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In recent years, there have been a number of attempts to connect enactivism with the work of Emmanuel Levinas. This essay is such an attempt. Its major theme is the relationship between affectivity and ethics. My touchstones in enactivist thought are Giovanna Colombetti and Steve Torrances' "Emotion and Ethics: an (inter-)enactive account" (2009) and the influential concept of participatory sense-making developed by Hanne De Jaegher and Ezequiel Di Paolo (2007). With respect to Levinas, I deploy major insights from Totality and Infinity and Otherwise than Being. I first show that enactivist thought (thus represented) and Levinas roughly agree on three points: the fundamentality of human affectivity; the ethical significance of affective response to the other; the interpersonal nature of sense-making. I then consider some difficulties with Colombetti and Torrance's conception of interaction-responsibility, which is based on De Jaegher and Di Paolo's formulation of interaction-autonomy, and use Levinas to draw attention to the role of passivity and asymmetry in interaction in a way so far overlooked by enactivist thinkers. Working through a problem case yields insights for both perspectives. I argue, first, that ethics does not arise from interaction but instead should be considered foundational for interaction as such. Second, we must distinguish between a participant and observer perspective on interaction in a way not yet carried out by enactivist thinkers. Third, the method of enactivist research exemplified by Colombetti and Torrance can help make phenomenologically manifest important insights into Levinas' difficult concept of "the third".

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In recent years, there have been a number of attempts to connect enactivism with the thought of Emmanuel Levinas (Dierckxsens, 2020; Gallagher, 2014; Métais & Villalobos, 2020). This essay is such an attempt. The topic of this essay is the relationship between affectivity (emotion in particular) and ethics in both Levinas and enactivism. I begin by explicating some major points developed by Giovanna Colombetti and Steve Torrance (2009) in "Emotion and ethics: An inter-(en)active approach," which involves touching on the concept of participatory sense-making developed by Hanne De Jaegher and Ezequiel Di Paolo (2007). I show that Levinas is roughly consistent with these accounts on three points: he holds a version of the primordial affectivity thesis, according to which our fundamental relationship to the world and to others is essentially affective; he takes ethical significance to be a matter of affective response to the other; and he maintains that we make *sense* of the world together. I then consider some difficulties regarding Colombetti and Torrance's conception of interaction-responsibility, based on De Jaegher and Di Paolo's formulation of interaction-autonomy, and draw attention to the role of passivity and asymmetry in interaction. I conclude that (1) ethics does not arise from interaction but, rather, should be considered foundational for interaction as such, (2) we must distinguish between a participant and observer perspective on interaction in a way overlooked by enactivist approaches, and (3) the very method of enactivist research

exemplified by Colombetti and Torrance can help make phenomenologically manifest important insights into Levinas' difficult concept of "the third".

Enactivist Ethics

Giovanna Colombetti and Steve Torrance (2009) draw a close connection between affectivity or, more specifically, emotions, and ethics. Their aim is to indicate and argue for a kind of responsibility, produced in and *by* interaction, that is in excess of the actions and intentions of individual subjects. Call this kind of responsibility – indexed to an interaction and irreducible to individual, personal responsibility – "interaction-responsibility."

Emotion and Ethics

According to Colombetti and Torrance, emotions are inherently ethical, since emotions (and affectivity in general) are value-laden. For enactivists, organisms make sense of the world, i.e., *enact a meaningful* world, in terms of what *matters* to them. The traditional, representational idea of cognition is replaced by the enactivist idea of sense-making, which always refers both to environmental features and the organism's own actions, both possible and actual, within that environment. Emotion is just one (perhaps complex) form of affectivity, but the more general point is that affectivity is both central to sense-making (this claim is known as the primordial affectivity thesis (Colombetti, 2017)) and value-laden: the way that the world affects the organism *matters* to that organism. The bacterium, for example, makes sense of a sugar gradient insofar as the sugar is relevant to the organism *as food*; that is, the sugar is *meaningful* to the organism because it affects

the organism in a way that matters. The way that the world affects the organism (and vice-versa) is value-laden: features of the environment attract and repel living beings. In the bacterium example, sugar has a value as food. Insofar as affectivity is a matter of value, then, affectivity is relevant to ethics.

The claim is not that bacteria have emotion in the same way as do humans. Rather, emotions are typically seen as a complex form of affectivity that is likely neither shared by all living beings nor exclusive to humanity. However, the point remains that, as a form of affectivity, emotions are in part a matter of what *matters* to us. Something utterly irrelevant fails to impact us at an emotional level. We fear what is dangerous, revel in good-fortune, and simply dismiss the irrelevant. We can consider emotions as a way of making sense of the world in terms of what matters to us. Thus, emotions can be considered as *disclosing* what matters.

Accordingly, Colombetti and Torrance thus take emotions to be inherently ethical in character: they reveal what matters to one and thus are relevant to what one *should do*. Relatedly, what one is *responsible for* depends on what matters, and thus emotions can help us to better understand responsibility.

Participatory Sense-Making

The world appears to us as always-already mattering, always-already colored by what matters: not as a neutral environment to be represented, but as meaningful. We are not only affected by *impersonal* nature, but also by *others*, e.g., other human beings[1]. We act alongside, with, for, and even through others. We are affected by others in terms of what

matters to us, but also in terms of what matters to the other. When we interact with another human being, our sense-making activities – in all their cognitive/affective richness, including our complex emotional processes – become intertwined with those of the other. We act and react, build and rebuild, call and respond. Through the dynamic coupling between myself and another person, new meanings, i.e., new ways of understanding the world in ways that *matter to us*, emerge, meanings that would have been inaccessible to me as an individual. The teacher-student relationship, for instance, exemplifies this kind of emergent meaning production, when in the process of education both the student and teacher learn something new. Musical improvisation is another popular example (e.g., Krueger, 2014) of meaning-production in excess of individual action or intent.

This is one way of characterizing what Hanne De Jaegher and Ezequiel Di Paolo (2007) call "participatory sense-making." According to them, an interaction can take on a life of its own, becoming itself autonomous relative to the autonomy of the agents that otherwise constitute its existence. Call this "interaction-autonomy." They write,

> ...meaning is generated and transformed in the interplay between the unfolding interaction process and the individuals engaged in it. The notion of sense-making in this realm becomes participatory sense-making. The onus of social understanding thus moves away from strictly the individual only. (p. 485)

Put simply, we make sense of the world *together*; we make sense of ourselves and of others *together*. With respect to emotions or affectivity, which are modes of sense-making, it is readily apparent that our emotional lives are deeply shaped by and within interaction with others. We get swept away by good conversation; we work each other up; seeing you

smile makes me smile; misery loves company, and so on.

If emotions are inherently ethical and relevant to what we *should do*, what we are *responsible for*, and if emotions are in part produced by interaction itself, then the interaction itself, in excess of the individuals engaged in it, has its own ethical significance and its own relationship to responsibility. At least, that is the claim made by Colombetti and Torrance, who argue for the existence of what I have called interaction-responsibility along the following lines: since interaction produces, irreducibly contributes to, or even has its own emotional character or tone (e.g., a heated debate, a lovely meal, a disappointing evening), it follows that responsibility should not be conceived of in exclusively individual terms; rather, it is the case that interaction itself can bear ethical responsibility.

Levinas

Before considering Colombetti's and Torrance's notion of interaction-responsibility, I turn to present some ideas and themes from Emmanuel Levinas' two major philosophical texts, *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise Than Being*. I do so in order to draw connections between Levinas and enactivism, but also to illustrate some key differences that I will later argue allow us to deal with some of the difficulties that arise out of interaction-responsibility.

In *Totality and Infinity* (TI), Levinas provides a narrative in which the encounter with the face of the other disrupts an otherwise self-interested ego who exists in the mode of enjoying the world. This disruption corresponds to responsibility: the other calls the ego's right to exist into question, demands the ego to justify its existence, its freedom, its activity in a world that is no longer unquestionably its own. In responding to this demand, the ego's attention is modified

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and the world becomes thematic – signification is first and foremost a signifying of oneself, an offering of oneself to the other, speech or discourse, welcome and address, and secondarily is a delivery of some content, a formulation of the world or a giving of bread from one's own mouth. The ego welcomes the other, but not empty-handed.

In *Otherwise Than Being* (OB), Levinas places a relationship with the other at the very heart of subjectivity itself: the self does not first exist in a mode of enjoyment which is then disrupted under the weight of responsibility but, rather, the very subjectivity of the subject *is* responsibility. In both cases the analysis begins with *sensibility*, which in TI is understood as enjoyment. In OB, sensibility refers to vulnerability, exposure, subjection to everything... equated with proximity to a neighbor, responsibility, and substitution of one-for-the-other. Signification is still a central theme in this later work and here the monstration of language in terms of saying – an address to the other that underlies what is said, denuding oneself in proximity, speaking, *me voici* – corresponding to a said – the order of ontology, the delivery of a content or essence – is in full swing.

Though the details of these stages in Levinas' thought differ, I here hope to show that we can, in broad strokes, point to certain features that they share and that, again in very broad strokes, are in agreement with enactivist thought as here considered. Specifically, I demonstrate that Levinas and enactivism overlap regarding primordial affectivity (or *sensibility*), the ethical import of affectivity (*responsibility*), and participatory sense-making (*signification*). Along the way, I also emphasize two crucial differences between Levinas and enactivism: the priority of responsibility in sense-making and the (a)symmetry of the intersubjective relation. The former protects us from the illusion that Levinas is simply an enactivist,

and the latter allows us to handle certain problem cases that I will consider regarding interaction-responsibility.

Primordial Affectivity – Sensibility

Levinas endorses a version of the primordial affectivity thesis, i.e., the claim that sense-making is always, in some way, affective. In both TI and OB, Levinas is interested in the relationship between self and other, and approaches this relationship through sensibility. Adriaan Peperzak (1993) writes:

> While *Totality and Infinity* placed the focus on the other's visage [i.e., face], the analyses of *Otherwise Than Being* concentrate on the Self (*le Soi*), which has from the beginning a special relation to the Other. Both books are concerned with the same relation. In the latter work, however, it is treated within the framework of the question, "Who am I?" (p. 217)

In TI, the relationship with the other is disruptive, while in OB it is constitutive (if we can be allowed such a term) of the subject as such. Both analyses begin with sensibility, and in both cases sensibility is proposed as a fundamental mode of engagement with the world prior to intentionality (in the Husserlian sense) or practical circumspection (as in Heidegger).

In TI, sensibility is analyzed in terms of enjoyment. Enjoyment refers to our affective sensitivity to a world that matters not only to our practical concerns – we eat to live – but also to the fact that we take pleasure (or pain) in the satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) of our needs – we eat to live, but we also live to eat; "we live from good soup" (Levinas, 1969, p. 110). In *The Feeling Body*, Colombetti calls the inherently affective nature of sense-making "primordial affectivity" (2017). While her notion draws on Spinoza's *conatus* and has

obvious resonances with Heideggerian ideas such as circumspection, mood [*Stimmung*], and the translation resistant *Befindlichkeit*, it can nonetheless be seen as broadly compatible with the TI account of enjoyment. What must be made clear is that enjoyment is not merely a matter of practical concern. It is a point in Levinas' favor that enjoyment, rather than intentionality, conatus, or circumspection, can make better sense of the phenomenologically manifest truth that we sometimes *enjoy* (and sometimes especially) that which we do not understand and even that which is counter to survival. In this way, sense-making is inherently affective in TI since our primary relation to the world is one of enjoyment, but the reverse is not true: we sometimes enjoy *non-sense*; to be affected is not, first and foremost, to be affected by or provided with a *sense*.

In OB, Levinas provides a different account of sensibility. The method of this work makes the entire idea of "account" problematic, however. Levinas takes TI to be too steeped in ontological language and OB attempts to counter this orientation through emphatic hyperbole and equivocation. Peperzak (1993) writes that, in OB, "signification is analyzed as *proximity*, proximity as *responsibility* for the Other, responsibility as *substitution*" and that "Most of the time, however, the various 'moments' are placed next to one another, seemingly without allowing a definite order among them" (p. 220).

Proximity – and thus responsibility and substitution – can only be understood in relation to sensibility. Sensibility is no longer understood as enjoyment but, instead, as *exposure*, *vulnerability*, *subjection to everything* (Levinas, 1981, p. 14). Taking pleasure and pain in one's life already occurs at the level of experience, but in OB Levinas thematizes a sensibility irreducible to experience (ibid., 54). Sensibility is conceived as a hyperbolic passivity, more passive than a faculty of

receptivity that would transform its relationship with a world into an intuition or representation. This passivity is akin to ageing, which cannot be understood as either a power of or faculty belonging to a subject. Rather, a sensible being is exposed to ageing, vulnerable, precarious and passive, subjected to time in a way that resists an ontological or phenomenological analysis of time as a structure of subjectivity. Ageing is not the experience of ageing, but a subjection to something other than experience. Sensibility thus refers to a radical affectivity, a being affected by a world in a way that certainly matters, but not in a way that can be understood primarily as meaning and sense.

Sensibility in OB, then, refers to a radically passive affectivity – a being-affected by the other which cannot be reduced to the self, and, in the framework of OB mentioned above, this condition of exposure is prior to the constitution of the self as power or force within existence. That is, this affectivity is primordial, though it does not refer first and foremost to sense and cognition but to subjection. Furthermore, "as a sensibly affected body," Peperzak writes, "one stands in an immediate contact with one's neighbor" (p. 223). That is, it is as a sensible being that I am approached by a neighbor, or that I welcome the other. The other is "nearby" or proximate insofar as I am unavoidably exposed to her in sensibility. It is for this reason that sensibility is also a position of being hostage to the other: prior to any initiative of my own, I am exposed.

In both works, then, Levinas can be understood as defending something like the thesis of primordial affectivity: the fundamental relation a being (in this case, a human being) has to the world is one of being affected, either by the pleasure and pain one takes in the satisfaction of one's own needs or in one's very exposure to that which is irreducible to oneself.

Ethical Significance — Responsibility

Furthermore, the way that we are affected by others at the level of sensibility is of central ethical importance for Levinas, though differing accounts of sensibility result in different analyses here. In TI, the story is a quite straightforward one. The ego enjoys the world as for-itself until this naïve existence is interrupted by the face of the other. In expressing herself, the other calls my right to be into question. That is, the face of the other diverts my attention from my enjoyment of the world – disrupts my contentment – and commands me to justify my activity, freedom, and existence. What I should do, what I am responsible for, is no longer merely a matter of my own values, interests, and actions, but also a matter of the other to whom I am exposed. For Levinas, responsibility is not something I volunteer myself for; rather, responsibility refers to the fact that, in the face of an other who affects me by expressing herself, a response is unavoidable. I might respond verbally, by negotiating with the other in order to balance her needs and my own, or by "giving the bread from my own mouth (Levinas, 1981, p. 55). I might even choose to ignore the other entirely, but in any case response is unavoidable: to not respond is itself a response.

In OB, sensibility is exposure or subjection to everything. In a developmental sense, I do not create myself but am rather brought into existence through the other – first the maternal other who carries me within herself, and then the others who continue to nourish me and introduce me to an entire world. From this perspective, my existence is not to be understood first as a locus of activity or even as a self-preserving conatus, but first as exposure to the world and second as a response to the other to whom I am exposed. That is, my very existence consists in response. Furthermore, uniquely human proximity is not the proximity of spatial relations or perception but the proximity accomplished by language or expression: the other is she who speaks to me, calling me to respond. It is as one who is held accountable, one who is response-able, that I am individuated as me, and this individuation is the work of the other rather than a product of my own initiative: I am elected without my consent. In this sense, the very subjectivity of the subject is responsibility, as any subsequent activity on my part occurs only on the basis of this prior summons or approach. In TI, the encounter with the other is a usurpation – a decentering of a pre-existing ego that enjoys its world – but in OB my relation to the other is characterized as an inspiration (Levinas, 1981, p. 140) – a breathing in of the other as the air that sustains me, a suffusion of my existence by the other in proximity, the other-in-the-same or the same (or self) itself constituted as being-for-the-other.

Recall that Levinas equates proximity (which occurs at the level of sensibility) with responsibility: my relationship to the other is established as being called to respond to one who affects me beyond my own activity. Furthermore, responsibility is substitution: to respond is to welcome the other, to open oneself, to expose oneself as exposed, to respond for the other. On the model of language, to speak is already to speak for the other, to answer and be answerable. Language – and the self constituted in language – cannot be understood as for-oneself but only as for-another. Thus responsibility is also a foundation for signification, as a making of signs and delivery of content already presupposes a relationship to the other characterized as responsibility.

Crucially, responsibility is an asymmetric relation. That is, according to Levinas, I am always infinitely responsible for the other, but not the other way around. My very existence is constituted as accountability and response. I can never absolve myself of responsibility since responsibility is subjectivity as such, my subjection to everything that characterizes my very existence as a sensible body. I am responsible even for my own persecution, even for the other's responsibility, as no matter what the other may do to me, I nevertheless exist as he who must respond. At the level of experience (understood as a phenomenology, distinct from the level of sensibility), we can see in intentionality and circumspection alike a necessary relation between that which is given to consciousness and myself – it is always I who must respond to the call of the other. As he states in his interviews with Phillipe Nemo, Ethics and Infinity, whether the other is not also responsible for me "is his affair" (Levinas, 1985, p. 98): it is my responsibility-for-the-other and not her-responsibility-for-me that characterizes and permeates my existence.

In both TI and OB, the way I am affected by the other is ethically significant or, perhaps, is ethical significance itself: my activity takes on an ethical sense only in relation to a prior affective relationship to the other. In TI, affectivity is ethical because the other affects me in such a way as to draw my attention away from my own values and towards the other, calling my own right to be (that is, to be-for-oneself) into question. In OB, affectivity is ethical because my very existence is characterized by a passive relation to the other, i.e., responsibility. Insofar as I exist, I exist in the position of hostage as one who must respond in some way or other to that which affects it. To again borrow from Peperzak:

> As a sensibly affected body, one stands in an immediate contact with one's neighbor, with whom one is obsessed (AE 126-29/OB 107). As a mother, I bear the other within me, without fusing together (132-35/104-7). I cannot grasp myself in thought; in saying, however, I expose myself. (p. 223)

Participatory Sense-Making — Signification

Third, Levinas can be seen as advocating some version of the participatory sense-making hypothesis. By affecting us, the other in part constitutes our process of making sense of the world: in TI, they disrupt an individualistic sense-making in terms of hedonic value, and in OB they are at the very foundation of signification as such.

According to Levinas in TI, the expression of the other is "the principle" that allows for the mere appearances occurring to my own subjective experience to refer beyond myself (Levinas, 1969, p. 92). In the face of the other, the world is no longer for-me but for-others. Through expression, the other thematizes the world, drawing my attention to things that I may not have otherwise noticed, in ways I may not have otherwise conceived. The expression of the other can even draw attention to what I could not have tended to myself, given my own values and capacities. This is the meaning of learning: the teacher introduces something to the student that he could not have arrived himself, an introduction of something new that he did not already contain. A special case of this is interpersonal creation, in which I do not just come to recognize something new but, rather, something new is itself produced.[2] Furthermore, in response to the other, I must formulate the world: I must come to understand the world in terms of what is relevant in order to respond to the other.

The same structure is at play in OB, though there it is more fleshed out. Here, the key insight is the distinction in language between saying and what is said. Saying is an approach, an exposure of oneself to the other, denuding oneself, welcoming the other, offering oneself and one's world to the other; it is the one-for-the-other or signification as such, not understood as a sign

by which I identity a content but, rather, as the very making of signs, giving a sign of giving signs (Levinas, 1981, p. 15). Saying always corresponds, however, to something said, the sign actually delivered in the act of delivering oneself to the other. Saying is first and foremost a response to the other, but in saying something is always said, and this something said is directed or affected by the specific way in which the other affects me. It is as a response to the other that I formulate what is said.

Consider an example. Say I am enjoying a bowl of soup. There is a knock at my door and when I answer it I see a child hunched over and rubbing her belly. I must respond to this expression in some way, and response involves formulating a world. I may recognize that the child is hungry, but not wish to share my food and slam the door in her face. I might recognize she is hungry and formulate my food as food-for-her. I might not recognize the sign of hunger as a sign of hunger and instead think she is sick and offer her medicine (perhaps she will correct me). This is an extremely simple example, but more complex cases can be understood similarly. The other expresses herself to me and, in responding, I must come to understand the world in some way or other. In an exceptionally difficult moral conundrum, I may have to reinterpret Kant or formulate a brand new transcendental argument of my own before deciding on a general policy, or unearth some

obscure but relevant factors to be considered by a utilitarian calculation. I may read a cutting-edge article in Nature and have to explicitly reformulate my conception of the world before making my own observations, forming my own hypotheses, testing them and so on.

The point is that we come to understand the world by being affected by and responding to others. The world is formed in contact with the other, understandable on the basis of discourse. First and foremost, I am affected by the other at the level of sensibility by which I receive her expression prior to any activity on my part. Saying emerges as a response to such contact, as a giving of oneself to the other, as a concretion of responsibility. Participatory sense-making touches on this response or level of saying insofar as it emphasizes affectivity and the way in which others affect and motivate (or "regulate") me and my behavior. However, they do not draw a distinction between saying and what is said, taking affectivity to be a matter of coordination between passivity and activity from the start, and thus already equating response with what is conveyed in it. That is, participatory sense-making provides an account of the collaborative production of what is said, the generation of mutual understanding or common sense.[3] Levinas makes room for this kind of account: we indeed make sense of the world together. What the other has to say to me is relevant to my understanding of the

world and how the other affects me is relevant to the totality of my affective relations to the world as large: the other can, at any time, shake up any or every part of the world, or the world itself. But what remains primary is the role that passivity prior to activity plays in such productions. What is said or done at the level of activity is always already a response to the other who affects me and, as such, must be understood in an ethical sense irreducible to my own values or established meaning.

Enactivist Responsibility

To recap, Levinas is to some extent compatible with certain features of enactivism and enactivist ethics. Specifically, (1) affectivity is prioritized as not only ubiquitous to human-being but also as a foundation of sense-making; (2) the way in which we are affected by others is ethically significant or, more strongly, is ethical significance as such; (3) we make sense of the world together, as my understanding of the world is oriented by the way the other affects me and my response to that other. But in the last section we also arrived at two important differences between Levinas and enactivism as so-far considered: (1) the intersubjective relationship, characterized as responsibility, is asymmetric, insofar as affectivity is radically passive and, accordingly, I can never do away with my responsibility for the other while simultaneously not supposing the other to be responsible for me; (2) response must first be understood in an ethical sense prior to the generation of common meaning or accomplishment of mutual understanding, which implies that abstract considerations resulting from sense-making cannot absolve one of responsibility. These last two points should be kept in mind when considering the enactivist conception of interaction-responsibility, as I will argue that a Levinasian approach can maintain key insights from enactivism while resolving some of its tensions and difficulties.

Interaction-Responsibility

Colombetti and Torrance consider two interactions, drawn from studies by Perrin and May (2000), between an elderly woman and a caregiver. The first interaction, in which the caregiver inattentively feeds the elderly woman while silently gazing out a nearby window with her head in her hand, is utterly devoid of interest, genuine engagement, and, for lack of a better term, care. The second interaction, in which the caregiver initiates and maintains eye-contact (the elderly woman reciprocates), speaks softly, and personally connects with the elderly woman, is one with an overall tone of tender engagement.

Colombetti and Torrance point out that the emotional character of the interaction (i.e., cold detachment or tender warmth) depends not only on each participant considered in isolation, but also on the unfolding interaction itself. They suggest that their approach requires two shifts, the first of which is

> ...to see the ethical content or valuation of a given situation as emerging as much from the interaction of the participants as from the autonomous decision making or original authorship of the participants themselves. This shift implies a very different way in which ethical appraisal is to be applied in such situations from the way appraisal is conventionally applied. It constrains us to defocus (to a greater or lesser extent) from questions of individual responsibility, exculpation, blame and praise, and encourages us to focus on the ethical qualities of the interaction itself. (2009, p. 523)

Colombetti and Torrance leverage interaction-autonomy and their close association between autonomy and responsibility to argue that the coldness of the first interaction is not solely the caregiver's responsibility. The

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2   As an example, take group musical improvisation. The other with whom I play may draw my attention to certain elements of the music, accenting certain notes or changing the entire character through modulation. In group improvisation, I can play my instrument in ways I never would have on my own. I may also come to realize certain musical connections that had previously gone unnoticed, or form entirely new musical ideas in the way that a good conversation is thought provoking. And insofar as I, the other, or the very interaction between us results in something new, something new is brought to my awareness of the world, and this something new can impact my previous understanding. She resolves the song in an unanticipated way that utterly reshapes the significance of the entire piece.

3   This is why De Jaegher and Di Paolo insist that individual autonomy is necessary for sociality, as considered below.

coldness of the interaction is a relational fact, and as such the interaction itself is partly ethically responsible. Put another way, responsibility is somewhere between the caregiver and elderly woman. Indeed, to praise the second caregiver and blame the first represents a "superficial ethical analysis" (p. 522), whereas a sophisticated analysis would focus instead on interaction.

Some Concerns

The shift to interaction-autonomy conceived of as irreducible to the autonomy of the agents engaged in the interaction is feasible, but the additional step to redistributing responsibility away from those agents to the interaction itself is ethically untenable. First, a backwards-facing, guilt formulation of responsibility seems to be implied in the quick transition from causing or bringing about emotions, i.e., from causal responsibility for emotions, to ethical responsibility for those emotions brought about. This may be an unjustified transition.

Second, we do not need Levinas to tell us that ethics is concerned, at least predominantly, with personal responsibility. We might extend responsibility beyond the scope of individual human beings to animals, for example, or the environment, but it seems strange to hold an interaction between human beings to itself be ethically responsible over and above the responsibility of its participants. How would we hold an interaction accountable, blame or praise the interaction itself, or demand that an interaction cultivate its own virtues? It could perhaps be argued that the radical nature of Colombetti and Torrance's suggestion consists not only in defocusing the individual in favor of the relational but also in the excision of concepts such as accountability, blame, and praise from ethics itself. If this were the case though, I contend we would be left with something no longer recognizable as ethics. That is not necessarily

to be avoided, but either more must be said of what such a seemingly truncated ethics and its practices would consist of, or otherwise the project and its radicality must be clarified. A more modest suggestion is that the interaction itself is ethically relevant and must factor into our consideration, while nevertheless not being a bearer of specifically ethical responsibility.

Third, assuming that the interaction itself bears ethical responsibility for the emotional character of the encounter, and assuming that we can either hold interactions accountable or obviate any need for accountability in the face of interaction-responsibility, it would seem that defocusing from individuals, at least in the above examples, would amount to excuse-making. That is, in holding the interaction itself partially ethically responsible, we diminish the burden of responsibility on – we make an excuse for – a caregiver who arguably should have behaved better and whom some of my readers plausibly would hold responsible in the more demanding sense. This tactic is antithetical to the Levinasian claim that I am inexorably responsible for the other. Any formulation of an excusing principle, such as the conception of interaction-responsibility here being considered, presupposes a relationship of responsibility or one-for-the-other, i.e., saying irreducible to what is said, and thus cannot coherently deny this responsibility in practice. Furthermore, since the interaction in question is in part dependent on (though not reducible to) the actions of both the caregiver and the elderly woman, then would not some (but not all) of the responsibility for the interaction also fall on the elderly woman's actions? That is, the interaction may have a life of its own, but this life emerges out of the actions taken by the woman cared for as well as the caregiver. Would not the transition from the elderly woman's causal role in bringing about the interaction to her (partial) ethical responsibility for the interaction

be permitted by the same hasty logic leading from interaction-causality to interaction-responsibility? Bracketing that line of thinking, it is nevertheless the case that defocusing from individual responsibility does not mean that individuals are in no way responsible for the interactions they engage in, and I doubt that Colombetti and Torrance would want to go that far. But without going that far, the idea of interaction-responsibility might plausibly imply a form of victim-blaming. This difficulty seems to emerge from considering the ethical relationship to be symmetric in the interaction, i.e., that both persons involved bear responsibility in the same way and only for their own deeds and the consequences thereof.

A Possible Solution

De Jaegher and Di Paolo (2007) provide some resources for dealing with the second and third of these objections, and considering their possible response can help us to better understand Levinas' potential contribution to enactivist ethics as well as providing an enactivist clarification of Levinas' difficult concept of the third.

For De Jaegher and Di Paolo, although an interaction has a life of its own, i.e., its own (interaction-)autonomy, it nevertheless constitutionally depends on the autonomy of the individual participants. They write:

…the autonomy of the individuals as interactors must also not be broken (even though the interaction may enhance or diminish the scope of individual autonomy). If this were not so, if the autonomy of one of the interactors were destroyed, the process would reduce to the cognitive engagement of the remaining agent with his non-social world. (p. 492)

We could say, then, that in the case of the cold caregiver, since the elderly woman is

particularly vulnerable (she is institutionalized and depends on care), her autonomy has been undermined. According to De Jaegher and Di Paolo, maintaining that individual autonomy is an essential condition of social interaction, the cold interaction ceases to be a genuine social interaction at all. In some ways, this seems correct, as the caregiver does not even look at or speak with (or even to) the elderly woman, but instead mechanically serves her food while gazing out a window, occupied in her own world. We accordingly cannot appeal to any higher-level interaction-autonomy to exculpate the caregiver, since the relation between her and the elderly woman is not really an interaction at all, in the sense required by the concept of participatory sense-making. The "interaction" is reduced to the caregiver's actions, who is then squarely responsible for how she treats the elderly woman. In the tender interaction, however, we can understand the caregiver as genuinely engaging the woman she cares for, respecting and inviting her agency and, therefore, engaging in a social interaction that becomes greater than the sum of its parts. In this case, both parties are responsible since both are exercising their autonomy.

(It should be briefly noted that this kind of solution somewhat deflates Colombetti and Torrance's conclusions regarding interaction-responsibility. The former kind of "interaction," now determined to be no genuine social interaction at all, is an important case when thinking about ethics. Recognizing when and how social relations go wrong, and more specifically understanding and responding to the ways that autonomy is undermined by interaction, is plausibly of utmost ethical concern.)

Rejoinder

But does this solution work in general? I am not entirely convinced. It is incorrect to generalize the point and assert that a relation is not

a genuinely social interaction simply because one of the relata's autonomy has been destroyed or diminished. Many of history's great, unjust, violent social institutions have done exactly this. On the one hand, we cannot say that for this very reason they are not social. A social relation is one in which two or more persons relate (perhaps directly) to one another. We cannot identity the violent or "anti-social" with the non-social as such. On the other hand, it is also not the case that these institutions or interactions simply do not constitute genuine interactions. Requiring that each participant's autonomy be preserved in order for a relation to qualify as an interaction ignores the way that the other affects us passively. This passivity has a double sense. It is not our own action that affects us, but the other, that is, our relationships with others involve an element of passivity independent of my own activity. The other also affects us in her own passivity. To return to the example in which the caregiver takes no interest in the elderly woman, we can understand the very passivity of the elderly woman, the very fact that she is vulnerable and dependent rather than autonomously engaged, as meaningfully and ethically relevant to the encounter.

In The Paradox of Power and Weakness, George Kunz (1998) calls this "the power of weakness."[4] Building on Levinas, Kunz articulates the idea that the weaker the other is, the more powerless or helpless they are, the more dependent they are on the actions of others, the more forceful the demands of ethics becomes. That is, the vulnerable and helpless other still affects us, and powerfully if Kunz is correct. Insofar as they affect us, the overall emotional or affective character of the interaction is shaped by the other herself, no matter how passive she may seem. My point is that the other affects us by her

mere presence, by her mere expression as an other to which we are exposed, no matter how autonomous and active or dependent and passive she may be. In the very exposure to another, a relationship is formed – a social relationship – in which I am acted upon, a relationship that can just as easily take on a life of its own as one between vigorous interlocutors. This relationship is understood in terms of responsibility for the other who affects us, no matter how passive; Levinas sometimes calls responsibility "obsession" (1981, p. 55), which requires no activity on the part of the other, no transaction. It is easy to find examples of people trying to help others even when no help was explicitly requested. The relationship has an ethical meaning beyond either participant's actions or intentions, and that meaning is present even if or, better yet, especially when the other is least autonomous. In responding to the needs of the helpless other, we are affected by the other and must reformulate the world, perhaps even fundamentally rearranging our own values.

This is all to say, there is an element of interaction that has been overlooked, complementary to participation: the way that others affect us passively. Ethical sense-making is interpersonal but does not require that each agent exercise their autonomy. New ethical meaning is produced in being passively affected by the other and in responding to the other's needs in general, but especially when they are at their most vulnerable and least autonomous.

Conclusions

Enactivism conceives of sense-making as a fundamental activity and accordingly conceives of specifically ethical sense-making in

terms of activity. But there is another sense of ethics that refers instead to passivity, and ethics in this sense underlies activity as such. This passivity has its own structure, though not a structure understood in an ontological way, as all ontological structures are themselves disclosed to consciousness through activities dealing with sense. The structure of the passivity underlying sense-making can only be understood in an ethical sense of a different kind, one that does not itself depend on action but on subjection: sense-making as an activity depends on passivity construed as responsibility for my neighbor. Accordingly, the enactivist conception of ethical sense-making is itself founded on a radically passive ethical significance that it covers up by always formulating passivity in relation to action and autonomy.

Regarding Colombetti and Torrance's specific account of interaction-responsibility, I raised three concerns: it hastily transitions from causal to ethical responsibility; it implies an unclear and problematic idea of the overall project of ethics as well as ethical practices; and it risks excusing blameworthy action and blaming innocence. I considered a possible response to these second and third objections available to De Jaegher and Di Paolo, but argued that this response ignores that passivity structures interaction in ethically important ways. Now, I briefly propose an alternative principle for understanding the problem cases considered here, in a way that will further help to bring Levinas into enactivist discourse, and also show how the methods of that discourse can elucidate a difficult concept in Levinas' own work.

Ethics of Interaction

Levinas can help us to understand that the ethical importance of interaction cannot be reduced to symmetric or reciprocal activity (or any interactional domain emerging from such activity), but must also refer to

the way I am responsible to the other prior to any initiative of my own. As a condition of sense-making as such, responsibility is inexorable, inexcusable by reference to any action I or anyone else may perform. The difference between the two caregiver cases considered above is not that one describes a genuine social relation and the other does not, nor that one features what we consider to be morally blameworthy, and the other praiseworthy, behavior. The difference is in the description of the cases itself or, more precisely, the justification that the concept of interaction-responsibility produces.

In the case of the cold-caregiver, interaction-autonomy is leveraged to ease the responsibility of one-for-the-other. In the sense of TI, we can see that the caregiver attends to her own values: her behavior is egocentric (actively oriented by self-interest, in Kunz' (1998) sense of the term) while the concerned caregiver's behavior is alterocentric (directed by a genuine interest in the other). But on neither the TI nor OB accounts do these orientations or any transaction between caregiver and ward alter the fundamental relationship of responsibility presupposed by the activity considered and the entire exercise of considering activity as such. The difficulty regarding these cases lies in providing a philosophical account that offers irresponsibility as a solution to a social concern. Not only is such an approach problematic at best and incoherent at worst, as the analysis overlooks and subsequently denies the condition of its own claims, but it also yields an irresponsible conception of ethics as such.

There is truth to the enactivist position that affectivity is ethically significant, and also that the interaction (including its affective aspects) takes on a life of its own. In both cases, whether the elderly woman is passive or not, whether the caregiver is interested or prima facie indifferent, the character of

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the relationship depends on both persons and cannot be reduced to individual agency. But rather than only something above individual agency, the ethical character of the relationship depends on something below it, something more primary than a process of sense-making navigated by activity. Levinas allows us to make sense of both truths or levels, complicating and enriching the conception of ethics available to enactivism: ethics is not something produced by an interaction but, rather, should feature in our characterization of interaction as such.

From within interaction, I am responsible for the other in such a way that this responsibility cannot be excused nor irresponsibility ever justified: responsibility just is the relationship I have to the other. From outside the interaction, that is, from an observational perspective such as the one we have taken up here, considering interactions as evidence, examples, or experiments for making a philosopher's point, the situation is somewhat different. From within, we say or do, we live, suffer, and respond. From outside, we judge, praise, blame, and so forth. That is, from outside the interaction we engage in all those practices ordinarily associated with ethics and morality. From this perspective, Kunz's analysis of the power of weakness is compelling. It is because the elderly woman is vulnerable, dependent, in a certain sense weak that we demand a better response from the caregiver. On the face of it – but not for that reason superficial! - the most salient concern from outside the interaction is whether the caregiver adequately responds to the person she cares for, whether the primary activity of the interaction is for-the-self or for-the-other. This brings me to my final point.

Elucidation of Levinas' 'Third'

I want to comment on the very method of Colombetti and Torrance's Emotion and Ethics, as well as the method employed by myself here. Perrin and May's examples and their take-up by Colombetti and Torrance are compelling. Indeed, at my first exposure to them I must admit I had an immediate reaction: something has gone wrong in this first case; the caregiver is neglectful, uncaring, wrong. The more I consider the example, the more I recognize that any one of a million possibilities could undermine this perhaps rash judgment. Perhaps this kind of disconnect can even be considered a cost of some kind, necessary for carrying out this kind of work day after day. Nevertheless, my quick judgment (which was no doubt shared by at least some readers) or, more interestingly, that such a judgement was made at all, regardless of its content, I think points to something important. We cannot be indifferent to relationships between others. Those relationships, like the singular other, affect us in our passivity in their own way. These examples can thereby help us to better understand Levinas' difficult concept of "the third." According to Levinas, I owe the other everything; responsibility is infinite. But once there is an *other* other, that is, at the appearance of a third outside the relationship between myself and the other, I must begin to compare, judge, adjudicate. I must determine what to do for one, and what to do for the other as well. On the basis of my infinite responsibility to each, I cannot ethically remain indifferent to the relationship between them. I cannot, for example, countenance apparently unjustified cruelty or violence or neglect. It is with the appearance of the third, then, that we enter into the business of establishing norms, principles, and laws. Here, mutual activity and the recognition of passivity are both crucial.

Colombetti and Torrance's examples are not just illustrative of certain interactional emotional tonalities and their relevance for ethics; they also produce an emotional, ethical reaction in sensitive readers. When one reads the example of the indifferent caregiver, one has a reaction of some kind – dismay, upset, anger, disappointment, sympathy, resignation, acceptance – which includes at least some emotional elements. In this way, emotion raises the ethical question, indicating it at an intuitive level and making phenomenologically manifest the ethical impossibility of being entirely indifferent to, utterly unaffected by, relationships between others. This is, I think, a central thrust of Levinas' conception of the third, and one that enactivism, with its broadly phenomenological method and emphasis on interpersonal relationships, is well positioned to elucidate.

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