



**THÁUMA: PAIN OR WONDER? CONSIDERATIONS STARTING  
FROM EMANUELE SEVERINO AND MARTIN HEIDEGGER**

***THÁUMA: ¿DOLOR O ASOMBRO? CONSIDERACIONES A PARTIR DE  
EMANUELE SEVERINO Y MARTIN HEIDEGGER***

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ABSTRACT

The topic of evil, variously understood, constitutes a fundamental object of questioning and problematicity, so much so that the Italian philosopher Emanuele Severino believes that the *tháuma* from which philosophical research traditionally begins means precisely “anguished pain”, caused, in the last resort, from the becoming of entities. This article intends, first of all, to evaluate the argumentative cogency of the Severinian interpretation in reference to this question and then, move on to analyze some of the writings in which Martin Heidegger deals with the same subject: even the German philosopher has in fact provided interesting considerations that can be profitably used to grasp the most appropriate way of understanding this concept. The question that arises, in fact, is not purely terminological, but involves the same tone that characterizes the philosophical question and the starting point from which it originates. From the

comparison between the two philosophers, in addition to some interpretative limits that seem to be found in both, some significant convergences will emerge, at least in relation to the role that emotions play within the philosophical investigation.

*Keywords:* Emanuele Severino, Martin Heidegger, *tháuma*, becoming.

## RESUMEN

El tema del mal, entendido de diversas formas, constituye un objeto fundamental de cuestionamiento y problematización, tanto que el filósofo italiano Emanuele Severino cree que el *tháuma* del que tradicionalmente parte la investigación filosófica significa precisamente “dolor angustioso”, provocado, en última instancia, por el devenir de las entidades. Este artículo pretende, en primer lugar, evaluar la fuerza argumentativa de la interpretación severiniana en referencia a esta cuestión y luego pasar a analizar la forma en que Martin Heidegger aborda el mismo tema: incluso el filósofo alemán ha aportado, de hecho, interesantes consideraciones que pueden utilizarse provechosamente para captar la forma más adecuada de entender este concepto. La pregunta que surge no es en realidad puramente terminológica, sino que involucra la entonación misma que caracteriza la pregunta filosófica y el punto de partida. De la comparación entre los dos filósofos, además de algunos límites interpretativos que parecen encontrarse en ambos, surgirán algunas convergencias significativas, al menos en relación con el papel que juegan las emociones dentro de la investigación filosófica.

*Palabras clave:* Emanuele Severino, Martin Heidegger, *tháuma*, devenir.

## I. THE NEW SENSE OF *THÁUMA* ACCORDING TO SEVERINO

In the course of human history there has been an attempt in various ways to provide a sense, a justification for the problem of evil, whether it was understood in the moral sense or even as physical and spiritual evil.

The latter theme has been addressed several times by the Italian philosopher Emanuele Severino (1929-2020). It should be noted that this author has not put the theme of evil or pain at the center of his research. The main works of the philosopher are focused on the theme of being, and therefore, more widely, refer to the classical themes of ontology and metaphysics. Trained at the school of the philosopher Gustavo Bontadini (1903-1990), Severino took the first steps of his

theoretical path in the field of classical metaphysics: this early philosophical commitment culminates with the publication of the volume *La struttura originaria*<sup>1</sup> (1958), in which he elaborates a complex and detailed analysis of the sense of being that leads to the affirmation of the creator transcendent Being. From the mid-sixties, and in particular with the publication of *Ritornare a Parmenide*<sup>2</sup> (1964), Severino began a progressive detachment from the philosophical context of origin, as he came to affirm the thesis of the eternity of every entity as such, and therefore the negation of the metaphysical perspective in the classical sense.

Alongside this primary interest of research, but closely related to it, Severino developed an original interpretation of Western culture and philosophy, which he defined as nihilistic. Indeed, for Severino Western culture forgot the true sense of being, that is, its not being able not to be, because this culture considers natural that the things of the world are generated and corrupted – passing from not being to being (and vice versa). Along this line of research, the author has analyzed some thinkers considered decisive for the history of nihilism (Aeschylus<sup>3</sup>, Giacomo Leopardi<sup>4</sup>, Friedrich Nietzsche<sup>5</sup>), to whom he dedicated specific studies. Moreover, he proceeded to elaborate a History of Western philosophy<sup>6</sup>, which he interpreted as a progressive fall of the immutables of tradition, namely those religious, metaphysical and moral structures, commonly considered as unchangeable, and that instead are necessarily destined to collapse, because of the faith in becoming, i.e. in the aforementioned persuasion (by Severino considered erroneous) that things become. It is in this context that the Italian philosopher has elaborated his own personal interpretation of the origin of philosophy, arriving at hypothesizing a new meaning of that *tháuma* that already Plato and Aristotle identified as the origin of the philosophizing.

Severino has elaborated a thesis according to which, from pain, from suffering, and therefore more generically, from evil, philosophy arose as an attempt to provide a definitive solution that could “save” from the pain originated by the becoming of things, that is, by their oscillation between being and nothingness. Please note that the pain referred to by the Author in this

1 Emanuele Severino, *La struttura originaria*. 2ª ed. (Milano: Adelphi, 1981).

2 Emanuele Severino, *Ritornare a Parmenide*, in Id., *Essenza del nichilismo*, 2ª ed. (Milano: Adelphi, 1982); *The Essence of Nihilism*, translated by Giacomo Donis, edited by Alessandro Carrera and Ines Testoni (New York-London: Verso Books, 2016).

3 Emanuele Severino, *Il giogo. Alle origini della ragione: Eschilo* (Milano: Adelphi, 1989).

4 Emanuele Severino, *Il nulla e la poesia. Alla fine dell'età della tecnica: Leopardi* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1990); Id., *Cosa arcana e stupenda. L'Occidente e Leopardi* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1997).

5 Emanuele Severino, *L'anello del ritorno* (Milano: Adelphi, 1999).

6 Emanuele Severino, *La filosofia dai Greci al nostro tempo*, 3 voll. (Milano: Rizzoli, 1996).

context is not of a physical or moral nature, but rather of a psychological nature, in the sense that the precariousness of the things of the world and life triggers a process of uncertainty and psychological anguish and pain. It should not even be linked to the complex issue of theological evil, i.e. to theodicy, that the Italian philosopher does not link to the kind of evil here in question.

Epistemic knowledge, understood as incontrovertible, stable and definitive knowledge, in which the process of philosophical investigation culminates, would thus provide a remedy capable of removing any form of spiritual anguish, resulting from the uncertainty caused by the emergence of entities or by the annihilation of what is (corruption). The incontrovertible knowledge which philosophy seeks (in the sense that philosophy tends to the identification of the definitive truth), which is achieved by detecting the Law or Principle to which reality obeys, is the remedy that allows to control becoming by predicting it. This is due to the fact that, although changing and heterogeneous, the generation of entities, and therefore the emergence of the new, as well as their annulment, will still have to obey the rules imposed by the principle of reality, without any possibility for them to cross its borders<sup>7</sup>.

The originality and interest raised by Severino's thesis is further accentuated by the fact that, for him, the pain from which philosophy was born is expressed by the Greek word *tháuma*<sup>8</sup>, used by both Plato and Aristotle, and which instead is traditionally rendered with "marvel" or "wonder"<sup>9</sup>.

Referring to the Platonic passage of *Theaetetus*, Severino identifies in the reference to Tháumas, father of Iris/Philosophy, a useful indication to support this interpretation. However, some contemporary commentators of Plato tend to favor a different translation. Christopher Rowe in his commentary on *Theaetetus* writes that "Tháumas is the personification of wonder or amazement"<sup>10</sup>, and Francis Macdonald Cornford translates "Tháumas" as "wonder"<sup>11</sup>.

Moreover, some passages found in Plato's *Sophist* suggest an interpretation

7 See Emanuele Severino, *La filosofia dai Greci al nostro tempo*, vol. III, *La filosofia contemporanea* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1996), 9-14.

8 I have dealt more extensively with this specific theme in Nicolò Tarquini, "Intorno al senso del *tháuma*", *Intersezioni. Rivista di storia delle idee* 1 (2022): 125-140.

9 For a study on the characteristics of philosophy in Plato and Aristotle (and others philosophers) see: Ignacio Verdù Berganza, "Amor y metafísica. Una reflexión acerca de la filosofía primera", *Cauriensia* XIV (2019): 117-130.

10 Christopher Rowe, *Plato, Theaetetus and Sophist*, edited by Christopher Rowe, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 19, n. 25.

11 Cf. Francis Macdonald Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge: The Theaetetus and the Sophist of Plato Translated with a Running Commentary* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1935), 43, note 1.

of the term *tháuma* more similar to the traditional version, namely as wonder: in *Sophist* 233a he speaks, for example, of the “miraculous capacity of the sophists” (τῆς σοφιστικῆς δυνάμεως θαῦμα), according to which the alleged omniscience of the sophists is a kind of prodigy whose inconsistency is underlined. In *Sophist* 236d he speaks, always in reference to the sophist, of “θαυμαστος ἀνὴρ” that can be rendered with conjurer, a term that is linked to the previous “θαυματοποιῶν” (235b5), in which reference is made to the thesis that the sophist is a kind of magician.

More articulated, but not without difficulties, is instead the Severinian argument that starts from the conjunction of the arguments of two Aristotelian passages, the first of which is the classic passage of *Metaphysics* A, which is combined with a passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In the first text, the Stagirite affirms that philosophy leads man into a state contrary to that possessed at the beginning of the research<sup>12</sup>; in the passage taken from *Ethics* it is instead evident how it is in the exercise of philosophy that happiness is achieved<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, concludes Severino, if the final state is that of happiness, and this is contrary to the initial one, the latter will be “*lo stato dell’infelicità, dell’angoscia, del terrore, del dolore e [...] dunque queste forme terribili dell’esistenza appartengono al significato essenziale [del] tháuma*”<sup>14</sup>. He also writes: “Non si tratta dell’angoscia di chi ancora non sa vivere nel mondo, ma della meraviglia angosciosa, del terrore, di chi non sa comprendere il mondo in cui vive”<sup>15</sup>.

Again, referring to Aristotle, Severino argues that the *apora* are not simply problems in the intellectual sense, but rather “le sventure e i dolori della vita,

12 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 983a “δεῖ δὲ εἰς τοῦναντίον καὶ τὸ ἄμεινον κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν ἀποτελεῦντῆσαι” (“but we must arrive at the opposite mood, which is also the best”).

13 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, 7, 1177a 10-15 “Ἐὶ δ’ ἐστὶν ἡ εὐδαιμονία κατ’ ἀρετὴν ἐνέργεια, εὐλογον κατὰ τὴν κρατίστην· αὐτὴ δ’ ἂν εἴη τοῦ ἀρίστου. Ἐἴτε δὴ νοῦς τοῦτο εἴτε ἄλλο τι, ὃ δὴ κατὰ φύσιν δοκεῖ ἄρχειν καὶ ἡγεῖσθαι καὶ ἔννοιαν ἔχειν περὶ καλῶν καὶ θείων, εἴτε θεῖον ὄν καὶ αὐτὸ εἴτε τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν τὸ θειότατον, ἡ τοῦτου ἐνέργεια κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρετὴν εἴη ἂν ἡ τελεία εὐδαιμονία. Ὅτι δ’ ἐστὶ θεωρητικὴ, εἴρηται. Ὁμολογούμενον δὲ τοῦτ’ ἂν δόξαιεν εἶναι καὶ τοῖς πρότερον καὶ τῷ ἄληθει” (If happiness is activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest virtue; and this will be that of the best thing in us. Whether it be reason or something else that is this element which is thought to be our natural ruler and guide and to take thought of things noble and divine, whether it be itself also divine or only the most divine element in us, the activity of this in accordance with its proper virtue will be perfect happiness. That this activity is contemplative we have already said. Now this would seem to be in agreement both with what we said before and with the truth”, translated by W.D. Ross, London: Penguin, 2004).

14 Emanuele Severino, *Pensieri sul Cristianesimo* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1995), 252. Italics mine. See also Emanuele Severino, *Il muro di pietra. Sul tramonto della tradizione filosofica* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2006), 116; Id., *Volontà, destino, linguaggio*, (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2010), 22-28; Id., *Dispute sulla verità e la morte* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2018), 148-152.

15 Severino, *Il giogo*, 350.

dei quali si ignora il rimedio”<sup>16</sup>. And yet, in contrast to this stringent Severinian argument, it should be pointed out that in the Aristotelian passage of *Metaphysics A* subsequent to that taken as a reference, the Stagirite evokes the wonder generated by realities such as the incommensurability of the diagonal and the side of the triangle, that could hardly be understood as anything frightening and distressing.

Despite this interesting Severinian proposal, it does not seem, therefore, that there are, at least at the textual level, sufficient reasons to legitimize this interpretation, which however retains its relevance even beyond what can be found in the classical *loci* taken as a reference.

As previously mentioned, it is good to reiterate the following concept: when Severino states that philosophy originated from pain, and that such pain is connected to the observation of the becoming of the entities, i.e. their birth and death, he is not saying that he shares this perspective, which he considers to be merely a persuasion, an erroneous interpretation of what is happening in reality.

The original truth of being, says Severino, prohibits that bodies can be produced and annihilated, as argued in *Returning to Parmenides*<sup>17</sup> (1964) and as further supported by the description of the true phenomenology of becoming contained in the 1965 *Postscript*<sup>18</sup> to *Returning to Parmenides*, in which it is shown that not even on an experiential level, the corruption of disappearing bodies can be detected.

Contrary to the interpretation that the West has offered of becoming, Severino opposes a conception according to which becoming is to be understood as the appearing and disappearing of eternal entities. What instead makes the nihilistic conception of becoming possible is the fact that the totality of being manifests itself processually - and not in its totality -, and it is precisely this inequality that opens the way to the persuasion that what appears, before appearing was not, and it is no longer, when it disappears.

We will now consider Heidegger’s analysis of the concept of *tháuma*, to evaluate its cogency, as well as to compare it with Severino’s thesis.

16 Ivi, 349-350.

17 Emanuele Severino, *Ritornare a Parmenide*, cit.

18 Emanuele Severino, *Poscritto a Ritornare a Parmenide*, in Severino *Essenza del nichilismo*, cit.

## II. THE ROLE OF WONDER IN HEIDEGGER

It should be emphasized, first of all, that Heidegger's considerations do not distance themselves, at least at first glance, from the more usual conception of the term *tháuma*; and yet, a more in-depth reading reveals interesting ideas, that can act as a stimulus for further consideration.

I will take my cue from what Heidegger said in a lecture entitled *What is philosophy?*<sup>19</sup> (1956), which takes up some reflections already present in a course held in Marburg in the Twenties, and then published as *The fundamental concepts of ancient philosophy*<sup>20</sup> (1926); the two texts share some aspects, both in terms of the specificity attributed to philosophical knowledge and in reference to the role of wonder, even though in *What is philosophy?* the theme is developed with greater breadth. For this reason, while taking into account the lessons of 1926, we will mainly refer to the 1956 writing.

In this paper, it can be noted at first that Heidegger argues that wonder is the principle of philosophy, in the sense that it constitutes the *arché*. We shall now try to assess the reasons for this approach to the question, in order to weigh up the justification for it and, if necessary, to highlight its limitations. For now, let's take a closer look at Heidegger's argument. The principle, the *arché*, is not something that is to be found at the beginning of a process and that can then be abandoned. Instead, it remains, and supports the entire path that originates from it, governing its development: "Astonishment carries and pervades philosophy"<sup>21</sup>. On the basis of these considerations, Heidegger concludes that marvel, or wonder, is philosophy itself. That is, philosophy is immediately identified with wonder. It is precisely this equation between wonder and philosophy that we will examine now: in fact, the passage of the Platonic *Theaetetus* in which Plato speaks of the birth of philosophy uses the term *arché*: a term that seems to be fully in line with Heidegger's proposal. In the Platonic text quoted, Socrates states: "It is typical of the true philosopher to feel this state of mind (τοῦτο τὸ πάθος), the wonder (τὸ θαυμάζειν). In fact there is no other principle of philosophy than this (οὐ γὰρ ἄλλη ἀρχὴ φιλοσοφίας ἢ αὐτῆ)"<sup>22</sup>.

19 Martin Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?* translated by Jean T. Wilde and William Kluback (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), [*Was ist das – die Philosophie?* GA 11, (Pfullingen: Neske, 1956)].

20 Martin Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy*, translated by Richard Rojcewicz, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), [*Die Grundbegriffe der antiken Philosophie* GA 22 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1993)].

21 Martin Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?*, 81.

22 Plato *Theaet.*, 155d; translation of mine.

Wonder would then be the principle of philosophy, the *arché*, certainly not in the sense that it is the “physical” element, but rather the firm point that governs the development of philosophical activity: in this sense, it can in some ways be compared to the *ápeiron* of Anaximander, which guides and regulates the alternation of worldly entities in their appearance and disappearance. It does not seem out of place to state that, in advancing this interpretation, the German philosopher takes into account not only the Platonic passage cited, but also the characterization of the *arché* offered by Anaximander<sup>23</sup>. However, if from what we can derive from the text of the Athenian philosopher a valid basis for the Heideggerian thesis is to be found, it does not seem that this conclusion can be extended to the analogous passage of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, as Heidegger wants to do. In fact, the Aristotelian text of Book A of *Metaphysics* is quite different from the Platonic one, in terms of both terminology and arguments: in it, with regard to the birth of philosophy, the term *arché* is not used. In the passage referred to by Heidegger (*Metaph.*, 982b 12 ff.), the expression “*nún kái próton*” is used instead, “now as originally”, in the chronological sense that the first philosophers found in wonder the thrust from which to start, and that even at the time of Aristotle – and at all times – provides the springboard for philosophical investigation. There is, in that expression, a temporal reference, for which the Stagirite intends to affirm that, in their research, the Ionics have been moved by wonder (or, according to Heidegger, “amazement”). Anyone, in any time, who will start a philosophical investigation will do so, because she will be motivated by something “amazing”, “wonderful”, that triggers investigation.

At first sight, it does not seem then that there are sufficient reasons to endorse Heidegger’s proposal. Let us now turn our attention to the Heideggerian translation of the Aristotelian passage in its entirety, and then we will formulate some critical remarks. The text in question of *Metaphysics* A (*Metaph.* A 2, 982 b 12 ff.) is translated by Heidegger in the following way: “Through astonishment men have reached now, as well as at first, *the determining path* of philosophizing (that from which philosophizing emanates and that which altogether *determinates the course* of philosophizing)”<sup>24</sup>. We can detect here the presence of at least two additions, which seem to be “problematic”: what the author presents as his own (wonder as that which “determines the entire path”

23 “Ἐξ ὧν δέ ἡ γένεσις ἐστὶ τοῖς οὖσι, καὶ τὴν φοδράν εἰς ταῦτα γίνεσθαι κατὰ το χρεῶν, διδόναι γάρ αὐτά δικην καὶ τίσιν ἀλλήλοις τῆς ἀδικίας κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν” (fr. 12 B1). Although the text of Anaximander does not contain the term *arché*, the principle from which entities originate and to which they return is traditionally expressed with this word, that indicates not only whence things come, but also what governs and guides a certain reality.

24 Martin Heidegger, *What is philosophy? ...*, 81. Italics mine.

of philosophy) raises doubts as to its legitimacy. But, even more, the statement that the source of philosophy is also what dominates it “from one end to the other”, seems to be an undue interpretation on the part of Heidegger<sup>25</sup>, added to the original text and heterogeneous with respect to the Aristotelian expression<sup>26</sup>.

This interpretation would be less problematic on the basis of Plato’s *Theaetetus*, while it seems discordant in reference to that passage of Aristotle’s major work to which Heidegger would like to extend it. Moreover, Emanuele Severino had already pointed out the poor adherence of Heidegger’s interpretation to the Aristotelian text: the objections raised by the Italian philosopher are based on the fact that it cannot be argued that marvel is philosophy itself, since the Aristotelian passage goes on to state that the possession of philosophy leads “to a contrary state” with respect to the initial one. If this is correct, it is not possible to argue that wonder guides philosophy “from one end to the other”: it can perform this function at its beginning, but not in its conclusion, since such a state is, as the Stagirite writes, contrary to the initial one<sup>27</sup>.

If it is true that both Plato and Aristotle identify in the *tháuma* the very origin of philosophy, in any case the context, the role attributed to it, and their arguments are different. Therefore, the overall sense that must be attributed to the term must be different as well.

As to the difficulty related to the Heideggerian attempt at overlapping the Platonic and Aristotelian modes of understanding *tháuma*, it seems appropriate to recall the distinction advanced by Guido Cusinato that differentiates, in my opinion opportunely, “epistemological wonder” from “dizzying”, attributing the former to the Aristotelian conception and the latter to Plato<sup>28</sup>. This clarification is important, because more loyal to what seem to be the inevitable differences between the two Greek philosophers on the role they attribute to the *tháuma*.

Despite our critical notes to Heidegger’s proposal, the choice to translate the Greek word in question with “astonishment” [*Erstaunen*] seems noteworthy. So far, we have used this word as a synonym for wonder, and as substantially interchangeable with it. In reality, although in the intentions of Aristotle the meaning attributable to it is the same, the term “wonder” is in fact open to misunderstandings. Indeed, one may be induced to consider the “wonder” from

25 Few lines after, Heidegger adds: “Astonishment is *arché* – it pervades every step of philosophy”, 83.

26 “Διὰ γὰρ τὸ θαυμάζειν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ νῦν καὶ τὸ πρῶτον ἤρξαντο φιλοσοφεῖν”.

27 Emanuele Severino, *Il muro di pietra...*, 115-117.

28 Guido Cusinato, Periaogoge. *Teoria della singolarità e filosofia come cura del desiderio* (Verona: QuiEdit, 2014), 329-331.

which philosophy is born as what one feels when faced with something that is made the object of aesthetic contemplation, and that thus generates joyful admiration. In reality, the Aristotelian use of the term alludes to what we feel when we are dealing with an unexpected problem, a difficulty. This interpretation is also emphasized by Enrico Berti, who states that “the wonder of which Plato and Aristotle speak has nothing aesthetic, it is a purely theoretical attitude, it is cognitive, it is a simple desire to know”<sup>29</sup>. Being faced with something unexpected that does not fit into a well-established scheme of understanding is at the origin of that peculiar condition – *tháuma* – from which the philosophical investigation is born. In light of what has been said, therefore, the term “astonishment” [*Erstaunen*] seems to be more appropriate, as Heidegger suggests, because less apt to be misunderstood than the more common “wonder” [*Wunder*], which in fact generates misconceptions.

If instead, in addition to the wonder understood in an epistemological sense, we also want to enhance the aesthetic dimension of the term, a valid solution could be found, in my opinion, in the distinction suggested by Linda M. Napolitano, namely, that between questioning wonder and contemplating wonder. The former, indicated by the verbs *thaumázein* and *aporéin*, is at the beginning of philosophy, whereas the latter is at the end of the research, and is denoted by verbs related to seeing – *théasthai* and *katidéin* – that can be found in other passages of Plato<sup>30</sup>.

It seems appropriate to report a passage of particular effectiveness: “a confermare la differenza fra i due stati, sta il fatto che [...] essi *si legano a situazioni cognitive ed emozionali diverse* e persino opposte: la meraviglia contemplante possiede, sperimentandolo direttamente, il proprio oggetto ed implica perciò uno stato emozionale positivo ed infinitamente gradevole, di espansione del sé nella devozione o nella gratitudine; la meraviglia interrogante, invece, segnala un distacco integrale dall’oggetto di conoscenza ed implica perciò uno stato emozionale perturbato e *perfino doloroso d’incertezza e confusione*, sul quale dovrà, se vi riesce, aver la meglio l’amor di sapienza”<sup>31</sup>.

*Tháuma* as the beginning of philosophizing, which Heidegger suggests to translate as “astonishment”, is the variant of the term on which we will focus in the concluding observations.

29 Enrico Berti, *In principio era la meraviglia* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2007), viii. Italics mine.

30 See *Resp.* 516b 4-7.

31 Linda Napolitano Valditara, “Meraviglia, perplessità, aporia: cognizioni ed emozioni alle radici della ricerca filosofica”, *Thaumázein* 2 (2014): 137. Italics mine.

### III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Our research has reasoned over the most appropriate way of understanding the Greek word *tháuma*. This problem, however, is not to be understood as a simple linguistic or lexical consideration: it rather involves a deeper and theoretically relevant issue, namely that relating to the most appropriate way of understanding philosophical investigation as such. If, in fact, *tháuma* is understood as intellectual astonishment, as the Aristotelian texts seem to indicate, the resulting mode of making philosophy will privilege the purely theoretical-contemplative dimension. On the contrary, if we follow Severino's proposal to understand *tháuma* – from which philosophy is born – as anguished pain, deriving from the discovery of something negative or threatening, the existential interpretation will be privileged.

Heidegger's position is more oscillating. If, on the one hand, the German philosopher fits, albeit in an original way, in the tradition of thought inaugurated by Aristotle, on the other he insists particularly on the role played by emotions, and specifically of wonder, as a push that leads to research and philosophical activity, which in a sense brings him closer to the Severinian approach.

Beyond the undeniable differences highlighted here, what seems to unite Heidegger and Severino is precisely the insistence on the emotional sense of *tháuma*. Although each of them privileges one aspect over the other, both underline the role played by emotions in the cognitive process. In Heidegger, this aspect is more emphasized and developed, while in Severino there is no equal explanation, although one could be derived from his considerations in this regard. What has been noted by Chiara Pasqualin seems thus to remain valid (although she refers specifically to Heidegger): "Contrary to the traditional conception that connotes the moods as blind, or at most producers of confused and indistinct knowledge, Heidegger claims to the sphere of *páschein* its specific light, a privileged evidence of a pre-theoretical type. In the passions we are not closed and folded in a subjectivity separated from the real, but we are delivered to the world, exposed to its occurrence, before any explicit reflection and our voluntary initiative"<sup>32</sup>.

In fact in Heidegger, as anticipated, we find interesting indications in this regard, as in the following passage: "For precisely when, and because,

32 Chiara Pasqualin, "Per una fenomenologia dello stupore. Heidegger e l'origine emotiva del pensare", in *La passione del pensare. In dialogo con Umberto Curi*, edd. Bruna Giacomini, Fabio Grigenti and Laura Sanò, (Milano: Mimesis, 2011), 547-556, in particular 549-550.

philosophy is the most rigorous thinking in the purest dispassion, it originates from and remains within a very high disposition [*Stimmung*]”<sup>33</sup>. These Heideggerian observations seem to align with Severino’s or, at least, they can also be interpreted as referring to the role that the Italian philosopher attributes to the discovery of evil, and the anguish that follows as an emotional source of philosophy. Indeed, also Severino seems to assign to the emotional component an important role in the process of philosophical investigation, although this must be referred to philosophy as it has developed within the nihilism that permeates Western culture.

A further point of contact concerns the fact that even in Heidegger, as in Severino, space is given to the feeling of pain and anguish, although with a significant difference. In Heidegger the emotional tone is the original mode of our dealing with the world; moods are the “coloring” that each of us provides to the world in its relationship to it. As Elisa Zocchi notes, “they [the emotional shades] must be understood in the totality of existence, not as a passive response to a “bump” of the world, but as revealing themselves the world”<sup>34</sup>.

In Severino, on the contrary, it seems that it is precisely the impact generated by becoming (or rather by its misinterpretation) that triggers the emotional state of anguish and pain, which in turn finds an answer in the intellectual elaboration of the remedy. Therefore, the role of the emotional dimension does not seem so characteristic of man’s being in the world, but is first of all at the origin of philosophical thought. Rather, according to the Italian philosopher, the basis of the emotional dimension is a theoretical error, that is, an erroneous “reading” of the processuality of the appearance of entities: the anguish generated by the unpredictable irruption of the new, and the pain caused by the corruption of what was already, which, as mentioned earlier, are nothing more than the result of an ontological lack, are to be scaled down in their

33 Martin Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected “Problems” of “Logic”*, translated by Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 3, [*Grundfragen der Philosophie. Ausgewählte “Probleme” der “Logik”*] GA 45, (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1984).

34 Elisa Zocchi, “*Stimmung* e trascendenza. Il ruolo del *pathos* in Martin Heidegger”, *Rivista internazionale di filosofia e psicologia* 8 n. 1 (2017): 47-60, in particular 55-56. On the role of emotions in Heidegger see also: Quentin Smith, “On Heidegger’s Theory of Moods”, *The Modern Schoolman* 58 (1981): 211-235; Byung-Chul Han, *Heideggers Herz. Zum Begriff der Stimmung bei Martin Heidegger* (München: Fink, 1996); Annalisa Caputo, *Pensiero e affettività: Heidegger e le ‘Stimmungen’ (1889-1928)* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2001); Paola Ludovika Coriando, *Affektenlehre und Phänomenologie der Stimmungen: Wege einer Ontologie und Ethik des Emotionalen* (Frankfurt a.M: Klostermann, 2002); Chiara Pasqualin, *Il fondamento “patico” dell’ermeneutico: affettività, pensiero e linguaggio nell’opera di Heidegger* (Roma: Inschibboleth, 2015).

effective ontological consistency<sup>35</sup>.

We can thus conclude that emotions – especially wonder, but also anguish and pain – constitute an unavoidable “ingredient” that characterizes philosophical activity. However, even if we conceive this emotional component as necessary for developing a theoretical path (as in Heidegger), it cannot be denied that rational reflection is then elevated to the consideration of being in its totality, and in this sense the observations of Severino seem better defined. Indeed, Severino’s reflection highlights effectively the inescapable epistemic scope of philosophical knowledge<sup>36</sup>: ever since its origins, philosophy has intended to be the search – and identification – of the unchangeable truth.

Ultimately, the outcome could be defined as a “circular symbiosis”, in which the affective and the intellectual elements influence each other, and interact profitably along the process of philosophical investigation.

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35 At least in reference to the role played by such emotions in the development of philosophical thought. There is no reference here to the broader problem of the physical and moral evil with which one has to deal in daily life, and which Severino certainly does not deny.

36 This is the case, even if, within the forgetfulness of the sense of being that unites the West, metaphysical systematization has, for the Italian philosopher, an undoubted practical-utilitarian significance.

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