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In this paper, I will examine relations between Levinas' philosophy and enactivism. At first glance, Levinas and enactivism have little in common. In fact, Levinas is well-known for his critique of ontology as well as his critique of naturalistic ethics,¹ while, generally speaking, enactivism explicitly defends a naturalistic-ontological model of cognition.² For Levinas, the primary relation is the encounter with the other, that is, an absolute otherness that cannot be explained in terms of a theoretical model of being, in the sense of a naturalistic ontology that outlines the nature of things. Conversely, for enactivism, embodied lived existence finds its origins in natural interactions with the physical world that run into an organism's biological functions (e.g. autopoiesis). Moreover, there exists little secondary literature that connects enactivism with Levinas.³

Yet, I will argue that there is nonetheless a mutual *complementarity* between Levinas and enactivism, in the sense that they can mutually correct each other to a certain extent, even if there is by no means any *compatibility*. In order to make my case, I will focus on Di Paolo, Cuffari and De Jaegher's version of enactivism, in particular on their concept of participatory sensemaking in relation to their notion of linguistic bodies, according to which human relations with others are naturally caring and cooperative relations through language.⁴ According to this idea, ethical relations originate naturally from interactions with others. Levinas, in contrast, thinks of relations with others in terms of an intrinsic asymmetry and passivity, and therefore relations of cooperation, for him, fit into the category of ontology.⁵ Hence, Levinas and enactivism defend two incompatible positions, a naturalistic understanding of ethics for enactivism and a defense, for Levinas, of an ethics exceeding our natural tendency toward participation.

My claim is that this incompatibility does not necessarily lead to an exclusion in the sense that both Levinas and enactivism are important for

understanding ethics and justice. In order to make this point, I will argue in the first part of this paper that enactivists point to the significance of defining cooperation and intersubjectivity for understanding ethical relations by introducing the notion of participatory sensemaking. Participatory sensemaking means that we naturally cooperate through language and that we thus develop a spontaneous ethical know-how (e.g. care through sympathy). What makes ethical participation understood in this sense valuable is precisely the difference between the subjects involved in the participation. Not only is participation only possible by combining different efforts and perspectives, but participation is only ethically valuable if one party can give something to another who needs it, as in care for example.

Nonetheless, Levinas offers a correction to enactivism by demonstrating that there is an ethically meaningful *otherness* in relations with other human beings, which differs from this notion of *difference* implied in the concept of participatory sensemaking. We are incapable of experiencing another's experiences and in that sense another is absolutely other. Yet, this brings with it a difficult responsibility that exceeds ethical know-how or participation. We cannot take the place of another suffering that we ethically care for. I will argue that Levinas thus highlights the difficulty of ethical relations and points out that ethics requires a responsibility that exceeds the capability of participation. Thus, Levinas criticizes participation in that it implies an equal distribution of tasks and rights, which ends the asymmetry that responsibility calls for (see his notions of the third and justice).

In the second part of this article, I will then argue that even though Levinas and enactivism take radically different positions, they do not necessarily exclude each other. More exactly, Levinas and enactivism share a similar concept of subjectivity, at least as far as *Totality and Infinity* is concerned, which is inspired by the phenomenological idea that lived existence is embodied and embedded in a natural environment. For enactivism, subjectivity implies natural interactions with the physical environment as in nourishing for example, and for Levinas, subjectivity results from natural interactions with the physical world as well, through enjoyment, dwelling, reason and other natural and cultural activities.

In the final part of this article, I will argue that combining Levinas and enactivism, based on their shared concept of subjectivity, offers an answer to a problem scholars find in Levinas' thought on justice.⁶ For Levinas, justice implies a third party and a reduction of otherness to a justice system. Yet, simultaneously the relation with the other is a condition of justice for Levinas. There is thus an ambiguity in Levinas' thought on justice and enactivism offers a way out in that allows thinking of justice as based on participatory sense making, a naturally and culturally embedded form of social cooperation. Combining enactivism with Levinas then enables making distinctions between several levels of justice: social justice, a social construction and justice for others. If one accepts that Levinas and enactivism

have similar concepts of subjectivity, I will then redefine the ethical dimension of dwelling in terms of natural cooperation, which Levinas overlooks. Levinas finds himself confronted with an ambiguity while thinking justice because justice is itself ambiguous, that is, it finds its meaning in opposite poles: mutual cooperation and responsibility for the other.

Otherness and Participation

Enactivism is a significantly growing field in philosophy of mind, as well as in cognitive science. It finds its origin in Varela, Thompson's and Rosch's *The Embodied Mind*, and defines cognition, generally speaking, in terms of a natural relation between an organism and its environment.⁷ Several of the early versions of enactivism adopt the biological concept of autopoiesis, according to which an organism is a system (consisting itself of a series of subsystems) that is capable of maintaining and reproducing itself within its natural environment.⁸ For enactivists, autopoiesis, which for example occurs in the cell cycle, is part of a human organism's larger evolutionary effort to maintain and reproduce itself by interacting in certain ways with the natural environment (e.g. nourishing, finding shelter, keeping warm, etc.). Cognition, understood in the sense of the gathering of information through thoughts, experience and the senses, is then an integrated part of these interactions with the environment.

In recent years, enactivists have been focusing on the social and normative aspects of cognition while introducing the notion of *participatory sense-making*.⁹ Participatory sensemaking means that humans are naturally cooperative insofar that they tend to participate with each other to find solutions to problems in their surroundings. In other words, in our relations with the surrounding environment, there exist different kinds of social interaction processes that run into the core of our self-constitution and self-affection, to the extent that social interactions change how we perceive, think and act. These relations are not just purely natural but intrinsically contain language and loop into culture. It is easy to see that this is the case, for instance, when thinking of a typical conversation between two persons. Talking to another person often changes our point of view or makes us look at things differently.

The notion of participatory sensemaking is attractive. Di Paolo, Cuffari and De Jaegher make a convincing argument that ethical relations naturally flow out of social relations.¹⁰ Because social relations are intrinsically linguistic relations, these also are naturally ethically significant. That is to say, by interacting and talking with others we develop a certain "ethical know-how," for example, how to sympathize with others or what equality and justice means.¹¹ Thus, we are what they define as *linguistic bodies* in that we naturally communicate and consequently have a potential of acting ethically.

By developing the idea of participatory sensemaking, enactivists thus explain in an elegant way how ethical questions turn up in a worldly and practical manner. Rather than developing a theoretically abstract ethical theory or assuming the existence of universal ethical norms, Di Paolo and colleagues demonstrate that in our daily lives we naturally face ethical situations (others that need care) and rely on shared knowledge about how to address these situations. And this is a sound idea. Within communities that share languages there do exist certain values and norms that have ethical meaning. This is not to claim that social values or norms are naturally always 'good' or cannot be corrupt. Ethical know-how is not free from "imperfection and ambiguity."¹²

More exactly, linguistic bodies are vulnerable bodies. Specific examples of vulnerabilities are "systematic impairments of linguistic becoming (isolation, neurological conditions)," but also "exclusion, impairments to participation, lack of recognition, not being skillful in a foreign language or the language of a subcommunity, neurophysiological impairments, mental disorders, neurodegenerative diseases, trauma."¹³ Obviously, communication can fail. On the one hand, humans are vulnerable and therefore demand particular ethical care or attention. On the other hand, ethical know-how is also itself fallible. We can make mistakes in caring for others or can be incapable of doing enough (such as misinterpretation in sympathy or not giving enough space to another).

Yet, the idea of participatory sensemaking is also problematic, so I will assert, in that it runs the risk of downplaying the role of otherness in ethical relations. By this I do not mean that the idea does not allow for others. Clearly, the idea that linguistic bodies are vulnerable bodies reflects to a certain extent a notion of otherness in the sense of difference. The examples above reflect the differences of others who do not have the same capacities as us. Not only is the essence of participation combining different capacities, such as efforts or point of views. What is more, vulnerable parties within participatory sensemaking relations are impaired in a certain way, and therefore ethical action, such as care, is required from the other parties. The ethical significance of the concept of participatory sensemaking thus results from the fact that participation includes participation between different parties, that is, between capable selves and impaired others (and vice versa).

Nonetheless, as Levinas demonstrates, otherness is significant in another sense than what is described above. For Levinas, otherness signifies the "transcendence" of the other or an alterity, "which is infinitely distant from my own reality."¹⁴ This means that the otherness of another, which manifests itself in face-to-face relations with other humans, cannot be defined by reference to oneself, for example as another who is, unlike me, impaired by speaking or of participatory sensemaking in some other way. Levinas explicitly states that otherness is *not* the otherness of a "patient who suffers" or of a "poor man who longs for wealth," in the sense that otherness in these

cases refers to what it negates: well-being and wealth.¹⁵ Otherness in face-to-face relations refers to that which one does not have or cannot understand. This otherness is 'behind' the face. It is that which one cannot understand about the other or anticipate in any ethical know-how, not because of failed communication, but because it cannot be communicated.

While enactivists focus on explaining cognition and ethical know-how as a natural interaction with the environment, Levinas argues in a very different way that "responsibility for the other" comes first.¹⁶ There exist several different interpretations on how to understand this responsibility, for example whether it is a sensibility to transcendence or a vulnerability toward other human beings, which already have been discussed extensively.¹⁷ I will therefore not go into too much detail of these discussions here. Yet, in order to make my comparison with enactivism, I will focus on Levinas' assertion that in face-to-face relations we are called to responsibility in the sense that we are sensible to another's otherness, which we cannot simply anticipate.¹⁸

Levinas' notion of otherness cannot be accounted for in an enactive understanding of participatory sensemaking, because participatory sensemaking expresses the idea that participation and communication are either possible or impaired, completely or to a certain extent. Consequently, the idea of participatory sensemaking downplays, to a certain extent, the significance of otherness for ethics. Levinas' demonstrates that a reference to absolute otherness is significant for ethics. Such a reference is significant in that others for whom we are responsible are human beings that we cannot fully grasp or they are more the counter poles of our action and communication.

What others feel, experience or think is sometimes impossible to communicate or unthinkable, not because communication is impaired, but since one cannot enter the mind of another. From a practical perspective, it is of course good to apply our ethical know-how. Yet, from an ethical perspective, this is not all there is to it. That is to say, there is not just an ethical demand in the know-how itself (in the practical wisdom how to care for another's well-being), nor in the vulnerability of the other (the absence of another's well-being), but also in another's otherness: We are responsible for others who are in a sense unknowable, unpredictable and non-understandable. What makes this particularly ethically significant and challenging is the impossibility and difficulty of the burden of this responsibility. For example, we cannot suffer the pain of another in his or her place, and that is what makes caring for another so difficult as an ethical task in situations when another is in great pain.

To see more clearly why this is ethically important, consider the following case of prosthetic treatment in health care. Medical studies report that patients who undergo prosthetic treatment often face a constant struggle in using and maintaining their prostheses, such as limb prostheses.¹⁹ There

are several reasons why this is the case. One of the contributing factors is that the patients in question are often elderly persons. And this contrasts with how the media often depicts prosthetic use, since the emphasis is often on young healthy people such as Paralympic athletes. Not that highlighting the latter category is bad in itself, yet what is often forgotten is the need of appropriate medical treatment of patients using a prosthesis, on the contrary, requires setting realistic goals and communicating well.

There are several different points of view one can take to look at these cases. From the perspective of the idea of participatory sensemaking, patients undergoing prosthetic treatment are of course vulnerable human beings. And communication with these patients may be difficult, in a certain sense impaired, since we do not know what it feels like to be in their position. Yet, from a Levinasian perspective, an intrinsic vulnerability or fragility resides in the relation between the patients and health care professionals, that is, a vulnerability that does not completely coincide with the patient's impairment, but a fragility that is proper to the relation itself. One cannot gain access to the experiences of the patient or to his or her lived existence. In that sense, the patient is absolutely other. One has no access to this otherness. And that is what makes responsibility for the patient so difficult: one is exposed to another's vulnerability without the possibility of overcoming it completely, despite all of the expertise and ethical know-how one can possibly have.

Levinas demonstrates that defining responsibility for another in terms of ethical know-how is *insufficient*. This does not mean that this know-how is *inefficient*. Of course, the cases mentioned above indicate how important efficient medical and ethical know-how are in order to adequately care for patients undergoing prosthetic treatment. Nevertheless, defining ethical relations in terms of know-how is only highlighting one side of the coin. This relation also involves others to whom we can never adequately respond since we cannot take over their experiences and suffering. In other words, Levinas reminds us that ethics is not only, or not even in the first place, a *practical* task but also an *impossible* challenge or "imperative" as he also calls it.²⁰ And this is an important reminder that we are dealing in ethical relations not only with a person who is incapable to a certain extent, a patient that needs to be treated, but with others that have their own singular lived existence, another human being that we cannot simply categorize as a condition or disease, or even vulnerability.

Levinas reminds us, in other words, that ethics starts off, not with participation, but with an impossible task, to which participation can only be an incomplete response. According to Levinas ethics also results from a language relation with the other, but this is not the natural linguistic cooperation enactivists have in mind. He writes, "the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised."²¹ Ethics thus commences in a face-to-face relation with another, when another speaks, but by speaking questions one's knowledge, one's (ethical) know-

how. Ethics means that we are responsible not only for vulnerable people or in natural cooperation, but also for others we cannot in any way grasp.

Levinas designates the face-to-face relation with his well-known expression “you shall not commit murder.”²² Language, for Levinas, should thus be understood in the face-to-face relation not in the first place as communication, but as a call to “responsibility.”²³ When we encounter another face-to-face, this is not just, or not necessarily, an invitation for communication, but the realization that the other we encounter is a human being capable of speaking. And this realization disrupts the spontaneity of one’s relation with the natural world.²⁴ One is not alone here to enjoy and to nourish oneself. There are others who need nourishment, possibly suffer, or whose food one is possibly consuming. In this sense, language leads to ethics for Levinas, to a call to responsibility.

Yet, one might argue at this point that the notion of participatory sensemaking is basically expressing a similar thought as Levinas’ face-to-face, namely, that language shows the vulnerability of others that demand our attention and thus call us to responsibility. However, the difference between enactivism and Levinas is also apparent in relations with others that exercise violence. Violence is also in a sense a form of vulnerability or an incapacity of participation, but it is not just failed participation. Violence calls, perhaps more urgently than any other relation, to our responsibility. A psychopathic murderer, for example, is not just someone we can ignore or even see as a case of failed communication and participation (due to a lack of empathy). Such people create deep injustices and demand a difficult responsibility, as we need to respond to their actions in a way to ensure he or she will do no harm, which implies more than just care or practical wisdom, or even a justice system (even though all of these things are also required). It requires a response that is always necessarily insufficient, because we fail to understand the murderer’s action and cannot undo them. Yet, we need to respond to them.

Levinas shows that responsibility for others has an intrinsic impossibility to it. We cannot, for example, take responsibility for a psychopathic murderer’s actions in the sense that they are another’s actions, not our own. Yet, we are responsible for them in another sense, namely in that they demand a response. We will need to deal with them and live with them, even if there is a prospect that justice cannot completely be achieved. Levinas thus demonstrates, in contrast to enactivism, that it is overly simplistic to define ethical relations in terms of participation and fallible or failed participation. Participation can be part of a response to others, yet the ethical demand – its significance and its seriousness – is not located in participation itself (or at least not entirely), but in the call for responsibility of the other.²⁵

A Holistic Approach to Subjectivity and Nature

Even though the idea of participatory sensemaking downplays the significance of otherness for ethics, I will demonstrate in this section that Levinas' philosophy is complementary with the core ideas of enactivism. This complementarity can be shown more exactly by investigating *Totality and Infinity*, in which Levinas defends a concept of subjectivity according to which we gain knowledge from the world by spontaneously interacting with our natural environment.²⁶ This concept of subjectivity is close to how enactivists understand subjectivity in the sense of the capability of gaining knowledge through interactions with the environment.

Certainly, Levinas' philosophy as a whole is without doubt very different from enactivism. And this is particularly the case for Levinas' later work, *Otherwise than Being*, which is, as its title indicates, a study that challenges traditional versions of ontology, understood as ontological naturalism, any theory that explains *being*, existence, in terms of natural phenomena, relations and principles.²⁷ Enactivism, on the other hand, has a specific outlook on the nature of being, which enactivists understand in terms of natural and organic processes. In fact, while there exist of course different varieties of enactivism, as is known, enactivists generally speaking defend some kind of naturalism.²⁸ Gallagher explains that enactivism is a "philosophy of nature," which means that it consists in a certain investigation of the "nature of the mind and the brain" and of "nature itself."²⁹

The term *enactivism* thus covers various theories of cognition and understands the process of gaining knowledge in close relation to nature. In other words, enactivism understands the mind as essentially embodied and embedded in its natural environment. And it is this kind of naturalistic theory of knowledge that Levinas would question, that is, at least as far as otherness is concerned. According to him, otherness should not be explained as part of this natural relation with the environment.

In *Otherwise than Being* we thus find several expressions questioning the idea that ethics can be naturalized. For example, Levinas writes that the "the human subject ... is not an avatar of nature."³⁰ He states, moreover, that the other who affects the subject does not do so by "by resemblance or common nature."³¹ He also calls "psychological naturalism" a "rhetoric" that is forgetful of what is "Good."³² In other words, Levinas is clear in *Otherwise than Being* that responsibility should not be explained in terms of a naturalistic psychology, that is, a theory of consciousness or cognition that contains a certain logic of what it would mean to be ethical as a subject. Yet, at the same time Levinas notes that subjectivity is not "against" nature.³³ Indeed, for Levinas, responsibility begins "on the hither side of the "state of nature," yet "from which nature itself arises."³⁴ This means that even though ethics should not be naturalized, ethics can itself be meaningful for natural relations. As explained above, sensibility for otherness points at the purpose of ethics, its

difficulty, yet this does not imply that natural interactions are without any meaning, even given that ethics cannot completely be defined in naturalistic terms.

Furthermore, enactivism generally does not defend a hard version of naturalism, but a naturalism that can connect to Levinas' thoughts on nature. More exactly, understanding cognition the way enactivism does, as a natural process of acquiring knowledge through interactions with the environment, does not imply in any way defending a classical ontological naturalism. If one understands ontology in this sense, as Levinas also does, as a (philosophical) theory that explains being in a system or "thematization" of representations (ideas, thoughts, images) of how being actually is, then enactivism cannot be a defense of ontological naturalism.³⁵ In fact, enactivism was originally developed as a critique of representationalism or any cognitive theory that explains cognition in terms of functions that represent the world in ways it actually is. In *The Embodied Mind*, Varela and colleagues present their project as an examination of "lived human experience," instead of being founded on "the representation of a world that is independent of our perceptual and cognitive capacities."³⁶ They are thus close to a phenomenological conception of consciousness, which is based on concrete lived experience from the perspective of a self.

In a general fashion, there is thus an overlap between Levinas' philosophy and enactivism, in that both oppose representationalism. Furthermore, it would be wrong to simply assert that Levinas is against naturalism or a defender of a certain kind of supernaturalism while emphasizing the significance of transcendence in the sense of what lies 'behind' the face. In fact, scholars have argued that Levinas himself favors a certain kind of naturalism. Fiona Ellis, for example, argues that Levinas defends a form of expansive naturalism.³⁷ This means that, according to Ellis, Levinas holds that nature provides a condition of morality. Yet, ethics involves transcendence as well, and ethics cannot therefore be reduced to a purely natural relationship or manifestation. Values come into this world, into a natural world through relations with others. Yet, there is an egoistic dimension of nature that is nonhuman as well, that is, nature has a brutal or at least ignorant side to it. In a similar way Gallagher contends that enactivism is a kind of holistic naturalism or a philosophy of nature in the sense that it not only builds on empirical research and empirical science, but also on other traditions or relations that transcend empirical relations.³⁸

The extent to which nature has meaning for Levinas – and how this relates to enactivism – is clearly apparent in *Totality and Infinity*. In the second part of *TI*, "Interiority and Economy," Levinas defines what he understands as "I," a concept of subjectivity that designates a separated being or egoistic subject in the sense that this subject's relation with nature is 'carefree.'³⁹ This relation starts with enjoyment.⁴⁰ As Levinas states, enjoyment is a carefree "living from," in the sense that we "live from "good soup," air, light,

spectacles, work, ideas, sleep, etc.”⁴¹ Yet he immediately adds: “These are not objects of representation.”⁴² In other words, enjoyment as understood in this sense means not thinking about others or even about the object we are enjoying, since we spontaneously engage in a relation with the object in such a way that we gain pleasure from it. Enjoying good soup does not require a reflection on the meaning of soup.

And this is a very ‘enactivist way’ of putting things. Certainly, according to the idea of participatory sensemaking, for enactivists *care* is also a natural relation.⁴³ Yet, for enactivism we spontaneously engage in relations with our environment, in order to live from and within the elements that constitute this environment. This way of living from the environment does not necessarily involve representations in the sense of higher-order mental content (believes, ideas, intentions).

Levinas is critical in particular of Husserl’s conception of phenomenology as a theory of representations. Levinas’ critique of Husserl is especially apparent in his later works. Yet already in *Totality and Infinity*, he states that Husserl’s phenomenology amounts to the “to the affirmation ... that the object of consciousness, while distinct from consciousness, is, as it were, a product of consciousness, being a ‘meaning’.”⁴⁴ In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas states in a similarly critical voice: “The meaningful [for Husserl] refers to a cognitive subjectivity and to the mathematical configuration of logical structures.”⁴⁵ As both quotes attest, Levinas’ questions Husserl’s idea that the essence of consciousness is representational in the sense that the task of phenomenology would be to define the logical essences of experiences.

Similarly, enactivism questions that the main task of cognitive theory would be to pinpoint the representational content of higher-level representations, such as thoughts and ideas, of which he obviously does not deny the existence. Enactivism nevertheless questions the idea that cognition should be explained *primarily* in terms of representations that in a certain logical way represent the world. Enactivists thus have a similar critique of representationalism.⁴⁶ Representations are already reflective, a product of consciousness, as Levinas puts it. By arguing that consciousness builds on enjoyment, not primarily on representations, Levinas thus defends an enactivist-like thesis, that is, the thesis that cognition starts with a spontaneous interaction with the natural environment on which higher-order cognitive relations build.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas continues his analysis of subjectivity with an analysis of nourishment.⁴⁷ This concept is similar to an enactivist account of autopoiesis in that Levinas understands it as a making “interior,” within one’s body, of “exteriority,” the surrounding world, in order to live from this exteriority.⁴⁸ Levinas’s notion of nourishment reflects the idea of autopoiesis the way enactivists understand it. Both concepts define the process of an

embodied subject surviving and living from its natural environment. Certainly, autopoiesis is in the first place a biological concept and Levinas is not a biologist, nor does his work draw on biological research. Yet, the enactivist interpretation of autopoiesis does not only or even primarily apply to cellular functions, as is the biological application, but to a larger notion of subjectivity that is inspired by phenomenology, as is Levinas'.

My point is of course not to claim that the differences in argument, style and scientific context between enactivism and Levinas' work are irrelevant. They certainly are not. Yet, enactivism and Levinas' work have their point of departure in common, which is a concept of embodied subjectivity that is closer to Merleau-Ponty than to the early Husserl. Levinas identifies the existence of the "I" as economical in the ontological sense as the self's "economy of being," which has characteristics of a naturalism.⁴⁹

Yet, Levinas' point is of course, as I argued in the previous section of this paper, that ethics should not simply be naturalized and transcends the "I." Nonetheless, given that the ethical relation transcends subjectivity in *Totality and Infinity*, the relation between subject and the natural environment, which Levinas calls the "elemental," is also the condition for the relation with the other.⁵⁰ His notion of "dwelling" demonstrates this: "To dwell ... is a recollection, a coming to oneself, as in a land of refuge, which answers to a hospitality, and expectancy, a human welcome."⁵¹ In other words, when we have a roof over our heads, are sufficiently nourished and capable of enjoying, we are capable of welcoming others in our homes. To dwell, as understood in this sense, is to promote hospitality and thus our natural relations with our environment condition, even if indirectly, ethical relations with others. Moreover, it is only within this environment that we can meet others face-to-face.

Theories of enactivism also develop an understanding of natural relations being a condition for ethics, that is, they argue that ethical relations naturally emerge out of interactions with our environment. These relations are naturally *part* of participatory sensemaking. Levinas, clearly, takes a different approach to ethics, as I showed above. Although he understands natural relations with the environment as a basis for welcoming others, ethical relations with others should not be understood in terms of or as part of these natural relations, that is, as enjoyment, nourishment or dwelling or any other natural relation. Nonetheless, natural relations precondition social relations. On this Levinas and enactivists would agree. Ethical relations moreover give meaning to natural relations. In this enactivism and Levinas share the same view as well. Although enactivism and Levinas thus contradict each other (for enactivism natural relation are ethical and for Levinas not), they complement each other if we accept that both demonstrate an important side of ethics. That is to say, we can state that enactivism shows pre-ethical social interactions, whereas Levinas demonstrates the difficulty of ethical relations. Both of these

relations build on a notion of subjectivity, in the sense of embodied lived existence that enactivism and Levinas share.

Levinas' ethics can therefore connect to enactivism, be it as a correction of enactivism, if we take a concept of subjectivity as part of an expansive or holistic naturalism to be the point of departure of cognition to which ethics adds meaning. Given that both Levinas and enactivism share a similar concept of subjectivity, they share the idea that embodied subjectivity is a condition of ethics. Levinas embraces the idea, at least in *Totality and Infinity*, that natural relations with our environment are pivotal for the functioning of cognition. Levinas and enactivism furthermore share the idea that ethical relations with others change our interactions with nature. These relations make interactions with nature more valuable, in the sense that we can offer something to others, for example food or shelter. Levinas then in turn offers a correction to enactivism, or can complement it, in that he shows, as I argued in the previous part, that ethical relations transcend natural relation in the sense that responsibility for others requires more than natural participation. It requires a sensibility for otherness which cannot simply be understood in terms of natural participation or failed natural participation, because it goes beyond that which any kind of participation could possibly achieve.

Levinas' ethics thus connects to enactivism's naturalistic holism. What ties together both positions is a shared concept of subjectivity based on interactions of dwelling in the environment in order to live from and live within it. Levinas and enactivism share this kind of basic notion of subjectivity because they both draw on the phenomenological idea of lived existence to develop a notion of subjectivity. My point is not to make of Levinas an enactivist. That would require naturalizing the face-to-face relation with the other, which would go against Levinas' main message about otherness. Yet, my point is that both of these very different perspective on ethics are both valuable and they are complementary if one accepts a naturalistic conception of cognition, as Levinas himself does not appear to rule out. However, as I will argue in the next section, connecting Levinas to enactivism also implies correcting Levinas' notion of dwelling and re-defining its ethical dimensions.

Dwelling is a Condition of Justice

Does enactivism, in turn, add something to Levinas' work? If we agree with Levinas that ethics should not simply be naturalized, as I argued above, enactivism can nevertheless provide an answer to a problem several Levinas scholars find in Levinas' work.⁵² More exactly, the problem is that there seems to be a contradiction in Levinas' work. On the one hand, he thinks of the relation with the other as a condition for justice, and yet, on the other hand justice implies action and organization (of laws, rights, bills, etc.), which is again a reduction of otherness to an essence. Enactivism provides an answer

to this problem by showing that the condition of justice lies in natural interactions of a subject with the environment (participatory sensemaking), rather than in the relation with the other, even though this relation is a call for responsibility that transcends naturalism. Enactivism in confrontation with Levinas thus offers the suggestion, as I will show in this part, that we should make a distinction between natural cooperation that brings an ethical dimension to relations of dwelling.

Several Levinas scholars have been arguing that there is an ambiguity in Levinas' approach to justice. Arthur Cools, for example, points to what he understands as an "insurmountable paradox" in Levinas' thought.⁵³ This paradox is the following. On the one hand, Levinas thinks of responsibility for the other, as I argued, as a relation that is opposite to ontology or any essence of being. Yet, on the other hand, this responsibility is a condition for justice for Levinas in that it is a call for the good. Hence, Levinas contests traditional ways of thinking of justice in terms of norms and legal principles that are defined by a community or state. Yet, the consequence of this is that "the moral norms within society and the ethical meaning of the responsibility for this singular other are opposed to each other, such that it is not possible to be faithful to both at the same time."⁵⁴ Moreover, it is hard to see how responsibility for the other can be translated into a concrete commitment to a just society or even a concrete action of caring for another, since these require following norms as well as a certain logic, which are ontological features. They connect to higher-level cognitive capabilities, to put it in enactivist terminology.

Indeed, in *Totality and Infinity* Levinas states that "language" in face-to-face relations with the other is "justice" and that the "face qua face opens humanity," meaning that justice should not be understood as dictated by a community or state but is the sensibility for otherness Levinas describes as the face-to-face.⁵⁵ However, at the same time justice understood in the sense of equality in a society requires a "third part" and thus a disruption of the face-to-face.⁵⁶ According to Cools, Levinas even speaks of a "betrayal" of the ethical relation, when it comes to deliberation and comparison.⁵⁷ The problem is thus that Levinas is unclear how justice could be anything else than a sensibility to otherness, or how it could even relate to what seems to be one its basic principles: equality.

Enactivism's idea of participatory sensemaking offers a way out of this paradox. Certainly, the idea of participatory sensemaking does not contain an explicitly elaborated concept of justice, that is, it focusses on natural social interaction, not on understanding social justice within the context of a legal system. Yet, the way in which linguistic bodies are entangled helps understanding how a demand for justice emerges out of natural social interactions. To see this more clearly, consider the notion of *microaggressions*, a sociological concept that Di Paolo and colleagues have adopted.⁵⁸ Microaggressions was a term first used to designate racial discrimination in

the U.S. in situations where white persons discriminate (a) black person(s) in small interpersonal exchanges that are very subtle but also carry an underlying power dynamic. Since its introduction the term microaggressions has been broadened beyond black-white relations, indicating forms of interpersonal exchanges of communicative behavior of marginalization and discrimination on a communal level. An example is “the use of the word *illegals* to refer to people in the US seen as Latino/a.”⁵⁹ Microaggressions demonstrate in a certain way how social injustice works. Linguistic bodies are not isolated entities, but entangled in networks of communication, in which on both a conscious and unconscious level inequality can emerge. This inequality is itself a demand for justice in that it does harm to marginalized groups.

This idea of social justice, understood in the sense of a demand for equality caused by an unbalanced social relation that causes harm to minorities, is different from how Levinas understands justice. At first glance, it might seem that Levinas has a similar understanding of justice, that is, it seems that the otherness of individuals who are discriminated calls for justice. In a certain sense this is also true: minorities consist of others that call for a sensibility to otherness, which is ignored or negated by behavior like microaggressions. In other words, microaggressions have their own logic (or lack of it) that assimilates the other to the totality of a dominating subject and violent rhetoric. Yet, this is not all that is happening in cases of microaggressions. First of all, to speak of another in terms of a minority is already to categorize the other in a political realm of power relations. In the case of discrimination, the power interaction itself calls for justice, that is, the act of aggression that creates inequality, not the otherness of the victim, calls for doing social justice, for setting things right. In these cases, inequality calls for a social response and action: restoration of justice, for example, by calling out racist discourse. The confrontation with the *interaction* that causes discrimination feels as unjust, not the sensibility that we confront an unsurmountable otherness.

Social justice as described above is similar to what Paul Ricoeur understands as a “sense of justice,” which is the feeling of injustice we experience when being confronted with the suffering or discrimination of another: “Unjust! What injustice!”⁶⁰ It is this kind of feeling that we experience, possibly in different degrees of intensity, also when being confronted with microaggressions. For example, when being confronted with racist discourse we cannot help but experiencing a feeling of injustice. This experience is obviously not guaranteed, as often people fail to identify with it, as is also the case for microaggressors. Yet, the fact that ignorance lies at the basis of microaggressions proves that sensibility to inequality and social action – which is different from sensibility to otherness – lies at the basis of social justice.

Another way of explaining this is by looking at Gallagher's comparison between Levinas and enactivism.⁶¹ Gallagher uses the enactivist concept of enactive coupling in order to naturalize Levinas' face-to-face relations. Enactive coupling refers to the way how relations work between co-dependent systems. These relations are dynamic processes in which that what happens in one system is partly constituted by the other and vice versa. What Gallagher defends, when applying the notion of enactive coupling to explain face-to-face relations, is an explanation of face perception that is not just the perception of the physical features of a (human) face. The face moreover allows an emotional interaction between individuals. The face is thus not an isolated entity here, but embodied (posture, gesture, movement) and embedded in a social context (background of the person). How one person feels is co-dependent on how others feel. This dynamic process explains how microaggressions work. A dominant social background can become a feeder of racist discourse between two persons in a conversation for example. Yet, the face-to-face also allows for sympathy with victims and feelings of injustice, which lead the way to social justice.

Yet, my intention in this paper is not to naturalize the face-to-face relation. Doing so would break apart again the connection between enactivism and Levinas that I have been defending so far, since the other would then be reduced to a natural interaction. Rather, I am arguing that, apart from the face-to-face, there is a call for justice. Part of dwelling, the interactions with the world that allow us to live within this world, is politics in the sense of the influence of power relations on our intersubjective interactions. However, within our dwelling the aggressions of these relations themselves call for social justice, for participatory sensemaking to put it in enactivist terms.

Certainly, social justice is more than a sense or a feeling of justice. As Ricoeur also explains, justice implies a legal system containing rules and guidelines, without which justice cannot work.⁶² To put it more simply: there can only be justice when there is a society. Levinas is well aware that this is the case. That is why he states that justice implies a third party. Moreover, justice also implies reason and representations, as represented in rules, trials and legal systems. Therefore, it transcends face-to-face relations. Therefore, an enactivist notion of participatory sensemaking does not necessarily contradict Levinas' understanding of justice. For both enactivism and Levinas, justice exists within totality, in connection to natural relations, and made possible by representational language.

Nonetheless, participatory sensemaking offers a correction of Levinas' understanding of dwelling. The idea of participatory sensemaking shows that justice is conditioned by natural interactions with others, by dwelling itself to use Levinas' term. By putting justice radically on the side of reason, of representations, Levinas overlooks the social dimension of nature, which is a condition for justice. Yet, this implies that Levinas' radical distinction between

the face-to-face relation on the one hand (Levinas' notion of responsibility), and, on the other hand, the sphere of totality, that is as part of our dwelling in the world, does not work for understanding justice. It does not work, because justice runs on both levels.

A way out of the paradox Levinas sees himself confronted with is thus to admit that there is a different call for justice on the level of 'dwelling.' This is not the other's call, but a call caused by inequality. In other words, one way of confronting the paradox is by embracing the paradox. Rather than making a radical opposition between justice and ethics, one can state that justice works on different levels. Following enactivism, justice gradually emerges out of natural relations. Yet, this is justice on a practical level, as a cooperation, that ultimately into institutionalized justice. The reason there is an ambiguity between being faithful to this kind of justice and to justice for absolute otherness is because the different meanings of justice contradict each other. Yet, they can complement each other in the sense that our responsibility for the other shows the difficulty of ethical relations in the real world, as I argued in the first part of this paper. We can only do justice to others in this world, but this is in a sense never enough. This is confirming Levinas' point that justice requires the third, but by stressing the natural roots of justice.

In fact, enactivism's idea that we are linguistic bodies shows that sensemaking is not a solitary business, but always the result of different interactions with others. Levinas is correct to point out that a subject is a totality who reduces otherness while spontaneously bathing in a natural environment (e.g. enjoyment). In this sense, as he points out, an ego, a subject aims to maintain oneself (cf. autopoiesis). Nonetheless, to a certain extent Levinas insufficiently thinks the social depth of a subject's relation with the environment. Embodied beings are embedded in their natural and cultural environment and in that sense these environments are co-constitutive for how we act, think and live and ultimately implement justice.

These natural social interactions thus lead to social justice systems through complex linguistic relations, which are a practical demand within communities. Hence, one way out of the paradox Levinas finds himself confronted with is to accept the paradox and that there are different meanings of justice. This means that Levinas is correct. Social justice reduces otherness inevitably since it always implies a distribution and thus a categorization of others in a system. There is a practical and social justice on the level of totality. Yet, there is also justice in the sense of ethics, the good, as a sensibility to otherness. Hence, the difficulty of ethics. Yet facing this ambiguity of justice implies finetuning the several meanings justice has, as I am arguing for, and thinking social justice along with enactivism in line with a subject's embodied interactions with the social and cultural environment.

The notion of participatory sensemaking thus further explains why there is an ambiguity when thinking justice. Justice depends on the fallible nature

of human cooperation and therefore a radical distinction between justice for others and social justice cannot hold. Justice is ambiguous because it can only be achieved in a natural world, and therefore it can never be fully achieved, even though humans have an infinite responsibility to achieve justice.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have been arguing that Levinas and enactivism mutually complement each other. By this I mean that Levinas corrects something enactivism misses as a theory, namely, a reference to otherness. And in turn, enactivism corrects something which Levinas' thought insufficiently highlights, namely, the dimension of social justice we find in dwelling in the natural environment.

What conclusion can we draw then from this mutual complementarity? First of all, in their concept of cognition, Levinas and enactivists do not essentially differ. According to enactivism, a subject gains knowledge while naturally and spontaneously interacting with the surrounding environment. According to Levinas in *Totality and Infinity*, a subject gains knowledge through similar interactions. Building on spontaneous experience of the elemental, we gain knowledge by interiorizing the exterior, that is, higher-order representations gradually emerge out of more spontaneous interactions.

Levinas nevertheless points out a significant challenge for an enactivist understanding of ethics and in that sense complements it: how to account for otherness. That is to say, while participatory sensemaking accounts for human vulnerability and difference (participation is not guaranteed and can also fail), vulnerability understood in this sense is defined in reference to a capable subject. Yet, this idea risks to categorize non-participation as a 'failed' or malfunctioning relation, while several passive or asymmetrical relations have ethical meaning, precisely because the other is 'other' and incapable of participation (e.g. care for a terminally ill person). Levinas complements enactivism in that he shows that what is challenging in ethical relations is that which we cannot understand or anticipate in our relations with others, that is, another's otherness.

Finally, enactivism offers an important challenge for Levinas as well: How to conceptualize social justice. I argued that even though ethics poses a bigger challenge than engaging natural participations, we should nonetheless also accept the idea that social justice is a practical and social demand that requires participation and equality. This means that one has to abandon Levinas' idea that a relation with otherness is the only condition of justice. Justice works on several different levels, naturally flows out of human relations and we can only do justice to others in the real world, even though this an imperfect world. Yet, given that Levinas' ethics contributes to a basic

enactivist concept of cognition, we can also use this conception of cognition as a basis for thinking social justice, without losing significant values contained in Levinas' message about otherness. Levinas and enactivism can thus meet half-way, and both add important aspects to ethics.

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Springer, 1991).

² Shaun S. Gallagher, *Enactivist Interventions: Rethinking the Mind*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

³ There exists one article by Shaun Gallagher which I will discuss later in this paper. See Shaun S. Gallagher, "In your face: transcendence in embodied interaction," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 8 (2014): 495. 10.3389/fnhum.2014.00495

⁴ Ezequiel Di Paolo, Elena Cuffari, and Hanne De Jaegher, *Linguistic Bodies: The Continuity Between Life and Language* (Cambridge (MA): MIT Press, 2018) (Kindle e-book edition).

⁵ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*.

⁶ See for example, Arthur Cools, "The Tragic Sense of Levinas' Ethics," *Ethical Perspectives* 21, No. 4 (2014): 55-69; Simon Critchley, "Five Problems in Levinas' View of Politics and the Sketch of a Solution to Them," *Political Theory* 32, No. 2 (2004): 172-85.

⁷ Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991).

⁸ Francisco J. Varela, *Ethical Know-How: Action, Wisdom, and Cognition* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

⁹ Hanne De Jaegher, "How We Affect Each Other: Michel Henry's "pathos-with" and the enactive approach to intersubjectivity," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 21, No. 1-2 (1999): 112-132; Hanne De Jaegher and Ezequiel Di Paolo, "Participatory sense-making: An enactive approach to social cognition," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 6, No. 4 (2007): 485-507; Di Paolo, et. al., *Linguistic Bodies*.

¹⁰ Di Paolo, et. al., *Linguistic Bodies*.

¹¹ Di Paolo, et. al., *Linguistic Bodies*, loc. 6550.

¹² Di Paolo, et. al., *Linguistic Bodies*, loc.6550.

¹³ Di Paolo, et. al., *Linguistic Bodies*, loc. 6518.

¹⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 41.

¹⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 41.

¹⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 9.

¹⁷ Rodolphe Calin, "Le corps de la responsabilité. Sensibilité, corporéité et subjectivité chez Lévinas," *Les études philosophique* 78, No. 3 (2006): 297-316; Cyndie Sautereau, "Subjectivité et Vulnérabilité chez Ricœur et Levinas," *Études Ricœuriennes/ Ricœur Studies* 4, No. 2 (2013): 8-24.

¹⁸ Enactivists have also investigated the notion of responsibility. Jana Van Grunsven in particular examines whether and to what extent persons can fully hold responsibility if their actions build on autopoietic systems, as enactivism contends. Yet, this notion of responsibility is closer to moral psychology debates than to how Levinas describes responsibility. I will therefore not go into further detail of this issue whether enactivism can account for personal responsibility. See Jana van Grunsven, "Enactivism, Second-Person Engagement, and Personal Responsibility," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 17, No. 1 (2018):131-156.

¹⁹ Valentine Gourinat, "La prothèse comme promesse de réparation du corps amputé: du discours à l'expérience," in *L'humain et ses prothèses: savoirs et pratiques du corps transformé*, ed. Cristina Lindenmeyer (Paris: Éditions CNRS, 2019), 155-70 (Kindle e-book edition).

²⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: Essays on Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 151.

²¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 198.

²² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 199.

²³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 200.

²⁴ Calin, *Le corps de la responsabilité*.

²⁵ Hanne De Jaegher makes a similar point in her paper on enactivism and Michel Henry, while arguing that Henry's notion of affection is similar to the notion of participatory sensemaking. Both notions express the idea that selves are deeply affected by others, yet that Henry adds something to enactivism by showing that not all social relations can be completely theorized, as they sometimes remain mysterious. It would lead us to far to bring Henry into the discussion here. However, the point is that Levinas, in a similar way as De Jaegher shows for Henry, adds something to enactivism, namely that not all social relations should be understood in terms of participation. Some of them we cannot theorize, and that is exactly also Levinas' point. See De Jaegher, "How We Affect Each Other."

²⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 109 ff.

²⁷ In fact, one could make a case that Levinas criticizes different kinds of ontology such as Heidegger's ontology of being and time. For an overview of Levinas' critique

of Heidegger's ontology, see the introduction of John E. Drabinski and Eric S. Nelson, *Between Levinas and Heidegger* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2014). Yet, in this paper we will focus on ontological naturalism.

²⁸ For an overview of the different varieties of enactivism, see Dave Ward, David Silverman, and Mario Villalobos, "Introduction: The varieties of enactivism," *Topoi* 36 (2017): 365-375. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-017-9484-6>

²⁹ Gallagher, *Enactivist Interventions*, loc. 604.

³⁰ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 18.

³¹ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 159.

³² Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 18.

³³ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 51.

³⁴ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 84.

³⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 7.

³⁶ Varela, et. al., *The Embodied Mind*, xx.

³⁷ Fiona Ellis, "Levinas on Nature and Naturalism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Levinas*, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

³⁸ Gallagher, *Enactivist Interventions*.

³⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 109 ff.

⁴⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 109.

⁴¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 109.

⁴² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 109.

⁴³ Di Paolo, et. al., *Linguistic Bodies*.

⁴⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 123.

⁴⁵ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 96.

⁴⁶ Daniel D. Hutto and Erik Myin, *Evolving Enactivism: Basic Minds Meet Content* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017).

⁴⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 127 ff.

⁴⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 127.

⁴⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 39.

⁵⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 59.

⁵¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 156.

⁵² See, Cools, "The Tragic Sense;" Critchley, "Five Problems."

⁵³ Cools, "The Tragic Sense," 363.

⁵⁴ Cools, "The Tragic Sense," 363.

⁵⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 213.

⁵⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 213.

⁵⁷ Cools, "The Tragic Sense," 362.

⁵⁸ Di Paolo, et. al., *Linguistic Bodies*, loc. 5579.

⁵⁹ Di Paolo, et. al., *Linguistic Bodies*, loc. 6599

⁶⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 198.

⁶¹ Gallagher, "In your face."

⁶² Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*.