

THE PRIVATIONS OF WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING

Chokmah as Folly and Discontinuity, Binah as Contextual Discontinuity and Delusion

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Abstract

This treatise gives the privations of the two supernal expressions in the soul, Chokmah and Binah — wisdom and understanding in their created reach — and grounds them in the neuropsychological dissociation of the cerebral hemispheres. Chokmah, the left hemisphere's focused, sequential, part-grasping intelligence, has as its privation folly and discontinuity: the part severed from the whole, the fragment that cannot be integrated, and the analytic agent that, deprived of the whole, fabricates a false coherence rather than tolerate a gap. Binah, the right hemisphere's broad, contextual, whole-grounding intelligence, has as its privation contextual discontinuity and delusion: the loss of the ground that keeps cognition tethered to reality, so that without context the parts float free and the mind misidentifies and confabulates. Three documented findings plant the picture. The hierarchical-figure dissociation — a large triangle composed of small letters, where right-hemisphere loss leaves the letters intact but the triangle ungraspable, and left-hemisphere loss leaves the triangle's outline but loses the letters — shows the part and the whole as the two hemispheres' distinct contributions. The disownership of a limb after right-hemisphere damage — the patient who, shown the arm joined to his own body, declares it his mother's — shows context-loss producing delusional misidentification. And Gazzaniga's left-hemisphere Interpreter, which fabricates a plausible story rather than answer 'I do not know,' shows the analytic faculty's native tendency to confabulate when the grounding whole is absent. The treatise unifies these into one mechanism — the Interpreter deprived of contextual reality-testing fabricates coherence rather than tolerate a gap — and closes with a measured reference to its application beyond the clinic: the same mechanism underlies the human tendency, under intolerance of ambiguity, to fabricate a conspiratorial coherence where the honest answer would be uncertainty. That application is developed in a separate paper.

Keywords: Chokmah · Binah · Wisdom · Understanding · Folly · Delusion · Left and Right Hemisphere · Confabulation · The Interpreter · Somatoparaphrenia · Hierarchical Figures · Privation · Catharturgy

I. The Two Faculties and the Boundary of Their Privation

Chokmah and Binah are, in the supernal register, the Logos and the Spirit, the Father's wisdom and his understanding, and as such they exceed the created category of virtue and its privation, as the Doctrine of the virtues establishes. But the soul receives their influence, and what the soul does with that influence has a created expression and a created failure. In the human microcosm Chokmah is expressed as the left hemisphere's focused, sequential, part-grasping intelligence — the directed beam that isolates, analyses, and manipulates the particular — and Binah as the right hemisphere's broad, contextual, whole-grounding intelligence — the open field that holds the gestalt, the situation, the whole within which any part has its place. This treatise concerns the privations of these created expressions: not the failure of the divine Logos and Spirit, which cannot fail, but the failure of the soul's wisdom and understanding when the influence is not received whole, when the part is severed from the whole or the whole loses its grip on the parts.

The privations are best understood together, because each is the other's shadow. Wisdom in its created reach is the right grasping of the part — but the part rightly grasped is the part held in its place within the whole; wisdom severed from the whole degrades into folly, the fragment that cannot be integrated and the analysis that runs on without context. Understanding in its created reach is the right holding of the whole — but the whole rightly held is the whole that grounds and contextualises its parts; understanding lost degrades into delusion, the context gone and the parts left to float free and be misidentified. The two faculties are the part-grasp and the whole-ground; their privations are the part-without-the-whole and the whole-lost, folly and delusion, and the deepest finding of this treatise is that the second produces the first — that when the grounding whole is lost, the part-grasping faculty does not fall silent but fabricates, and the fabrication is the form the privation takes.

II. The Picture in Three Findings

Three documented findings, drawn from the neuropsychology of the divided and damaged brain, plant the picture concretely, and they should be set down before the argument is built on them.

II.1 The Triangle of Letters: The Part and the Whole

The first is the dissociation of global and local processing in hierarchical figures — a large shape, a triangle, composed of many small shapes, the letter T repeated. Asked to reproduce such a figure, patients dissociate cleanly by hemisphere. With the right hemisphere lost, the patient can draw the small letters but cannot arrange them into the large triangle: the parts are preserved, the whole is ungraspable. With the left hemisphere lost, the patient can render the large triangle's outline but cannot supply the small letters that compose it: the whole is preserved, the parts are lost. The lateralisation is well documented — right-hemisphere dominance for the global form, left-hemisphere dominance for the local features — and confirmed at the level of the supporting white matter, the local-feature network confined to the left hemisphere and the global-feature

network to the right. Here, in a single drawing, is the distinction between Chokmah and Binah made visible: the left hemisphere holds the parts, the letters, the particulars; the right hemisphere holds the whole, the triangle, the form within which the particulars have their arrangement. Wisdom is the grasp of the part; understanding is the grasp of the whole; and the triangle of letters shows them as the two distinct contributions whose union is the intact perception of a thing.

II.2 The Disowned Limb: Context Lost

The second finding is the disownership of a limb after right-hemisphere damage. A patient with such damage, his left arm lying beside him, denies that the arm is his own; and when it is demonstrated to him that the arm is joined to his own shoulder, that it is continuous with his body and could be nothing but his, he does not accept the demonstration but confabulates around it, declaring that the arm must belong to someone else — the examiner, a relative, his mother. This is somatoparaphrenia, the delusional misidentification and confabulation of a body part contralateral to the lesion, and it follows characteristically from damage to the right hemisphere, the seat of the contextual whole and of the body's sense of itself as a unity. What has been lost is not the perception of the arm — the patient sees it — but the context that grounds the arm as belonging to the whole that is the self. With the contextualising whole gone, the part cannot be placed, and rather than tolerate the placelessness, the mind delivers a delusion: it must be my mother's arm. The loss of Binah's contextual grounding produces not a blank but a false placement, a delusional misidentification offered in the face of irrefutable evidence.

II.3 The Interpreter: Fabrication in Place of a Gap

The third finding is Gazzaniga's left-hemisphere Interpreter, drawn from the study of split-brain patients in whom the hemispheres can no longer communicate. When the right hemisphere is shown an instruction or an image that the left hemisphere cannot access, and the patient acts on it, the left hemisphere — which controls speech and is asked to explain the action — does not say 'I do not know why I did that,' which would be the true answer. It fabricates: it constructs a plausible story that fits what little it can see, confidently and without hesitation, unaware that it is inventing. Shown his own hand pointing, on the right hemisphere's instruction, to a shovel, one patient's speaking left hemisphere — knowing only that it had also seen a chicken — declared that the shovel was for cleaning the chicken shed. The Interpreter's function is to supply a running account of the self's behaviour, and when it lacks the real reason it does not fall silent; it manufactures coherence. This is the left hemisphere's native tendency, and it is the mechanism that the other two findings depend upon: the part-grasping, narratising faculty, deprived of the grounding whole, fabricates rather than tolerate a gap.

A triangle of small letters: lose the right hemisphere and the letters survive but the triangle cannot be assembled; lose the left and the triangle survives but the letters are gone. The part and the whole, made visible. Shown his own arm, the right-damaged patient says it is his mother's. Asked why his hand pointed where the right hemisphere directed, the split-brain left hemisphere invents

a reason rather than say ‘I do not know.’ The faculty of the part, deprived of the whole, does not fall silent. It fabricates.

III. Chokmah’s Privation: Folly and Discontinuity

Wisdom, in its created expression, is the left hemisphere’s right grasp of the particular — the focused analysis that isolates a part, works upon it, and follows a sequence to its conclusion. This is a genuine excellence, and the Tree places it high, for the grasp of the part is indispensable; nothing is understood that is not, in some measure, taken apart. But the part is rightly grasped only as a part of a whole, in service of the whole, returned to the whole. Wisdom’s privation is the part severed from the whole — and this severance has two faces, which are folly and discontinuity.

The first face is discontinuity. The left hemisphere holds the letters but cannot assemble the triangle; the analytic faculty, cut off from the right hemisphere’s integrating whole, produces fragments that will not cohere. This is discontinuity in the precise sense: the parts are present but the continuity that would bind them into a whole is absent, and what remains is a heap of particulars rather than an integrated thing. The wisdom that has lost its understanding is a wisdom of pieces — facts without their connections, steps without their direction, analyses that never return to the whole they were meant to serve. Discontinuity is the structural privation of Chokmah: the part-grasp running on without the whole-ground that would give the parts their continuity.

The second face is folly, and folly is what discontinuity becomes when the severed analytic faculty is required to account for what it cannot grasp. For the left hemisphere does not, when it meets the limit of its fragments, fall silent and confess the gap. It is the Interpreter; it fabricates. Folly, in this account, is not mere ignorance — ignorance might be humble — but the confident fabrication of a false coherence in place of an admitted gap, the manufacture of a plausible story that fits the fragments while missing the whole. The fool is not the one who does not know; the fool is the one who, not knowing, produces an answer anyway, and produces it with confidence, because the part-grasping faculty would rather invent a continuity than tolerate a discontinuity it cannot fill. Folly is the Interpreter unchecked: wisdom’s tool, the narratising analytic faculty, running without the understanding that would tell it when to stop and say ‘I do not know.’ The privation of wisdom is thus folly and discontinuity together — the fragments that will not cohere, and the false coherence fabricated to cover their incoherence.

Discontinuity is the part severed from the whole — the letters that will not assemble into the triangle, the facts without their connections. Folly is what discontinuity becomes when the severed faculty must account for what it cannot grasp: not the humility of not knowing, but the confident fabrication of a false coherence in place of an admitted gap. The fool is not the one who does not know, but the one who, not knowing, produces an answer anyway.

IV. Binah's Privation: Contextual Discontinuity and Delusion

Understanding, in its created expression, is the right hemisphere's right holding of the whole — the broad, contextual awareness that grounds each part in the situation, the body, the world to which it belongs. This too is a genuine excellence, and the Tree places it high, for the whole rightly held is what gives every part its meaning and its place. But the whole is rightly held only as the ground of its parts, in living contact with them; understanding that loses its grip on the parts, or that is itself lost, leaves the parts ungrounded. Binah's privation is the loss of the contextualising whole — and this too has two faces, contextual discontinuity and delusion.

The first face is contextual discontinuity. Where Chokmah's discontinuity is the failure of the parts to cohere, Binah's is the failure of the context to hold — the loss of the grounding whole within which parts are placed. The right-damaged patient still perceives his arm; what he has lost is the context that makes the arm his, the bodily whole to which it belongs. Contextual discontinuity is the severing of the part from its ground rather than from its fellow-parts: the thing is still seen, but the frame that would place it is gone, and a thing seen without its context is a thing unmoored. This is the distinctive privation of understanding — not the loss of the particulars, which the left hemisphere still supplies, but the loss of the whole that would tell the soul what the particulars are and where they belong.

The second face is delusion, and delusion is what contextual discontinuity becomes when the ungrounded part is given a false ground. For here, as with folly, the mind does not tolerate the gap. Shown the disowned arm and unable to place it in the lost bodily context, the patient does not say 'I cannot account for this arm'; he supplies a false context — it is my mother's arm — and holds to it against all evidence. Delusion is precisely this: a false context supplied in place of the lost true one, a misplacement held with conviction because the mind would rather have a wrong whole than no whole at all. The deluded person is not merely mistaken about a fact; he has lost the contextual ground that would let the facts be rightly placed, and has filled the loss with a fabricated frame. And here the two privations meet, for the false context is fabricated by the same Interpreter that fabricates folly's false coherence: when Binah's grounding whole is lost, Chokmah's unchecked Interpreter supplies a counterfeit whole, and the counterfeit, held with conviction, is delusion. Contextual discontinuity is the wound; delusion is the Interpreter's fabricated dressing over it.

Contextual discontinuity is the part severed from its ground — the arm still seen but no longer placed in the bodily whole that makes it one's own. Delusion is what this becomes when the ungrounded part is given a false ground: not a mere mistake of fact but a fabricated frame held with conviction, because the mind would rather have a wrong whole than no whole at all. It is my mother's arm.

V. The Unifying Mechanism: The Interpreter Without Its Ground

The two privations are one mechanism seen from two sides, and naming it precisely is the

treatise's central result. The mechanism is this: the left hemisphere's Interpreter — the part-grasping, narratising, meaning-supplying faculty — deprived of the right hemisphere's contextual reality-testing, fabricates a coherence rather than tolerate a gap. From the side of Chokmah, this is folly: the analytic faculty, severed from the whole, manufactures a false coherence over its fragments. From the side of Binah, this is delusion: the contextual whole lost, the Interpreter supplies a false context over the ungrounded parts. In both, the same engine runs — the Interpreter that will not say 'I do not know' — and the same condition releases it: the loss of the grounding whole that would otherwise check its fabrications against reality.

This is why the right hemisphere's role is rightly called the master's, and the left's the emissary's, in the framework this treatise draws upon. The Interpreter is a brilliant and indispensable servant — the faculty that supplies the running account, the analysis, the story that makes the parts intelligible. But it is a servant that must be checked, because its native tendency, when it reaches the limit of what it can grasp, is not to stop but to invent. The right hemisphere's contextual grounding is that check: the living contact with the whole and with reality that tells the Interpreter when its story has left the ground. Health is the Interpreter governed by the contextual whole — wisdom in service of understanding, the part returned to the whole, the analysis checked against the living situation. Privation is the Interpreter unchecked — whether because wisdom has severed itself from the whole (folly) or because understanding's whole has been lost (delusion) — and the unchecked Interpreter fabricates, confidently and without knowing it fabricates, a coherence that is not there.

There is a deep fittingness in the names the tradition gave these faculties. Wisdom and understanding are paired in scripture and in the tradition as the two that must go together, and their pairing is exactly the pairing this mechanism requires: the wisdom that grasps the part and the understanding that holds the whole, each correcting the other, neither sufficient alone. The fear of the privation is, in the tradition's own idiom, the loss of one without the other — wisdom without understanding running to folly, understanding lost leaving the parts to delusion. To get wisdom, and with all thy getting get understanding: the ancient counsel is, read through this mechanism, the counsel to keep the part-grasp and the whole-ground together, lest the Interpreter, deprived of its ground, fabricate a world.

One mechanism, two sides: the Interpreter — the part-grasping, story-making faculty — deprived of the right hemisphere's contextual reality-testing, fabricates a coherence rather than tolerate a gap. From Chokmah's side this is folly; from Binah's side, delusion. The same engine runs in both: the faculty that will not say 'I do not know.' Health is the Interpreter checked by the grounding whole; privation is the Interpreter unchecked, inventing a world.

VI. Beyond the Clinic: A Note Toward the Political Application

The mechanism described here is not confined to the damaged or divided brain; the clinical cases display in extremity a tendency present in every mind, for every mind has an Interpreter and every mind is tempted, at the limit of what it can grasp, to fabricate a coherence rather than rest in not-knowing. This is the ordinary form of the privation, and it has a recognisable shape in the

common life of reasoning. When a person reaches a genuine dead end — a fact that will not fit the available frame, a situation whose true explanation is unavailable or simply unknown — the healthy response is to tolerate the gap, to hold the uncertainty, to say ‘I do not know why this is.’ But the Interpreter, deprived of the contextual ground that would let it rest there, supplies a fabricated coherence instead, and the more it lacks the grounding whole, the more confidently it fabricates.

One recognisable form of this fabrication, in the common life of reasoning, is the move to a conspiratorial explanation: when the honest answer would be uncertainty, the ungrounded Interpreter supplies instead a hidden agent, a concealed design, a secret whole that makes the unaccountable facts cohere — a counterfeit context held with the same conviction as the patient’s ‘it must be my mother’s arm.’ The conspiratorial frame is, structurally, a delusion in the precise sense of this treatise: a false context supplied over a contextual discontinuity, a fabricated whole preferred to no whole at all, manufactured by the Interpreter that will not tolerate a gap. This is a general human tendency, released wherever the grounding whole is weak and the tolerance of ambiguity is low; it is not the property of any faction, and it is named here as a structural consequence of the mechanism rather than as a partisan claim. Its fuller development — the conditions under which whole communities of minds fall into the unchecked-Interpreter mode, and what the restoration of the grounding whole would require of a polity — is the subject of a separate paper. Here it is enough to mark that the privations of wisdom and understanding, displayed in extremity by the clinic, are the same privations that, in the ordinary reasoning of ordinary minds, produce folly’s false coherence and delusion’s false context — and that the cathartic restoration is, here as everywhere, the return of the part to the whole, the Interpreter to its ground, the analysis to the living contact with reality that alone can check it.

VII. Conclusion

Chokmah and Binah, wisdom and understanding in their created reach, are the soul’s grasp of the part and its holding of the whole — the left hemisphere’s focused analysis and the right hemisphere’s contextual ground. Their privations are folly and delusion, and the clinic displays both: the triangle of letters that shows the part and the whole as distinct contributions, the disowned arm that shows context-loss producing delusional misidentification, and the Interpreter that fabricates a story rather than confess a gap. Chokmah’s privation is folly and discontinuity — the part severed from the whole, the fragments that will not cohere, and the false coherence fabricated over them. Binah’s privation is contextual discontinuity and delusion — the part severed from its ground, the context lost, and the false context fabricated over it. And the two are one mechanism: the Interpreter, deprived of its grounding whole, fabricates rather than tolerate a gap, producing folly from wisdom’s side and delusion from understanding’s.

The healing is the one the whole Corpus names: the return of the part to the whole, the wisdom to the understanding, the Interpreter to the contextual ground that checks it against reality. Wisdom severed from understanding is folly; understanding lost leaves the parts to delusion; and the two faculties, kept together, are the soul’s right grasp of a world it neither fragments into incoherence nor frames in a fabricated whole. To get wisdom is good; to get wisdom and understanding

together is the soul's protection against the Interpreter's tireless fabrication — the keeping of the part and the whole in the union that lets the soul see what is there, rather than invent what is not.

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