

# Dark Nature: Understanding the Western Narrative of Nature as Other



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It goes without saying, any and all mistakes within the following text are mine alone.

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## Abstract

Linguistically, conceptually, and spatially, nature has become Western society's ultimate other; it has been dominated, stripped of its power, and transformed from an active, threatening wilderness to a passive, vulnerable scenery. Drawing from a variety of works by thinkers like René Descartes and George Lakoff my paper performs a historical and cultural analysis of Western organic metaphors, formulated during the Enlightenment, and persisting into present day. Thereby, exploring the conceptual wedges driven between nature and humanity as they align with the boundaries demarcating the self and the other. I demonstrate that nature was aligned with darkness during the Enlightenment – imbuing it with connotations of mystery, and foreboding – while civilization was aligned with light due to its ability to literally illuminate the world, neutralizing the threat of nature's otherness. I argue that this erroneous nature/darkness-civilization/light conceptualization underpins contemporary society's misunderstanding of its relationship to the rest of nature. I attempt to redefine what nature has become to us as the ultimate Other and explicate how comprehending this narrative in its totality could aid humanity in orienting ourselves towards nature and darkness in the right way. The hope is to create a space in which fear is replaced by acceptance and passivity is replaced by activity.

## **I. Introduction**

*“The young must first die to sight and hearing, must be torn away from concrete representations, must be withdrawn into the night of the soul and so learn to see on this new level.” -Georg Hegel*

## I.

The discussion to follow is fragmented and incomplete. It invites you into unknown spaces and tempts you to remember what the world long ago forgot. It is a conversation with the primordial void that stands outside the hegemony of western metaphysics in strong defiance, existing despite humanities best efforts to forget it, bury it, and keep it hidden. This work invites you to lose yourself in the darkness. It is here, in the proto-ontological that the self and the milieu are boundless, capable of shedding the Cartesian illusion that has held our modern cosmology hostage since its inception. I say proto-ontological because the investigation surrounds how thinkers of the past built the ontological foundations we tend to accept without question. Foundations that are illuminated, transparent and seemingly given *a priori*. However, it is in the dark, hidden spaces that we reflect on the very nature of the self and the natural world. The dark poses the question, where do we end and the Other begin? So, before going any further remember that this irrational and possibly heretical discussion is meant to challenge the very core of our cultural normativity. It stands to present the beginnings of an alternative cosmological foundation that rejects the self as an ego-logical, disembodied, isolated entity trapped within a corruptible machine. Thereby, concluding that the self and nature are not two ostensibly antagonistic substances. Rather, they are intimately rooted in the earth and dependent on their connection to one another. This work starts to approach the idea of an ontology of darkness that embraces the metaphorical and the mythopoetic in order to ascertain the true dimensionality of existence.

It was during the Enlightenment, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, that Descartes drove a wedge between humanity and nature (Mueller 2016: 43). His substance plurality noted that there were two substances making up the cosmos; namely matter and spirit. On the side of the knowing subject resided the transcendent spirit gifted by the divine creator. It was here that the rational mind exercised its unique power to ascertain the truth of forms. On the opposing side of this dichotomic disjunction lived sensuous feeling and the organic body of nature (Mathews 1991:17-18). The natural world was depicted as a dark, seductive force. All things capable of decay, moral ineptitude, and deception were considered inferior to the mind and of constituting an ontologically disparate entity. Therefore, the continuous sensory input imposed on the self by

nature could lead someone to form false conclusions. More precisely, it could lead one to conclude that natural bodies were imbued with vitality and not mere mechanistic illusions. The body and the earthly domain were not to be trusted. The growing fear of being misled and of falling prey to otherness drove humanity to turn inward, away from the external world. The outer world of phenomena was abandoned as a source of knowledge (Vetlesen 2016: 57).

The inability to move beyond oneself and encounter the world of physical phenomena was rooted in two major axioms present in Descartes' *Meditations*. The first being that Descartes transformed nature into something that demanded to be dominated by the essence of its very being. That is to say, the mechanization of nature denoted nonhuman others as beings for use rather than beings for themselves (2016: 56). The ontological status of humans was threatened by nature—as is depicted in the parable of the Garden of Eden.<sup>1</sup> Humanity fell by falling prey to natural temptations. If humans wished to transcend their earthly cage they needed to take “nature with all her children...bind her to [their] service and make her [their]<sup>2</sup> slave (Ariew 2009: 36).” Second, within the *Meditations*, nature was defined as a source of darkness. It was unknowable, impenetrable, and corruptible. It is here that vision as a perceptual capacity was granted the power to not only carry out its epistemic prerogative as a biological sense organ but became a capacity for channeling ontological perceptiveness. Thereby, vision was necessarily an instrument of normative appointment (Lakoff 1999: 396). The moment that saw the scientific possibility of light simultaneously birthed a spatial phenomenology of darkness.<sup>3</sup> The fear of the dark is the fear of the unknown and it is the fear of losing the self. It is the way light and vision highlight the boundedness of objects that allows for this bifurcation to be realized. Once we define light as our starting point we begin to think of everything as knowable. The self then becomes the prototypical known object, making all knowledge start with the *res cogitans* and extend outward. The idea that the self is the shining light in the darkness makes us automatically alien to the world and it to us.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on how the Judeo-Christian worldview led to the perspective that nature was lesser or deceptive please see Oelschlaeger (1991)

<sup>2</sup> The quote has been modified from the original for readability.

<sup>3</sup> Once Descartes philosophical ideals became publicly endorsed there was a way in which the scope of the universe shrunk. It shrunk all the way down to the plane of the singular subject. Once this happened all that remained exterior to the self, i.e. nature, became a space of darkness.

At the moment of this division Being itself was not simply spliced in half, but a normative decision was made about the type of being worthy of value. A boundary was erected around the human subject and the world of human activity that left nature on the exteriority of society. A dualistic ontology, á la Descartes, separates heaven and earth, mind and body, man and woman, human and beast. It was this moment that created a cosmology of opposition in the West. For a cosmology to function properly it must grant power back to the natural world and to begin to see it as a space imbued with vitality. This endeavor is meant to help us remember the otherness. An obvious indicator that our current cosmology is built upon a rotting foundation is clearly the ongoing climate crisis. The fact that we have exploited nature so thoughtlessly and ruthlessly speaks to the kind of worldview our culture has pursued. Then, to add insult to injury, the blatant denial that there is a crisis at all demonstrates how little the reality of the external world figures into our investigative method. In conjunction, the techno-optimist view that humanity can create a machine to solve all of our environmental problems echoes the Baconian belief that humanity could fully dominate nature and even improve upon it (Ariew 2009).

As Freya Mathews states, “cosmologies depict the large-scale structure, origin, and evolution of the concrete world (Mathews 1991: 11).” A cosmology is similar to an ontology in many ways, but the difference lies in their cultural orientation (1991: 10). While an ontology abstracts away from the world and is grounded in facts, a cosmology is informed by ethical concerns. It is rooted in our cultural perspective and informed by various historical, psychological, technological, and environmental factors (1991: 13.). It is the actual world that this discussion is concerned with. Specifically, it is concerned with how successfully Cartesianism has integrated into the culture of the West. Thus, leading to environmental degradation, one-sided evaluation of truth, and alienation from the natural world. It is through the phenomenal evaluation of our lived experience that the legacy of naturalized alienation can be revealed. The totality of this discussion focuses on moving towards a reunification of the cosmos by suggesting a new way of experiencing that could lead us to an alternative to our current broken cosmology. Although, in order to do so one must first explicate how and why our current conceptual scheme is flawed. I suggest that this is best done by moving into the realm of the proto-ontological. <sup>4</sup>When we consider coming into being, as defined by our current

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<sup>4</sup> In the domain of post- Kantian philosophy discussions of ontology are seen as less robust or applicable, and for good reason too. Kant’s famous argument demonstrating that all metaphysics is really epistemology is hard to



conceptualization, we recognize that all of the various dichotomies<sup>5</sup> are reducible to the two most basic aspects of observable reality. They are light and dark. With this as the starting point we can attempt to formulate the emergence of an ontological body of knowledge in response to Descartes alignment of nature/matter with darkness and humanity/spirit with light. This erroneous distinction has had lasting negative effects. By characterizing nature as humanities opposite it became the embodiment of otherness (Vetlesen 2016: 58).

It is the case that things that are judged as Other demand action. They imply a threatening presence that could cause harm to one's normative being. I wish to show throughout this text that the threat of the natural body, the body of nature, has been continuously attacked and neutralized throughout history, along with darkness. Both have been driven out to allow for the instantiation and homogenization of Western ideals. This is because both of these terms became entangled in Descartes' metaphorical framework. Nature now exists as the ultimate Other. No longer does it inspire sublime meditations but sits dormant and pliable waiting for man to give it meaning. There is even a debate on whether there truly is any nature left. This argument is packaged in two radically dissimilar ways. Is it either the case that the Anthropocene has conquered all, and the concept 'nature' is an outdated term? Or do we take the post humanist route and define all that exists as 'nature (Vogel 2016: 54-55).'<sup>6</sup>

Now, defining everything as nature propagates a monism similar to that of the Anthropocene model, in fact, drastically altering the concept of 'nature'. This is done to such a degree that you could still argue that 'nature' ceases to exist. It is an argument, akin to the age-old adage, "if everything is nature then is anything really nature" that every two-year-old immediately masters. Yet, that does not make the argument any less effective. In regard to the episteme, boundaries are of the utmost importance. Blatantly dissolving the demarcation between nature and culture, in either way, does the natural world a disservice. Both continue working within a passive worldview that allows us to continue to utilize natural resources at an unfettered

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disagree with (Kant 1998). However, I will occasionally touch on ontology within this discourse because I am not always attempting to uncover knowledge about the phenomenal world. At times, I will simply be attempting to discuss the status of Being. This may not generate axioms for which you can attribute truth-value, but they remain a useful heuristic.

<sup>5</sup> I am working with the accepted belief that our current cosmology is inherently Cartesian.

<sup>6</sup> This first kind of argument is epitomized by thinkers like Bill McKibben in his *The End of Nature*. Whereas the second kind of argument can be found in Keim (2014).

rate. If there is nothing but the Anthropocene then there is no nature left to damage and therefore there is no need to alter our consumeristic lifestyle (Vogel 2016: 55). On the other hand, if nature is all that there is, and humanity is already a perfectly integrated part of it, then, again, there is no need for real change to occur (Crist 2019: 115). It is better to define how the boundaries between nature and culture were erected and then determine a process that allows us to begin the long journey towards reconciliation.

## II.

I have continuously used the word ‘nature’ throughout this introduction and purposefully withheld an overt explication of how I am using the term. The point being that our current cosmology is so unconcerned with nature, and our lived experience is so far removed from it, that even the word we use to denote it is broken. There is no clear referent for which you, as the reader, can easily pick out when I deploy the term. It is not just an ambiguous concept but is an empty one. The word ‘nature’ can now be used to describe whatever we want it to be. Just as we use physical nature for our own purposes so too do we use the concept. I could mean human nature differentiated from wild nature, human nature in relation to wild nature, wild nature in and of itself, an animate nature, an inanimate nature, and the list continues *ad infinitum*. With that said, when I say ‘nature’ I use the term in a broad sense like Vetlesen in his book *The Denial of Nature*. He states, “nature... taken in the wide sense... comprises everything that lives and grows, dies and decays (Vetlesen 2015: 2).” I would like to go a step further and say that I am not just using it in a broad sense, but in a deep sense. Descartes divorced the mind from the body because the mind is not nature. It is something beyond nature, something that transcends nature. When I say ‘nature’ I am referring to the body and its intricately intimate connection to the biosphere. It does not transcend the self but is deeply rooted in it and in the world. It is a word invoked as the last line of defense against the damaging reasoning that accepts that the mind is something disparate from the body, or that we are capable of abstracting away from the world of phenomena. Nature is a feeling. It is an experience that has since been lost to time. We now lack the words to define it and so the only way to speak of it is to outline an aesthetic experience capable of evoking some semblance of remembrance.

In Timothy Morton's book, *Ecology Without Nature* he expounds upon this transient and enigmatic conceptualization of nature that reeks of overly romanticized sentiments. Similarly, he recognizes that the term 'nature' is not doing the kind of work it should. Namely, aiding the environmental movement or, at the very least, granting some kind of non-ambiguous referent. In his own words, Morton states: "But nature keeps giving writers the slip. And in all its confusing, ideological intensity, nature ironically impedes a proper relationship with the earth and its life-forms, which would, of course, include ethics and science (2007: 2)." However, Morton believes the term 'nature' should be done away with altogether. It is an outdated and mythologized term that no longer performs real work. It has become an imaginary entity that humanity has placed "on a pedestal to be admired from afar... [it] is a paradoxical act of sadistic admiration.... Nature has become a transcendental principle (2007: 5)."<sup>7</sup> Basically, for Morton, nature is an object that has been fetishized. I am quite certain the kind of environmental aesthetic project laid out in this text would indeed be viewed by Morton as a continued propagation of this kind of fetishization. I must, however, disagree. The idea of fetishization or voyeuristic tendencies stems from a removal of the subject from the world. It requires a separation of the self from the object of attention (Keller & Gronkowski 2004: 207). That is, it demands distance, which is completely at odds with the entire spirit of this work. The spirit being to breach the divide and penetrate the world more fully.

Furthermore, Morton's text primarily concerns itself with poetic aesthetics and Romantic paintings. That is, he is not concerned, first and foremost, with the body politic or society. His project is to see how these aesthetic forms have influenced the larger culture (2007: 4). Another way of putting this is to say that he moves from the imagined to the real. One thing that Modernity demands is constant production of things and of the self. The production of the self does not occur within culture at large but is done discretely within the symbolic images of art (Foucault: 42). This production is often one imagined by those belonging to a subordinate counterculture that looks on society from a historicocritical perspective, imagining it otherwise than it is (41). Therefore, to presume that the images and musings found within art are demonstrative of the mainstream is confused. The idealized image in art is not a fetishization but is an attempt to highlight what has been lost, and what is now missing in contemporary society.

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<sup>7</sup> The quote is altered from its original form for readability. Nothing has been changed that alters the meaning of the statement.

All one has to do is look outside and see plumes of black smoke billowing in the wind, supernatural skyscrapers replacing the horizon and feel the unnatural intensity of the seasons to recognize there is nothing idealized about nature in reality. It has not been placed on a pedestal but has been shoved into tiny little corners of the earth where it can not be a bother. Nature is not a transcendental principle offering universal structures of morality or knowledge. In fact, it is a space of nonknowledge and immorality (Vetlesen 2007: 62). This work belongs to the aesthetic domain and positions itself in relation to a Romantic understanding of nature<sup>8</sup>. I do not ascribe to an idealized nature but see the importance of aesthetic experience in generating value judgements. That is, in helping us recognize the value of the nature that is still present at hand. We can “transform reality, not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is (Foucault 41).” We just need to connect to what is already there. In this sense, ‘nature’ is an archaeological term. It is buried beneath our feet and no longer functions the way it once did. Still, that does not mean we cannot dig it up, dust it off and breathe new life back into it.

### III.

The discourse can be described as an experiential process of desubjectification produced by a textual intertwining of disciplines. The chapters each speak to the overall project of the work but give their own unique perspective. They could be presented in a number of ways, but I would like to propose the order I continue to find the most suggestive. It is broken into three movements, and they are as follows: the deconstruction of modern organic metaphors, the construction of darkness as an object and not simply qualia, and the reconceptualization of darkness as a necessary part of the human experience. The first chapter comprises the first movement. I am indebted to the work of Elanor Rosch<sup>9</sup> and subsequently the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1999). It was their research on embodied prototype theory, as it relates to metaphorical schemes, that gave me the idea to deconstruct the work of Renee Descartes and determine the experiential gestalt encoded in his argumentation. Within this chapter I show that Descartes aligns nature with darkness. In this case, darkness does not simply

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<sup>8</sup> For more on how the Romantics understood nature see Beiser 2006.

<sup>9</sup> The seminal work outlining prototype theory can be found in Rosch 1978.

act as a metaphor for the unknown but is viewed as an agent of deception. It is also discovered that vision acts as the primary mode of constructing prototypical members of our language, making metaphors of sight more prolific within our conceptual system. This reinforces the primordial existence of light and dark as an essential distinction within our cosmological understanding. I deconstruct the work of Descartes because I believe it has had the most detrimental effects on our current conception of nature. Not only was Descartes a pillar of thought during his lifetime but he remains influential today. He continues to be known as the father of modern philosophy.

To continue, the second movement is contained in chapter two. It is a conversation with Timothy Morton's book *Hyperobjects* (2013). It is an exploratory essay about the conditions for objecthood. While darkness has been classically considered a quality of something, be it a subject or object, there is an aspect of darkness that suggests that it could be more. By using Morton's own guidelines, I outline the ways in which darkness can be considered a hyperobject and use this to argue that the encounter with the dark can act as a mediating interaction between ourselves and nature. The act of granting darkness objecthood allows us to phenomenally reflect upon it interobjectively. Once we have granted the dark objecthood we must infuse it with value. The hope being to show that the Other can be embodied by nonhuman entities as well. However, I argue once value is truly exteriorized a totalizing metaphysics should be endorsed over a transcendental one. This is because a totalizing metaphysics can abandon the concept of infinity for unity. Whereas, a transcendental metaphysics, like Descartes', needs infinity as its starting point (Levinas 1961: 25). I find this problematic because it creates an unboundedness within the mind and the external world, resulting in asymmetrical effects. This section is meant to provide a way of experiencing that allows the subject to move beyond the socialized ego and discover a conception of the self that is defined in relation to nature rather than in opposition to it.

The third and final movement is found in chapter three. This chapter further expounds upon the encounter with the Other using darkness as a mediating representation. The Other being nature. In this final movement we continue to move away from a vision-based ontology and explore the effects of the unconscious on our adaptive capabilities. As we continue to dive down into the dark we begin to expose the connection between the unconscious and the dark leading to the coinage of the "deep dark". This chapter focuses more on how experiential darkness can act

as an instrument progressing the ideals of deep ecology. It gives a more practical basis for “making the darkness conscious”, to reiterate Jung’s famous words. Once we expose the connective properties of the dark we can elucidate how the disparity instantiated by an ontology of light is overcome when we apply an ontology of darkness.

The manifold of perspectives that can be taken, when addressing the impact synonymizing the words ‘darkness’ and ‘nature’ has had on the development of the particular subject and the larger collective, is indicative of how wholly Cartesianism has defined western cosmology. The creative powers of the dark ground our proto-ontological understanding of being by clarifying the moment when the self-developing body becomes aware of sense experience. It is our project here, in the unknown, in the alien, in the body of nature, to feel our way through the dark and to learn a new way of seeing. I don’t claim that this work is in any way complete or perfect but only wish to invite you, the reader, into a conversation I believe has the potential for positive change.

## **II. Modern Organic Metaphors: Rejecting the Dark**

*The world of magic retained distinctions whose traces have disappeared even in linguistic form... On the magical plane dream and image were not mere signs for the thing in question, but were bound up with it by similarity. -Adorno & Horkheimer*

## I.

Words that exist as a part of my conscious association with the word “dark” include evil, unknown, sinister, and down, just to name a few. The words listed are not unique to me but are common word associations made by the majority of human persons (Montello&Co: 12). There is a widespread conception in the West that places humans in a negative relationship with the dark. Not only do we flee from it in horror and reduce its presence through the use of streetlamps or night lights; additionally, we define it as the lack of something. It is not defined as something in and of itself, but solely designates the absence of light. This is a misleading characterization because it presents the dark as an empty void. Something that is unreal, illusory, and devoid of investigative interest. It is not viewed as the default state of being but is an aberration. Thus, the dark is designated as a source of nonknowledge. The experience of it and the way we define our relation to it is accepted at surface value. However, if given the slightest attention then, on first impression, this strikes one as contradictory. If a dark space is not conceived of having any real depth or knowledge within our conceptual scheme then why is fear of the dark such an ordinary phenomenon that can result in an array of phobias? Real fear does not come from illusory or mediated representations. It would be irrational to fear nothing. Due to the fact that fear of the dark is so widely spread, and we do not want to commit to the claim that such a diverse selection of individuals are irrational beings. We must then submit to the fact that darkness is something, at least within our collective experience.

Darkness as an absence of light restricts the semantic scope of the concept so much so that it lacks independent value and only presents as antinomy. Yet, this is not how we perceive darkness in our lived experience. Instead, the dark is pregnant with all manner of insidious entities. The presence of a dark space is almost palpable and is easily personified to express taboos repressed or oppressed by civilization.<sup>10</sup> The experiential dark is very much filled and requires us to reveal what has been concealed. The question then becomes, how did a very normal and natural occurrence, like the dark, transform into a benighted thing? Does the fear of the dark stem from the fact that we are bipedal primates who primarily make use of our visual perceptive capacity to gain information about the world? Is it because during the evolutionary process our ancestors had a selective disadvantage against possible predators in the dark? Or is

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<sup>10</sup> For discussions on dark archetypes please see Jung (1969).



there a cultural factor driving people to fear the dark? The focus of this chapter addresses this very question by utilizing discussions of embodiment and conceptual metaphors to determine a working metaphorical mapping indicative of the way we utilize “darkness” within our conceptual scheme (Lakoff& Johnson 1999). The argument that follows will first explicate the way in which metaphor theory constructs a convincing and functional model for language processing and production in daily life. It provides cognitive grounding for further discussions of the role of darkness in contemporary society. Next, and most importantly, I suggest that the current metaphorical mapping utilized today was constructed by Renee Descartes during the Enlightenment. His philosophical argumentation is almost entirely metaphorical and would not be informative without this kind of conceptual underpinning (1999: 393). It is at this moment in history that the dark was entirely rejected along with all that it entails, namely nature. Lastly, I will present a hypothesis for how our current schemata incorporates darkness in a metaphorical manner in conjunction with illustrating that the boundaries between literal darkness and metaphorical darkness have collapsed in on one another making a discussion of conceptual metaphor highly apt.

While the discussion of metaphor classically referred to poetic elaborations, the work conducted by Lakoff and Johnson (1999) suggests that all language can be thought of as metaphorical. Broadly construed, a metaphor is produced when one thing is structured through another. Metaphors are an often-ignored aspect of language, but they have a fundamental role in our ability to generate knowledge about the world. It is often believed that metaphors are simply a form of figurative language that is isolated to the linguistic domain, but it is the case that they are pervasive throughout our conceptual system. “The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities... what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor (Lakoff& Johnson 1980: 61).” Metaphors take something unfamiliar and transform it into something familiar. They define concepts that are “not clearly delineated in our experience in any direct fashion and therefore must be comprehended indirectly, through metaphor (1980: 85).” It plays on the systematic correlation of our experiences of the world, giving rise to apparent similarities

between unrelated concepts. These “similarities” are rooted in our cultural and perceptual realities (Lakoff& Johnson 1980).

There are two primary types of metaphors. They are known as orientational metaphors and ontological metaphors, respectively. Orientational metaphors come from our anatomical human existence and the way it obliges us to spatially experience the world. Cooper and Ross (1975) observed what they call the ME-FIRST orientation (1980: 32). They realized that our culture’s view of what a prototypical member of society acts like, determines an orientation of concepts within our conceptual system. The canonical person generates a reference point that allows for a judgement about what it means to ascribe to this prototypical normativity or be in conflict with it. Conceptually we expect members of our society to function in an upright position, move forward, perform actions and be good. We exist in the present here and now rather than there and then. Consequently, a prototypical person is of the orientation UP, FRONT, ACTIVE, GOOD, HERE and NOW. While BACKWARD, DOWN, PASSIVE, BAD, THERE, and THEN are all oriented away from the person (1980: 32). This generates a linear procession regarding the communication of ideas.<sup>11</sup>

Generally speaking, the ideas that are nearest to the proper orientation of the canonical person come first, and those that are less closely related to the normative functioning of a given person are represented farther away in the syntactic structure. It is in this way that we can start to understand how, even in our most mundane linguistic constructions, we begin to profess normative decisions concerning societal membership. Minorities remain in opposition to cultural normativity due to their non-prototypical categorization of personhood. The demonization of the dark is very much a matter of normative valuation and extends to the way in which nature - whether embodied or wild- is kept tamed, passivized, scenic and beyond the known borders of human cityscapes.

Additionally, ontological metaphors emerge naturally in a culture like ours because what they highlight corresponds so closely to what we experience collectively, and what they hide corresponds to so little (Lakoff& Johnson 1980). That is to say, the collective experience defined

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<sup>11</sup> Additionally, it corresponds to the Cartesian methodology of “I think, therefore I am,” in which, the subject begins gaining knowledge by first taking account of themselves; hence, a ME- FIRST orientation. Although, it should be noted that “I think, therefore I am” is a truncated version of the argument found in Descartes’ *First Meditations*.

by the majority is what is expressed through metaphor. What remains hidden, in the dark, are those experiences and existences less commonly experienced. So, the majority perspective dominates while the minority is oppressed. These metaphors are not only grounded in our physical and cultural experience; they also influence our experiences and our actions. I will primarily be focusing on structural metaphors that use one highly structured and clearly delineated concept to structure another. In this instance, how does darkness structure nature.

Structural metaphors tend to be based on similarities that arise from orientational and ontological metaphors (1980: 152). Thus, it is both our biological body plan's orientation, as a subject, in a time and place, in conjunction with diachronic cultural factors, that gives rise to our conceptualization of the phenomenal world. An example of a structural metaphor would be that DARK is BAD, to be contrasted with, LIGHT is GOOD (Montello & Co: 12). By extension this provides a further qualification that needs filled when ascribing prototype membership. One should be oriented towards the LIGHT and oriented away from the DARK, for instance.

Our current ontological constructions are dependent on dichotomic thinking that produces oppositionally placed objects, inhabiting contradictory worlds, defined by antagonistic metaphysical beliefs. Consequently, we have strict epistemic boundaries that hierarchically privilege some concepts over others, as they prioritize some beings over others. It is these dichotomies that need to be critically engaged with. Since the first-wave environmental movement, philosophers have continuously condemned dichotomic cosmologies. Yet, their words have failed to catalyze change because dichotomies are so deeply entrenched in our being, our conceptual framework, and within our environment (Mueller 2016). They dictate societal function at levels ranging from the microcosm to the macro. However, I do not wish to reject dichotomies in their totality because that seems like an impractically large task. With something so deeply engrained I am not sure it is possible to move into a post-dichotomic world. We are, as Hegel characterized, amphibious beings. He formulates the human problem as the following:

Spiritual culture, the modern intellect, produces this opposition in man which makes him an amphibious animal, because he now has to live in two worlds which contradict one another ... But for modern culture and its intellect this discordance in life and consciousness involves the demand that such a contradiction be resolved. Yet the intellect cannot cut itself free from the rigidity of these oppositions; therefore the solution remains for consciousness a mere ought, and the present and reality move only in the unrest of a

hither and thither which seeks a reconciliation without finding one. (Aesthetics 54; Werke 13:80)

This disunion between intellect and culture mimics the wedge driven between spiritual and physical being left by Descartes' mechanization of the nonhuman other. By highlighting the unconquerable divide generated by the transfiguration of nature from a wild, rich lifeworld filled with secondary qualities into a passivized scenery inhabited by animate corpses ready to be dissected, measured, and utilized in the name of science we are transported into a world of extreme contradiction (Jonas 1966: 11-12). Under such circumstances the world becomes a place of uncanniness where the lifeless are animate, the body is detached from the mind, and heaven and earth are forever at odds. If heaven and earth have yet to be moved after 400 years then I think they may be firmly rooted in place.

However, dichotomy does not necessarily entail contradiction (Merleau- Ponty 2012: 18). While Descartes' dualism erected extreme boundaries between humans and nature that penetrate the boundedness of our very skin, there are less radical dichotomies generated as a byproduct of our perceptual system. Being embodied is to be a dichotomic being, not a dualistic being in the ontological sense, but within the episteme. We see light and dark, feel hot and cold, view the world internally and externally. The way we encounter the phenomenal world is through both synonymous and antonymous conceptualizations. The environmental philosopher Hans Jonas stated that "the basic separation between subject and object [coincides] with the situation of sentience and motility, which equally include the element of distance. "Distance" in all these respects includes the subject-object split. This is at the bottom of the whole phenomenon of animality."<sup>12</sup> (Jonas 2001: 102) Thusly, to be the kind of being that possesses the trait of locomotion and that can navigate its environment generates some kind of separation between the self and the world. Simultaneously, the boundary between the self and the world is fuzzy due to the fact that our lungs are continuously filled with oxygen, our energy is sustained by sustenance provided by nonhuman subjects, and even the constellation of cells constituting our being is fueled by mitochondria that contain "alien" DNA. So, each individual subject, whilst seemingly removed and self- contained is actually porous and penetrative (Jonas 2001: 75). We breathe only as long as the earth breathes.

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<sup>12</sup> Altered from original for readability, but without any change to the meaning.

I will utilize dichotomies throughout this discussion due to the fact that I cannot escape them when I am discussing the juxtaposition of light with darkness. Nevertheless, I hope to show that the reason Descartes' dichotomic ontology radicalized into substance dualism is because he prioritized light over darkness. His ontology was systematically hierarchical and imbued with moral connotations. The production of a similar ontology that recognizes the importance of both conceptual metaphors would be less divisive and more totalizing. So, while we cannot do away with dichotomies completely it is possible to discard harmful and irrational conceptions resulting from substance dualism.

## II.

Before we can begin to evaluate Descartes' philosophical framework a bit more needs to be said on how conceptual metaphors work. Often they make use of bottom-up processing. Thereby taking our most basic experiences as embodied beings and producing formulations to express more abstract content. They are generated by our cognitive system's reliance on the body to gain sensory information (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). It is for this reason that things within our immediate environment are described by the affect they have on us. All abstract thoughts, removed from our surroundings, are elucidated through their more basic constructions. For example, understanding can be represented through touch and vision. The KNOWING is SEEING, and the KNOWING is TOUCHING metaphors allow us to articulate statements of the kind "I see what you mean", "Can you shed some light on that for me?", "I am in the dark on that", "I think I have a handle on it", "I grasp what you are saying", etc. Embodiment and experience ground metaphorical prototypes, giving them a cultural and biological component (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). The way the human subject exists in the world obliges them to encounter it in a way that is simultaneously kinesthetically and culturally structured. I will allow dichotomies that arise as a result of the human animal's body plan because, as will be shown, it does not yield negative implications. The kinds of dichotomies resulting from a biological basis, alone, remain rooted in the epistemic sphere. Thus, any seemingly negative effects produced within our conceptual scheme are due to the effect of Cartesian cosmologies that inform our being in the world.

## III.

As was previously mentioned, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) describe Descartes' *Meditations* as entirely metaphorical. Without utilizing conceptual metaphor, the whole of the

argument would become incomprehensible (1999: 393). This would imply that, in order to understand the text, one would need to either adopt the same conceptual scheme as Descartes while they engage with the work or else they are already working within the same framework. This begins to suggest that, if we are able to interact with Descartes' work so naturally, perhaps it is the case that these metaphors are pervasive within our contemporary conceptual system. Many thinkers -like Freya Mathews (1991), Arne Johan Vetlesen (2015), and Max Oelschlaeger (1991)- have suggested as such, when reiterating the far-reaching implications Descartes' work has had on the production of science. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) echo their words if not their sentiments. They recognize Descartes' work as being in the same conceptual framework as our own but do not see this as a negative impact resulting from the work. Rather, it is a simple byproduct of the KNOWING is SEEING metaphor that is universal to human persons. They make this point because the KNOWING is SEEING metaphor is found in Plato during antiquity, as is most obviously evidenced by the allegory of the cave. However, the GRASPING is UNDERSTANDING metaphor is present in Aristotle and wielded with an equal amount of authority (1999: 392). Expounding on this, the differentiation between light and dark has been present since the body plan evolved the proper visual capabilities. It could be said that it is the most basic and primitive distinction; the ability to make out the outline of shadows<sup>13</sup>. This is reinforced by Lakoff and Johnson's observation that metaphors of light and dark are present within the "Allegory of The Cave".

However, the way the metaphors are deployed within the dialogue are equally as important as the fact that they are present at all. In the story, Socrates describes a scene for Glaucon in which there is a population of cave-dwelling prisoners, incapable of moving their feet or heads. Their entire lives are spent staring at shadows of statues and relics that are cast onto the cave wall. It is because they know no better that they view these objects as the things themselves. They believe that they know the truth of phenomena. One day one of the prisoners is freed and forced out of the cave. They are angry and pained because the immense brightness hurts their eyes and hinders their ability to see. Slowly, as their eyes begin to adjust they are able to perceive shadows and reflections. That is, until the day arrives when they are able to behold the

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<sup>13</sup> For more on the evolution of photoreceptors please see Nilsson, Dan E, & Bok, Michael J. (2017).

light of the sun, itself, in its rightful place. The story is meant to be an extended metaphor depicting the struggle of education (Plato 2004: Book VII).

Throughout this story the sun and the light above ground are meant to symbolize the known or the enlightened. It is where one arrives if they practice philosophical reasoning. Whereas the shadows and darkness of the cave are meant to denote the ignorant state in which we exist throughout our lives if we neglect our education. The darkness can most easily be categorized as a signifier of the unknown while light is a signifier of the known. The dark has no ontological metaphorical meaning but is restricted to the epistemic sphere. It dictates whether an object is known or unknown and whether a person is knowledgeable or uninformed. Although one could consider human nature to be dark or ignorant. In this way they could be using darkness to make an ontic statement. I think this would be a confused reading because for Plato human nature is inherently reasonable. He states the following:

for a sensible man will recollect that the eyes may be confused in two distinct ways and from two distinct causes, that is to say, by sudden transitions either from **light** to **darkness**, or from **darkness** to **light**. And, believing the same idea to be applicable to the soul, whenever such a person sees a case in which the mind is perplexed and unable to distinguish objects, he will not laugh irrationally, but he will examine whether it has just quitted a brighter life, and has been blinded by the novelty of **darkness**, or whether it has come from the depths of ignorance into a more brilliant life, and has been dazzled by the unusual splendor; and not till then will he congratulate the one upon its life and condition, and compassionate the other. (Plato 2004: 239)

The quote above helps to highlight that within antiquity whether one is living a brighter or darker life, there is no negative connotation. The relationship between the dark and light is understood more holistically as two intrinsic aspects of experience. In order for one to distinguish between enlightenment and ignorance there must be the experience of both. “With modern theories of optics, the eye becomes a passive lens, no longer thought to be emitting its own stream, and the transcendent coupling between inside and outside which Plato had imagined to occur was gone (Keller& Gronkowski 2004: 214).” Once Descartes dualism took effect there was a radical division between the subject and the object that placed the subject outside of the world, granting them a privileged and disengaged viewpoint from which to observe phenomena without fear of

contamination. There could not be the comingling of internal and external. In its place there was a strict demarcation between the self and Other (2004: 216). Thus, I am in disagreement with this specific statement made by Lakoff and Johnson (1999) and align my own sentiments with those thinkers who find the Cartesian framework to be problematic. My reasoning is that the KNOWING is SEEING metaphor was popularized and transformed into a foundationary epistemic principle by Descartes. It was not something that dominated in its current contemporary hegemonic fashion prior to the early modern era.<sup>14</sup>

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) have no argument or proof to support their claim to the contrary. That is, aside from the fact that we are embodied beings. While vision is a part of our perceptual capacity, this capacity is not only an embodied program. It is also an existential facility, a potentiality for being, that is already corporally schematized. The fact that vision can be understood as both a biological function and a cultural perception speaks to the way the individual and the society are interactively, interdependently co-emergent. I would like to suggest that vision was not necessarily the prominent sense utilized for knowledge acquisition prior to Descartes. The fact that there are other senses -such as touch- that can be formulated as conceptual metaphors for knowledge, alerts us to the fact that there are other ways in which we generate knowledge (Lakoff& Johnson 1999: 376). It does not always have to be the removed objectification imposed by the eyes that defines the subject-object relation. It easily could have been the involved connectivity of touch that became our perceptual foundation. This last sentence is mere speculation, but it serves to emphasize the fact that Lakoff and Johnson's universalizable assumption may fall into the domain of evolutionary psychology and is simply hypothetical. Both arguments are equally plausible.

#### IV.

Submitting to the premise that Descartes' argumentation is developed using visual metaphors, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) provide a systematic reading that maps the various metaphorical prototypes being utilized. However, they habitually discuss metaphors of LIGHT, thereby overshadowing the way in which metaphors of the DARK are deployed in the work.

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<sup>14</sup> This is most obviously evidenced by the built environment. There are no dark spaces that exist intentionally as a part of the public domain. Rather, places without lighted streets are considered dangerous and unseemly. During Antiquity certain spaces were left dark for ceremonial purposes and caves were revered as spiritual spaces. There was knowledge to be gained in the dark. (Katsarou & Nagel 2021)



Being that Cartesianism is a dualistic system, to discuss the importance of one part of the duality without acknowledging the other is to give, at best, an incomplete depiction. At worst, it is to give a skewed depiction. In the discussion to come I will briefly summarize the observations made by Lakoff and Johnson in their text *Philosophy in the Flesh* and then attempt to fill in the gaps left by their inattention to the DARK. Again, this is yet another instance in which we seem to recognize the importance of LIGHT on our conceptual system but continue to view the DARK as devoid of any effect. The reason for this oversight is made obvious once we shed light on the way LIGHT becomes the KNOWN while the DARK is radically UNKNOWN. The UNKNOWN is something nonexistent within Cartesian epistemology (Vetlesesn 2015: 57)<sup>15</sup>. It is a space of nonknowledge and requires no deliberation. Not only is this epistemically problematic but it relies on an ontological disparity between the normative value of *res extensa* contrasted with the *res cogitans*.

In order to develop this point further we must delve more deeply into the specific metaphorical formulations given in Descartes' *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations*, as are illuminated by Lakoff and Johnson. The first major metaphor to be analyzed in terms of LIGHT is the one we have been engaging with thus far - KNOWING is SEEING. The primary entailments derived from such a foundation are numerous but those relevant to our current discussion include a mapping from the visual domain to that of the knowledge domain. They are as follows:

1. Object seen > Idea
2. Seeing an object clearly > Knowing an idea
3. Person who sees > Person who knows
4. Light > "light" of reason<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> "When in mathematical procedure the unknown becomes the unknown quantity of an equation, this marks it as the well-known even before any value is inserted... valid knowledge... can only be achieved concerning objects that are of such a kind that they can be studied in the appropriate way- i.e. measured, counted, calculated... Everything that falls short of these requirements falls by the wayside as unknowable and not worth knowing."

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that in the *Meditations* Descartes actually uses the phrase "light of nature". However, Lakoff and Johnson translate it as "light of reason" because that is what Descartes means when discussing nature. However, this nature is not the Nature constructing the wild world. Rather, it is a nod to Aristotelian essences (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 389). This "light of nature", i.e., reason, is the defining factor of human nature. Even more specifically, it is the nature of the mind. The subject and reason become invariably linked.

5. Visual obstruction > Impediment to knowledge (Lakoff& Johnson 1999: 393)

In the context of *Meditations*, we can consider the above metaphorical entailments as the logic grounding Descartes' method. The work attempts to provide unfettered certainty that exists beyond all doubt. All ways of knowing and reason belong strictly to the world of ideas within the mind of the individual (Keller& Gronkowski 2004: 214-217). It is only this that we can know for certain is true. Hence, the famous words that have echoed through the ages; *cogito ergo sum*- I think, therefore I am. All that exists outside of the mind does not provide clear epistemic access. Perceived objects must then be filtered through the light of reason in order to become meaningful. It is not their content that is sought after but merely their structure within thought. The qualities, colors, tastes, and smells that vivify the lifeworld are reduced to a quantified form (Oelschlaeger 1991: 77). The reductionist epistemic perspective is built on the ontological ground that there is only a single point of certainty in the universe and that is our own being. The whole project is an attempt to maintain some semblance of boundedness between internal mental life and that of the external world. It is an endeavor to provide a safe space for knowledge production that takes the vastness of space and condenses it into something manageable, manipulable, and comprehensible (Mueller 2016: 43).

Martin Lee Mueller traces this existential drive to erect an ontology of enclosure on the historical context informing Descartes' thought. This moment in history was a grand opening of the cosmos that left humanity feeling small and unimportant. Galileo had recently published his findings debunking geocentrism which left the sciences reeling. All the certainty surrounding the belief that the world was known and reliably reported on through our sensory organs was removed. Radical skepticism concerning our senses was introduced (Mueller 2016: 42-44). Thus, "nothing at all may remain outside because the mere idea of outsideness is the very source of fear (Adorno 1997)." Anything beyond the individual subject was not knowable with certainty, meaning it could not be trusted and must be feared as the deceptive force it is. This was the backdrop that inspired Descartes to construct an ideal version of reality in which there is nothing left to the unknown because "man imagines himself free from fear [only] when there is no longer anything unknown (Adorno 1997)." Mueller defines four major tenets as to why Cartesianism was such a successful movement. All stem from the motivating factors that pushed Descartes to conceive of the world, as such, in the first place. I will not reiterate all of them here due to

relevance. The first tenet remains the desperate need to separate the internal from the external, as is stated above. The fourth tenet, which also supports the current discussion, is that Cartesianism strongly implied that “humans were not only separate, but *superior* to the entire rest of earth’s creatures, its landmasses its oceans! Rising above the confusion as much as stepping outside of it (Mueller 2016: 44).” So, not only do we see a correspondence between LIGHT and the subject, but we also begin to see how LIGHT could also be correlated with the orientation UP. Dark nature remains down on earth where it will remain in servitude.

Within the *Meditations*, LIGHT is used as a crucial part of the KNOWING is SEEING metaphor. It is most intimately connected to the light of reason which produces an intuition capable of grasping ideas without doubt. “It contains nothing within itself except for that which is clear (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 394).” That is, it only contains ideas that have been illuminated by the light of reason. It should be noted that the words “illuminated” and “light of reason” have no direct translation. They simply exist as part of the metaphorical ontology within the work. If there is indeed something hiding or obscuring the idea, removing the illumination, then Reason is not actually capable of comprehending itself. Hence, the desperate need to separate the internal structure of ideas from the external world of phenomenon. As a byproduct of the light of reason, Descartes sees with certainty that he can think. That ability arises without prompting which means that it is indeed a part of his essence. In fact, it is not just part of his essence but is the sole attribute comprising his essence (1999: 401). The ability to see granted by light is the starting point for the entire Cartesian enterprise. Without light the mind is not definable. Nor can we conceive of it as an infinite substance disconnected from the body. “This is owing to the fact that there can be no other faculty that I can trust as much as this LIGHT (Descartes 48).” Light being synonymous here for reason or the mind. It is only these things that can be trusted.

Contrastingly, darkness for Descartes is presented in a less straightforward manner. This is because the demonization of nature is done subtly through the negation of certain qualities. Descartes states the following:

Nor should I think that I do not perceive the infinite by means of a true idea, but only through a negation of the finite, just as I perceive rest and DARKNESS by means of a negation of motion and LIGHT. On the contrary, I clearly understand that there is more reality in an infinite substance than in a finite one. Thus, the perception of the infinite is

somehow prior in me than the perception of the finite; that is, my perception of God is prior to my perception of myself. (Descartes 51)

This quote is important because it gives an essential insight into how Descartes structures his argumentation. That is, that he privileges one idea through negation of another. Here we begin to see the entirety of Descartes thought process take shape. On one side of the dichotomy, you have LIGHT, MIND, GOD, and the INFINITE. On the other side, resides DARK, BODY, NATURE and the FINITE. If darkness is the negation of light then this entails that darkness is the absence of reason or mind since within the conceptual mapping light > light of reason/ mind. The mind is a substance completely disconnected from the rest of the world. It is infinite and lives on once the body dies. Again, if darkness is the absence of light then it lacks infinitude as well as reason. We can now assert that the mind is a container for ideas (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 395). That is, there is knowledge to be found in the light. And if darkness is the negation of light then there is no knowledge to be found in the dark. However, this leaves us with the question, what is the dark in Descartes methodology?

Since Descartes' discussion moves from the outside to the inside we know that he abandoned the outside world of phenomena as a source of knowledge. The light of reason remains the only thing that can be trusted to help us clearly evaluate ideas. Nature is defined, in this text, as anything that is capable of growth, decay and death. Thusly, if the dark is an external space of nonknowledge associated with the finite and the body then we can conclude that darkness is a container for nature. This is made evident when we take the following quotes into account. Firstly, Descartes states that "when I am less attentive the image of sensible things blinds the mind's eye (Descartes 52)." Whereby, he means to say that sensory input about the world of phenomena can counteract the light of reason and lead one to form false knowledge. The outer world of natural phenomena can darken the mind. "Phenomena no longer stand in the light; rather, they are subjected to the lights of an examination from a particular perspective (Blumberg 1993: 53)." Nature and all that comprises it remains in the dark until the particular subject intuit its true form as idea. The second quote we must consider is "I little by little freed myself from the many errors that can DARKEN our NATURAL LIGHT and render us less able to listen to reason (Descartes 28)." Here Descartes does more than designate nature as a space of nonknowledge. Instead, he further depicts it as a place in which one needs to break free or escape. Nature here is granted a lower status both epistemically and morally. Not only can we

not gain anything from it, but we must remove ourselves from it in order to better ourselves. That is, we can't sink to its level. In summation, the following ontological components determine the structural metaphors that define Descartes' canonical reality: LIGHT, INFINITE, MIND, GOD. These are what the rational soul is oriented towards. It is oriented away from DARK, FINITE, BODY, NATURE.

To continue, the reason it is so easy for Descartes to demonize the dark and nature beyond an aesthetic provocation is because he imbues it with a sense of subjecthood through personification. This is where the final metaphorical mapping is revealed. That is, nature > deceptive force. Nature purposefully impedes vision and "blinds the mind's eye". Levi- Strauss puts it best when he said

Through analogy, the invisible causes and forces which give rise to and regulate the nonhuman world (nature) or the human world (culture) assume the attributes of man, i.e. present themselves spontaneously in consciousness as beings endowed with consciousness, will, authority, and power, therefore as beings analogous to men... (Vetlesen 2015: 63)<sup>17</sup>

The vitality of the natural world cannot be denied. Even as Descartes sought to produce a discourse that stripped the life world of qualia he could not escape the feeling that nature was agentive. This is why it was capable to deceiving or overwhelming the senses. However, in his discourse he portrays nature as othered from humanity. For something to be Other requires action because Otherness is viewed as threatening. Nature, having the dangerous power of seduction, demanded to be dominated, stripped of its power and passivized.

In contemporary society, we recognize that the metaphorical tenants upholding Cartesian ideology are still present and utilized. We continue to say things like "her darker urges got the best of her" and "floods of emotion washed over her". Not only is darkness still a container for nature but we see two other metaphors that have an effect on how we relate to the natural world. The first is Morality is Cleanliness (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 307). Therefore, to be immoral is to be impure. Common impurities or stains in clothing come from being outside and close to nature. When someone is considered impure they are "soiled". The fact "dirt" is the exemplar of an impure substance suggests that the closer one is to natural bodies the farther away they have fallen from any "higher" conception of self. Moreover, this metaphor often depicts the body as

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<sup>17</sup> Quote from Habermas quoting Levi- Strauss.

the primary source of impurity. “Being pure means being rational, following only the commands of reason, and not letting [oneself] be tainted by anything of the body, such as desires, emotions and passions (1999: 308).”<sup>18</sup> So, to be pure is to reject the body in a decidedly Cartesian manner. The second metaphor is Nature is a Force of Evil in which nature, as an external force, acts on you and drives you to display a lack of self-control or moral weakness (1999: 299). Formulations of this metaphor include sayings like “he lost control to the fires of passion” and “her dark mood clouded the room”.

Cartesian language is still very much alive today and we use it in our everyday language. It has penetrated the deepest recesses of our cognitive functioning and grounds so many of the arguments we accept at face value. In order to begin to breach the centuries wide divide between humans and nature we need to recognize that “where darkness reigned, light [has] prevail[ed]; what had, since time immemorial, appeared incomprehensible and beyond control, beyond the reach of the makeable and serviceable for human purposes, [has been] made wholly transparent (Vetlesen 2015: 56).”<sup>19</sup> We need to not only invite darkness back in on a physical level and recognize the importance of its phenomenal existence, but we need to recognize that even our language plays an active role in oppressing nature both internally and externally.

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<sup>18</sup> Adapted from original for readability.

<sup>19</sup> Adapted from original for readability.

### **III. Facing the Faceless Other: Darkness as Hyperobject**

*What we see before us is just one tiny part of the world. We get into the habit of thinking, this is the world, but that's not true at all. The real world is a much darker and deeper place than this, and much of it is occupied by jellyfish and things. – Haruki Murakami*

*All real living is meeting. -Martin Buber*

## I.

As I sit writing this manuscript, I find my eyes wondering again and again to the lightly falling snow outside the window. The scene that unfolds before me is hypnotic. Each snowflake is clearly delineated against the gray-blue sky. Thousands of them fall to earth dramatically altering the landscape. A bundle of snowflakes begin to amass together while clinging to my windowsill. Winter brings with it shocking dynamism. Once rolling green hills are now painted white. The occasional snowman stands look out. His shape changes with each snowflake that lands a top his head. Although, the changes are so slow that they are imperceivable to the human eye. The only other thing that can be spotted beneath the blanket of white is two large Pine trees with strikingly golden trunks and green needles. They catch the snow until a breeze comes and shakes it lose. Tiny tornados of snow are picked up and carried off to find a new resting place. It is a world of objects, of things, each one is a part of a manifold unfolding. Their forms highly varied with different hues and complex arrangements. Yet, each one appears undoubtably individuated. If one looks hard enough and with enough patience, they can even find the boundaries between snowflakes clustered together against the frosty window frame. However, once the sun sets and the clouds overtake the sky the boundedness of these objects becomes uncertain. What was once assuredly an inanimate snowman could be mistaken for a person walking home from work.

The dark highlights the weaknesses of long- established philosophical presuppositions concerning atomism and substance pluralism. Western culture takes it to be the case that “the world is made up of a plurality of discrete individual substances: the world has been viewed, since classical times, as an array of objects which are logically mutually independent but bound in a web of causal ties (Mathews 1991: 8).” This understanding lacks acknowledgement of the interconnectedness and unity that is displayed by ecosystems and the biosphere, as a whole. Thinking in terms of a plurality that highlights the differentiation of objects continuously focuses on the removal of objects from context, expecting knowledge discovered in a vacuum to be the same as knowledge discovered in the world. Additionally, it stems from the fact that within our lived experience, our visual perceptive capacity is the dominant sense receptor used to gain knowledge. Therefore, light as a phenomenon is granted a kind or primordial existence. It is somehow viewed as more natural than the dark. So, the way object boundaries are defined in a



lighted setting intuitively feels more akin to the way things actually are. However, in this instance, privileging the epistemic power of darkness over light may bring us closer to the truth.

The chapter being presented attempts to interrogate one of the problems that can arise from an over reliance on vision as the dominant epistemic framework. Namely, it does not easily adapt to the notion of fuzzy boundaries, nonvisual objects, or objects that may be too large to engage with directly. Throughout this chapter a close reading of Timothy Morton's manuscript, *Hyperobjects*, is conducted in order to determine if it is possible to depict Darkness as a hyperobject. If it is indeed the case, then what does this mean for the way we engage with darkness? For these purposes, darkness continues to be defined metaphorically as a container for nature that can be phenomenally experienced through the physical medium of literal darkness.

## II.

To begin, we must first understand what a hyperobject actually is. Then, we can start to expound upon some of its various properties, explicating their relationship to the dark. For the purposes of this text, we will only be focusing on two qualities of hyperobjects. They are, viscosity and interobjectivity. Morton coined the term "hyperobject" and defines it as such:

Hyperobjects refer to things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans. A hyperobject could be a black hole. A hyperobject could be the Lago Agrio oil field in Ecuador, or the Florida Everglades. A hyperobject could be the biosphere, or the Solar System. A hyperobject could be the sum total of all the nuclear materials on Earth; or just the plutonium, or the uranium. A hyperobject could be the very long-lasting product of direct human manufacture, such as Styrofoam or plastic bags, or the sum of all the whirring machinery of capitalism. Hyperobjects, then, are "hyper" in relation to some other entity, whether they are directly manufactured by humans or not. (Morton 1)

That is to say, a hyperobject is not something that can be taken in with a single glance, nor can it be experienced directly without some kind of mediation. Hyperobjects are invisible to humans for long stretches of time making them problematic for an egocentric episteme. If, at a societal level, we consider only the observable and directly interactable to be objects bound up within the causal web then hyperobjects would be exempt from action (2). That is to say, while it is obviously the case that scientists and specialists acknowledge the reality and causal powers of nonvisible entities, such as quantum particles, dark matter, and planets beyond the edges of our galaxy; it may not be the case that the general public recognizes how these entities play such a

large role within the cosmos, roles that affect our everyday realities without us even noticing. The hegemony of vision in Western culture makes us blind to some aspects of reality.<sup>20</sup> If darkness can be reconceptualized as a hyperobject then it could reignite the belief that objects outside of our reality are capable of affecting us. The psychosomatic response brought on by all-encompassing darkness makes it self-evident that even things we cannot see are imbued with causal power.

However, it must be noted that hyperobjects are more than simply the collection of objects of a certain type of categorization or objects belonging to a certain kind of causal system i.e., all the plutonium on earth or climate change. Rather, for Morton, they are objects in their own right. Although, Morton does not use the word object in the classical sense of the word. He uses it with reference to an object-oriented ontology. He commits himself to a radical realism that rejects any kind of anthropocentrism (2). On this view objects are transmuted into strange, active agents that we are incapable of knowing fully. Additionally, Morton relies on a totalizing metaphysics that does not allow for “transcendental leaps “outside” of reality (2)” Therefore, any notion of a priori judgements or definitions of objects as illusory mental images defined by the imagination alone would be a complete misunderstanding. Hyperobjects are like gravity, they force us down to earth and make us confront the at-handedness of the physical world, reminding us to think in concrete terms instead of mere abstractions.

### III.

The first property we will consider here is that of *viscosity*. Classically, viscosity is used as a term to describe the density of liquids. If a liquid has a high viscosity, like honey, then it will move very slowly when subjected to the effects of gravity. While a liquid, like water, that is less dense would have a lower viscosity. Regarding hyperobjects, viscosity is used more as a metaphor. Morton imagines hyperobjects in the way one might imagine a honey trap. They cling to you no matter how hard you try to peel them off or avoid them. There is an in-your-faceness about them. When confronted with the enormity of a hyperobject you are unable to deny that you are a being in the world (32). This is because hyperobjects overwhelm you to the point that they

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<sup>20</sup> This could be one of the reasons that so many people are incapable of accepting the reality and urgency of the current climate crisis. Without overtly observable effects that are always present it can be easy to underestimate the power of a phenomenon or, in Morton’s words, a hyperobject (Morton 2).

penetrate you, pursue you, and act on you. The lack of distance is suffocating (32). This realization is shocking to individuals in the West because our Cartesian cosmology is one in which objects are viewed as illusory phenomena devoid of animation, qualia, and vitality. To be so forcefully acted upon by something viewed as lifeless generates a highly uncanny experience. What was once familiar becomes radically unfamiliar. Thus, accompanying this newfound sense of intimacy with objects there is also a growing feeling of unreality (Morton 32).

No longer does the human subject hold sole dominion over the world. Rather, more-than-human forces are revealed to be more powerful and more capable. The conceptualization of viscosity as a trap seems to echo Descartes' fear of being stuck in the world of matter. Our entire cosmology can be viewed as a reactionary defense mechanism against the confusion and unknowability that Descartes experienced during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Once it was discovered that celestial bodies acted nothing like we anticipated, there was simultaneously an opening of the cosmos and a closing of the human mind (Mueller 2016: 42-44). It was only through distance between the thinking subject and phenomenal objects that one was capable of freeing oneself from the unknowability of the universe (Descartes 28). Really acknowledging the interconnectedness of all individuals within the cosmos -human and nonhuman alike- is not only felt through beauty. It is also felt through fear and panic because it acknowledges the fact that everything around you is uncontrollably alive. Consequently, it is no longer logical to believe that humans are the "top of the food chain" or "the center of the universe" (Burroughs 1985).

Val Plumwood (1996) discusses a similar thought process in her essay "Being Prey." Within the paper, Plumwood recounts the loss of her subjecthood through the experience of being attacked by a crocodile in an Australian river. We could consider the ecosystem in which the crocodile was a member to be a hyperobject, the crocodile was then simply a medium through which Plumwood was able to experience it. Whereby, her own objecthood was confirmed. When put face to face with such a deadly animal, a literal dinosaur, and a symbol of nature's durability, it is impossible not to be humbled. An experience such as that alters you to your core and sticks with you. Morton continues to use fear as a way to describe the power and scale of hyperobjects. It is this overwhelming magnitude that defines their viscosity. Once you have encountered a hyperobject, even if mediated, it leaves a mark on you, follows you, and becomes a very present part of reality. To convey this, Morton uses words like demonic, shadow, dark, strange, masochistic and nightmare. He states:

The vastness of the hyperobject's scale makes smaller beings—people, countries, even continents—seem like an illusion, or a small colored patch on a large **dark** surface. The threat of unreality is the very sign of reality itself. Like a **nightmare** that brings news of some real psychic intensity, the **shadow** of the hyperobject announces the existence of the hyperobject. We find ourselves caught in them. (32)<sup>21</sup>

The word choice in this paragraph is not unique for the manuscript. There is a running theme throughout the work in hyperobjects are defined as dark. This is first and foremost because a hyperobject is not fully transparent. Its complexity and enormity make pinpointing the boundaries of the object difficult. Hence, it is shrouded in darkness. Secondly, it appears as if darkness is used here in a way that is very similar to Descartes *Meditations*. It is agentive and capable of trapping you. Not to mention that most hyperobjects discussed are aligned with natural phenomenon. Hyperobjects are in a sense a dark nature. The difference is that where Descartes saw this as problematic, Morton sees this as simply the way the world is. Nothing about this darkness is found morally abject.

To continue, while it appears that darkness is a quality of hyperobjects can we call darkness a hyperobject? Or at least a medium through which we experience a hyperobject? I would say that given the fact that both darkness and hyperobjects are defined by such similar metaphorical underpinnings there is a good case for it. Darkness as an object is such a strange thing to wrap your head around because it is normally thought of as a quality of something rather than something in its own right. However, Morton makes the transition a little easier by saying “light itself is the most viscous thing of all, since nothing can surpass its speed (32).” If the quality of light can be considered a viscous hyperobject then so too should darkness. So far, we know three things about the viscosity of hyperobjects. We know that they are so large and overwhelming that they can annihilate your sense of self; they stick with you, envelop you; and they illicit feelings of uncanniness (23). In more aesthetic terms, hyperobjects are accessed through the feelings of the sublime and the uncanny. Darkness itself is an aesthetic quality that is seldomly interacted with in contemporary society due to the existence of streetlights, light pollution, satellites, and the list goes on.

Darkness is becoming an endangered thing in the world. In fact, we can consider the movements of dark energy to be a fitting analogy for the role darkness plays in the world today.

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<sup>21</sup> Emphasis added

Dark energy fields are constantly in flux and change depending on its environment. Due to the stronger forces of gravity, dark energy practically disappears when in a context with lots of matter, like our galaxy. Although, it is misleading to say that it disappears because it is more like it is hidden by stronger forces. The effects of dark energy only present themselves when the amount of matter present is negligible. One cannot see it if they try to look for its effect on things because only when there is a lack of things does its full powers exert themselves (Cambray 2016: 79). Like a viscous substance the effect of gravity alters the features of the phenomenon. This is a fitting analogy for darkness because an environment that displays an overabundance of light masks the darkness of the space. While it clings to the shadows behind objects and sticks to corners the light could not find, overall, it is removed from the setting. Only when the amount of light approaches nothing, can we “see” and feel the full affects of darkness.

Pure darkness is only accessed in one of two ways: through artificial sensory deprivation instillations and in nature on a moonless night far from city lights. Although, one doesn't need total, pure darkness to feel the weight it carries. The dark is continuously described as a space of fear that insights panic. Along with darkness and the night there comes with it a sense of the uncanny in both its early conceptions and later. The early being that the uncanny is a terrible sublime from which there is no escape (Vidler 1992: 21). An encounter with the dark makes you question the very boundedness of your own skin and forces you to confront your own physical limitations. Very much in the same way as a viscous hyperobject. It completely encompasses you, sticks to you, and penetrates you, leaving you in a transformed reality. This strange opening of aesthetic experience subverts any attempts at transcendence and leaves you rooted in place. At the very onset of sublime meditations, you are already covered in a viscous layer. In order to be touched by an object and react to its aesthetic properties is to already have been acted on by it (Morton 32). In its later conception, the uncanny portrays the familiar as unfamiliar (Kortekallio 2019: 75). The homely is changed into the unhomely by unknown forces (Vidler 1992: 21). Here it is the way the lack of light alters a known space that generates a sense of unreality. This type of uncanny makes you question the very notion of what is real. The demarcation between the sublime, uncanny and darkness involves a slippage or transference of qualities from one to the other. But no matter how the experience is construed, one is filled with the same thoughts and emotions as when confronted with a hyperobject.

#### IV.

The second property of hyperobjects we will consider is *interobjectivity*. The first thing Morton says concerning the interobjective is:

The abyss in front of things is interobjective. It floats among objects, “between” them; though this between is not “in” spacetime—it is spacetime. On this view, what is called intersubjectivity—a shared space in which human meaning resonates—is a small region of a much larger interobjective configuration space. Hyperobjects disclose interobjectivity. The phenomenon we call intersubjectivity is just a local, anthropocentric instance of a much more widespread phenomenon, namely interobjectivity...

“intersubjectivity” is really human interobjectivity with lines drawn around it to exclude nonhumans. (81)

By giving this kind of argument everything in existence is objectified. Now, “objectification” has a negative connotation due to its relationship to fetishization and oppression, but in this instance “objectification” simply puts every individual entity on the same level. It may seem strange to consider oneself as important as a coffee cup, but it is a way of imbuing the world with value (2).

Furthermore, hyperobjects are perfect exemplars of interobjectivity because a hyperobject can never be experienced directly. They are only experienced in a mediated fashion through other entities within a sensual space i.e., aesthetically (86). With this we begin to understand the role of darkness as hyperobject a bit more clearly. Within an interobjective system there is always something withdrawn that can’t be seen, heard, or felt in itself. It is only observed by its effect on others. So, of these hidden entities, “we only see their shadow, we easily see the “surface” on which their shadow falls as part of a system that they corral into being (84).” That is to say, within a dark interobjective system what is experienced directly is the dark. The surface on which it falls is the perceiving person. We have previously established that experiential darkness acts like a hyperobject, but perhaps it only appears to be imbued with such qualities and the true hyperobject is the entity hidden within. Instead, it may be better to characterize darkness as the aesthetically mediating object between human and hyperobject.

#### V.

I would like to suggest that the true hyperobject is nature. Metaphorically speaking, darkness is a container for nature. Therefore, the literal experience of darkness should bring out all the aspects of nature that have been rejected since the enlightenment. Any monstrous

imaginings or fear brought on by engaging with it in its fully objectified form could grant insight about both the external and internal points of breakage between nature and culture. Additionally, by conceiving of all of nature as a unified hyperobject we can evaluate the experience of facing it in the same way we would evaluate coming face-to-face with the Other. Defining the nature-darkness relation as an interobjective hyperobject system gives a foundation for equal ethical engagement between nature and persons, removing the ontological asymmetry that previously prevented such an encounter. Now, “nature and culture are projected onto the same plane. From this reciprocal assimilation of nature to culture and conversely, culture to nature, there results ‘a nature that is outfitted with anthropomorphic features, drawn into the communicative network of social subjects and in this sense humanized’; at the same time, there is ‘a culture that is to a certain extent naturalized and reified and absorbed into the objective nexus of operations of anonymous powers (Vetlesen 2015: 47).” With the blurring of objective domains, we can begin a kind of “thinking-with”, as is often engaged in within post-humanist literature (Kortekallio 2019: 59). While Donna Haraway thinks with dogs and Astrida Neimanis thinks with water, here we will be thinking with darkness.

## VI.

Within *Totality and Infinity* (1969), Levinas develops a first philosophy rooted in ethics. It takes the form of an encounter between two individuals, the I and the Other. Through an intricate description of this face-to-face meeting a spontaneous unfolding of rights and responsibilities is produced.<sup>22</sup> Throughout the rest of this chapter, I will consider if it is possible to do a reading of the work that would allow an object-oriented ontology. Previously it was claimed that by objectifying both the dark and the person within an interobjective system, an ethics could arise that would imbue both with value. Now, we will put that to a little test. The reason I chose to utilize Levinas to engage with here is because his philosophy already values exteriority and Otherhood over the I. Additionally, his work values embodied sensuality and intersubjectivity. The work already has many of the major requirements necessary for connecting

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<sup>22</sup> Levinas calls the face-face meeting metaphysical. “we have called this relation metaphysical. It is premature and ... insufficient to qualify it, by opposition to negativity, as positive. It would be false to qualify it as theological (84).” It is for this reason we can consider the project one in first philosophy, in so far as it recounts a level of experience that is prior to reflection or practical engagements.

with Otherness in a fair and equal way. The problem that arises is that the work is grounded in subjecthood. In order for something to be seen as valuable in its own right, face-to-face engagement is required, as is the use of language. This appears to bar any ability to engage with the nonhuman other but if we circumvent a literal historical reading of Levinas' work and instead do a reconstruction that remains true to its spirit we find that ethical obligations can indeed be provoked by nonhuman others and hyperobjects (Davy 2007: 40).

First and foremost, on Levinas' account the I has a responsibility to the Other no matter what cognitive capacities the Other possesses. This responsibility exists prior to any recognition of the Other as human. Personhood is ascribed to every object at the moment of the meeting. Thematization or lack thereof only occurs after a moment of ethical reflection. So, there is a moment prior to genuine recognition in which all things are "persons". This is because "person" is not a thematic category, just as "Other" is not a thematic category (41). The relation is always prior to thematization. In that way it has a more primordial existence.

The primary requirements for something to be considered worthy of ethical evaluation is that (1) the Other is capable of interrupting the I's thematization of the world and then presenting their own view; (2) the Other needs a face; and (3) the Other can speak. I would briefly like to attempt to categorize the Other as a dark hyperobject and show that it too can produce ethical relations. Levinas defines the presence of the other as a "more direct than visible manifestation, and at the same time a remote presence... This presence dominates him who welcomes it, comes from the heights, unforeseen, and consequently teaches its very novelty (Levinas 1969: 66). This definition is overflowing with a conception of hyperobjectivity. The immense in-your-faceness of darkness as a hyperobject fits into this definition with ease as it is more direct than any visible presentation. It is nonvisible and fully presents as the thing it is. It does not simply give itself over to the I, but throws itself at it with undeniable force. In this way it interrupts all thematization of the world. To elaborate, when one comes to face-to-faceless with the dark they are overwhelmed by sensations and feelings that they would not identify as their own or at the least, feelings that they have no control over. This kind of disruption can act as a meditative or psychoanalytic tool that breaks down conceptions of the self (Kortekallio 2019: 62). The dark presents to us a new way of orienting ourselves in the world. Continuing, the Other needs to speak, but speaking does not always have to be done using verbal language. For example, Levinas states, "the eyes break through the mask—the language of the eyes, impossible to



dissemble. The eye does not shine; it speaks" (Levinas 1969: 66). While the dark can't speak nor does it have eyes through which to speak, darkness is personified in western culture which means we often imbue it with human qualities, like speech. For instance, it isn't completely absurd for me to say something along the lines of "the night told of romances both old and new." Since Levinas gives such a highly metaphorical definition of speech I think it is fine to allow a few liberties with how speech is defined for hyperobjects as well.

Finally, the Other needs a naked face. That is to say, it needs a face that lacks thematization. This is because the face of the Other speaks to the I before any themes are applied to cognize the Other (Davy 2007: 57). In this way, the face presents as infinity. It transcends the I's idea of it rather than allowing the I to totalize the Other into an object (57). However, Davy (2007) makes a good point. While objects are capable of being thematized, this thematization does not latch onto the essence of the thing. Rather, it simply reduces the thing to a description, but any object can be described *ad infinitum*. All entities exceed our ideas of them. This is especially the case of hyperobjects which are so complex that we can't begin to fully grasp the totality of what they are or how they work. They are still capable of confronting us, physically, in the here and now. Moreover, "these differences between the Other and me do not depend on different 'properties' that would be inherent in the 'I,' on the one hand, and, on the other hand, in the Other . . . They are due to the I-Other conjuncture, to the inevitable *orientation* of being 'starting from oneself' toward 'the Other' (Levinas 1969: 215)." Thus, the specific characteristics that comprise the face are not relevant to the I-Other relation. This is because the Other controls me before being thematized, regardless of whether or not it has a human face. This is often the case when we are confronted with hyperobjects. They shroud us in viscosity and impose themselves upon us, acting on us, and penetrating us whenever possible (Morton 32).

While Levinas' metaphysical framework is not ideal for prioritizing more-than-human: human relations, we are still able to see how an interobjective ethical foundation could be equally promising as an intersubjective one. Hyperobjects are a large part of contemporary reality and a new way of ethically relating is required in order to understand how we are to orient ourselves towards them.

#### **IV. Deep Ecology and the Deep Dark**

*...the shadows of man and beast flickered huge like ancestral ghosts, which since the days of the caves have haunted the corners of fantasy, but which the electric light has killed. -Laurie Lee*

## I.

“Woah man, that’s like so deep,” has to be every philosopher’s least favorite phrase. Yet, as much as it pains me to say it, there is in fact something “deep” about such a statement. Currently, there’s a deep awakening or deep renaissance occurring in the West. Every concept nowadays is “deep”. There is deep ecology, deep time, deep sleep, deep space, and the list goes on. There is something about the word “deep” that seems to connect to some semblance of primordial wisdom. Depth as an adjective seems to signify the reality of the concept, that it is somehow not just getting at the concept of something but is getting at the thing itself. For instance, deep time is a concept that arose from the juxtaposition of biblical narratives and geological records (Fredengren 2016: 482). Once it was gathered that the earth was around 4.5 billion years old, much older than the bible suggested, there was a shift in thinking. The time humans have been residents on this planet is relatively short compared to the overarching cosmic timeline. Such a massive amount of time can be difficult to grasp for beings like us who live, on average, 75 years (82). Therefore, deep time is meant to designate time as it relates to ecological beings. I don’t know if we can say that this means deep time is more real than anthropocentric time since both concern the interaction of the same entities, but it does require the individual to interrogate time, as a known construct, and reflect on its limitations. Therefore, it seems that “deep” concepts go beyond the human understanding of an idea by reconceptualizing humanity in context.

This chapter is concerned with explicating a definition of the “deep dark” in order to present the possibility of experiential darkness as a tool, furthering the goals of Deep Ecology. First, I will give a brief overview of the field of deep ecology and the primary tenants it upholds. Then, I will discuss the relationship between darkness and the unconscious in order to more fully articulate the person-darkness relation as it is found in deep ecology. Finally, I will give a working definition of the deep dark and the role it could play in Zen meditative practices as a form of self-realization.

To begin, deep ecology, as Freya Mathews puts it, “enjoins us to develop ‘ecological consciousness’, recognizing our inalienable interconnectedness and oneness with the whole of life (Mathews 1991: 145-146).” Deep ecology is both a philosophical and spiritual movement that was started by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss. It runs counter to the dominant cultural paradigm that sees nature as a being for-use, rather than a being for-itself. The two

primary goals of the movement are to define nature as a space worthy of intrinsic value as well as to characterize a form of ‘self-realization’ that corresponds to ‘ecological consciousness’ (147). It is a quest for liberation and cultivation. Næss differentiated between the ‘deep’ and ‘shallow’ ecological movements by characterizing the ‘shallow’ movement as a continued part of the degradation of nature (Evernden 1993: 28). Rather than depicting humans as a part of nature it simply reinforced the mechanistic worldview that reduced nature to numbers abstracted away and distanced from the reality of things. For instance, on this shallow view, say you are an ecologist. You need to report on the percentage of rhinos that die every year, and you find that the answer is 2%. This is purely hypothetical but bear with me. While 2% sounds acceptable it does not take into account that many species of rhinos are endangered or have recently gone extinct.<sup>23</sup> Whereas, on the deep ecological view, the status of beings in the world is understood through their complex, interrelatedness with one another. Humans too are included in this causal web and held accountable for the negative effects they wreak. There’s an enrootedness in deep ecology that acknowledges the entanglement of the human and more-than-human within the biosphere (28).

## II.

In a similar vein to that of deep ecology, psychoanalysis highlights the contextual realities that affect both the unconscious and conscious lifeworld of individuals. This is done in an attempt to help them reach some kind of self-actualization. By expounding on the properties of psychoanalysis we can develop a baseline definition of darkness, as it appears to the cultural unconscious. Now, I know what you must be thinking... Psychoanalysis is just a bunch of weird mumbo jumbo about how everyone wants to sleep with their mother or father. However, I promise you that is not the case. The psychoanalytic model developed by Carl Jung is simply a collection of ideas concerning the collective unconscious, the process of individuation and universal archetypes (Fellows 2019: 70). Like deep ecology, many of these ideas are opposed to a reductionist account of humans and nature in which phenomena are nothing more than mere mechanistic automatons lacking any internality. Both movements constitute a counterculture that is defiant of mainstream western values (70).

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<sup>23</sup> Both the Javan rhino and the West African black rhino have been functionally extinct since 2011 according to the World Wildlife Fund, meaning they now only live in national parks.

Regarding psychoanalysis, this rejection stems from the fact that Jung traced many of societies' negative drives to the Enlightenment, a decidedly western movement. Fellows calls it humanities "greatest triumph and our most dangerous weakness (135)." This is because not only did the Enlightenment bring with it exciting new discoveries in the realms of science and mathematics, but it also locked the world into disjunctive either/or dichotomy in which you were either human or animal; subject or object; conscious or unconscious. It forced us to ignore the reality of our amphibious nature and singularly pursue the light, or consciousness. Jung puts it thusly:

We lack all knowledge of the unconscious psyche and pursue the cult of consciousness to the exclusion of all else. Our true religion is a monotheism of consciousness, a possession by it, coupled with a fanatical denial of the existence of fragmentary autonomous systems. ... This entails a great psychic danger, because the autonomous systems then behave like any other repressed contents: they necessarily induce wrong attitudes since the repressed material reappears in consciousness in spurious form. ... The effect is collectively present all the time. (Jung 1969)

That is to say, the modern condition is one brought on by extreme one-sidedness resulting in repression and a dissociative state. We have repressed our unconscious needs and animal body leading to a dissociation from ourselves, along with the rest of nature. Continuation of a fractured self is considered dangerous (135). The only way to rectify such a fragmentation is through what Berry calls the "acceptance of the shadow aspect of the natural world." It is in the dark spaces of nature that the creative condition is most active. Here there lies an intimacy, a closeness, between beings and the world. In a universe monopolized by consciousness there exists no opposing forces or unknown threats. It is all too accessible and leaves no room for creation (Berry, 1995: 16).

Now that we have defined the dark/ shadow world to be what is missing from present experience, we must determine how engaging with experiential darkness can act as space for self-realization. An important clue comes from Jung. Concerning the early years of life, our consciousness is like "single lamps or lighted objects in the far-flung darkness (141)." What this means is that there is yet to be defined a cohesive stream of memories. However, these are not mere perceptions. They contain a chain of subjective information unique to the perceiving person. This information is the budding ego (141). It is a true coming into being. In this way the

darkness is defined both ego-logically and eco-logically. Like a child, at their creative beginnings, so too do we have the opportunity to revisit a time of potential, a pre-egoistical time. All we have to do is engage with phenomenological darkness in all its terrible sublimity. Darkness as a quality is heavy and oppressive. It's chameleon-like features change depending on the context. In a pure dark space, the most striking observation is that of how fully and easily our body can blend into the milieu. There arises a difficulty to recognize where oneself ends and the darkness begins. One's status as a subject is undermined by these uncontrollable feelings of uncertainty and unreality. Accompanying this uncertainty is the fear of losing oneself and being swallowed up and possessed by the darkness. This self-annihilation can make one doubt the experience they are having, leading to growing feelings of apprehension. However, to be exposed to the repressed primordial secrets hidden in the dark depths is to be exposed to aspects of reality that define our alienated unconscious being, as is revealed by psychoanalysis (Bronstein 2020: 85).

Dark "matter" comprises our dreams, nightmares and aesthetic experiences. It is also experienced in lit rooms, mediated by an impure darkness, when one catches a glimpse of their shadow out the corner of their eye. Watching a silhouette move in your wake is uncanny. It doesn't just ask who you are, but it also needs to know who you are not. The disjunction of light and dark is at its core a delineation of being (Bronstein 2020: 85). The experiential dark hints at a reunification of being through the blurring of dichotomies by producing a deeper and otherwise unattainable dimension of being (90). Nevertheless, this kind of experience requires a certain level of openness to the negative. Deconstructing the self and reorienting it towards nature is a scary and uncomfortable process because it requires confronting the oppressed (86). Being open – at some level – to experiencing the negative, is a fundamental aspect of the psychoanalytic experience as well as the aesthetic experience of darkness. In both instances depersonalization occurs before any kind of reconciliation can unfold.

We now have a grasp on what it means to come in contact with the dark in a phenomenological way. However, this is not the kind of darkness we want to utilize within deep ecology. While it does do some good work, such as, the breakdown of subjecthood and the ability to experience nature for what it is; there are still some problems with the definition. Namely, for darkness to function as an instrument of reunification in deep ecology it needs to fully surpass subjecthood in order to reconceptualize the person as a thing fully emersed and

enmeshed in the lifeworld. Psychoanalytic darkness remains too firmly rooted in the terrible sublime to ever let go of subjecthood in its totality. Through fear and a sense of uncanniness the subject will continuously give way to doubt, break down, redefine its subjecthood, breakdown... and the cycle continues (89). This is because the reaction to the dark under this definition is reactionary. Instead, experiential aspects of the “deep” dark can be viewed as being more meditative and in tune with the tenants of deep ecology.

### III.

The “deep” dark, as is the case with most deep concepts, can be differentiated from its shallow counterpart through the acknowledgement of ecological primacy. What that means is that it takes it as given that the world of human activity is not somehow better or more privileged than the rest of nature. Instead, it allows us to begin with the claim that humans are nature. Thereby, allowing us to circumvent any unpleasurable emotions that may accompany digging up repressed, primordial memories. Instead, it allows us to imagine a unity between ourselves and the cosmos in a more Romantically sublime sense. While conceptions of the dark are heuristically useful when evaluating various aspects of our cultural normativity I believe that a deep dark could be useful when assessing other realms of thought. In the same way that deep time relates to the planetary so too will the deep dark relate to the cosmic. Nonetheless, it was still important to reveal the properties of shallow darkness in order to find a deeper conceptualization. The discussion to follow will develop a more comprehensive definition of the deep dark through the understanding of nothingness in Hua- Yen Buddhism, or as it is more commonly known, Zen Buddhism (Cambray 2016: 83).

The easiest way to demonstrate what is meant by darkness and nothingness is through narrative. One of the most sublime meditations within the Buddhist cannon is the demonstration of totality. It goes like this:

Fa-tsang set a shining golden statue of the Buddha with a flaming torch beside it at the center of a darkened chamber filled with polished mirrors; all assembled beheld the one image of Buddha being multiplied and interreflected ad infinitum, whereupon Fa-tsang explained: Your majesty, this is a demonstration of Totality in the dharmadhatu. In each and every mirror within this room you will find the reflections of all the other mirrors with the Buddha’s image in them. (Odin 1982: 17)

This account of Totality can only take place with a dark backdrop. The darkened room in this instance can be defined as a metaphor for the expansive vastness of space, or even the expansive internality of Being. Both spaces are “dark” because it is this darkness that defines the essence of Being in Zen Buddhism. The whole philosophy is built around the sameness of phenomena. Within the dark, all objects are reduced to the same due to the inability of the eye to pick out particular qualities, making it an apt metaphor for the equality of Being and the equality of beings (xiv). Another story makes this even more evident. It is that of the monk Wonhyo. He awoke one morning realizing that he had slept in a crypt overnight. In the night he had drunk water from a gourd but in the morning awoke to the startling fact that the gourd was really a skull (xv). Yet, at this moment, Wonhyo achieved Enlightenment. Mistakenly drinking from the skull made it evident to Wonhyo that only the mind discriminates between objects. Whereas, in the darkness a gourd and skull are equally as interchangeable as a crypt and a house (xv). The nocturnal is given primacy over the day. While light leads to the illusory belief that all objects are unique, individuated and self-contained, deep darkness presents them as they truly are; blurry, equal, and commonplace.

In addition, the story of Totality recounted above, displays one other principle of Buddhism needed to comprehend the way in which an encounter with the deep dark can be fostered. That is, the idea of non-obstructed interpenetration in which the one is in all, and the all is in one. The totality of objects is defined by a detachment from a self-nature or particular nature. Instead, things are made manifest in the world through the hanging together of causal conditions (xiv). The unity of the cosmos does not attempt to pick out the particular entities constituting it but acknowledges that the whole is the parts and the parts are the whole. Meaning, all objects are already present to one another. The boundaries between them are porous, permitting them to be penetrated and to penetrate. It is through simultaneous mutual-reflection that these ideas can be grasped (xiv).

Mutual-reflection here indicates the act of meditation. It is by reflecting on the totality of the cosmos that the person too can feel that they are a part of this atomic/ anatomic intertwining. Although, meditative reflection is not thought. It is not conscious. It is more akin to a feeling of opening oneself up. Jung describes meditation as “something like a descent into the fountainhead of the psyche, into the unconscious itself. . . the gaze of the meditator can penetrate into the depths of the psyche’s secrets. Therefore he sees what could not be seen before, i.e., what was



unconscious (165).” For our purposes we can consider the “mediator” to be that of the deep dark. One does not need to necessarily go out and find deep darkness. Rather, one simply needs to close their eyes and sink inward, down into the unconscious. What is being uncovered is the metaphysically equal status of all beings; accompanied by the realization that at the most basic level of reality, all objects are continuously penetrating one another.

As for deep ecology, how can the deep dark aid as an instrument in self-realization? Næss’ concept of self-actualization is borrowed from the Bhagavad-Gita. He states: “Through identification a higher-level unity is experienced... This way of thinking and feeling... corresponds to that of... the yogi, who sees the same... and is not alienated from anything (Mathews 1991: 147).” While this gives us an understanding of the kind of actualization deep ecology strives towards, no process for actualization is given. The primary point of interest for Næss is “unity”. The deep dark, as a meditative practice, is a sinking into oneself. It is a removal from the visual world in which “I” exist at a distance from the world, and with the technological revolution that distance is always lengthening (Vetlesen 2015: 151-152). Instead, the deep dark is a move away from egocentricity towards sensuous feeling. By closing one’s eyes and moving down into the self you can let the totalizing effects of darkness overpower the “I”, leaving behind the self to become the All in One (Odin 1982: xiv).

To conclude, Whitehead’s principle of experiential togetherness asserts, the whole universe abides “experientially together” as an aesthetic and harmonized unity of feelings at the standpoint of each event in nature (Odin 1982: 136). Similarly, both shallow darkness, depicted as an aesthetic object, and deep darkness -defined as an experiential practice- present a way of getting at the world that does not rely on Cartesian epistemic frameworks and mechanistic, reductionist ontologies. Instead, they present a space of hyper- thrownness in which the feeling of being in the world is made acutely known, sometimes to an uncomfortable degree. Not only can the dark be used as a psychoanalytic tool aiding us on our journey to find a way back to Nature, but it can be used as a meditative practice that reveals how the truth and unity of things can best be seen through the nonvisual.

## **V. Concluding Remarks**

*We often forget that WE ARE NATURE. Nature is not something separate from us. So, when we say that we have lost our connection to nature, we've lost our connection to ourselves. -Andy Goldsworthy*

DARK and LIGHT have been constructed as primordial archetypes for as long as humans have roamed the earth. We see this with the use of caves in ceremonial and spiritual rituals dating back to the Paleolithic.<sup>24</sup> This is to be contrasted with how the DARK is demonized within modernity. The injustice done to the dark is a violence against us and the natural world. Physically speaking, bright light at night can trigger songbirds to begin singing too early in the morning which leads to overfeeding and early migration, causing catastrophic damage to the bird's entire ecosystem (Barkman 2010: 266). Additionally, nocturnal birds have been known to become confused and fly into brightly lit skyscrapers in the evening. While sea birds have been known to circle oil platforms all night, until they die of exhaustion. Unnatural light disrupts the lives and reproductive habits of a large number of animals from sea turtles to moths. Even human beings are not exempt from these effects. Light pollution leads to a disruption of our circadian rhythm, anxiety, sleep deprivation, obesity and a lower sex drive (Barkman 2010: 266). However, this discussion has concentrated less on the physical ramifications of light pollution and more on the psychological effects brought on by the removal of darkness from the environment. I find that reiterating the negative effects of light pollution is redundant because it is something we all know commonsensically just by being in the kind of world we live today.

Rather, throughout this discussion I have focused on how the concepts of NATURE and DARKNESS became entangled during the enlightenment, leading to a degradation of both the physical world as well as our internal sense of self. As diurnal creatures, humans often perceive dark spaces as frightening or foreboding. However, this fear does not simply arise because of how our body plan is constructed. It is also due to cultural perceptions (Cambray 2016: 77). Literal darkness as a neutral, natural phenomenon no longer defines an accessible experiential gestalt. It has been removed from the human environment. Instead, it was absorbed by metaphorical darkness, making the two one and the same. The dark now presents as a personified subject whom we reactively moralize against (Cambray 2016: 77). The dark is filled with intersubjective projections of all those things we consider lesser, bad, or unsightly. Yet, on the other hand, there is a way to view darkness by which it serves as a creative medium. Thereby exciting the imagination and impregnating it with a richness and fecundity. The psyche “comes

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<sup>24</sup> In “Light, Human Evolution and the Paleolithic”, Sakamoto et. al discuss how Paleolithic people viewed caves as spiritual places. It is in within the disorienting darkness of caves that they gave birth and buried their dead. Dark spaces were viewed as places of connection to the Netherworld from which all life came, and all life returned.

alive more fully in the dark, outside direct quantitative scrutiny (Cambray 2016: 77).” Meaning perhaps that the creative powers of the mind work best when unobserved or weighed down by numerical valuation. Knowledge production is more than simply crunching numbers. It is an enthralled fasciantion.

In a similar vein, while the dark can be used aesthetically to enrich our lifeworld it is also a sublime force that has the power to humble the self. The most obvious point of sublime reference is the night sky filled with billions upon billions of stars. This is not a sight many of us see nowadays, and it is a sight we desperately need (Barkman 2010: 273). The darkness of the night reveals nature in all her splendor and reminds us of the ethical trespasses we have brought against her. Not only have we unjustly depicted nature as holding a status of lesser moral consideration, but we have unjustly elevated the human subject to a much higher moral status than it deserves (Barkman 2010: 267). Descartes relied on metaphors of light to highlight the differences between the self and the natural world, resulting in a deep separation. Contrastingly, metaphors of the dark can be used to confront this separation.

For instance, the use of the term’s dark energy and dark matter present new metaphorical ways of thinking within the sciences. Dark matter exists in extreme masses at the farthest edges of the cosmos (Cambray 2016: 79). It interacts with light much differently than other kinds of matter and tends to exist in places less populated by light or matter proper. Dark energy, alternatively, is always present but its affects are masked by the stronger forces of gravity. It doesn’t fully present until conditions approach nothingness (Cambray 2016: 79). These discoveries were mind-blowing. The fact that there were other kinds of matter that functioned in such a strikingly different way put the emphasis on darkness in the cosmos. Mapping dark spaces within the galaxies gave rise to the discovery that there is more dark matter in the cosmos than there is general matter (Cambray 2016: 80). The confusing properties of dark matter and dark energy once again infuse the cosmos with awe, wonder and doubt (Cambray 2016: 80). Feelings that had been removed from the epistemic endeavor since the time of Descartes. This refocuses the dichotomies of light and dark as equally important and puts the emphasis on galaxies far removed from anthropocentric activity. Thereby, signaling that the cosmos are not devoid of activity and there are still surprises hidden within its depths.

The comparative studies that can be done relating the terms darkness and nature are overwhelming. Just as David Michael Levin<sup>25</sup> has made a career studying the role of light and vision within the philosophical cannon, so too could someone evaluate the role of the dark. Not only could you explore how a new metaphor of darkness is emerging in the sciences and its affect on the epistemological domain, but one could also explore the idea of the dark feminine. Women have, historically, been viewed as lesser than men due to the fact that they are more natural beings. They belong closer to the earth. As such, they are less rational, overly emotional, lack control, bleed, and give birth. To men of the past, women's bodies were a dark space, a space of horror (Creed 1986). This opens up some interesting conversations concerning the relationship between women, darkness and nature. Finally, I think that in the context of contemporary society, this discussion makes way for an analysis of what I am going to call Cartesian architecture. That is, architecture that overuses fluorescent lighting and puts an emphasis on metaphors of light. Often before a building is built the architect must submit a proposal for how the building is meant to function in relation to the given surrounding. Concerning gentrification, you often here about how "light" is being brought back into an area. Additionally, gentrification tends to occur in, what is considered to be, "shady" parts of town. An evaluation of the language used in city planning could highlight how the flood of artificial light coming from buildings relates to the physical boundaries of society, affecting societal membership. Metaphors of darkness should be more intricately explored within critical race theory.

Darkness is a fascinating phenomenon theoretically, aesthetically, linguistically, and literally. While I was not able to capture all the nuances of its phenomenal existence, I do hope that the next time you go for a walk on a moonless night, preferably surrounded by trees, that your thoughts will drift back to these words, and you will find fear replaced by inspiration.

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<sup>25</sup> See David Michael Levin's *The Opening of Vision* (1988) and *The Philosopher's Gaze* (1999).

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