Paradisiacal Knowledge (or, Falling from the Epistemological Constellation)

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I

Chapter 2 of Giorgio Agamben's book *The Signature of All Things: On Method* is dedicated to a thorough discussion of the *Theory of Signatures.* The emphasis, to a large extent, is placed on the theory's epistemological function by showing the various evolutions and transformations it underwent over time and through the different conceptions of the signature proposed by the thinkers Agamben discusses.

Put very briefly, the point of departure in Agamben's historical depiction is the thought of Paracelsus (AD 1493–1541) who positions man himself as the original *signer* who uses originally manmade (linguistic) signatures to expose hidden knowledge.[1] A further important landmark in this genealogy is the thought of Jakob Böhme (AD 1575–1624), who emphasised, on Agamben's reading, the process of revelation whereby signs are known since signatures actively resuscitate them.

Agamben's historical and philosophical study of the theory of signatures concludes with his own interpretation of the signature,[2] according to which new

[1] The original core of Paracelsus's *episteme,* as outlined in his treatise 'Concerning the Nature of Things' (Paracelsus, *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings*, 171–94), is the idea that 'all things bear a sign that manifests and reveals their invisible qualities' (ibid, 33) and that 'nothing is without a sign since nature does not release anything in which it has not marked what is to be found within that thing' (Paracelsus, *Bücher und Schriften*, 131). Accordingly, if each and every existing thing in the natural world has invisible qualities within itself that nevertheless can potentially be revealed, and if, by means of embedded, marked signs, man can know the deepest essences of things, it follows that the ability of humans to attain knowledge (of things and as such) is conditioned by the deciphering of the particular structure of signs. But in order fully to realise the sign's particular structure and its concealed content, as well as the transformative outcome of its decoding, perhaps (in this instance) a further stage in Agamben's genealogy had to be reached, so as to show how and against the background of which tradition Paracelsus arrives at his ideas and beliefs. Specifically, this means to depart from Augustine (AD 354–430) since his theory of signs (constituting the only elaborate theory of signs before the thirteenth century) substantially prepared the ground for Paracelsus's work, pivoting on the idea that the deciphering of the sign's components leads to knowledge of God. This Augustinian contribution to the theory of signatures, needless to say, did not in principle escape Agamben, as is evident in numerous other places throughout Agamben's œuvre where this contribution is directly or indirectly discussed.

[2] Agamben's interpretation builds upon his collected elaborations of the works of others — in this case, linguists such as Émile Benveniste, Nikolai Trubetzkoy and Roman Jakobson, and thinkers

knowledge of a certain subject matter, in comparison with past understandings of it, is a derivative of the continuous displacements of its signature or epistemological function in contexts yet to be encountered. The signature thus describes a mode of distribution (of paradigms or paradigmatic signs). Understanding the signature's past generates new knowledge or a new understanding of it in the present on the basis of a conceptualisation of the signature as an historical element or index capable of linking together different times and contexts against (or outside of) chronology.

Agamben thus grants signatures an active force; the signature is understood as an operator (a 'bearer of efficacy') that no longer passively represents or illuminates a certain relation between two factors, but has the ability to displace, transform, and reproduce this relation within a new context or a new domain, and in this way to constitute it anew within different hermeneutic constellations.

The signature has a specific structure in the sense of being suspended between signifier and signified, so that rather than being a sign as such, it is 'what makes a sign intelligible'[3] by determining its existence through its actual use. It is a sign that shifts locations and yet retains the same semiotic and semantic being. Signatures, for Agamben, must be able to move from one set of discursive practices to another without changing form or meaning, as form and meaning are not relevant to their specific operation. It is not what a sign says but what it allows to be said, not what it means but what meaning structure it allows to operate. The signature's operative and excessive nature is elegantly summarised by Roberto Esposito in his discussion of Agamben's thought in the broad context of Italian philosophy: 'the "signature" [...] is a strategic operator which marks and simultaneously exceeds [...] concepts, referring them back to their [...] origin. This does not mean that in this passage, or excess, no transformation occurs. However, rather than deriving from semantic mutation, it comes from its opposite, namely, from the repercussion caused by retaining the same meaning in different contexts'.[4]

Agamben cites Paracelsus who summarises his *episteme* with the following claim: '*signatura* is the science by which everything that is hidden is found, and without this art nothing of any profundity can be done'.[5] However, '[t]his science', writes Agamben, 'like all knowledge, is a consequence of sin, insofar as[6] Adam, in Eden, was absolutely unmarked, and would have remained so had he not "fallen into nature",

such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Thomas Aquinas, Aby Warburg, Michel Foucault, Walter Benjamin and others.

[3] Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 42.

[4] Esposito, *Living Thought: The Origins and Actuality of Italian Philosophy*, 251.

[5] Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 33.

[6] The Italian reads *'perché'* (because; for; since; in this context).

which leaves nothing unmarked'.[7]

What does it mean to be 'unmarked?' What were the consequences, for Adam, in such a situation? What kind of epistemological status does Eden possess in and of itself, as well as for Adam. At the end of his discussion, Agamben claims that, '[i]t is possible [...] to imagine a practice that [...] reaches back beyond the split between signature and sign and between the semiotic and the semantic in order to lead signatures to their historical fulfilment'.[8] Can one follow this line of thought or assumption? Is a philosophical inquiry (as reasoned and postulated by Agamben) that reaches beyond signatures towards the Non-marked (i.e. towards the paradisiacal state and final perfection, according to Paracelsus) possible?

II

The ability to follow the long shadow cast by the signature in its course constitutes part of what Agamben terms *archaeology:* a research method that designates both travel through time and acts of epistemic disclosure – in other words, a time-based tracing of objects through different discourses. Archaeology, as a 'science' or method of inquiry, could be applied to any subject (including itself) in an attempt to discover its signatory history.[9] As such the investigation will attempt to reveal not so much its origin in a chronological sense, but rather the numerous operative forces within its history; or a historical field of multi-polar flows that extends between a phenomenon's 'emergence, the moment of arising'[10] and its becoming. But how exactly does it become possible for a historical investigation to renounce the concept of origin?

In his book, *La linea e il circolo*, Enzo Melandri discusses the domain of *analogy* in relation to procedures of knowledge. He proposes the analogy as an epistemological alternative to the dichotomous model that dominates Western logic. Rejecting the drastic alternative 'A or B', which excludes a possible third option, 'analogy imposes its stubborn "neither A nor B"'.[11] This model intervenes in the dichotomies of logic (particular/universal, form/content) in order to 'transform them into a force field traversed by polar tensions, where (as in an electro-magnetic field) their substantial identities evaporate'.[12] The third is given here not from the perspective of dichotomy (or else it would still follow the previous logic), but through the dis-identification and neutralisation of the first two, which now become

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[7] Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 33.
[8] Ibid., 80.
[9] In *The Signature of All Things*, this sort of operation is discussed in the third chapter, entitled 'Philosophical Archaeology'.
[10] Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 83.
[11] Ibid., 20.
[12] Ibid.

indiscernible. Thus, '[t]he third is this indiscernibility'[13] as it is no longer a scalable magnitude, but a vectorial intensity.

In another text that deals with a related topic, that of Foucault's *archaeology,* Melandri opposes the model of the origin – where 'the basic codes and matrices of a culture are explicated by a recourse to a code of a higher order to which a mysterious explicative power is attributed'[14] – to that of the historical *a priori*,[15] thus rejecting (on a different account) the logic of the dichotomy in favour of an alternative epistemology.

In this sense, if we try to look at the entire development of the epistemological function of the theory of signatures, if we try to trace it back in order to reach its presupposed origin, and as a result, the point of the 'emergence' of knowledge (an evolved outcome of the theory of signatures) or its exact historical moment of birth, we risk understanding Agamben's assertion that 'knowledge is a consequence of sin' in literal and diachronic terms. We should not be tempted to understand this supposed consequentiality in terms of direct cause and effect, as if paradisiacal knowledge came into existence due to the actions of sinners or immediately after an approximated split or fall. Paradisiacal knowledge's consequentiality, its time signature, is of a different order.

III

Our abstention from understanding paradisiacal knowledge in binary terms does not merely coincide with Agamben's research methodology and his conception of time and history. It is put forth particularly in order to prevent ourselves from simply or instinctively dichotomising the whole human experience of Eden by formulating a 'before and after' binary schema of knowledge as a consequence of a presupposed, imaginary 'fall'.

Had we based our analysis on such a misleading dichotomisation or consequentiality, we would theoretically formulate a description according to which various elements existed in Eden in opposition to their counterparts that existed in nature, after the fall. It will be as if Eden were the unmarked sphere in which we find unnatural beings, a sphere of revealed character, where unity exists, and a sphere incapable of generating knowledge. Whereas, on the contrary, nature will be the marked sphere inhabited by natural beings, a sphere of hidden things, characterised by fragmentariness, and a sphere capable of generating knowledge by way of the redemptive deciphering of the fractal structure of things. Why is such a binary description not an apt one? Let us take another example, to assist us.

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., 96.

[15] Melandri, 'Michel Foucault: L'epistemologia delle Scienze Umane', 96.

One of the many interpretations of the fall, and its before and after,[16] seems to adopt a similarly decisive binary logic. Looking at the opening sentence of Genesis, we find the word *Bara* (*Bereshit bara Elohim*, translated in the King James Bible as 'In the beginning God created...'). *Bara* in Hebrew etymologically derives from the Aramaic word *Bar*, which means a type of creation 'from the outside' or 'externally' — that is, the world (nature) is external to God.[17] Because the world was created so as to stand outside of God, it is dark and needs the light to fill it.

The purpose of man is to bring back the divine light of God into the dark world with the help of the Torah ('Torah' comes from *Or* in Hebrew, meaning 'Light'). The light was created 'in the beginning', but this should not be understood as the first day in the sense of a durational process of creation (that supposedly took six days to complete); rather, at the beginning there was unity and the process of creation is comprised of six ontological stages.

At the second stage (or more literally the second 'day' according to the biblical story), we see right away a differentiation between materiality and spirituality, body and soul, earth and heaven, nature and paradise. This differentiation is necessary, according to this common interpretation, since man cannot exist at the same ontological or cosmological level as God; man can only try to name God with as many attributes as he can possibly articulate. But the differentiation creates a theological-cosmological problem, which has long troubled the scholars of the Kabbala, namely, the relation between *En-Sof* (God as simple and infinite being) and the *Sephiroth* (the ten 'words' or attributes in which God is manifested): 'How can multiple attributes and determinations be admitted if God is simple, one, and infinite? If the *Sephiroth* are in God, God's unity and simplicity is lost; if they are outside of God, they cannot be divine at all'.[18]

This example shows us that even though the differentiation was supposedly needed in order to separate man from God (based on scriptural hermeneutics) and to maintain God as the (external) origin of all creation, it entails various problems, such as the above-mentioned paradoxical relation, God's continuous intervention and governing of the world;[19] but also, it mainly indicates the problematisation of

[16] This is indeed just an example, as there are many other interpretations out of which we cannot create a system of gradation or indicate them in terms of popularity or their 'truth-adequacy'; nonetheless this interpretation is quite a common reading.

[17] Historically this theological issue of *creation* (*ex/in nihilo*) was read as an objection to the Pagan conception of the *production* of the world.

[18] Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 67.

[19] Various 'solutions' were given to this problem. The theory of signatures solves this 'false alternative,' according to Agamben, as it shows that the *Sephiroth* are neither God's essence nor foreign to God's essence; they are signatures that 'by barely brushing against the absoluteness and simplicity of the being that is solely its own existing, dispose it towards revelation and knowability'. Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 68.

conceiving the paradisiacal sphere (and knowledge) necessarily in binary terms.

Indeed, a lot of the models, structures, formulations, conceptions, and processes that we have seen so far might be taken to encourage us to understand the paradisiacal sphere in this binary way. Nonetheless, we should refrain from pursuing this approach. Thus, in relation to paradisiacal knowledge, should we encompass it within an overall binary schema, should we naively obligate ourselves to an origin that regulates the emergence of knowledge, should we understand knowledge as necessarily coming to exist only after the fall (and not existing prior to it), it would entail a complete annulment of any form of knowledge before the point identified as the first bite, so to speak.

This, I suggest, will be impossible, for three reasons. First, a literal reading of the biblical story teaches us that Adam already had knowledge of various things before the sin: he had some knowledge or understanding of God and their mutual means of communication; he was cognisant of where he was and the work he was commanded to carry out ('to do work in it and take care of it'); he knew about the prohibition of eating from the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; he had to be familiar with the meaning of a death, etc.

Second, even before we get into the question of what exactly paradisiacal knowledge means, literally or metaphorically, we see (though somewhat differently for each thinker Agamben discusses) that the cognitive process of gaining knowledge is historically equated, at the very least, with an act of revelation or some sort of exposure of the hidden. For example, although Adam's naming of the creatures is based on God's predestined knowledge, the mere fact that this revelatory process takes place before the sin indicates that some sort of knowledge is already part of the epistemological structure and life of Eden, and is (at least to a certain degree and in a certain form) man's lot.[20]

Third, in relation to knowledge specifically as the idiosyncratic outcome of (the epistemological function of) the theory of signatures, if one builds upon Agamben's argumentation (that seemingly, due to its wording, might be naively interpreted in terms of causality or chronology, which is not, on my understanding, his intention), one realises that to speak in terms of a chronological 'emergence' of knowledge, as for any other philosophical or cultural phenomenon, is to speak paradoxically; a phenomenon does not emerge *ex nihilo* and out of a specific origin that decisively splits it, in historical terms, into 'pre' and 'post', but is a consequence of a continuous signatory transformation and incarnations across various diverse contexts.[21] Thus

[20] This claim is supported, for example, by Maimonides' assertion that, prior to eating from the tree of knowledge, Adam and Eve could not distinguish between good and evil, but *could* distinguish between truth and falsehood. Elior, *Gan be-'Eden mi-Kedem,* 254–68.

[21] This resonates with Agamben's broader discussion of *Kairology* (as opposed to *Chronology*) or messianic time ('the time of the now') as exemplified in Agamben's book *The Time that Remains*

knowledge as such, and as a sociopolitical phenomenon, must always have existed one way or the other and was conceived anew with each historical metamorphosis. This, naturally, also holds true for the special case of paradisiacal knowledge.

IV

If we should avoid seeing paradisiacal knowledge in terms of a before-and-after split, as would follow from a literal, consequential understanding of Agamben's assertion that 'knowledge is a consequence of sin'; if we should avoid looking for a diachronic origin and seek rather a synchronic 'moment of arising'; if we should avoid understanding the development of the epistemological function in binary terms and rather see it as existing within (or as) a force-field of multiple historical and even political currents; if we should not identify Adam and Eve's nakedness with a sense of shame and thus understand their ontological nudity as the absence of knowledge, how should it be understood? How should we interpret the idea of being 'unmarked'? How should we conceptualise the epistemological status of Eden and of the human beings within it? In what form precisely did paradisiacal knowledge exist then?

We will try to look at these issues and questions by proposing a different reading, ungoverned by an assumed splitting, ungoverned by a predetermined division that might appear to be implied by certain of Agamben's perhaps somewhat misleading formulations: the 'emergence' of knowledge as a result of sin; the human as a 'non-marked' being (in a relation of dichotomy with the 'marked' being); and the identification of the 'Non-marked' with a paradisiacal sphere and a state of final perfection. Recall Agamben's reflections upon whether a philosophical inquiry that reaches beyond signatures (beyond the split between sign and signature, between semantics and semiotics), towards the Non-marked, is possible.[22] The way this statement is articulated or constructed, and its appearance at the end of *The Signature of All Things*'s chapter on signatures in particular, might perplex the reader. It seems to stand in contradiction to Agamben's own words regarding, for example, deconstruction's 'false belief in pure signs', and his argument *against* the idea that 'there are pure and unmarked signs'.[23] Thus we shall try to look at these issues and questions through the theory of signatures as it is understood from a contemporary

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and the essay 'What Is the Contemporary?' where he writes: 'Not only is this time chronologically indeterminate (the *parousia*, the return of Christ that signals the end is certain and near, though not a calculable point), but it also has the singular capacity of putting every instant of the past in direct relationship with itself, of making every moment or episode of biblical history a prophecy or a prefiguration (Paul prefers the term *typos*, figure) of the present (thus Adam, through whom humanity received death and sin, is a 'type' or figure of the Messiah, who brings about redemption and life to men)'. Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*, 52–53.

[22] Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 80.

[23] Agamben criticises Derrida on this point in various places: cf. *The Time that Remains*, 102–103, & n. 28 of the present work.

philosophical standpoint (as historically outlined by Agamben); we shall try to avoid the binary model and in its place synthesise a non-dichotomous model based on what has been proposed, although somewhat differently and unrelatedly, in philosophies both included in and absent from Agamben's book: Aristotle's theory of privation, Baruch Spinoza's propositions, Nikolai Trubetzkoy's concept of *privative opposition*, and the contemporary thought of Giorgio Colli; we shall try to understand the 'emergence' of knowledge as an epistemological tension held under a(n) ('always-already') unified epistemological constellation that is not characterised negatively, but positively and consecutively. Finally, we shall try to see if a radicalisation of this tension beyond the breaking point of the constellation is possible, and if so, what it entails.

V

One can illuminate a few presuppositions characterising structuralist linguistics in the twentieth century. For instance: that language should be studied as a system (this is inherited from Saussure's work); a tendency towards abstraction (as a complete reversal of nineteenth-century nominalism, which was concerned with the description of facts isolated from one another); the attempt to provide a formal analysis of language; and the presupposition that the structure of language should be described in terms of binary features.[24]

That which structuralism understood to be 'language universals', such as binary features, the phenomenon expressed in the notion of *markedness* or the related concept of *privative opposition* is widely acknowledged in linguistic research:[25] one might consider, for example, the discussion of the semantic differences between various pairs of marked and unmarked elements at the level of 'formal' marking. To this end, let us examine the difference between the pairs *poet/poetess* and *prince/princess*.[26] The two pairs (sharing the ending 'ess') differ thanks to the type of semantic opposition they enter into: *poet/poetess* presents us with a *privative opposition* since the marked member of this pair, *poetess*, in its general meaning, includes the property 'female', which is neither included nor excluded from the general meaning of the *un*marked term, *poet*. By contrast, the unmarked term of the second pair, *prince*, explicitly excludes the property 'female' carried by the marked term, *princess*. The difference between the pairs is also illustrated by the possible adjectival modification of the unmarked term — *male prince* is redundant whereas *male poet* is not. Thus the two pairs represent different types of opposition: *prince/princess* is a case of polar opposition with contrary terms, while *poet/poetess* is a case of *privative opposition* with the terms standing in the lexical relation of *privative*

[24] Maurais, 'The Prague School and Verbal Morphology: A Trend in European Structuralism'.
[25] Zuber, 'Privative Opposition as a Semantic Relation', 413.
[26] Ibid., 414.

opposition.

What we can infer from this is that the meaning of the unmarked term, in some contexts, can have the meaning of its opposite, the marked term, while in other contexts its meaning is opposed, usually by contrariety or antonymy, to the meaning of the marked counterpart. In other words, 'the unmarked term is in some way "ambiguous": it can either have a general meaning, in which case the meaning of the marked term is "included" in it, or it can have a particular meaning, in which case its meaning is in some way opposed to the meaning of the marked term [...]. [T]he unmarked term is *privatively* or *pre-suppositionally* ambiguous'.[27] Thus the notion of *markedness*, advanced for consideration as a 'language universal', depends on the context in which it operates or to which it is applied; in its ambiguousness, the unmarked term forms a special semantic relation with its counterpart, that is rendered differently in each case and is subjected also to historical manifestations.

Consider Nikolai Trubetzkoy's assertion that, '[t]he non-marked term is not opposed to the marked term as an absence is to a presence, but rather that non-presence is somewhat equivalent to a zero degree of presence (that presence is *lacking* in its absence)'.[28] This means that, when considered in relation to the epistemological sphere of Eden, the notion of *markedness* entails the rejection of understanding the paradisiacal knowledge necessarily in binary terms or necessarily understanding the paradisiacal sphere as governed by an assumed splitting. The paradisiacal unmarked establishes the semantic relation of *privative opposition* with its counterpart, the paradisiacal marked. Thus being 'non-marked' is, in fact, being 'zero-degree marked' rather than the absolute dichotomous opposite of 'marked'.

This also means that a description of Adam and Eve as entities who, prior to their sin, were unmarked and thus possessed of absolutely no knowledge, is misleading. If we follow the logic proposed so far, we understand their 'un-markedness' as nonetheless positively marked but in zero-degree; as un-marked beings in which the meaning of their (ambiguous) state of knowledge includes the meaning of (confirmed) marked beings — as un-marked beings that, in their *privatively ambiguous* state, were never completely rendered 'illiterate' and, as a result, actually have an infinite potentiality to become entities of absolute knowledge.

The issue of overcoming the dichotomous model through which we might have understood the existence of paradisiacal knowledge was intertwined with Agamben's idea of consequentiality (the relation between knowledge and sin) as we interpreted it. As we suggested earlier, the research methodology of a philosophical archaeology

[27] Ibid.
[28] Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 77.

does not aim to identify 'a given locatable in chronology [...] but an operative force within history'. Thus, overcoming a conception of splitting, which necessitates an identifiable chronological origin, we understand paradisiacal knowledge as ontologically always existing, as a cognitive force within the epistemological history of Eden and its inhabitants that, although continuously oscillating between actuality and potentiality, is nevertheless unified ontologically. Since paradisiacal knowledge never really emerged, it was always an available epistemological resource to which Adam and Eve clung for its infinite potentiality, and as such guaranteed the feasibility of paradisiacal knowledge in a *privative* state or relation — guaranteed it as an option within a legitimate context.

Thus we can see that the 'emergence' of paradisiacal knowledge is, in fact, knowledge in the state of a signature; knowledge in a state that is correlated with Trubetzkoy's idea of an unmarked term that is *privatively* ambiguous or with what Christian theology named 'character'[29]; a form of knowledge under the influence of a unified epistemological sphere; a form of knowledge that, even though it exists in a zero-degree state and is thus perhaps devoid of any actual content, nonetheless operates as a saturated, charged movement.

VI

Our proposed conception of paradisiacal knowledge as ungoverned by splitting, as existing under a non-dichotomous model and as a multi-polar field of forces traversing contexts and terrains, entails another methodological principle that prevails when dealing with dichotomies. That is, how exactly does one need to understand a dichotomy? How does a dichotomy form? What kind of relation keeps a dichotomy intact? And perhaps more importantly, is it possible to understand both elements not as relating, but as connecting, touching one another?

For when we think about two factions, elements or concepts, we create a relation between them, we create a representation of one in the other. We then tend to think

[29] The sacrament, for Agamben, is a signature that shows the excess of the sacrament over the sign (the mere act of baptism): 'something that is inseparable from the sign yet irreducible to it, a character or signature that by insisting on a sign makes it efficacious and capable of action'. Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 50. Baptism without significance can potentially exist, but baptism as a pure sign without a signature is really just a signature that has suffered a removal of meaning (i.e., a zero-degree signature). Thus, says Agamben, it is false to believe in pure signs as such (of the kind that Derrida's deconstruction advocates for, where in fact zero-degree signatures are mistaken for pure signs). '[T]he theory of signatures [...] rectifies the abstract and fallacious idea that there are [...] pure and unmarked signs, that the *signans* neutrally signifies the *signatum*, univocally and once and for all. Instead, the sign signifies because it carries a signature that necessarily predetermines its interpretation and distributes its use and efficacy according to rules, practices, and precepts that it is our task to recognise. In this sense, archaeology is the science of signatures'. Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 64.

that that richer representation amounts to a stronger connection between them as a result of a higher degree of affinity, and the stronger the affinity, the closer they get. But contrary to common opinion, they will ultimately be articulated or joined together, they will be in real contact, only as a result of a complete *absence of representation*.[30] This is a definition of infinite proximity quite opposed to the one we usually give. As long as there is a degree of representation between both elements, as long as we find a relation between them, they are related but not yet unified. By absolutely unravelling all their connections, both factions disappear in and of themselves, making space for a third thing to emerge for the first time as a figure of their unification. This is the meaning of the verb 'to coincide', from the medieval Latin, *coincidere,* meaning literally 'to fall-upon-together'.

From this framing of dichotomy a question should immediately arise: if we assume that paradisiacal knowledge exists under a unified framework, but simultaneously assert that it exists and relates *privatively*, does paradisiacal knowledge then establish itself dichotomously? Is it thus a paradox?

VII

In 1677, Baruch Spinoza published a book, relatively marginal to his corpus, about Hebrew grammar. In one chapter he explains that a preposition is a noun that indicates a connection between individuals. Since it is a noun, it can be conjugated from singular to plural even though 'one may say relationships are not species which have many individuals under them, and for that reason they should, in common with proper nouns, not be able to be in the plural'.[31] However, prepositions in an absolute state, claims Spinoza, are merely relations/connections of themselves; they are conceived abstractly but cannot be uttered, expressed or charged with an affirmative content. As such, they no longer express the relation between things, but the time or space of a certain matter. Consider, for example, the preposition 'between': the Hebrew word *Bein* (between, in the singular) conjugates to form the Hebrew word *Beinot* (between, in the plural). In the case of the latter, the preposition no longer indicates a certain relation between two factions or individuals, but the space in between them. In its absolute state, this preposition apparently collapses in on itself and shifts from the sphere of grammar to that of metaphysics. In this sense it can be seen as resembling a signature displaced in location and context and now expressing a relation of a different order, a relation or connection that is not governed by logic but rather by ontology. In the same way, being an unmarked entity that has paradisiacal knowledge indicates a state of existence. This means that paradisiacal knowledge does not constitute itself dichotomously, as we momentarily suspected, but is still conceived

[30] See Giorgio Colli, *Filosofia dell'espressione*.
[31] Spinoza, *Hebrew Grammar*, 58.

abstractly under a unified framework: as (reiterating Trubetzkoy) 'presence *lacking* in its absence'.

VIII

Our discussion has led us to realise that being in a paradisiacal stage of un-markedness, which Paracelsus conceived as being the state of final perfection, is, in fact, only infinitesimally remote from its possible existence as such. In order for Adam and Eve's paradisiacal knowledge to exist beyond a state of zero-degree, it would have to move just one more step, crossing over a threshold, into the final stage beyond complete null meaning. But what kind of 'final perfection' stage would it be? What would be the consequence of moving beyond the breaking point of what we previously called the 'epistemological constellation'?

By taking the final step, it will exist no longer as an almost absolutely meaningless concept, no longer in a state of zero-degree, no longer *privatively* united with God's infinite wisdom, but for the first time it will exist individually and independently. It will then exist in a relational degree to a former paradisiacal unity, and in relation to another faction, which from that moment on will mutually gain a reciprocal degree of representation. This is, perhaps, the true meaning of the fall from Eden and its epistemological implications, as well as the manner in which we ought to understand Agamben's assertion that 'knowledge is a consequence of a sin': that after the forbidden bite, humans did not suddenly gain knowledge as such, but became for the first time perpetually aware of their own epistemological lacking.

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