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Radicalizing the philosophical foundations of environmental ethics and political ecology: A metaphysical criticism of modernity and a program of a life phenomenology as its possible overcoming¹

Radicalizar los fundamentos filosóficos de la ética ambiental y de la ecología política: una crítica metafísica de la modernidad y el programa de una fenomenología de la vida como su posible superación

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ABSTRACT: Our article intends to determine to what extent the development of life sciences, on the one hand, and of biopolitics, on the other, is still nourished by the same metaphysical presuppositions that have led to an environmental crisis and, consequently, do not represent a radical alternative for its overcoming. The purpose is to outline a work program around our living condition, where a reflection that can genuinely aspire to environmental ethics as a political ecology worthy of such name should be normatively founded.

Keywords: life; flesh; living; ethics; ecology.

RESUMEN: Nuestro artículo se propone determinar en qué medida el desarrollo de las ciencias de la vida, por una parte, y de la biopolítica, por otro lado, se siguen nutriendo de los mismos presupuestos metafísicos que han conducido a una crisis ambiental, y en consecuencia, no representan una alternativa radical de su superación. El propósito es bosquejar un programa de trabajo en torno a nuestra condición viviente, donde debería fundarse normativamente una reflexión que genuinamente pueda aspirar a una ética ambiental como una ecología política digna de ese nombre.

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1. Introduction

When interviewed by the *Le Monde* newspaper in its electronic issue of May 20th, 2020, given the situation implied by the COVID-19 virus pandemic for humanity, Phillipe Descola starts answering by reverting a statement: the pandemic does not confront subsistence of humanity to a virus; it rather reveals humanity as a virus for life. I believe that the anthropologist's gesture should be highlighted in terms of what it entails: the need to think about the metaphysical presuppositions of the environmental crisis – which we explain in the subsequent sections of this article – linked to the major development of science and the power of its practical application: technology. Our article intends to determine to what extent the development of life sciences, on the one hand, and of biopolitics, on the other, is still nourished by the same metaphysical presuppositions that have led to an environmental crisis and, consequently, do not represent a radical alternative for its overcoming. The purpose is to outline a work program around the life experience, where a reflection that can genuinely aspire to environmental ethics as a political ecology worthy of such name should be normatively founded.

2. Hans Jonas, the need for environmental ethics in the technological era

Although the environment issue does not start with Hans Jonas², in some way, it is with him that it is first announced as a philosophical problem given the evolution of technological civilization. Or, in other words, it is with Jonas that the need arises to philosophically question the terms that ethics should assume to face the enormous power of technology. It is an issue that is previously concerned with asking about the way of being of technology and about its future.

From the first lines of his main work, *The Imperative of Responsibility*, Jonas announces the diagnoses on which his text is argumentatively built: “the promise of modern technology has turned into a threat” (Jonas, 1995, p. 15). The aforementioned means that the unprecedented power of scientific development and its technological application has been so significant that it has been reverted from its initial purpose – protect man from nature through its control – to its opposite form: a threat to man. In such respect, Jonas points out the following: “none of the ethics to the present day instructs us about the ‘good’ and ‘evil’ rules to which the entirely new modality of power and of its creation possibilities will be subjected to” (Jonas, 1995, p. 15). Consequently, science and technology – without ethics – imply submitting to a power that is so devastating that, for the time in history, outdoes the life regeneration ability. The horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, and of Chernobyl in 1986, which permeate generations with the effects of radiation, are not only historical facts but represent, by themselves,

² As a topic, the environment is already philosophically preconfigured in Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* (1882), in Dilthey's *The Types of World-View and Their Development in Metaphysical Systems* (1911), in Bergson's *Creative Evolution* (1907), in Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927) and in Husserl's *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936), among other works.

metaphysical events that account for a new stage in the relationship between human beings and science³: the ecosystem's inability to regenerate and overcome the destruction in the time horizon implied by questioning the very idea of progress, as a historical vector around which modernity and science development are temporarily organized. Consequently, technology faces us with actions of an unforeseeable causal scope. Thus, both science and its technological application imply certain imbalance that is not correlated to the normative ability devoted to controlling the effects of an action. Consequently, Jonas' Imperative of Responsibility seeks "to preserve the permanent ambiguity of man's freedom, which no change in the circumstances can abolish; [and] to preserve integrity of the world and its essences against power abuse" (Jonas, 1995, p. 17).

For Jonas, this new hegemony of technological power imposes the need for new normative presuppositions – both ethical and political – called "The Heuristic of Fear", which imposes the need to transcend the existing ethical approaches exclusively concentrated on the other to recalibrate the relationship with the being and with the should-be, cause and end, as well as the relationship between nature and value, "in order to establish a duty with

the being in man", to which "the concept of responsibility is reduced" (Jonas, 1995, p. 17).

However, Jonas incurs into an *impasse* in the conceptual formulation of his idea of responsibility. In fact, in order to face the new normative challenge imposed by technology, following Kant, Jonas invokes the need for a new negative categorical imperative: "act in such way that the effects of your action are not destructive to the future possibility of life". And, formulated in positive terms: "include the future integrity of man as object of your desire in your current choice". An axiom that Jonas extends to politics (Jonas, 1995, p. 37), and which reserves greater space for science as previous knowledge of the probable harmful consequences of an action⁴. Consequently, despite formulating criticism to the Kantian practical philosophy⁵, Jonas appeals to the same extent at a universal legislative ability of practical reason, which shares with Kant the practical determination of actions based on a reason that operates from an abstraction in opposition to sensitivity. Thus, Jonas writes the following, for example:

This adds the time horizon that is missing in instantaneous logical generation from the Kantian imperative to the moral calculation. If the Kantian imperative refers to an always present order of abstract com-

³ This is an issue that was timely diagnosed by Gunther Anders in *Wenn ich verzweifelt bin, was geht's mich an?* (1977) and by Hanna Arendt in *The Human Condition* (1958).

⁴ "Let us take it, for example, as the first and major change resulting in the traditional situation, the tremendous vulnerability of nature subjected to man's technological intervention, a vulnerability that was not suspected before it could be recognized in the harms caused; this discovery, whose impact gave rise to the concept and to incipient science of environmental research (Ecology), modifies the entire concept of ourselves as a causative factor in the broad system of things" (Jonas, 1995, p. 32-33). The "veil of ignorance" acts as the demand for a guarantee of previous knowledge before acting, agreeing preference for the pessimistic forecasts over the optimistic ones.

⁵ "As his principle [the one of the hypothetical imperative] is not the self-awareness of reason that confers itself action laws as in the Kantian imperative, that is, it is not an idea of doing that is assumed to somehow be produced, but an idea consisting in the existence of its content, of some possible agents in general and which is therefore an ontological idea, that is, an idea of the being; it is inferred that the first principle of an "ethics oriented towards the future" is not ethics in terms of the doctrine of doing to which all laws for future men belong, but metaphysics in terms of the doctrine of the being, from which the idea of man stems" (Jonas, 1995, p. 89).

patibility, our imperative refers to a foreseeable real future as an abstract dimension of our responsibility (Jonas, 1995, p. 41).

As can be noticed, as in the case of Kant (1980), this imperative implies a universal legislative form that should abstain from the agent's concrete particularity to institute itself as a universal legislative form on which will should be shaped. As I see it, this postulate holds greater difficulty for the construction of environmental ethics and, by extension, of political ecology, as this premise shares the same metaphysical presuppositions inaugurating modernity that are intended to be denounced – with their subject-object dualism, as well as with the opposition of reason to the sensitive experience – and which have enabled the divorce with life that is now projected as a historical path of civilization towards an abyss. In the following section, we intend to deepen precisely on this criticism.

3. Metaphysical presuppositions of the life crisis

From Descartes and going through Kant, German Idealism, Positivism and Neokantism up to Analytical Philosophy, it is possible to identify only a single movement in which life is subordinate to thought. Man, and more precisely man thought as a subject, starts to be the foundation and condition for the possibility of other realities. If in the Middle Ages, entities were differentiated between natural substances (*ens creatum*) and the objectivities that were arbitrated by thought (*ens cogitata*), with Modernity, the former progressively step back

in benefit of the latter. The deep transformation implied by the metaphysics of Modernity thus supposes progressively thinking the substance as a subject and the subject as a substance, according to the *dictum* contained in the preface to Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). In other words, this implies determining modernity according to the *desiderátum* of subjectivity metaphysics. It is precisely from this *desiderátum* that *ens creatum* will be progressively considered as *ens cogitata*; in other words, as objectivities arranged by thought. These are objects of which a subject can have a representation (*Vorstellung*) and that will be considered as entities themselves; in other words, to the extent that they are susceptible of being represented.

Although Descartes was first thinker to thematize the *res cogitans* by opposition to the *res extensa*, that is, thought as opposed to the world, spirit vis-à-vis body, both existing as substances, they were differentiated by an essential attribute in which the latter was subordinated to the former according to the famous Cartesian argument: *res cogitans, id est, mens sive animus, sive intellectus, sive ratio*⁶ (Descartes, 1967, p. 184-186). It is in this way that Descartes discovers subjectivity; in other words, the constitutive relationship of any being to this experience of *cogito*, which is thought; in turn, this is the reason why an animal is reduced to a machine in this mechanistic view of what is real. Consequently, it is not only the body experience but also the world experience (*res extensa*) that is degraded in its redirection towards an essence that is determined from an act of thought:

However, I have convinced myself that there was

⁶ “In a precise way, I am merely a thinking thing, that is, mind, or mood, or intellect, or reason” (Descartes, 2009, p. 87).

absolutely nothing in the world, no sky, no Earth, no spirits, no body whatsoever; but then, have I not also convinced myself that I was nothing? Certainly not; undoubtedly, I was something, if I have convinced myself, or only if I have thought something. However, there is this very powerful and clever deceiver that uses all its dexterity to deceive me every time. But there is no doubt that I am, if it deceives me; and may it deceive me as much as it wants, it will never be able to do anything as long as I think that I am something. Therefore, after having thoroughly thought it over and having carefully examined all things, it is to be concluded and have it as certain that *I am, I exist* proposal is necessarily true each time that I pronounce it or that I conceive it in my spirit (Descartes, 2001, p. 171).

In Kant, this separation between body and spirit is not only confirmed but deepened. Although in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) (B-26), Kant was early concerned with warning that intuitions that lack concepts are blind and that concepts that lack intuitions are empty, granting – to the same extent – a place to the categorical jurisdiction of reason and to the experience in knowledge construction, Kant's clarification of time and space as pure forms of the experience in “Transcendental Ethics” rapidly gives rise to “Transcendental Analytics” and to clarification of the pure concepts of understanding. This procrastination and abandonment of the experience field emerges with full clarity, for example, in the Kantian doctrine of the perception and experience judgments (Kant, 1977, p. 18), where the concept of experience already acts in benefit of the object considerations according to causality relationships. In simple words, the experience is already limited and hostage to the categorical perspective of causality that Kant privileged in his cognitive function.

The same thing might be asserted about Husserlian thinking, precisely about transcendental phenomenology where – unlike Descartes as stated by Husserl in his *Cartesian Meditations* (1986) – it is not thought (*cogitatio*) but the intentionality of conscience together with the body that acts as a reference center of reality; in the same way that, for analytical philosophy, the world does not differ from the set of facts that should be normatively adjusted to the demands of a logical meta-language (Cfr. Carnap, 2002). As pointed out by Husserl, in the case of phenomenology, subjectivity “is an absolute-being system in which nothing can penetrate and from which nothing can escape” (Cfr. Husserl, 1950, p. 95).

In this way, the metaphysics of modernity set the epistemological bases from which a transition took place from Aristotelian mechanicism to the logical-mathematical paradigm that prevailed – and still prevails – in sciences.

In fact, the progressive movement of the intuitive nature towards idealized nature is already initiated with Galileo Galilei. In fact, Galileo's “Law of Bodies Falling” (1590) is a hypothesis that is impossible to produce experimentally (the conditions to create vacuum were not yet given in Galileo's time); therefore, it is an idealized and purified experience, which implies that nature is redirected to mathematical language. Furthermore, according to Galileo, nature is in fact written in mathematical language.

However, it will be with Newton that the formulation of the “Laws of Motion” will go hand in hand with the methodological formalization of physical-mathematical premises as a scientific paradigm, in his work entitled *Philosophia naturalis principia mathematica* (1687), where an abstraction

is made of the sensitive qualities of the experience in benefit of mathematical principles that govern knowledge. Consequently, the behavior of natural phenomena is subordinated to mathematical idealizations, reducing the vital experience of nature to an object level to redirect it, in its epistemological statute, towards a universal system of physical knowledge with abstract formalization norms. (Astrophysics is the most evident contemporary example of this postulate.)

In synthesis, Physics – which becomes science by excellence – ceases to be conceived to the inner part of a cosmos to become, to the contrary, scientific knowledge to which any and all possible ideas of cosmos should be adjusted.

It is precisely in this scientific scheme, implicit to a given metaphysical system, that certain economy of knowledge that progressively ceases to be related or comparable to life. In other words, the distance between a factual issue, which is man's belonging to life, and an ethical issue, which are the premises that organize sciences normatively, is also the distance that travels and enables the magnitude of the announced environmental tragedy. Thus, for example, if at any time in the history of Physics it was still possible to observe the experience of the "Law of Motion", more recent scientific discoveries such as Higgs' Boson (1964) or a direct observation of a Quasar seem to us entirely impossible to be experienced.

Paradoxically, it was Husserl himself that, in a text entitled *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936), abandoned late in time the model of the scientific premises to which he himself had adhered and warned about the risks of a science that does entirely without the “ter-

rain” of the experience and, more precisely, of the vital experience. Husserl points out the following:

In the sense of Galileo's science of nature, mathematical-physicalist nature is the objective and true one; it should be what is announced in the subjective phenomena themselves. Consequently, and as we have already mentioned, it is clear that the character of nature's exact sciences is not an effective nature that can be experienced, that one of the life world (*Lebenswelt*). It is a hypothetically substituted idea, which emerged from the idealization of effectively intuitive nature. The idealization thinking method is the foundation for the entire scientific-natural method (of the pure science of bodies) for the discovery of the “exact” and formal theories, as well as for their use in the practice that is active in the world of the effective experience (Husserl, 2008a, p. 259).

As I see it, this concept of *Lebenswelt* seems fertile to understand this crisis in two senses:

The first, which usually privileges the exegesis of Husserlian thinking, is the one that refers to a hermeneutic of everyday life, wisdom adjusted to the praxis of life forms that is concealed and shadowed behind Physics' pretension to emerge as the single authorized *organon* to describe the world in which we live and act. The things to which we relate every day, such as a bird or a tree, become entirely “dressed” and disguised by scientific objectivity. We no longer see the tree to thematize biological objectivity. As Claude Romano wisely points out:

The physical thing then ceases to be the thing we should face in our everyday interactions with our life environment, but it should be approached and understood in the light of the physical theory, in the first place, as well as in mathematical multiplicity. Consequently, vague inductions of the life world acquire a [mere] approach statute when faced with the

exact predictions of science (Romano, 2010, p. 915).

In this way, according to the accuracy model of physical laws, as civilization we progressively distance from the concrete experimental contexts of life experiences to tend to an increasingly demanding approach in the set of our relationships based on a *more mathematical* absolute accuracy model. It is with this in mind that what Husserl called *theoretisch-logische Substruktion*⁷ operates; or everyday life concealment by the objectivity formulated by scientific language, which reifies logical-mathematical idealizations as if they were real entities (Husserl, 2008b). With this “objectivism”, life is granted its sense and validity from an absolute framework that does not originate in any terrestrial experience or even in a possible one, but which comes from a scientific idealization and, consequently, from an eventually impossible experience. In relation to the aforementioned, Husserl writes the following: “The objective is not precisely so as long as it can never be experienced” (Husserl, 2008b, p. 131). Consequently, science “empties” (*Sinnleerung*) the world of all knowledge associated with the life experience and the most basic questions related to our existence. As I see it, in this sense, atomic radioactivity is an excellent example of science whose development is no longer susceptible to a life experience (without dying in the attempt). It is probably for this reason that Werner Heisenberg wrote that mathematization of nature is susceptible of being considered “not only outside God, but also outside man” (Heisenberg, 2000, p. 121). *Substruktion* is not only an inversion of the concrete and life experience in favor of the ideologized one. In

more depth, it is a moral inversion: the sinking of the value of life in favor of the value of knowing, which is no different than the value of the power conferred by this knowledge.

4. Program for a post-metaphysical overcoming of the life crisis

It is at this moment, I believe, that we cannot but pose ourselves some critical questions that I think impair the possibilities of environmental ethics and of political ecology. To what extent do life sciences (Ecology, Biology, Genetics and Medicine, among others), which are in some or other way oriented towards knowing the ecosystems, fail to share the same scientific objectivism we had just denounced, both in their premises and in their method? And, to what extent are life sciences included in the same paradigm that nourishes the environmental crisis? Does this not imply the need to subject ecology itself – ecology which presents itself as a critical theory – to criticism? In fact, the scientific apparatus of Environmentalism is still supportive of Objectivism. Therefore, life sciences inevitably present life as an object to us, which makes Ecology still operate within the same metaphysical horizon grounded on a representational paradigm from the subject-object relationship that, paradoxically, it seeks to denounce.

This objection affects to the same extent the other strand that has more recently nourished political ecology: Foucaultian Biopolitics. For it, life is the object of disciplinary techniques through which life politics is structured. However, as revolutionary as its reading record may be, the approach to life

⁷ “Logical-theoretical substitution”.

is no less objective when it is organized through a reading key supported on social sciences and, more specifically, on History as analytical device. In its own way, scientific objectivism also acts within this line of thought that, paradoxically, seeks to denounce the so-called objectivism acting in the different knowledge regimes operating within the diverse scientific discourses throughout History.

How can this *impasse* be solved? The *impasse* is but more severe, as life emancipation is at stake, not only faced with its domination but directly confronted to the likely hypothesis of its destruction. As I see it, the answer can only come from radicalizing the question for life.

In fact, in Jonas' *The Imperative of Responsibility*, as is the case in almost the entire tradition of Western thinking, there is some confusion between life and nature⁷. This is a transcendental issue because, although the distinction may not be relevant at the lexical level, it is entirely determinant at the ontological one. In fact, nature is susceptible to objectivation; in other words, of being considered an object and reduced to the entity. On the other hand, life has an entirely different hierarchy from the ontological perspective. It lacks ontological density as an object. Or expressed in strictly phenomenological terms: it cannot be thematized. Life is not susceptible of being objectivized because it is the horizon of any and all objects possible, in a similar way that it encompasses and involves any and all subject-object possible relationships. In other words, it is within life that any subject-object relationship is possible from the moment that the subject itself and the perception act are vital

phenomena. Thus, life transcends any attempt at its objectivation. However, any objectivation is immanent to the life that operates as presupposition and condition. Nevertheless, tradition has long concealed the phenomenon of life under its semantic ambiguity with nature.

Then, how to thematize life in its enigmatic character, the most unfathomable and, at the same time, the most intimate to our vital condition? I believe that the second meaning used by Husserl in the *Lebenswelt* expression can contribute a valuable reading key. It deals with the notion of “Earth” (*Erde*) by opposition the one of “World” (*Welt*), as understood by Heidegger in *Being and Time* (1927). In fact, in a late text entitled *The Earth Does Not Move* (*Die ur-arche Erde bewegt sich nicht*), Husserl writes the following: “for us Copernicans, men from modern times, we say: the Earth (...) is one of the stars in infinite space” (Husserl, 1989, p. 12). However, there is a more vital rest and movement experience, which emerges as the “first stratum itself in the construction of the Earth as terrain (*Boden*)” (Husserl, 1989, p. 14).

Before the world as a practical sense horizon, there would be an original experience, which is the Earth, from which any physical idea of “rest” and “movement” can be even thinkable. An original certainty (*Urdoxa*) in the terrain (*Boden*), from which any idea of foundation is even conceivable (*Grund*). In other words, it is faith supported on the terrain robustness, presupposed by the idea of foundation itself. This dimension cannot be represented as an object. It rather constitutes an element, a *presupposition that is prior to any certainty and any belief*.

⁸ A confusion that Jonas, nevertheless, seems to overcome on later works. *Cfr. Ethik für die Zukunft. Im Diskurs mit Hans Jonas*. Herausgegeben Dietrich Böhler in Verbindung mit Ingrid Hoppe. München. C. H., Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung (Oskar Beck), 1994.

Although not exactly a phenomenologist of life, in the “Interiority and Economy” section from *Totality and Infinite* (1961), Levinas thematizes on the following terms this relationship with the elemental life and pleasure (*vie et jouissance*):

The milieu has its own thickness. Things refer to possession, they can be taken along, they are *mobile*; the milieu by which they come to me have no owner, background or common terrain, which, essentially, cannot be possessed by «anybody»: the Earth, the sea, light, the city. Any and all relation or possession is located in the core of what cannot be possessed, which surrounds or contains without any possibility of being contained or surrounded. We call it “elemental” (Levinas, 2002, p. 150).

In fact, the Earth, space, light, darkness and the sea constitute an original dimension presupposed by any theoretical elaboration and, in which, any final elaboration should find validity for a living being, as it is the final terrain both of our beliefs and of our practical possibilities. There is no life or thought horizon beyond these elements presupposed by any knowledge. However, any possible experience on the Earth's terrain is inseparable from the body. In other words, it is not possible to experience robustness (or any experience whatsoever) without the body acting as a place for inclusion in Earth. In this sense, Husserl writes the following: “Whether I am at rest or moving, my own body (*Leib*) is the center and the at-rest and moving objects are around me, and I have motionless terrain” (Husserl, 1989, p. 18).

As I see it, the body ranks in a higher statute in the question we intend to answer. In fact, the body is not only the inclusion place of conscience in Earth, of spirit in matter, but – in more fundamental terms

– it is the irreducible place where thought becomes inseparable from life. And it becomes inseparable from life because the body is the place for life in the living being. In other words, if there is a privileged link from which to think about life, it is precisely the link that unites life to the living being. And this link is the body. It is in the body that life is embodied as sensitivity.

However, if there was ever a thinker that advanced in radically asking himself about the body, it was Merleau-Ponty. In fact, in *Phénoménologie de la Perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty argumentatively operates a crucial distinction for our reflection: the difference between body and flesh. If the body is the setting to subjectivity, susceptible of appropriation and becoming “my body” among the bodies; to the contrary, the flesh is this preconceptual original instance, a dimension anonymous to my inner intimacy inseparable from the world texture. Strange and unknown, sensitive flesh is the realm where life manifests in common among the living beings. Ontologically, life is – eventually – inseparable from mystery, as transparency of the gaze is organized and rests on life's opacity. In his late text entitled *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964), Merleau-Ponty leverages the entire yield of the wild and vital dimension of our living condition, which is flesh:

What we call flesh, that innerly worked-on mass, has no name in any philosophy. It is not the atom of the being, the hard in-itself that resides in a single time and place: it might as well be stated about my body that it is not elsewhere but it cannot be stated that it is here or now, in the sense of objects; however, my sight does not fly over them, it is not the being that knows everything, because it has its inertia, its attachments. It is flesh that we should think about, not substances, body or spirit because, then, it would

be a fusion of the contradictory, but we rather say, as an element, the concrete symbol of a general way of being (Merleau-Ponty, 1999, p. 191). (...) Flesh (whether the world's or mine) is not a contingency but a texture that subsides in itself and is convenient to itself (Merleau-Ponty, 1999, p. 190).

“Closer” to any subject-object relationship, objectivity presupposes life as the simplest condition of possibility; the flesh presents us a privileged situation from which to conceive life: our fundamental living condition as sensitive flesh. It is in terms of flesh, and consequently in terms of a living being, that I am no different to life and that thought is not only unconceivable at the margins of life, but it should clarify – inversely – the living being as a fundamental presupposition of all possible thinking. In a second sense, closer to culture and history, life appears in flesh as a point of indistinction with things and the other living beings. It is then a Copernican twist: if, since ancient philosophy the *polis* is thought by opposition to nature, and in the entire tradition man has been thought by opposition to animals; on the contrary, it is necessary to fully assume the fundamental statute of our living condition (flesh), without which our common existence is unthinkable. Consequently, the aforementioned implies assuming a *status* common to the set of living beings. Furthermore, life as such cannot be separated from the living beings where it manifests itself. Although there is a system that is alive and an Absolute that is transcending life, it is no less true noticing that life manifests itself in living beings. This means identifying a fundamental *status* than man is not exclusive to its being, but common to animals, plants and microorganisms, that is, living beings.

This is a living dimension on which Heidegger failed to sufficiently meditate when obliterating the spatial privilege implied by the body in benefit of temporality. In the fundamental scope, for Heidegger, the exclusive aspect of the *Dasein* is to question its own being, or rather, being what it is about the way-of-having the being. This is what Heidegger calls existence (*Existenz*). Then, if the exclusive aspect of entities is to be thought according to the categories, the exclusive of the *Dasein* is to be thought about according to the existential components. And, among them, the being-in-the-world of which its openness is supportive of, as Heidegger calls it, its transcendence (*Transzendenz*). However, when pronouncing himself about life in paragraph 10 from *Being and Time* (1967), Heidegger subordinates it to clarifying the ontology of the *Dasein*. With this, Heidegger not only excludes thinking about the body but about the fundamental ontological link of the living being with life. In other words, when refusing to ground existence on life, Heidegger leads us to the alternative of grounding life on existence, which is untenable (Barbaras, 2003, p. 141).

5. *Final considerations*

Throughout this article, the purpose has been to argue that the development of life sciences, on the one hand, and of biopolitics, on the, still nourish on the same metaphysical presuppositions that have resulted in an environmental crisis, which has led as to criticize both Hans Jonas' thinking and the Foucaultian legacy. Based on the aforementioned, we have outlined the program of a life phenomenology that, based on our living condition, allows normatively grounding a reflection that may truly aspire to

environmental ethics as well as to political ecology, in a way which represents a radical alternative to overcoming the crisis that affects the environment.

In fact, these reflections herein presented hold important normative richness: if both politics and ethics presuppose subjects and their agency, without which both ethics and politics are unthinkable, it is not less true that any subject and its action ability presuppose a body and, with it, a fundamental *status* in common with living beings. This fundamental and primordial *status* with living beings also implies the possibility of identifying not only certain life factuality in common but also a moral statute in common that unites us with living beings. It is not only on empathy that a moral feeling seems to operate, which is spontaneously projected from an alive body over the other alive bodies in distress⁹. In more fundamental terms, in its sensitive and affective openness, flesh would also be the living *status* of responsibility over the “Other”, which is not reduced to fellow individuals, but extends itself to the Living Other. As pointed out by Cristina Morar (2014), it is the body of hospitality. Although Levinas is far from being a philosopher of “life”, his philosophy opens up this possibility. In his second major work, entitled *Otherwise than Being* (1974) Levinas has no doubts in referring to responsibility towards the Other's vulnerability from the precise point of view of their mortality as “skin lined with wrinkles” (Levinas, 1974, p. 141). It is this ethics of vulnerability (as the experience of the Other's death) that gives rise to the fear for the Living Other that questions responsibility. Derrida timely warned about this possibility in the animal's gaze when he

wrote the following in *The Animal that Therefore I Am (More to Follow)*:

(...) the animal looks at us, it concerns us and we are naked before it. It is here that the most radical way of thinking the finitude that we share with animals lies, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion, to the possibility of sharing the possibility of this impossibility, the anguish of this vulnerability, and the vulnerability of this anguish (Derrida, 2008, p. 44-45).

Radically thought Ecology should not only assume overcoming the metaphysics of Modernity that nourishes the treat of a full destruction of life; it should also open itself to noticing the limitations of its own discourse when addressing the environmental challenges of our time.

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⁹ Cfr. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and Theodor Lipps, *Leitfaden der Psychologie* (1909).

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