but he could not accept it because of health problems. Finally, Cardinal Franjo Šeper and Severino agreed on a concluding meeting in Rome in January 1970 at the Palace of the Holy Office. The atmosphere was very cordial, but the parties maintained their positions [25]. In April 1970, the SCDF declared the incompatibility between Severino's thought and the doctrine of the Church, letting Severino know through correspondence. Fabro would later publish his judgement, adding to it in a very substantial way, in the volume *L'alienazione dell'Occidente. Osservazioni sul pensiero di Emanuele Severino (The alienation of the West. Observations on the thought of Emanuele Severino)* [26]. Severino also collected his own writings on which the discussion had focused, publishing all of the condemned texts in *Essenza del nichilismo (The Essence Of Nihilism)* [27].

All this is widely documented in the books *Il mio ricordo degli eterni (My memory of the eternal)* [28] and *Il mio scontro con la Chiesa (My clash with the Church)* [25] which, in addition to a presentation of the whole affair, contains the documents from 1961 to December 1975 and the three references of the SCDF experts. As Severino explained in those texts, he was fully aware of the contrast between his own philosophical discourse and Christianity, and he was aware of the inevitability of having to leave the Catholic University.

#### **4. The eternity by Severino that Bruno did not conceive**

The difference in intentions, between Bruno's founding of the idea of an imminent God and Severino's eternity of everything, lies in the radicalness of the indication of the latter that the former was not able to assume. What Bruno was not able to consider was the necessity of the eternity of each being and its appearance, which characterizes the foundation of Emanuele Severino's philosophy. Severino's philosophy does not simply differentiate itself from other philosophical perspectives; rather, it posits itself in absolute opposition to the whole of Western culture and civilization. Although initially described as *Neoparmenidism*, Severino's philosophy is quite different from any form of Parmenidism because it is an all-encompassing critique of nihilism (the so called

‘night path’ of Western thought) taken by the same Parmenides, by post-Parmenidean metaphysics, and, finally, by contemporary thought. The essence of nihilism is the assumption that time and becoming (considered as annihilation of something) are self-evident, and this initial major error is the basis of all the fundamental logical and ontological errors of both Metaphysics (and metaphysically founded theology) and Science. Eternity is the fundamental concept that all Western thought has tried to indicate in a very true and not mythological way, and it has failed in the enterprise precisely because of the faith in becoming understood as annihilation.

The emergence of philosophical thought as indicated by Severino [27] intended to define the line of separation between true discourse, and mythology and faith, whereas Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle were the most convinced confuters of mythological thought thanks to the development of a systematic reflection on truth. However, truth is exactly what Western thought is unable to think. To indicate what truth means, Severino considers as unavoidable the first ontological and logical reasoning aimed at defining what being is and what being is not, starting from Parmenides. This indication is erected on a tripartite logical axis: a) *The Principle of Identity*:  $A \equiv A$ ; every being is identical to itself, or ‘ $(\forall x) (x=x)$ ’, in which  $\forall$  means ‘for every’; or simply that ‘ $x$  is  $x$ ’; b) *The Principle of Noncontradiction*: for all propositions  $p$ , it is impossible for both  $p$  and not  $p$  to be true; and c) *The Principle of Excluded Middle (or Third)*: there is no third or middle true proposition between them. This starting point, which defined the original difference between truth and myth with regards to Being, was inherent to all the entities (all realities). However, despite this, the fundamental tripartite system was originally developed by metaphysics (Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle) and was followed by related theologies (e.g. Agostino and Thomas Aquinas), subsequently founding all modern and contemporary scientific epistemologies; indeed it was betrayed as soon as it was developed by Parmenides because of the misconception of ‘becoming’.

The necessity of truth is inherent to the issue of ‘being’ (as ‘*einai*’ [*εἶναι*]) versus ‘Nonbeing/nothing’ (as ‘*me ón*’ [*μη̅ ὄν*]). As Parmenides affirmed, the way of truth is knowledge: “that it is and that it is not possible for it not to be [...] that it is not and that it must not be” (*On nature*, Frag. B 2.2–6). Being necessarily is, and it cannot be nihil. The tripartite system was derived from this initial indication of the absolute opposition between Being and nothing, and it was betrayed because, as Severino demonstrates, Parmenides indicated the dichotomy of the necessity of eternal Being versus the contingency of phenomena, defined as the product of contradiction. From Parmenides’ perspective, absolute Being does not change, and the ‘true way’ asserts that reality is, and must necessarily always be, identical and unitary. In the ‘well-rounded reality’, any change is impossible: there is no before or after, and ‘becoming’ (transformation, change, or alteration) is impossible and illusory. The “unshaken heart of persuasive truth” consists in any statements affirming the necessity of the being and confuting the “opinions of mortals in which there is no true warranty” (Parmenides, Frag. B 1.28–30). Severino was

able to intercept and confute Parmenides' original formulation, which was inherent to the becoming of phenomena and are assumed to be illusive and opposite to the 'path of truth'. Indeed, from Parmenides' point of view, faith in the phenomena of becoming is the 'way of mortals' and produces contradictory opinions derived from experience, whereas phenomena are devoid of any true meaning. From this initial false problem, the Platonic first attempt to remedy the negation of phenomena and worldly appearance was made. In the work *Il parricidio mancato* (*The failed parricide*) [29], Severino shows how Plato introduced the concept of 'relative Nonbeing/nothing', defining the 'multiplicity of beings' as the 'énantíon' (*εναντίον*), which is the oscillation between the Being (*τὸ ὄν*) and Nonbeing/nothing (*μὴ ὄν*) of everything that is changing (*Sophist*, 256e–258b). Subsequently, Aristotle systematized the difference between metaphysical or Absolute Being as 'first cause' (the object of Metaphysics) versus 'physical being', which is composed by finite and contingent 'determinations' oscillating between Being and Nothing, subjected to the power of time and space (object of physics). Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics then marked rules to define what constitutes the truth: the relationship between the Absolute Being (God) and contingent beings, where the former determines (causes) the becoming of the latter.

As Severino demonstrates, Bruno was substantially Parmenidean, and his fundamental error was the same as that of Parmenides - that is, the conviction that phenomena are inconsistent (*nihil*), as clearly appears in DCPU [18, p. 74]: "*Dunque le formi esteriori sole si cangiano e si annullano ancora, perché non sono cose ma de le cose, non sono sostanze ma de le sustanze sono accidenti e circostanze*" (Therefore the external forms only change and nullify themselves, because they are not things but of the things, they are not substances but of the substances, they are accidents and circumstances).

The further principle of truthful knowledge consists of the dialectic relationship between truth and the negation of truth. It is the 'elenchos' (*ἔλεγχος*) aimed to demonstrate the incontrovertibility of the former principles. It results from the dialectic of 'pólemos' (*πόλεμος*), which is the 'elenchic argumentation' that demonstrates the auto-contradiction of the confutation of the true thesis. As defined in the Aristotelian IV Book of *Metaphysics*, the deniers of a true thesis are, as a result, deniers of their own confutation. The 'elenchos' is the fundamental basis of logical argumentation, and the knowledge obtained from using it was named 'epistêmê', of which the Aristotelian first philosophy consists.

The *epistêmê*, or true knowledge, should have defined the necessary connections between metaphysical causes and physical phenomena. However, Severino shows that the *epistêmê* was not able to indicate the truth. In fact, the same Aristotle stated that the *elenchos* and the principle of noncontradiction (which means the tripartite logical system) are applicable to the entities of the world only with respect to the "time while they are" (*Metaphysics* IV [Gamma] 3–6). As Severino highlights [27], in this way, Aristotle admits that there is a time when an entity (something which is) is not yet or is no more - that is,

‘being is nothing’. The error lies in the claim that the appearance of ‘becoming’ in the world amounts to the appearance of the annihilation of that which becomes, and that the becoming of beings and things amounts to their creation or annihilation.

Severino shows that, contrary to what Western philosophy assumes, no becoming appears in the sense of the appearance of the annihilation or of the becoming ‘*ex nihilo*’ of beings. The scenario of transformation does not testify creation or annihilation: beings cannot come into or go out of being. Beings cannot be created or annihilated by any God or scientist. The condemnation of the SCDF was due to the affirmation of the impossibility of any act of creation, which nihilistically implies that things can emerge from nothing by virtue of an external agency and, as long as they have been brought into the world, can be annihilated too.

## 5. Between the decline of Metaphysics and scientific thought

“An old king is dying. A sword has been driven deep inside his breast. All around the king, friends, foes, courtiers, jesters dance: each of them believes the one who drove the sword into the king’s breast. And yet there the sword stands, plunged in that breast, regardless of the will of all those reckless dancers. The dying king is philosophy (in its strong, Greek meaning, namely metaphysical *epistêmê*). The reckless dancers are all the criticism that has been addressed to metaphysics throughout the history of philosophy. No part of this criticism can *really* kill philosophy. Yet, philosophy is *really* dying. Of an illness that our culture still cannot identify. It is dying in the *gaze* of destiny, of which philosophy as *epistêmê* is the deformed image.”

This excerpt, taken from *Studi di filosofia della prassi* [22, p. 396-397], introduces the problem of the death of God, which coincides with the decline of the metaphysical rational and nonmythological idea of truth (*epistêmê*) and the triumph of the sciences. The death of God coincides with the demonstration that the *epistêmê* was the greatest attempt and, simultaneously, the most important failure to solve the problem of becoming and truly indicating the relationships between temporary being and eternal being.

Severino shows that the metaphysical *epistêmê*, which aimed to define the necessary eternity and necessary cause of the things oscillating between being and nothing failed because, as indicated by Nietzsche, if a little atom can come from nothing, then everything can come from nothing, and God - as first and final cause - is a mere hypostatization of a redundant cause, removable with Occam’s razor. After the Nietzschean ‘death of God’, materialistic, neopositivist reductionism destroyed any absolute knowledge, and the truth guaranteed by incontestable knowledge was overwhelmed by hypothetical opinions inherent to the total contingency of Being: every Being springs from and returns to Nonbeing/nothing, and no absolute Being is necessary to explain the world. The knowledge that this form of thought guarantees does not use the Aristotelian elenchic method to prove the incontrovertible truth (syllogism and deduction)

but rather uses the positive method (induction and abduction) to prove the validity of every hypothetical assertion.

However, the essence of nihilism consists in the belief that the appearance of the world's becoming is the appearance of the annihilation of what becomes, whereas Severino shows that, in opposition to what is maintained in Western thought, there appears no becoming that can be intended as the appearance of annihilation and of a coming-out-of-nowhere of beings. Therefore, to consider becoming, as attested through experience, as going out from and coming back into nothing, is just a mythological faith.

The ontological opposition between an eternal Being (God) and the world where beings oscillate between being and nothing is thus shown to have the traits of a faith without any veridical foundation. For this reason, Severino considers the eternity of God versus the contingency of world and phenomena, as has been affirmed throughout Western history, as one of the most radical negations of the authentic meaning of eternity, namely the eternity of beings. This is the same erroneous conviction of contemporary thought, of all epistemologies, and of Science. The extreme mistake here coincides with the extreme violence of the belief according to which the act of becoming is proof of the creation and annihilation of beings inhabiting the world. Greek philosophy is at the basis of this mistake, and everything that has been conceived from this starting point, consisting of a 'faith in the becoming', is thoroughly corrupted by this mistake.

## **6. Discussion of a radical change of paradigm**

Giordano Bruno was condemned to the stake because his infinite words and cosmos deleted the privileged view of God's eye. This was a disobedience that the minister of the religious authority, in particular the inquisitor cardinals Madruzzo, Santorio, Dezza, Pinelli, Berberi, Sfondrati, Sasso, Borghese, Arrigoni, and Bellarmino could not admit, so they condemned him to death. Ontologically speaking, immanent animism implied the idea of eternity (*'aeternitate mundi'*), deified everything, and was aimed at deleting any ontological difference between absolute and contingent beings; negating the latter necessarily depended on the former. From this perspective, it appears that 'eternity' intrinsically regards any beings as: "*Da questo spirito poi, che è detto vita dell'universo, intendo nella mia filosofia provenire la vita et l'anima a ciascuna cosa che have anima et vita, la qual però intendo essere immortale; come anco alli corpi. Quanto alla loro substantia, tutti sono immortali, non essendo altro morte che divisione et congregazione*" (From this spirit, which is called the life of the universe, I intend in my philosophy for life and soul to come to everything that has soul and life, which I intend to be immortal, as well as bodies. As for their substance, all of them are immortal, since they are no other death than that of division and integration.) [30] The condemnation was inevitable for the two reasons described above and because he was not able to theoretically persuade the inquisitors with his rational explanation of the eternity

of all beings. After having affirmed that “*La materia de tutti questi libri, parlando in generale, è materia filosofica [...] nelli quali tutti io sempre ho diffinito filosoficamente et secondo li principii et lume natural*” (The subject of all these books, speaking in general, is a philosophical matter [...] in all of them I have always spoken philosophically and according to the principles of reason), he was not able to explain the theoretical foundation of his critique to the classical metaphysics. The most significant errors derived, on one hand, from his Neoplatonic perspective and the subsequent assumption of the Demiurge as the One (God) and, on the other hand, from considering God as subjected to the *kénosis* because of his being matter’s manifestation (phenomena) of becoming.

Neither of these beliefs could be accepted by the Catholic point of view, particularly after the ‘ontological argument’ discussed by Anselm of Aosta (*ratio Anselmi*) in the *Proslogion*, in whose opinion God is the supreme being subsistent (“*Domine, non solum es quo maius cogitari nequit, sed es quiddam maius quam cogitari possit*”) [Lord, you are not only what we cannot think of anything greater, but you are greater than anything we can think of]. This means that the Neoplatonic perspective of Giordano Bruno presented a God that was inferior to the metaphysical One. This means that the Neoplatonic perspective of Giordano Bruno presented a God that was inferior to the metaphysical One, inasmuch as its God was a manifestation of contingent becoming. The violent jury of the Inquisition, in facing this representation of a diminished God, condemned Bruno for the conviction of his blasphemy.

The ontological argument, despite Kant, is still fundamental, to indicate God. Any inferior God, as brilliantly emphasized by Nietzsche, is inevitably human too human (*Menschliches, Allzumenschliches. Ein Buch für freie Geister*) or, better, scientific too scientific, then hypothetical. The problem is then that of ‘eternity uncontaminated by nothing’ - the same problem that science has tried to define since the twentieth century, encountering infinite difficulties and contradictions. In particular, the question is inherent to the relationships between time and eternity and is also engaged in demonstrating the reason for faith with respect to eternity, as widely discussed by William Lane Craig [31, 32]. After Einstein, epistemologists and philosophers, who are deeply divided about the nature of time, debate whether time is tensed or tenseless, linear or circular, or without any relationship to reality [33-35]. The problem is to define the sense of the past, the present, and the future. Eternalist and presentist thinkers debate these issues, trying to understand whether the issue is purely mind dependent (as Kant’s and neo-Kantian perspectives assume) or real. The latter affirm that events and objects that exist are those that exist in the present [36, 37]. On the contrary, the former, pivoting on Einstein’s theory of relativity, try to explain how everything that is past still exists elsewhere; that is, all points in time are equally real: the past, the present, and the future are all real [38]. However, the ‘future’ is their problem [39-41]. They are able to say that all the past is still somewhere, but, while admitting the ‘possibility’ of the future, they are not able to say if future things are already somewhere. Scientific thought is convinced that it is only probable that something can be next time.

The solution is offered by Emanuele Severino, who clearly explains that the problem does not regard the Western means of ‘reality’ (which nihilistically means ‘what there is when it is’) but the true indication of being, respecting both the tripartite logical system and the *elenchos*. Eternity, as it is indicated by the Italian philosopher, is then necessary, and it also concerns the appearance of everything. The future is already, as the past is still, together with their appearing elsewhere. This is exactly what Giordano Bruno was not able to explain to begin the new path of explanation regarding the phenomena of the world.

Starting from Severino’s indication, a new epistemology may be opened. Indeed, it is possible to change the basic nihilistic and contradictory Western paradigm, which assumes that ‘being is nothing’ (which means that the basis of being is time; that it is no longer in the past and is not yet in the future) and develop a new epistemological era that can integrate both Science and a new theology. However, if God means ‘absolute and eternal being,’ the ultimate authentic meaning of ‘God’ shown by Severino is ‘Destiny’. This is by no means an eternal entity in opposition to contingent entities but it is rather the totality of beings and their appearance - namely, the totality of the eternal - below which we do not find a corruptible, ever-becoming, contingent world. From this perspective, contemporary epistemology is facing a real and substantial scientific revolution, similar to that described by Thomas Kuhn regarding the passage from the Ptolemaic to the Copernican perspective. The Severinian indication can recognize and solve any contradiction in both scientific and theological discourses, showing how nihilism (i.e. believing that being may not be) is the basis of all possible theoretical errors.

## **7. Conclusions**

During the seven-year Roman period of the trial, Bruno developed his defensive line, affirming the philosophical character of his speculation and attempting to demonstrate that his views were not incompatible with the theological conceptions of Christianity. The inquisitors rejected his demonstrations and pressed him for a formal retraction. Bruno finally declared that he had nothing to retract and that he did not even know what he was expected to retract. Pope Clement VIII then ordered that he be sentenced as an impenitent and pertinacious heretic. In 1970, Emanuele Severino did not retract his position and shared with the Church authorities that he could no longer teach at the Catholic University. This has been very costly for Italian culture, as it has somehow failed to fully appreciate the greatness of its contemporary philosopher. It has only been in the last decade that a school of thought has started to develop a new line of thought that is not afraid of the reactions of the fundamentalist Catholic world.

Severino’s condemnation was caused by his assumption that it is impossible that beings come into being and return to nothingness, either by creation or by production - an assumption that gives rise to the notion that the

world can be produced or destroyed by God or scientists. Furthermore, since all beings exist eternally and cannot be annihilated, Severino views Gods, theologically described throughout the history of Western culture, as the most radical forms of denial of the true meaning of eternity. However, the indication of 'Destiny' is the highest indication of Being with its necessary appearance, so that, following Anselmo's ontological discourse, it can be considered as the highest indication of any God. It is not clear why Catholic theologians are not able to recognize the theoretical extent of this indication and continue to condemn it.

The core of Severino's authentically revolutionary discourse consists of affirming the necessity of Destiny - that is, the necessary truth indicating that all beings are eternal and that absolutely nothing concerning or composing them is doomed to annihilation. Every 'being' - every object, every relationship, every instant, every experience, every state of mind, and every event - that appears in any way is eternal; eternal means: since everything that is not nothing is a being, it is necessary for every being to be exactly as it is, while it is impossible for any being not to be. The systematic accuracy with which Severino shows the necessity of beings cannot be that of the metaphysics introduced by Greek philosophy. Neither can it be similar to scientific knowledge, as it defines itself as hypothetical and questionable. As the philosopher shows, eternity is pertaining to the identity of beings, and their being as they are and nothing else is equal to eternity, as beings cannot be that absolute other that is nothing.

Historians have described the violence of Christianity and in particular of the Catholic Church through Western history, developing the terrifying profile which Helen Ellerbe defines as 'The dark side of Christian History' [42]. The most important critique, widely shared against Christianity and Catholicism, is the inconsistency of their perspectives, which instead are assumed and imposed as infallible. Inquisition, on the other hand, has taught humanity that when, in order to protect a theory, it is necessary to use force, it means that what is intended to be assumed as true can be falsified.

What any religious inquisition does not understand is that any divine expression of God cannot be thought to be less intelligent than the human mind, so, when any religious idea is truly confuted, the irrational negation of the confutation cannot be expressed other than through violence. It is possible to consider theology as a science that adopts a new paradigm, as indicated above with respect to science. In this way, God may be considered as the totality of beings, albeit not in a pantheistic sense but as the totality of eternal things, which does not have the corruptible, becoming, contingent world below it. If this revolution occurred, theology and science, which share the same noncontradictory ontology, could start a new path that starts from the same paradigm. Instead of fighting one another, an alliance could offer a great horizon of systematic research.

On 31 October 1992, after approximately 360 years, the Vatican definitively cancelled the historic condemnation to silence inflicted on Galileo Galilei on 22 June 1633 by the Holy Office, which was held at that time by

Cardinal Roberto Bellarmino. The author of the present article wrote a letter to Pope Francis in 2015, asking him to remove the sentence against Emanuele Severino; a confirmation that the Pope had read the message was later received. This action is significant because it is now possible to find a theoretical solution to what in 1970 appeared to be irreconcilable. Several Catholic theologians are able to show that there is a new perspective that allows novel hermeneutics of the Sacred Scriptures, which can be derived from Severino's indication. If Pope Francis were to remove Severino's sentence, he would realize an important precedent in history, highlighting that a new horizon between new hermeneutic research in theology and a new gnoseological perspective in epistemology could be opened that reconciles Theology and Science.

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