

# Facts for Necessitists and Permanentists

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Both Williamson and Severino are committed to the thesis that whatever exists permanently and necessarily exists. They, therefore, need an account of the reality of becoming and contingency. This paper compares their approaches, with a focus on the role played in them by facts. According to Williamson, it is contingent how necessary entities are. Consequently, his metaphysics is incompatible with the existence of truth-making entities, such as facts. In contrast, Severino also admits permanent and necessary truth-making facts, which are about specific times. Severino explains the reality of becoming differently: things – including facts – do not begin or cease to exist but appear and disappear. Some reality is also attributed to contingency, inasmuch as some features of appearance (the background) are necessary in an especially strong way, while others (the variants) are necessary only in a more general way. To further situate Severino's account with respect to analytic metaphysics, two other versions of permanentism and necessitism are also involved in the comparison, namely the early Wittgenstein's theory of objects and facts and Karofsky's so-called necessitarianism.

**Keywords:**

**Facts, Necessitism, Permanentism, Williamson, Wittgenstein**

## 1. Introduction

A recurrent theme in Emanuele Severino's works, and in particular in those more directly connected to *Ritornare a Parmenide* (1964) and collected in *Essenza del nichilismo* (1982), is that nothing begins to be and nothing ceases to be and that whatever is necessarily is. Being is, therefore, permanent and necessary. The being here at stake includes (but – as we are going to see – is not exhausted by) what in contemporary analytic metaphysics is called “existence.”<sup>60</sup> Thus, according to Severino, everything that exists necessarily and permanently exists.

Severino saw this thesis as revolutionary with respect to the entire tradition of Western metaphysics. This tradition was under the perduring influx of Plato, who, in the misguided hope of accounting for the reality of becoming in front of Parmenides' denial of it, ended up construing becoming as a succession of entities entering into being (*i.e.*, beginning to exist) and exiting from being (*i.e.*, ceasing to exist).<sup>61</sup> Aristotle would also be to blame. For example, in a passage of the *De interpretatione* (19a 23-27), discussed at length by Severino in *Ritornare a Parmenide*, Aristotle would reduce the *de re* necessity of existence (according to which everything necessarily exists) to the trivial *de dicto* theses that necessarily whatever exists exists, and that necessarily whatever does not exist does not exist.<sup>62</sup> Severino expects his revolution to clash with Western civilization's entire spirit, with many consequences also concerning our practical attitude towards it.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> This is especially clear in the first pages of the *Poscritto* (1965). See in particular Severino (1982, 99-100). All the page numbers for specific passages of the essays collected in *Essenza del nichilismo* refer to the (partial) English translation, except in those cases where the referenced essay is not included in the English translation. These cases are explicitly signaled.

<sup>61</sup> This is a recurrent topic in several of Severino's writings. See, for example, Severino (1967, sec. 4).

<sup>62</sup> See Severino (1982, 57).

<sup>63</sup> These consequences are, for example, at the center stage in Severino (1968a).

In front of this short presentation, any reader more familiar with contemporary analytic metaphysics than with Severino's writings risks thinking that Severino's revolution has been an enormous success and ended up being accepted in the philosophical mainstream. Indeed, one of the most influential works in this field published in the last decade is *Modal Logic as Metaphysics* by Timothy Williamson (2013), which is an extended defense of the thesis that necessarily everything is necessarily identical to something, that is, in the formalism of quantified modal logic:

$$\Box \forall x \Box \exists y x=y$$

This is the formulation of Williamson's *necessitism*. Despite some qualms on the part of Williamson about the ambiguity of the concept of existence<sup>64</sup> and under the assumption that existence is expressed in the logical language by the particular/existential quantifier "∃," necessitism can also be expressed by saying that necessarily everything necessarily exists.<sup>65</sup>

While Williamson's focus in the book is on necessity, he also emphasizes that the theses and most of the arguments in support of them could be transposed to the temporal sphere, thereby leading to *permanentism*, according to which at every time everything is such that at every time there is something identical to it, or – in terms of existence – that always everything always exists.<sup>66</sup>

In the first chapter of his influential book, Williamson also refers to some historical antecedents of his theses, such as Ibn Sīnā's metaphysical treatises and Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Williamson, who writes only some decades after Severino and is plausibly utterly unaware of Severino's thought, does not qualify his necessitism and permanentism as revolutionary. He indeed contrasts them with the contingentism (the thesis that it is possible that something is such that it is possible that nothing is identical to it) and temporaryism (the thesis that sometimes something is such that sometimes nothing is identical to it) of many influential twentieth-century logicians and metaphysicians, such as Arthur Prior, Saul Kripke, and Robert Stalnaker. However, Williamson does not claim that his stances are in stark contrast with Western metaphysics in general, let alone with Western civilization.

The purpose of this paper is to compare Williamson's and Severino's varieties of necessitism and permanentism and to suggest that, some similarities

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, Williamson (2013, 18–20).

<sup>65</sup> A similar formulation was assumed in Williamson (2002).

<sup>66</sup> Williamson (2013, 4).

notwithstanding, they diverge from each other in some pivotal respects, mostly connected with the role of truth-making facts, and in particular with those whose existence should necessitate *contingent* truths, such as “Sunak is the UK’s Prime Minister in 2023”.

In a nutshell, in this paper, I show that Williamson’s approach is incompatible with the existence of truth-making facts, while Severino is explicitly committed to their necessary existence. Consequently, Williamson and Severino sharply disagree about the reality of contingency and becoming and how to make them in some way compatible with necessitism and permanentism.

To further situate Severino’s account with respect to metaphysics in the analytic tradition, I also compare it with two other accounts, both committed to the necessary existence of at least some entities and also to the existence of facts. They are the theory of objects and facts of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922) and the necessitarianism of Amy Karofsky (2021). Both substantially diverge from Severino’s and Williamson’s accounts. At the end of the day, Severino’s account will come out relatively easily and fruitfully comparable, yet interestingly different with respect to all the varieties of analytic necessitism and permanentism discussed in this paper.

To unify and simplify the terminology, Williamson’s terms “necessitism” and “permanentism” (as well as the respective adjectives) are employed throughout the paper. They thus refer, respectively, to the *family* of theses according to which existence is in some way necessary; and to the *family* of theses according to which existence is in some way permanent or eternal. Thus, they are used not only in analyzing Williamson’s specific theses but also when Severino’s theses and others are under discussion.

The paper is structured as follows. In §2, I introduce Williamson’s necessitism and permanentism, with a focus on those aspects that can be usefully compared with Severino’s approach, and I subsequently focus on the inadmissibility of facts and truth-makers in the resulting metaphysics and on Williamson’s account of the reality of contingency and becoming. §3 discusses the different status of facts and truth-makers and the consequently different account of the reality of becoming in Severino’s metaphysics. §4 discusses the relation between Severino’s facts and time, a delicate issue that has to be clarified in order to make sense of Severino’s thesis that every fact is permanent. §5 focuses on Severino’s account of contingency, particularly as regards Severino’s concept of factuality and the so-called “variants” of appearance. §6 compares Severino’s and Williamson’s approaches with Wittgenstein’s theory of objects and facts in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, whereas §7 draws the comparison with the views recently defended in *A*

*Case for Necessitarianism* by Karofsky (2021), according to which absolutely nothing about the world could have been otherwise in any way, whatsoever. Finally, §8 draws some conclusions.

## 2. No Truth-Making Facts in Williamson's Higher-Order Necessitism

The above quoted primary formulation of Williamson's necessitism ( $\Box\forall x\Box\exists yx=y$ ) tells that it is a non-contingent matter what individuals there are. According to an influential tradition in twentieth-century analytic metaphysics, whose most quoted point of reference is Quine (1948), the existence of something is expressed by the particular/existential quantifier "∃" in formulas that, in order to be well-formed, also include at least one predicate. When this predicate is the identity predicate "=" and the resulting syntactical form is that of the formula above, the naked existence of something (not qualified in any way since everything is identical to itself) is expressed.

The quantifiers are here unrestricted *first-order* quantifiers and thus concern whatever is in the domain of first-order logic. Williamson has defended first-order necessitism in several works (1998, 1999, 2002, 2013) on the basis of various arguments. For example, in Williamson (2002), he argued that, for any entity, the proposition that this entity does not exist cannot be true in a possible world without that entity existing in that same world. Thus, for any entity, the proposition that it does not exist is false in every world and is, therefore, necessarily false. Everything necessarily exists.

In the most mature and extended defense of his necessitism (2013), Williamson goes much further than first-order necessitism and adopts so-called *uniform necessitism*,<sup>67</sup> which adopts the corresponding theses also for higher-order quantifiers, which bind variables occupying the syntactic position of first-level predicates (second-order quantifiers), the position of sentences (propositional quantifiers), or even the positions of higher-level predicates, logical connectives, operators, first-order quantifiers themselves, and so forth. Williamson thinks that higher-order quantifiers are very useful in metaphysics, where metaphysicians often want to say something general about what predicates, quantifiers, or – say – modal operators stand for.

Once the language of logic is so extended, necessitism is preferable to contingentism at every level. Thus, if capital letters are employed for vari-

<sup>67</sup> This label is employed in Skiba (2022, 1).

ables of a certain higher order and higher-order identity ( $\equiv$ ) is introduced for that order,<sup>68</sup> the following principle holds:

$$\Box \forall X \Box \exists Y X \equiv Y$$

It may be controversial what the values of higher-order variables are, but, for reasons we skip over for the sake of brevity, Williamson thinks that they are intensionally individuated entities, such as properties and relations, in the case of variables occupying the position of first-level predicates, bound by second-order quantifiers (Williamson 2013, secs. 5.7–5.9). Thus, in Williamson’s metaphysics, properties and relations exist as necessarily as individuals.

Indeed, a central argument in favor of first-order necessitism (Williamson 2013, ch. 6) hinges on second-order necessitism. In a nutshell, second-order logic needs a comprehension principle that establishes what properties there are, and the simplest and most desirable principle of comprehension roughly says that, for every open formula “ $\varphi x$ ,” there is the property  $\lambda x (\varphi x)$  instantiated by what satisfies the formula. As a consequence, there are also the so-called haecceities. A haecceity is the property of being identical to a specific individual, such as the property of being identical to Severino. Given the open formula “ $x = \textit{Severino}$ ,” the principle of comprehension warrants that there is the haecceity of Severino,  $\lambda x (x = \textit{Severino})$ . The principle of comprehension is a true logical principle and is, therefore, necessarily true. Thus, the haecceity of Severino – the property of being identical to Severino – necessarily exists.

Williamson contends that first-order contingentism (*i.e.*, the opposite of first-order necessitism, according to which it is possible that some individual is such that possibly no individual is identical to it) is unable to explain how the haecceity of Severino “locks onto” Severino (Williamson 2013, 269ff). Consider a putative possible scenario in which the property of being identical to Severino exists, but Severino fails to exist: it is not clear how the former manages to be – so to say – about Severino, if Severino in that scenario does not exist. Thus, while, for example, Plantinga (1974) thought that haecceities necessarily exist whereas individuals contingently exist, Williamson thinks that second-order necessitism leads to first-order necessitism and that, in general, uniform necessitism enjoys the theoretical virtue of simplicity, in comparison with hybrid forms that mix necessitism at certain orders and contingentism at others.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>68</sup> This is discussed in Williamson (2013, ch. 6, §1) and fully articulated in Dorr (2016).

<sup>69</sup> Skiba (2022) has recently defended hybrid contingentism.

What entities there are is uniformly necessary at every order, but *how things are* is not such. In a quantified statement, the domain of a quantifier is *what* we speak about, but then the whole sentence says *how* what we speak about is. Some sentences are true, some others false. Among true sentences, some are necessarily true (such as “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ” and “ $\forall x \square \exists y x = y$ ”), while many others (such as “Emanuele Severino is the author of *Ritornare a Parmenide*” and “at least one human being is higher than 2 meters and 10 centimeters”) are contingently true.

The values of variables in true quantifications of *any order* necessarily exist, but this must be made compatible with the contingency of many truths about them. This entails that there are no truth-makers for these truths, and the title of a section of *Modal Logic as Metaphysics* is precisely “No truthmakers” (Williamson 2013, sec. 8.3). The truth-maker principle according to which every truth is made true by some things is incompatible with Williamson’s necessitism. Truth-makers are entities whose existence necessitates the truth of sentences. If every truth has a truth-maker, then these entities (as any other entity) necessarily exist. They necessitate the truth of which they are truth-makers. Thus, every truth is a necessary truth, and we end up with the following “disastrous schema,” which “drags us from the non-contingency of being to the non-contingency of truth” (Williamson 2013, 393):

$$\alpha \rightarrow \square \alpha$$

Thus, “given that the language contains contingent truths, [the truth-maker principle] is inconsistent with necessitism” (*ibid.*). Actually, the inconsistency does not depend on truth-maker maximalism, that is, on the thesis that every contingent truth has a truth-maker.<sup>70</sup> A single contingent truth with a truth-maker already clashes with necessitism.

According to Williamson, a prejudice favoring first-order quantification and existence makes the truth-maker principle unduly attractive. In a scenario where a sentence is true, there should be *something* different with respect to a scenario where that sentence is false. This something has to be an individual of some kind (a fact or a trope: two popular candidates to the role of truth-makers), if only quantification in the syntactic position of names is considered. However, there are alternatives that avoid the contrast with necessitism and deflate all the emphasis on truth-makers. In particular, the *something* could correspond to quantification in sentence position.

<sup>70</sup> This is important since truth-maker maximalism is not endorsed even by many supporters of truth-making, including the seminal Mulligan, Simons, and Smith (1984), where the principle is restricted to atomic truths.

While Williamson considers various hypotheses about the interpretation of quantification in sentence position (401-402), let us assume for simplicity that the values of the sentential variables are propositions. The resulting truth-maker principle will then and uncontroversially say that, for any contingent truth, there is a proposition such that necessarily, if it is true, then the sentence is true (399):

$$\alpha \rightarrow \exists P (P \wedge \Box (P \rightarrow \alpha))$$

These propositions are allowed to be necessary existents in a uniform necessitist perspective without impacting on the contingency of truths. They are not truth-makers since their existence does not make themselves or the sentences true. Still, they are the *something* connected to the truth of sentences in the best form of the principle that – when wrongly formulated in terms of quantification in name position – leads to postulating facts or tropes in the role of truth-makers. The contingency of truth is thus preserved and made compatible with the necessity of existence.

There is another important aspect in Williamson's necessitist account of the reality of contingency. Some necessary existents are neither concrete nor abstract. They are not abstract since they are not numbers, sets, or other prototypically abstract entities that cannot occupy regions of spacetime; and they are not concrete since, as a matter of fact, they do not occupy any region of spacetime, even if they could. *Concreteness* is, for Williamson, the feature of what occupies spacetime. So-called mere *possibilia* – such as the possible son of Wittgenstein – are possibly concrete entities (they would occupy regions of spacetime in scenarios where Wittgenstein had a son). This means contingency also concerns a specific way in which necessarily existents are: their contingent concreteness.

In all his works on necessitism, Williamson is rather dismissive of a radical form of necessitarianism (I borrow this label from Karofsky (2021), to which I return in §7), according to which also how things are – and not only what exists – is necessary: Williamson's reasons in support of necessitism (including the two arguments sketched above, stemming respectively from negative existential propositions and the comprehension principle of second-order logic) do not support a radical form of necessitarianism according to which also how things are is necessary.<sup>71</sup>

It should be underlined that this approach forbids the existence of some categories of entities, such as facts, that could also serve other theoretical

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<sup>71</sup> Necessitarianism is, in particular, criticized in Williamson (2013, sec. 8.4).



purposes independent of truth-making.<sup>72</sup> Two examples: in philosophy of mind, Searle (1983) believes that facts play a pivotal role in the best account of intentionality; in epistemology, Hossack (2007) deems facts to be the best candidates to the role of objects of knowledge. Williamson's necessitism is incompatible with these theories about intentionality and knowledge, and this lack of neutrality with respect to seemingly independent philosophical debates can be considered a theoretical cost.

While in this paper I shall mainly focus on facts, the case of tropes is analogous: at least in the extant versions of the theory of tropes, tropes exist only if it is true that a certain individual has a certain property. Thus, the whiteness of snow exists if and only if the snow is white. Perhaps one could devise a necessitist theory of tropes in which tropes behave analogously to merely possible individuals so that – say – the blackness of snow exists but is not concrete; and would be concrete in a scenario in which snow is black. I am not aware of any trope theory of this kind, in which, in any case, tropes would not be truth-makers, that is, they would not be such that their existence makes sentences true (their concreteness would play this role).

Williamson's necessitism is incompatible with the existence of *truth-making* tropes, while – analogously to facts – the commitment to this kind of tropes is not exclusively motivated by the truth-maker principle.<sup>73</sup> Some theorists expect tropes to be involved in causality, inasmuch as – say – it is the particular temperature of a specific portion of water that causes its boiling and not the universal it shares with other portions of water at the same temperature.<sup>74</sup> Tropes are also often thought to be the primary objects of our perceptions: when I am in perceptual contact with a green leaf, I do never see a leaf in its entirety, and this is perhaps a reason to think that the leaf is not the object of my perception; I also do not see the universal greenness, which is not located exclusively there. According to Lowe (2008) and Mulligan, Simons, and Smith (1984, 306), among others, the objects of perception are tropes, namely the particular greenness of the leaf I am in perceptual contact with. Tropes have also been attributed a role in semantics, such as referents of nominalizations that are not sensibly taken to refer to

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<sup>72</sup> See Mulligan and Correia (2021) for an overview of the metaphysics of facts and Betti (2015) for an in-depth analysis of the motivations for the existence of facts, albeit from a skeptical perspective.

<sup>73</sup> Maurin (2023) and Allen (2016, ch. 3) are two overviews of the contemporary debate about tropes.

<sup>74</sup> This role of trope is, for example, at center stage in Campbell (1990).

universals, e.g., “Giorgio’s height.”<sup>75</sup> Williamson’s necessitism is incompatible with all this, and, again, this lack of neutrality with respect to seemingly independent debates can count as a theoretical cost.

These costs do not translate into self-standing objections to Williamson’s necessitism since it is controversial whether facts (and tropes) exist and that they are the best candidates for the theoretical roles sketched above. Williamson could even contend that if there are solid arguments in favor of necessitism, then we obtain a welcome simplification of several debates, because the option of involving truth-making entities in these debates gets excluded because of their incompatibility with an independently well-supported doctrine. The reason why I focus on this incompatibility is that it is a significant difference between, on the one hand, Williamson’s necessitism and, on the other hand, Severino’s necessitism and also Wittgenstein’s and Karofsky’s approaches, which – as we will see in §§6-7 – all admit the existence of facts.

This whole picture is developed in *Modal Logic as Metaphysics*, focusing on the modal sphere, *i.e.*, on the *necessary* existence of entities, *contingent* truths, and the *contingent* concreteness of entities. However, Williamson explicitly maintains that many of his theses and arguments “have parallels for the temporal dispute between permanentism and temporaryism” (Williamson 2013, 4). They could thus be transposed to the temporal sphere, thereby coming to concern the *permanent* existence of entities, *temporary* truths, and the *temporary* concreteness of entities. The reality of becoming is also easily accounted for, given that sentences are allowed to change truth value not only from one possible scenario to another but also from one time to another.

### 3. Facts in Severino’s Necessitism

According to Severino, being is not born and does not die, because otherwise it is not. The simple hypothesis that what is is not leads to an unacceptable contradiction. The hypothesis that something, which is, is not is so unacceptable that the status of the principle of excluded middle is, according to Severino, thereby jeopardized: “The principle of the excluded middle becomes an explicit declaration of the possibility of the not-being of Being” (Severino 1982, 75), because, given a true “*p*,” according to which some-

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<sup>75</sup> This is only one among many semantic roles attributed to tropes in several works of Friederike Moltmann, including (2003), (2009), and (2013, ch. 2).

thing is, “ $p \vee \neg p$ ” includes as the second disjunct the hypothesis that what is is not; and this simple hypothesis is unacceptable, even within a logical construction such as a disjunction.

Being is a form of positivity and is radically incompatible with negativity in the temporal and modal dimensions: “This tree is a positive, and as such it is and it cannot befall it to not-be, and so it is eternal. And, as eternal, it dwells in the hospitable house of Being” (Severino 1982, 97). Thus, whatever is permanently and necessarily is.

Severino writes that “it cannot be thought of *Being* (of all and of every Being) that it is-not” (Severino 1982, 99) and thereby asserts that permanence and necessity concern the entire realm of being, both collectively and distributively. Collectively since for Severino the whole reality (“all Being,” “tutto l’essere” in Italian) permanently and necessarily is; and distributively (“every Being,” “ogni essere” in Italian) since every single, particular entity permanently and necessarily is.

The distributive aspect of Severino’s necessitism is radical and concerns every entity without any category limitation. Severino resolutely opposes any restriction of permanence and necessity to entities of some category. He traces back to Plato the idea that only universals or ideas permanently and necessarily exist (Severino 1982, 67); and to ancient and medieval ontological and cosmological arguments for the (permanent and necessary) existence of God the idea that only God permanently and necessarily exists (Severino 1982, 70-71). In both cases, metaphysicians end up looking for a constant and reliable source of positivity (for example, something that is always and necessarily actual, without which nothing could pass from potentiality to actuality). They have this need precisely because they have admitted the contingency and temporariness of particular beings in the first place, in the misbegotten attempt to account for the reality of becoming in terms of particular entities entering and exiting the realm of being. Without this initial mistake, there is no reason to attribute a special temporal or modal status to universals or God. They are as permanent and necessary as everything else.

In order to draw the comparison with Williamson, removing some minor conceptual or terminological discrepancies is important. Severino usually does not underline the difference between predicative uses of the verb “to be,” which express that something is in a certain way (as in “the apple *is* green”), and existential uses, which express the existence of something and could be replaced by the verb “to exist” (as in “God *is*”).

However, this should not be mistaken for unawareness of this pivotal distinction, which Severino occasionally discusses, particularly where, in

his *Risposta ai critici* (1968b), he answers to some objections on the part of Enrico Berti. The controversy concerns the passage mentioned above of Aristotle's *De interpretatione*. John Ackrill translates it in English as follows: "What is, necessarily is, when it is; and what is not, necessarily is not, when it is not" (19a 23-27). As we said in the introduction, Severino (1964) had interpreted this passage as the admission that the necessity of being is merely *de dicto*: necessarily, what is is; and necessarily, what is not is not. *Contra* Aristotle, Severino maintains that also *de re* necessity (as well as permanence) concerns being: whatever is permanently and necessarily is. *Contra* Severino, Berti (1966) had objected that Aristotle's passage only concerns being in a certain way, and not existence, so, in that passage, Aristotle is only affirming the *de dicto* permanent and necessary truth of the principle of non-contradiction without expressing any thesis about existence at all.

In his *Risposta ai critici* (1968b), Severino shows full awareness of the distinction and insists that, in any case, both existence and being in a certain way are *de re* permanent and necessary (Severino 1982, 308-11).<sup>76</sup> In doing so, he clearly suggests that any being in a certain way corresponds to the existence of something: the apple is green if and only if the apple's greenness (a *trope* in the jargon of contemporary English-speaking metaphysics) exists; the apple is green if and only if the *fact* (Severino explicitly admits a category of facts, as we will see) that the apple is green exists. Severino emphasizes that permanence and necessity concern both levels: existence and being in some particular way. According to Williamson, it instead concerns only existence, as it is expressed by the particular/existential quantifier "∃" of any order.

While, in his controversy with Berti about Aristotle, Severino shows awareness of the distinction between existence and predicative being, he had not drawn explicitly the distinction in his extensive, positive discussion about the permanence and necessity of being in the previous *Ritorno a Parmenide* (1964). This, however, cohered with the spirit of his approach, open to an abundance of truth-making entities: for every instance of predicative being – that is, for every case in which a particular is in a certain way or some particulars are related in a certain way – *something exists*, and this something is often characterized in Severino's writings as a fact. In the jargon of contemporary analytic metaphysics, these entities

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<sup>76</sup> Severino (1968b) has been later included in Severino (1982) but not in its English translation. Thus, the page numbers (in this case and the subsequent references to the *Risposta ai critici*) refer to the original text of Severino (1982) in Italian. The translations of the quoted excerpts from the *Risposta ai critici* are mine.

are truth-makers of seemingly contingent truths. As such, if they are not banned from the ontology as they should be according to Williamson, then their necessary existence entails that those truths are necessary and not contingent. Thus, it lacked importance to underline the distinction between necessary existence and necessary being in a certain way since, at the end of the day, every instance of being in a certain way corresponds to a necessary existent – and necessary existence was at the center stage already in *Ritornare a Parmenide*.

As regards facts, in the initial pages of the *Poscritto*, published in 1965, Severino includes facts in the following list of what “Being” stands for and is therefore permanent and necessary according to Parmenides and Parmenideans like himself: “‘Being’ stands for everything that is not nothing: nature and language, appearance and reality, facts and ideal essences, the human and the divine” (Severino 1982, 99).

The above list may seem heterogeneous and cryptic. However, other passages in Severino’s works make clear that Severino is committed to facts as truth-making structured entities, similar to those of Armstrong (1997), and in particular composed of one or more particulars and exactly one property or one relation. This is again especially evident in the dialectics with Berti in the *Risposta ai critici*. Berti (1966) had observed that an instance of the above-discussed Aristotelian principle (necessarily, what is is) is that necessarily a white thing is white, and that this is perfectly compatible with the possibility that this thing is not white. Berti had maintained that it is *only a fact* that this thing is white. Severino strongly disagrees with Berti: the fact that this thing is white cannot begin or cease to exist. From this viewpoint, the being/existence of facts is on a par with the being/existence of the entities within facts (particulars, properties, relations), namely permanent and necessary.

Severino writes, as a comment to Berti’s hypothesis that the fact that this thing is white is contingent: “When this thing, that is now white, ceases to be white, what happens to this-white-thing?” (Severino 1982, 310). This-white-thing would stop existing. It would exit from the realm of being, in contrast with the radical, unrestricted thesis that everything permanently exists. Given that everything permanently exists, even this-white-thing – even the fact that this thing is white – permanently (and necessarily) exists. Severino qualifies this fact as a specific synthesis, that is, a synthesis of the particular thing and of the property of whiteness, and the hypothesis that “the synthesis has become a nothing” is rejected (*ibid.*). On account of his claim that this synthesis becomes a nothing, Berti is qualified as a nihilist, that is, as a philosopher who follows the prevailing line in Western meta-

physics of considering becoming as a process in which things begin and cease to exist (Severino 1982, 310, fn. 44). Severino coherently concludes that, if a certain thing is white, then it is permanently and necessarily white: “this white thing, as any other determination of being, is eternal: it cannot fail to be; thus, there cannot be any time in which it wasn’t yet white or in which it is not white anymore” (Severino 1982, 311, fn. 44).

One can wonder whether it is possible to reconcile in any form a position of this kind with the reality of becoming, but Severino thinks that this can be done. We have seen in §2 that an aspect of Williamson’s account is the distinction between existence as expressed by the particular/existential quantifier on the one hand and concreteness as occupation of spacetime on the other. When Socrates dies, he continues to exist but stops occupying a region of spacetime. In a possible scenario when my parents did not meet, I exist but do not occupy any region of spacetime.

Severino’s account is focused on something other than the abstract/concrete distinction.<sup>77</sup> Becoming – for particulars, essences, facts, and whatever necessarily and permanently is and yet participates in the becoming – consists in appearing and disappearing, in entering the realm of appearance and later exiting it:

The Becoming that appears is not the birth and the death of Being, but rather its appearing and disappearing. Becoming is the process of the revelation of the immutable. [...] The *becoming* of Being that is the content of Appearing does *not* appear as an issuing from and a returning to nothingness on the part of Being, but rather as an appearing and disappearing of *Being*, and thus as an appearing and disappearing of that which is, i.e., of the immutable, which eternally *is*, even when it has not yet appeared and even when it has disappeared. (Severino 1982, 118-19).

As Severino clarifies some pages later in the *Poscritto*, the events of appearing and disappearing are also permanent and necessary beings. The temporal succession of these events concerning appearance is a fact and, as such, is also permanent and necessary, given that facts are admitted in Severino’s ontology and are as permanent and necessary as everything else: “appearing is a predicate that *necessarily* belongs to things that appear” (Severino 1982, 128).

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<sup>77</sup> Severino qualifies as concrete the totality of the permanent and necessary being (the entire universe, in all its history), while any part of it is abstract inasmuch as it is considered without the context. Thus, Severino’s concept of concreteness differs from Williamson’s and is primarily epistemic. See, for example, Severino (1982, 133-34).

Thus, when Socrates was born, he began to appear; when he died, he stopped appearing; but Socrates permanently and necessarily exists, and also the events of his birth and death and thus the events of beginning to appear and of stopping appearing, as well as their temporal succession, all permanently and necessarily exist. When a thing becomes white, the above-mentioned truth-making synthesis/fact dubbed by Severino “this-white-thing” begins to appear (but existed also beforehand because it is as permanent and necessary as everything else).

At every time, there is the totality of what appears (particulars, facts, properties, and other categories of entities), and this totality is the *transcendental event*, “the horizon of all that appears”; to begin to appear is tantamount to becoming part of the transcendental event. The transcendental event is also eternal, and it is not even possible to suppose that it is not (Severino 1982, 99).

The Kantian term “transcendental,” while never explicitly defined in these works, suggests that the subject involved in these appearances is not an empirical human subject to which the various particulars or facts appear. The transcendental event is not always perceived by some empirical subjects but is at the disposal of the human subjects that are there (necessarily, as everything else) to perceive them. What belongs to the transcendental event is available to perception, even if nobody actually perceives it.

This availability to the perception of what is not actually perceived cannot be the mere possibility to be perceived because everything (every being, every not being, including those concerning appearance and appearance) is necessary. Thus, it presumably consists simply in its belonging to a certain time in the necessary succession of times: this gives it features that are compatible with perception at that time, even if it is not actually perceived and therefore cannot be perceived.

#### 4. Facts and Time in Severino

To complete Severino’s account of becoming and illustrate his account of contingency, it is important to discuss two aspects for which clear and decisive textual evidence is lacking in Severino’s works. They are both important to obtain an overall compelling picture that does not fly in the face of evident data concerning becoming and contingency and can be fruitfully compared with metaphysics in the analytic tradition to which Williamson belongs.

The first aspect, discussed in this section, concerns the relation between *time* and permanently existing truth-making facts. I am not aware of any

direct evidence in Severino's writing that directly supports the solution I will suggest on his behalf; but the solution maximizes the coherence of Severino's approach while avoiding committing it to utterly implausible consequences. The second aspect is discussed in the next section (§5) and concerns modal distinctions among (all equally necessarily existing) facts and is supported by some sparse Severino's claims.

As regards the first aspect, a truth-making fact (say, the fact that Sunak is the UK's prime minister, or the fact that this leaf is green) permanently, always exists. Severino does never draw from this the absurd conclusion that Sunak is *eternally* the UK's prime minister or that at no time the leaf is not yet green or becomes yellow. Thus, it is charitable to interpret Severino's account of becoming as presupposing an understanding of facts such that this absurd consequence does not follow.

This can be done by hypothesizing that times are components of facts. If times are components of facts – components that are, for brevity, sometimes left implicit in their denominations – the absurd consequence does not follow. The fact that Sunak is the UK's prime minister is thus more adequately described by denoting it in a way that explicitly indicates an instant or a time span; for example, with the denoting phrase “the fact that Sunak is the UK's prime minister in July 2023”. The fact at stake makes true the sentence in the present tense “Sunak is the UK's prime minister” uttered during that month; and – to make another example, among the various one could consider – this same fact also makes true the sentence in the past tense “Sunak was the UK's prime minister in June 2023” uttered at a later time. The fact and all the truth-making relations eternally and necessarily exist. They existed also when Churchill was the UK's prime minister, and they will exist when the United Kingdom eventually ceases to exist. What is eternal is a fact that concerns not only Sunak and British politics but also a specific time. The fact about the leaf will also be more explicitly denominated with a denoting phrase such as “the fact that this leaf is green on 20 July 2023”; it permanently exists and always concerns that specific day.

There is nothing peculiar in this understanding of facts. While I have yet to learn of any explicit theory of facts developed in combination with permanentism, truth-makers are, in general, expected to make true also utterances and beliefs concerning specific times. For this reason a time is often considered part of their identity. In §6, we will see that this happens, for example, in the theory of facts of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. The same holds for tropes (such as the leaf's particular greenness), which have been thought, for example, by Keith Campbell to be momentary in the sense that



they are properties had by a specific individual at a certain time: tropes “have a local habitation, a single, circumscribed place in space-time” (Campbell 1990, 53).<sup>78</sup> Once facts are put in the context of Severino’s permanentism, they cannot be momentary in the sense of existing for a single moment (because, for a permanentist, everything exists at every time), but they can nonetheless concern a single time by having it among its constituents.

## 5. Modal Distinctions among Severino’s Facts

Every fact is permanent and necessary. By construing facts as concerning specific times and having them as constituents, it is possible to make sense of the permanence of facts concerning material entities that patently have different properties and relations at different times. What about modal distinctions among different facts? The fact that the sum of 2 and 3 is 5 can be expected to enjoy a different modal status with respect to the fact that the leaf is green, even once the latter is made specific to a certain time. An essentialist could even think that there is a difference in modal status between – say – the fact that Socrates is a man in a certain day of 401 BC, on the one hand, and the facts that Socrates is a philosopher in that same day and that he is the husband of Xanthippe in that same day, on the other.

Williamson’s necessitism is admittedly incompatible with truth-making entities such as facts. Nevertheless, it has an easy time accounting for the modal distinctions between the truths at stake since they do not concern what entities exist but how they are. Severino’s approach instead contends that everything is necessary, and this includes both what entities exist and how these entities are, even considering that truth-making entities (whose necessary existence necessitates that entities are in a certain way) are admitted in the ontology. This *prima facie* leaves no space for modal distinctions. Temporal becoming does not entail modal distinctions either, given that – as we have seen in §4 – everything that concerns appearance and the variability of the transcendental event is necessary.

However, in Severino’s works, it is possible to find at least *two* mutually coherent traces of modal distinctions drawn within the unrestricted realm of the necessary and permanent being. *First*, in the *Risposta ai critici* (Severino 1968b), there is a list of “imperishable” and “immutable” entities, which includes what is “factual and necessary” (Severino 1982, 67). According to

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<sup>78</sup> Some trope theorists disagree. For example, Ehring (1998) contends, against Campbell, that some tropes can persist.

Severino, all that is factual is (as everything else) also necessary. Thus, in a footnote, Severino feels the need to explain why the phrase “factual and necessary” is not redundant by analyzing the distinction between “factual” and “necessary.” He writes:

Here it is important to make clear that the ‘factual’ is not what is, but could not be; but is what whose non-being is actually excluded only by the consideration that a positive cannot fail to be; while the non-existence of the ‘necessary’ is excluded not only by this consideration, but also by other considerations about a self-contradiction in the non-existence of what is said to be ‘necessary’; this self-contradiction goes beyond the fundamental self-contradiction of the non-being of being. However, it is now clear that this distinction between ‘factual’ and ‘necessary’ is internal to the necessity that bears a primary speculative value. (Severino 1982, 67, fn. 3)

Thus, in the unrestricted realm of the necessary<sub>1</sub> (the sense of ‘necessary’ “that bears a primary speculative value”), the mere factual can still be distinguished from the necessary<sub>2</sub>, which enjoys a less speculatively valuable variety of necessity. The hypothesis that what is necessary<sub>2</sub> fails to exist is self-contradictory, not only in the general sense in which being and not-being are mutually contradictory, but in a different, more specific sense.

Severino does not say in the above passage what this different form of self-contradiction is. However, it is plausible to hypothesize that a variety of Severino’s necessity<sub>2</sub> could be logical necessity, where  $p$  is logically necessary if and only if  $\neg p$  is a logical contradiction or entails a logical contradiction; so, any instance of  $p \rightarrow p$  will be logically necessary or necessary<sub>2</sub> since  $\neg(p \rightarrow p)$  entails a contradiction.<sup>79</sup> Other varieties of necessity<sub>2</sub> could even be more substantive varieties of objective necessity, such as *metaphysical* or *nomological* necessity. Thus, given the true general principles of metaphysics,  $p$  is metaphysically necessary if and only if the conjunction of  $\neg p$  and the totality of the true general principles of metaphysics is or entails a contradic-

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<sup>79</sup> The hypothesis is also supported by Severino’s discussion of the analytic/synthetic distinction in Severino (1981, ch. 6, sec. 11). I thank Federico Perelda for pointing me towards this passage and making me aware of its importance. In this text Severino claims that the analytic/synthetic distinction operates within the domain of identical judgments. Synthetic judgments are identical judgments whose negation is not immediately self-contradictory, while analytic judgments are identical judgments whose negation is immediately self-contradictory. The distinction is presented in the jargon of Severino’s doctrine of judgment and apophansis, which is at the center stage in Severino (1981). The involvement of the analytic/synthetic distinction also complicates the comparison with Williamson, who is rather dismissive of this distinction (Williamson 2006) and keeps it apart from modal concepts.

tion; and, given the scientific laws of nature,  $p$  is nomologically necessary if and only if the conjunction of  $\neg p$  and the laws of nature is or entails a contradiction. To exemplify, it would be nomologically necessary (a variety of necessity<sub>2</sub>) that my car does not surpass the velocity of light since the conjunction of the opposite claim and the laws of nature (which include the laws of Einstein's theory of special relativity) entails a contradiction.

In the case of logical necessity, the negation of what is necessary<sub>2</sub> is straightforwardly self-contradictory. In the latter case of more substantial objective necessity, the negation of what is necessary<sub>2</sub> is not autonomously self-contradictory but primarily contributes to the self-contradiction (the conjunction of it with the principles of metaphysics or the laws of nature is self-contradictory). Thus, within unrestricted necessity<sub>1</sub>, it is possible to draw subtler modal distinctions on the basis of more standard logical self-contradictions (the negations of these contradictions – or of a conjunct within them – are necessary<sub>2</sub>).

A *second* trace in Severino's works is found in a distinction within the realm of appearance. Becoming consists of entities entering the realm of appearances, also dubbed "transcendental event." Within this realm, Severino (1965, sec. 6, §8) distinguishes the *background* and the *variants*. The background is "constituted by those meanings whose not-appearing would imply the disappearing of every determination" (Severino 1982, 106, fn. 23), and thus by those features of appearance without which there would be no appearance. Again, whatever concerns appearance is as necessary (necessary<sub>1</sub>) as anything else, but the hypothesis that these fundamental features that constitute the background are not instantiated by appearance is also self-contradictory in a stricter sense so that the background is also – in the terminology we have introduced above – necessary<sub>2</sub>.

It can be conjectured that they are more specifically *metaphysically necessary*, if we assume as a general principle of metaphysics that something appears and that the transcendental event is not empty: the conjunction of the negation of the background and this metaphysical principle will then be contradictory, and so the background is metaphysically necessary (necessary<sub>2</sub>, in one of the varieties we have postulated above), besides being necessary<sub>1</sub> as everything else.

Severino's examples of what constitutes the background concern formal and non-contentual aspects of the appearance. He writes: "The fundamental (but not exhaustive) complex of these meanings is formed by meanings such as "Being," "not-Being," "totality," "Appearing" (Severino 1982, 334, fn. 20). As usual, Severino does not pay much attention to the distinction between

existing entities and predicative truths about them, also because it thinks that for any predicative truth there is a truth-making entity. Thus, we can speculate that the background includes the listed entities and truths about them (such as “being is,” “being exists,” or “particular beings enter and exit the totality of appearances”). In the introduction to the 1981 edition of *La struttura originaria* – the complex treatise that Severino originally published in 1958 and is the breeding ground of many doctrines to be also presented or reworked in later works – Severino also defines the background as “the basic content that appears in the appearance of any content.” (Severino 1981, 84).<sup>80</sup>

The variants are all the other contents of appearance. As the following passage illustrates, Severino is open to two alternatives about them:

[...] the background and the variants may be related in two different ways:  
1. the appearing of the background does not necessarily imply the appearing of variants, and thus their appearing is a *fact*; 2. the appearing of the background necessarily implies the appearing of variants. (Severino 1982, 138)

The variants of appearance are the specific contents of what appears at a certain time. The laptop I am seeing and using in writing this paper belongs to the variants since its non-appearance is undoubtedly compatible with something else appearing. In both the hypotheses outlined in the quoted passage (1. and 2.), the variants are necessary<sub>1</sub>. In hypothesis 2. they are also as necessary<sub>2</sub> as the background of appearance (namely – as we have hypothesized – metaphysically necessary) since the background is necessary<sub>2</sub> and the background necessitates the variants. In hypothesis 1. the variants are instead merely necessary<sub>1</sub>, whereas they do not inherit the necessity<sub>2</sub> of the background, since the background does not necessitate the variants. In hypothesis 2. the variants are a mere fact, in the sense we have discussed above, since their necessity does not concern the form of appearance and the basic requirements for something appearing but is simply the general necessity<sub>1</sub>, which is shared with everything else in general.

To sum up, while contending that everything is necessary<sub>1</sub>, Severino also countenances narrower instances of necessity<sub>2</sub>. The negations of strictly logical self-contradiction and of what contradicts objective general laws are necessary<sub>2</sub>, while the realm of the mere factual is necessary<sub>1</sub> but not necessary<sub>2</sub> (it is contingent<sub>2</sub>).

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<sup>80</sup> The translation is mine.

## 6. Facts, Necessitism, and Permanentism in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*

In §§2-5, we have discussed the peculiarities of Severino's and Williamson's respective varieties of permanentism and necessitism and, in particular, how they account for the reality of temporal becoming and modal contingency. We will summarize the main similarities and differences in the conclusion (§8). This section and the following (§§6-7) look to two other extant strains of necessitism/permanentism in the tradition of analytic metaphysics and compare them with Severino's (and Williamson's) doctrines so as to further situate Severino's approach with respect to analytic metaphysics. For the sake of relative brevity, the presentations of these two other strains are quicker.

First, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922), which – as we have seen in §1 – Williamson explicitly mentions as a historical precedent of his necessitism. Wittgenstein is indeed committed – in the words of (Williamson 2013, sec. 8.1) – to a “necessary framework of objects.” The simple objects (*Gegenstände* in German) “make up the substance of the world” (*Tractatus* 2.021), and “are what is unalterable and subsistent” (2.0271).<sup>81</sup> No matter how different it is from the actual world, an imagined world shares with the actual world a form, that consists of the objects (2.022-2.023). The imagined worlds of the *Tractatus* are often seen as forerunners of twentieth-century possible worlds semantics.<sup>82</sup> Objects are, in this sense, both permanent and necessary existents (necessary since they are common to each possible/imagined world).

This holds at least if we keep fixed the concept of existence and, thus, apply to the *Tractatus* Williamson's idea (coming from Quine (1948) and for a long time dominant in analytic philosophy) that existence is expressed by the particular/existential quantifier of first-order logic.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, given a true atomic proposition of the *Tractatus*, it is possible to replace any name denoting an object with a variable and bind this variable with a particular/existential quantifier, thereby obtaining a true existential claim concerning that object. Given any false atomic proposition, it is analogously possible to apply a negation to it, replace any name denoting an object with a vari-

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<sup>81</sup> The quoted passages of the *Tractatus* come from the translation of David Pears and Brian McGuinness.

<sup>82</sup> See Copeland (2002) for a historical reconstruction and Armstrong (1989) for a theory of modality inspired by the *Tractatus*.

<sup>83</sup> In §2, we have seen that Williamson extends the Quinean approach from first-order quantifiers to quantifiers of any order.

able, and bind this variable with a particular/existential quantifier, thereby obtaining, also in this case, a true existential claim concerning this object.

States of affairs (*Sachverhalte*) are also a pivotal category of entities in the metaphysics and semantics of the *Tractatus*. They are possible combinations of objects and are pictured by atomic propositions. The possible combinations of objects are determined by the forms or natures of the objects (2.01, 2.0123, 2.0141), so that the totality of the objects determines the totality of the states of affairs (this totality is the logical space; 2.0124, 2.014). This means that, since objects are permanent and necessary, states of affairs are permanent and necessary too. The *Tractatus* does not countenance any other kind of quantification beyond first-order quantification in the syntactical position of a name. Thus, it is impossible to directly apply Williamson's conception of existence to anything except objects in the metaphysics of the *Tractatus*. Nonetheless, the totality of states of affairs is stable across times and worlds, no matter that they are not possible values of any quantifier in the rigidly delimited language of the *Tractatus*. If less bigoted, more flexible languages (such as Williamson's higher-order languages discussed in §2) are considered, then Wittgenstein's states of affairs come out as necessary existents.

As argued in Frascolla (2021, sec. 4), in the context of the metaphysics of the *Tractatus*, existence can instead be plausibly construed as participation in an *actual fact*. Given that the world is, according to the *Tractatus*, the *totality of the facts* (1.1), existence can be legitimately seen as a form of presence in the world, that is, of participation in one of the facts of which the world is the totality. Given this understanding of existence, objects *are not* necessary existents, since the *Tractatus* explicitly admits the possibility that an object does not participate in any actual fact. In the jargon of the *Tractatus*, an object's logical space can be empty (2.013) so that an object can participate in one or more facts in a world but in no fact in another world.

However, in order to make the metaphysics of the *Tractatus* comparable with Williamson's (and Severino's) theories, it is arguably preferable to hold still the Quine-Williamson understanding of existence in terms of quantification. Under this *proviso*, objects and states of affairs are necessary existents.

*Facts* are, anyhow, why the necessitism of the *Tractatus* is very different from Williamson's and Severino's varieties. Facts are subsisting states of affairs. Every imagined world – every possible world, in contemporary terms – is a set of facts, that is, of those states of affairs that would subsist if things were in that way. Thus, the domain of facts varies from world to world: it is contingent. Facts are truth-making entities: each of them makes true an

atomic proposition, and contingent molecular propositions are also made true by combinations of the subsistence and non-subsistence of states of affairs (where subsisting states of affairs are facts). The facts of the *Tractatus* have the specific purpose of tracking the contingency. The above-quoted sentence about objects being unalterable and subsistent is also (in its second half) about the changing and unstable configurations of objects, namely the facts: “Objects are what is unalterable and subsistent; their configuration is what is changing and unstable” (2.0271).

Williamson does not admit truth-making facts in its ontology precisely because they are incompatible with necessitism. Severino admits facts in his ontology but contends that they exist necessarily (at least in the sense of necessity<sub>1</sub>, given the distinctions introduced in §5). The facts of the *Tractatus* are contingent truth-makers, which is a difference with respect to both Williamson and Severino.

One can wonder whether Wittgenstein’s permanentism about objects (that are said to be “unalterable” and thus are never altered in time) can also be extended not only to states of affairs but also to facts. Given that facts are said to be “changing and unstable,” a negative answer may seem obvious. However, a hint in a different direction comes from the thesis that “space, time, colour (being coloured) are forms of objects” (2.0251). According to the influential phenomenistic interpretation of the early Wittgenstein’s metaphysics in Frasca (2004), this section means that some objects *are* times. They are repeatable phenomenal qualities, which can be combined with repeatable phenomenal qualities of space and other phenomenal qualities of minimal perceivable items in the realm of a specific sense, such as sight or hearing, similarly to what happens in the system of Goodman (1951). Every combination of a space, a time, and a color<sup>84</sup> could then be a state of affairs in the visual realm of sight. The subject involved in these experiences is not a specific empirical subject but a broadly Kantian transcendental subject. A state of affairs of this kind subsists and is, therefore, a contingent fact, if that location of the visual space is of that color at that time.

This means that times are components of Wittgenstein’s facts, are within them, similarly to what we have conjectured about Severino’s permanentism in §4. This allows Wittgenstein’s facts to be analogously permanent: suppose that, at a certain time  $t_7$ , the location  $s_4$  of the visual field of the transcen-

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<sup>84</sup> As Frasca (2004) clarifies, colors are not objects, according to Wittgenstein, but should be further analyzed in more basic phenomenal qualities. Here, I lay this complication aside for the sake of simplicity.

dental subject is green; if this is the case, then at any time this fact (the fact that  $s_4$  is green at  $t_7$ , a fact that is about time  $t_7$  and has time  $t_7$  among its components), exists. In this sense, Wittgenstein's facts are permanent entities, although this consequence is never drawn in the *Tractatus*, which in contrast explicitly claims – as we have seen above – that facts are, unlike objects, “changing and unstable” (2.0271).

## 7. Karofsky's Necessitarianism

To further situate Severino's necessitism and permanentism in the contemporary analytic debate about these doctrines, it is also helpful to consider the recent *A Case for Necessitarianism* by Amy Karofsky (2021). The blurb on the back cover presents this book as “the first detailed and focused defense of necessitarianism,” *i.e.*, “the view that absolutely nothing about the world could have been otherwise in any way whatsoever.”

By using a different term, Karofsky explicitly distinguishes *necessitarianism* from Williamson's *necessitism*, according to which necessarily everything is such that necessarily something is identical to it or – more simply – necessarily everything necessarily exists. Karofsky criticizes Williamson for the admission of some contingency, regarding, in particular, how the necessary existents are. The huge theoretical benefits of necessitarianism come, according to Karofsky, only if possibility, actuality, and necessity are extensionally identified at every level.

Karofsky explicitly includes facts among necessary entities, for example, in the following passage:

Thus, all of the following count as entities: objects, properties, events, facts, states of affairs, laws, propositions, truth-values of propositions, and, in general, anything that is, was, or will be. So, a necessary entity or a necessity is anything that actually exists, occurs, manifests, obtains, holds, is in fact the case, or is true and could not have been otherwise in any way whatsoever. (Karofsky 2021, 2)

There is no need either to follow Williamson in excluding truth-making facts from the ontology or to follow Wittgenstein in endowing facts with the exclusive status of contingent entities. Karofsky (as Severino) countenances necessary truth-making facts and contends that also the truths that are necessitated by the existence of these facts are necessary.

Karofsky's and Severino's approaches also have other striking general similarities, even though Karofsky never mentions Severino. Karofsky



considers Parmenides a forerunner of her necessitarianism, for one thing (Karofsky 2021, 7-9). Moreover, one of the arguments in support of Karofsky's necessitarianism is that there cannot be any unactualized possibility because unactualized possibilities are contradictory (Karofsky 2021, sec. 3.3). Consider a gray cat and try to describe the counterfactual scenario in which it is orange. In this attempt, you end up saying "The cat is orange and not-gray". Given that the cat is gray, nothing stops you at this point from also saying "The cat that is gray is orange and not-gray", which is a contradiction. What you are then expressing is not a possible scenario but a contradictory and thus impossible scenario.

Any attempt to describe a counterfactual scenario ends up describing an impossible scenario. This squares with necessitarianism, according to which any falsity is necessarily false (and so is an impossibility), as much as any truth is necessarily true. There is here an apparent similarity with Severino's idea that the simple hypothesis that what is is not (even if embedded in a more complex logical framework, as we have seen in §3 with respect to the principle of the excluded middle) leads to an unacceptable contradiction.

However, there are also at least two prominent differences. The *first* difference is that Karofsky is an eliminativist about modality. The collapse of necessity, actuality, and possibility with one another is seen as a significant advantage of necessitarianism since it warrants a vast gain in ideological economy (Karofsky 2021, sec. 3.5). Also, the distinctions between different varieties of modalities (logical, metaphysical, nomological, deontic, and so forth) become simply useless, and can be dispensed with (§4.2). All the framework of ways things might be, unactualized possibilities, and possible worlds is expunged from philosophical language for the best, and the expunction is compared to that of phlogiston from science (135).

Karofsky only concedes that it is sometimes appropriate to talk about possibility in order to express a lack of knowledge about actuality ("Possibly it is raining," uttered when the speaker feels a rain-like noise on the roof but is unable to look outside and identify the cause), or about a certain concept ("Possibly an inorganic machine is conscious," uttered when the speaker is exploring the concepts involved and still lacks a complete understanding of them; 136): also in these cases no epistemic modality is expressed but only the lack of knowledge itself. In contrast, as we have seen in §5, Severino offers hints towards the possibility of drawing various interesting modal distinctions – delimiting different varieties of necessity<sub>2</sub> – within the unrestricted realm of necessity<sub>1</sub>.

A *second* difference is that Karofsky is not a permanentist. The collapse

of actuality, necessity, and possibility does not make the universe static.<sup>85</sup> In general, Karofsky thinks that a virtue of necessitarianism is to satisfy a form of naturalistic disdain for modal distinctions, and this naturalistic disdain does not concern the fact that reality continuously changes: it changes, and whatever concerns these changes is as necessary as everything else. Changes concern both the existence of entities (they begin and cease to exist) and how entities are (entities acquire and lose properties, begin to entertain and stop entertaining relations with one another).

In contrast, Williamson is a permanentist, but, as we have seen in §2, his stance only concerns existence and is therefore perfectly compatible with the reality of becoming, where becoming consists of changes in how things are. To repeat, the detachment between the necessity of the existence of entities and the widespread contingency of how entities are requires Williamson to exclude facts and truth-making entities in general from the ontology. Severino is a permanentist too (§4), but this does not make his universe static, if times – as we have conjectured – are components of facts, and eternal, permanent facts concern specific times, so that the fact that the temperature is sweltering in Rome on 23 August 2023 is eternal.

## 7. Conclusion

The analysis in §§2-5 shows that the most important similarities between Williamson's permanentism and necessitism and Severino's permanentism and necessitism are the following.

- a) They agree that absolutely everything necessarily and permanently exists;
- b) They agree in introducing a more specific feature that distinguishes what merely exists from what belongs to concrete reality (this feature being concreteness for Williamson and belonging to appearance or to the transcendental event for Severino).

On the other hand, the most important differences are the following.

- c) Williamson thinks that necessitism and permanentism are incompatible with the existence of facts and truth-makers in general; on the other hand, Severino explicitly countenances facts as permanent and necessary existents.
- d) The reality of becoming and contingency concerns for Williamson how entities are; for Severino, how entities are is permanent and necessary and the reality of becoming concerns the fact that entities (including facts)

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<sup>85</sup> See, in particular, the claim that necessitarianism is compatible with a vast range of philosophical contentions about time at Karofsky (2021, 18, fn. 25).

enter the realm of appearances and go out of it; contingency is real for Severino only for specific modal notions belonging to the sphere of what we have called necessity<sub>2</sub>, while no contingency<sub>1</sub> is admitted.

The approaches of Wittgenstein (§6) and Karofsky (§7) are interestingly different with respect to a)-d). Wittgenstein disagrees with a), insofar as, at least once we lay aside qualms about the peculiar understanding of existence in the *Tractatus*, facts should be classified as contingent existents. As regards b), any object can fail to be a constituent of any fact (its logical space can be empty): its being a constituent of a fact is Wittgenstein's specific feature at stake in b). For what concerns c) and d), contingent facts account for the reality of becoming and contingency, which marks a pivotal difference with respect to both Williamson and Severino.

Karofsky's necessitarianism wholeheartedly endorses a), but only as regards necessity. It instead has no use for b): everything is actual/necessary/possible and no subtler distinction is countenanced or even discussed. Karofsky concurs with Severino about c), as concerns the necessity of facts. Karofsky is not committed to the permanence of facts and permanentism in general. Thus, as regards d), she needs no special account of the reality of becoming. On the other hand, she uncompromisingly denies the reality of contingency.

The comparison between Severino's theses about necessitism, permanentism, and facts and partially analogous theses in the analytic tradition of metaphysics turns out to be rich and interesting. At least for what concerns these topics, there is no evidence of incommensurability or incomparability between Severino and analytic metaphysics. There are some obvious differences in the style and philosophical jargon, as well as in some contextual elements. For example, Severino, among the authors discussed in this paper, pays most attention to the practical consequences of necessitism and permanentism, as regards the role of human beings in the necessary and eternal reality.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, there is an almost total historical separation. Neither Williamson nor Karofsky seem to have any information about Severino's works. On the other hand, Severino's rich historical references hardly include, at least in the essays considered in this paper, any author in the analytic tradition.

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<sup>86</sup> Many of Severino's works discuss these consequences. They are, for example, at center stage in Severino (1968a). Also Williamson's and Karofsky's works include short sections about the consequences of necessitism and necessitarianism in the practical sphere. In mere two pages, Williamson (2013, sec. 1.8) discusses moral problems about birth and death (which, for a necessitist, are not instances of beginning and ceasing to exist). In analogously mere six pages, Karofsky (2021, sec. 4.6) deals with free will and moral responsibility in the context of necessitarianism.

Nonetheless, it is relatively easy to compare the theories, as well as the arguments in support of them. The outcome of the comparison is that Severino's varieties of necessitism and permanentism – in particular as regards the role of facts in them – are not reducible to the other theories we have considered in this paper and surely deserve to be further scrutinized by contemporary necessitists and permanentists (as well as by contingentists and temporaryists, who are interested in a rich and original form of the adversary theories).<sup>87</sup>

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