religions

MDPI

*Article*

# On the Tension Between the Elemental Nature and the Ethical Other in Levinas's Thought: An Interpretation Conducted with the Body as a Clue

**Kai Qi and Guangyao Wang ***

School of Politics and Public Administration, Soochow University, Suzhou 215123, China; qikai0321@gmail.com
* Correspondence: gywang123@suda.edu.cn

**Abstract:** The article discusses the irreducible tension between the elemental nature and the ethical Other in Levinas's philosophy. Firstly, the article indicates that Levinas, as a phenomenologist, uncovers that the relationship between humans and nature is primarily characterized by sensitive enjoyment, where the sensitive body bathes and immerses itself in the elemental nature. Secondly, the paper reveals how Levinas, as both a disciple and a sharp critic of Heidegger, elucidates the anteriority of the elemental nature over the equipmental world, further illustrating how the elemental nature transforms into the world of equipment. Thirdly, the paper indicates that, as a prominent pioneer of the ethics of the Other, Levinas emphasizes the tension between nature and ethics: on one hand, the enjoyment immersing in the elemental nature leads to an egoistic way of life, while the ethical relation with the Other disrupts and breaks this egoism; on the other hand, the subject's enjoyment and possession of nature is a necessary prerequisite for responding to the Other. Finally, the paper reveals that, when elucidating the irreducible tension between nature and ethics, Levinas, as a Jewish philosopher, is profoundly influenced by the absolute separation between the transcendence and the world that Judaism upholds.

**Keywords:** Levinas; nature; ethics; body; sensibility; enjoyment; suffering; element; the Other; Judaism

check for updates

Academic Editor: Daniel Lemeni

Received: 4 January 2025
Revised: 30 January 2025
Accepted: 3 February 2025
Published: 6 February 2025

**Citation:** Qi, Kai, and Guangyao Wang. 2025. On the Tension Between the Elemental Nature and the Ethical Other in Levinas's Thought: An Interpretation Conducted with the Body as a Clue. *Religions* 16: 187. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16020187

**Copyright:** © 2025 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

## 1. Introduction: Levinas and Natural Philosophy

The origins of Western philosophy can be traced back to the natural philosophy of ancient Greece, where the initial core issue was the question of the origin of the world. In the development and evolution of natural philosophy, Western philosophy's interpretations of nature have roughly formed the following three frameworks: cosmology, teleology, and mechanism.

Cosmology is the contemplation of questions regarding the essence, origin, evolution, and structure of the entire universe. The Milesian school explained the origin of the world through material natural elements and deduced the entire process of the universe's formation from a specific origin. This represents the cosmological interpretation of nature in the early stages of Western philosophy. However, as the process of interpreting nature from a cosmological perspective, ancient Greek philosophers gradually recognized the importance of Logos in the process of cosmic generation. For instance, in the Pythagorean school's doctrine of "number as the origin", "number" is not a material natural element but a formal element that governs the operation of all things (Zeller 1889, pp. 50–52). Heraclitus, while identifying fire as the natural element that is the origin of all things, also regarded Logos as the measure that must be followed for the burning of fire (Robinson 1987,

p. 25). Anaxagoras, a pluralist, in addition to considering seeds (which are inert material entities, infinite in both quality and quantity) as the material origin of all things, specifically introduced the concept of *Nous* (mind or intellect) as a spiritual origin. The active *Nous* drives the aggregation and separation of seeds, thereby generating the myriad diverse things. *Nous* is not only the law that the aggregation and separation of seeds follow but also the driving force behind this process (Curd 2007, p. 23). Thus, it is evident that the ancient Greek philosophers' exploration of the natural origin gradually shifted from an initial focus on material natural elements to an emphasis on formal or dynamic elements such as law, principle, ground, and driving force that govern the generation and operation of all things. In other words, the generation and operation of nature are active processes that inherently contain rational elements that can be comprehended. As Collingwood stated, "the world of nature is not only alive but intelligent, not only a vast animal with a 'soul' or life of its own, but a rational animal with a 'mind' of its own" (Collingwood 1945, p. 3). Further, ancient Greek natural philosophy "was based on the principle that the world of nature is saturated or permeated by mind" (Collingwood 1945, p. 3).

The focus on the inherent vitality and rational laws of nature led ancient Greek philosophers to shift their interpretation of nature from a cosmological framework to a teleological one: nature possesses an internal purpose, and things in the natural world develop towards this purpose. Aristotle, in his Metaphysics, first introduced the concept of the "four causes" (Aristotle 2016, pp. 7–9). Among them, the "material cause", "formal cause", and "efficient cause" refer to the matter of a thing, its form, and the realization of that form, while the "final cause" reveals that "the substance in virtue of its existence not only materializes a form but also implies the realization of a purpose" (Dijksterhuis 1986, p. 41). For Aristotle, the purpose of nature "is restless in its search for a perfection already existing in God and identical with God" (Collingwood 1945, p. 88). Aristotle's God neither knows this world nor created it out of nothing. Medieval philosophy, particularly Scholasticism, absorbed Aristotle's hylomorphism. However, to the medieval Christian philosophers, nature no longer appeared as a rational organism, as it did for the ancient Greek philosophers, but rather as "an arrangement of bodily parts designed and put together and set going for a definite purpose by an intelligent mind outside itself" (Collingwood 1945, p. 5). This nature is subject to the Christian God and is a product of His intellect. And, in turn, nature reflects God's will and intellect. In a teleological argument for the existence of God, Thomas Aquinas states that God is the only one who gives the whole of nature a kind of purposiveness (Aquinas 1952, p. 241). However, in this view, nature no longer appears as an active, living, organic whole containing an internal "soul" that drives its own operation. Instead, it retreats beneath God, becoming a work created and arranged by the Divine, endowed with causality and order by God. This shift precisely laid the foundation for the emergence of the mechanistic worldview.

Mechanism holds that natural objects and phenomena can be fully explained as processes of causal mechanical motion. Thomas Hobbes describes nature as the function and operation of a huge machine, denying any underlying purpose behind nature (Hobbes 1998, pp. 15–20). Meanwhile, René Descartes reduced the figure and movement of things to a mechanical picture defined entirely by geometrical rules (Descartes 1982, pp. 76–77). Such a mechanistic view of nature is "based on the Christian idea of a creative and omnipotent God" (Collingwood 1945, p. 8) on the one hand, and "based on the human experience of designing and constructing machines" (Collingwood 1945, p. 8) on the other. The mechanistic understanding of nature employs human reason's grasp of the mathematical principles of nature as a means. According to E. J. Dijksterhuis, "The mechanization of the world-picture during the transition from ancient to classical science meant the introduction of a description of nature with the aid of the mathematical concepts of classical mechanics"

(Dijksterhuis 1986, p. 501). Conversely, it was precisely through this mechanistic view of nature that the natural sciences made significant progress.

Throughout the development of Western philosophy, it becomes evident that the investigation of nature has increasingly emphasized the rational elements within it. Cosmology sought to deduce the generation of all things in the world from an original element. Teleology interpreted nature as a living whole saturated with mind, operating according to rational laws and possessing inherent tendency and purpose. Medieval philosophy transferred the "mind" into God, viewing nature as the work of God, the unparalleled creator. Nature, constrained by the causal laws endowed by God, appeared as a vast, ordered chain. As the dominance of theology gradually waned, the mechanical feature of nature was further emphasized and magnified. Mechanists firmly believed that by uncovering the mechanical laws within nature, humans, as rational beings, could conquer, transform, and control nature. With the continued development and advancement of modern science and technology, nature has increasingly become an available resource for human exploitation and utilization.

However, whether in the cosmological, teleological, or mechanistic understanding of nature, all of these perspectives overlook the more primordial interaction between man and nature: the person who owns the sensitive body firstly enjoys the elemental nature, bathing in and inhabiting nature. For Levinas, the relationship between man and nature is not first and foremost a relationship of cognition or utilization, but rather a sensitive relationship established through the bodily enjoyment of nature. From this point of view, Levinas employs the methods of phenomenological intentional analysis and existential analysis to develop a unique interpretation of nature distinct from that of previous Western philosophers. These interpretations are concentrated in the second part of Levinas's masterpiece, *Totality and Infinity*.

Can a unique natural philosophy[1] be distilled from Levinas's thought? Few researchers have specifically posed this question, let alone attempted to answer it. In our view, Levinas's exploration of nature holds an indispensable position within his philosophy, especially within his well-known ethics of the Other, yet previous studies on Levinas's thought have often overlooked this dimension. However, many researchers have thematically explored some important notions such as "the elemental", "enjoyment", "pleasure", "sensibility", "body", "dwelling", "home", and so on, which are highly relevant to the question we aim to raise. For instance, John Sallis identified seven main characteristics of "the elemental" in the sense of Levinas and two different modes of the subject's association with the elemental, and in response to the uncertainty of the elements, the subject must overcome it through labor and the establishment of a home (Sallis 1998). Sasha L. Biro showed that the subject separates from the mysterious, anonymous flow of the elements and moves towards an ethical relationship with the Other (Biro 2017). Jojo Joseph Varakukalayil revealed that the body is a necessary prerequisite for an ethical relationship with the Other, and as a sensitive being, the body is first and foremost immersed in the elements (Varakukalayil 2015). Jolanta Saldukaitytė examined how welcoming the Other emerges from the act of dwelling, thereby highlighting the ethical dimension inherent in Levinas's concept of home (Saldukaitytė 2019). Kathryn Bevis shows that in Levinas's philosophy, the body has a dual characteristic: it acts as a place of self-establishment and, at the same time, reveals exposure and vulnerability in encounters with the Other (Bevis 2007). Ted Toadvine argues that the significance of nature lies in being a source of enjoyment for the subject and a material condition for life, rather than being an independent entity deserving of ethical concern (Toadvine 2012). Graham Harman suggests that Levinas's philosophy shows that the first encounter between sensibility and the world is aesthetic, occurring before ethical relationship is established (Harman 2007). Jacob Meskin reveals that in

Levinas's philosophy, the body is not just a physiological entity but also a bearer of ethical responsibility, closely connected to the experience of Jewish ritual (Meskin 1993).

Although these studies do not directly deal with Levinas's natural philosophy, they are important and enlightening for systematically revealing a Levinasian natural philosophy and the role of Levinas's discussions on nature within his overall thought. This paper aims to elucidate that a unique philosophy of nature can be distilled from Levinas's thought by following the clues of bodily need, enjoyment, labor, dwelling, desire, suffering, and giving. Furthermore, this paper seeks to reveal that Levinas's exploration of nature holds an indispensable position within his well-known ethics of the Other. Based on this, we will specifically explore the following four questions.

Firstly, as a phenomenologist, what is the original meaning of nature that Levinas reveals through the phenomenological method? Secondly, as both a disciple and sharp critic of Heidegger, what is the relationship between Levinas's conception of the elemental nature and the equipmental world as revealed in Heidegger's *Being and Time*? And how does the elemental nature transform into the equipmental world? Thirdly, as the founder of the renowned ethics of the Other, what is the irreducible tensional relation between nature and ethics in Levinas's writings? Finally, as a Jewish philosopher[2], how do the transcendent God of the Jewish tradition and the separation between the transcendence and the world dimension that Judaism upholds decisively influence Levinas's discussion of the relationship between nature and ethics? Exploring and answering these four questions will help uncover a natural philosophy in Levinas's sense and systematically reveal the tensional relationship between nature and ethics in his philosophy, as well as the unique Jewish perspective behind Levinas's views on nature and ethics.

## 2. Enjoyment: The Primordial Sensitive Bond with Nature

As mentioned above, whether cosmological, teleological, or mechanistic, understandings of nature ignore the more original interaction between man and nature: the enjoyment, bathing, and inhabiting within nature of those who possess the body. For Levinas, the relationship between man and nature is not first and foremost one of static awareness or domination over nature as a means and a resource, but rather one of sensitive enjoyment. None of the three—cosmological, teleological, and mechanistic—begins to examine the relationship between the subject and nature at the level of sensibility. However, the absence of this perspective does not mean that examining the relationship between sensibility and nature is unnecessary. On the contrary, if one ignores sensibility and examines nature directly from the perspective of rational factors, the result will ultimately be to fall into an external order that holds everything in its hands. Whether it is the living, spiritual nature of cosmology, or the God of creation in teleology, or the chain of cause and effect that orchestrates all movement in mechanism, they all present themselves as governors that are external to the subject. The individual, under their domination, can only accept their rational laws passively. The consequence is that the relationship between the individual and nature is transformed into a relationship between rationalities, thereby erasing the subject's unique intrinsic sensibility when facing nature into an external rational order. But the truth is something more than that, as the subject in nature feels initially and distinctly its own separation from nature as a sole individual. For the subject, "no activity precedes sensibility" (Levinas 2007, p. 158) and all rational knowledge of nature inevitably presupposes the subject's sensibility of contact with nature.

So how does this subject of sensibility with a body initially relate to external nature? In the history of Western philosophy, the vast majority of philosophers agree that sensibility is subordinate to the activity of representation. It serves as the primary stage of representation, providing rough raw material for it. And it is rational thought that is the way to recognize

the world. As Kant commented on sensibility, "Objects are therefore given to us by means of sensibility, and it alone affords us intuitions; but they are thought through the understanding, and from it arise concepts" (Kant 1998, p. 155). But in this perspective, we have neglected the intentional activity of the sensibility itself—does the sensibility itself have a unique activity that belongs to itself, apart from serving rational cognition? From this point of view, Levinas makes a clear distinction between the intentional acts of representation and those of sensibility, pointing out that sensibility has its own "enjoyment" activity outside the framework of rational cognition.

The intentional acts of representation are essentially an activity of identification, which transforms everything that is different from the subject into an "intentional correlate" (*noema*). Levinas vividly compares this identifying activity to "light": "Light is that through which something is other than myself, but already as if it came from me" (Levinas 1987, p. 64). Light illuminates things, and those things that are made visible by light have to accept the way light illuminates them. The same applies to things known through representation: they manifest their form only in representation and thus inevitably must adhere to the conditions set by representation. The subordination of the things to the representation makes the things fundamentally not alien to the subject, and anything recognized by the subject has already undergone the construction of the representation, so that "in the intelligibility of representation the distinction between me and the object, between interior and exterior, is effaced" (Levinas 2007, p. 124). Secondly, the activity of representation is an absolutely spontaneous act, and there is no passivity in its identification. Representation automatically constructs meanings for the other things, and this process is continually being accomplished in each present moment. For only in this way is the activity of representation continuous and absolute, and the world it constructs is complete. As Levinas puts it, "To represent is not to reduce a past fact to an actual image but to reduce to the instantaneousness of thought everything that seems independent of it" (Levinas 2007, p. 127). To conclude, the intentional acts of representation can be summarized as the activity of building the same with absoluteness and spontaneity. Everything it recognizes can be utilized and controlled by the subject. There is no gap between the external world and the subject.

But in addition to capturing the object as a concept subordinate to the subject through signification, the subject can also experience an affectivity in the process of experiencing the thing. This "affectivity" (*affectivité*)[3] is the very embodiment of the intentional activity of the sensibility. In the intentional activity of the sensibility, the sensibility does not construct the thing it encounters as an identification object, but simply experiences the sensation that the thing brings to the body as well as the emotion that accompanies this sensation. As Levinas puts it, this sensitive activity "does not belong to the order of thought but to that of sentiment, that is, the affectivity wherein the egoism of the I pulsates. One does not know, one lives sensible qualities: the green of these leaves, the red of this sunset" (Levinas 2007, p. 135). Whether it is "the green of these leaves" (Levinas 2007, p. 135) or "the red of this sunset" (Levinas 2007, p. 135), when the subject experiences them with its own sensibility, it is not attempting to understand them as conceptualized objects, nor trying to gain insights into their contexts, or regulating them. On the contrary, in encountering them, the sensibility is purely "enjoying" the satisfaction of the need of the sensibility for this thing.

Sensibility always presents itself as a need for the satisfaction of the sensible subject, since sensitive activity "is concretized in corporeal existence" (Levinas 2007, p. 164). There is no doubt that sensibility is not an inner contemplation. In contemplation, the subject can detach a contemplative "I" from the body, as the scepticism of Descartes ultimately leads to "I am thinking therefore I exist" (Descartes 2006, p. 28). However, sensitive activity is the

body activity of the subject, and it cannot be realised independently of the body. And the body is always exposed, it is always in constant contact with the outer world. The outer world to which the body is in touch is not a vacuum of nothing, but is full of colorful and sensible beings. In addition to the "the green of these leaves, the red of this sunset" (Levinas 2007, p. 135), "the breath of the wind, the undulation of the sea, the sparkle of the light" (Levinas 2007, p. 141), as Levinas points out, we could continue to give examples such as "the freshness of the air", "the fragrance of the flowers", "the roughness of the bark", "the rustling of leaves in the wind" and so on. This set of examples collectively illustrates that the external world, which sensibility engages with, is in fact one that constantly satisfies the needs of sensibility. It responds to the call for satisfaction from sensibility and never ceases to do so. In this sense, Levinas vividly refers to the activity of sensibility continuously encountering the sensible and being perpetually satisfied by it as "enjoyment".

Thus, through the above discussions, it is not difficult to see that enjoyment is an intentional activity of sensibility. In phenomenology, the term "intentionality" refers to the idea that "cognitive mental processes (and this belongs to their essence) have an intentio, they refer to something, they are related in this or that way to an object" (Husserl 1973, p. 43). And "enjoyment" is the same; it is always the "enjoyment of..". and always requires the sensible external world to satisfy the needs of the body and sensibility. If the object of enjoyment does not exist, then there can be no talk of enjoyment, and sensibility can no longer be called sensibility. However, as we mentioned above, sensibility never represents the things it senses as identical objects or constructs them as concepts grasped by thought. Thus, the object of enjoyment is not some entity that integrates form and matter, nor is it a sensitive intuition awaiting further processing by the intellect; rather, it is the "pure quality" (Levinas 2007, p. 132) that simply satisfies the subject's capacities of sensibility. Everything that is sensible in the outside world can respond to the subject's sensibility and enable the subject's activity of enjoyment to take place. Thus, enjoyment cannot be understood as a purposeful activity of grasping. "Life does not consist in seeking and consuming the fuel furnished by breathing and nourishment, but . . . in consummating terrestrial and celestial nourishments" (Levinas 2007, p. 114). These "terrestrial and celestial nourishments" are precisely all the enjoyed things that can be acted upon in the sensibility. Levinas refers to these sensible entities that surround sensibility and continually satisfy the subject's sensitive needs as "the elemental" (*l'élémental*). The embodiment of sensibility manifests as the body, and the body is always surrounded by the rich and diverse sensible elements. Therefore, from the very beginning, the sensible subject, endowed with a body, is immersed in the flow of the elemental. The relationship between the subject and the external world is not one of reason and concepts from beginning to end. The intentional activity of sensibility outlines a different picture: in enjoyment, the subject is always bathed in the elemental, "I am always within the element" (Levinas 2007, p. 131). In this sense, Levinas reveals a more original outside world—the purposeful equipmental world constructed by representations is not the only description of the outside world, but the intentional acts of representation outline a more original elemental nature. Elemental nature will continue to be analyzed later on, for after elaborating on the outward dependence and appeal of enjoyment activity to the elements, we must move on to the coiling movement of enjoyment.

Indeed, the intentional activity of enjoyment always points towards the external sensible entities. However, as we have revealed above, the main difference between sensibility and representation is that the former does not conceptualize or systematize the sensible elements it encounters; instead, it simply experiences the emotional tremors brought about by the elements. While experiencing this emotion, the subject is also experiencing the emotion that arises from the experience itself. When the subject's body enjoys the elements externally, the subject feels "happy" because sensibility is being fulfilled, and when this

feeling of "happiness" naturally arises, the subject also feels "happy" because they are experiencing "happiness". Thus, enjoyment not only has an outward intentionality but also possesses a reflexivity—"enjoyment is an enjoying of enjoyment" (Levinas 1974, p. 73).[4] While enjoying the elements, it is also "able to be complacent in itself" (Levinas 1974, p. 73). Regarding this point, Levinas offers a more vivid explanation: "Enjoyment is a withdrawal into oneself, an involution . . .the I is the very contraction of sentiment, the pole of a spiral whose coiling and involution is drawn by enjoyment: the focus of the curve is a part of the curve. It is precisely as a 'coiling,' as a movement toward oneself, that enjoyment comes into play" (Levinas 2007, p. 118). In the coiling movement of enjoyment, the reflexivity of enjoyment causes the sensations brought by sensibility to continuously flow towards a center. It is precisely in this process that the subject's inner selfhood is highlighted. During the enjoyment of elements, sensibility merely follows the traces of external sensible elements. However, when the subject becomes aware of their own emotions and experiences the generation and flow of these emotions, a self within the body is clearly revealed by the emotions. As Levinas puts it: "because life is happiness it is personal" (Levinas 2007, p. 115). In other words, because I can be happy for my own happiness, I am not merely a thing swayed randomly by the flow of the elemental, but rather an independent subject with an inner foundation who can relate to itself.

The presentation of enjoyment as the subject's original relationship with nature undoubtedly challenges and refutes Heidegger's existentialism. In Heidegger, the human being as Dasein is thrown into a given world, which is already an equipmental world structured by material, cultural, historical, and meaningful contexts. Dasein cannot escape from the limitations of the established equipmental world and is constrained by social, historical, and other conditions, so Dasein itself is shown to be trapped and limited. But Levinas undoubtedly takes a more positive attitude on this issue. By pointing to the independent intentional function of sensibility, Levinas highlights a bodily being. This Being is able to experience the elements outwardly because of its body, to be immersed and bathed in elemental nature, and to expect the elements to respond to its needs. Thus, "The human being does not find himself in an absurd world in which he would be *geworfen*" (Levinas 2007, p. 140). For Levinas, the subject is not only a rational being engaged in representation but also a being that experiences hunger, has needs, and is capable of enjoyment. Therefore, the original activity of the subject is not concern for the future, nor is it "anxiety" towards the death, but rather a sensitive touch of the elements, enjoyment within the elemental nature, and happiness in life.

It is true that the sensibility can be engaged in an activity of inner enjoyment at all times in a nature that is enriched by the elemental. However, the elements cannot provide a consistent guarantee for this enjoyment. While serving as objects of sensitive enjoyment, the element retains their anonymity, mystery, and insecurity. As the subject bathes in elemental nature and is happy to live, it also recognizes the finite character of sensibility itself. And on this point, it is necessary to further portray nature as the elemental.

## 3. Nature as the Elemental

In the previous text, we discussed that in intentional activities of sensibility, the subject is bathed and immersed in elemental nature, experiencing the elements and engaging in enjoyment. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas refers to the elements surrounding and enveloping the subject's body as "medium" (*milieu*). On one hand, the activities of sensibility do not bestow clear characteristics on objects like representational activities do; within the sensibility realm, the elements retain their ambiguity. Thus, everything perceptible surrounding the body can only be vaguely termed "medium". On the other hand, the elemental, as medium, serves as the background from which all concrete things emerge.

Things have to pass through a medium in order to be presented to the subject. As John Sallis points out, "The things of enjoyment come to us from a background, emerging from and returning to that background in the course of the enjoyment we can have of them" (Sallis 1998, p. 157). Thus, the elemental is in fact the preconditioning medium for our cognitive activity. Levinas also has a clear description of this point: "They are found in space, in the air, on the earth, in the street, along the road. The medium remains essential to things, even when they refer to property" (Levinas 2007, pp. 130–31).

Thus, the subject's enjoyment activities have both narrow and broad dimensions. When the subject focuses on a specific object—such as tasting food, watching waves, listening to the rustle of wind through trees, or touching rough bark—both rational and sensitive capacities are engaged in the process. Beyond representing this specific object as a unified concept, the sensibility experience brings pure joy and happiness simply from experiencing these concrete things, which constitutes the narrow dimension of enjoyment. In the broader dimension, the enjoyment derived from elemental nature as medium allows the subject to interact with the overall perceptible world solely through sensibility engagement, without the representational capacity dividing the elements into distinct objects. Thus, the elemental nature of the medium inherently envelops the body of the subject from the very beginning. The subject exists within the elemental, rather than placing the elemental opposite to itself. Therefore, in a broad sense of enjoyment, subjects cannot examine the element as if it is a specific object. The elements remain faceless to the subject, just as Levinas stated: "to tell the truth the element has no side at all. One does not approach it. The relation adequate to its essence discovers it precisely as a medium" (Levinas 2007, p. 131). Whereas the subject's activity of enjoyment always has the elements as the relevant aspects of its intentional activity, the distinction between the narrow and the broad sense of the activity of enjoyment naturally reflects the two corresponding dimensions of the elements in Levinas's philosophy: on the one hand, the element is experienced by the subject's sensibility and body in the course of the subject's encounters with a concrete thing; on the other hand, the elemental nature always constitutes the medium that wraps around the body and surrounds it.

By revealing the facelessness of elements, Levinas similarly defines the characteristic of anonymity that the elements possess. This further highlights the fundamental difference between the elemental nature experienced by sensibility and the equipmental world constructed by representation. In *Time and the Other*, Levinas defines "existence" as follows: "there is neither anyone nor anything that takes this existence upon itself" (Levinas 1987, p. 47); "it is never attached to an object that is, and because of this I call it anonymous" (Levinas 1987, p. 48). It can thus be seen that in Levinas's context, "anonymity" implies a neutral state of being that does not manifest itself in the form of a specific individual or a concrete object. In the equipmental world, things have their own specific properties and functions. Through the insight and grasp of each thing, the subject is able to build a complete chain of purpose. However, the element differs from objects, maintaining an anonymity same to that of existence. In the intentional activity of sensibility, the element does, on the one hand, surround the body of the subject and satisfy the natural need of sensibility; but on the other hand, the element is also the sensible that sensibility cannot grasp or intercept, the quality that is merely felt without being bound by a concrete form. As Levinas puts it, "the side it presents to us does not determine an object, remains entirely anonymous. It is wind, earth, sea, sky, air" (Levinas 2007, p. 132). When Levinas says that the elements are the wind, the earth, the sea, the sky, the air, he is not merely saying that the elements are these types of things, but he wants to point out that the elements are the "pure quality" (Levinas 2007, p. 132) that is not grasped, that does not have an individual identity—just as, although the subject is able to gain insight into the properties of the wind,

the earth, the sea, the sky, and the air, the subject can only bathe in them, not take them out and away as things.

It is clear to see, therefore, that although sensibility enjoys the elements and is happy because of the elements, the elements surrounding sensibility always have its own inscrutable character—"the element comes to us from nowhere" (Levinas 2007, p. 132) and "The depth of the element prolongs it till it is lost in the earth and in the heavens. 'Nothing ends, nothing begins'" (Levinas 2007, p. 131). For sensibility, the element is an object full of mystery that cannot be traced back to its origins. When sensibility experiences the element and the affect it brings, it cannot bridge the gap between the elements and the subject in its essence: the subject's body does touch the elements, but the subject does not know for how long this enjoyment will last, because sensibility cannot identify the elements. The mysterious character of the elements always casts a shadow of uncertainty over my future enjoyment. The element is "coming always, without my being able to possess the source" (Levinas 2007, p. 141). This fact of the element "delineates the future of sensibility and enjoyment" (Levinas 2007, p. 141). This future is a potential descent into nothingness: if the elements are not things that sensibility can grasp, and if it always possesses an elusive mystery, then how can sensibility and the body ensure the continuity of their enjoyment?

This question, however, is entirely one that sensibility cannot answer. As Levinas puts it, "its elemental character, its coming forth from nothing, constitutes its fragility, the disintegration of becoming, that time prior to representation—which is menace and destruction" (Levinas 2007, p. 141). It is precisely the facelessness, anonymity, and mystery of the element that gives it a kind of uncertainty in relation to the subject: the element is fragile for the subject's future enjoyment, because the element is neither a concept controlled by the mind nor something that can be clearly perceived and grasped in the hand. Its own mysterious format makes the element overflow into sensibility. Faced with it, sensibility and the body can only be passive receivers.

Levinas refers to the elements, which are beyond sensibility, as "faceless gods, impersonal gods" (Levinas 2007, p. 142)[5] and the instability of the elements as "the mythical divinity of the element" (Levinas 2007, p. 142). Undoubtedly, in referring to the elements in this way, Levinas intends to point out the transcendence of the elements in relation to the sensibility and the body—for the sensibility, the element is the mysterious being that surpasses it, which "is not a 'something' susceptible of being revealed, but an ever-new depth of absence, an existence without existent:, the impersonal par excellence" (Levinas 2007, p. 142). The sensibility and the body receive the action of the elements in the midst of elemental nature. But the element itself can neither be known nor regulated. The body and sensibility are therefore left to the flow of the elements, and are fundamentally powerless over the elements. But Levinas does not point to the elements as "faceless gods" (Levinas 2007, p. 142) in order to reintroduce a mystical attitude towards naturalism. On the contrary, it is precisely to transform the mysticism of the elements into the attitude of atheism towards nature, to transform the transcendence of the elements over the sensibility into the transcendence of the other over the subject.

In elemental nature, the elements both give the subject the possibility of enjoyment and construct a self by arousing the sensibility's coiling movement. However, because of their own insecurity, the elemental flows are always threatening the enjoyment of sensibility, casting a shadow of uncertainty over the future of enjoyment. What the subject seeks is always stable enjoyment and happiness. If this were not the case, the subject's ongoing self would be lost in the anonymous flow of the elements, transforming it into something that is not subjective. Levinas, though, recognizes the inability of sensibility to deal with the insecurity of the elements. However, the subject with a body has the capacity to be active in addition to passively sensing the elements—"The disquietude that manifests itself

within the enjoyment of the element, in the overflowing of the instant that escapes the gentle mastery of enjoyment, is . . . recouped by labor. Labor recoups the lag between the element and the sensation" (Levinas 2007, pp. 140–41). The mystery and insecurity of the elements, though an inherent problem of sensibility, is not the end. Through labour, the subject will acquire the "furnishings" of the floating and uncertain elemental nature, which the subject will occupy. And this process will bring about the transformation of elemental nature into an equipmental world.

## 4. The Transformation from the Elemental Nature to the Equipmental World

From passively enjoying the unstable elements to actively constructing a world that can be used by the self, this process requires the effort of the subject. As pointed out earlier, the elemental nature is, in essence, an unstable nature for the subject. Therefore, it is only when the self begins to examine the instability of the elements it experiences that it strives to create a world under its control. Through the analysis of the intentional activity of "enjoyment", the self is clearly highlighted by the inward movement of enjoyment. This self feels the emotions stirred by the sensitive experience and is happy because of the happiness that the body itself experiences. However, what needs to be further clarified is the mode of existence of this self, which is aroused by the emotional stirrings of the senses. How exactly does this self exist?

In analyzing sensibility and enjoyment, we highlight the dual nature of the body itself, which is both inward and outward. As for sensibility, the body itself is sensibility. On one hand, the body is always exposed to the outside world, immersed in elemental nature. On the other hand, it is precisely because of the body that sensations can be conveyed, and the coiling movement of enjoyment can be realized. Thus, the ambiguity of the body lies in its ability to simultaneously reach both inward and outward: outward, the body enjoys the elements; inward, the coiling movement of enjoyment arouses the self's existence. This ambiguity of the body also reveals the mode of operation and the state of existence of the self. That is, the self itself is an absolutely isolated self, and the body continually stimulates this self with the emotional stirrings of enjoyment, making its existence persist. These two aspects together illustrate the self's existential position: the self opens a gap within the anonymous and mysterious flow of the elements. The subject is not a drifting, rootless entity, nor is it merely part of the flow of the elements; it is an independent being with uninterrupted autonomy. Only when at home can the subject extract from the mysterious, indeterminate, insecure elemental nature things that belong to itself, and only then can it move from elemental nature to the equipmental world.

In the context of Levinas's philosophy, the concept of home absolutely does not refer to material architecture or the body itself. A home gains its significance as home only through the dwelling of the self. It is the place where the subject finds its grounding, as well as the intermediary space through which the subject establishes a connection with the outside world—"the dwelling is not situated in the objective world, but the objective world is situated by relation to my dwelling" (Levinas 2007, p. 153). The original state of being at home is precisely the fact that the self is placed within the body: the body provides a place for interiority to dwell, while also realizing its own absolute isolation. Therefore, home carries the dual attributes presented by the body: on the one hand, the subject in the home is separated from the external world, thereby opening a place where the subject itself can rest; on the other hand, the subject can both depart from the home to reach the external world and return from the external world back to the home. This is why the existence of home disrupts the fullness of elemental nature: without the shelter and protection of the home, the subject is merely one of the scattered elements in the vastness of the world. Only

with the establishment of home can the self perform as "opening in it the utopia in which the 'I' recollects itself in dwelling at home with itself" (Levinas 2007, p. 156).

The state of dwelling at home signifies the separation of the self from the outside world, marking the realization of "recollecting itself", which means that the subject is no longer merely exercising its sensibility, passively affected by the elements. Instead, it begins to care for its own insecure future and confronts its absolute separation from the outside world. This concern goes beyond the relationship between sensibility and nature: in sensibility, the body directly perceives the elements surrounding it, but the satisfaction the elements provide is merely the result of a passive mechanism, with the insecurity of the elements casting a shadow of scarcity over this activity. The self in the home must be more concerned with its own situation—recollection is "no longer deriving its freedom from the agreeableness of the elements" (Levinas 2007, p. 154). The self that gathers itself no longer remains immersed in the elements; it begins to realize that it must worry about the future's void.

However, simply recognizing the insecurity of the elements does not resolve the potential void of the future. In this situation, the conscious subject that is revealed through the home not only perceives the possible demise of the future in the passive contact between the body and the elements, but also actively strives to secure the future through labor. As Levinas states, "Labor will henceforth draw things from the elements and thus discover the world" (Levinas 2007, p. 157). This quote highlights the role of labor: it extracts things from the boundless, formless elemental nature and makes them subject to my control and possession. The direct manifestation of this process is the body's action on the elements to ensure the continuation of enjoyment. "The power of the hand that grasps or tears up or crushes or kneads relates the element . . . but to an end in the sense of a goal, to the goal of need" (Levinas 2007, p. 164). The immediate drive of labor is the threat that the insecurity of the elements poses to need, and labor seeks to make the satisfaction of need something under my control. The direct way of labor is through the hands' groping, through which things emerge from the elements. In elemental nature, the elemental envelops the subject as the medium; but in labor, the hands outline objects, giving form to the formless, causing things to emerge from the elements. Things are no longer mere quality; they have their own contours and boundaries. Thus, through the hands' groping, objects undergo their own process of solidification.

Simply distinguishing the boundaries of things is not sufficient. The hands' groping only clarifies the contours of the object. In order for enjoyment to be sustained, it is necessary to understand the origins of things, so that they can continue to be of use in the future. Therefore, the subject needs to grasp the inherent properties of the things that have achieved solidification. This means that the way the subject interacts with things must shift from solidification to the process of substantiation. For the subject, an object is not only something with contours; it also contains its own attributes and functions. The subject's approach to the object is essentially an insight into its nature. Thus, if the subject wants to engage with the object in its full essence, it cannot remain only at the level of tactile groping. But solidification remains the prerequisite for substantiation; without outlining the contours of the things in elemental nature, the object's attributes and functions cannot be known. Thus, it is precisely through the process of the hands' groping that the subject further realizes the substantiation of things through possession. "The access to values, usage, manipulation, and manufacture rest on possession, on the hand that takes, that acquires, that brings back home" (Levinas 2007, p. 162). The state of dwelling and the hands' role in solidification make possession possible: objects are separated from one another, each with its own contours, allowing them to become movable property—things the subject can take with it. For the subject, the value of these movable properties is directly

tied to their value for the home, for sustaining the self's enjoyment. With possession, things completely become dependent on the subject, transforming into furnishings that "can be exchanged and accordingly be compared, be quantified" (Levinas 2007, p. 162).

Under the condition of dwelling, and through labor and possession, the subject acquires objects from the original elemental nature that can sustain its enjoyment. These objects no longer exhibit the indeterminate, formless qualities of the elements, but instead become distinct, well-defined, and concrete furnishings that are available for the subject's use. These possessions are all intended to guarantee the continuation of the subject's enjoyment in this world, as the core purpose of all this work is to eliminate the threat posed by the instability of the elements to that enjoyment. The way to neutralize this threat is by actively obtaining specific objects that can provide for the subject's enjoyment. Therefore, with the process of labor and possession, the subject's intentional activity, aimed at representation, becomes clearly manifested, and a teleological system is constructed: all things are grasped by the subject according to whether their nature serves to sustain the subject's enjoyment. Everything is brought under the scrutiny of the subject's representational faculties and transformed into furnishings for the subject's use. This, in turn, reflects the very nature of representational activity itself: All things represented are presented as related to consciousness and are determined by the identity. As a result, the original elemental nature transforms in this process into an equipmental world that is attached to the subject, becoming a humanized world that is usable by self.

Thus, Levinas portrays how the subject shifts from passively indulging in elemental nature to actively constructing an equipmental world through a series of steps, including dwelling, recollecting itself, the groping of hand, labor, and possession. However, the process of extracting things from the elements does not signify the disappearance of elemental nature. In fact, the elemental nature, as the background and medium of the equipmental world, can never be eradicated. While representation constructs the equipmental world, it cannot overturn elemental nature, because representation "is constitutive but already rests on the enjoyment of a real completely constituted" (Levinas 2007, p. 169). As discussed earlier, enjoyment of sensibility and the state of dwelling precede representation and serve as the foundation and condition for the construction of this world. Representation is never an ability that arises from nothing; it essentially serves to sustain and prolong the enjoyment. This is where Levinas reveals the anteriority of elemental nature over the equipmental world. Heidegger views "care" (*Sorge*) as the primordial mode of existence for Dasein, stating that "its existential meaning is care" (Heidegger 2001a, p. 65). Through care, the subject becomes aware of the existence and significance of equipment, incorporating it into our way of being. However, Heidegger's consideration fails to account for the anteriority of sensibility and dwelling: the subject first enjoys the elements and, in order to maintain this sensitive activity, further constructs the equipmental world; moreover, it is only after the establishment of a "home" that enables recollecting that the subject can concern itself with things and build a teleological system.

The neglect of the home and the disregard for sensibility and enjoyment inevitably render Heidegger's philosophy of Dasein as a "thrown" and "caring" Dasein, a Dasein that is a wanderer, rootless in the world. Consequently, this world can only be understood as an equipmental world. However, this description fundamentally neglects the intentional functions of sensibility, as Levinas points out: "Dasein in Heidegger is never hungry" (Levinas 2007, p. 134). Levinas, through his explanation of the process from nature to world, clarifies that the first experience of the existent is the elements, with sensibility preceding representation in its functioning.

Based on the analysis of Levinas's thought, it can be observed that the process from elemental nature to the equipmental world generates three distinct modes of existence:

"existence in elemental nature", "dwelling at home", and "existence in the world". In each of these modes, the subject's interaction with the external world differs: In existence within elemental nature, the subject directly experiences the elements, with the mode of interaction being a passive enjoyment of sensibility. In existence within the world, the subject engages with furnishings and movable possessions, where the mode of interaction is identification of representation, as well as labor and possession. Dwelling at home is the necessary precondition for existence in the world, acting as the bridge between elemental nature and the equipmental world. The subject dwelling at home interacts not only with the elements but also with furnishings and other properties brought into the home through consciousness and labor.

However, it is important to note that the state of "dwelling at home" is not strictly separate from "existing in elemental nature" or "existing in the world". Rather, "dwelling at home" actually permeates the other two. Sensibility, in enjoying the coiling movement of itself, highlights the existence of the self and reveals that the self is always an independent self dwelling at home. Moreover, only on the condition of dwelling at home can the subject find a shelter in the external world, measure the meaning and value of all concrete things in relation to "home", and construct an equipmental world centered around the self. "The privileged role of the home does not consist in being the end of human activity but in being its condition" (Levinas 2007, p. 152).[6] The premise for the subject to construct an entire equipmental world is necessarily a subject who dwells at home, and all that this subject seeks is to maintain and ensure the security of its enjoyment of sensibility, thereby safeguarding the self's long-term existence. The transition from elemental nature to an equipmental world fundamentally reflects the subject's effort to overcome the insecurity inherent in the elements themselves, striving for a stable and continuous enjoyment of life. The ultimate result it reaches is the construction of a solipsistic, totalizing world system, in which everything is incorporated into the order of representation and revolves around the Ego.

## 5. From the Enjoyment for Oneself to the Disquiet for the Other: The Tension Between Nature and Ethics

The analysis of nature, home, and world above primarily focuses on the relationship between the personified subject and the impersonal other. However, the subject is not only situated in a relationship with the elemental other and the instrumental other but also must confront other subjects who, like itself, exist in the world—namely, the personal other: the absolute Other. The ethics of the Other has always been a significant theme in Levinas's philosophical thought and is also one of the most well-known aspects of his philosophy. If we aim to undertake a thorough investigation of Levinas's natural philosophy, it is impossible to bypass this critical theme of the ethics of the Other. In this section, we intend to explore the tension-filled relationship between nature and ethics within Levinas's thought.

In the analysis above, we have revealed how, in the transition from elemental nature to the instrumental world, the subject transforms from a passive being affected by the elements into an active being that possesses and dominates things. As the possessor of furnishings, the subject's authority over these possessions is not questioned by the objects themselves. However, the subject does not exist in the world alone. In this world, the Other always encounters us and is capable of questioning our ownership of things. According to Levinas, the challenge to the subject's power is precisely the core characteristic that distinguishes the Other from elemental nature and the equipmental world: "The Other—the absolutely other—paralyzes possession, which he contests by his epiphany in the face" (Levinas 2007, p. 171).

As a phenomenologist, Levinas primarily appeals to the phenomenological description of the phenomenon of the face of the Other to reveal the unique characteristics of the Other as compared to elemental nature and the instrumental world, as well as the ethical status of the Other. What is the unique quality of the phenomenon of the face? According to Levinas, the face speaks for itself, expresses itself, and manifests itself autonomously, based on and from its own being.[7] For the subject, the face is always forthcoming, and it expresses itself in its very manifestation. At the same time, however, the face can withdraw of its own accord, interrupt its manifestation, and end its encounter with the subject. The face comes forth on its own, expresses itself, and retreats and conceals itself of its own accord. Although the subject can impose representations onto the face of the Other, such an understanding is constantly transcended by the Other itself. As Levinas writes, "The face is a living presence; it is expression" (Levinas 2007, p. 66). The face, as an essentially unfixed and variable presence, continually overflows and disrupts the subject's established understanding of the Other. Thus, the arrival of the face is neither the approach of a material entity nor the appearance of a fixed image. Rather, it signifies the transcendence inherent in the Other. As Levinas states, "The way in which the other presents himself, exceeding the idea of the other in me, we here name face" (Levinas 2007, p. 50). In the "expresses itself" (*s'exprime*) (Levinas 2007, p. 51) of the face, "The face of the Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me, the idea existing to my own measure and to the measure of its ideatum—the adequate idea" (Levinas 2007, pp. 50–51). It is evident, therefore, that the transcendence revealed by the phenomenon of the face lies in its surpassing of the subject's unilateral intentional activities. It represents the impossibility of subsuming the face of the Other into the Same. As Derrida aptly comments, "A philosophy of the He who would not be an impersonal object opposed to the thou, but the invisible transcendence of the Other" (Derrida 2001, p. 131).

However, the epiphany of the face of the Other is not merely characterized by its overflowing and surpassing of the subject's representation. If that were the case, the Other would merely be an ungraspable being for the subject, and the subject could adopt an indifferent and unconcerned attitude toward the Other. But this is not the case. The self-expression of the face not only surpasses the grasp of the subject but also calls upon the subject, making it impossible for the subject to ignore the presence of the Other. When encountering the Other, the subject is always affected by the Other, involuntarily stirred by a desire to respond to the Other. In the face of the Other's call, an ethical subject that responds to the Other is awakened—a subject that is always moved by the face of the Other, always compelled to be deeply concerned about the Other's words. For the subject, the sheer fact of the epiphany of the Other's face is always a summons, even a challenge, to the very existence of the subject. As Levinas questions, "My being-in-the-world . . . have these not also been the usurpation of spaces belonging to the other man . . . are they not acts of repulsing, excluding, exiling, stripping, killing?" (Levinas 1989, p. 82). These questions, conveyed through the epiphany of the face, summon the subject to respond. However, this response is endless, as each call of the face is new, and each response to the Other's call is always insufficient. What Levinas refers to as the subject's metaphysical desire for the Other arises precisely from the "urgency of the response" (Levinas 2007, p. 178) that the Other's call constitutes for the subject. This urgency of response originates from the fact that such a response can never be definitively completed once and for all.

Levinas particularly emphasizes that the metaphysical desire for the Other is entirely different from the need arising from the subject's own lack. Desire is a longing exigency that can never be fulfilled, whose depth originates from the inherent infinity of the face. Thus, rather than the desire, it is better understood as an inextinguishable disquietude

and suffering that is triggered in the subject when confronted with the call of the face of the Other.

When engaging with elemental nature and the equipmental world, the subject's needs and deficiencies can be fulfilled because all things exist for me and are graspable and possessable by the subject. However, once the subject enters into a relationship with the Other, "interiority then discovers itself to be insufficient" (Levinas 2007, p. 179), because the subject, in its condition of dwelling at home, discovers its complete inability to control the absolute Other, which is radically exterior to and unpossessed by the subject. The subject will come to realize that the Other is, in its very essence, an entity absolutely excluded from being thematized. Therefore, desire "is not only factually unmet but also exists beyond the perspective of all satisfaction or dissatisfaction" (Levinas 2007, p. 179). Need, on the other hand, is entirely different from desire. Although need also arises from the distance between the subject and the world, this distance is not insurmountable. In the realm of sensibility, need can always be satisfied. "Happiness is made up not of an absence of needs. . .but of the satisfaction of all needs" (Levinas 2007, p. 115). What sensibility requires is the elements, and sensibility is always capable of finding fulfillment through the elements. However, the instability inherent in the elements casts a shadow of uncertainty over the future of such satisfaction. Nevertheless, bodily labor and the construction of representations ensure the continuity of sensibility's enjoyment, transforming the originally mysterious and fluid elemental nature into the stable and suitable instrumental world that aligns with the needs of the subject.

Therefore, the distinction between desire and need originates from the fact that the Other, with absolute alterity, compels the subject to break free from a self-sufficient, secure world. In *Time and the Other*, Levinas reveals that genuine time lies in the relationship between the subject and the Other: "The situation of the face-to-face would be the very accomplishment of time; the encroachment of the present on the future is not the feat of the subject alone, but the intersubjective relationship" (Levinas 1987, p. 79). This assertion stems precisely from Levinas's analysis of the tension between the subject's enjoyment of life and their ethical relationship with the Other. In the enjoyment of the elemental, the subject perpetually revolves inward, centered on itself through the repetition of sensibility—a process further solidified in the instrumental world, where representation reinforces the world as mine and homogeneous. Need is delineated at this level. The material objects of need are always entities that the subject can assimilate and possess. Though these objects remain external, through labor and possession, the subject "breaks. . . the very thrust of the alterity upon which need depends" (Levinas 2007, p. 116). Thus, the satisfaction of need is a task the subject can accomplish independently, and the oscillation between fulfillment and lack remains an internal cycle. From the perspective of need and satisfaction, the subject inhabits only a self-enclosed, homogenized, repetitive temporality. However, the epiphany of the Other's face tears an irreparable fissure in the subject's self-satisfied interiority. The Other, as the object of desire, is perpetually absent, always exceeding the subject's representation. The call of the Other belongs neither to the past that has occurred nor to the foreseeable future. In desire for the Other, a heterogenous temporality shatters the synthesized, unified time constructed by Husserl's threefold temporal horizon of "retention–primal impression–protention". A hetero-affection from the exterior ruptures the subject's identity. As Levinas states, "It is to suggest further that in its temporality, which disperses consciousness into successive moments. . . an alterity can undo this simultaneity and this assembly of the successive into the presence of representation, and that consciousness finds itself concerned with the Immemorial" (Levinas 1998, pp. 104–105). Here, the fundamental distinction between desire and need emerges: "In need I can sink my teeth into the real

and satisfy myself in assimilating the other; in Desire there is no sinking one's teeth into being, no satiety, but an uncharted future before me" (Levinas 2007, p. 117).

It is precisely from this point that we can understand Levinas's words at the beginning of *Totality and Infinity*: "'The true life is absent.' But we are in the world" (Levinas 2007, p. 33). The journey from elemental nature to the equipmental world is essentially a process of transforming the external world into one that perpetuates enjoyment. This process is inherently imbued with solipsistic tendencies. However, true life is not merely about enjoying all that belongs to me within the world. The encounter with the Other redirects "true life" toward "absence": the unfixed and ungraspable presence of the Other, the unavoidable response evoked by the Other's call, and the insatiable desire elicited in the face of the Other—all lead true life toward the dimension of infinity that transcends presence. This process thoroughly overturns the solipsistic enjoyment of the subject within the world. In the presence of the Other, the subject's enjoyment and possession are called into question, forcing it to concern about the Other, and even "to give, to-be-for-another, despite oneself, but in interrupting the for-oneself, is to take the bread out of one's own mouth, to nourish the hunger of another with one's own fasting" (Levinas 1974, p. 56).

Thus the difference between the fulfillment of needs and the unfulfillability of desires is only a superficial one. What these two reflect are, in fact, two modes of operation. Needs revolve around the subject, unfolding as a centripetal motion grounded in sensibility. It focuses on a world full of relative others that can be possessed and identified. It embodies a body that nourishes and satisfies itself. Through the subject's construction of a equipmental world, this body always provides the self with a peaceful and stable dwelling. In this sense, the subject situated within the world is self-sufficient and content. However, the ethical relationship with the absolute Other breaks the subject's immersion in happiness and pleasure, disturbing the peace of the subject's body and its enjoyment of sensibility. The desire for the absolute Other constitutes a centrifugal motion oriented toward the Other. It demands that the subject step outside its self-sufficient world, to listen to the call of the Other, who cannot be possessed or identified at all, and to endlessly undertake the response—a response that is destined to remain incomplete. In this process, the once self-sufficient subject is compelled to take the furnishings originally used to nourish and satisfy its own body and sensibility and give them to the Other. This is because the very manifestation of the Other always calls to me, always questions me. The Other "precisely imposes itself by appealing to me with its destitution and nudity—its hunger—without my being able to be deaf to that appeal" (Levinas 2007, p. 200).

Although there is a fundamental difference between need and desire, this difference does not constitute a strict opposition between the two. Rather, the distinction arises from the fact that they each operate within different dimensions. Through our analysis of Levinas's philosophy of nature, it becomes evident that the relationship of enjoyment between the subject and elemental nature constitutes the premise and foundation for the equipmental world, and this is equally true of ethical relations. The satisfaction of needs provides the precondition for desire: only when the sensitive body is satisfied can concerns about the instability of the elements, the labor and possession that extend from the home, and the representations grounded in enjoyment begin to unfold their activities. As Levinas states, "The morality of 'earthly nourishments' is the first morality" (Levinas 1987, p. 64). Borrowing the title of Gide's work, Levinas emphasizes the primacy of material needs that sustain life. On the one hand, "the pleasurable enjoyment of the 'earthly nourishments' allows the subject to escape from the anonymous existence" (Wang and Jiang 2022, p. 11), which is to discover the self at home within its gathering of being. On the other hand, "if there isn't enjoyment that makes my existence worth desiring, then there isn't weight in giving up the pleasure of my life for the sake of the Other" (Wang and Jiang 2022, p. 11).

Therefore, "it presupposes an I, an existence separated in its enjoyment, which does not welcome empty-handed the face and its voice coming from another shore" (Levinas 2007, p. 216). When the subject shifts its gaze from "enjoyment", the centripetal motion centered on itself, to "ethics", the theme concerning the Other, it does not mean that the subject ceases its activities of enjoyment. Without the activity of enjoyment awakening the inner personified self, without the activity of enjoyment making the world of the subject happy and self-sufficient, there would be no basis for speaking of the call and questioning of the subject by the Other, and thus no possibility of opening the ethical dimension between the subject and the Other.

In the history of Western philosophy, the vast majority of philosophers have focused their discussions of ethical relationships on the dimension of the individual's needs, taking the satisfaction of one's own conditions of survival and the sustenance of one's existence as the primary starting point for human interactions. Few have gone further to address the aspect of the individual's suffering for the Other and passively taking on the ethical responsibility of responding to the Other. One of the most prominent expressions of this solipsistic tradition is Hobbes's description of the state of nature: in the absence of authoritative institutions and legal constraints, individuals are guided solely by natural law or self-interest, willing to employ any means to exclude or eliminate enemies in order to preserve themselves. In the state of nature, the Other is often regarded as an enemy who threatens one's survival. "Every one is governed by his own reason; and there is nothing he can make use of, that may not be a help unto him, in preserving his life against his enemies" (Hobbes 1998, pp. 86–87). This state of mutual enmity ultimately results in a situation where "as long as every man holdeth this right, of doing any thing he liketh; so long are all men in the condition of war" (Hobbes 1998, p. 87). Even though Hobbes proposed the principle of "transferring rights" as a way to move from the state of nature to the state of civil society, this principle is also grounded in the goal of better preserving each individual's own existence. According to Hobbes's reasoning, the emergence of social order and moral norms is merely a means of better fulfilling the needs for self-preservation and advancement for all individuals participating in the contract. By contrast, Levinas's ethical perspective, which emphasizes the individual's passive posture in the face of the Other, undoubtedly departs further from this solipsistic centripetal motion. Although each person bases their existence on their own enjoyment, according to Levinas, ethics cannot be limited to this dimension alone. Beyond considerations of one's own survival and the satisfaction of personal needs, the subject is compelled to enter the ethical realm, to reflect upon the legitimacy of what it has obtained, and to assume the inescapable responsibility that arises when the face of the Other appears before the subject. It is only by rising to this level that one can truly clarify the following: ethics, at its core, is not the strategy of isolated individuals for their own survival; it is not based on self-preservation or self-enhancement, but rather it is each person's unavoidable response to the suffering of the Other, to being touched by the Other, to hearing the Other's call. However, at the same time, in Levinas's philosophy, the solipsism of enjoyment and the centrifugal movement of ethics are not strictly separate poles; they represent different stages in the subject's existence. It is precisely for this reason that Levinas's ethics does not slip into asceticism that negates material satisfaction. Only on the basis of the enjoyment and satisfaction of being immersed in the elemental nature, and by becoming self-sufficient, self-independent, can the subject, in its encounter with the Other, be awakened to an attitude of "being-for-the-Other". Only then can the subject break free from the solitude of its own totality, listening to the call of the infinite Other. As Levinas says: "Having recognized its needs as material needs, as capable of being satisfied, the I can henceforth turn to what it does not lack. It distinguishes the material from the spiritual, opens to Desire" (Levinas 2007, p. 115).

## 6. The Absolute Separation Between the Worldly Dimension and the Transcendent Dimension: The Influence of Jewish Thought on Levinas

Through the above discussion, it can be seen that in natural philosophy, Levinas emphasizes the anteriority of the elemental nature, directly apprehended by the senses, over an equipmental world constructed by representations. He further points out that the primary activity of the subject within the elements is the enjoyment of sensibility, rather than a goal-oriented act of appropriation. In ethics, Levinas discusses a "metaphysical desire" that does not stem from the subject's lack, beyond the subject's own "needs". The subject is not merely enjoying the possessions of the world in comfort but is also compelled to listen and respond to the call of the absolute Other, even if this requires interrupting one's own enjoyment. Thus, a tremendous tension is created between nature and ethics.

It is important to point out that behind Levinas's distinction between nature and ethics, as well as his distinction between needs and metaphysical desire, there lies a deep cultural and religious background. As a Jewish philosopher, Levinas acknowledges the profound influence of Jewish thought on his philosophy. Levinas once said: "every philosophical thought rests on pre-philosophical experiences, and. . .for me reading *the Bible* has belonged to these founding experiences" (Levinas 1985, p. 24). In Levinas's view, the foundation of Judaism lies in unconditional loyalty to the teaching of God, the absolute Other who transcends the world. And God's teaching is precisely ethical, condensed in the commandment to "love your neighbor". Levinas said, "Now the pole of this confuence is the ethical, which incontestably dominates this whole book (i.e., *the Bible*)" (Levinas 1985, p. 115). "Now, in the entirety of the book, there is always a priority of the other in relation to me. This is the biblical contribution in its entirety. And that is how I would respond to your question: 'Love your neighbor; all that is yourself; this work is yourself; this love is yourself.'" (Levinas 1998, p. 91).

For Levinas, the fundamental difference between Jewish thought and the Greek philosophical tradition lies in the fact that the Greek tradition seeks to construct a totalizing world, while Jewish thought emphasizes the absolute separation between the world and the Transcendent, highlighting the infinity that overflows beyond the totality of the world. In the Greek philosophical tradition, everything within the world can be integrated into a totality order. For example, in Plato, the world of Ideas, as the essence of the phenomenal world, provides the fundamental form to the things of the phenomenal realm. Human beings within the phenomenal world can grasp and comprehend the Ideas through "ecstasy" or the "dialectic of reason". Aristotle viewed God as the ultimate cause, final cause, and formal cause, which drives the creation and movement of the world. He also believed that through the elevation of rational activity, humans could attain a state of thought similar to God's, seeking wisdom and self-sufficiency through pure rational thought. In Hegel, this thought of totality was carried to its extreme: Absolute Spirit, as the apex of Hegel's philosophy, is both the ultimate closure reached through all the movements of "sublation" and "negation of the negation", and the all-encompassing totality that contains every element in the development of the entire system. Within this tradition, Western philosophy as a whole presents a tendency toward violence in its identification and a *bonne conscience*:[8] under thought and reason, everything in the external world can be grasped by reason and integrated into a totality. The subject only needs to grasp this totalized world to live self-sufficiently within it. This solipsistic tradition of thought is closely related to a kind of "local philosophy"—rooted in the subject itself and in the land the subject inhabits, the subject can acquire the entire world.

However, within Jewish thought, God as the absolute Other radically transcends the world. Jews heed the word of God and acknowledge the irrefutable, inescapable authority inherent in His word. Yet, God remains infinitely distant from the world in which humans

live—a call from an unreachable beyond, perpetually out of reach for humanity. Moreover, in Judaism, God's command for the Jewish people to leave their homeland and wander in exile shapes a form of Jewish thought that does not foster a sense of familiarity to the homeland or the surrounding world. As Levinas says, "The Jewish man discovers man before discovering landscapes and towns. He is at home in a society before being so in a house. He understands the world on the basis of the Other rather than the whole of being functioning in relation to the earth" (Levinas 1990, p. 22).

It is precisely from this standpoint that Levinas critiques the Greek philosophical tradition for remaining confined within the worldly dimension and the totality of Being. In his view, "paganism is a radical powerlessness to get out of the world. It consists not in denying spirits and gods but in situating chem in the world . . . Pagan morality is only the consequence of this basic incapacity to transgress the limits of the world. The pagan is shut up in this world, sufficient unto himself and closed upon himself. He finds it solid and firmly established. He finds it eternal. He orders his actions and his destiny according to the world" (Levinas 2003, p. 91). For this reason, Levinas specifically characterizes the Greek philosophical tradition as Odyssean to capture the recurring theme of returning home that runs through Greek philosophy, alongside its inherently self-enclosed nature: "As a stage the separated being traverses on the way of its return to its metaphysical source, a moment of a history that will be concluded by union, metaphysics would be an Odyssey, and its disquietude nostalgia. But the philosophy of unity has never been able to say whence came this accidental illusion and fall, inconceivable in the Infinite, the Absolute, and the Perfect" (Levinas 2007, p. 102).

In contrast, Levinas argues that Jewish thought does not express this tone of self-satisfaction within the world, but rather presents the opposite, a movement of departure from the world to something beyond it: "The Jew does not have, in the world, the definitive foundations of the pagan. In the midst of the most complete confidence accorded to things, the Jew is tormented by a silent worry. As unshakable as the world might appear to chose one calls healthy minds, it contains for the Jew the trace of the provisional and the created" (Levinas 2003, p. 91). The subject thus haunted by the absolute Other is one compelled to incessantly turn inward toward an exteriority. Such a subject does not dwell securely in any homeland but perpetually departs from the familiar, oriented toward an alien elsewhere—the "absolute Other" signified by the figure of God. This Other awakens the subject to the responsibility of response, a responsibility whose origin is neither premeditated nor conditional but arises *anarchically*, prior to all free choice or judgment. It mirrors the ungrounded demand of God to Abraham: "Go forth from your land, your birthplace, and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (*Genesis 12:1*).

Although Levinas emphasized that his philosophical and religious texts were separate, his philosophical writings were undoubtedly inspired and influenced by Judaism. Behind Levinas's revelation of the tension between nature and ethics lies the absolute separation between the worldly dimension and the transcendent dimension in Jewish thought. Nature essentially belongs to the created world, while ethics is evoked by the absolute Other, which is entirely separate from the subject, and thus transcends the world. On the one hand, humans dwell within the world; on the other hand, the subject has always been called by the absolute Other, entering into a "non-relational relation" with the Transcendent that goes beyond the world, thereby exiting the world. However, Levinas does not negate the worldly dimension; rather, he integrates it into a positive relationship with ethics. Just as Levinas analyzes the word "Tamarisk" in *Difficult Freedom*, he explains: "Tamarisk is an acronym; the three letters needed to write this word are the initials of 'food,' 'drink,' and 'shelter,' three essential things that humanity provides for each other. The earth exists for this. Man is his own master, in order to serve man" (Levinas 1990, p. 233).

By the way, it is precisely in this distinction between the subject's dwelling in the world and its departure from the world that we can discern the core of Levinas's critique of Heidegger's later thought. Heidegger introduces concepts like the "fourfold" and "poetically man dwells" in his later thought. According to Heidegger, finite human beings dwell between heaven and earth, "remaining before the divinities" (Heidegger 2001b, p. 147). By introducing the dimension of the divinities into the fourfold, Heidegger aims to make people aware of the inherent sacredness within the world constituted by the fourfold. However, this attitude of sanctifying the world itself undoubtedly reveals a tendency toward mysticism. In *Difficult Freedom*, Levinas criticizes Heidegger's mystical view of nature: "This, then, is the eternal seductiveness of paganism, beyond the infantilism of idolatry, which long ago was surpassed. The Sacred filtering into the world—Judaism is perhaps no more than the negation of all that. . .The mystery of things is the source of all cruelty towards men" (Levinas 1990, p. 232). In Levinas's view, Heidegger's supposed understanding of the sacred and his experience of the fourfold is merely an echo of the self's own discourse—it is nothing more than "reflections of our own looks" (Levinas 1974, p. 182), "mirages of our needs" (Levinas 1974, p. 182), and "echoes of our prayers" (Levinas 1974, p. 182). Levinas thus identifies an obsession with the ineffable sacred destiny and a veneration for the hidden, mysterious gods in Heidegger's later thought. This obsession and veneration inevitably undermine the status of the truly transcendent absolute Other. For Levinas, the external world, which Heidegger imbues with sacredness, is merely nourishment that stimulates and sustains the self. Its mystery has already been overcome by the subject through labor and possession. In this world, the only thing that possesses divinity is the absolutely Other, which cannot be subjected to identification. The existence of the Other reveals to the subject the fact that, beyond the natural instincts of self-preservation and self-satisfaction, the subject must suffer for the Other, must continually listen to the Other's call, and respond to the Other's needs, even if such listening and responding expose the subject to the risk of harm. From the perspective of the subject's natural instinct for self-preservation, this ethical state—where the subject is affected by the Other and departs from itself—can be seen as a miracle. According to Levinas, this is the testimony to the sacredness of God: "The dimension of the divine opens forth from the human face" (Levinas 2007, p. 78). The subject's unconditional responsibility toward the Other is the subject's relationship with God.

## 7. Conclusions

Through the above analysis of the tension between nature and ethics in Levinas's thought, we can now address the four questions raised in the introduction: (1) as a phenomenologist, what is the primordial meaning of nature that Levinas reveals through the lens and method of phenomenology? (2) as a disciple and a sharp critic of Heidegger, what is the relationship between the nature depicted by Levinas and the world as a totality of equipment, as revealed by Heidegger in *Being and Time*? How does nature transform into the equipmental world? (3) As the founder of the renowned ethics of the Other, what is the inescapable tensional relation between nature and ethics in Levinas's writings? (4) As a Jewish philosopher, how do the transcendent God of the Jewish tradition and the separation between the transcendence and the world dimension decisively influence Levinas's discussion of the relationship between nature and ethics?

Firstly, for Levinas, the relationship between humans and nature is not primarily a relationship of knowledge or use, but rather a relationship of sensibility. That is to say, the subject, through its sensitive body, immerses itself in the elemental nature, and through self-affection and a coiling movement, establishes a self with an inner life. However, the

elements that sensibility touches still retain their mystery and anonymity, and this insecurity threatens the stability and continuity of the enjoyment of sensibility.

Secondly, Levinas uses the state of the self's dwelling at home as an intermediary, highlighting an independent self that is detached from the mysterious flow of the elements. In order to obtain a sustained satisfaction of enjoyment, the subject, through the groping of the hands, labor, and possession, extracts concrete things and furnishings from the elements, thereby constructing an equipmental world based on elemental nature that ensures the subject's sustained enjoyment. Therefore, by transforming elemental nature into an equipmental world under the condition of the subject's state of dwelling at home, Levinas points to the anteriority of elemental nature over the equipmental world. In doing so, he provides a necessary supplement to Heidegger's philosophy, which asserts that Dasein is from the beginning thrown into the equipmental world, affirming the self-sufficiency of the subject and fulfillment of the subject's needs within the equipmental world.

Furthermore, Levinas points out that the ethical relationship is one of self-transcendence, a relationship without reason that is compelled by the Other. Thus, the tensional relation between nature and ethics in Levinas's philosophy is expressed as follows: on the one hand, enjoyment in elemental nature manifests as an egoistic centripetal movement, while the ethical relation interrupts and breaks this egoistic enjoyment. The self-sufficient life constructed through bodily enjoyment, labor, and dwelling is the necessary precondition for establishing an ethical relation with the Other, for only by first constructing a life that sustains itself can one subsequently offer the sustenance that nourishes oneself to the Other.

Finally, Levinas's philosophy is deeply influenced by the absolute separation between the worldy dimension and the transcendent dimension in Jewish thought. This transcendent dimension causes the Jewish intellectual tradition to not present itself as the violence of totality and a *bonne conscience* found in Western philosophical traditions, but rather as a listening and obedience to the one absolute Being, which holds sacredness and exists beyond this world. In Levinas's view, the relation between the subject and God is the subject's desire towards the absolute Other. In the ethical relationship with the absolute Other, the subject is always passive, exposed, vulnerable, and susceptible to harm. This pulls the subject's body out of its originally self-sufficient natural state and into an unavoidable condition of suffering for the sake of the Other.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, K.Q. and G.W.; methodology, K.Q. and G.W.; investigation, K.Q. and G.W.; resources, K.Q. and G.W.; writing—original draft preparation, K.Q. and G.W.; writing—review and editing, K.Q. and G.W.; supervision, G.W.; project administration, K.Q. and G.W.; funding acquisition, G.W. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research was funded by The National Social Science Fund of China, grant number 24CZX049.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

## Notes

[1] This article characterizes Levinas's discussion of nature and the elements as "natural philosophy" in order to situate his unique discourse within the broader tradition of natural philosophy, thereby highlighting the distinctive perspective Levinas adopts when exploring the theme of nature. This distinctiveness is primarily reflected in the fact that the concept of "nature" in Levinas's context does not refer to an object of subjective representation, situated within specific forms, but rather to a de-substantialized,

pre-representational element, what Levinas terms "pure quality" (Levinas 2007, p. 132). In the following, we will analyze in detail the role of nature as an element in Levinas's philosophy, as well as our primordial sensibility to nature: enjoyment.

[2] To refer to Levinas as a "Jewish philosopher" is not to categorize his philosophy as a narrowly defined philosophy of Jewish thought, but rather to emphasize that the Jewish religious tradition profoundly influenced Levinas's critical engagement with the Western philosophical tradition.

[3] Levinas uses the term *affectivité* in French to translate the famous Befindlichkeit from Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Like Heidegger, Levinas also contends that affectivity is the primordial way for a person to discover and comprehend his actual life.

[4] When discussing "what is a thinking thing", Descartes sates, "a thing that doubts, that understands, that affirms, that denies, that wishes to do this and does not wish to do that, and also that imagines and perceives" (Descartes 2008, p. 20). We can add "enjoyment" to the list of actions that Descartes enumerates. However, in the context of Levinas, enjoyment is not simply an action alongside these behaviors. Above all the actions of doubting, understanding, affirming, denying, willing, not willing, imagining, and perceiving, there exists an enjoyment of these very actions themselves. Enjoyment embodies the most primordial reflexive relationship between life and life itself.

[5] It is clear that Levinas's reference to the elements as "faceless gods" alludes to Heidegger's later philosophy of the fourfold—"the ringing of earth and heaven, divinities and mortals" (Heidegger 2001b, p. 180)—and his approach of attributing the divinity to Being itself.

[6] In Levinas's view, as a habitation, the home is not an insignificant position within the world; rather, it is a condition and a precedence for humanity's engagement with the world. Levinas's exploration of the home resonates with Confucian perspectives on home. For Confucians, a person is never, as Heidegger says, thrown into the world from the outset; instead, they are first nurtured in the home and grow up within the parent-child relationship.

[7] In Levinas's ethics of the Other, the face is a pivotal concept. It transcends the mere physical features or appearance of the Other, representing a profound ethical call and the immediate epiphany of the Other. The face unveils the vulnerability of the Other, compelling the subject to respond to the Other's call, thus culminating in an inescapable ethical responsibility toward the Other.

[8] Levinas uses the expression "la bonne conscience" (good consciousness) to define the core characteristics of the Western philosophical tradition. According to Levinas, Western philosophy regards being as a self-sufficient, complete, and enclosed state, focused on achieving a realm of spiritual self-sufficiency and inner stability that remains unaffected by the outside world. This philosophical tradition frequently takes the form of a self-centered mastery over the world, evading the ethical responsibilities that the subject should hold and overlooking the absolute Other.

## References


Aquinas, Thomas. 1952. *The Summa Theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica.

Aristotle. 2016. *Metaphysics*. Translated by C. D. C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hacket Publishing Company.

Bevis, Kathryn. 2007. 'Better than Metaphors'? Dwelling and the Maternal Body in Emmanuel Levinas. *Literature and Theology* 21: 317–29. [CrossRef]

Biro, Sasha L. 2017. Levinas's Reception of the Mythic. *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 31: 422–31. [CrossRef]

Collingwood, Robin George. 1945. *The Idea of Nature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Curd, Patricia. 2007. *Anaxagoras of Clazomenae: Fragments and Testimonia: A Text and Translation with Notes and Essays*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Derrida, Jacques. 2001. *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass. London: Routledge.

Descartes, René. 1982. *Principles of Philosophy*. Translated by Valentine Rodger Miller, and Reese P. Miller. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company.

Descartes, René. 2006. *A Discourse on the Method of Correctly Conducting One's Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*. Translated by Ian Maclean. New York: Oxford University Press.

Descartes, René. 2008. *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*. Translated by Michael Moriarty. New York: Oxford University Press.

Dijksterhuis, Eduard Jan. 1986. *The Mechanization of the World Picture: Pythagoras to Newton*. Translated by C. Dikshoorn. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Harman, Graham. 2007. Aesthetics as First Philosophy: Levinas and the Non-Human. *Naked Punch* 9: 21–30.

Heidegger, Martin. 2001a. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie, and Edward Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Heidegger, Martin. 2001b. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Hobbes, Thomas. 1998. *Leviathan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Husserl, Edmund. 1973. *The Idea of Phenomenology*. Translated by William P. Alston, and George Nakhnikian. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Kant, Immanuel. 1998. *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Paul Guyer, and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Levinas, Emmanuel. 1974. *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
Levinas, Emmanuel. 1985. *Ethics and Infinity*. Translated by Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
Levinas, Emmanuel. 1987. *Time and the Other*. Translated by Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
Levinas, Emmanuel. 1989. *The Levinas Reader*. Edited by Seán Hand. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
Levinas, Emmanuel. 1990. *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*. Translated by Seán Hand. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
Levinas, Emmanuel. 1998. *Of God Who Comes to Mind*. Translated by Bettina Bergo. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Levinas, Emmanuel. 2003. *On Escape*. Translated by Bettina Bergo. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Levinas, Emmanuel. 2007. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
Meskin, Jacob. 1993. In The Flesh: Embodiment and Jewish Existence in the Thought of Emmanual Levinas. *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 76: 173–190.
Robinson, Thomas M. 1987. *Heraclitus: Fragments*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
Saldukaitytė, Jolanta. 2019. The Place and Face of the Stranger in Levinas. *Religions* 10: 67. [CrossRef]
Sallis, John. 1998. Levinas and the Elemental. *Research in Phenomenology* 28: 152–59. [CrossRef]
Toadvine, Ted. 2012. Enjoyment and its Discontents: On Separation from Nature in Levinas. In *Facing Nature: Levinas and Environmental Thought*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
Varakukalayil, Jojo Joseph. 2015. Body as Subjectivity to Ethical Signification of the Body: Revisiting Levinas's Early Conception of the Subject. *Sophia* 54: 281–95. [CrossRef]
Wang, Guangyao, and Longxiang Jiang. 2022. Levinas on the Relationship Between Pleasure and the Good. *Religions* 13: 765. [CrossRef]
Zeller, Edward. 1889. *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy*. Translated by Sarah Frances Alleyne, and Evelyn Abbott. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

**Disclaimer/Publisher's Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.