

Datum: October 13, 2025

Betreft:

# 1 Dark Intelligibility

A Metabolic Philosophy of the Between

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## 2 Companionability and Possession

"I really like things I don't understand. When I read a thing I don't understand, I feel a sweet and abysmal vertigo."

—Clarice Lispector, *A Breath of Life*, p. 29

I should disorganize, and yet structure simultaneously. I should create meta-structures that can kiss disorganization here and there.

I love the pen. I'm too disconnected from the physical process of writing. There is a different flow when you actually draw the words.

What has language done for me, for better and worse? Or perhaps more precisely: **How does the determined become companionable to indeterminacy?** How do light and dark conjoin in chiaroscuro? And how to develop the metabolic capacity to receive the chiaroscuro, to affirm their interpenetration? This requires more than intellectual understanding; it demands a transformation of our very relation to being.

Today, in a world where ambiguity dominates and social cohesion evaporates, too much meaning exists—univocal, equivocal, or otherwise. What draws our focus is the ever-present stage of self-determination, the human spectacle. We can see that there are real limits to that self-determination. Being is communicative, but it is inseparable from non-being. I seem to be spinning around dualities again. There is an urgency for us to become intimate to their conjunctions and interpenetrations. However, the demands of life hijack our capacity to open to them. Let us stop making sense for a moment and try to delve deeper.

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Words do not come easy at times, so we let them be. It is natural not to know the way, so we should become

lost. If there is one thing clear I can say about myself, it is that I'm lost. I find things, things happen to me, but I am groundless, like a cell breaking open, its contents spilling out. Disorganization can be messy.

How can I write without knowing where to go? I shall have somebody else write through me. Starting with my parental voices, Clarice Lispector and William Desmond.

Heteronomy is the intrusion autonomy tries to prevent. We encounter the other, framed as an intrusion. If it's not capable of being dominated, at least made manageable. We foreclose true encounter with the other, but the relations remain and with it the potential for another break.

The other intrudes in myself as well. In my voice, my very being, there is a whole host of voices speaking through me. It is certainly astonishing that we, such porous interconnected beings, think of ourselves as autonomous. At any given moment I am possessed by voices not my own.

Cum panis indeed. Following Desmond's sense of the open whole, do we arrive at a liberated autonomy? An autonomy that knows itself to be plurivocal and connected to others? Perhaps such freedom emerges by transformation of our relation to the other—to undergo the ordeal of being claimed by what exceeds us, until the intrusion reveals itself as gift. Can we come companionable to what threatens to possess and destroy us?

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To return briefly to the chiaroscuro: a beautiful word, for I used to draw too, and writing is an extension of drawing. The mediaticity of writing physically is its own medium. I have drawn on tablets and made beautiful life drawings but they remain digital files.

If we consider writing the techno-pharmakon par excellence then of course we cannot underestimate the power of a trembling hand furtively scribbling thoughts to the page as if the line was its very consciousness.

Sweet and abysmal because, hell, we have no idea and we still want to sit with the question. Companionable to the question.

Breath, dissolution, structure, should be part of writing. Words should be able to breathe. We can run into blockages and aporia and what do we do? Give up? Hunt further?

Or let it breathe?

Aporia is companionable to the going, sweetly abysmal as it is. What appears as dead-end becomes, for the patient, the site where new passages open.

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My desire for possession comes not from a desire for self-dissolution but for recognizing interdependence and flowing in the river. What freedom would that give? It could be radical.

The body writes and has written for a few thousand years, enough for it to be a new page in our evolutionary techgnosis. Quickly it is being abandoned for the keyboard and the screen. Command line interfaces.

While there are ways of exaptation and we are of course fluid beings in becoming, I do still like physical writing. Perhaps precisely because it is a form of drawing.

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Today it felt urgent to work but it also felt urgent to disorganize.

I was playful in letting Lispector and Desmond together with me make us into a triangle. Geometric stability through threeness, yet each point remains irreducible. Not synthesis but constellation.

Both Desmond and Clarice are enactive of what they write about. It is a lived philosophy after all. Porosity requires that intimacy, that vulnerability of expression in the midst of things. I want to get to the threshold of both thinkers.

The body writes. There is a restlessness there. This disorganization felt urgent, and it worked. But the danger is tying disorganization and productivity to any external means, lest we become too dependent. We are not independent—we allow heteronomy to affect our writing as well.

However, this disorganization and productivity is dangerous to be tied to any single source. Since I am not independent, I flow with the interdependence. But I must remain vigilant.

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## 3 01 The Pharmakon and the Metaxu

### 3.0.1 Porosity and the Neutral

“The World had always been humanized. Now I was before the inhuman. The neutral was what was intimate.”<sup>1</sup> Clarice Lispector’s narrator in *The Passion According to G.H.* encounters an intimacy that is not warm, not consoling, but alien. Intimacy here is not the communion of similarity, but the piercing proximity of otherness. There is an otherness to selving. The cockroach, that abject creature, tears through the membrane of her constructed self. She confronts what she calls “the great living neutrality struggling,”<sup>2</sup> life stripped of its human face, vitality indifferent to meaning.

William Desmond offers a striking parallel in his book *God and the Between*: “The idiocy of being is the sheer astonishment that there is anything at all, its intimate givenness and its foreign neutrality.”<sup>3</sup> What Lispector calls the neutral, Desmond refers to as the primal ethos: the bare fact of being before any determination, given to us before we come to be in a double register — as strangely intimate and irreducibly foreign.

Both writers refuse the hard split of subject and object. For Lispector, the self is undone by what leaks through from within and without. For Desmond, the self always arises at the metaxu, the between, where self and other constantly co-determine each other. But what exactly is this “between”?

### 3.0.2 The Metaxu as Overdetermined Between

Desmond’s concept of the **metaxu**—the “between”—provides the ontological framework for understanding how Lispector and Desmond navigate the space where intelligible and unintelligible, self and other, human

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<sup>1</sup>Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, trans. Idra Novey (New York: New Directions, 2012), [PAGE NEEDED].

<sup>2</sup>Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, [PAGE NEEDED].

<sup>3</sup>William Desmond, *God and the Between* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 331.

and inhuman meet without reduction. We are constituted in relation, through the between- the “rich ontological intermedium of happening”<sup>4</sup> where beings and their others constantly co-determine each other. As the intermedium of happening it is an “overdetermined” space, saturated with excessive possibility. The metaxu is where different modes of being encounter each other in their genuine otherness while remaining in relation. It is the field of relation itself.

The metaxu operates through what Desmond calls “**double mediation**”: both self-mediation (consciousness thinking itself through its other) and intermediation (the other’s genuine mediation from its own otherness). This is crucial. In self-mediation, the self relates to itself by passing through what appears as other—this is the familiar movement of reflection, where I come to know myself by encountering what I am not. But **intermediation** names something more radical: the other genuinely mediates from its own center, its own idiotic singularity, and is not reducible to my self-relation.

Unlike dialectical thinking, which ultimately collapses otherness back into self-relation (the other becomes a moment in the self’s own becoming), **metaxological thinking maintains genuine plurality within unity**. The other remains other even in the intimacy of encounter. The cockroach does not become a symbol that G.H. masters; it retains its “thick radiant indifference,” its alien vitality that cannot be assimilated.

This double mediation is precisely what Lispector enacts in her literary practice. The protagonist’s encounter with the cockroach creates a metaxu—a space where human and non-human, subject and object, familiar and strange meet without reduction to dialectical unity. G.H. cannot synthesize the roach into her understanding; she can only undergo the ordeal of remaining in the between, letting it work on her, dissolving the protective boundaries she has constructed.

### 3.0.3 Surplus Givenness and the Overdeterminate

Both thinkers understand this “between” as **overdetermined** rather than indeterminate. For Desmond, being presents itself as “**surplus givenness**”—an excessive abundance that gives rise to astonishment rather than mastery. Being gives more than we can ask for, more than our concepts can contain, more than our self-determination can manage. This surplus is not a problem to be solved but the primal condition of existence itself.

For Lispector, reality exceeds linguistic capture not through poverty but through richness: “reality is too delicate, only reality is delicate, my unreality and my imagination are heavier.”<sup>5</sup> Her prose constantly gestures toward what language cannot hold—not because reality is void, but because it overflows every attempt at containment. The neutral is not empty but **fertile**—generative precisely in its refusal to conform to our categories.

This overdetermination means that the metaxu is always already more than any single perspective can encompass. The self cannot master the between because the between exceeds the self’s totalizing grasp. Yet this excess is not a limitation but a gift—it is what allows genuine encounter, genuine surprise, genuine transformation. We are claimed by more than we can claim.

The key point is not merely that the world resists humanization, but that the self too harbors alterity. To be porous to the other is to be porous to oneself. Serving is not a closed autonomy but an openness where alterity can shine through. The metaxu names this condition: we are always already in relation, always already situated in a between that precedes and exceeds our self-determination.

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<sup>4</sup>William Desmond, *Being and the Between* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), [PAGE NEEDED].

<sup>5</sup>Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, [PAGE NEEDED].

When the constructions of self break down, something else emerges — the fertile neutrality of being. What is neutral is not dead; it is generative precisely in its refusal to conform to categories. This fertility is terrifying because it loosens the boundaries of identity. Yet it is also the beginning of intimacy — a strange intimacy with the inhuman in ourselves.

### 3.1 The Thing-Part and Neutral Being

Something in us is already there before all our conceptions of being human: “the inhuman part is the best part of us... the thing-part of us... matter of God, waiting to reclaim me.” The inhuman here is not the alienated other, nor the negation of the human. It is nearer to us than our own self-conceptions, nearer than the “self” that thinks it stands apart from the world.

“Why shouldn’t I become unclean, exactly as I was discovering my whole self to be?” This question collapses the hierarchy between human and thing, revealing the co-identity of self and non-self, the neutral being in which we participate alongside the roach, the stone, the dust. The “thing-part” is not a degradation but a re-claiming: the intimacy of the impersonal, the suchness of “matter-of-God”, the elemental flesh that precedes our personhood.

Lispector’s discovery is not without terror: “it was a joy without redemption... a joy without hope.” This is joy untethered from any counterfeit double of salvation—no promise of return, no narrative arc to make sense of it. It does not lead elsewhere. And precisely because it is without hope, it is pure: a joy that redeems only by annihilating the need for redemption.

This **hopeless joy** names a radical affirmation that has learned to metabolize neutrality without converting it into something else. It is joy that doesn’t project into futures, doesn’t seek redemptive narratives, doesn’t transform itself into hope for better circumstances. It remains stubbornly at the level of pure affirmation—**joy in suchness**, in the bare astonishing fact that anything is at all.

Hopeless joy arises precisely when we have stopped fleeing the neutral ground of being, when we can finally receive the **great living neutrality** not as dead meaninglessness but as fertile groundlessness. The neutral gives neither comfort nor promise, yet precisely in this refusal to conform to our demand for meaning, it offers something more fundamental: participation in being’s own self-subsistence, the sheer thereness that precedes and exceeds all human valuation.

To experience hopeless joy is to affirm being without the supplements of meaning-making, to find nourishment in what initially appears as pure poison or meaninglessness. It is joy that has developed sufficient metabolic capacity to receive the neutral directly—not by transforming it into something more palatable, but by learning to recognize the neutral itself as a form of sustenance.

Kyoto School philosopher Nishitani Keiji names this “the Great Affirmation”<sup>6</sup>—a yes to being that emerges not by refusing negation but by a profound ontological conversion we will explore more fully. Hopeless joy is this Great Affirmation: affirmation that has learned to subsist on the neutral itself, without supplements.

The excess of being overflows our capacity to receive it without trembling. The gift terrifies and attracts because it annihilates the prison in which the self guards its boundaries. It does not flatter our stability; it strips it away.

In this register, to encounter being is to be claimed by it, drawn into the impersonal intimacy of suchness, where self and non-self mingle, and the only fidelity is to remain porous—even to what terrifies us. But what

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<sup>6</sup>Nishitani Keiji, *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. Jan Van Bragt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 138.

is the actual substance of this terrifying, neutral reality? And what is the nature of the ordeal required to metabolize it?

### 3.1.1 The Saltless Truth and the Pharmakon

Lispector locates the ordeal with a striking metaphor: "For salt I had always been ready, salt was the transcendence that I used to experience a taste, and to flee what I was calling 'nothing.' But what my mouth wouldn't know how to understand—was the saltless."<sup>7</sup> Our filters and constructions, our limited self-determination which ultimately forecloses our direct encounter with being's naked actuality.

Desmond frames the same ordeal as the tension between *conatus essendi* and *passio essendi*: "We are given to be before we give ourselves to be. There is a *passio essendi*, a patience of being, more primordial than our *conatus essendi*, our endeavor to be."<sup>8</sup> *Conatus* is our striving, our effort to preserve and assert selfhood, keeping reality in a digestible order. *Passio* is our given-ness, the raw unmediated encounter of being.

Being at this level can be seen as a *pharmakon*. The *pharmakon* reaches us through a philosophical lineage that reveals its metaxological character. In Plato's *Phaedrus*, King Thamus warns that writing—Thoth's gift to humanity—will be both remedy and poison for memory: strengthening external recall while weakening the soul's internal capacity for recollection. Bernard Stiegler extends this insight in his *technopharmacology*, showing how technical objects are constitutive of human becoming itself—we co-evolve with our tools in what is fundamentally a metaxological relationship. Technology is neither external instrument nor internal capacity but the very between-space where human and world co-determine each other.

The **Pharmakon of Being** I'm proposing operates at this same constitutive level, but more fundamentally still. Where Derrida's *pharmakon* reveals the undecidability of conceptual oppositions, and Stiegler's *technopharmacology* shows the co-constitutive relationship between human and technical objects, the *Pharmakon of Being* concerns our metabolic encounter with existence itself. This concerns the ordeal of existence: whether we can bear being's gift without being destroyed by its excess.

Desmond hints at this metabolic dimension: "We clot on ourselves again and close the porosity. The blood stream of life is made the carrier of death."<sup>9</sup> The same encounter with being's overdeterminate richness can either open us to deeper community or close us off into "counterfeit doubles" of authentic transcendence.

Lispector embodies this viscerally. The roach's white matter becomes literal *pharmakon*—she must eat it to receive its truth, knowing it may poison her old self even as it nourishes new understanding. The "anti-sin" she discovers is precisely this willingness to metabolize reality rather than flee into transcendent abstractions. This is the metaxological courage to remain in the between rather than escape to false unities.

The ambiguity is fundamental. There is only so much indeterminate grace we can bear. Can we come to terms with our own strangeness? As the self protests, calcified by its own understanding, can we let the world collapse and come to trembling uncertainty? It will certainly require courage.

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<sup>7</sup>Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, [PAGE NEEDED].

<sup>8</sup>Desmond, *God and the Between*, 21.

<sup>9</sup>Desmond, *God and the Between*, 331.

## 4 02 The Violence of Grace

**Gift and Debt** The world given to us places us in a condition of fundamental indebtedness. This is not necessarily a burdensome obligation but a condition inherent in the givenness of relation itself. The very fact of being given, of existing without having chosen to, places us in a prior relation of dependency. This debt that accompanies the gift of being is itself a **pharmakon**: it is both blessing (the sheer wonder of existence) and burden (the inescapable vulnerability and non-self-sufficiency it reveals). The gift of being is not ours to master; it continuously exceeds our capacity to claim it, continuously placing us in a relation of inherent indebtedness that simultaneously nourishes and destabilizes.

This ambivalence of the gift points toward the ordeal of finitude: the inescapable reality that, while being is given, it is also fragile, ambiguous, and marked by suffering and evil. **“Sin,” understood as an existential posture, can be seen as the refusal of this gift**—the *conatus essendi* turning away from the inherent vulnerability and indebtedness of *passio essendi*. It is a futile attempt to master or possess being on its own terms, a **metabolic failure** to process the *pharmakon* of givenness without demanding control. Yet we must also recognize the parts of reality that we cannot accept—those elements of evil and suffering that challenge our capacity to say “yes” to the given world.

We cannot have the gift without the debt, blessing without burden, nourishment without destabilization. This is the no-sive-yes, gift-sive-debt structure of existence itself. The question becomes: can we affirm being in its constitutive ambiguity? Can we say yes to what includes no? This requires a profound conversion in how we understand affirmation itself.

### 4.0.1 No-sive-Yes

The paradoxical affirmation we’re calling “no-sive-yes” finds philosophical articulation in Nishitani Keiji’s concept of *sive* (*soku*, 卍)—not “either/or” or simple “and,” but radical interpenetration. The “no” becomes the very condition for “yes,” as in the Heart Sutra: “Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.”

Nishitani distinguishes this from nihilism: “The standpoint of *sunyata*... is the standpoint at which absolute negation is at the same time... a Great Affirmation.”<sup>10</sup> The conversion occurs when we realize “not that the self is empty, but that emptiness is the self; not that things are empty, but that emptiness is things.”<sup>11</sup> This transforms void into fertile ground—what Nishitani calls moving from “nullification” to “be-ification,” the field where “we can say Yes to all things.”<sup>12</sup> For Lispector’s G.H., the roach encounter enacts this conversion. The dissolution of her constructed self doesn’t destroy her but reveals her “in its true suchness”—the “inhuman, thing-part” as her deepest reality, where “the absolute within and absolute without are here one and the same.”<sup>13</sup>

This conversion enables what follows: the capacity to undergo the violence of grace without being destroyed by it. ### The Violence of Grace

The violence of grace occurs when we encounter what exceeds us, placing us in the strata between finite and infinite where our constructs are shattered. In Lispector’s G.H., the brutality of grace is unflinching: the protagonist is violently unseated by an encounter that kills her narcissistic certainties even as it births strange compassion. Grace strikes like a knife, collapsing the ‘familiar middle’—the counterfeit refuge built by *conatus*—and forcing us back into astonishment.

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<sup>10</sup>Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 138.

<sup>11</sup>Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 138.

<sup>12</sup>Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 131.

<sup>13</sup>Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 71, 74.

Lispector describes losing “a third leg that kept me from walking but made me a stable tripod.” What provides stability also prevents genuine movement. The tripod of ordinary consciousness—grounded in self-certainty, conceptual mastery, and narrative coherence—keeps us upright but immobile. The violence of grace kicks away this third leg, forcing us to learn a terrifying new way of being.

Nishitani speaks of “**the solitary one laid bare amidst the myriad phenomena**”—and paradoxically, when we are stripped to essence, everything becomes more real. “In bearing witness to this solitary one laid bare, each and every phenomenon is by far more itself than it is on its own home-ground.”<sup>14</sup> The roach in its alien vitality, the neutral in its fertility, being itself in its astonishing thereness.

**What appears in this laying bare is what Nishitani calls “double exposure”—reality appearing simultaneously under contradictory aspects without resolution.** “The real Form of all things, including man, comes to be a ‘double exposure’ of life and death. All living things can be seen under the Form of death without thereby being separated from their proper Form of life.”<sup>15</sup>

This is not seeing death instead of life, nor dialectical synthesis. It is seeing life and death simultaneously, each fully present, neither canceling the other. In ceremony, in the depths of the purge, this becomes visceral: the body dying and the body being born—simultaneously. Not metaphorically but actually: cellular death enabling cellular renewal, ego dissolution making space for deeper selfhood.

Lispector: “I was eating myself, I who am also living matter of the Sabbath”—simultaneously eating and being eaten, destroying and being destroyed, dying and being born. The roach’s white matter is both poison and sacrament, death and life in one substance. Life and death revealed as one field, appearing in double exposure.

Yet her courage reveals something crucial about the nature of transformation. She demonstrates what she calls the sleepwalker’s courage—the ability to move beyond the compulsive need to organize and reflect:

“I was courageous like a sleepwalker who simply goes. During the hours of perdition I had the courage not to compose or organize. And above all not to look ahead.”

Lispector shows vulnerability as epistemological method—knowing that acknowledges the limits of autonomous reason while remaining open to forms of understanding that exceed those limits. She writes: “Perhaps what happened to me was an understanding—and for me to be true, I have to keep on being unable to grasp it, keep on not understanding it.” The sleepwalker doesn’t strategize each step; she allows herself to be moved by what she cannot consciously control. This is not passivity but a radical form of trust—trust in the process of disorganization itself as necessary for genuine transformation.

The medicine is violent grace embodied. It does not ask permission; it works according to its own intelligence. What arrives is radical reorganization. The nausea, the fear, dissolution—these are not obstacles to healing but the healing itself. The body knows how to expel what has become toxic. The work is not to control the purge but to allow it, to remain companionable to what the medicine is doing even when it feels like dying.

Lispector’s encounter with the roach follows this structure exactly. She drinks the white matter—literally eats the neutral—and undergoes the metabolic crisis. “I was eating myself, I who am also living matter of the Sabbath.” The pharmakon cannot be observed from safe distance; it must be ingested, must enter the system and do its transformative-destructive work.

What the medicine teaches is this: **resistance prolongs suffering; surrender enables metabolism.** Not pas-

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<sup>14</sup>Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 199.

<sup>15</sup>Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 76.



sive submission but active cooperation with a process that exceeds us. The sleepwalker's courage Lispector describes—moving without knowing, trusting the disorganization itself—this is precisely the ceremonial attitude required. One does not strategize the purge; one allows the purge to complete itself.

And yet something in us consents. There is a blurring of heteronomy and autonomy: ordeal comes as if from outside us, yet it is also our own doing. Here lies a deeper paradox—**the ordeal emerges because we have already consented to it**, even if unconsciously. The very fact that the encounter happens means some dimension of our being has opened to it, has said yes before we consciously know we are saying anything. But this implicit consent must become explicit consent—the willingness to undergo, the courage to remain disorganized, the vulnerability to let transformation work on us rather than trying to master it.

We say yes to being transformed, even as this yes undoes us. As Desmond notes, the new astonishment is a gratitude “won from suffering; a ‘yes’ purged of complaint; an affirmation that has wept, as there is a mourning that is blessed.”<sup>16</sup> This explicit consent requires courage precisely because we don’t know if we can bear it.

Lispector names it “the worse truth”<sup>17</sup>—horrible not because it’s false but because it confronts us with totality. The worse truth is the recognition that being gives itself as both beautiful and horrific, gift and ordeal, life-sive-death, without dialectical resolution.

What makes truth “worse”? It shatters the familiar middle—the safe refuge built by conatus. It reveals our inescapable entanglement in being, even with what we deem abject. We cannot have the gift without the debt, the yes without the no, the beauty without the horror. Desmond writes of “the equivocality of evil”—how the same reality that enables good also permits radical destruction. The worse truth is that this ambiguity is constitutional, not accidental.

And yet—here is the paradox—this worse truth is also “the best truth” because it is truth. Lispector: “Why would I be afraid of eating the good and the evil? if they exist that is because that is what exists.” It opens the possibility of what she calls “hopeless joy”: not joy despite the lack of hope, but joy that has moved beyond hope’s comforting illusions. Radical affirmation won from absolute negation.

The paradox is stark. Ordeal comes as heteronomy, as Rilke’s command “You must change your life.”<sup>18</sup> But it also demands our autonomy, our willingness to undergo. It is a participatory surrender, a choice that is also not a choice. The violence of grace names this ambiguity—it can be received as transformative ordeal or destructive overwhelm, and the difference lies not only in metabolic capacity but in our willingness to meet what arrives with sleepwalker’s courage rather than defensive refusal. For what if we refuse? The pharmakon of being cannot be avoided; it can only be received, consciously or unconsciously. The question is whether we can metabolize reality, or whether we are metabolized by our refusal. The violence of grace strips away our constructions. What remains is not nothing but a transformed way of knowing. In the ruins of the familiar middle, in the metabolized ordeal, something new emerges: a knowing that has learned to dwell companionably with what exceeds it.

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<sup>16</sup>Desmond, *God and the Between*, 121.

<sup>17</sup>Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, [PAGE NEEDED].

<sup>18</sup>Rainer Maria Rilke, “Archaic Torso of Apollo,” *New Poems*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Vintage, 1989), [PAGE NEEDED].

## 5 Dark Intelligibility

### 5.0.1 The Fruit of the Ordeal

To affirm suchness without narrative, to receive the pharmakon without fleeing—this is the intimacy with the inhuman, the fertile neutrality at the heart of being. It is here, in the ruins of the old self, that astonishment begins again. This metabolic relationship points toward a new mode of knowing. Not an end to reason, but its maturation into a faculty that can dwell companionably with what exceeds it.

There is an understanding that emerges not despite our encounter with the incomprehensible, but precisely through it. It is the faculty born when the self remains porous to the ordeal of being, the ground where the hyperbolic, the intimate, and the impersonal meet. This is not a voiding of intelligibility, but its deepening into a mode that can hold the discomfort of excess—where understanding and un-understanding interpenetrate without resolution. The darkness is not an absence of light but the saturation of it, the light too full to be borne without distortion.

As such, dark intelligibility is not the end of reason but its maturation. It operates by giving equal weight to the day of reason and the night of mystery. As Desmond powerfully suggests, our daytime reason risks going mad if it cannot return to and draw nourishment from the mystery of the night, just as a person who cannot sleep cannot properly return to the day.<sup>19</sup>

The chiaroscuro of dark intelligibility emerges precisely here—in the recognition that “The diurnal mind, sovereign of its clarities, drops down into sleep, and from deep within it horror floats up from bourns beyond the boundary of all definition.”<sup>20</sup> We are not simply moving from light to dark, but discovering that the darkness has its own luminosity, its own mode of disclosure. This requires acknowledging what Desmond calls “the nocturnal side of things inhuman, human, and transhuman”<sup>21</sup>—a recognition that mystery is not merely the absence of clarity but a positive register of being.

Like Aristotle's metaphor, echoed by Aquinas, that with the highest things “we are like bats in sunlight”<sup>22</sup>—our daytime reason finds itself blinded precisely where nocturnal intuition might navigate. Nocturnal souls find the daylight itself a nighttime illumination.

Dark intelligibility is thus a form of **non-propositional knowing** that requires attunement and fidelity to mystery, revealing the limits of conceptual thought while grounding it in embodied wisdom. It is what Desmond calls “**agapeic mindfulness**”—an unknowing knowing, a *docta ignorantia*. “One hesitates even to call it knowing lest one imply one has grasped a determinate somewhat, mastered through oneself alone.”<sup>23</sup> This communication is excessive, extending beyond self-determining cognition into what can only be called “an excess of

<sup>19</sup>William Desmond, “Thought Singing its Other,” in conversation with Guy Sengstock, *Circling Dialogos with Guy Sengstock*, YouTube, timestamp 1:08:15–1:09:58, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_\\_giSFKUwklw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=__giSFKUwklw). Desmond discusses Hegel's critique of Schelling's Absolute as “the night in which all cows are black” (Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Preface §16), responding: “The night is sometimes more interesting than the Hegelian day... I don't think that Hegel does justice to the mystery of the night... I'm arguing for a sense of mystery that is an abiding sense of mystery out of which the diurnal daytime philosophical reason comes to be. But if we can't return to the night of mystery, our daytime reason actually goes mad just as we find in life. If we can't sleep and return to the darkness of sleep, we can't live in the day properly.”

<sup>20</sup>Desmond, *God and the Between*, 265. The full passage continues: “The sweating relief to which one awakens chastens one's daylight certainty. A flame flares up, a rush of exhilaration, and suddenly one has no boundary of identity, and one is like a line on the sand washed out by a rogue wave. Joy breaks out, and against the grain one hums, one does not choose this, it is as if one were chosen. The overdeterminate otherness comes out, comes upon one, overtakes, takes over, ruptures, surprises, raptures, silences, utters itself in singing. There is an idiotic excess that crosses over every fixed boundary.”

<sup>21</sup>Desmond, *God and the Between*, 231. Desmond discusses “the nocturnal side of things inhuman, human, and transhuman” in the context of acknowledging mystery in Romanticism: “At best, there was an honesty: the nocturnal side of things inhuman, human, and transhuman must be acknowledged. This is true also of the surrational darkness of God.”

<sup>22</sup>Desmond, *God and the Between*, 273n. The footnote references Gregory of Nyssa's progression of light (*phōs*), cloud (*nephelē*), and darkness (*gnophos*), and cites Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 80–97.

<sup>23</sup>Desmond, *God and the Between*, 273. Desmond writes: “The agapeics of the mystical means we must speak of the union as a communion, for this keeps the openness of the ‘being with.’ Communion does not reduce to a mystical monism... This is an agapeic mindfulness. One hesitates even to call it a knowing lest one imply one has grasped a determinate somewhat, mastered through oneself alone. This communication will be an unknowing knowing, a *docta ignorantia*, in Cusanus's words, in a cloud of unknowing, as Julian of Norwich calls it.”

the other [that] strains the limits of self-determining."

This points to forms of knowing that operate through what can be called **metabolic wisdom**—the body's capacity to process and integrate what exceeds mental comprehension. Somatic practices are conducive of energetic releases that are entirely non-rational, sometimes even devoid of conscious content. The body releases what it has been holding without the mind needing to understand what is being released. Lispector's encounter with the roach demonstrates this in action. Her body knows before her mind that transformation is occurring: "I was slowly swimming through my oldest primeval soup, the sweat was plankton and pneuma and pabulum vitae, I was being, I was me being." The somatic knowing precedes and exceeds conceptual understanding, teaching consciousness what it needs to know through direct metabolic experience.

Dark intelligibility operates from what Nishitani calls **ontological samadhi**: "In its own home-ground, the being of the self is essentially a sort of samadhi. No matter how dispersed the conscious self be, its self as it is in itself is ever in samadhi."<sup>24</sup> This is not meditative achievement but our deepest structure. Even in turbulence, confusion, the metabolic crisis of ordeal—at the ground, there is samadhi. A stillness that precedes and enables all our motion, a dark knowing that operates even when daylight consciousness fails. Dark intelligibility is learning to think from this ontological primacy rather than from the dispersed, anxious surface consciousness. It's intelligence that draws from the home-ground, knowing that rests in what Nishitani, consonant with Desmond's *metaxu*, calls the "middle": "Our self in itself is most elementally 'middle.'"<sup>25</sup> the immediate ground where we actually are, "at hand" and "underfoot," the point from which all our actions proceed with "absolute immediacy."

**The Purge: Somatic Integration** Repression is the banishment of forms of knowing to the body—what cannot be thought becomes lodged in flesh, held in tension, calcified into blockage. The body becomes the repository for what consciousness refuses to metabolize. But the body is not a tomb. It is a living archive that seeks to communicate what has been silenced.

The purge is what happens when we become porous anew—when the sealed channels of circulation reopen and blocked energy can finally surface and speak. This is not primarily about expulsion but about **communication**: the body is trying to tell us something, to make present what has been banished. The nausea, the shaking, the tears, the trembling—these are not symptoms to be managed but **utterances to be received**.

A circulation of energy becomes expressed. It surfaces bodily and mentally at once, indivisibly. We cry and the crying is the grief made manifest, not its symptom. We shake and the shaking is the fear finding voice, not its side effect. The somatic and psychic are revealed as always already unified—what we call "mental" and "physical" are arbitrary divisions of a single communicative event.

The purge is often elemental, somatic: the yawn that releases held breath, the tears that speak unspeakable sorrow, the discharge that completes interrupted circuits. What is commonly deemed abject—that which must be expelled, separated from us—reveals itself as energy seeking completion, circulation seeking restoration. After it passes through us, the subtle body no longer carries that particular weight. Not because we have thrown something away, but because we have finally allowed it to complete its movement, to say what it needed to say.

When we allow this—when we participate in rather than resist the purge—our porosity is restored. The channels that had clotted reopen. Communication is reestablished between the differentiated but unified dimensions of our being. We find ourselves alive in the hyperbole. Swept into it. On fire. Ecstatic. Weeping, Laughing, Gleaming, Sighing. The grammar of the *metaxu* is revealed in its full intensity, a language of pure verbs, of pure

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<sup>24</sup>Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 165-166.

<sup>25</sup>Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 166.

happening. The sovereign "I" dissolves. There is no longer an "I" who is weeping or an "I" who is laughing. There is simply Weeping, Laughing, Gleaming.

This is precisely the overdeterminate otherness Desmond describes when he writes of how "the diurnal mind, sovereign of its clarities, drops down" and we discover ourselves with "no boundary of identity"—like "a line on the sand washed out by a rogue wave." This breakthrough doesn't come from choosing but from being chosen: "Joy breaks out, and against the grain one hums, one does not choose this, it is as if one were chosen."<sup>26</sup> The hyperbolic grammar emerges when thought stops grasping and begins singing its Other.

**The Grammar of Limits** In Lispector's work there is a tension between apophasis and phasis, negative and positive theology, saying what being is not and what it is. They are deeply entangled. Pure apophasis is impossible, as every negation carries the trace of what it negates. Dark intelligibility works at these limits—identifying them however bright or dark they are, however high or low (hyper-, hypo-).

This work at limits brings us to the Greek concept of **aporia**—literally "without passage" or "waylessness." Traditionally understood as a productive philosophical impasse that clears space for new thinking, aporia reveals something more paradoxical when examined through the lens of dark intelligibility. It is not simply a luminous clearing but the paradoxical simultaneity of blockage and passage.

As Desmond explains, poros has connotations of "a way across." With no way across or through, we are at an impasse, an aporia. But poros isn't just passage—it names "a transition that is no transition, since in making a way, it makes way and hence there is a withdrawal in the very opening of the way."<sup>27</sup> **The way opens by withdrawing, creates passage through its own recession.**

This is the double nature of aporia itself. The blockage contains the resource for breakthrough, but only if we can metabolize the impasse rather than flee from it. What appears as dead-end becomes, for consciousness with sufficient metabolic capacity, the very site where new passages open.

**Semantic Constipation and Porosity** "Sometimes rational univocity seems the callous of mind that hardens over the porosity of our being... a remedial protective for vulnerability?"<sup>28</sup> We become constipated with our own constructions of meaning. Language, meant to be porous medium, calcifies into barrier. Our determination of meaning can foreclose genuine relation, sealing the porosity where the bloodstream of life flows.

Yet this semantic blockage is itself pharmakon. The same meaning-making that opens worlds can become the prison that forecloses them. The construction that was medicine hardens into poison. But the blockage itself, when recognized and metabolized, becomes the pressure that forces breakthrough.

**Perplexity as Metabolic Resistance** "Perplexity seeds a troubled thinking in porosity that makes us patient to given otherness."<sup>29</sup> Perplexity—that troubled thinking in porosity—is the middle space between overdetermined being and our need for determinate articulation. It's the resistance we encounter when trying to make the indefinite definite, to domesticate the mystery of our being.

<sup>26</sup>Desmond, *God and the Between*, 265. The full passage continues: "The sweating relief to which one wakens chastens one's daylight certainty. A flame flares up, a rush of exhilaration, and suddenly one has no boundary of identity, and one is like a line on the sand washed out by a rogue wave. Joy breaks out, and against the grain one hums, one does not choose this, it is as if one were chosen. The overdeterminate otherness comes out, comes upon one, overtakes, takes over, ruptures, surprises, raptures, silences, utters itself in singing. There is an idiotic excess that crosses over every fixed boundary."

<sup>27</sup>Desmond, *God and the Between*, 41.

<sup>28</sup>Desmond, *God and the Between*, 78.

<sup>29</sup>Desmond, *God and the Between*, 119.

There is something of suffering in this perplexity, as in astonishment. Being in the between is first a suffering; we undergo our being given to be. Perplexity cannot be eliminated, only metabolized. Mystery will always resist our attempts at eradication. The troubling perplexity must be borne rather than solved.

Dark intelligibility learns to treat aporia not as obstacle to be overcome but as what Desmond calls hyperintelligibility—excessive intelligibility that exceeds our capacity to master it. We make present the negativity: the discomfort, shadow, frustrated meaning, limits of language. We highlight the insufficiency of pure daylight reason and reveal the urgency for night's mystery to meet its conjunction with day. This isn't the *via negativa* of *neti neti* ("not this, not that") but something more visceral—**making the blockage itself luminous**.

The paradox requires what Desmond calls "idiotic trust"—the "overdeterminate faith" that "is other to determine and self-determining reason" yet "is not absurd; it is the mustard seed of agapeic minding in us."<sup>30</sup> We trust that the way opens precisely through its own recession, that passage emerges from within the impasse itself.

### 5.0.2 Hyperrational Finesse

Dark intelligibility is not anti-rational thinking but **hyperrational**—reason stretched to its creative limits. Desmond traces a similar movement from thought thinking itself (Hegel's self-closing dialectic) to thought thinking its Other, and finally to thought singing its Other. In this "singing," thought becomes a celebratory, performative, and porous act—an ecstasis that does not seek to possess the other, but to witness it. This is the responsive finesse that dark intelligibility cultivates.

Lispector's final words in *The Passion According to G.H.* capture this perfectly: "I am not understanding whatever it is I'm saying, never! never again shall I understand anything I say... And so I adore it."

The adoration that emerges from not-understanding signals an intelligence that has learned to think at the edge of thought itself. The saltless truth demands nothing less than a transformation of intelligence—from grasping to receiving, from solving to dissolving. This transformation is intimately linked to the *Pharmakon* of Being: our metabolic capacity is ultimately a measure of our ability to receive communication. When we remain open to the "shown and the reserved" nature of being, we can metabolize the experience. When that communication breaks down into the absurd, the *pharmakon* becomes poison. As Desmond writes: "This perplexity grows into unknowing the more growing into knowing."<sup>31</sup>

### 5.0.3 The Fruit

This new knowing gives birth to a new affective relation to being: agapeic love. This is not eros, the possessive, striving love, but a generous, non-possessive affirmation of the other in its pure, untamed otherness. This love is born not from the *conatus essendi* but from the *passio essendi*, flowing from the reception of being's "surplus givenness" rather than a striving to master it. But what does this love actually feel like? How does it manifest?

Agapeic love is what remains when we have stopped trying to convert the neutral into something we can manage, when we have learned to receive the great living neutrality as it gives itself. It is love that has developed the metabolic capacity to affirm being without demanding that being conform to our needs for meaning, comfort, or redemption. It is the affective dimension of hopeless joy—a generous yes to suchness. But more than

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<sup>30</sup>Desmond, *God and the Between*, 340.

<sup>31</sup>Desmond, *God and the Between*, 120.

this: it is compassionate witnessing, the capacity to see beings in their own light, to let them be what they are without our projections obscuring their suchness.

This witnessing is not passive observation but active participation. It requires courage—the sleepwalker's courage to remain open even when what we encounter exceeds our capacity to comprehend it. It demands connection—to self and world simultaneously, recognizing that these are not separate domains but interpenetrating fields of the same original part.

What Nishitani describes shows us how this works ontologically. After the conversion, after person-centered self-prehension is broken down, "the personal mode of being becomes more real, draws closer to the self, and appears in its true suchness."<sup>[^X]</sup> The paradox is that we become more genuinely personal by passing through the impersonal. "Insofar as the field of nothingness is completely one with personality and consciousness, the whole of this oneness is present within personality and consciousness. Conversely, insofar as personality and consciousness can be what they are only in oneness with absolute nothingness, the same complete oneness stands ecstatically outside of personality and consciousness. The absolute within and absolute without are here one and the same."<sup>[^X]</sup>

This is not mystical dissolution but the emergence of a higher 'person'—one that includes both personal intimacy and impersonal vastness. The "shadowy man" Nishitani speaks of, whose "heart and mind... originate from moment to moment as things completely temporary," yet "in their very temporality they stand ecstatically outside of time... altogether 'eternal' in their temporality."<sup>[^X]</sup> We become more ourselves by discovering we are not only ourselves.

Agapeic love recognizes this in the other as well. "Hills and rivers are here hills and rivers in not being hills and rivers, just as the self is the self in not being the self. And yet it is only here that hills and rivers are real hills and rivers in their suchness, only here that the self is the real self in its suchness."<sup>[^X]</sup> This is love that affirms beings in their emptiness, recognizing that their very groundlessness is their reality. To love agapeically is to see the other as "the self in not being the self"—fully other yet constituted by the same original part, different yet sharing the same home-ground.

#### 5.0.4 To Be Confirmed By All Things

But there is something more radical still. Dōgen writes: "To learn the Buddha Way is to learn one's self. To learn one's self is to forget one's self. To forget one's self is to be confirmed by all things."<sup>[^X]</sup> What does it mean to be confirmed by all things? This is not mere recognition or validation. It is ontological reciprocity—when we have learned to witness beings in their suchness, they begin to witness us in ours. When we sing deeply through the other, the other starts singing back to us. The roach confirms G.H. The white matter, when eaten, reveals her to herself more truly than her mirror ever did. The neutral, when received without flight, shows her "the thing-part... matter of God" that constitutes her. The inhuman reveals the human's deepest truth.

This is the phenomenology Nishitani articulates: "all things come forth and practice and confirm the self."<sup>[^X]</sup> When we have developed sufficient metabolic capacity, when we can remain porous to what exceeds us, beings begin to practice us—they work on us, teach us, reveal us to ourselves. "In bearing witness to this solitary one laid bare, each and every phenomenon is by far more itself than it is on its own home-ground."<sup>[^X]</sup> The more real we become, the more real everything else becomes. Our suchness enables their suchness; their suchness confirms ours.

This is a co-identification born out of mutual recognition in shared emptiness. I am empty; the roach is empty; this shared groundlessness is what allows genuine meeting. We recognize each other as "the self in not being the self," as expressions of the same original part taking different forms.

Desmond calls this “the quiet festivity of the agapeics of being”—a phrase that captures something essential. There is joy in this witnessing. Not the frantic joy of achievement but the quiet joy of participation, of finding ourselves part of something vastly larger than our constructed selves while simultaneously being utterly ourselves. An intimate joy in us participating in creation a mutual bringing-forth of reality.

### 5.0.5 Thought Singing Its Other

At its highest intensity, this becomes what Desmond calls “thought singing its other.” He traces a progression: from thought thinking itself (Hegel’s self-enclosed dialectic) to thought thinking its Other, and finally to thought singing its Other. In this singing, thought becomes “a celebratory, performative, and porous act—an ecstasis that does not seek to possess the other, but to witness it.”

This is the language that emerges when consciousness has developed sufficient metabolic capacity to dwell in the metaxu without collapsing it. Not the instrumental language of mastery, not even the conceptual language of understanding, but the language of praise. Thought singing its other is thought that has learned to let beings be, to witness them in their suchness, to participate in their self-manifestation without interference.

Lispector ends *The Passion According to G.H.* with precisely this gesture: “I am not understanding whatever it is I’m saying, never! never again shall I understand anything I say... And so I adore it.” The adoration that emerges from not-understanding is thought singing its other. She doesn’t comprehend the roach, the neutral, the worse truth—and precisely in that non-comprehension, she can finally receive them, can finally sing them.

When we sing deeply through the other—human, non-human, matter, God—the other starts singing back to us. This is not projection but genuine reciprocity. The tree sings its treeness; in witnessing that without demand, we enable it to sing more fully; its song then confirms our own existence, teaches us our own suchness.

An intimacy so alien and yet so near. The roach reveals G.H. to herself. The neutral proves fertile. The thing-part shows itself as matter-of-God. What seemed most foreign—the inhuman, the impersonal, the neutral—reveals itself as more intimate than we are to ourselves. Nishitani’s “absolute near side,” Desmond’s metaxu, Lispector’s thing-part—all naming the same structure: we are constituted by what we thought was other, confirmed by what we feared was alien.

**Enchantment and the Agapeic Ground** When I sing the other, I find myself in love. Enchanted and chanting. The boundaries that kept me separate dissolve not into void but into intimacy. It is in this agapeic surrender that the heart burns through the fabric of reality—not destroying it but making it transparent, revealing what was always already there.

This is wanting to be met and being met by myself through the world. Not narcissistic self-reflection but the discovery that the world is the medium of self-encounter. I meet myself on my home-ground and lose myself there. The circuminsessional relationship Nishitani describes becomes lived experience: I find myself one with nature, yet more myself than I’ve ever been. “The self is the self in not being the self”—this is not conceptual paradox but phenomenological reality.

It is a divine meeting with an Other, an inhuman mirror of myself. The roach, the tree, the stone—each shows me what I am by being utterly other than what I think I am. Each reveals the thing-part, the original part, the matter-of-God that constitutes me. The alien becomes intimate; the foreign reveals itself as home.

This is the agapeic ground in which I am completely and absolutely whole—not by excluding what I feared or re-

jected, but by discovering that the neutral itself is fertile, that the inhuman is nearer than my human constructions, that emptiness is my substance. It is my resting place in my soul—that ontological samadhi Nishitani speaks of, the stillness at the ground that persists through all turbulence, the home I never left even when I felt most lost.

A flash of union—not permanent fusion but fleeting glimpse of mutual participation in being's self-manifestation. A glimpse of a singing khora, that primordial receptacle now understood not as passive container but as active participant in the cosmic singing. The metaxu itself sings, and when we have learned to listen, we discover we have always been part of that song, that our voice is needed for the chorus to be complete, that the world waits for our participation in its self-manifestation.

This is the ethos that emerges from dark intelligibility: courage, participation, connection. The courage to remain open to what exceeds us. The participation in creation that happens when we stop imposing and start witnessing. The connection to self and world that reveals itself when we discover these are not separate domains but interpenetrating dimensions of the same original part. Desmond calls this “the quiet festivity of the agapeics of being”—an intimate joy in us participating in creation, a mutual bringing-forth of reality.

This is the Great Affirmation in its lived reality: not abstract yes to being, but intimate participation in being's festivity. The metabolic transformation that began in ordeal, that passed through the ruins of meaning and the terror of the neutral, arrives finally at this: we learn to sing, and in singing, we are sung. We find our resting place not by escaping the between but by discovering the between as home, the metaxu as the very ground of wholeness.

Dark intelligibility and agapeic love are not separate achievements but two dimensions of the same transformation: a way of knowing that is simultaneously a way of loving, a receptivity that is simultaneously an affirmation, a vulnerability that is simultaneously a strength. This is the fruit of the ordeal, the harvest of metabolic development, the gift that was always already present in the pharmakon we feared would destroy us.

### 5.0.6 Toward Ontological Nutrition

This entire framework suggests that spiritual traditions might be understood as sophisticated technologies for **metabolic development**—systematic training programs for consciousness to expand its digestive range, to learn to find sustenance in what initially appears as pure poison or meaninglessness. Maturation becomes precisely this expansion of metabolic range: learning to digest stronger and stronger doses of unsalted reality until we can finally subsist on being itself without the mediating supplements of human meaning-making.

The roach encounter becomes a genuine philosophical experiment in **ontological nutrition**—testing whether human consciousness can learn to subsist on unsalted being, to find sustenance in neutrality itself. Can we develop the metabolic capacity to break our chrysalis ourselves, to undergo the necessary decomposition that allows genuine transformation rather than mere reformation?

The Pharmakon of Being ultimately names both the challenge and the promise of existence: the same reality that can dissolve unprepared consciousness becomes, for those with sufficient metabolic capacity, the deepest form of nourishment available to human awareness.

We desperately need **ritual containers**, **philosophical depth**, and **existential courage** to meet the ambiguity that the pharmakon reveals. A truthful spiritual practice should include the whole spectrum, the yes and the no, the gift and the debt. The fundamental ambiguity of any practice is not something to be eliminated but engaged with **finesse rather than geometry**—the responsive attunement of dark intelligibility rather than the calculative mastery of technical reason.



The pharmakon of being cannot be resolved through scientific taxonomy but must be lived, metabolized, and integrated through mature spiritual practice within wisdom traditions that understand transformation's necessarily equivocal waters. The question isn't how to avoid the ordeal but how to bear it, how to let it work on us until the blockage itself becomes the clearing, until we find ourselves saying yes to what we cannot yet comprehend, trusting that the way opens precisely through its own recession.

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## 5.1 Endnotes

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Met vriendelijke groet,

Jeroen Kortekaas