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Hunger, World, I. Phenomenologies of Humility

Fome, mundo, eu. Fenomenologias da humildade

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Abstract

Being aware of a world/environment does not bring into being the world or the consciousness. And the sense of hunger does not make the reality of the world an instrument and a possession for one's own use and consumption. The quasi-evidence of hunger in terms of taking and chowing down is a phenomenological issue. With hunger and consciousness there is no "identification." Neither with things in themselves, nor with things for me.

Keywords: *Hunger. Consciousness. World. I. Humility.*

Resumo

Estar ciente de um mundo/ambiente não traz o mundo ou a consciência à existência. E a sensação de fome não torna a realidade do mundo um instrumento e uma posse para uso e consumo próprios. A

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quase evidência da fome em termos de ingestão e consumo é uma questão fenomenológica. Com a fome e a consciência não há "identificação". Nem com as coisas em si, nem com as coisas para mim.

Palavras-chave: Fome. Consciência. Mundo. Eu. Humildade.

Hunger and Consciousness

Just as being aware of a world/environment does not bring into being the world or the consciousness that already exist, so the sense of hunger does not make the reality of the world an instrument and a possession for one's own use and consumption. The consciousness that is always presupposed in every intentional act, and the hunger that inevitably manifests every day, share the evidence of the first person, of the I. An I, however, that would not be able to make itself, with a skillful turnaround, into the principle and sense of being of consciousness and of the world— feeling hungry distorts for this purpose one's own lack, which, if anything, invites a little more caution.

In other words, since they are already immersed in the world, the "life experience"[1] of every living being, including man, "does not coincide with 'things in themselves' (*Ding an sich*, Kant), nor with 'things for me' (*Ding an mich*)." (Naess, 2016b, p. 169). And again: "self-realization" does not coincide "with self-centering;" (Naess, 2016a, p. 117) even if the risks of confusing, slipping, and messing up between the evidence of the ego as intentional pillar of hunger and consciousness, and its positioning itself as the center of reference and as the very principle of reality are always around the corner—with devastating consequences on an individual, collective, and environmental level.

Consciousness is not reality, nor is evidence the principle of what is evident. Hunger finds itself in the eye of the storm of this fundamental dyscrasia, to which it gives an everyday and dramatic flavor that immediately brings us back to the "oldest needy place of our existence" (Bloch, 1994, p. 78 ss.), to the "*needful-freedom*"—which is not only a void to be filled but rather the very way of being for the man of organic life intertwining freedom and necessity (Jonas, 1999, p. 111)—, and to the I of need.

With hunger, even the sympathetic and "ecological Self" (Naess, 2016a, p. 107) that allows the I to see itself in the other seems to return to the ego, its "identifying" (Naess, 2016a, p. 107) with every living being takes on an introjective tone, and the new environmentalist imperative to "never use a living being only as a means" (Naess, 1994, p. 222) seems to stumble precisely between the "means" and the "not only" (Naess, 1994, p. 222) —which are indeed not so easy to connect with each other. As is partially the case for the third ecological principle: "men have no right to reduce such richness and diversity except to satisfy their *vital* needs" (Naess, 2016c, p. 41).

Like consciousness, therefore, hunger too entrenches one in the first person, in the ego who, the hungrier it is, the more it demands "I, I, I" (Weil, 1982d, p. 264). Although, the "I" uttered by hunger is merciless and paradoxical, because the famous "empty belly" challenges every excess of "I" at the same time that it seems to fuel it. In the need to eat, the I is exalted and denies itself at the same time, as it becomes glaringly aware of depending on an outside (factor) without which it is not, and of having to medicate its very being.

Hunger says I while discussing it, centering and decentralizing it, and destabilizing it. It says I and it says the other without which it would not even be, on which it depends. Hunger announces an outside, a world, an environment. Every idealistic fantasy of being the center and the origin of one's own being shatters against the stumbling block of hunger. In this view, even discussing which perspective is the most valid to protect the environment—whether "anthropocentric," "biocentric" (Jonas, 1999, p. 111), or "ecocentric"

[1] Anche le citazioni sono tradotte in inglese con il testo. All source quotes have been translated into English alongside the main text.

(Naess, 2016e, p. 12-135)—may appear to be a variation on the "center" theme, about which hunger always and in every case ironizes.

The sense of lacking. In the consciousness of hunger two evidences are intertwined: the undisputed evidence of the subject's need for food, and its twin evidence of an I that, whether individual or expanded, finds itself to be precarious and under accusation, mortally wounded in the ancestral dream of making itself king, in its very pride of self-sufficiency. Hence, an evidence hungry for a right of the I, yet denied for having to depend on, to ask, to thank [for being able] to exercise such a right; and evidence of a denial that does not deny hunger and rights, but that on the contrary gives food the force of a just and universal solidarity because it no longer centers on itself, and no longer only says "I," even when hungry.

Consciousness and Environment

Just as the evidence of the need to eat is not selfishness and subjugation, so too the evidence of denial has little to do with angelic and dualistic escapes of the I from the body, the world, the others. Since "man makes the absolute by everything," even "by breathing, by eating" (Sartre, 1986, p. 89), saying that "man is what he eats" is ultimately more serious than the conventional accusations of being "trivial" (L. Feuerbach) - (Riva, 2016, p. 48ss.). However, even here it is no longer just a question of man, absolute, matter, spirit, but of the consciousness of hunger which, facing the environment, both says and unsays the centering on oneself at the very moment of individual and collective need. We may make the absolute even by breathing, but we are also "the air we breathe" (Naess, 2022d).

Between thrusts and counter-thrusts, evidence and counter-evidence, two words are—not by chance—continuously chasing each other for the sense of hunger: humiliation and humility. But with significant differences.

It is no longer the false humiliation of the spirit due to contempt for the body and for the world, the humiliation of the annoying hunger that distracts the I from itself and from thinking, as Socrates laments according to Plato (Cfr. Platone, *Fedone,* 63bss)[2]. It is rather the humiliation of those who are hungry and are kept hungry, the consciousness of "the unemployed person on the verge of collapse, who has not eaten for days," of the depths "of our existence" (Bloch, 1994, p. 78ss.). The same humiliation inflicted on the Third World by the "untruthful humanism" of the West that plunders and robs, making this humanism, as the flagship of a civilization, an "exquisite justification for plunder," global and colonial (Sartre, 1966, p. XXI).

It is no longer that humility which at the end of the day always returns to the I—an I that is virtuous at last because it is capable of limiting itself, restricting itself, controlling itself; it is a humility that is a benign concession of its own Promethean excess with respect to the world and the others. It is therefore the humility of an overturned and intimidated—yet victorious—pride, just like the "humility" that mimics opposingly "pretension" and like the responsible "fear" that mimics opposingly the irresponsible "hope" (Jonas, 2009, p. 262).

Thus, not the humancentric humility of primacy. However exhausted, this homocentric humility is reflected even within the environmentalist need to "formulate limits" to the rights "of human beings in the ecosphere," where even "profound interests that are specifically human" are "in full harmony with the norms

[2] Platone, 1994, p. 75ss.

of deep ecology." (Naess, 2016d, p. 125). Indeed, by way of "identification with the whole," in the "ecological Self" *ego* and *alter*, individual good and common good converge: even further, therefore, than the lesser "inequality between man and man" in Rousseau's "state of nature," "with the simplicity and uniformity that prevails in the animal and savage life, where all the individuals make use of the same aliments, live in the same manner, and do exactly the same things" (Rousseau, 2022, p. 68-69), (it remains to be seen, then, if empathy, solidarity, etc. are a matter of undifferentiation or identification, and if they presuppose it). The humility of law, so to speak, shares nothing with the old idea of man's "sacrifice" for the environment, that is, of the "altruism" which "implies that the *ego* sacrifices its interest in favor of the other" (Naess, 2016a, p. 116-117). Given the formulation, these are mysteries: about limits that are no longer sacrifices; and about sacrifices that have never been limits.

This is not the humility, therefore, which holds the center upside down. But the humility that diverts from one's self and from a morally sublimated pride. Beyond the survival of the human species on earth (Jonas) and the common vital interest (Naess). Beyond the necessary humility of Prometheus and the humility surpassed by the ecological Self. In the feeling of hunger there is the I and there is the other, an outside that is not entirely outside, an otherness that concerns, a world/environment that both precedes and accompanies one's own being oneself. If anything, the consciousness of hunger restores the humility of depending, receiving, thanking (Weil, E. Levinas).

With hunger and consciousness there is no "identification." Neither with things in themselves, nor with things for me.

Humiliation. Wild Nature and Exploited Nature

"If a man will not work, he shall not eat," we read in Paul. "'He who does not have a pastime should not eat either,' we state here," is found on the contrary in Ernst Bloch (1994, p. 1067ss.). Signed: Hans Jonas (2009, p. 287).

As if it were a phenomenological evidence, the idea of hunger as a primary need indispensable for life, as a void to be filled, as a cry of the I for itself, remains identical on either side of the intense debate engaging Jonas against Bloch's utopia of free time. The way to approach hunger and need, however, creates the divide.

With a view to a utopian society of free time, Bloch entrusts technological progress with the task of freeing man from the exertion and conditions of labor—especially manual labor and work aimed at the satisfaction of primary needs, of which hunger is the paradigm par excellence. From the more cautious perspective of a concrete and industrious society, Jonas denies everything and defends work, generating considerable friction. Jonas denies that the dignity of a person can be found above all beyond labor, that technology deserves so much trust, and that nature should be humanized as well—that is, subjected and "enslaved" to man through technological progress, given that "the very nature that has not been transformed and exploited by man, the 'wild' nature," is the true and "human" one (Jonas, 2009, p. 271). At the same time, he defends the principle of technology by claiming labor as a worthy and essential activity for human beings.

In the head-on clash between "wild" nature and "exploited" nature, work and free time, hunger remains a material need, lack, necessity, humiliation. As if there were a quasi-phenomenological evidence of hunger that stops at the empty stomach to be filled at any cost, and that influences the relationship between the I and the world. One looks at the world through a proprietary, instrumental and utilitarian perspective, as a global supermarket and a land of conquest; one looks at the I as master of the world, who

overturns the denial of hunger into pretension, from which it legitimizes the consumption of the world and of being. Between hunger being always in the first person, and first person being sovereign even in hunger, the explosion is near.

Eating that which is and eating the world justify the global struggle for survival, which seems to find a formidable foothold in the need to eat. Regarding food, it seems even more true that "Polemos is father of all and king of all; and some he has shown as gods, others men; some he has made slaves, others free" (Heraclitus, fr. B 53). The posture of eating being conceives of the other only as food, or, at most, as an accomplice and a food competitor. The relationship with the environment is "cynical" and immediate, shared and denied by way of nutritional "assimilation" and utilitarian-instrumental reduction (Lévinas, 2010, p. 49-50). As if food did not make us face the other-than-ourselves, without which we are not—the world and the environment. As if it were impossible to escape being-by-force-of-circumstances against being-in-the-name-of-one's-own-being, and to preserve oneself.

With hunger everything seems in conflict: men and animals, men and men, men and gods. Worlds against worlds, earth against earth, nature against nature. Hence the two paradigms, anthropocentric and ecocentric, opposing one another even from an environmental perspective. Anthropocentric paradigm: Hesiod contrasts the world of the living, where one devours the other without respite and without mercy "because there is no justice between them," with the human world in which "however this is not the case." (Esiodo, 2010, p. 274-285). Ecocentric paradigm: Plutarch instead contrasts the excessiveness of the human world, apparent in the excess of meat eating, with the measure and balance of nature, where only what is needed is taken (Plutarco, 2011, p. 92ss.). The justice of the human world, on the other hand, suspends—but does not protect against—the return of violence, of which food violence remains the emblem, between the opposing extremes of the new commandment "Do not eat"—typical of the obese and global metropolis (Riva, 2021, p. 26ss.)—and the humiliation of labor and hunger.

We are not far from the conflict between work and free time, wild nature and exploited nature. The gods of Hesiod and the Mesopotamian deities, who eat without working, return in the utopia of free time; and the infrequent celebrations in their honor, mentioned by Plato, return in the suffocating rhythm of "long periods of tiring and humiliating work, which is impossible to love for its own sake."[3]

Hunger, Evidence, Principle

The quasi-evidence of hunger in terms of taking and chowing down is a phenomenological issue. We need to go deep and pause at that "quasi," to verify the misunderstood evidence, the certainty of an assumed relationship between hunger, self and world, and the excessive haste of wishing to derive from hunger a tyrannical, subjective, and ontological principle. Indeed, starting with need, the quasi-evidence of hunger frames the individual and collective subject as the holder of inescapable rights vis-a-vis the world and others. As a result, a quasi-evidence of hunger—as a phenomenon that distorts the (ontological) principle—and a principle that usurps the actual evidence come to match.

It hardly matters if from the quasi-evidence of hunger we want to derive a (mostly spiritual) principle of abandonment rather than a (mostly material) principle of commitment towards the body and the world. Indeed, in the always latent short circuit between evidence and principle, changing the order of

[3] Cf. Jonas, 2009, p. 259; Esiodo,2010, p. 106-126; *L'epopea di Gilgames*, 1986; Platone, *Leggi*: II, 653 c-d (1994b, p. 1482-1483).

addends does not change the sum because "being hungry" is interpreted in the same way, making lack (an evidence: negative) and liberation (a principle: positive) coincide; and vice-versa. After all, the phenomenological gap of a too evident evidence and a too principled principle reassuring each other by overcoming each other is as old as the world.

In other words, the quasi-evidence of hunger is encrusted with beliefs that are in too much of a hurry to become principles, but also principles that are too eager to find evidence. It is not always easy to decide where one (the evidence that runs towards the principle) or the other thing (the principle that runs towards the evidence) does more. And this, always assuming that it is possible to do so, given the sticky situation where the evidence mimics the principle and the principle mimics the evidence.

Whether material or spiritual, certain motives—that are taken for granted but are inconsistent—derive from the recurrence of evidence and principle: 1. hunger as negative: need, lack, emptiness; 2. hunger as discomfort: wound, humiliation, inferiority; 3. being hungry as a source of the subject's sovereignty (as right) with respect to a world/environment; 4. hunger as necessity, response as freedom; 5. feeding oneself as a mobilizing and leading root of human action. These beliefs, which are all supportive of each other (negative, need, discomfort, emptiness, being hungry, necessity) and at the same time hostile to each other (sovereignty, acting, taking, freeing oneself), send danger signals and cause distress to the "quasi" evidence of hunger.

We must therefore return to the evidence of hunger to verify the chase between evidences and principles. But it is difficult to do so as long as they get intertwined. As long as the evidence of hunger is satisfied with the negative that pushes, on this side, on need and necessity, and, on the other side, on sovereignty and on a liberation that translates into opposing (material, spiritual) principles, which are nonetheless similar in their functioning.

Prison and Cave. Hunger and Utopia

Like trains that leave from the same station for different destinations, Plato's and Bloch's phenomenologies of hunger share the fact that they stop at its quasi-evidence: lack, need, I.

The chase between hunger and principle is mirrored in Plato's classic images of the prison and the cave. In the first part of the *Phaedo*, which calls to mind the *Apology of Socrates*, Plato makes use of a literary inclusion to transport at once the reader from the initial prison that is Athens's jail, where Socrates is locked up on trial, to that which is his own body once he has been freed and returned home—following in this the Orphic motifs of the tomb and prison of the soul. A prison, therefore, that is jail, and a prison that is the body. With a difference, because, if one can be freed from the city prison, one cannot be equally freed from the daily chains of caring for and nourishing a body; from these, only death frees us (Platone, *Fedone*, 63b-65a; 66b)[4].

The sordid prison of the body and of the belly is echoed by the cave in the *Republic*, where human beings are chained, like slaves, in its dark end, with their backs turned towards the exit and the light. The prison is a cave, the cave is a prison. On either side [there are] chains and liberation, inside and outside, darkness and light, body and spirit, belly and sight. On either side, there is no other "way" than a radical conversion from the belly of hunger and of ignorance to the sight of light and of knowledge (Cfr. Platone, *Fedone*, 66b; *Repubblica*, VII.)[5]. The quasi-evidence of hunger as a material necessity drives towards the

[4] Platone, 1994a, p. 75-78.

[5] Platone, 1994a, p. 78; 1994c, p. 1238-1261.

spiritual principle of one's liberation as much as the principle of liberation needs the quasi-evidence of hunger. So that we no longer know what is actually evident and what is a principle; whether it is the evidence that reveals the principle or if it is rather the principle constructing the appropriate evidence for itself.

On the other hand, even when hunger is no longer just evil but brings us back to the "oldest needy place of our existence" along with the "the unemployed person on the verge of collapse, who has not eaten for days," the game of hide and seek between evidence and principle works just the same. Bloch takes us back to the concrete, "ethical" and sympathetic hunger, which concerns everyone and begs to work for everyone's justice.

But even in this case, where freeing oneself from hunger no longer means getting rid of hunger itself, because hunger no longer corresponds to escape and abandonment, the chasing between evidence and principle promptly reappears. Because the stomach is indeed the "first lamp on which oil must be poured." And yet, this hunger, which is so ethical and concrete, endures all over again the allegorical rewriting as a (positive) figure of the dialectical, progressive and liberating principle of the "oil of history" itself" (Cfr. Bloch, 1994, p. 78, 83, 1212, 1215).

Plato and Bloch. Hunger of the I and sympathetic hunger. Amoral hunger and ethical hunger. Spiritual liberation and historical liberation. Whether in a selfish or a sympathetic form, the race of the evidence towards the principle, as well as the race of the principle towards the evidence, still reappears. Identical emptiness and lack, discomfort and slavery, ego, need and right, taking and freeing oneself.

In the name of justice, ethical and sympathetic hunger de facto universalizes man's right over the world to satisfy it, with a view to a humanized and subservient nature. However, that is not to say that starting from shared hunger will necessarily lead to greater democracy in the human world. On the contrary, various narratives about hunger end up in absolutism: to protect from the "*homo homini lupus*" of the state of nature (Hobbes, 2005, p. 2); to guarantee bread for all—"the only absolute banner"—giving up freedom in exchange for food with the usual cry, "make us your slaves, but give us food!" (Dostoevskij, 1995, p. 73, 75, 84); to maintain social peace, with the institutional and eloquent prerogatives of the tyrant who "eats" more than the others, displays abundance, and threatens to devour his subjects (Canetti, 1990, p. 1240ss.).

If the quasi-evidence of hunger (lack, humiliation, I, technological domination) dictates the perpetual war of devouring (or not devouring) one another, then there is no escape for human beings or for the environment, or for democracy.

Man, Life, Animal

The need to eat in order to live is indisputable. The quasi-evidence of hunger, however, which blends horror and escape with the domination of the I over the world in order to be satisfied, can be easily contradicted. This is the sign of a hunger that, stuck in its need to eat, does not fully adapt its evidence; and the sign of a principle that betrays itself by insisting on the sovereign prerogatives of the I even when it is found in need and lack; and this happens several times every day. The continuous chasing between hunger and principle collides with obstacles, which force us to become aware of what is not seen in the evidence and in the assumptions of the principle. This is because both in the evidence of hunger and in the principle there is something else besides the void to be filled and the unquestionable, exclusive, right of the I.

The dominant model that brings together the quasi-evidence of hunger, the principle of the self, and a *self-service* world is absurd and unfair and must be denounced. Bloch's ethical hunger already fractures the

model from the outside, by way of human and class solidarity. However, Weil's humble hunger does the same from within, and finds solidarity precisely where there seems to be room only for need and necessity.

Just as for Bloch, for Weil too in hunger there are work ("toil"), solidarity ("a piece of bread"), and the future ("the heavens"). But hunger is not just a pretext, the beginning or the representation of the dialectical progress of history, the righteous utopia of the "future homeland." Along with the working class, there is man itself "spurred on by hunger, or at any rate by the anguished thought that he will soon go hungry:" (Weil, 1997, p. 71)[6]; "No poetry concerning the people is authentic if fatigue does not figure in it—and the hunger and thirst which come from fatigue" of those "who must toil every day." (Weil, 1982a, p. 311).

As in Plato, to aspire to freedom man must be ready "to die of hunger and thirst," (Weil, 2008, p. 125) because the "vegetative and the social are two areas in which good does not enter." (Weil, 1982c, p. 247). Food is the animal that is within us and against us, the inflexible law of nature, which always and only shouts "me, me, me," and which must be kept under control like a "doggy" using sugar and whip—that is to say, by granting and forbidding, by indulging and beating, alternating training and ascetic renunciation. The only way to contain the violence exerted by material needs on freedom is to in turn face violence with violence. Hunger and need are the "animals" within us that "must be silenced" because "they have the habit of constantly shouting: me, me, me, me, me," "day and night, even as they sleep, every second." It would be better if they died "before the body. As long as the body obeys them, they believe they are communicating with the universe." (Weil, 1982d, p. 264; 1982a, p. 386). However, that is not all. The embodied existence cannot be denied all the way. And then something begins to break in the first, quasi-evidence of hunger that calls into question the dualistic man/animal assumption.

Hunger and death, life and passing away—so far [goes] Plato. But, thanks to the body and to hunger, in Weil, matter and spirit find—if nothing else—a bridge connecting the shores. The "human body is the scale on which the supernatural and nature act as counterweights;" (Weil, 1982b, p. 315); "the access route—as far as it is possible for man on earth—passes through one's own body." (Weil, 1982b, p. 244). Hunger no longer stops at the first evidence, and the principle of holding the center—no matter what—shakes, even though we find ourselves starving. Because the animal that is within us, "the pride of the flesh, consists in believing that it draws life from itself," when instead "hunger and thirst make it feel that it depends on the outside. The feeling of dependence makes her humble." (Weil, 1982c, p. 117-118).

All Beggars

The discourse in which man and animal find themselves close (hunger: the animal in us) while remaining distant is an ambiguous and paradoxical one. Hence the conflict between necessity (animal) and freedom (spiritual). Hence the recovery: the body as "scale" and "gateway" between natural and supernatural; the consciousness of life that does not coincide with the source of one's own life; the hunger and thirst that make us humble, aware of being dependent on something outside us. Body, life, hunger, and thirst remain animals and environment, but in a sense that is different from the pride of the I. The "dialogue with the universe" does not involve continuously "shouting" "I, I, I, I, I."

Phenomenological question: Hunger testifies that we depend on an outside, it invites us to be humble for a shared life, de-centers us towards life itself, towards the world, towards others. Another

[6] Cfr. Weil, 1997, p. 105; Weil, 1994; Weil, 1982a, p. 149.

evidence bursts into the first quasi-evidence of hunger, challenging and denying it. The same goes for the principle: In hunger, the self is overthrown at the same moment when it establishes itself by saying I; it is life, but not the origin of life; it is I, but not the origin of the self. Hunger ironizes, and proves wrong the principle of self-confirmation while appearing to certify it.

Position and deposition. The consciousness of being alive without being able to believe that one is the origin of life; depending even before taking; the other and solidarity; shared bread; recognizing that we are all beggars: all these too belong to the evidence of hunger. So much so that "a single piece of bread given to someone who is hungry is enough to save a soul—if it is given in the right way. It is not easy to give with the same humility that is appropriate for receiving. To give in the spirit of one who begs." (Weil, 1982c, p. 117).

We cannot even explain and resolve everything about hunger in the present [situation] of a void to be filled. "Hunger (thirst, etc.)" is "an orientation of the body towards the future. The whole carnal part of our soul is oriented towards the future." (Weil, 1982c, p. 117-118). A future that remains future even when its goal seems to be reached—be it Bloch's social utopia, or Weil's encounter with God—because, in the end, "desire will be my treasure," according to the biblical puzzle that toys between "*whoever drinks from this water will always be thirsty*, and at the same time *whoever drinks from this water will never be thirsty again*." (Weil, 1982c, p. 215-216). Drinking and always being thirsty, drinking and never being thirsty again. The same puzzle of hunger, never completely evident in the quasi-evidence of being hungry.

The center of life is not where it manifests. The evidence of hunger includes confirmation and denial of oneself, establishment and contestation of the I, inside and outside, present and future, self and other than self, pride and humility, possession and begging. Hunger bespeaks a first person who is already other than themselves.

Counter-Evidences

In the quasi-evidence of hunger, what prevails is the I, the need, the necessity, the void to be filled, the world as a pantry. In the evidence of hunger, instead, next to the I, there is the other than oneself; next to the human world, the environment; next to taking, depending; next to *hybris*, humility; next to the future, the present; next to the unquestionable, the questionable; next to the limitless, the limit. Indeed, when "you are very thirsty, you would like to drink all the water there is in the universe. We would like nothing more than to drink. However, thirst is limited. Midas would have liked everything to be gold. Wanting to drink everything, and only drink, you drink too much. So you do not want to drink at all anymore." (Weil, 1982c, p. 137). Hunger and thirst are sources of moderation and "modesty," if not exactly humility, for "lifestyles" and in the intertwining of cultures. Naess obtains them, for example, from the Buddhist and oriental side more than from the Jewish (Levinas, Jonas) or Christian (Weil) one (Naess, 2022c, p. 75; 2022b, 29-66; 2022a, p. 175-202; 2022d).

What is this exactly about? Is it about contextual evidences coexisting within hunger, or are these evidences against, out-and-out counter-evidences? Extricating oneself is not easy, because daily and universal experience puts in front of us dual and dissonant evidences within hunger itself. If we look at what brews in the experience of hunger, it is not out of place to talk about concomitant levels and evidences, and this is no small matter. However, looking at the principle that interacts with the evidence, at the I that resists as sovereign even in the denial of hunger, the conflict of contrary evidences re-emerges. Because that I who demands (only) for itself and establishes itself in the principle of hunger is no longer so evident, nor is it free

of implications and presuppositions. And neither is the predictable circle among principle, center, and man evident—a circle that hunger decentralizes towards the world and the living.

Regarding hunger, evidence that is too obvious is demoted to quasi-evidence. Roland Barthes is not wrong: "eating rare steak," the French national dish, signifies "a nature and a morality at the same time." (Barthes, 1974, p. 70). Just as the stomach does not come first and morality follows, so too the principle of the I does not follow from being hungry—a condition which, by forcing things, the principle of the I can also precede, as it searches for its own confirmation at all costs, despite the hunger.

Thanks to hunger, the tensions I/world, center/decenterment, and affirmation/denial take shape in the transition from humiliation to humility—a passage through which the problem of conflicting evidence that cannot be entirely reduced to concomitant evidence is taken seriously. In the evidence of hunger, in the I called into question by its very saying "I," we move from the humiliation of being (and being kept) starving to the humility of hunger which interrupts the short circuit of a self returning to itself even where one's own insufficiency is revealed. Therefore, what happens regarding hunger is something still different from the feeling of "long periods of tiring and humiliating work," behind which lies the humiliation of hunger and the extortion of work on our existence—both when there is work and when there is not (Jonas, 2009, p. 259). Paul Ricoeur thus points out that the "humiliation of work" is a match to the "pride of culture"—the result of the dualism between matter and spirit that reduces the body to an instrument and to biology (Ricoeur, 1994, p. 256).

In the consciousness of hunger, there is concomitant evidence that is against, and counter evidence that remains concomitant. Just like that humility which is not humiliation, and that humiliation which is not yet humility.

Humility

The "feeling of dependence makes you humble." Giving a "piece of bread" to the hungry requires the attitude of a beggar, even if "giving with the same humility that is appropriate for receiving" is not easy (Weil, 1982c, p. 117-118). Humility of knowing how to receive, humility of knowing how to give. In hunger there is no room for pride. Hunger disputes a principle as a principle and a humility as humility: the principle of the I that on the contrary crowns itself as hungry and lacking; the strange humility of those who give bread, forgetting that they are all beggars.

Levinas seems to take these thoughts head-on, letting less-than-humble humility and overly ascetic humiliations drift away. He does so precisely in hunger, which "of all the appetites in which our *conatus essendi* asserts itself, [...] is the most interested," (Lévinas, 1996, p. 232) where "in a first moment the Same of the 'me' seeks only to confirm its identity," but of which it is still not the case that "we [have] plumbed the depths." (Lévinas, 1996, p. 233). It is not true that "the famished stomach has no ears." (Lévinas, 1996, p. 232). On the contrary, "our daily life is already a way of freeing ourselves from initial materiality," "it already contains a self-oblivion," "the morality of the '*nourritures terrestres*' is the first moral. The first form of self-denial." (Lévinas, 1993, p. 35).

We have not measured the depths of hunger, from which words of begging, self-sacrifice, gratitude, and transcendence come to the surface. These are words that humility itself holds together, now that it is no longer the reverse side of pride: "in the humility of hunger, we can see taking shape a non-ontological

transcendence that begins in human corporeality." (Lévinas, 1996, p. 232). The "humility of hunger" is neither the intellectual humiliation of being starved, nor the reverse side of pride. It allows us to glimpse "a non-ontological transcendence" in the body because it no longer makes being into the lowest common denominator that renders everything indifferent and interchangeable, usable and consumable. In the consciousness of hunger, the I crashes in front of what it transcends and for which it can be only responsible: the "untransferable responsibility."

With hunger, "at a very humble level, transcendence progressively appears." (Lévinas, 1996, p. 232). Hence the daily supplication of hunger, its "begging infinitely." Hunger is a prayer par excellence because the consciousness of need brings back up every day the very need to pray. Hunger is an existential "demand as mendicancy," (Lévinas, 1996, p. 233) a "pre-orational prayer" even before speaking, "as though it appealed to some hidden side of nothing; an appeal without reason or oration; neither aiming nor thematization, this despair is like a preintentional turning, like a departure out of the world." (Lévinas, 1996, p. 232-233).

The quasi-evidence of hunger as a necessity is not its entire evidence. The I is neither principle nor center. It is not even a matter of self, being, identity, lack, limit, imperfection. But it is a matter of begging, and thanking, infinitely. That is, to find ourselves off-center, exposed, indebted to that which, be it the other or the environment, transcends while being that without which we are not. In the humility of hunger there is no trace or memory of arrogance—not even arrogance in reverse. In the principle there is everything except for the pride of (becoming) principle.

Off Center

Humility, decentering, world, injustice. Hunger speaks of the I and it speaks of the other. Dostoevskij's *Inquisitor*: bread is the "only absolute banner" for men, which "no science will give them [...] so long as they remain free" because "men will never be able to fairly divide [it] among themselves." (Dostoevskij, 1995, p. 75, 73). Bloch: hunger is "the only widespread feeling, in fact the only possible one in terms of extension;" the only universal one, because it bites everyone, and generates "empathy" and "solidarity" for the utopia of a society freed from toil thanks to the techne that subjugates and humanizes nature (Bloch, 1994, p. 78). Jonas: No to the 'hope principle' and ecological disaster; Yes to "humility," "caution," "frugality," "responsibility," and "altruistic fear" in order to save the survival of humanity on earth (Jonas, 2009, p. 181ss.).

Jonas and Levinas share the same words, differently used: "humility," "earth," "nourishment," "survival," "responsibility." Jonas fights against utopia, prescribes responsibility, and sees in the *conatus essendi*—that is, in the effort of the living to persevere in being—the cipher of an evolving nature (finalism) where necessity and freedom continually confront each other within the arena of need, in a framework of interdependence between Self and world (Jonas, 1999, p. 116-118, nt-60).

Levinas instead sinks into the experience of hunger to deny that it is only a matter of self-confirmation, that is, of being affirming itself in the "*conatus*" of the living to preserve their own life: "To recognize the Other is to recognize a hunger. To recognize the Other is to give;" "The presence of the Other is equivalent to this calling into question of my joyous possession of the world." (Lévinas, 2023, p. 74).

Moreover, Jonas' humility is the Promethean pride inverted, the need for "an ethics that through self-restrictions prevents the power" of Prometheus, "irresistibly unleashed," "from becoming a misfortune

for man," just as "altruistic fear" does with regards to technological hope; and about which "no traditional ethics instructs." (Jonas, 2009, p. xxvii). Levinas' humility is rather a counter-principle within the same, indisputable, evidence of hunger.

What changes for humility? That in hunger the self is decentered right as it centers itself for its confirmation. That the principle is contested in establishing itself as a principle. That the other is no longer a generic term or a pluralistic equalizer (humanity, being, living, etc.), as it could also be the case for solidarity in hunger (Bloch), humanity or future generations (Jonas).

What changes is that, in the end, not even the world, the environment, nature are there anymore at all, because, in transcending the I, they also receive the chrism of the other and of the difference that is stronger than every (vague) universal, stronger than every (easy) pluralism. No longer the other, but others, and others of others. No longer the environment, but environments of environments, worlds of worlds.

Off center. Consciousness of hunger. Humility that does not ripen in the folds of pride, which does not emulate arrogance in reverse. Denunciation. Of misreading the evidence of hunger as the subjective principle of life; of misreading being with one's own being without depending, thanking, answering for anything else. Denunciation of being centered on oneself, in the ultimate hypocrisy of exploiting for this purpose even the hunger, which instead denies. Denunciation of the injustice that humiliates in hunger and in labor. Denunciation of the idea that living and violating, eating and destroying are synonymous. Denunciation of the insistence on thinking, all things considered, about the world and others starting from oneself—even if it were in the framework of ecological do-goodism—rather than thinking one's self starting from the world and others.

Anthropocentric, Biocentric, Ecocentric

The consciousness of hunger implies that of the world-environment as irreducible to the self. Even the environment differs, transcends, is other than itself.

In different ways, a philosophy of the other (Levinas) and a philosophy of the environment (Naess) share the motifs of the usurped center, of the offset self, as the premise of responsibility for the Earth. However, their paths diverge. If Levinas indicts the I by deconstructing the logic of the center and of primacy, Naess keeps it alive with the ecological Self, despite the conversion from homocentric to ecocentric. Levinas opts for metaphysics and transcendence (ethics and difference); vice versa, Naess opts (with Jonas) for (bio)ontology and immanence (being, life, identity, identification). Levinas has duty rise in front of the other than oneself that demands responsibility; for Naess duty flows spontaneously from the ecological Self, which, although sympathetic as living [being] and softened as *homo*, remains somehow at the center.

Off the center—but with incompatible languages. Levinas runs quickly towards metaphysics, transcendence, and difference. Towards an "absolute exteriority" (Lévinas, 2023, p. 33) and a "radical heterogeneity" (Lévinas, 2023, p. 34) of the other who already announces itself in life, in hunger, as "lord" and "master," "in a dimension of majesty" (Lévinas, 2023, p. 74).

How far we are from Jonas' "*needful-freedom*," (Jonas, 1999, 111) from lack and states of need such as hunger, which is not just a void to be filled. States that are inherent in the existence of the living, intrinsic to the dynamics of self-integration of the organism through the metabolic dialectic of lack and satisfaction. We are also distant from the "self-transcendence of life towards the world," which arises "from the primary antinomy of freedom and necessity which is rooted in the being of the organism as such." (Jonas, 1999, 119).

With Levinas we have none of this. Thus, even for the environment the notion that "ontology presupposes metaphysics," that "this 'saying to Others'—this relationship with Others as an interlocutor, this relationship with an entity—precedes any ontology" (Lévinas, 2023, p. 46) can be valid. Metaphysics is ethical, it rules. The first word is an obligation, a categorical duty, yet arising from the other and not from oneself. A "thou shall not kill" (Lévinas, 2023, p. 206; 2018, p. 88-89) that also applies to the environment and to the living, because ontology remains a "philosophy of power" whereas ethics does not provide space for selfishness as a principle of the Self and of the world (Lévinas, 2023, p. 44).

Naess instead runs towards ontology, immanence, and identification; that is, towards biocentric and ecocentric egalitarianism rather than towards an anthropocentric one. The ecological Self lives in the networked biological world whose nodes are all living beings—all possessing equal intrinsic value. (Bio)ontology guarantees openness in the sense that it weakens the *ego*/*alter* contrast, as they are homologated in the living being. Ethics loses the Kantian and painful quality of duty, because the moral practices of care and respect for the environment flow freely in the very moment when the Self identifies itself with all living beings. Therefore, "take care of yourselves without feeling any moral pressure." (Naess, 2016a, p. 116).

In all this, lies the struggle of the center: Jonas insists on the primacy of the human even while looking at an ontology of nature. Naess displaces this center with ecocentrism, but resurrects it with the ecological Self. For Levinas, it is not about the center. In all this, humility again, and ethics.

Environment. What imperative?

Humility of self-regulation, reversal of Prometheus unleashed (Jonas). Humility, more or less, or "modesty," of a self-limiting human right, which is reabsorbed in the capacity for "measure," "simplicity," "lifestyles," pluralism, and symbiotic interdependence of the ecological Self with all living beings (Naess, 2022a, p. 175-202; 2016c, p. 41-44): a "profound" modesty, though, "consequence of a way of understanding ourselves as parts of nature in the broadest sense of the term," of "feeling as small" as possible in order to "participate in its greatness" (think mountains). (Naess, 2022c, p. 79-80). Humility of begging and saying thanks (Weil, Levinas).

Similar humilities, different humilities. Against the backdrop of the environmental question, of the anthropocentric/ecocentric conflict, all humilities translate into moral imperatives which, between revisions and rewritings, inevitably always revolve around Kant.

Kant's categorical imperative considers "the person in you and in others always as an end and never as a means." (Kant, *Critica della ragion pratica,* I, III)[7]. For Naess, this must be corrected to "never use a living being only as a means" (Naess, 1994, p. 222)—an imperative which, guaranteed from the beginning by the ecological Self, remains to be deciphered. The prohibition to "never use" the living "only" as an instrument ("means") presupposes and enables nonetheless the "use" of man, relativizing the strength of the "never" and "alone" restrictions along with leaving traces of the homocentric enemy in biocentric egalitarianism itself.

Traces, that is, of an insurmountable anthropocentric root remain in every discussion about the environment, just as Jonas wants, given that for him "man is in no way superior to other living beings, except that he alone *can* be responsible for them *too*, that is, for the protection of their being an end in themselves."

[7] Kant, 1993, p. 228.

(Jonas, 2009, p. 124). Ultimately, for Jonas, the "archetype of all responsibility is" still "that of man for man." (Jonas, 2009, p. 124). "Never use a living being only as a means" is addressed to man (Naess). The "archetype" of responsibility remains "that of man for man" (Jonas). This is quite a problem, when we deal with the environment.

According to Jonas, then, in the face of technological catastrophe, there is a need for "an imperative appropriate to the new type of human action" and of "acting subject," which would roughly sound like this: "Act in such a way that the consequences of your action are compatible with the persistence of genuine human life on Earth," or translated in the negative form: "Act in such a way that the consequences of your action do not destroy the future possibility of such life," or simply: "Do not endanger the conditions for the indefinite survival of humanity on Earth," or again, translated back into the positive form: "Include in your current choice the future integrity of humanity as the object of your will." (Jonas, 2009, p. 16). Naess would have no trouble, in turn, denouncing a stubborn anthropocentrism, perhaps about how the expression "on Earth" is used. Indeed, in the dizzying contortions of the positive and negative formulations of Jonas' imperative, the earth appears only as something necessary for the life of man. The duty to "compatible" actions, not "to destroy," not to put in "danger," to "include" concerns exclusively "human life" in terms of its "possibilities," "future integrity," and "indefinite survival." As if to say that the duty to respect the environment arises as a consequence of humans prescribing, to themselves and for themselves, their own survival. Another big problem indeed.

Finally, Levinas sets down the categorical imperative in a resolute "do not kill," which emphasizes duty for duty's sake yet reverses its origin, since the command comes from the other and no longer from the Self as a vicarious replacement for all mankind. Here, too, the feelings of threat and of destruction return; but they are grasped at the root in their condition of possibility, which is the annihilation of the other as other. Do not kill and do not destroy, the other and the environment. The same responsibility weighs on, the same imperative that already surfaces in hunger: "leaving people without food is a fault that is not mitigated by any circumstance; the distinction between voluntary and involuntary does not apply to it;" "in the face of human hunger, responsibility can only be objectively measured. It is indisputable." (Lévinas, 2023, p. 20).

Towards Law

In the consciousness of hunger, and in consciousness itself, there is an off-centered center, an evidence denied as the principle of its evidence, a humility that no longer insists on itself; and that is not even exhibited in the inverted form, with respect to pride, of man's ability to limit and restrict himself.

Even the world and the environment are other than themselves, they transcend. No longer humanity, responsibility, being, life, balancing out in general. Off center can mean very different things, such as changing center or rejecting its presuppositions—and how many of those centers have been changed, humanisms included.

What will best safeguard the ecological imperative, in practical and legal terms as well? Will it be the responsibilities and the identification of self-restrictions and self-limitations, which keep man in a center, albeit shifted? Or will it be the otherness of the other, of the environment, which rules without waiting for limits, needs, dangers, risks, conveniences, permissions, concessions coming from man? Or maybe the "right" to use of man—who is often prone to possession and excess—which now falls back into "satisfying"

only “vital needs” while respecting biodiversity, and must deal with the truly thorny problem of the border, the decision-maker, the actors involved, and the contingencies as expected? (Naess, 2016c, p. 41).

Laws are written by human beings. But does the imperative, from which the writing of laws arises, originate with man? And is this imperative directed to the environment, or does it rather not come from it?

Data availability statement

The main focus of this article is contributions of a theoretical or methodological nature, without the use of empirical data sets. Therefore, in accordance with the journal's editorial guidelines, the article is exempt from being deposited in SciELO Data.

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