Moral education from Levinas: Another educational model

La educación moral a partir de Levinas: otro modelo educativo

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Abstract:

This work takes Levinasian ethics and anthropology as sources to inspire a new pedagogical discourse and educational praxis in the field of moral education. In this paradigm, the human being is a historical, situational being that is open to the other from its vulnerability. Accordingly, moral education becomes a compassionate, welcoming response to the other in its situation of special need. The authors highlight the close link between education and a particular conception of the human being and how it relates to others. To ask about education is to ask about the human. Levinasian ethics do not back setting specific guidelines for educational action; they only justify the creation of an educational climate (*ethos*) in classrooms that favours openness to the other through action in the following areas of intervention: pupils' experience as a space of encounter; teachers' testimony; attention to students in their context; the need to examine the sense of responsibilty further; and the pedagogy of donation. Moral education, based on Levinasian ethics, can serve to increase alerity and humanise the school and society.

Keywords: ethics, anthropology, moral education, welcoming, educational climate.

Resumen:

Los autores parten de la ética y la antropología levinasiana como fuentes inspiradoras de un nuevo discurso pedagógico y praxis educativa en el ámbito de la educación moral. Desde este paradigma el ser humano es concebido como un ser histórico, situacional y abierto al otro desde su vulnerabilidad. De este modo, la educación moral se traduce en

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una respuesta de acogida compasiva al otro en su situación de especial necesidad. Los autores subrayan la estrecha vinculación de la educación a una determinada concepción del ser humano y su relación con los demás. Preguntar por la educación es preguntar por el hombre. La ética levinasiana no ampara la programación de pautas concretas de actuación educativa; solo justifica la creación de un clima educativo (*ethos*) en las aulas que favorezca la apertura al otro a través de una acción en los siguientes focos de intervención: la experiencia del alumno como espacio de encuentro; el testimonio del maestro; la atención al educando en su contexto; la necesidad de profundizar en el sentido de la responsabilidad; y la apuesta por la pedagogía del don. La educación moral, fundamentada en la ética levinasiana, puede servir para desarrollar la aleridad y para humanizar a la escuela y a la sociedad.

Descriptores: ética, antropología, educación moral, acogida, clima educativo.

1. Introduction

Discourse and praxis in moral education currently revolve around two principal focuses: ontological ethics inspired by Platonic idealism, and material ethics represented by Schopenhauer, the first generation of philosophers from the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2004), and Levinas. These two focuses differ in their conception of man and his relationship with the world and with others. Idealist ethics emphasise the individual dimension of the person; material ethics accentuate its relational dimension. While idealist ethics emphasise the person's transcendence, material ethics emphasise its immanence; if idealist ethics insist that "there is something" immutable in human beings that transcends the body and is independent of it, material ethics reaffirm it corporeality and contingency. This dialectic forms part of our vision of the human being and its relationship with the world and with others. These two currents form the structure of moral education at present on the basis of differing discourses and different educational practices.

Emmanuel Levinas has had a notable influence in the field of ethics and moral education. Although Levinas did not explicitly address the question of education as a "topic" to study, his philosophical thinking comprises a fertile source for "another mode" of educating from "another way" of understanding the relational structure of the human being.

The prevailing view of education as a project of producing rational autonomous subjects has been challenged by postmodern and poststructuralist critiques of substantial subjectivity. In a similar vein, Levinas, understands that subjectivity is derivative of an existentially prior responsibility to and for the other… This reframing of ethical responsibility as the precondition for subjectivity might offer a

new way of conceiving moral agency in education. (Chinnery, 2003, pp. 5-7)

For Levinas, the human being is only understood *from* the other and *for* the other. It is not an autonomous and independent being with its reason for being in itself. Instead, its way of existing is a constant appeal to the other on whom it depends to be called to a *human* existence. Nobody is human by himself or herself. It is the ethical relationship with the other, dependence on the other, that makes us human. This way of understanding human beings and their relationship with the world and with the other is the starting point for a new pedagogical discourse and a new educational praxis, which are expressed through welcoming the other in its particular situation. Hence, education, in line with Levinasian philosophy, is faithful to the historical condition of the human being and to the "circumstance" that envelops the life of each student.

While "moral education" can be inspired by many authors, we intend to base ours on the philosophy of Levinas.

2. Anthropology and ethics in Levinas

There are no ethics without anthropology, nor is there anthropology or education without ethics. A particular conception of the human being (anthropology) underlies each ethical model, even if at times there is an intention to ignore the essential dependence of education on the anthropological and ethical foundations that support it, stressing its link to students' processes of psychological development, to the detriment of the philosophical basis (Sánchez Rojo, 2019). An antipathy towards philosophy can easily be perceived in many pedagogical discourses, as though ethical and anthropological reflection were "alien" tasks for education. And there is no educational action that is not linked to a particular conception of the human being: "To educate is to create a person, and asking about education is to ask about the human being" (Delgado, 2010, p. 479). Some authors have expressed their concern about the positivist drift in pedagogical discourse and educational praxis: "The contemporary problem of the epistemological colonisation of pedagogy by cognitive-behavioural psychology is symptomatic of a process that has replaced pre-comprehensions and facilitated the replacement of the usual concepts" (Pagès, 2016, p. 272). The epistemological question is not the most urgent challenge that educationalists must address; it is not the control of the inputs that affect an educational process, but rather whether in education we are helping to form human beings who are responsible for the *other* and for the world.

For Levinas, the openness of the human being to the other "does not come as a supplement to a previous existential base; it is in ethics, understood as responsibility, that the very knot of the subjective is tied" (Levinas, 2015, p. 79). Levinas's original idea of subjectivity shatters many of the metaphysical foundations of the Being on which Western philosophy has been based

since the Enlightenment. For Levinas, it is fundamental to examine the ethical conditions at the heart of subjective interpellation as infinite responsibility based on key concepts such as substitution, hostage, and hospitality (Lee, 2019). For many philosophers of education (Lee, 2019; Matanky, 2018; Todd, 2016; Zhao, 2014; Mèlich, 2010), this interpretation of subjectivity is especially relevant in the field of education and particularly in moral education.

Levinas sets out to deconstruct Western philosophy centred on the Self. He explains this through the metaphor of Abraham and Ulysses. While the former left his land on a journey without return, Ulysses lives with the obsession of returning to Ithaca, a land he has never really left. Being human means being open to the other and living with others: we are human through others. That which is human in man involves being constantly focussed on the "outside," the other person, the inappropiable stranger. For Levinas "the way of being that is characteristic of man, more than being with the other (*mit sein*) is being for the other, which is not explained from itself and in itself, but from the other in an asymmetrical relationship that dispenses with or ignores all reciprocity between the I and the you" (Ortega, 2016, p. 251). The radical structure of man is openness to the other; being in a constant exit from himself that appeals to the other, the "stranger." Levinas expresses this in these terms: "The for itself of the identity is no longer for itself. The identity of the same in the "I" comes from outside despite itself, as a choice or an inspiration in way of the oneness of what is assigned. The subject is for the other, its being disappears for the other, its being dies in signification" (2011, p. 106).

Levinas turns away from the Platonic idea of the universal man, situating it in time and space. "The One of which Plato speaks in the first hypothesis of Parmenides is a stranger to definition and to the limit, to the place and time, to identity with itself and the difference with regards to itself, to similarity and dissimilarity, a stranger to being and to the knowledge of the fact that, furthermore, all of these attributes are categories" (Levinas, 1998, pp. 51-52). For Levinas, the human being is not a concept or an idea from which we make ourselves; but rather a historical, corporeal being. "Under the species of corporeality the ties are joined … for the other, reluctantly, from itself; the laborious nature of work in the patience of ageing, in the duty to give the other the bread from one's own mouth and the cloak from one's own shoulders" (Levinas, 2011, p. 110); the ethical relationship is only established between historical human beings, not imaginary ones: "Only when all are clothed and well-fed will the true ethical problem be visible" (Levinas, 2008, p. 42).

Idealist ethics have underestimated the corporeal dimension of the human being. Its openness to the other, from corporeality, has always been viewed with suspicion, if not scorned; and by overlooking corporeality, idealistic ethics are incapable of answering *for the* other. "We take it

for granted, as truth, that in the events of peoples, an ultimate purpose dominates, not the reason of a particular subject, but the divine and absolute reason" (Hegel, 2005, p. 98). The vulnerability of the human being, its exposure to suffering, does not find a historical response in Hegel, only in divine reason, and this response is outside of history. For material ethics, in contrast, corporeality is not a stranger, but rather its identifying mark: "That human beings are corporeal does not mean that everything is reduced to the body, but that everything we think, do or feel 'passes' through the body" (Mèlich, 2010, p. 100). The body is not the prison of the soul, nor a covering that hides the true reality of the human being; it is not simply the physical or material part of a person, something that can be separated from the other spiritual part. The body, for Levinas, is extreme passiveness, exposure to illness, to suffering and death; it is exposure to compassion and to help and care of the other. The body is the whole person insofar as it feels itself rooted in the world, living with others. *We are body*, and through it we can sympathise with the other, respond to its suffering and take responsibility for it. Without corporeality there is no ethics, because without it, there cannot be com-passion. Levinas accepts corporeality as the only possible way for the human being to live in time and space. And outside of this "circumstance" the human being disappears, is diluted in its context and its history.

For Levinas, subjectivity is the *experience* of the other as wholly other, that passively imposes itself on me and makes me liable for it without it being possible for me to decide to accept or reject this responsibility. Levinas expresses this in these terms: "Not being able to evade responsibility, not having as a hiding place an inner being in which one returns to oneself, moving forwards without consideration of oneself" (Levinas, 1998, p. 64). This openness to the other, being responsible for the other, affects the very composition of the subject as a human being. It is not my freedom of choice, but obedience to the invocation of the other from its position of need that confers the status of moral subject on me. "It is not, in effect, a matter of receiving an order, first perceiving it and then obeying it, in an act of will. The obligation to obedience precedes hearing the order in this proximity of the face" (Levinas, 2014, pp. 40-41).

In Levinasian anthropology, the human being is a being fractured by the presence of the other, which we cannot let go of without risking our own identities. The characteristic mode of existence and of being human is the un-condition of being a "stranger," being strange to oneself. "This tear in the very structure of the being of man … is what makes man a stranger to himself because he depends on others" (Ortega, 2016, p. 251), to the point that one cannot think without the presence of the other, without a relationship of radical dependence on the other. "The face of the other means for me an unchallengeable responsibility that precedes any free consent, any pact, any contract" (Levinas, 2011, p. 150). But the individual is not only open to the singu-

lar and concrete other, but to all human beings, to others. This is what Levinas (2014, p. 82) means with the expression of the "third": "The third is also a neighbour, a face, an unattainable otherness. Here is, based on the third, the proximity of a human plurality". Levinas categorically asserts openness to "others": " ...all men are responsible for one another, 'and I more than the others'." For me, this formula and this asymmetry are of the greatest importance: "all mean are responsible for one another and I more than any" (Levinas, 1993, p. 133), citing the words of Dostoievski "each of us is guilty before everyone for everyone, and I more than the others" (Toumayan, 2004, p. 55).

In the anthropology of Levinas, openness to the other goes beyond the confines of idealist anthropology and ethics, which ignored the structural ties that link us to humans and make us interdependent to exist as humans. Humankind is not a mass of isolated, self-sufficient individuals who are independent of one another, but rather it comprises structurally associated and interdependent beings whose existence as humans is linked to the unavoidable relationship with the other. This conception of the human being opens the door for us to another way of being in the world: it makes a new pedagogical discourse and educational praxis possible.

For Levinasian anthropology, the human being is a historical being subjected to contingency and uncertainty as unavoidable conditions of its existence. Far from building a world of absolute certainty and truth, Levinas makes circumstance, the contingent, and the ephemeral into the natural habitat of the life of human beings. It is not the permanent and definitive that characterises human beings, but rather the precarious and provisional, becoming and change. The subject in Levinas is not the transcendental being from Kantian ethics, but rather the historical being who is moved by and sympathises with the other in need of help; it is the negative experience of the suffering of the other as totally other, that makes the subject a moral subject when he answers for it. This experience of *exteriority* breaks the limited sphere of ontology to inscribe itself in the field of ethics, in other words, of responsibility towards the other. "Speaking about ethics from anthropology, and not from ontology, means starting from finitude and, therefore, from time and space, from history, from contingency, from memory, from relationality, and from otherness" (Mèlich, 2002, p. 129). This movement from ontology to ethics in the "I-you" relationship positions the you in history, in space and time, in a relationship of responsibility towards the specific other in need, not towards an imaginary being without biography or context. Levinas breaks with the Western philosophical tradition, which is strongly marked by ontology, by reduction of the Other to the Same. "This primacy of the Same was Socrates' teaching. To receive nothing of the Other but what was in me, as though from all eternity I was in possession of what comes to me from the outside" (Levinas, 1987, p. 65).

3. Ethics are a response to the demand of the other

Where is your brother? This is the question that persistently confronts us. The experience of the other's need breaks all of the barriers we might build to avoid answering this question. It is the mysterious voice from our interior that we cannot silence before the demand of the "stranger, the orphan and the widow," of the vulnerable other in its *human* condition. It is not the argumentative force of discourse that obliges us to respond to the demand of the other, but instead the authority of its vulnerable face. "Spontaneous agitation when faced with the suffering of others does not originate from self-legislating reason, but rather from physical distress and the feeling of solidarity with tortured and humiliated bodies. ... This spontaneous agitation manifests itself in urgency and impatience when faced with injustice. Both resist a deferral of action for reasons of rationalisation or substantiation" (Zamora, 2004, pp. 265-266). We should not interpret the Levinasian expression of the "stranger, the orphan and the widow" in a sociological sense – those abandoned by society – but rather in the anthropological sense: the human being is structurally fragile, vulnerable, in need of compassion. We are all suffering beings, subjected to suffering, pain, and death. This is the baggage that is always with us.

Levinasian ethics are responsibility before the *other* that is assigned to me and obliges me to put myself in its place without any possibility of rejecting its demand, of responding before being able to decide, before exercising my freedom. "Why does the other concern me? What's Hecuba to me? Am I my brother's keeper? These questions only make sense if it has already been assumed that the I only care for itself, is only care for itself. In effect, in such a hypothesis, the absolute outside of Me, the other who concerns me, is incomprehensible. That said, in the 'prehistory' of the I, positioned for itself, a responsibility speaks. The self in its full depth is a hostage in a much older way that is I, before the principles" (Levinas, 2011, p. 187).

For Levinas, the human being is dependence and subjection of the I to the Other. From Levinasian ethics, freedom breaks into an ethical situation that is unforeseen by nature. In contrast with moral codes that impose a particular behaviour, Levinasian ethics allow for the possibility of transgression that "opens the door to being in another way, to being another, to being different, not just with the world and with others, but also and, above all, with ourselves as we are, to a great extent, the result of this world. In short, for an ethics of compassion, there is only ethics if there is transgression" (Mèlich, 2010, p. 173). For Levinas, "the notion of freedom as autonomy is tied to an egocentered, self-enclosing subject and is the very part and parcel of the humanist subject. In critiquing the Western tendency to locate the origin of human subjectivity essentially in ego and consciousness, Levinas pro-poses freedom as heteronomy" (Zhao, 2014, p. 514).

Levinas's insistence on the responsibility of the I does not in any way lead to the development of an egological immanence to which Levinasian thinking is wholly opposed. Levinas (1993, pp. 130-131) expresses it thus: " ... what is affirmed in the relationship with the Face is the asymmetry: in the starting point, what another is with respect to me matters little to me, it is the other's business; for me, the other is above all one for whom I am responsible." Egology is the legacy received from Western philosophy in which "not just theoretical thinking, but all spontaneous movement of the conscience again appears to be directed at such a return to itself" (Levinas, 1998, p. 50).

Ethics is the response to the demand formulated by the injured man by the side of the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Its attention is not focussed on the idea of obeying the law (morals), but on the need to help the other, to take care of it (ethics). From this ethical focus, the human being becomes *somebody* who moves us, who interpellates us. Responsibility in the response is framed in a circumstance, in a specific time and space, not in an ideal world without context; the demand of the other that calls on us to act by not obeying the law or the norm does not go unanswered. Sometimes, the response to the other is urgent and does not fit the mould of the established moral codes. This is what Waldenfels calls the "dark stain" of morals.

We encounter new frontiers when we subject to our consideration the criteria that underlie the judgement of actions. When someone refers to an existing order, whether it is legal or moral in nature. However, we must start from the supposition that any order is contingent from its very origins. ... But if every one of the orders has its frontiers, this suggests that judgements do indeed have arguments in favour of them, but not sufficient arguments. These would occur if, as Leibniz thought, we found ourselves in the best of worlds. (Waldenfels, 2015, p. 209)

There are situations in which it is not possible to turn to established moral codes, and a response becomes urgent. These are the dark areas or new frontiers of morality. "One of these 'dark areas' or new frontiers of morality is the situation of migrants adrift in the Mediterranean Sea who seek help in a host country but are turned away by laws passed in the countries they hope to reach" (Ortega & Romero, 2019, p. 193). Material ethics makes the situation of the other its own and responds with help and welcome, above or against the established moral codes. This responsible answer derives from the experience of need of the other, of concern for the fate of the other who appears before me without prior warning. The clearest example of the distinction between ethics and morals is the passage from the Gospel according to Luke (10, pp. 30-35). Ethical behaviour is represented by the Samaritan, moral behaviour by the priest and the Levite.

The ethical response in Levinas is not born from a reflection on the dignity of the human being and the consequent

obligation to act in accordance with this principle. Instead, it is an unwavering response to a specific situation of the other who demands our help and care. For the Lithuanian thinker, ethics are not born from a reflection on the dignity of the person. They are not born from reason, nor from universal and abstract principles, but rather from the absolute command of the "nakedness" of the vulnerable face of the other. It is the face of the "orphan and of the widow" that "orders" me to respond to its command. Nobody can respond for me. It is the other that interpellates me and accuses me while I cannot ignore the question of its fate. It is the feeling of compassion towards the other, the inability to be unconcerned about the other that precedes any attempt at motivation or rational justification. "The face of the other concerns me without the responsibility-for-with-other that he orders allowing me to return to the thematic presence of a being, which would be the cause or source of this order. It is not, in effect, a case of receiving an order perceiving it first and then obeying it in a decision, in an act of will. The obligation to obedience precedes hearing the order in this proximity of the face" (Levinas, 2014, pp. 40-41).

Ethics comprise the response to all that escapes from the realm of morals; they enter the "dark areas" of morality, which morals cannot reach, thus transcending codes of moral behaviour. In this passage to the dark areas of morality, nothing is prescribed or established in advance; it is necessary to respond from uncertainty and unease. Therefore, we will never know whether we have acted in accordance with the needs of the other, if we have been sufficiently responsible. In the ethical relationship we are always accompanied by the restlessness of conscience about the unfulfilled duty. The human being does not have a fixed homeland nor a firm ethical ground to tread. It lives provisionally, in uncertainty. This is the precarious baggage with which it must confront the task of living with others. Therefore, in the ethical relationship with the other there cannot be a calm conscience when faced with the fear of not having been sufficiently responsible towards it. If there were, this would involve placing limits on the ethical signification of the other. And the other, in the signification of its face, is inexhaustible, it evokes the Infinite: "The face of the other in proximity, more than representation, is the unrepresentable trace, the mode of the Infinite" (Levinas, 2011, p. 185).

For Levinas, "that which is human is the return ... to the bad conscience, to its possibility of fearing injustice rather than death, of preferring the injustice suffered to the injustice committed" (2014, p. 38). In Levinasian ethics there is no place for complacence with the duty done; we are always exposed to "shame" thanks to the fear that we have not responded adequately to the demand of the other in need. From Levinasian ethics, "one can never have a clear conscience. We will never be able to pass through the gates of heaven, and so it is not possible to know for sure if we have acted well, if we have acted correctly" (Mèlich, 2010, p. 153).

4. Another educational model

Levinasian ethics lead to "another way of educating," making its own the situation of the other in need of help and care, "the orphan, the stranger and the widow," in Levinas's words. If Levinasian ethics cannot dispense with their relationship with the other in the "nakedness" of its face, educational action also cannot free itself from the bonds that link it to the other as a historical subject. Abstract defence of human rights is not, therefore, the starting point in education. Instead it is the concrete situations that surround the life of each student. It is the experience of life that marks the framework of action of education.

Ethics, in Levinas, are always an unforeseen and singular response given to the other in a specific situation, here and now. Any *ethical* response is always situated, provisional, singular, and unrepeatable; it does not form part of our behavioural habits. It is always improvised, in contrast with *moral* behaviour which always refers to norms or codes of "good conduct," such as: respecting the rules of the road, paying taxes, rules for living together, and so on, behaviour that is indispensable for living in a society. The essential characteristic of the ethical response means that it is not appropriate to refer to a competence that is acquired or learnt for an ethical response. And so we can only speak of the creation of an educational climate that favours the development of feelings of openness to the other, sensitivity towards the demands of the other (Todd, 2016). In other words, favouring the creation of an educational *ethos* or environment that makes it possible "to foster spaces for coexistence among the students themselves, as well as between them and the teachers, with the aim of creating positive environments that provide for plans for welcoming, rituals of mutual respect, etc." (Pallarés, 2020, p. 23).

Levinasian ethics are resistant to an education that results in planning concrete guidelines for action. The educator is only permitted to create an educational climate in the classroom that encourages students to put themselves in the place of the other and welcome it, broadening ethical horizons to include the "third," expanding ethical interest in caring for nature and the most vulnerable. Developing these attitudes does not involve setting guidelines for action that can be extrapolated to other subjects and other contexts, since the ethical response, as the experience of each subject, is always original and unrepeatable. And experience is a necessary part of each educational process.

This way of understanding ethics calls for "another form of education," which results in an ethical response to the student in its specific situation. To educate is to welcome, to accompany the other in its process of personal construction; it is to answer *for the* other (Ortega, 2010). But each student, in its singularity, sets the pace of this process depending on its personal characteristics and on the contribution of its social and family setting. Individualising educational pro-

cesses is an inescapable requirement of education.

Cognitive pedagogy has centred on the learning of knowledge and competences, forgetting other essential dimensions of the training of the student. The idealist philosophy that reduces education to the development of the "higher" faculties of the human being is behind this educational model. Feelings are ignored, subordinated to an idealist conception of the human being. Educators' interests did not include corporeality as a form of existence and human life but instead they only deposited the knowledge that had to be transmitted. Sharon Todd in her book *Learning from the Other* (2003) argues that what is important is not so much knowing the other as learning from it. She focuses on empathy, love, guilt, and listening in order to underline the complex nature of learning about difference and the ethical possibilities of education. To do so she establishes an interesting dialogue, not without tension, between the thinking of Emmanuel Levinas and that of Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein, Judith Butler, and Cornelius Castoriadis among others.

This educational model based on Levinasian ethics is linked to the creation of an educational *ethos* or classroom environment, associated with the following focal points for intervention:

4.1. Experience, meeting space

"Our life is not just a series of situations that follow on from one another, but rather we live our lives recounting them to ourselves. Our life is, inextricably, experience" (Pérez-Guerrero, 2016, p. 229). Students, in their lived realities, were just a pretext for transmitting what was previously prescribed. Without experience, education becomes an activity without meaningful content (Ortega & Romero, 2021). The subject of education is *somebody*, and this is inseparable from the experience of that person's life. The thread of the life of each student becomes the basic content of any educational process. It is not the students' intelligence or skills that must be formulated as a priority, but also the ethical values that make up the basic architecture of the building of the human being and the foundation of life in society. Without accepting the experience of the student as educational content, there is discourse alone, and no education. In such a situation, the student remains overlooked in the action of the teacher. The experience of the student is the only space in which teacher and student can meet in a dialogue that is fruitful for both.

4.2. The testimony of the teacher

The pedagogy of testimony (Standish, 2020) aims to transmit an experience of proximity and reception towards the other. It does not set out to show, nor to tell anyone what they must do, only to *show* an experience, to testify to a way of being a neighbour (proximate) to the other. *Teachers* are witnesses to what "is happening." They should not hide their responsibility towards the problems that affect the community of which they form part. Teachers cannot limit themselves to being good professionals, if they want their

students to be able to critique what is happening in their surroundings. They must also be *witnesses*. The story of the experience of healthcare workers during the Covid-19 pandemic could be one very effective way of conveying the experience of solidarity with people in need better than any discourse on human fraternity; or the story of the experience of immigrants on their journey to an unknown land could help students put themselves in the other's shoes. The story of an experience of suffering and receiving has the force of testimony, it is what interpellates us, what obliges us to think about "what is happening." And "it is not the experience of ideal models drawn from legend and literature that becomes an ethical experience; it is the close experiences, subject to contradictions, that reflect the life of individuals who are also real" (Ortega & Romero, 2021, p. 101, own translation). The authority of educational action lies in its credibility, in the testimony of someone who *displays* ethical values from the experience of his or her life. Values are learnt or appropriated by mimesis or imitation, not through discourse or reasoning.

4.3. Attention to the other in its circumstance or context

Educating demands acceptance of all of the human, all of what envelops the life of the other. We do not educate imaginary beings, but rather individuals who live in a context that shapes them in their essence. We are *circumstance*. But the human being that we know by experience is the corporeal being, vulnerable, in need of compassion, the "stranger, the orphan and the widow" of which Levinas speaks. This means that educational action cannot be confined to knowledge of virtue and reflection on human rights as basic strategies. In moral education, from Levinasian ethics, the life experience of the other, in *its* circumstance, is the starting point, and its reception the end point. Education, if it is such, cannot make the specific situation of each individual into an abstraction in order to take refuge in "neutral land." But "circumstance" is very different in each individual. All people, to some extent, make their situation or context their own, and it will mould or shape a particular way of being and living. "In education there are no educational processes or educational languages that are the same and work for everyone. There is no 'objective' world that is the same for everyone. This is a world that is necessarily *interpreted* in the way peculiar to each culture. To educate it is essential that educators emerge from themselves and take responsibility for the other in *all* of its reality, in which the student lives, because 'until they make a space for the other, even at the cost of their own survival, the ethical significance of the other will not be real'" (González R.-Arnáiz, 2002, p. 89).

4.4. Elaborating on the meaning of responsibility

The discovery of my responsibility before the other and the others. It is not my future as an individual that is in play; the fate of the other and of the others with me is also in my fate. "My life is implicated in other lives. My life is not

completely mine. We come into the world needing hospitality and this vulnerable condition cannot be avoided, it cannot be overcome" (Butler, 2006, p. 44). Bringing experiences of suffering caused by hunger and wars into the classroom makes it possible for the world of pain to come close to the lives of students, making them sensitive to another frequently forgotten reality; bringing the experience of suffering of immigrants and prisoners into the classroom can help students see them with other eyes, fostering the help and welcoming that make us regard them as *others* that belong to us. This is a means of breaking down the walls – sometimes insurmountable – that school has built, isolating itself from the reality of life. Beyond my interests and needs there is a "third" that also reclaims what belongs to it. It is the sense of belonging to a community that is linked to the awareness of my responsibility towards others and of the others. This is how to face up to a society of isolated individuals in an atomised society. The other forms part of me as question and answer.

4.5. A pedagogy of donation

Turning classrooms into spaces for encounter and disinterested help, in contrast with teaching centred on training individuals to compete, acritically and detached or indifferent to the good of the community. "Human education has more to do with contributing to different chains of altruism than with the solitary conquest of autonomy. … Pedagogy should direct itself towards processes of mutual help and contribution to the community through connection and service" (Martín et al., 2019, p. 58). The school should make space for the culture of donation. Coexistence in society is very difficult or impossible without relationships of freely-given trust, cooperation, and care and attention for the other. A society built only on the structures of justice would be uninhabitable, inhuman. Interhuman relations based on solidarity and giving-freely, on the culture of donation as a form of living, are necessary. "There is no society without donation, and there is no education without understanding the donation by educators and the capacity to give of students" (Martín et al., 2019, p. 14). But for there to be a donation, there must not be any payment or recognition of the gift received (Derrida, 1995). "The gift always resides in gratuity and even in the lack of reason" (Mèlich, 2021, p. 125). Educators should take the experience of donation as common behaviour in society and in places of educational into the classroom; they should help students name the behaviour of solidarity and fraternity that make society more human. It is ethical experiences in "normal" people that bring values within our reach, and help us to appreciate and imitate them.

5. Final considerations

The educational theorists who have considered the work of Levinas emphasise his importance for rethinking educational theory and praxis (Lee, 2019; Matanky, 2018; Biesta, 2010; Ortega, 2016). All of them underline the originality of his thinking and the need to elaborate another

educational discourse and praxis centred on the singularity of each subject, in *its* circumstance, and converting educational action into an action of receiving and caring for the other (Ortega, 2016). They also underline the role of educators as credible sources of what they transmit, and their responsibility for creating an educational climate that favours ethical behaviour. "Like Seneca, educators believe in what they teach, they express it in their behaviour, and if they use rhetorical *techne* it is so that the uttered truth forms the being of the listener" (Santos, 2013, p. 482).

Levinasian ethics do not turn to arguments based on reason to prescribe particular types of behaviour. It is not reflection based on discussion that leads us to receive the other. Instead, it is the ethical authority of the *other* that pulls us out of our indifference towards the other, from the confines of our "I". Compared with the moral world of Kantian ethics, which are predetermined, Levinasian ethics develop in uncertainty, in provisionality like the human being itself. Nothing is definitively conquered; we are obliged to invent ethical responses, because the ones already given only respond to the need of the other in a concrete, singular, and unrepeatable situation. Therefore, ethical competence is not possible. There will always be an unbridgeable gap between the need of the other and the ethical response given.

Ethics in Kant and in Levinas differs substantially in their starting point. For Kant the ethical question is: *what should I do?* Its reference point is the rule, the duty that must be fulfilled. For Levinas, the question is another very different one: *who is my neighbour?* The referent is not the rule, but the *other* in its concrete situation. A different ethics necessarily leads to an educational praxis that is also different. In this work, we might be expected to offer concrete strategies or guidelines for educational action that are already set in advance, as cognitive pedagogy does in moral education. Levinasian ethics do not contain a detailed programme, fixed in time, because the ethical response is always given to the unforeseen demand of the other. And the response is always linked to a unique, singular situation. It is not, therefore, possible to plan actions that prepare the individual for an ethical response. It is only possible to create an educational climate that favours openness to the other, sensitivity to the other in its situation. This is what makes the ethics of Levinas great and of value. The educational model proposed, starting from Levinas, takes the limitation and contingency of the human being from its structural need as its starting point, and compassionate reception as its end point.

Moral education, founded on Levinasian ethics, can serve to *humanise* the school and society. Being attentive to the other, listening to it and welcoming it, accompanying it in the adventure of the construction of *its* life project is an essential task of schools.

This entails … helping, from one's own uncertainty and testimony, the other to follow its own path without any certainty

of reaching the destination it seeks. It involves letting go of some 'certainties' that have accompanied us for too long and have made education an *in-significant* task, distanced from the life of each student (Ortega & Romero, 2019, p. 166).

It is necessary to create "another way" of educating that accepts the human reality of the student. Education, like ethics, does not contemplate idealised beings, lost in the skies of "beautiful ideas," but specific individuals shaped by *their* circumstances. "If being human is an ethical category and not just a biological one, learning to be so is the principal task all humans have throughout our lives" (Pérez-Guerrero, 2016, p. 238).

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