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Severino as a Temporarist Static Eternalist

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

Keywords:

Being, Time, Tense, Analytic Philosophy

1. Introduction

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

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

2. Three debates in the analytic metaphysics of time

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

⁸⁸ All translations of the quotes are ours.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁹⁵ Degree presentism is elaborated by Smith (2002).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁹⁸ See Williamson (2013).

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

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

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

3. Severino as a temporarist eternalist

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Severino as a static eternalist

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. Conclusion

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

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

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