

Dark Intelligibility

The Pharmakon of Being

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*The greatest act of love for myself
is to look at my own pain.*

Companionability

“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

How do we relate to what ultimately concerns us? We are thrown into reality’s whirl without ground, without given orientation. The religious traditions once held these ultimate questions—the meaning of existence, our stance toward being, the ground of value itself. But today we delegate our ultimate concerns to the background, occupying ourselves with anything but the direct encounter with being itself. The result of this deferral, this devaluation of being, is nihilism.

Nihilism appears first as ending, as the collapse into meaninglessness. But it may be doorway rather than dead end, an essential waystation toward transformed relation to being. Our coming to

nothing—if we can bear to remain there rather than flee—hollows out a space where something new might be born from the ruins.

This requires that we stop trying to make sense of it, that we feel our way into the question itself. The determined must somehow become companionable to indeterminacy. How does light and dark conjoin in *chiaroscuro*? We need metabolic capacity to receive this interpenetration, to digest what threatens to poison us. But such capacity does not come easily.

Today, in a world where ambiguity dominates and social cohesion evaporates, the demands of life can overwhelm our capacity to remain open. I must be compassionate here—with myself, with us. It is no surprise that we foreclose our porosity. Faced with real suffering, oppression, the devaluation of being, a lack of meaning can feel like terminal diagnosis. The temptation is to close off, to protect. What results is not some heroic refusal, but a quiet death—the death of community with others, and more devastatingly, the death of communication with ourselves, with our own being.

I have to confess I cannot be honest to you, dear reader. I'm not sure I have the capacity to tell you the truth. I follow the flame called love and I try to discern in its light, the gradations of color, the intensity of its burning. Everything I believe can be told by the flame of a single candle. Maybe this essay will be some half-unfinished regurgitation, unmetabolized material, purged from a system that is processing, messy, academically questionable, of questionable authenticity. On the page I should not shy from truth as I do not do so in my body, my soul. I encounter myself fully. But of course I'm full of my own bullshit too.

Writing itself becomes a site of perplexity and astonishment. It is

an attempt to give myself breath, to give myself space to wonder and attend to myself. Not as achievement but as necessity, an attempt to save my life.

How can I write without knowing where to go? I shall have somebody else write through me. In my voice, my very being, there is a whole host of voices speaking through me. I feel easily possessed. This doesn't have to be a problem. Starting with my parental voices, Clarice Lispector and William Desmond. 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. The aim here is not a perfect synthesis, which would risk domesticating the radical singularity of each voice. Rather, it is to stage a tense and improvisational tango where resonance emerges from the space opened up between them. Hopefully I will not be a wallflower.

The Between and Its Medicine

“As beings proceed, they recede; as they show themselves, they reserve themselves; as they manifest themselves, they hide their being.”—William Desmond, God and the Between

Porosity and the Neutral

Where does this tango begin? At the threshold where we stand exposed—porous to what exceeds us, yet strangely intimate with it. Both Lispector and Desmond trace this exposure through what appears most alien, most resistant to meaning: the neutral. This is where the triangle finds its first movement.

Clarice Lispector’s protagonist in *The Passion According to G.H.* encounters an alien intimacy. She confronts what she calls “the

great living neutrality struggling”,¹ life stripped of its human face, vitality indifferent to meaning. Intimacy here is not the communion of similarity, but the piercing proximity of otherness. There is an otherness to selving.

William Desmond offers a striking parallel in his book *the 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.”² 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”?

The Metaxu as Overdetermined Between

Desmond’s concept of the *metaxu* (μεταξύ)—the “between”—provides the ontological framework for understanding how Lispector and Desmond navigate the space where intelligible and unintelligible, self and other, human and inhuman meet without reduction. We are constituted *in* relation, through the between- the “rich ontological intermedium of happening”³ 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.

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.”⁴ 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 a profound and complex alterity. To navigate this, William Desmond offers a crucial map of three interwoven senses of transcendence. First transcendence (T^1) is the otherness of

beings in the world, like the cockroach, whose existence resists being reduced to our categories. Second transcendence (T^2) is our own self-transcendence—our freedom and drive toward self-determination.⁵ Modernity has often championed this T^2 as a sovereign autonomy, the *conatus essendi* in full command. Yet, as Desmond warns, when we delve into our own immanent depths, we find they are “bottomless, depths murky, depths terrifying.” Our autonomy shivers as it discovers an “inward otherness” that is not its own creation but its source, an otherness tied to the primordial givenness of our being—our *passio essendi*.⁶

This points toward the Third transcendence (T^3), a “hyperbolic” otherness that is the ultimate, overdeterminate source of both the world (T^1) and the self (T^2).⁷ This the “transobjective and transsubjective” ground of all being.⁸ The ordeal of the *pharmakon* is precisely what happens when an encounter in the first transcendence shatters the illusion of simple autonomy in the second (the self), forcing a terrifying and fascinating exposure to the third. This reveals the double register of heteronomy we will explore: the encounter with the “murky depths” within our self-transcendence (T^2)—our exiled, intimate other—and the simultaneous exposure to the irreducible, hyperbolic mystery that grounds us (T^3).

This double heteronomy, from the exiled parts within us and the hyperbolic mystery beyond us, finds its most startling articulation in what Lispector calls “the thing-part.”

The Thing-Part

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.”⁹ The inhuman here is nearer to us than our own self-conceptions. When Lispector’s narrator asks, “Why shouldn’t I become unclean, exactly as I was discovering my whole self to be?”¹⁰ she names the ordeal of receiving what our constructed purity had excluded. To become “unclean” is to allow the overdeterminate matter-of-God to stain the categories we use to separate spirit from flesh, human from thing. She collapses the hierarchy between human and thing. This reveals the co-identity of self and non-self, the neutral being in which we participate alongside the roach, the stone, the dust.

This “thing-part” emerges as a fundamental ground we share in being with the world. It points to what Kyoto School philosopher Nishitani Keiji calls the *self’s original part*: “Hills and rivers, the earth, plants and trees, tiles and stones, all of these are the self’s own original part.”^{11 12} This is the place where self and world are not yet differentiated, pre-subjective and pre-objective. The encounter with the abject roach is not a discovery of something foreign, but a homecoming to our shared original ground.

This perspective points to neither materialism (which would reduce consciousness to mechanism) nor transcendentalism (which would separate spirit from flesh). Instead, it names an immanent divinity: the sacred as the very substance of what is. Matter is not dead stuff awaiting animation by spirit; it is *Materia-de-Deus*, the very

flesh of the divine. The “original part” is our shared participation in this ground, the recognition that matter itself is the medium of the sacred. We are not souls trapped in bodies but embodied consciousness recognizing itself as always already divine substance, neutral fertility, living suchness.

Lispector’s discovery is not without terror: “it was a joy without redemption...a joy without hope.”¹³ 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 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.

To experience hopeless joy is to affirm being without the supplements of meaning-making, to find nourishment in what initially appears as pure poison. It is joy that has developed sufficient metabolic capacity to receive the neutral directly.

Yet this immanent ground—the thing-part we share with all beings—seems to contradict the radical transcendence Desmond insists upon. How can we hold both?

The Ground We Share: Desmond and Nishitani

Here we must tread carefully. Desmond's three transcendences—the world (T^1), the self (T^2), and God (T^3)—each insist on irreducible otherness that cannot be collapsed into identity. Yet Lispector's "matter of God" and Nishitani's *sunyata* both point toward an immanent ground we share with all beings. How do we reconcile this apparent contradiction between transcendent otherness and immanent sharing?

The tension is creative rather than contradictory. Nishitani's *sunyata*—the standpoint of emptiness—is not a substance we share but the *field* in which all things appear in their suchness. It is "more near to us than we are to ourselves,"¹⁴ yet it is not *ours*. It is the groundlessness that grounds, the nothingness that lets beings be. Similarly, Lispector's "matter of God" is not God *as* matter (which would collapse T^3 into T^1) but the *trace* of the divine in the material—the way the ultimate source shows itself *in* and *through* finite beings without being reduced to them.

Desmond's caution about pantheistic collapse remains valid: we are not God, and God is not simply the sum of beings. Yet the *between* itself—the metaxu—is precisely where the transcendent and immanent interpenetrate without collapsing into identity. The shared ground is not a substance but a *participation*—we share in being without being the source of being. This is *union-in-difference*: profound intimacy without identity, deep communion without fusion.

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. 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.

How do we relate to this excess? How much of it can we bear?

The Pharmakon of Being

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.”¹⁵ 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.”¹⁶ *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 concept reaches us through a philosophical lineage that reveals its metaxological character. In Plato’s *Phaedrus*, King Thamus warns that writing—Thoth’s gift—is a pharmakon that will be both remedy and

poison for memory. This idea of a fundamental ambiguity extends to the strange heteronomy of technology and even drugs, as I have explored in previous work. Bernard Stiegler extends Plato's insight into his technopharmacology, showing how technical objects are constitutive of human becoming itself—we co-evolve with our tools in a metaxological relationship where human and world co-determine each other.

The *Pharmakon of Being* this essay proposes 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.

The ambiguity is fundamental. Being is *given* as dose (*dosis*)—an ordeal to undergo. Whether this dose becomes poison or medicine depends not on the gift itself but on our capacity to metabolize it. *Conatus* seeks to control the dose, to keep reality salted and digestible. *Passio* receives the saltless directly, exposed to being's naked actuality without protective mediation. This is the threshold where we stand: constitutively porous, exposed to overdeterminate excess, faced with the question of whether we can bear what claims us.

The ordeal comes as heteronomy—but whose heteronomy? Not as divine imperative imposed from without, but as the *heteronomy of our own being*. Rilke's command rings through the encounter with radical otherness: "*You must change your life.*" This demand emerges

not from some external judge but from our ontological porosity itself. We are already open, already porous, already given-to-be—and this givenness carries within it a “must” toward transformation.

The ordeal emerges because we have already consented to it at the ontological level—not through deliberate choice but through the very structure of our being. We *are* consent before we choose to consent. The question, then, is not whether we consent but whether our existential self can align with the original affirmation we already are. Can we metabolize what being gives us, or will we be metabolized by our own refusal? The pharmakon works either way—the only question is whether we participate consciously in our transformation or resist until resistance itself becomes the ordeal.

Metabolic Crisis

“All the world began with a yes. One molecule said yes to another molecule and life was born.”—Clarice Lispector, Hour of the Star

The question now demands enactment. We have traced the structure—the *metaxu* where we stand exposed, the *pharmakon* that arrives as both poison and cure. But structure becomes ordeal when philosophy turns visceral, when the gift forecloses, when grace strikes with violence, when transformation demands the body’s participation. This is the metabolic crisis itself: not whether being claims us, but whether we can consciously undergo what has already begun.

The Gift and Its Foreclosure

Being gives itself as pure excess, agapeic letting-be. The gift arrives without condition, without demand for return—what Desmond calls the ontological “yes” we already *are* before we know it. “By virtue of the *passio essendi* we are already participants in a primal affirmation of the good of the ‘to be’—ontologically we are the living of this affirmation before we know of it.” Simply by continuing to be, we already affirm existence. This is the elemental yes: not something we achieve but what we already participate in by virtue of being at all.

Yet this gift places us in radical vulnerability. To be given is to be finite, to be dependent, to be exposed to what exceeds us. This ontological vulnerability is not debt but the very structure of creaturely existence—the *passio essendi*, our fundamental porosity to what is beyond us.

Debt arises not from the gift itself but from our response to this vulnerability. When we cannot metabolize our ontological porosity—when the *conatus essendi* refuses the inherent vulnerability of *passio essendi*—we foreclose the gift through a futile attempt to master what can only be received. This foreclosure is what we might call “sin” as existential posture: not the acceptance of a contaminated gift but the *metabolic failure* to receive the gift.

The gift arrives as pharmakon—not because it is inherently poisonous but because our inability to receive it can make it so. 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.”¹⁷ 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. These are the refuges we construct to protect ourselves from our constitutional porosity—counterfeit affirmations that say “yes” without vulnerability, counterfeit wholes that prematurely resolve tension, counterfeit gods fashioned to our measure. What Lispector calls the “vital lie” tempts us precisely because it offers partial truths, domesticating the self in denial of its exposure to what exceeds it. The worse truth demands the breakdown of these often tempting doubles.

The Violence of Grace

There is violence in grace—not cruelty, but the necessary destruction of what cannot withstand truth. Grace strikes like a knife, collapsing the ‘familiar middle’—the counterfeit refuge built by *conatus*—and forcing us back into astonishment.

Lispector describes losing “a third leg that kept me from walking but made me a stable tripod.”¹⁸ 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.

The violence of grace occurs, yes, when we are somehow receptive to it. But perhaps it emerges from our ontological consent, which we already are. Our existential consent might struggle to undergo the ordeal but the original affirmation that we are calls us to

transformation. We grow by being able to bear more of the totality, which includes the collapsing of our counterfeit refuges. Grace is then our alignment with the ‘worse’ truth. We accept the totality of light and dark because that is the truth of what is.

Nishitani calls this ordeal the *Great Death*—not physical death but the absolute negation of the ego-self that clings to its own being and its own meaning. It is the culmination of what Zen calls the Great Doubt, the radical questioning that presses itself to its existential limit. “The Great Doubt comes to light from the ground of our existence only when we press our doubts...to their limits as conscious acts of the doubting self. The Great Doubt represents not only the apex of the doubting self but also the point of its ‘passing away’ and ceasing to be ‘self.’...This is also why it can be called the ‘Great Death.’”¹⁹ The Great Death is the existential breakdown to be undergone. As the Zen saying put it: “In the Great Death heaven and earth become new.”

This is the radical conversion from “the self is empty” to “emptiness is self”—a *metanoia*. While nihilism remains trapped in pure negation, experiencing emptiness as mere void, the conversion reveals emptiness itself as a generative, fertile, neutral ground—the field of *śūnyatā* over which *penia-sive-poros* are struck, porosity and poverty of the kenotic self made manifest.

This violence of grace strips away our constructions, revealing that the sense of agency itself dissolves. It’s not a sense of otherness we discover but a sense of union through clear communication that turns into pure happening in which we are fully part. We become the process rather than standing outside observing it.

Double Exposure and the Solitary One

What appears in this stripping 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.”²⁰

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. This paradoxical structure finds philosophical articulation in Nishitani Keiji’s usage of *soku-hi* (即非)—rendered by translator Jan van Bragt as *sive*—expressing radical interpenetration where seeming opposites mutually constitute each other. It captures something crucial: unlike “or” which separates or “and” which merely conjoins, *soku-hi* expresses simultaneity and mutual constitution. A-*sive*-B means A *is* B precisely in *not* being B. Each pole affirms itself through its relation to its opposite.²¹

Lispector experiences this viscerally: “I was eating myself, I who am also living matter of the Sabbath”²²—simultaneously eating and being eaten, destroying and being destroyed, dying and being born. Life-*sive*-death in double exposure.

This logic extends beyond life and death to encompass the totality: *no-sive-yes*. We cannot affirm authentically without the capacity to negate; we cannot negate genuinely without something to affirm. The ordeal forces us into this unbearable totality—good-*sive*-evil, beautiful-*sive*-horrific, meaning-*sive*-meaninglessness. The “worse

truth”cannot be domesticated into comfortable synthesis. We must undergo it in its terrible fullness.

Nishitani speaks of “the solitary one laid bare amidst the myriad phenomena”—and 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.”²³ The roach in its alien vitality, the neutral in its fertility, being itself in its astonishing thereness.

Poros-Sive-Penia: The Structure of the Ordeal

Within the ordeal, we discover not mere blockage but a deeper structure: the interpenetration of poverty and passage, lack and opening. We are constitutively needy—neediness is inherent to the neutral ground itself, not a lack to be overcome but our very structure in the midst of things. This neediness—what the greeks call *penia* (poverty)—meets in us with *poros* (passage, resource). Eros is the restless child of both. We are given to be before we give ourselves to be, thrown into existence, exposed to more than we can claim. Lispector affirms this: “do not be afraid of neediness: it is our greater destiny.”²⁴

Penia is poverty, lack, need—but not mere absence. Lispector articulates its paradoxical power: “The great emptiness in me shall be my place for existing; my extreme poverty shall be a great volition.”²⁵ The lack is not passive but active, generative, volitional.

Poros is passage, way, resource—but not straightforward path. As Desmond notes, *poros* carries connotations of “a way across,” yet it is

“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.”²⁶ The way opens by withdrawing. The passage creates space through its own recession.

Both *poros* and *penia* involve emptiness. They are not opposites but complementary movements of the same groundlessness. The hyphen in *poros-sive-penia* is crucial—not “*poros* or *penia*” but the radical interpenetration where each is the condition for the other’s manifestation.

The words themselves reveal their kinship: *porous*, *poor*, *pore*. We are poor because we are porous, porous because we are poor. The pore is an opening, a passage through which things flow—neither pure emptiness nor pure fullness, but the space that allows both reaching and receiving. Poverty here is not mere lack but the constitutive openness of our being. To be porous is to be penetrable, vulnerable, exposed—and precisely in this exposure, to be capable of encounter, transformation, nourishment. Emptiness is not absence but the fertile space that makes presence possible.

This is the structure of the ordeal itself—we are suspended between emptiness that hungers and emptiness that opens. The ordeal intensifies our constitutional restlessness. We cannot rest in pure *penia*, for that way lies the madness of *eros turannos*—a consuming lack that can never be filled. Nor can we rest in pure *poros*, for that becomes a passive dissolution, a loss of self into the flow. The restlessness itself, this suspension between the two, strung across the emptiness between the hunger of *penia* and the opening of *poros*, is the energy of transformation.

Sleepwalker's Courage and the Worse Truth

Lispector demonstrates what she calls 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.”²⁷

The heroic will of the *conatus* seeks to master reality, to chart a course, to “look ahead.” The sleepwalker's will, by contrast, is a will to trust the process. It is the conscious, difficult decision to *not* compose, to *not* organize, to *not* flee the disorienting vertigo of the ordeal. It is the will turned against its own sovereign impulse: a willed letting-go of the will to control. This is the core of active receptivity: an act of profound courage that chooses vulnerability over the illusion of safety, and trusts the dark intelligibility of the body over the daylight certainties of the mind.

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.” This willed surrender is vulnerability as epistemological method—knowing that acknowledges the limits of autonomous reason while remaining open to forms of understanding that exceed those limits.

This leads to what she calls “the worse truth”²⁸—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.

“Why would I be afraid of eating the good and the evil? if they exist that is because that is what exists.”²⁹

And yet—here is the paradox—this worse truth is also “the best truth” because it is *truth*. 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.

Consent Non-Consent

The ordeal brings us to a paradox: we must consent to what we cannot control, yield to what we would never choose. We are, as Desmond puts it, “the struggle between consent and refusal...consent as an overdeterminate trust in the basic goodness of being, or refusal as an indeterminate negation of, and dissent from, being as good at bottom.”³⁰ This is not a single decision but a violent oscillation, the very drama of the soul at the threshold of transformation.

The existential self, the *conatus*, recoils in terror. Faced with the dissolution of its constructed world—the kicking away of the “third leg”—its immediate response is refusal. This is the voice of legitimate fear, the organism’s desperate attempt to preserve its integrity against what feels like annihilation. Lispector gives this voice its honest due: “I don’t feel strong enough to stay disorganized”.³¹ This is the existential “no,” a frank admission of incapacity in the face of overwhelming excess.

And yet, this refusal is met with an equally powerful fascination. The terror is accompanied by a strange, irresistible pull toward the

very thing that threatens to destroy it. To understand this push and pull, we must recognize that heteronomy—the intrusion of otherness—operates here in a crucial double register. On one hand, we are confronted by those exiled parts of ourselves we have foreclosed, aspects of our own being now seeking communication. This is the “other” that *can* be metabolized, the source of the *fascinans*, the pull toward homecoming. On the other hand, we are exposed to a genuine and irreducible otherness, both in the world and in the depths of our own ontological ground. This is the alterity that cannot be assimilated into a larger whole. It is the raw encounter with the infinite, the source of the *tremendum*, the terror of annihilation. To collapse these two—to treat all otherness as merely an alienated part of the self—is to fall into a Hegelian dialectic that ultimately domesticates the mystery. The metaxological ordeal insists that we remain a question to ourselves, constitutively open to what exceeds us even within our own being.

Torn between the terror of dissolution and the fascination of homecoming, the self thrashes. It is in this moment of unbearable tension that the counterfeit voice arrives, offering an escape. When the ordeal becomes too much, the mind scrambles to reassert control, to find a way out of the painful between. Lispector recognizes this mechanism with striking clarity: “It’s hard to get lost,” she admits. “It’s so hard that I’ll probably quickly figure out some way to find myself, even if finding myself is once again my vital lie.”³² She knows she must be vigilant against the “new third leg that from me sprouts swiftly as weeds,” a protective story she might call “‘a truth.’”³³ As Desmond warns, this is a moment of profound ambiguity and danger: “There is an asceticism of hatred; there is a purging of love; and

hatred may speak the language of love.”³⁴ The most tempting counterfeit is the one that mimics the language of authentic surrender while secretly serving the agenda of the *conatus*.

Willed Surrender

Yet authentic consent is not passive collapse. The ordeal requires a double movement: both porosity and participation. We must *let* being work on us while actively *undergoing* the work. This is not contradiction but the paradox at the heart of metabolic transformation.

The double movement can be easily counterfeited in either direction. There is a passivity that dissolves into inertia—a “giving up” that mimics surrender while refusing the actual work of transformation. And there is a participation that becomes manic activity—restless doing that avoids the ordeal through constant motion, mistaking busyness for engagement. Between these false modes, authentic reception threads its narrow way: porous enough to let grace strike, engaged enough to metabolize what arrives.

This is consent as ontological alignment—not a decision made once but a sustained posture of active receptivity. It is learning to breathe with the ordeal rather than against it, to recognize that we are already being worked upon and that our task is not to resist or control but to participate consciously in our own transformation.

The drama of consent non-consent is therefore a war between two dimensions of the self. Our ontological self has already said “yes.” It is consent. But our existential self, the self of the *conatus*, resists. Willed surrender is the agonizing process of bringing the existential

will into alignment with the ontological will. It is the “I” of the *conatus* learning to trust the deeper “I” that is already porous, already in communion. This is not a choice made in a vacuum, but a willed alignment with a pre-existing reality. The “will” in willed surrender is the will to stop fighting what one already is. It is the decision to cease the fighting in the self and to finally join the original consent that constitutes our very being.

The ordeal continues until the existential self exhausts its capacity for refusal. The victory of the “yes” is not achieved through heroic willpower; it is realized through surrender. The struggle purges the “no” until what remains is the quiet, terrifying, and indestructible fact of the original affirmation that was there from the beginning. This is the consent that is not chosen but undergone, a “yes” that has been won from suffering and purged of all complaint.³⁵

This is what Nishitani means by the shift from “self is empty” to “emptiness is self”—the radical conversion where the void we feared becomes the very ground of our being. The Great Death reveals itself not as annihilation but as passage to what he calls the *Great Affirmation*: the standpoint of *śūnyatā* where all things manifest in their suchness, “just as they are.” What appeared as negation—the stripping away of the ego’s constructions—reveals itself as the condition for a more fundamental affirmation. Not the naive “yes” of unreflective existence, nor the desperate “yes” of the *conatus* seeking security, but the resurrected “yes” that has passed through absolute negation and emerged transfigured.

It is only from this place of exhausted surrender that the final, transformative act can occur. But why must this act be somatic? Why does the climax manifest in the body rather than remaining in the

realm of will and consciousness?

Somatic Consent

The ordeal reveals a split that our intellectualism obscures. The mind can only pose an existential frame—it operates in the realm of meaning, narrative, constructed identity. It builds what Desmond calls “counterfeit doubles”: conceptual refuges that protect us from our constitutional porosity. The mind is the domain of *conatus essendi*, forever seeking to master, to filter, to make reality digestible.

But the body knows the ontological frame. The body does not debate whether to participate in being—it breathes, it hungers, it metabolizes, it dies. These are not concepts but lived realities that cannot be refused. The body *is* the *passio essendi*: always already given, always already exposed, always already consenting to what exceeds it. We are porous not as metaphor but as biological fact. Every breath is an exchange with non-self.

The mind constructs narratives of autonomy and control, but the body remains stubbornly relational, dependent, open. This creates the tension at the heart of the ordeal: the mind can refuse what the body has already accepted. The existential self recoils while the organism continues its metabolic participation in being. We can foreclose the gift in our mind while it lives on in the body.

What the mind has banished to preserve its illusion of sovereignty—the horror, the neutral, the finitude—does not simply disappear. It continues to live in the soma, unmetabolized. The things we cannot think accumulate in the body. What has been foreclosed from

consciousness must be physically processed. The crisis becomes somatic because the refusal has been somatic.

The body lives what Nishitani describes as *soku-hi*—the radical interpenetration of opposites. In breathing, we are simultaneously taking in and giving out, life-*sive*-death in a single movement. In every metabolic process, self and other exchange without fusion. The body enacts the metaxu that the mind struggles to comprehend. It *is* the between-space where being communicates.

When Nishitani speaks of our self being “most elementally middle,”³⁶ he names what Desmond calls the metaxu. These are not parallel insights but two names, from different traditions, for the same groundless ground. The body’s heteronomy enacts what both philosophers articulate: we are not autonomous origins but metabolic middles, porous participants in a field that is simultaneously empty (*śūnyatā*) and communicative (*metaxu*).

The ordeal forces a reckoning with this split. The violence of grace does strips away the illusions that have clotted our porosity. The mind must be brought to where the body has always been: exposed, dependent, open to what exceeds it. This is why the climax of the ordeal is visceral, why it manifests as purge. The body takes over where consciousness fails, physically expelling what cannot be mentally integrated. What cannot be thought must be sweated, cried, vomited.

The Purge: Metabolic Climax

The moment arrives. Lispector recognizes what must happen: “Redemption had to be in the thing itself,” which means “putting into my mouth the white paste of the roach.”³⁷ She calls it “the anti-sin,” but one that comes “at the price of traversing a sensation of death.” She rises “with the determination not of a suicide but of a murderer of myself.”

The sweat begins—not ordinary perspiration but something primordial, “a sweat I didn’t recognize and that smelled like what comes from dried-up earth after the first rains.” She’s swimming now in her “oldest primeval soup,” the sweat as “plankton and pneuma and pabulum vitae.” She has become the process: “I was being, I was me being.” This is metabolic wisdom unfolding—the body knows before the mind what transformation requires. Then the first purge is violent and entire: “I suddenly threw up the milk and bread I had eaten for breakfast...I had vomited the exaltation.” The body expels what cannot be metabolized, including the very spiritual state that would have made the act bearable, forcing her to approach it “physically simple as a girl.”

She eats, but not through will or consciousness. The act happens in dizziness, in a space where she has “removed from myself all participation,” having “not wanted ‘to know.’” Afterward, she reflects: “So that was how things were processed? ‘Not knowing’—so that was how the deepest things happened?...Was the secret of never escaping from the greater life living like a sleepwalker?”³⁸

Here, the willed surrender reaches its apex. The *conatus* has

exhausted itself. The heroic will that tried to orchestrate its own transformation has failed. It is precisely at this point of absolute failure that the deeper, metabolic wisdom takes over. The purge is not an act *of* the will but an event that happens *to* the will. The conscious, organizing “I” is sidelined, becoming a mere witness to a process it can neither start nor stop. Lispector’s realization that she “removed from myself all participation” is the final, paradoxical act of will: the will to let go of agency itself. It is the ultimate enactment of the sleepwalker’s courage—the decision to trust the process so completely that the decider dissolves into the process itself. This is not a failure of will, but its successful surrender to a greater, more intelligent power that operates through the body, through the very “matter of God” she sought to encounter.

Then the second purge, the spitting. “I now felt the nastiness in my mouth, and then began to spit, to furiously spit that taste of no such thing.” The Apocalypse verse surfaces: “because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.” But she discovers: “The neutral thing is extremely energetic, I was spitting and it was still I.” She cannot expel the neutral because the neutral is what she is.

When we allow this—when we participate in rather than resist the purge—we restore porosity. The channels that had clotted reopen. We find ourselves alive in the hyperbole. Weeping, Laughing, Gleaming, Sighing. The grammar of the *metaxu* revealed in full intensity—a language of pure verbs, of pure happening. The sovereign “I” dissolves. There is no longer an “I” who weeps or laughs. There is simply Weeping, Laughing, Gleaming.

Reality as Communication

What is real is what communicates to us—what makes contact. Lispector discovers this in the ordeal: direct communication with being becomes more real than any conceptual overlay. “All sudden understanding is finally the revelation of an acute incomprehension.”³⁹ The communication exceeds our capacity to grasp it conceptually, communicating its incommunications, revelation and concealment in a single movement.

Reality is combinatorially explosive, echoing John Vervaeke. We cannot process every quality, every aspect, every relation. We must filter, select, make intelligible what would otherwise overwhelm us. The very act of making something intelligible—rendering it legible, coherent, graspable—makes it appear as true. We trust the clearly formatted page, the coherent narrative, the comprehensible concept. Intelligibility becomes our criterion for reality.

Yet the ordeal reveals that communication operates beyond this frame. Both hyperintelligibility (excessive meaning that overwhelms) and the neutral (stripped of imposed meaning) communicate truths our filtering had excluded. The hyperintelligible reveals deeper truth precisely by overwhelming us, forcing acknowledgment of our finitude before the glory that exceeds our grasp. This is not failure of communication but its perfection—we are claimed by what we cannot master.

To be in communication with reality is to allow oneself to be claimed by what shows itself, to receive what cannot be fully processed. This is why Lispector insists: “Creating isn’t imagination, it’s

taking the great risk of grasping reality.”⁴⁰ Imagination offers refuge—we can shape it, control it, keep it within our metabolic capacity. But reality communicates on its own terms, and to receive that communication is to undergo transformation.

The incapacity to receive this communication is metabolic failure. Not a psychological repression but an ontological foreclosure—the channels have clotted. We remain in contact with reality, but the contact registers as unbearable because we cannot metabolize what it offers. The horror, the absurd, emerges not from reality’s meaninglessness but from our inability to bear its excess. Every attempt at comprehension becomes “an acute incomprehension” because we are trying to grasp from within the very closure that blocks reception.

Lispector recognizes, finally: “The divine for me is whatever is real.”⁴¹ Not the transcendent, not the beautiful, not even the meaningful—but the real itself, in its terrible and fertile neutrality. This is the fruit of metabolic transformation: reality becomes luminous precisely as reality. The real no longer needs to be made intelligible, legible, comprehensible to be worthy of attention. It communicates directly in its suchness.

And then the admission: “I understood that, by placing in my mouth the paste of the roach, I was not stripping myself as the saints do, but was once again yearning for the accretion. The accretion is easier to love.”⁴² Even the most radical gesture risks becoming counterfeit—seeking more when what’s needed is acceptance of what already communicates. But this recognition itself is metabolic wisdom: seeing how the drive to accumulate, to accrete meaning, infiltrates even our most sincere attempts at receiving the simple real.

The violence of grace strips away our constructions, our filters,

our comfortable criteria of intelligibility. What remains is not nothing but a transformed capacity for reception. 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.

Dark Intelligibility

“Not dark but just without light.”—Clarice Lispector, The Passion According to G.H.

What emerges from the purge? After the violence of grace has done its work, after the body has expelled what consciousness could not integrate, after the will has exhausted itself in surrender—what remains? Not nothing. Not the restoration of old certainties. But something stranger: a transformed capacity for knowing that has learned to metabolize what once seemed poison. This is dark intelligibility.

Metabolic Knowing

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. Not an end to reason, but its maturation into a faculty that can dwell companionably with what exceeds it.

What nihilism clears, dark intelligibility learns to inhabit. Not the restoration of old meanings but a new way of dwelling in the between.

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.⁴³

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.”⁴⁴ 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”⁴⁵—a recognition that even darkness is a vital communication.

Somatic Depths and Metabolic Wisdom

This transformation of knowing requires more than mental work. It points to forms of knowing that operate through *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.”⁴⁶ The somatic knowing precedes and exceeds conceptual understanding, teaching consciousness what it needs to know through direct metabolic experience.

We do not control our breathing, our heartbeat, our digestion—yet these are the very processes that constitute our being. The body participates in being without our permission, whether the mind consents or not. This is heteronomy in its deepest sense: we are constituted by what we do not master, sustained by processes we do not command, embodied in a way that exceeds our autonomy.

The body’s heteronomy is our deepest relationality. We are not self-contained subjects but porous participants in a larger ecology of being. The mind’s illusion of autonomy can only be shattered when brought face-to-face with the body’s inescapable interdependence.

Dark intelligibility learns to think *from* this heteronomous ground rather than against it. When Nishitani speaks of our self being “most elementally middle,” he names what the body already enacts: we are not autonomous origins but metabolic middles, perpetually transforming what we receive into what we give, simultaneously receiver and giver, dependent and generative. The body is the living metaxu.

Perplexity and the Grammar of Limits

Yet this new ground is not a place of absolute clarity. Dark intelligibility operates not by eliminating limits, but by transforming our relationship to them. This brings us to the grammar of limits, where impasse itself becomes a mode of disclosure.

Traditionally understood as a productive philosophical impasse that clears space for new thinking, *aporia* reveals something more paradoxical. As we discovered through *poros-sive-penia* in the ordeal, the impasse is not the opposite of passage but its secret intensity. When *poros* withdraws, when the way recedes, we experience *aporia*—no way forward, no path visible. But this very blockage, if we can remain porous to it rather than flee from it, becomes the site where new passages open. The dead-end, metabolized rather than resisted, reveals itself as threshold. This is the double nature of *aporia* itself: blockage *and* breakthrough, simultaneously.

“Perplexity seeds a troubled thinking in porosity that makes us patient to given otherness.”⁴⁷ Perplexity—that troubled thinking in porosity—is the middle space between overdetermined being and our need for determinate articulation. It’s the resistance we en-

counter when trying to make the indefinite definite, to domesticate the mystery of our being.

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.

Yet perplexity itself transforms through the ordeal. Before the metabolic transformation, perplexity appears as obstacle—the frustrating inability to grasp, the collapse of our conceptual frameworks, the maddening resistance of reality to our categories. This is perplexity as suffering, as crisis, as breakdown. This perplexity threatens to overwhelm us, to drive us either toward nihilistic refusal or toward counterfeit certainties that foreclose genuine encounter.

After the metabolic transformation—or rather, *through* the practice of bearing it—perplexity reveals its other face: not obstacle but opening, not breakdown but breakthrough. Perplexity becomes the very *mode* of dark intelligibility. We remain troubled, yes—but now the trouble is metabolized, transformed from paralysis into a dynamic porosity. This is perplexity as gift: the perpetual reminder that reality exceeds our grasp, that mystery remains irreducible, that the between is inexhaustible. We no longer need to eliminate perplexity; we learn to dwell *in* it, to think *through* it, to let it seed new forms of understanding.

The transformation is not from perplexity to clarity but from perplexity-as-curse to perplexity-as-grace. The troubled thinking becomes itself a form of prayer, a way of staying open to what we cannot master. Patience here is not passive waiting but active receptivity—

the metabolic capacity to remain present to what troubles us, to bear the resistance without demanding resolution.

Dark intelligibility learns to treat aporia not as obstacle to be overcome but as what Desmond calls hyperintelligibility⁴⁸—excessive intelligibility that exceeds our capacity to master it. Yet being also defeats understanding through what we might call *hypointelligibility*—the incomprehensibility of radical simplicity, the way suchness resists capture precisely in being irreducibly itself. The roach is simultaneously hyperintelligible (overwhelming presence, hypersalient actuality) and hypointelligible (*just roach*, stripped of all imposed meaning, bare suchness). This is *emptiness-sive-plenitude* in double exposure.

Here Desmond and Nishitani converge from opposite emphases. Desmond's *surplus givenness*—being as overdeterminate excess—meets Nishitani's *sunyata*—being as the empty field where things appear in their suchness. These are not contradictions but complementary disclosures of the same porous encounter. The neutral is both stripped (empty of our categories) and saturated (full of its own overwhelming actuality). Metaxological thinking holds both in tension, recognizing that being escapes our grasp whether we face its overwhelming fullness or its overwhelming bareness.

The paradox requires what Desmond calls “idiotic trust”—the “overdeterminate faith” that “is other to determinate and self-determining reason” yet “is not absurd; it is the mustard seed of agapeic minding in us.”⁴⁹ We trust that the way opens precisely through its own recession, that passage emerges from within the impasse itself.

The Practice of Bearing More

This transformation is not a static achievement but an ongoing practice: the practice of bearing more. It is the development of a spiritual metabolism robust enough to process reality's "murky bile" as well as its joys. A wholeness that can hold and work with the totality. It doesn't have to be perfect but there is a sense of attending to it that then widens our capacity to bear more. That is the practice. When we are communicating, that is when the medicine gets flowing and our capacity becomes greater. But with that power comes a double movement for holding more suffering as well. The metaxu of an equanimity between oppositions, not fully resolved but balanced. Not counterfeit yeses but the communication of a deeper affirmation, our original affirmation.

The key recognition here is that your affirmation and negation is not just an existential but a bodily, ontological concern. It takes our "multimodal" ways of knowing to bear the excess of reality. To receive the medicine.

The body bears what the mind cannot yet comprehend. Practices that work somatically—breathwork, movement, ritual—can expand our metabolic capacity in ways that purely mental work cannot. This is not anti-intellectual but recognizes that intelligence itself is embodied, that our capacity to receive reality's excess depends on our somatic attunement. The practice of bearing more is as much *philophysical* as philosophical, honoring the body's heteronomous participation in the transformation.

To suffer and undergo the ordeal in that sense is to restore com-

munication to ourselves and the world. But what if we do not take the communication? What if we cannot receive it? The capacity for horror, the absurd arises from that failure. No resolution but failure of communication. Every comprehension itself is an “acute incomprehension” and exposed to the hyperintelligible there always remains a part inaccessible, incommunicable, one that remains enigmatic and fiery at the center of things, a terrible power and infinite source of energy that flows directly to us.

Departure, Arrival, Return

The practice of bearing more is not a linear achievement but a cyclical rhythm—departure, arrival, return—that honors all directions as necessary dimensions of the same lived truth. We are always already in motion. The metabolic capacity we develop through ordeal doesn’t eliminate the need for repeated transformation; rather, it prepares us for the ongoing cycle.

After the peak experience comes *amnesia*—the inevitable fading of the revelation, the return to ordinary consciousness. Yet something remains: not the experience itself but the expanded metabolic capacity, the widened ability to receive. We forget, yes—but we forget *differently*. The channel has been opened, even if it narrows again.

This is what distinguishes genuine transformation from mere peak experience. The peak comes and goes; the practice remains. Fidelity to the between means consenting to flux itself—the pendulum swing between exposure to overdeterminacy and the necessary withdrawal into manageable determinacy.

We cannot remain constantly exposed to excess—we would burn out, unable to function in the world. Yet we cannot lose touch with overdeterminacy—we would fall back asleep to the familiar middle, into the comfortable domestication that refuses transformation. The practice is walking this line: between *eros turannos* and *eros ouranios*, between tyrannical possession and genuine participation, between self-enclosure and self-dissolution.

Companionability, then, is ongoing work rather than final achievement. We become companionable not by possessing the mystery once and for all but by learning the rhythm of approach and withdrawal, presence and absence, revelation and concealment. The ordeal taught us to metabolize what seemed like poison; the practice teaches us to trust the cycle, to find our footing in flux, to discover that home is not a fixed position but a dance.

And through this dance—through the practice of bearing more, through honoring the rhythm of arrival and return—a deeper understanding emerges. Not understanding as endpoint, but as ongoing revelation.

The Hyperluminous Dark

The ancients understood this paradox with striking precision. Aristotle's metaphor, echoed by Aquinas and developed in the Christian mystical tradition, captures it perfectly: with the highest things "we are like bats in sunlight."⁵⁰ Our daytime reason finds itself blinded precisely where nocturnal intuition might navigate. The metaphor reveals something essential—that what we call "darkness" in relation

to ultimate matters is not obscurity but *hyperluminosity*. The divine light, as Gregory of Nyssa understood, is so intense it appears as darkness to finite minds—not because God is obscure but because the revelation exceeds our capacity to receive it.

This inverts the Enlightenment's confidence in reason's illuminating power. With ultimate matters, our clearest concepts become the very blindness that prevents seeing. The more we try to grasp being through determinate categories, the more we obscure what shows itself only to those who have learned to see differently. Nocturnal souls—those who have undergone the metabolic transformation of consciousness—find that what appeared as daylight clarity was itself a kind of darkness, while what seemed impenetrably obscure reveals itself as luminous.

Dark intelligibility, then, names not the absence of light but its overwhelming presence. It is intelligence that has learned to navigate by a different luminosity, one that doesn't eliminate mystery but draws nourishment from it. The darkness is not what we must overcome to achieve clarity, but the very medium through which ultimate things disclose themselves to consciousness sufficiently porous to receive them.

This understanding echoes through traditions. Plato's cave-dwellers, blinded by the sun when first exposed, must learn to see by the very light that initially overwhelms them. The mystic's *via negativa* strips away determinate concepts not to reach blankness but to open to what cannot be grasped yet can be known through intimate participation. Nishitani's field of emptiness is not nihilistic void but the fertile ground where all determinate beings find their suchness.

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.”⁵¹ This communication is excessive, extending beyond self-determining cognition into what can only be called “an excess of the other [that] strains the limits of self-determining.”

The question of chiaroscuro returns here, but transformed. It’s not about blending good and evil, or finding a middle path between affirmation and negation. I’m beginning to see it is about witnessing their terrible co-constitutiveness, and in that witnessing, consenting to a reality our morality finds scandalous.

The scandal is the sheer, unblinking *that-it-is* of being. It is what Desmond calls the “idiocy” of being, and it is difficult to reconcile. It points to a total ‘letting-be’ that feels, to our human sense, like an abdication. Desmond speaks of the scandal of an “ultimate patience” in the divine, a giving that “may seem to have vanished into anonymity, seeking no reward...nothing at all.”⁵² This is the patience that allows for all freedom, but also for all horror. It doesn’t conform to our moral calculus.

Lispector touches the same nerve when she finds the moral problem “not only overwhelming, but extremely petty.” She asks, “Am I moral to the extent that I do what I should, and feel as I should?” before concluding, “The ethics of the moral is keeping it secret. Freedom is a secret.”⁵³ Perhaps the freedom to truly see this hyperluminous dark requires a secret initiation: a letting go of the petty moral

framework of what “ought to be” in order to receive the scandalous, idiotic truth of what simply *is*. This requires more than just looking; it requires a transformation of the eyes.

Thought Singing Its Other

Dark intelligibility is not anti-rational thinking but *hyperrational*—reason stretched to its creative limits. Desmond traces a 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 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’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.”⁵⁴ She doesn’t comprehend the roach, the neutral, the worse truth—and precisely in that non-comprehension, she can finally sing them.

When we sing deeply through the other, the other starts singing back to us. The tree sings its treeness; in witnessing that without demand, we enable it to sing more fully; and as if in unison, its song then confirms our own existence. An intimacy so alien and yet so near.

The Fourfold Deliverance

The journey that began in aporia and passed through the violence of grace does not end in a static state of enlightenment. It culminates in a new way of being, a new form of love. The ordeal has transformed the very energy that drives us. The restless, hungry desire born of lack—the *penia* of the erotic self—matures into what Desmond calls “agapeic self-transcendence,” a going-beyond that arises from “abundance and from gratitude for being as gift.”⁵⁵ This transformed state reveals itself in a *fourfold deliverance*, a harvest that finally provides the answer to our question of companionability.

First is the release toward creation. We are delivered to the world, free to behold the other in its astonishing thereness. No longer a thing to be categorized or assimilated, the other is suffered as “unutterably precious.”⁵⁶ Desmond speaks of a person confined, beholding a frail spider with a love that keeps faith alive.⁵⁷ This is the perfection of our relationship with the first transcendence (T¹). In this release, the world becomes an inhuman mirror, showing me the matter-of-God that constitutes me. The alien becomes intimate; the foreign reveals itself as home. When I sing the other, I find myself in love, enchanted and chanting.

Second is the release of the abyss within the self. The ordeal does not eliminate our inner darkness, but transforms our relation to it. We have entered into “fearful converse with the monstrous,” with our “own gargoyle self.” The deliverance comes in “making proper peace with one’s gargoyle shadow,” an act which “bends the deformed energy into a diviner form.”⁵⁸ This is the final metabolization of the

murky depths of our self-transcendence (T^2). The exiled parts of the self are not vanquished but integrated, their energy reclaimed for a more generous and compassionate being-in-the-world.

This peace with the shadow is not merely psychological but fundamentally *somatic*. The shadow communicates through the body, not limited to our conceptualizations—and thus all the more powerful, all the more monstrous. The body knows what we’ve exiled before the mind admits it. Tension in the shoulders, nausea in the gut, the clench of the jaw—these are the shadow’s language.

Lispector’s ordeal is visceral precisely because the shadow cannot be integrated through mental work alone. She must *eat* the roach, must *vomit* the exaltation, must feel the primordial sweat. The transformation requires the body’s participation because the shadow *is* partially somatic—the rejected flesh, the despised materiality, the animal self we’ve tried to transcend.

To embody the shadow means to *become* its integration rather than merely thinking it. The deformed energy, as Desmond says, must be bent into a diviner form—but this bending happens in muscle and nerve and breath, not just in concept. We learn to carry our darkness differently, to let it inform rather than deform us. The monster within becomes the guardian at the threshold, the fierce energy that once threatened us now protecting the vulnerable openness we’ve achieved.

This integration reveals that the shadow itself is heteronomous—it is constituted not just by what *we* have repressed, but by what *exceeds us* entirely. The shadow includes our animal nature, our mortality, our metabolic dependence on what is not-self. It includes the parts of us that belong to the earth, to evolutionary history, to processes that

long preceded our conscious existence and will continue after it. To make peace with the shadow is to accept the body's heteronomy: we are not self-made but co-constituted by forces beyond our control. The work of integration is allowing the mind to catch up to what the flesh has been enacting all along.

The agapeic harvest reveals itself as what Buddhist thought calls *karuṇā* (compassion)—yet the two emerge from different recognitions of the same ground. *Karuṇā* arises from *interpenetration*: recognizing that we share the groundless ground of *śūnyatā*, that suffering is not external to us because we are constitutively open to all others. Agape arises from transcendence: serving the irreducible otherness of the other, welcoming what exceeds us without reducing it to our projections.

These are not contradictory but complementary emphases within *compassio essendi*—compassion *for and with* being itself. *Karuṇā* emphasizes the “with”—we suffer-with because we are not separate, because the field is one. Agape emphasizes the “for”—we love-toward the other precisely as other, preserving genuine transcendence. Both are necessary. Without *karuṇā*'s recognition of shared ground, agape risks becoming mere duty, service without intimacy. Without agape's preservation of otherness, *karuṇā* risks collapsing into undifferentiated identification, dissolving the very beings it would serve.

The metaxu-as-*śūnyatā* demands both: I recognize you as radically intimate and as irreducibly other. This is the paradox of genuine love: the closer I come to you through emptiness, the more I must honor your transcendence. The field is shared but the forms remain distinct. Emptiness-*sive*-suchness in ethical mode.

Third is the release into a new community, one founded on agapeic service. This reveals a “heteronomy beyond autonomy,” a call from the other that is a “welcome rather than a demand.”⁵⁹ This echoes what Nishitani calls our constitutional emptiness—we are not self-sufficient substances but openings through which being communicates. The call from the other is a call from the field itself, the *metaxu/śūnyatā* where all genuine service unfolds.

This service, which expects no return, opens the way for the fourth and ultimate deliverance: a release toward the ultimate Other (T^3). This is achieved through the most profound paradox: the practice of “counting for nothing.” This, Desmond reveals, is the “affirmative double” of the nihilistic void. It is a willing self-emptying that “makes a way for transcendence as other.”⁶⁰ This is how we become companionable to the irreducible mystery—not by possessing it, but by becoming porous to its passage. This is the absolute poverty that is also the absolute plenitude.

Compassio Essendi

I must confess: I write this not from the summit of achievement but from the midst of the ordeal. The capacity for foreclosure remains. In those moments when my porosity unclogs, I am completely in faith, in absolved trust. I have to confess to myself that I believe in God, because the heteronomy in myself opens to God. That experience comes first, always—the moment when being itself became transparent to its source.

There are times when I can believe, moments of ecstasy where

my porosity is restored. The aesthetics of happening become the vehicle—art, music, ritual, love—that inspire in us a connection so powerful it resuscitates our very being back into life. But the cycle continues. I have also forgotten, fallen back, closed off. And therein lies the wound.

For how do you relate to divinity once you have experienced it? How do you give that a place in your life when the doors of perception close again? When you have seen what you perhaps should not have seen, and must now live in what feels like its absence? The agapeic harvest is not a permanent state but a fidelity—staying faithful to what you have encountered even through the departures, even when the world loses its luminosity, even when you cannot access what you know to be true. This is *compassio essendi* as wound and as practice: the compassion to remain open to being even when being has withdrawn its overwhelming gift, to sing even when the song falters, to bear witness even in the midst of forgetting. Because what else is there to do when you have been claimed by love, if not to remain faithful to the claim?

This state, this harvest, is best described as *compassio essendi*—a compassion for and with being itself. It is the perfection of the *passio essendi* we first suffered, transformed from a passive undergoing into an active, loving participation. It is a state where thought itself is “surprised by a kind of praying.”⁶¹ In this passionate porosity, we discover that the boundaries have dissolved. A glimpse of a singing *khora*, that primordial receptacle now understood not as a passive container but as an active participant in the cosmic singing. The *metaxu* itself sings, and we discover we have always been part of that song.

The journey ends here, in communion. The vertigo is no longer a disorientation to be overcome but the very rhythm of the “quiet festivity of being.” We find our home not by escaping the between, but by discovering our role within it. For the world waits patiently for our participation, and our voice is needed for the chorus to be complete.

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Endnotes

1. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 91.
2. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 331.
3. Desmond, *Being and the Between*.
4. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 26.
5. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 22.
6. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 24.
7. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 22–23.
8. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 23.
9. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 65.
10. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 67.
11. Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 107–8.
12. Nishitani is quoting Muso Kokushi's *Muchu mondo* here. This concept connects to the profound Zen teaching from Dōgen's *Genjokoan*: "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 (*dharmas*).”And elsewhere in the *Shobogenzo*: "To practice and confirm all things by conveying one's self to them, is illusion; for all things (*dharmas*) to advance forward and practice and confirm the self, is enlightenment.”The movement is paradoxical—we must *forget* self to be *confirmed* as self, we must allow things to practice *us* rather than us practicing them. This is ontological reciprocity: the more we release our constructed selfhood, the more we discover our real selfhood as inseparable from the original part we share with all beings. (Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 107–8)
13. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 70.
14. Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 91.
15. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 83.
16. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 21.
17. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 331.

18. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 4.
19. Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 21.
20. Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 76.
21. Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, pp. -intro-xxx.
22. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 135.
23. Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 199.
24. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 179.
25. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 158–59.
26. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 41.
27. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 8.
28. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 53.
29. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 151.
30. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 82.
31. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 7.
32. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 4.
33. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 6.
34. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 36.
35. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 121.
36. Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 165.
37. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 172–74.
38. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 173–74.
39. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 8.
40. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 12.
41. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 175.
42. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 178.
43. Desmond, *God and the Between*.
44. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 265.
45. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 231.
46. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 173.
47. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 119.
48. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 244.

49. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 340.
50. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 273.
51. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 273.
52. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 320.
53. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 59.
54. Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, 175.
55. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 43.
56. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 43.
57. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 43.
58. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 43.
59. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 43–44.
60. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 44–45.
61. Desmond, *God and the Between*, 45.