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Embodied ethics: Levinas' gift for enactivism

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Abstract
This paper suggests that the enactive approach to ethics could benefit from engaging a dialogue with the phenomenology of Emmanuel Levinas, a philosopher who has given ethics a decisive role in the understanding of our social life. Taking the enactive approach of Colombetti and Torrance (PHEN 8:505–526, 2009) as a starting point, we show how Levinas' philosophy, with the key notions of *face*, *otherness,* and *responsibility* among others can complement and enrich the enactive view of ethics. Specifically, we argue that Levinas can provide, on the one hand, a phenomenological characterisation of ethics itself, of its nature and fundamental meaning, and on the other, an account of how sociality, affectivity and embodiment, as presented in Colombetti and Torrance's work, combine to bring about the ethical experience. However, we also point out that introducing Levinas to the enactive approach could be challenging. It is not obvious how sense-making and value-making, as centred (à la Jonas) on the precariousness and potential death of the subject, would account for the ethical experience as grounded (à la Levinas) on the precariousness and potential death of the other.

Keywords Enaction · Levinas · Otherness · Ethics · Embodiment · Sense-making · Affectivity · Sociality

1 Introduction

The phenomenological analysis of subjective experience is a key and distinctive component of the enactive approach in cognitive science.[1] Taking inspiration mainly

[1]We refer here, and throughout the paper, to what is usually viewed as the "classical" or canonical version of enactivism, also called "autopoietic enactivism" or "autonomist enactivism." We do not consider, for the purposes of our discussion, the sensorimotor and radical (REC) branches of enactivism.

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from Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Jonas—and through the latter, Heidegger—the enactive approach has explored both the cognitive and affective dimensions of our experiential life, giving an account of the deeply embodied nature of those dimensions. In this paper, we want to enrich the phenomenological work of enactivism by addressing an essential dimension of our social lives: the ethical experience.

The question of ethics and the relation to the other has been, from the start, a preoccupation for the enactivist community. Already in the seminal work *The Embodied Mind* (Varela et al. 1991), the enactive approach was concerned with ethical considerations, and Francisco Varela pushed the questioning further in 1999 with the idea of an embodied ethical know-how (Varela 1999). Since then, following this interest, a series of works have developed the enactive approach to ethics in different directions, ranging from connections with Eastern traditions (Nishigaki 2006) to social anthropology (Loaiza 2019), including forays into McDowellian ideas of an ethical second nature (DeSouza 2013). Also, theoretical works such as those of Di Paolo et al. (2018), and De Jaegher (2019), though not focused on ethics as their main topic, have provided important insights for the development of an enactive approach to ethics.

In this context, of particular interest for the purposes of the present project is the contribution made by Colombetti and Torrance (2009). Building on the enactive notion of participatory sense-making and having, as a background, an embodied conception of affectivity, Colombetti and Torrance link ethics directly to the affective dimension of social life. This is a move that, if developed and complemented with the right kind of philosophical resources, as we argue here, offers unique potentialities for enactivism. The work of Colombetti and Torrance (2009) has been already commented and critically examined by authors who propose the 'ethics of care' as an alternative development for enactivism (Urban 2014; Grunsven 2018). We will examine Colombetti and Torrance's work in a critical way, too, but our proposal will be different.

In this paper, we want to offer a phenomenological resource that is particularly pertinent to the topic of ethics but has, so far, been largely unexplored by enactivism, namely the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas.[2] Levinas, like enactivism, conceives of subjectivity as fundamentally linked to life and embodiment, but instead of describing it as concerned with the precariousness of the subject's living body, he describes it as appealed by the precariousness and potential death of the other. This move, which breaks with the agent-centred (Heideggerian, Jonasian) characterisation of meaning, where meaning is understood as emanating from and referring back to the subject, opens the sphere of subjectivity, via embodied affectivity, towards the (radical) otherness of the other and allows us to see, so we argue, the particular significance of ethical experience.

We think that a dialogue with the phenomenology of Levinas would benefit the enactive approach in its concern with questions of ethics. And we think that the work of Colombetti and Torrance (2009), with its embodied background and its emphasis on affectivity and sociality, represents a good starting point to initiate such a dialogue.[3]

[2] To the best of our knowledge, the only and very recent exception to this diagnosis is the work of Dierckxsens (2020), who attempts to set a dialogue between enactivism and Levinas' philosophy regarding the question of justice.

[3] This does not mean, of course, that Colombetti and Torrance's work is the only window in the enactive approach to make contact with Levinas' philosophy. There are, as far as we can see, interesting possibilities too in the works of De Jaegher (2019), Loaiza (2018), Grunsven (2018), and Di Paolo et al. (2018). We hope, in the future, to explore these possibilities.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In Section 2, as a way of preparing the terrain for the reception of Levinas, we will show how enactivism, in the work of Colombetti and Torrance (2009), approaches the question of ethics. In doing so, we will identify some questions and gaps that emerge in Colombetti and Torrance's proposal, which would call for Levinas' philosophy as an answer and complement. Then, in Sections 3 and 4, having in view the questions and gaps identified before, we will introduce and analyse some of the basic notions of Levinas' philosophy, paying special attention to the deeply embodied and affective roots that such a philosophy uncovers in the ethical experience. In doing this, we will show how Levinas' philosophy can complement and enrich the enactive approach to ethics, as presented in Colombetti and Torrance's work. In Section 5, we will develop the conversation between Levinas and enactivism more in general, questioning the role of death in the ethical experience. Finally, in Section 6, we will briefly recapitulate the main points of the paper.

Before starting our analysis, however, perhaps it is worth saying a few words about the general and prima facie compatibility that we see between Levinas and the enactive approach, which gives us a preliminary motivation to carry out the present philosophical exercise. At least three points of contact can be distinguished in this regard: 1) preoccupation with the first-person experience; 2) attention to a primarily non-intellectual dimension of meaning; and 3) attention to the role of embodiment.

Paying attention to first-person lived experience is a fundamental pillar of the enactive approach, and it is one of the main differences between this approach and other approaches in cognitive science (Varela et al. 1991). It is through this fundamental concern with first-person experience that the enactive approach engages in dialogue with different phenomenologies.[4] Levinas' approach to experience, as we will see, is a first-person approach – using the gestures of phenomenology– and is, therefore, well-suited to enter in dialogue with the enactive approach.

The enactive view develops a *non-intellectualist approach to experience*. In reaction to the limitations of classical cognitivism and GOFAI (Haugeland 1989) (as too focused on solving abstract problems and unable to manage more down-to-earth ones), the enactive approach brought to our attention a level of cognition that does not presuppose manipulations of symbolic structures and abstract concepts – and that might, on the contrary, permit them. Similarly, Levinas, as we shall see, starts first with a pre-conceptual (non-intellectual) dimension of meaning (enjoyment, affectivity), before considering situations involving abstraction and distance (e.g., justice, politics).

Finally, and very related to the previous point, is *the central role given to embodiment* in the enactive approach. Enactivism considers cognition as an essentially embodied phenomenon of meaning construction or sense-making[5] (Varela et al.

[4] We might say that the enactive approach has chosen the description of the lived experience as its *explanandum* (Hempel and Oppenheim 1948). The debate is still open about how to articulate third-person and first-person approaches epistemologically (Sebbah 2004; Varela 2004; Salanskis and Sebbah 2008). However, the dialogue that the enactive approach develops through phenomenology has been, at least on its side, fruitful.

[5] In *The Embodied Mind,* beyond the title itself, the authors draw our interest to the work of those "Continental philosophers [who have produced] detailed discussions that show how knowledge depends on being in a world that is inseparable from our bodies, our language, and our social history-in short, from our *embodiment*." (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991, p. 149. Original emphasis).

1991; Weber and Varela 2002; Thompson 2007). The following developments will show that, although from a different perspective, Levinas also considers that the role of embodiment in the process of subjective signification is primordial.

With these three general points, we think Levinas and the enactive approach can be seen as passing a first-level compatibility check.

2 Colombetti and Torrance's enactive approach to ethics

Colombetti and Torrance (2009) analyse the ethical dimension of social interaction, linking it with what they consider to be the intrinsically affective character of participatory sense-making. Participatory sense-making is a key notion in the enactive approach when it comes to an understanding of social interaction. In brief, the main idea behind this notion is that in the interaction of two or more cognitive agents, a new and autonomous level of meaning emerges as a social dynamic that cannot be reduced to the individual autonomy of the participant cognitive agents (De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007). The interesting turn that Colombetti and Torrance give to the notion of participatory sense-making is that the social interaction between agents might be viewed as having an intrinsic ethical dimension, and as being, as they say, "*inevitably ethical* in nature" (Colombetti and Torrance 2009, p. 523. Original emphasis).

How do Colombetti and Torrance get to this idea? On the one hand, they see ethics as profoundly linked to affectivity and emotions. In line with the non-intellectualist spirit of enactivism, Colombetti and Torrance see the grounds of ethics not in rational, abstract principles but in affective and emotional bases. On the other hand, Colombetti and Torrance see affectivity as an intrinsic (ever-present) dimension of participatory sense-making. From there, they seem to assume that if affectivity is an intrinsic dimension of participatory sense-making, and ethics, in turn, is a dimension deeply linked to affectivity, then there are good reasons to think that ethics is also an intrinsic dimension of participatory sense-making. Let us reconstruct this enactive line of thought.

The notion of participatory sense-making is built upon the fundamental enactive concept of sense-making (De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007). Sense-making, according to the enactivists, is "behaviour or conduct in relation to significance, valence, and norms that the system itself brings forth or enacts on the basis of its autonomy" (Thompson 2011, p. 211). As such, sense-making is the most basic form of cognition and is present in every living being. The canonical example by which to illustrate sense-making at its most basic level is bacteria swimming up through a gradient of sugar (Weber and Varela 2002; Thompson 2005, 2007). Sugar is a chemical substance in the environment, but its meaning as 'food' is given only by the sense-making activity of the bacteria as autonomous systems:

> [The] significance and valence of sugar are not intrinsic to the sugar molecules; they are relational features, tied to the bacteria as autonomous unities. Sugar has significance as food, but only in the milieu that the organism itself enacts through its autonomous dynamics (Thompson and Stapleton 2009, p. 25).

It is because the bacteria value sugar as something good for their needs that sugar takes on significance as food, and it is because the bacteria have needs to fulfil that they can value something as good or bad. Following this conceptualization, Colombetti observes that, so characterised, sense-making is revealed as a process that is not only cognitive but also affective.

> An important consequence of the enactive characterization of cognition as sense-making is that cognition turns out to be, from its roots, intrinsically affective, and that, accordingly, there are no cognitive systems that are not at the same time also affective (Colombetti 2017, p. 448).

Taking up this point, Colombetti and Torrance (2009) argue that, if affectivity is an intrinsic dimension of sense-making, then the encounter of two or more cognitive agents in participatory sense-making will necessarily have an affective dimension. Social interaction, understood as participatory sense-making, inherits the affective dimension of the participating cognitive agents and brings about its own (autonomous) dimension of affective meaning. This point is emphasised by Colombetti and Torrance (2009):

> [I]f sense-making (...) is inherently affective already at the level of the individual organism, then participatory sense-making is (...) always affect-laden; autonomous organisms bring to their encounter their own forms of cognitive as well as affective understanding, and as a consequence affectivity is perturbed and transformed as the encounter unfolds, and as it generates its own meaning. (p. 507)

After reaching this point, Colombetti and Torrance (2009) take note of what they think to be the "deep linkages between ethics and the emotions" (p. 514). They arrive at the idea that since social interaction seems to be inherently affective, then, per the linkages assumed, it may also be inherently ethical. For them, "the pervasively affective character of intersubjectivity is one of the things that help to make clear how our *encounter with the other* is a thoroughly ethical enterprise" (Colombetti and Torrance 2009, p. 506. Emphasis added). Ethics, like affectivity, comes to be an essential and irremovable dimension of social interaction.[6]

> [Social interaction] turns out to be not just an interaction between agents who are essentially ethically neutral, where ethical considerations occasionally come in. Rather, it may be that the negotiative dance of participatory sense-making is *inevitably ethical* in nature: that what we participate in is, to its very bones, an

[6] Strictly speaking, the true point of contact with Levinas, as we will see in the next section, lies in the specific idea of the encounter with the other, and not, or at least not without some qualifications, in the more general categories of social interaction or even participatory sense-making. For Levinas, not every social encounter would immediately count as an ethical encounter in the sense of an encounter with the other. However, in this presentation, for the sake of setting the dialogue with enactivism, we follow the rather open use that Colombetti and Torrance make of these concepts.

> *ethical* communal sense-making or value-making. (Colombetti and Torrance 2009, p. 523. Original emphasis)

Colombetti and Torrance present this insight as a conjecture that needs to be elaborated on but also as one that, if on the right track, might have a profound impact on the enactive approach to social interaction.

> In the process of collective individuation, each one of us in turn individuates himself or herself in a richer way. And this richness may not just be a constitutive richness, but also an ethical richness. This latter idea—at best, a conjecture at the moment—needs more elaboration than is possible here. But if it turns out to be a fruitful conjecture, then it would have profound implications for the way in which enactive theories of social interaction are further developed. (Colombetti and Torrance 2009, p. 523)[7]

In the rest of the paper, we argue and try to show that Levinas' phenomenology is an excellent philosophical resource to elaborate on Colombetti and Torrance's conjecture, showing that the conjecture is indeed fruitful and of profound impact for the enactive approach to social life. To this purpose and as a way of organising the discussion, we identify in Colombetti and Torrance's proposal four main points that are in need of elaboration, explanation or justification, and for which Levinas' philosophy seems to be a good complement.

Question 1 (Q1). The first (and most basic) point is mainly definitional and has to do with the very idea of ethics. Colombetti and Torrance want to reveal and analyse the "ethical character of participatory sense-making," its "ethical colourings," and its "ethical overtones" (2009, p. 506). However, they do not give us a general (primary) conception or characterisation of ethics itself to begin with. What should we understand by "ethical" in the first place? When we qualify something as ethical (e.g., ethical character, ethical colouring, ethical overtone), what do we mean? What is, so to speak, the distinctive mark of the ethical (as different, for example, from the emotional, the cognitive, the social)? The first question, then, is this: What is the nature of ethics?

Question 2 (Q2). The second point revolves around the link between ethics and sociality, and asks for an account of the specific role of the social encounter in the ethical experience. Colombetti and Torrance, as we saw, suggest that our social interaction is *inevitably* ethical in nature. However, they do not explain the origin and nature of such inevitability. Colombetti and Torrance, recall, assert that sense-making "is inherently affective already at the level of the individual organism" (2009, p. 507) and that, therefore, participatory sense-making, being the encounter of agents that already bring their own affectivity, is inevitably also affective in nature. How about ethics? Is participatory sense-making inevitably ethical in nature for the same reason, that is, because sense-making is already an ethical phenomenon at the level of the individual organism? Do agents bring a sort of pre-social individual ethics to social life? Or is the encounter with the other in social interaction what confers an ethical

[7] Colombetti and Torrance indicate, in a footnote to the same page, that this conjecture was first formulated by Charles Lenay.

dimension to their lives? In other words: Is the social encounter with the other a necessary condition for ethics? And if so, how and why?

Question 3 (Q3). The third point has to do with the specific role of affectivity and emotions in ethics. Colombetti and Torrance tell us that "there are deep linkages between ethics and the emotions" (2009, p. 514). However, they give us neither a characterisation nor an explanation of such linkages. They claim that "it cannot be doubted that emotion plays an intimate and indispensable role in the ethical sphere" (2009, p. 516), but do not provide us with an account of why that is so. In which way are emotions and affectivity indispensable for ethics? Is ethical experience grounded in affectivity? Is affectivity a necessary condition for ethics? And if so, exactly in what way?

Question 4 (Q4). The last question inquires into the embodied roots of the ethical experience. In the enactive approach, and particularly in the work of Colombetti (2014, 2017), affectivity is always linked to the living body. Every living body, in this view, is at the same time a "feeling body" (Colombetti 2014, p. 114). According to Colombetti, "affectivity (...) depends on (...) life, such that all living systems—even the simplest ones—are affective" (2014, p. 2). Now, if affectivity depends on the living body, then, assuming the deep linkages between affectivity and ethics, in which way, if any, does ethics depend on the living body? What is the role of the living body in ethics? What is its contribution? Is the living body a necessary condition for ethical experience? And if so, how and why?

Colombetti and Torrance (2009) do not address these kinds of questions, yet they are crucial, we think, to understanding our ethical experience. In the next section, we will introduce and review some basic concepts of Levinas' philosophy, which will help us to understand the nature of ethics at its most fundamental level. This exercise will provide us with an answer for Q1 and some initial insights to approach Q2.

3 Levinas and the relation to the other: Face, responsibility, and the spontaneity of the constitutive I

What makes Levinas' approach to ethics original (and sometimes puzzling) is that he pursues the origin of the moral "ought" at the level of subjectivity and subjective experience. It contrasts with approaches that situate the origin of the moral ought in abstract rules (e.g., Kantian deontology), in the consequences of actions (consequentialism), or in virtues (virtue-based ethics). In Levinas' philosophy, the primordial signification of ethics, the origin of the moral "ought," is to be traced down to the subjective experience of encountering another person. Levinas traces the very birth of ethics to the respect that the other calls for when she shows herself in our consciousness, with her autonomy and dignity, refusing to be reduced to an object by the constitutive powers of our subjectivity. With Levinas, this experience is approached through a *phenomenology of the face*.[8] According to him, the manifestation of the face

[8] We want to apologise in advance to the reader who is already well-acquainted with Levinas' work because—for the sake of engaging in a constructive dialogue with the enactive approach and making Levinas' approach easier to grasp for non-specialist readers—we might sometimes be unfaithful to the specificities of the Levinasian use of technical vocabulary. However, we think it is worth the price of these minor approximations if this paper might contribute to enlarging the impact of Levinas' work.

of the other calls for a phenomenological description that would counter and go beyond the Husserlian (or Heideggerian) approach to experience, as essentially contained in the limits of an intentional consciousness (or an existential structure).

Here's an explanation. On the one hand, Levinas does not question that the face of the other is still an object. It is seeable and graspable, like any other constituted object. On the other hand, he wants to bring our attention to the fact that in the experience of encountering the other, there is something in its peculiar "presence" that would not be reducible to this kind of intentional phenomenality. We might interpret it this way, so Levinas invites us to distinguish two different levels of experienced exteriorities: the exteriority of the constituted object and the radical exteriority of the other *as other*. The constituted object—as a *noema* pointed to by intentional acts–always stays at a measurable distance from the I, the distance of intentionality. Intentionality defines a sphere of accessibility or, in the words of Levinas, a sphere of immanence (Levinas 1979). There is, like an original fitness, original compliance between the subject and the object as they are unified in a whole, or totality, by the structure of intentionality. The exteriority of the constituted object is, in this Levinasian sense, always relative to the subject (and vice versa).

In contrast, the exteriority of the other *as other* is not relative but absolute or radical in the sense that it exceeds the attunement of the object to the subjectivity, implied by the constitutive dynamics. Reducing the otherness of the other to what is reachable by intentional acts would be missing the peculiar signification of the experience of facing the other precisely *as other*. The other is not other because she bears some constitutable differences but because she exceeds the powers of constitution, which define a realm of sameness (*le même*).

Otherness as such, so to speak, is never contained in phenomena, and, in this sense, never present if the presence is what phenomenality brings forth. In his phenomenology of the face, Levinas describes an experience that touches the limits of what phenomenology could approach (Sebbah 2012). Otherness is beyond phenomena; strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a phenomenology of otherness or of the face. Otherness, Levinas insists, reveals itself as an absence.

If the other radically exceeds the powers of constitution, if her exteriority is absolute, one may wonder how there can be an experience of the other *as other* at all. How can there be any kind of experiential contact between consciousness and otherness? If the radical absence of the other is more than just a negation or limitation of presence, if it has a positive signification, Levinas needs to provide a description of how the absence of the other is entangled with phenomenal presence.

To introduce this key point, we think it might be helpful to refer to a paradigmatic example that Levinas uses: the possibility of murder and the command not to kill. This extreme example will serve as a magnification tool to highlight the specificity of the experience of facing the other *as other*, the specificity of the ethical experience. In the possibility of killing the other, the subject faces a symptomatic resistance that radically differs from the one opposed by the world and the objects. For Levinas, if the face is still on one side -a thing, a construable and graspable object- it reveals, on the other side, a new dimension of signification.

> The face resists possession and resists my powers. In its epiphany, in the expression, the sensible and still graspable turns into total resistance to the

> grasp. This mutation can occur only by the opening of a new dimension. This is because the resistance to the grasp is not produced as an insurmountable resistance, like the hardness of the rock against which the effort of the hand comes to naught or like the remoteness of a star in the immensity of space. The expression that the face introduces into the world does not defy the feebleness of my powers but my ability for power [mon pouvoir de pouvoir]. (Levinas 1979, pp. 197–198)

> [The other] thus opposes to me not a greater force, an energy assessable and consequently presenting itself as though it were part of a whole; it is not some superlative of power but precisely the infinity of his transcendence. This infinity, stronger than murder, already resists us in his face, is his face, is the primordial *expression*, and is the first word: "You shall not commit murder" (Levinas 1979, p. 199. Original emphasis)

With Levinas, the command not to kill is not an abstract moral rule that the subject would apply in a given situation. The command not to kill is, so to speak, in the face itself when it reveals itself to consciousness by opposing this "new dimension" of resistance to its powers. Through the phenomenological analysis of this situation in which the subject faces the possibility of murder, Levinas draws our attention to a specific dimension of signification: a dimension that would have remained unseen as long as phenomenology was only concerned with objects or things. In this situation, consciousness faces something—something that would turn out to be someone—that resists its (thus far) uncontested powers of constitution, something that thwarts its *ability to power*.[9]

In the extreme situation of the (im)possibility of murder, as in more daily situations like politeness or care, or in any social situation when the other is treated with respect - when she's not considered to be a thing- the face "calls into question the naïve right of my powers, my glorious spontaneity as a living being." (Levinas 1979, p. 84). Also, "the presence of the other is equivalent to this calling into question of my joyous possession of the world" (Levinas 1979, p. 75–76). The face, as radical alterity, is never contained in phenomena, but it is revealed through them by questioning (but not in an intellectual way, as we will see in the next section) their joyous spontaneity. When encountering the other as other, the subject is, for the first time, revoked—dismissed from—her spontaneous primacy over her phenomenal world. It is this revocation that opens, according to Levinas, the very primordial significance of ethics.

[9] Let us insist on the specificity of this ethical resistance or excess that the other opposes to the subject. One could argue that a three-dimensional object, or the perceptive world in general, already exceeds the actual phenomenon and always has a dimension of absence associated with its presence (e.g., the invisible side of the cube). But this phenomenal excess in regard with presence, whose positive name is *horizon*, is nothing but a constitutive modality of the original acquaintance between consciousness and the world, still contained in the subject/world totality. This totality, Levinas argues, is structured as an asymmetric relation of power, as the subject has a dominating position over the objects she constitutes. The ethical resistance of the face is not of the same kind as the invisibility of the rear side of the cube as what is resisted by the face is the centripetal and domination-ruled closure of the subject/world totality.

> The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics (Levinas 1979, p. 43).

With this move, Levinas is pulling the notion of ethics down to a very primordial level, inviting us to explore the phenomenological roots, the deep nature of what we usually, in common sense or in theoretical ethics, identify as "ethical." The *I losing her primacy for the other* is, according to Levinas, the fundamental meaning and original source of ethics.

Reaching this point, we already can see how Levinas could start to complement Colombetti and Torrance's enactive approach, first by providing an answer to the question of the nature of ethics (Q1) and second by shedding some (initial) light on the role of sociality in it (Q2). We will develop these points at the end of this section. But just to anticipate, notice that with Levinas, it starts to be clear why it can be said that the encounter with the other is, as Colombetti and Torrance suggest (but do not explain), intrinsically *ethical in nature*. We might say with Levinas that the encounter with the other is ethical in nature, for it is the primordial dismissal of the subject's spontaneous primacy over her constitutive powers. In Levinas' view, the experience of the social encounter with the other is uncovered, ultimately, as the experience of ethics itself (an idea that helps us think about the role of sociality in the very possibility of ethics).

We will say more about this soon. For now, we want to call attention to the radical reversal that the ethical revelation of the face induces on the structure of subjectivity. The revelation of the face "consists in a being telling itself to us independently of every position we would have taken in its regard, *expressing itself*" (Levinas 1979, pp. 65–66. Original emphasis). Contrary to the dynamics of constitution, where the object is constituted *by* the subject in a move that goes from the subject toward exteriority (i.e., intentionality) and where the subject is the dominating pole, the face reveals herself *to* the subject, striking her in her passivity, in a move that goes from exteriority toward the subject.

> The being that expresses itself imposes itself, but does so precisely by appealing to me with its destitution and nudity—its hunger—without my being able to be deaf to that appeal. Thus, in expression, the being that imposes itself does not limit but promotes my freedom, by arousing my goodness (Levinas 1979, p. 200).

Freedom is here to be understood as a characterisation of the spontaneity of intentional acts that go freely, without resistance, towards objects. Intentionality is free because it does not meet any obstacle to its dynamics of constitution. (Of course, the subject can meet obstacles in her experience; nonetheless, those obstacles would be freely constituted as obstacles, and, thereby, they would not be obstacles *to constitution*).

Otherness, according to Levinas, is not an obstacle to constitution. It is rather a command, an appeal. It affects intentionality but does not prevent it from going or responding; it does not limit its intrinsic freedom. Otherness pushes intentionality rather than holding it back. This meaningful articulation between the subject's constitutive power and otherness, where the power of the I–or the I as power–is commanded, called, appealed (and therefore stops being the sole spontaneous origin of its freedom),

Levinas calls *goodness.*[10] We understand here that *goodness* is not a property of the I but a qualification of the articulation between the I and the other—an articulation that is *ethical in nature*. *Goodness,* as understood in this Levinasian sense*,* precedes the will to be good (and ultimately any will at all). When facing the other, the subject and her powers are touched and commanded, and this very contact, this passive exposure to alterity, from which the subject cannot retreat, is what Levinas understands as the introduction of the subject into the ethical world. The subject, certainly, might or might not respond to the call; she might act—freely—in a good or bad manner. (For instance, if someone asks for help, she might act in an altruistic or selfish manner.) Nonetheless, observes Levinas, the very experience of acting well or badly inherits its significance, *ethical in nature*, from the passive exposure of freedom to otherness.

The Levinasian subject, thus, is not only the independent, free, intentional I: her very independence, freedom, and intentional spontaneity are touched and appealed to by otherness. And this contact—this appeal—has the primordial signification of ethics. Thereby, Levinas qualifies subjectivity as *responsibility*; the subject is called to re-spond, called to care, and subjected by otherness. With its plain ethical connotation, the notion of *responsibility* is, with Levinas, nothing less than a descriptive qualification of the structure of subjectivity—a passive exposure to the call of the other articulated with the powers to respond.[11]

Now, for Levinas, to respond to the other means, in a fundamental sense, to give. Whether you give your attention, your time or the things you own, the ethical experience is, in essence, the experience of being called to give yourself to the other. Or, to use Levinas' formula, the experience of being called for a *gift* (Levinas 1979). *Gift*, in this Levinasian sense, refers primarily to the (commanded) action of giving, and thereby to the givability of the self and not necessarily to a particular object which might be given (e.g., a present). The ethical experience is, thus, the experience of a subject who is called for a *gift*, in the relevant sense of being called to sacrifice or lose something for the other.

The possibility of being called for a gift has its own origin and preconditions, which will be analysed in the next section. But before moving to that, let us recapitulate what

[10] It has to be noted that the use of the notion of *goodness* we are referring to here is the one developed in *Totality and Infinity* (1979). In *Otherwise than Being* (1998), Levinas uses this notion in a slightly different way.

[11] In comparison to how other phenomenologists approach the question of the relation with the other, the originality of Levinas' approach lies in the very specific way he tackles the question of otherness *as such*, so to speak, and how he draws radical consequences from there, especially regarding the structure of subjectivity and signification. Of course, other phenomenologists have considered the question of the other, but, in Levinas' view—a view we would be inclined to share—they fail to assume the radical reversal of intentionality it involves. For Levinas, Husserl's approach of the relation with the other as empathy (*Einfülhung*), as described in his *Cartesian Meditations*, still essentially relies on a dynamic of comprehension, centred on and originated in the constitutive subject. And for this reason, it would fail to do justice to the "veritable inversion" called by the face (Levinas 1979, p. 67). Heidegger, with his notion of *coexistence*, also acknowledged the irreducibility of the social relation to objective cognition. But Levinas deplores that "in the final analysis it also rests on the relationship with *being in general*, on comprehension, on ontology. Heidegger posits in advance this as the horizon on which every existent arises, as though the horizon, and the idea of limits it includes (...) were the ultimate structure of relationship" (Levinas 1979, pp. 67–68). There could be no radical otherness between the Dasein and the "other," since their relationship is contained in the more general structure of being. The idea of a radical excess is indeed decisive in Heidegger's description of the structure of being. But this excess is not associated with the notion of ethics as it is centred on the Dasein itself as its relation with the possibility of its very own death. (We will say more on that topic in Section 5).

we have reviewed so far, paying attention to how Levinas' ideas start to complement Colombetti and Torrance's enactive approach to ethics.

Levinas has invited us to explore the phenomenological roots of the ethical experience and to find its fundamental meaning. He has started by considering the profound contrast between, on the one hand, the original acquaintance in which the subject and her world are united in a coherent totality structured by the dynamics of constitution, and, on the other hand, the radical otherness of the other who can only be respected as such when she is not reduced and forced to fit in said totality. Within this contrast, through the paradigmatic example of the (im)possibility of murder, he has then disclosed the encounter with the face as the primordial revocation of the primacy of the I as a spontaneous constitutive power. And through this view, finally, the fundamental nature of ethics, in its primordial sense, has been uncovered for us as the *I losing her primacy for the other*.

Also, by reviewing the notion of goodness, Levinas has shown that the ethical subject is not any more the sole origin of her freedom. Subjectivity, with Levinas, has been exposed as *responsibility* -that is, as free powers exposed to the demand that the other as other expresses. And from there, the ethical experience has been revealed, essentially, as the experience of being commanded to respond, being requested to care for the vulnerability of the other, and ultimately being called to make a gift of yourself.

As we see it, not only has this quick tour of Levinas' basic notions given us precise insights regarding the question of the fundamental nature of ethics (Q1), but it has also shed light on the primitive articulation between sociality and ethics (Q2). Indeed, if we follow the Levinasian characterisation of ethics as the *I losing her primacy for the other* and his view of the ethical subject as the one that is called by the other to respond, we not only gain a phenomenological understanding of the nature of ethics as such, but also an idea of the essential role that sociality plays in it. We come to see that without sociality, i.e., without the possibility of encountering the other, such a thing as the ethical experience seems just impossible, for it is only the other who can revoke the spontaneity of my constitutive power and call me to respond. With Levinas, the social encounter with the other proves to be, as Colombetti and Torrance conjecture, inevitably ethical in nature, for the experience of encountering the other as other *is but* the experience of ethics itself.

Despite this essential role given to sociality, Levinas' description of ethics, as we will see in the next section, does not fail to consider the necessity of an independent and autonomous side of subjectivity. According to Levinas, ethical experience presupposes, as a necessary but not sufficient condition, an autonomous subject for her to be touched by otherness and contested in her autonomy. By reviewing the Levinasian notions of sensibility and enjoyment, we will see how the phenomenological description of the encounter with the other puts forward a specific role of embodied affectivity. More precisely, it will appear that the ethical dimension of experience reveals as a *switch* in the signification of affectivity, from egoic to altruistic signification. Thus, we will show how Levinas' ideas could complement the enactive approach to ethics, especially regarding the questions about the role of affectivity (Q3) and embodiment (Q4), respectively. Additionally, highlighting the role of embodied affectivity in the experience of encountering the other will offer new insights on the articulation between sociality and ethics (Q2).

4 The ethical switch

We have seen how Levinas describes the ethical experience as a meaningful contact between otherness and the I or ego, i.e., as the contestation of the egoic spontaneity by the other. In this section, we will see how Levinas describes this very contact, this ethical contestation, as anchored in embodied affectivity. For Levinas, as we will see, the other contests the spontaneously affirmed ego in her very flesh.

In the same way that the enactive approach considers experience as embodied (Varela et al. 1991; Thompson 2007), Levinas, like many phenomenologists, acknowledges the constitutive role of the body. However, because Levinas approaches the question of embodiment from the peculiar perspective of the ethical experience and its specific way of signifying, he opens, we think, the original view of an *ethical body*.

In Section 3, we saw how Levinas gives us a characterisation of ethical experience in terms of a subject who is called for a gift; now, he seems to owe us an account of a subject who actually has something to give, that is, something to lose. Focusing on the role of embodied affectivity, we will see that it is by describing the solitary relation between the subject and her (pre-social) environment as a relation of nourishment and enjoyment, that Levinas provides an account of an independent and autonomous ego that can be ethically contested.

The other is not contesting the subject at an abstract or theoretical level. The ethical contestation takes place at a very *concrete* level. While looking for this radical level of concreteness, Levinas invites us to revisit the notion of sensibility. Levinas first describes an *egoic* dimension of sensibility that becomes the condition for an *ethical* sensibility.

Let us start with egoic sensibility. In Levinas' approach, sensibility does not only serve as a provider of data for perception and constitution. At a more basic level, sensibility, for Levinas, is a primordial embodied affective experience of enjoyment.

> The world I live in is not simply the counterpart or the contemporary of thought and its constitutive freedom (...). The world I constitute nourishes me and bathes me. It is aliment and "medium" ["milieu"] (Levinas 1979, p. 129).

The Levinasian subject not only constitutes exteriority but *lives from* it: "*living from*… is not a simple becoming conscious of what fills life. These contents are lived: they feed life" (Levinas 1979, p. 111. Original emphasis). The relation with the exteriority of the world is not only a relation *to* things, *to* objects, *to* ideas, but the enjoyment of these very relations we have with them, as we consume things, objects, ideas. When I eat a delicious fruit, the deliciousness of the fruit is not first experienced as a property of the fruit, nor even as a property of the relation I have with the fruit, but as an immediate pleasure, as an affective experience. And with Levinas, the paradigmatic relation of nourishment is enlarged to all kinds of relationships with exteriority (exteriority of the milieu), including relations with abstract ideas: "We live from 'good soup,' air, light, spectacles, work, ideas, sleep. These are not objects of representations. We live from them" (Levinas 1979, p. 110). Underneath the dynamics of constitution, the primordial acquaintance between the subject and the world lies in the essential fulfilment of needs in

consumption and enjoyment. Even if it could be precarious as the fulfilment of needs might not be forever guaranteed (Levinas 1979, pp. 141 and 158), enjoyment is nevertheless the primordial signification of the relation between the subject and her milieu. As sensibility is approached as a relation of nourishment and enjoyment, the Levinasian subject gains a "material" thickness or concreteness that will be necessary for the ethical relation as a relation of gift.

> Enjoyment, which is the *other* of life in relation to nourishment, is an independence *sui generis*, the independence of happiness. The life that is life *from* something is happiness. Life is affectivity and emotion or *sentiment*; to live is to enjoy life (Levinas 1979, p. 115. Original emphasis, translation modified).

To Levinas, sensibility—as "the *mode* of enjoyment" (Levinas 1979, p. 135. Original emphasis)—has its own positive signification, which is happiness [bonheur], "love of life" (Levinas 1979, p. 145). Through the pure positivity of happiness, enjoyment separates the being experiencing enjoyment from the milieu that nourishes her and in which she bathes.[12] Thereby, enjoyment is the affirmation of the I as independent from the milieu, which nourishes her. The I curls up into herself—is for herself—in the enjoyment of consumption that essentially fulfils her needs. "Happiness is a principle of individuation" in the sense that it realises "the independence of the self" (Levinas 1979, p. 147), her "autonomy"[13] (Levinas 1979, p. 119).

> [Sensibility] does not belong to the order of thought but to that of emotion [sentiment], that is, the affectivity wherein the egoism of the I pulsates (Levinas 1979, p. 135, translation modified).

At the primary level of the solitary relation between the world and the subject,[14] for Levinas, the question of sensibility and embodiment is not the one of the embodied powers of action and sensation that would fuel the dynamics of constitution. Levinas' descriptions draw our attention to a fundamental affective dimension of sensibility. It is through a primordial happiness that the ego affirms itself as independent. "Enjoyment is (...) the very pulsation of the I" (Levinas 1979, p. 113). With Levinas, the rise of the ego is more of an affective process than a cognitive (i.e., sensorimotor) one.

[12] Enjoyment not only concerns pleasurable relations with exteriority but also has to do with every relation with exteriority, including unpleasurable ones—like pain, for instance—as their ultimate references: "Far from putting the sensible life into question, pain takes place within its horizons and refers to the joy of living" (Levinas 1979, p. 145).

[13] "The existent is 'autonomous' with respect to being; it designates not a participation in being, but happiness" (Levinas 1979, p. 119). The Levinasian use of the concept of *autonomy* as phenomenological independence from the milieu is affective in character and distinct from the technical way in which (autonomist) enactivism uses it. However, it might be interesting for enactivists to explore whether their technical notion of autonomy proves to be compatible with, or enriched by, the Levinasian one.

[14] So far, the relation with exteriority and the emergence of an independent self, have been approached without any reference to the radical otherness of the other, and thereby could be qualified as a pre-social solitude: "In enjoyment I am absolutely for myself. Egoist without reference to the Other, I am alone without solitude, innocently egoist and alone. Not against the Others, not 'as for me...'—but entirely deaf to the Other, outside of all communication and all refusal to communicate—without ears, like a hungry stomach" (Levinas 1979, p. 134).

With the notions of need, enjoyment, and happiness, Levinas describes a primordial level of sensibility and affectivity that leads to the rise of an independent I. This first dimension occurs as the relation with the exteriority of the milieu, without any reference so far to the radical exteriority of the other *as other*. But if Levinas insists so much on this solitary process (in a pre-social solitude), it is only because this independent enjoying self is the condition[15] for the ethical contact. Egoic sensibility is a condition for an ethical sensibility:

> Enjoyment in its ability to be complacent in itself, exempt from dialectical tensions, is the condition of the for-the-other involved in [ethical] sensibility and in its vulnerability as an exposure to the other.

> This sensibility has meaning only as a "taking care of the other's need," of his misfortunes and his faults, that is, as a giving. But giving has meaning only as tearing from oneself despite oneself and not only *without* me. And to be torn from oneself despite oneself has meaning only as a being torn from the complacency in oneself's characteristic of enjoyment, snatching the bread from one's mouth. Only a subject that eats can be for-the-other or can signify. Signification, the-one-for-the-other, has meaning only among beings of flesh and blood (Levinas 1998, p. 74. Original emphasis).

In Levinas, the independence of the ego, settled through enjoyment, is only a step in the perspective of ethical contact.[16] It is only through enjoyment and happiness, in the fulfilment of needs, that the subject gains a "material" thickness and thus something to be given and sacrificed for the other. As mentioned before, with the notion of *goodness*, the ethical meaning of the gift is not taken on voluntarily. On the contrary, ethics signifies as the passive exposure of the ego to the other. When the other *as other* breaks through, she does so by questioning the spontaneous solitary happiness entailed in enjoyment. In that sense, for Levinas, the egoic sensibility of enjoyment is vulnerable, as it is always already passively exposed to the ethical questioning. The ethical sensibility is precisely this passive exposure of egoic sensibility to otherness. For the ethical subject, the otherness of the other is, so to speak, haunting the spontaneity of happiness, creeping in its very autonomy as *the other in me,* contesting its egoic self-sufficient independence.

And this unsettling "presence" of *the other in me* is not an abstract thought. For Levinas, "matter is the very locus of the for-the-other" (1998, p. 77). It is not enough to

[15] "Egoism, enjoyment, [egoic] sensibility, and the whole dimension of interiority—the articulations of separation—are necessary for the idea of Infinity, the relation with the Other which opens forth from the separated and finite being" (Levinas 1979, p. 148). It is probably important here to keep in mind that Levinas' descriptions pertain to the phenomenological domain. And it is not obvious if there are easy ways to articulate them with ontogenetic or phylogenetic approaches regarding the question of the conditions of the rise of the *ego*.

[16] From *Totality and Infinity* (Levinas 1979) to *Otherwise than Being* (Levinas 1998), the description of the articulation between, on the one hand, the rise of the egoic, independent I in enjoyment and, on the other hand, the exposure to the ethical call keeps the same structure. Nonetheless, it has to be noted that in the first book, Levinas gives more room to the description of the independent I in order to ultimately make it a condition of the contact with otherness and its peculiar signification. In the second book, the accent moves to the primacy of the contestation of egoism by otherness, that is, to the exposure of enjoyment to the ethical call.

say that the concreteness of enjoyment is a condition for a gift. With Levinas, the ethical contestation itself, the ethical call challenging egoic enjoyment, is an embodied and concrete event, for the weight of otherness is carried, borne, and endured by the subject, in her very flesh.[17]

> The immediacy of the [ethical] sensibility is the for-the-other of one's own materiality; it is the immediacy or the proximity of the other. The proximity of the other is the immediate opening up for the other of the immediacy of enjoyment, the immediacy of taste, materialization of matter, altered by the immediacy of contact (Levinas 1998, p. 74).

The passive exposure to the call of the other is not mediated through an abstract level of thoughts and consciousness; it is already immediately there, incarnated in sensibility and in the flesh of the affective body. The subject cannot retreat behind the distance of constitution, for ethical sensibility occurs at the very level of flesh and matter, in the immediacy of an ethical contact. Being the locus of this self/otherness contact is what makes the subject's body an *ethical body*. Ethical thoughts and conscience only inherit their significations from this primordial embodied ethics.

Figure 1 offers, through the image of the "ethical switch," a visual summary of the Levinasian approach to ethics as we have reviewed it so far.

First, at an individual or pre-social level (represented on the left side of the figure), the subject rises as an enjoying ego through the spontaneity of consumption. She erects as an autonomous self, separated from the milieu that nourishes her through the pure positivity of happiness entailed in the fulfilment of needs. When encountering the face, the otherness of the other reveals by questioning the spontaneous rise of the ego in enjoyment, by calling the enjoying subject for a sacrifice of her egoic happiness, calling her for a gift (as represented on the right side of the figure). Thus, when the other manifests herself *as other*, the significance of sensibility as embodied affectivity switches from purely egoic to ethical. The revelation of the face corresponds to the event of this switch.

The image of the ethical switch also leaves us in a position to answer the questions set in Section 2 about the role of sociality (Q2), affectivity (Q3), and embodiment (Q4) in ethics, and so complement Colombetti and Torrance's enactive approach.

Let us start with Q3. Colombetti and Torrance, recall, told us that affectivity plays an intimate and indispensable role in ethics. However, they did not give us an account of why that is so. In which way is affectivity indispensable for ethics? Is affectivity a necessary condition for ethics? And if so, how and why? As was exposed in Section 3, the experience of ethics is the experience of being called to give yourself to the other. And, as reviewed in the present section, only an independent ego, emerging as an autonomous and enclosed unity, separated from her exteriority, could tear out a part of herself for giving to the other. In other words, the formation of an independent ego is a necessary condition for ethical contact. But, crucially, it is not the formation of any kind of ego. The ego for ethical contact -that is, the ego that has something to lose, something to give at the cost of a sacrifice- can only emerge, Levinas explains, through the emotional density of affectivity. Levinas insists that enjoyment, happiness, and *love*

[17] In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas refers to maternity as the paradigmatic example of this material "gestation of the other in the same" (Levinas 1998, p. 75).

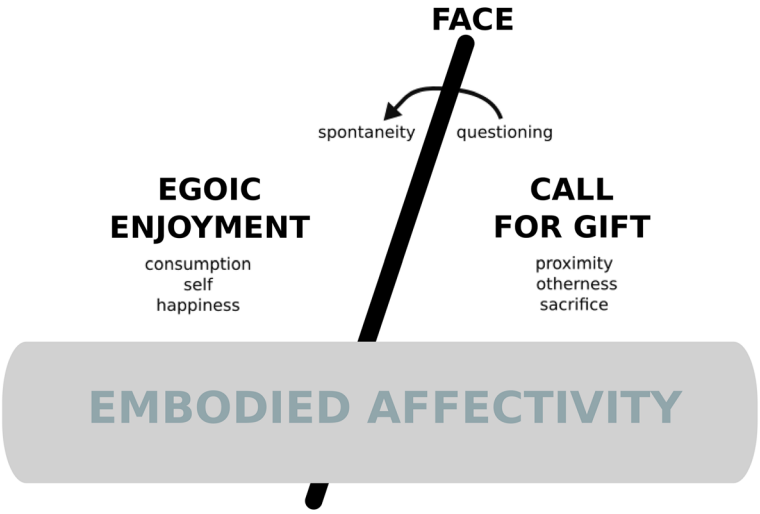

Fig. 1 It is the same ground of embodied affectivity that switches from the egoic significance of enjoyment to the ethical significance of responsibility

of life are emotional or affective dimensions of experience, not cognitive (e.g., sensorimotor, intellectual) ones. Life, as a relation of consumption, is loved and cherished, and, in Levinas' view, this affective relation with life itself is the very concrete material of ethical contact for only something with which one is affectively attached can be given in a meaningful way, that is at the cost of a sacrifice. Put another way, had we a purely cognitive ego, an ego lacking enjoyment, ethics would be impossible.

Regarding Q4, Levinas offers an interesting complement, too. Q4 referred to the role of embodiment in ethics. As seen in a previous quotation by Levinas, "only a subject that eats" could encounter the other in an ethical way. Only a subject with needs to fulfil through consumption, and who thereby enjoys, in an embodied way, her relation with her milieu can then be called to sacrifice this enjoyment for the other. The ethical tension rises, at a very concrete level of incarnation, between the subject who breathes fresh air, eats bread and good soup, and is warmly protected in her clothes and shelter, and the other who is cold, hungry, and weak, and is always already potentially dying. From the egoic enjoyment of the subject to the weakness of the other, and through the relation of the gift that articulates them, the whole structure of ethics implies beings of "flesh and blood" who can enjoy life and be threatened by death, that is, living beings who maintain themselves through a vital relationship with their milieu. Thus, following Levinas, we can say that the living body is a necessary condition for ethics and that ethics is embodied to the extent that only living bodies can experience it.

Finally, the image of the ethical switch also brings a new perspective on the essential role of sociality in ethics (Q2). In Levinas, the encounter with the face is what "operates" the very switch that turns the signification of affectivity from egoism to (demanded) altruism. Thus, in front of Q2, we come to see that there is not such a thing as a pre-social level of ethics that would then be imported as is in the social encounter, turning it into an ethical experience. Rather, there is a pre-social ground of egoic embodied affectivity that switches towards ethical signification *when and only if the*

face is met. Sociality, in this sense, is clearly revealed as a necessary condition for ethics, having the crucial role of operating precisely the "ethical switch."

If Levinas' philosophy has proved to be a potential resource to complement and enrich the enactive approach to ethics, we think it is nonetheless important to highlight the fact that a full integration of this philosophy in enactivism could also be challenging. In the next section, by focusing on the role of death in the process of signification, we will expose what could be a critical distance between the two approaches.

5 The relation to death

So far, we have shown that Levinas' descriptions could be used to bring some interesting complements to the enactive approach in regard to the question of ethics. What would happen, however, if the enactivists were willing to engage in a more in-depth integration with Levinas' philosophy? This might prove challenging, we think, for at least one basic reason. Levinasian philosophy is, in origin and spirit, fundamentally an objection to the Heideggerian existential ontology[18]; an ontology that the enactive approach has integrated through its recourse to the philosophy of Jonas. Although it is well beyond our scope to review the philosophical differences between the Heideggerian/Jonasian/enactive approach and the Levinasian one, here we will illustrate them, in a very condensed way, through a revealing comparison. In both approaches, signification or meaning emerges from a tension between life (or existence) and the mystery of death (or nothingness). However, whether we look at the (Heideggerian/Jonasian) enactive approach or at the Levinasian one, this meaningful tension unfolds in a very different way.

Let us start with the enactive approach. In sense-making, sense and value are related to metabolism. For instance, for the bacteria, sugar is *good* because it is necessary for the metabolic being to maintain itself. On the contrary, acid is *bad* because it contravenes the metabolic dynamics and could potentially stop them, leading to the bacteria's death. In enactivism, meaning is built upon an existentialist approach to metabolism. This approach is to be traced back to the philosophy of biology of Hans Jonas (Weber and Varela 2002; Thompson and Stapleton 2009).

> Yet, if it is true that with metabolizing existence not-being made its appearance in the world as an alternative embodied in the existence itself, it is equally true that thereby to be first assumes an emphatic sense: intrinsically qualified by the threat of its negative, it must affirm itself, and existence affirmed is existence as a *concern* (Jonas 1992, p. 35. Original emphasis).

[18] It might be worth reminding that there is a historical context in which this objection was born. Levinas had studied phenomenology in Germany at the end of the 1920s, including as a pupil of Husserl and Heidegger. Also, he contributed significantly to the introduction of this school of thought in France in the 1930s. But after he had been a prisoner in Nazi camps during WWII, there was an urge for a philosophy that would put the respect for the other person as its main motive, a philosophy that would call out the risk of reducing all human significations to the disclosure of being.

In this view, the living being must affirm itself facing the possibility of its negation, the possibility of its death. Through Jonas, the existentialist background of the enactive approach to meaning can ultimately be traced back to Heidegger's *being-toward-death*[19] (Heidegger 2008). Existence is called back to itself by the threat of its end, and this centripetal concern[20] is what gives existence a meaningful direction.[21] The signification of existence takes, as an ultimate reference, the relation between the existing being and her (or its) own death.

In the enactive approach, death is the negation of life, and this negation occurs as the termination of metabolism. Life is thereby teleologically attached to death. Sense-making is value-making because the signification of what is enacted takes its ultimate reference in the precariousness of metabolism, which is in the affirmation of life against death, which here is an autonomous process. Life is good; death is bad. What goes along with life is good; what goes against life is bad. Value and meaning arise from the life/death tension, tension contained in the very autonomy of the autonomous being.

On the contrary, for the Levinasian subject, the question of her own death is not primordial. And by describing the relation with the milieu as pure enjoyment in the fulfilment of needs, Levinas' approach clearly contrasts with an approach to metabolism as concerned with the possibility of its negation: "The need for food does not have existence as its goal, but food. Biology teaches the prolongation of nourishment into existence; need is naive" (Levinas 1979, p. 134). Enjoyment is not attached to a teleological approach to existence.[22] The only goal of need is its fulfilment; it is naive of any role in the prolongation of existence. As forms of enjoyment, happiness, love of life, need and its fulfilment in consumption have their own positive signification, and are not determined by an external end, such as the possibility of dying. With Levinas, the affirmation of the ego is rooted in the pure positivity of enjoyment and has nothing to do with an existentialist reading of metabolism. The value of the life of the subject as cherished in enjoyment is not teleologically related to the possibility of its termination.

Levinas shares the idea, somewhat commonplace, that the mystery of death gives meaning to existence, but for him, the only way through which the subject gets to touch

[19] And this is not by accident since Jonas was a pupil of Heidegger.

[20] We use the word "concern" to translate Heidegger's *die sorge*. We keep, for the most part, the word "care" for Levinas' *soin*: with Levinas, care will be oriented towards the other.

[21] It is centripetal in the sense that in this existentialist scheme, the existent being is concerned with her own existence.

[22] Levinas explicitly refuses Heidegger's teleological scheme: "Nor is what we live from a 'means of life,' as the pen is a means with respect to the letter it permits us to write—nor a goal of life, as communication is the goal of the letter. The things we live from are not tools, nor even implements, in the Heideggerian sense of the term. Their existence is not exhausted by the utilitarian schematism that delineates them as having the existence of hammers, needles, or machines. They are always in a certain measure—and even the hammers, needles, and machines are objects of enjoyment, presenting themselves to 'taste,' already adorned, embellished. Moreover, whereas the recourse to the instrument implies finality and indicates a dependence with regard to the other, living from (...) delineates independence itself, the independence of enjoyment and of its happiness, which is the original pattern of all independence" (Levinas 1979, p. 110). "To enjoy without utility, in pure loss, gratuitously, without referring to anything, in pure expenditure (...)" (Levinas 1979, p. 133). Again: "What seems to have escaped Heidegger (...) is that prior to being a system of tools, the world is an ensemble of nourishments. (...) The uttermost finality of eating is contained in food. When one smells a flower, it is the smell that limits the finality of the act. To stroll is to enjoy the fresh air, not for health but for the air" (Levinas 1987, p. 63).

this mystery is through an ethical concern with the death of the other, or with the other as potentially dying.

> Death (...) is only *present* in the other; and only through him, it urges me back to my very essence: responsibility. (Levinas 1979, p. 179. Original emphasis)

What weighs, in a meaningful way, on the subject's being is the latent death of the other. The relation to death is not understood as a solitary affirmation of life against its negation (Jonas), but as an ethical call, coming from the radical exteriority of the other. As we have seen previously in Section 3, Levinas understands the very essence of subjectivity as responsibility—i.e., as being called on to respond. Ethical responsibility is undetachable from the social encounter, understood as contact with otherness, for only in this encounter does the subject face the radical mystery of death. Only the encounter with a potentially dying being could trigger the ethical switch.

In the revelation of the face, the free, spontaneous egoic enjoyment of the subject is exposed, contested in its autonomy, called to be given, and sacrificed for the other. As we have seen in the previous section, this embodied exposure of egoic enjoyment to the dyingness of the other is the genuine significance of ethics. In Levinas, if the subject is to be "concerned," then her "concern" is about the death of the other. At the level of primordial ethical experience, what is precarious and vulnerable is not the life of the subject but the life of the other.

The life/death tension spans the asymmetry between the subject and the other. The notion of life is used mainly to describe the relation of the subject with her environment, that is, nourishment and enjoyment (with expressions like *living from...*, *happiness*, *love of life*), but the notion of death and the idea of dying are mainly attached to the other. Only in the precariousness of the other can the mystery of death be faced. In Levinas, there is no teleological articulation between the life of the subject and her death. There is an ethical relation between, on the one hand, the life of the subject described as egoic enjoyment, and, on the other hand, the death of the other as calling for care. Just as with sense-making, value emerges in the tension between life and death, but here, this tension crosses sociality and crosses the distance between oneself and the other.

The embodied and subjective alternative that Levinas is drawing our attention to is not the existentialist one between *being or not being*, but the ethical one between *egoism and altruism*.

6 Conclusion

In this paper, we argued that the enactive approach to ethics, as presented in the work of Colombetti and Torrance (2009), would benefit from opening a dialogue with the phenomenology of Levinas. As a way of motivating such a dialogue, we started by identifying in Colombetti and Torrance's work four main questions or gaps for which Levinas' philosophy could offer a valuable complement. The questions had to do, on the one hand, with the nature and fundamental meaning of ethics itself, and on the other, with the specific roles that sociality, affectivity, and embodiment play in making possible the ethical experience. Levinas' phenomenology showed us, first, that the deep

nature and fundamental meaning of ethics lies in the *I losing her primacy for the other*, where the I is called to respond, to give and to sacrifice for the other. Second, by implication, it showed us that without sociality the ethical experience seems to be impossible, for it is only in sociality that the I has the chance to encounter the otherness of the other. Third, it showed us that the social encounter with the other, if it is to be experienced as a call to give and to sacrifice, that is, as an ethical call, must presuppose an affective dimension of sensibility (i.e., egoic enjoyment), for it is only for an enjoying ego that the call to respond can be felt as a call to sacrifice. And fourth, Levinas' phenomenology led us to see that said affective experience presupposes, ultimately, a living body, for it is only in beings that exist in consumption (e.g., beings that eat and breath), that the very possibility of giving or losing something finds a real, concrete and material basis. In this way, Levinas provided us with a phenomenological characterisation of the nature of ethics and shed light on the specific roles that sociality, affectivity and embodiment play in the ethical experience, revealing each of these elements as a necessary condition for ethics.

We also called attention to the challenge that would represent for enactivism the attempt to a more complete integration of Levinasian ethics. In particular, we suggested that to fully embrace Levinas' message, the meaningful articulation between life and death, which enactivism characteristically assumes in an existentialist way -that is, as a concern life devotes to the possibility of its own termination- would need to be spanned across sociality. For, when ethics matters, teaches Levinas, what gives meaning to the subject's life is the mortality of the other.

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