



The Fearful Ethical Subject: On the Fear for the Other, Moral Education, and Levinas in the Pandemic

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Abstract

The article seeks to reclaim a type of fear lost in silent omission in education, yet central to the development of an ethical subject. It distinguishes the fear described by Martin Heidegger through the concept of *befindlichkeit* and fear for the other as an essential moment for ethics articulated by Emmanuel Levinas. It argues that the latter conception of fear has inverted the traditional assumption of the ideal ethical subject as fearless. It then examines how Levinas's interpretation of fear might contribute to the discussion on fear and responsibility in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It concludes that fear for the other reveals our tremendous capacity to suffer for the other, which is an aspect of the emotional life that has not been identified in the general educational discourse. This inattention manifests itself as a categorical omission in which the existence of fear for the other is not recognized and impedes the ability of educators to address ethics as it is deeply lived.

Keywords Fear · Moral education · Levinas · Pandemic · Emotion

Introduction

Is fear inherently unethical? Does one always need to resist the intrusive force of fear in order to live ethically? Should moral education underscore the task to quell, restrain, and overcome fear among students at any time? This article is concerned with the nature of fear and whether fearlessness is an unquestionable ethical ideal and pursuit of moral education. This research question is situated in the context of the pandemic, where many students, educators, and parents have encountered fear as the world has ground to a halt. Also, noticeably, over the past few months, controversies have swirled about how we should understand, pass judgments on, and react to fear in such a precarious moment. Some writers have heeded to the corruptive aspects of fear (Agamben 2020; Lévy 2020; Reno 2020). Being reflective of our affective states, we would like to take up the occurrence of fear as an opportunity to question some taken-for-granted perceptions of fear, explore its ambiguous nature, and investigate the relationship between fear and responsibility in moral education.

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In the first section, we make a distinction between the fear described by Martin Heidegger through the concept of *befindlichkeit* and fear for the other as an essential moment for ethics articulated by Emmanuel Levinas. Then, we argue that the latter conception of fear has inverted the traditional assumption of the ideal ethical subject as fearless in the sense that (1) Levinas's conception of the ethical subject as being fearful for the other prioritizes one's ability to be deeply affected by the presence of the other (2) Levinas not only reverses the intellectual habit of designating fear as inherently unethical but also relates it to the secret of sociality and love. We also notice that in the familiar narratives regarding fear, the assumed indubitable imperative to be fearless is not gender neutral. In the third section, we question and reject the idea that individuals must caution against, not COVID-19, but the epidemic of fear as the worst outbreak. The reasons are twofold. First, this argument fails to heed the highly ambiguous nature of fear. Second, the argument suffers from the enabling silence to a current instantiation of what might be called *fearless irresponsibility* in public and educational discourses in the United States. The article concludes that fear for the other reveals our tremendous capacity to suffer for the other, which is an aspect of the emotional life that has not been identified in the general educational discourse. This inattention not only leads to a categorical omission in which the existence of fear for the other is not recognized but also impedes the ability of educators to address ethics as it is deeply lived.

Heidegger and Levinas on Fear for the Other

For Heidegger, fear is a specific mode of attunement (*befindlichkeit*). The structure of fear is threefold: the thing of which we are afraid, the fearing, and that for which we are afraid. First, fear directs itself to the thing that Dasein approaches as fearsome in the world. It can be an object, event, or other Dasein. Fearing opens us to be affected by and concerned with the things that we have deemed as threatening. The latter (that about which we are afraid) is critical. Heidegger maintains that what we are really fearful for is the fearful being itself, Dasein (Heidegger 2010, p. 137). Only the being that is concerned about its own being can be fearful of something. In fear, Dasein reveals its ownmost being at issue for itself.

In Levinas's view, Heidegger's existential analysis of attunement (*Befindlichkeit*) has sort of a double "intentionality" structure:

A reflective structure in which emotion is always an emotion of something that moves it, but also emotion for oneself, in which emotion consists in being moved—in being afraid, glad, sad, etc.—a double "intentionality" of the of and the for participating in emotion par excellence; anxiety; being-toward-death in which the finite being is moved by its finitude for that finitude itself. (Levinas 1998, p. 131).

In the case of Heidegger's account of fear, the attunement of fearing animates or frees something by which Dasein can be threatened, and at the same time, unfolds Dasein to itself as a being concerned with its own being, including the possibility of being threatened not to be. Dasein is anxious in the very ground of its being (Heidegger 2010, p. 184). For Heidegger, in the state of fear, Dasein is still in the inauthentic mode of the evasive turning away. Only in the mode of authenticity, Dasein returns to the anxious anticipation of its death, confronted with our ownmost insuperable certain but indefinite possibility.

Noticeably, in section 30 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger has performed an analysis of fear for the other. For Heidegger, the for which we are fearful can also involve other people

regardless of whether others are in fear or not for themselves.¹ Thus, the fear for others is *my* fear. Furthermore, this fear-for is a fear for oneself. “What is ‘feared’ here is the being-with the other who could be snatched away from us (p. 138).” Fear discloses being-with (*Mit-sein*) as a fundamental constitution of Dasein. Fear for the other, in Heidegger’s account, is ultimately *my* fear for *myself*.

Levinas admits that Heidegger’s analysis of fear is admirable, but in his account, fear for the other cannot be grasped by the theory of *Befindlichkeit*. Levinas describes that the fear for the other comes to oneself when one engages in the unreflective encounter with the face of the other. Indeed, echoing Heidegger’s analysis, the fear is concerned with the death of the other. But there is another layer of the fear as being fearful of all the violence and murder my existing can bring about (Levinas 1998, p. 130). The fear discloses to me that my home, my “being in the world,” or “my place under the sun” is what Levinas calls “usurpation of places that belong to the other man (p. 130).” The fear is the moment when the pull of the other is stronger than the fear of death for oneself. The fear puts in question the righteousness of my presence, my right to be, the priority of the I. It goes back behind my “consciousness of self,” creates an ethical disturbance of being, and transcends me and my self-centered categories.

Levinas says it is “a fear of occupying someone’s place in the Da (there) of my Dasein.” It is above the task of being (Levinas 2001, p. 177). Fear for the other is no longer part of the inauthentic mode of attunement but an essential moment for ethics. One is capable of being gripped by the fear *for* the death of the other not because of anxiety but because of the responsibility that comes before being and “persecutes” the ego. The fear for the other is *my* fear, *not* for myself but the other (Levinas 1998, p. 131).

Levinas’s theory gives rise to a profound phenomenological interpretation of a specific kind of fear that can overflow my concerns for my being. Levinas contends that this type of fear is nothing rare but a quotidian element in everyday life (Levinas 2001, p. 177). Recent sociological research on altruistic fear (Warr 1992; Warr and Ellison 2000; Snedker 2006) strongly resonates with Levinas’s thought. By altruistic fear, they refer to the fear people have for others in their lives—children, spouses, friends—whose safety they value. Based on empirical investigation, Warr and Ellison (2000) argue that this fear for the other is *more common and intense than* what they call “the personal fear,” which is the self-protective emotion for oneself. Interestingly, they point out that many of the everyday precautions practiced by Americans and conventionally assumed to be self-protective appear to be a consequence of altruistic fear to protect significant others. Yet, it should also be pointed out that Levinas’s notion of fear is conceptually beyond the altruistic fear in contemporary sociological research. In *Totality and Infinity* (Levinas 1969), Levinas also uses the word “neighbor” “Stranger” to refer to the other. One can fear for a close member in one’s life, such as in parental relations or friendships, but this fear also extends to anyone, including and, perhaps, especially for a stranger (Levinas 2001, p. 177). As Levinas reminds us that “every other is a friend (Levinas 1998, p. 131).” The other incites my fear for his or her death not because she or he is relatively closer to me by ordinary standards of closeness, but due to the absolute proximity revealed through his or her presence.

¹ We use the plural form of the word “other” here to differentiate Heidegger from Levinas in that when Levinas concerns with fear-for, he specifically refers to the event of one encountering a singular other, one at a time.

The Fearful Ethical Subject

Remarkably, Levinas conceptualizes the ethical subject as fearful rather than fearless, not for oneself but the other. This offers a stark contrast to everyday assumptions regarding what an ideally good, responsible person looks like and the place of fear in moral education. Broadly speaking, the consensus view is that a good, responsible person is either always fearless or has overcome fear.

First, the conventional idea of a responsible, ethical subject in traditional ethics is the kind of person that is not only fearless but also non-affective in general. The traditional construal of the ethical subject is a rational, lucid, independent decision-maker who can make well-informed choices. Moral education grounded on the traditional liberal humanist philosophy gives prominence to the task of cultivating students' capacities to make rational reflection and assessment to ethical questions, concepts, and dilemmas. In this paradigm, any emotion, including fear, is rendered aside.

Levinas's conception of the ethical subject as being fearful *for* the other prioritizes one's ability to be deeply affected by the presence of the other. For Levinas, subjectivity is "the locus where alterity makes contact (Lingis 2006)" and begins in the very sensing of sensations. It is an exposedness prior to and beyond the unity of the 'I think (Levinas 1998).' In recent years, many scholars in different traditions and schools have taken issues with the sole emphasis on rationality and autonomy in traditional moral education, which seems to minimize the place for and of affective, passionate, relational parts of ethical life in an educational context. Specifically, influenced by Levinas, philosophers in education have pointed out on multiple occasions how Levinas's thought informs us that the relentless focus on a detached, neutral rational being circumvents the ethical possibilities in education (Chinnery 2003; Biesta 2008; Strhan 2012; Zhao 2012) through the discussion of heteronomy, ethics as first philosophy, and so forth. With regard to the concept of fear for the other, what Levinas emphasizes is the existence of the horror of killing that cannot be dissolved by moral reasoning and judgments and yet, is definitive of human being's ethical possibility. It is the "anxiety about the legitimacy of the suffering inflicted on some by the irrefutable logic of things, even if, in regard to one's own hardships, one imposed a philosopher's consent... anxiety about the legitimacy of all that is apparently logical (Levinas 1998, p.192)." Moral education that based itself only on the primacy of shared rationality could problematically fail to address this most significant dimension of ethics.

Second, the novelty and depth of the idea that the ethical subject is fearful for the other cannot be reduced to a matter of bringing insights regarding affectivity to moral education. There is something about fear in particular. Even for those who adamantly support approaching ethics in all its richness, the notion of a fearful ethical subject can still seem bizarre and appear as an oxymoron.

Compared to other emotions such as joy and grief, fear is often culturally classified as inherently unethical. Despite manifest differences in interpretations of fear, the understanding of it still remains one-dimensional by loosely ascribing to the modern (Hobbesian) conception of fear as the passion for self-preservation. Fear is a reaction to the hazardous natural and social environment that traps one in the primary concern for one's own life, which includes the consideration for one's own death, suffering, and the diminishing of certain ongoingness and life possibilities. Fear is relational but isolating. It is inherently relational in that it is an unpleasant subjection to outer influences. Yet, at the same time, it absorbs one into the awareness that one's whole being is at stake, which, in many cases, can intrigue a defense mechanism to sustain that being whatever the cost ethically. For

example, much academic ink has been spilled on the dangers of fear-mongering in public life where narrative techniques are deployed to normalize erroneous and flawed reasoning so as to arouse and nourish disproportionate fear among people of something that is not threatening (Bosetti 2011; Glassner 2004; Gil 2016; Nussbaum 2012). In the case of xenophobia, subjection to manipulative rhetoric of fear of foreigners can lead one to be complicit with and instrumental in the exploitation of and hostility toward marginalized group members in societies. This self-regarding fear can result in dangerous hatefulness and violence toward other fellow human beings and exacerbating social injustice writ large. Perhaps few writers could summarize the nature of the self-regarding fear more eloquently than Nussbaum (2012), “Fear is a “dimming preoccupation”: an intense focus on the self that casts others into darkness. However valuable and indeed essential it is in a genuinely dangerous world; it is itself one of life’s great dangers (p. 58).” In a nutshell, this fear is corruptive, alienating, and opposite to love.

In addition, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (2008) once indicates in *Emile: Or On Education* that the fear of death is a more deadly disease than physical ones because it jeopardizes a boy’s (here the education of Emile is apparently gendered) ontological possibility of becoming a man.

A feeble body makes a feeble mind. Hence the influence of physic, an art which does more harm to man than all the evils it professes to cure. I do not know what the doctors cure us of, but I know this: they infect us with very deadly diseases, cowardice, timidity, credulity, the fear of death. What matter if they make the dead walk, we have no need of corpses; they fail to give us men, and it is men we need (p. 30).

Fear puts one at stake in an ethical and ontological sense because it threatens one’s project of becoming a *man* who lives for himself as an independent, happy, and moral individual. In suspicion of the medical power, Rousseau offers a reason why fear, understood as the fear of one’s own death (or the fear of something threatening for one’s own death), is the real danger in life compared to the ones in hazardous environments.

Thus, the idea of fear as an essential moment of ethics can sound inconceivable initially. According to Levinas, this is because a more primordial, non-narcissistic type of fear has not even been allowed to enter into conventional analyses of fear. As aforementioned, this is a fear above the task of perseverance in being. That is, it directs toward responsibility, transcends the fear of death, leaves not the other but allergic egoism behind, and counters ruthless survivalism. It is a fear for the other even when one is facing death as well; it is a courageous rather than cowardly moment. What’s more, different from the traditional fearless, autonomous subject, the fearful ethical subject is *courageous while vulnerable* because being fearful for the other entails that the subject is exposed to the given world and susceptible to wounding and sacrifice. The subject discloses an openness to the other and contrasts the figure extolled by the liberal tradition as an invulnerable, solitary man in possession and mastery of the self. Levinas not only reverses the intellectual habit of designating fear as inherently unethical but also relates it to “the secret of sociality” and “love without concupiscence (Levinas 1998, p. 131).” In *Totipotency and Infinity* (Levinas 1969), he emphasizes, “to love is to fear for another, to come to the assistance of his frailty (p. 256).”²

² Although this is not the focus of this paper, we believe that it is worth pointing out that for Levinas, the discussion on fear inhabits a spiritual dimension. For example, in an interview (Levinas 2001), he argues: “To me, it is an essential moment; I even think that fearing God primarily means fearing for the other (p. 177).” Though not focused on issues of fear, Katz (2003), in reading Levinas in light of the story of Abraham who raises a knife to his son and Søren Kierkegaard’s interpretation of Abraham in *Fear and Trembling*, offers significant insights on the spiritual dimension of fear for the other. She maintains that Abraham

Third, the intricacies of fear have another layer. Consider the Disney Pixar's film *Inside Out* (Rivera 2015), where the protagonist Riley has five personified emotions residing within her mind. One of the intriguing details about the film is that each emotion performs gender differently. Among the five emotions, fear and anger are presented as men. But contrasting anger, fear is an unmanly figure who is underweight, timid, and often passes out after a panic. Hilarious as this personified fear is, the aesthetic choice is very representative of a broad, familiar social perception of the fearful individual as not masculine. Social scientific researchers have begun to investigate vigorously how the quest for fearlessness is constitutive of the everyday expectation of optimizing male invulnerability (Courtenay 2009; Goody 2017; Stanko and Hobdell 1993) and calls for more research into the ways in which patriarchy has constructed the definitions and experiences of fear and prescribed how best to cope with it (Fisher 2013).

Despite the actual empirical research on fear as deeply gendered experiences, philosophical scholarship has generally approached issues of fear and fear-related ethical questions irrespective of gender. As previously mentioned, Levinas's conception of the fear for the other stems from a mode of subjectivity as the vulnerable openness to wound, to bear for the other. It is a type of fear that transcends ontological concerns, including and especially for fear of emasculation and the pervasive social perception of fear as emasculating. The fearful ethical subject can be a conceivable concept only when we recognize the existence of a non-phallogocentric fear. Levinas's reconceptualization of fear provides an opportunity for us to rethink whether, despite the best of intentions, as we inherit prevailing meanings of fear in a male-dominated society, we are making a morally idealized projection of traits and values that are historically identified with the masculine under the cover of gender neutrality.

Fear and Responsibility in the Pandemic

In the previous sections, we sketched a Levinasian analysis of fear, followed by an elaboration on how Levinas has inverted the traditional conception of the ideal ethical subject as fearless. Here we consider how Levinas's fresh and insightful interpretation of fear might contribute to the discussion on the relationship between fear and responsibility in the context of the pandemic. This is a precarious moment in the United States and across the globe. Questions regarding fear are vital to think about how one shall live in a time of crisis and connect ethically with other people.

Recently, there has been a line of argument espoused by quite a few writers regarding possible ethical perils surfaced through the pandemic (Agamben 2020; Lévy 2020; Reno 2020). According to this argument, the fear which weighs heavily on the minds of the many at this point is one of the greatest enemies of our time. Although each claim is developed from different intellectual traditions and conceptual apparatuses, there is one common strand of thought shared by all these writers, which is the claim that fear, interpreted as primal, instinctual fear of death occupying the animalistic side of humanity, poses a

Footnote 2 (continued)

is the figure who ultimately responds to the human other and is willing to *put down* the knife. As she contends, "Abraham passed that test when he was ready and willing to put down the knife (p. 110)." He is the one who "ultimately realizes that responsibility to God is expressed through responsibility to the human other (p.6)".

fundamental threat to anything higher and nobler in human life. For example, Reno (2020) regards this fear as “the demonic side to the sentimentalism of saving lives at any cost.” He questions, “Everything for the sake of physical life? What about justice, beauty, and honor?” Starting the essay with the claim that “fear is a poor advisor,” Agamben (2020), based in Italy, also contends that “the first thing that the wave of panic that has paralyzed the country obviously shows is that our society no longer believes in anything but bare life.” He further asks, “... what is a society that has no value other than survival?”

Echoing the conventional interpretation and analysis of fear as corruptive and alienating, which has been illustrated in the previous section, these authors re-emphasize the message that individuals must caution against, not COVID-19, but the epidemic of fear as the worst outbreak and we shall recognize death as an inevitable affair. For these authors, to live resolutely as human beings amidst the pandemic means specifically to continue practicing quotidian elements in life that constitute (Western) cultural identities such as hugging, visiting loved ones, going to a funeral, and handshaking, a gesture on which Bernard-Henri Lévy particularly puts stress in his recent interview and book (Appleyard 2020; Lévy 2020).

Of course, some readers have found this line of argument untenable (Berg 2020; Duesterberg 2020; Nancy 2020). In March, Berg (2020) published an essay on *The Chronicle of Higher Education* in response to Agamben’s recent essays and argued that though Agamben was right on the potential costs of our response to the pandemic, that is, the of which we were sacrificing, his analysis was ill-conceived on the *for which* individuals surrendered. His polemic suffered from profound blindness to the wholehearted struggle of sacrifice by ordinary people to care for each other.

As the article is written, people are navigating the deadly pandemic as the death toll escalates, as overburdened medical professionals have to decide who to let die (Cohen 2020; Beall 2020), as nursing homes are ravaged by the virus and enduring ageism (Aronson 2020; Samuel 2020; Stevis-Gridneff et al. 2020; The New York Times 2020), as police brutality against innocent black and brown people becomes abominably routine, and as politicians call for sacrificing senior members in the society for reopening up the economy (Hennessy-Fiske 2020). One may feel that humanity is at stake. Indeed, many of us have experienced higher levels of fear at this moment, which has made issues of fear more pertinent and urgent. The current thought on fear is woefully unable to address these ongoing colossal moral failures in societies. Even though it is apparently true that one needs to be cognizant of fear as an obsession for self-preservation at the expense of human connections and the welfare of others, fear is a much more complex and philosophically rich phenomenon that still needs to be unpacked. To deem the collective gesture of following health care directives such as wearing a mask and self-quarantining as nothing but manifestations of one’s fear for one’s own death is abysmally missing the point.

The pandemic has foregrounded the acuity of an existential reality shared by all living human beings: to be a human means that not only I am a breathing vulnerability to suffering and death, but also, my breath, even in the most unintentional and innocent ways, can cause the suffering and death of the other. There is *a fear of killing*, a fear of sabotaging the other’s well-being, that cannot be simply interpreted as an obsessive, self-regarding pathology. The CDC in the United States and WHO have repeatedly alerted the public that the disease can be transmitted by asymptomatic persons (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2020; World Health Organization 2020). The principle to act as if you have Covid-19, rightfully proclaimed by Jacinda Ardern (Menon 2020; Peters 2020), is not a directive for people to rush into a hospital or hoard essential items and medicine out of a Hobbesian fear. Rather, it underscores one’s heightened potential to harm the other directly

or indirectly in a global pandemic. For many, this is apparent in the affective immediacy: one can be fearfully compelled by the face of an anonymous other who is vulnerable, open, living in flesh and bones, with a life ahead, and at the same time, subject to my breath, my freedom of movement, and my will. This fear *for* the death and suffering of the other is not a subjection to tyrannical power but to the face of the other as the emblem of exposure and call for responsibility. There is no contradiction in wearing a mask and fighting against police brutality with and for others at the same time. In these cases, the masked face should not be interpreted just as a symbol of the fear of the other, alienation, and a rejection of the face-to-face relation because it may also be suffering, both emotionally and physically, on one's own part in recognition of the breathing vulnerability of the other and for the other. There is no question that many people are in fear. But to jump quickly from this preposition to the far-fetched conclusion that the collective effort to contain the virus is a fear-ravaged moral collapse devoid of any possibility for ethical connection is more of a manifestation of intellectual inertia than grounded access to the phenomenon of fear.

Furthermore, this argument is problematic not only as a result of its failure to account for the motivation behind many people's effort (including the sacrifice of certain personal freedoms such as the freedom of movement) to ameliorate the public health crisis in this particular moment, but also its enabling silence to a concerning phenomenon which might be called as fearless irresponsibility. By fearless irresponsibility, we attend to the issue where the condemnation of fear or the pursuit of fearlessness is initiated at a notably high frequency to legitimate disregard for the responsibility to others in society. The current instantiations of it include the support to warrant some troubling educational measures to open schools in person without serious considerations of health consequences of students, teachers, staff members and the refusal to wearing masks by some "masculine" leaders to take on fearless personae. In pressuring schools to open without offering sufficient resources, Betsy Devos argued that, "There are no excuses for sowing fear" (Kaplan 2020). But what does it mean by being fearless in putting students, educators, and their families at risk for the economy in a pandemic where suffering is blatantly present almost everywhere? In this rhetoric, the traditional denunciation of the self-regarding fear of the virus for oneself is employed to quell a fear for the other. This is when fearlessness is no longer a courageous resoluteness in the face of one's own death but the conscious offloading of responsibility, an adamant egoism undeterred by others' deaths and suffering.

What is also demonstrative in this line of argument, which arbitrarily pits fear against anything noble in human life, is an enduring tendency in philosophical thinking. Traditionally speaking, fear is perceived as a very primitive emotion (Nussbaum 2012) that features the animalistic aspect of being a human (where the human is conceived as *animal rationale*). Beneath the intellectual convention where fear is constantly treated as inherently unethical, fear is consistently deemed as metaphysically low: in fear, one is stagnant in the realm of immanence. While in this essay, we would like to point out that fear is a highly ambiguous ethical phenomenon. As an unabashed humanist, Levinas points out that fear discloses to us not just an animal fighting for its life, but also one's felt anarchic responsibility to the other before sorting to any moral reasoning or principle.³ As Pulcini (2013) once noted, "starting from the Hobbesian scenario of modernity, fear is the passion

³ This is an interesting focal point where Levinas and Heidegger's views converge and diverge. Both Heidegger and Levinas illustrate that in fear, there is something more than an animal fighting for its life. But for Levinas, fear for the other is outside of the theory of *beinglichkeit* and what fear for the other ultimately discloses is not Dasein as care (*sorge*), but one's responsibility to the Other.

that lies at the origin of associative life (p. 7).” Understanding fear is a task deeply tied into question regarding what it means to be a human for education. We believe that human beings, in the deepest sense, *even in fear*, can care about other people.

Fear for the other and Moral Education

Fear for the other reveals our tremendous capacity to suffer for the other, which is an aspect of the emotional life of human beings that have not been identified in the general educational discourse. For the most part, fear is what needs to be prevented or eliminated indiscriminately. Several scholars (Cristian 2012; English and Stengel 2010; Fisher 2001; Jackson 2010; Kukkola 2014) have expressed concerns for the phenomenon that contemporary education has committed to a pursuit of fearlessness without a close examination of fear itself. Fisher (2001) once noted that the contemporary U.S. schools are filled with superficial “without fear” projects that are not based on any definition or theory of fear or fearlessness. There are a plethora of banners and titles that advocate for certain educational programs through promising a future free from fear, such as “teaching math without fear,” “teaching physics without fear,” “emergency skills without fear,” “schools without fear,” and “fear-free education” (Fisher 2001, p. 6). Recent articles start to complicate our understanding of what fear is and how it functions in the context of both formal schooling and education in general. Skeptical of the imprudent eradication campaigns of fear in education, Cristian (2012) contends that a conditional acceptance of fear might empower students to manage their lives superlatively; Kukkola (2014) explores the aspect of fear as disclosive of truth and how fear can also be a self-educative process of grasping the world and gaining self-knowledge; English and Stengel (2010) argues that fear can be both a prompt for and an impediment to growth. The latest scholarship on fear has kept this hasty embracement of fearlessness as a feature of contemporary education in check and showed that under the right conditions, certain types of fear have the possibility of playing a more significant role in education.

In this article, we have paid exclusive attention to the fear for the other in light of Levinas’s thoughts. This reconceptualization is critical because the recognition of the fear for the death of the other disrupts the long-time fixation on fear as an emotion only for one’s own survival. Thus, Levinas allows us to explore, as Katz (2018) has underlined, how “our emotional lives assume an existential dimension that far exceeds our bare or minimal survival (p.75).” In addition, this fear for the other is distinct from empathy, a virtue that highlights one’s ability to enter into and share the feelings and perspectives of others (Meier 1996; Sutherland 1986). Different from empathy, fear for the other as openness to the other strikes home prior to the recognition of oneself in the other, thus precedes empathetic awareness. Many scholars have explicated the problems of imagining and assuming the position of the other as the ground for ethics or moral education from a Levinasian perspective where the notion of radical alterity resists any appeal to sameness (Chinnery 2000, 2003; Davenport 1998; Putnam 2008).

We are concerned that fear for the other as a deep and ordinary ethical experience among students and educators in schools goes unnoticed. This inattention first manifests itself as a categorical omission. The existence of fear for the other is not recognized in general educational research, in moral education that is attentive to emotion, and in the everyday school experience. Fear is interpreted only in a one-dimensional sense as an emotional reaction to the hazardous environment, and possibility traps one into solipsism.

In recent sociological studies, researchers have come to introduce the conceptual distinctions between altruistic and personal fear so as to give justice to the subtlety of emotional response of participants (Warr and Ellison 2000; Snedker 2006). As we have mentioned in the second section, Levinas's concept of fear for the other is conceptually beyond the altruistic fear, but we resonate with this direction of progress in the sense that a richer ethical language to access the phenomenon of fear is necessary.

Furthermore, this silent omission is unhelpful for moral education to address ethics as it is ardently lived. Feminist educational philosopher Nel Noddings has illustrated that moral education should not uncritically privilege a rational-cognitive approach (Noddings 1984, p. 8), which is still frequently, if not ubiquitously, practiced in this field. For Noddings, to address ethical issues in schools only through the language of principle and demonstration will cause us to miss the heuristic processes in our ethical thinking and fail to address the feelings, the conflicts, the hopes, and ideas that influence our eventual choices (p. 132). Fear is a very intense emotion. It keeps people awake at night. Fear for the other is the moment where an individual cares for other people's welfare in a direct, simple, immediate, overwhelming way. It is an educationally formative moment for the ethical subjectivity of an individual.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, arguments have blossomed over the idea that perhaps there is a moral obligation to flatten the curve. The reasonings are masterful, ranging from the utilitarian pursuit of saving the greatest number of lives possible to embracing the virtue of solidarity, and even to the naturalistic and evolutionary reason to let the virus take its course (Litvack 2020). This shows that there are plenty of intellectual resources for moral education to deal with contemporary issues in a classic manner, abstractly and dispassionately. But what about individuals' distressful subjective experiences that give rise to ethical questions in the first place? From our observation, at least the current treatment of fear is not immensely impressive to address ethics in its affective immediacy, and as it is holistically lived. With regard to the initial question at the beginning of this article on how shall we understand, pass judgment on, and react to fear in the pandemic, we believe that fear is *not necessarily* isolating, cowardly, pitting individuals against each other, and dragging society into a dystopia as long as we recognize that there is a kind of fear as an ethical troubling of being, as a response to the other at the moment precisely like this one: "here I am."

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