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“The orphaned fervour...”¹ Or: the truth of knowledge²

This essay has nothing to do with Jacques Rancière, but this sentiment, “the orphaned fervour...,” which occasionally does the rounds, can stand as epithet for what I am going to say about what is said. It’s not a description or a polemic: at least not anymore. It is the embedded real of what passes as critical in what used to be called “the human sciences.” In another register, this real is what we might call the *jouissance* of university discourse. Thus it is a register of how self-reflexive critical academics – and the enlightened bosses of such creatures – give the cover of a radical desire to the servicing of a monotonous, relentless and ultimately self-satisfying demand. The bad taste in the mouth is the small price to be paid for being paid.

I’m going to speak somewhat elliptically but nevertheless directly of the love that dare not speak its name: that between Plato and Lacan, that between truth and subject. The name of this love which is almost nowhere is education.

Apology/Analyticon

What I am making the coincidence or the double-site of this non-rapport made flesh is the *Apology*, where, with Socrates being the exemplar, truth is on trial and *Analyticon*, one of the appendices to Seminar 17, from 1969 – Serge and Jane’s *année érotique* after all – where Lacan, speaking at Vincennes, the so-called “experimental university” – which he calls “vein scene” – is heckled by comrade-students as he tries to speak about his four discourses, specifically university discourse which, as you know, puts knowledge, which is not truth, in

313

¹ ... of denouncing the system with the disenchanting certitude of its perpetuity.” J. Rancière, “L’éthique de la sociologie,” *L’empire du sociologue*, Collectif Revoltes Logiques, Paris, Éditions La Découverte, 1984, p. 7.

² This is an edited version of a paper given at *Reason + Enjoyment*, UNSW, July 11-14. I have kept the sense of it being spoken, given it deals with Socrates and Lacan.

the place of the master, the place of getting things going and to which everything owes its significance.³

At the beginning of the impromptu, Lacan says that the experiment of this university – the university as such having “deep roots” – is exemplary and given it is an experiment asks “what use are you,” the student? That is, what use are you to the deep roots such that the university can find a new way to go on making use of you, like a language. He tells them he will draw this diagram, which is the four discourses, which maintain at a certain point an incommensurability with each other. This point being the impasse of all thought, like it or not. Hence, what he has to transmit is not a body of knowledge but a discourse: effect of an impasse or an impossible position.

“Socrates is guilty of corrupting the young and of not believing in the gods in whom the city believes, but in other new spiritual things” (Apol. 24b)⁴: Corruption and impiety are the crimes against the “university.” And nowhere is this exemplified more clearly than in his own famous diagram wherein mathematically plotting the diagonal of the square marks the rational demonstration of incommensurability as such: thus as “integrally transmissible”; Lacan’s own teaching desire. This dialogue, the *Meno*, treats the question of knowledge and its transmissibility, of knowability as such, and going all the way, Socrates forces knowledge to confront what it will not know as knowledge.

Socrates treats with a slave – not a student to be sure, not even a citizen and so a sort of irrational figure relative to the state but one involved precisely in producing something that is *never his own*. Dealing with the irrational or inexpressible rigorously, thus mathematically, treating a slave as capable of thought and, later in the dialogue, humiliating the education of that good citizen Anytus all over again, Socrates corrupts and as this corruption strikes at the core of Athenian pride, its knowledge, he *must* go down.

314

³ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar 17: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, (ed.) Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg, W.W. Norton, New York 2007, pp. 197-208 (227-240).

⁴ Plato, *Apology*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, *Complete Works*, (ed.), John M. Cooper & associate ed. D. S. Hutchinson, Hackett Publishing Co., Indianapolis 1997, pp. 17-36.

Lacan is accused of backsliding, reaction and liberalism, of fiddling about with diagrams and discourse inside, while outside the revolutionaries are going to burn it all down. In a way, Lacan is given a sort of trial – or we can say, as with Socrates, what is true of knowledge, which Lacan is trying to show, is tried in this reverse of the seminar. The irony, as in the *Apology* with the accusation against Socrates of oratory, is that what Lacan is trying to articulate in *Analyticon* as an effect of structure is what the comrade students assume themselves to be protesting. The point of the discourse for Lacan, as he points out, as he wants to not stop writing for the kids who interrupt him, is to place the place wherein the fire can be set that will have the desired effect.

If you don't light the spark at this point, if you go off everywhere at once, so to speak, your desire shows itself to the state for which it can only register as *its* enjoyment. This because ultimately the state cannot think and so "you will get a new master." To set fire to the state within the state but at a point of which the state is ignorant, that's the trick. One must un-know what the state does. "Lacan," a comrade asks, "is psychoanalysis revolutionary? Now there is a good question," he retorts (A. 200).

Socrates points out the history of his own dis-placement within the city-state: Meletus, Anytus and Lycon who bring the charges *and* are vexed on behalf of the poets, the businessmen and the politicians, and the orators or men of the law, have "all their life" Socrates says, been schooled by the state in these accusations of corruption of the youth and impiety. The means of this corruption, Socrates forces them to confirm is that he is the sole non-educator in the entire state (Apol. 23de -24e). He is the single un-knower: if you like, the mark of lack. He remains over, singularly unproductive for the university, without the stamp of the "credit points" – which the comrade students – ancient and contemporary – as Lacan says, not only consent to but which they also applaud (A. 201).

Hence Lacan's famous and damning turn: "The regime is putting you on display. It says, "Look at them enjoying!" – enjoying what? The university discourse; which of course, is not where they thought it would be ... it's on the board, Lacan says (A. 201-208)! Which is what Socrates says to the jury: "Remember what I asked you when I began, not to create a disturbance if I proceed in my usual manner" (Apol. 27b).

Reason/Enjoyment

This connection between the knowledge of the state – let’s call it reason but in the sense of sense (so, religious) – and the register of its affects as enjoyment and thus as the obverse of what the subject supposes of his knowledge is most compelling because as both Lacan and Socrates insist – Socrates on trial for non-educating and Lacan for precisely zeroing in on the disjunctive relation between knowledge as it is bought and sold for the master via credit points and truth as it is obfuscated and deployed in this process – education is the medium of this determination.

The determination in fine comes down to this: that the knowledge of the state is all there is to know and that what is not known as state knowledge is what must not be known. Nothing not of the state must exist. Reason and enjoyment form a one-all at the limit we might say; a double act – the reasoned state of the situation and its affective object objection. “But,” as Lacan says in 1973, adding science to the three impossible “professions,” “the experts are not expert enough to know that their position is untenable.”⁵

These terms, reason and enjoyment, so often supposed to mark an irreducible dichotomy, on one reading or on another the limits of an equally irreducible relation, are worth considering here as affective of states or universities qua *its* discourse or *as a* discourse: that insidious type of discourse which, following what Lacan doesn’t say explicitly but teaches, lacks at once the indifference of the master, the conviction of the hysteric and the courage of the analyst, insofar as it exists only insofar as it holds out. Indeed, it is the sum total of these lacks that makes the university so able to sell itself as every-bodies friend: conserver for the conservatives; liberaliser for the liberals – the comrade students, Lacan suggests, will not be able to see them off but will at best be wedged between them.

Thus as we see in both *Analyticon* and the *Apology*, speaking of this discourse is spoken about in terms of coming in and out of this discourse and coming into it in order to go out of it and also of a-voiding it *all together*, and I mean here of

⁵ Jacques Lacan, “There can be no crisis of psychoanalysis,” *Panorama*, 1974. <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1668-there-can-be-no-crisis-of-psychoanalysis-jacques-lacan-interviewed-in-1974> trans. Jordan Skinner.

rendering this discourse void, one way or another, from within but critically, at the site of its own impasse which for the state is not. "It is after all on the cutting edge of anxiety that we have to maintain ourselves."⁶

Like nowhere else, universities – the social bond as social body – serve at the pleasure of the master and do so very well: the desire of the university is always at the pleasure of the master. It creates after all, the means of the surplus the master requires: graduates, who make the correct accusations (sometimes called critique), which is to say, they correctly enjoy. The universities protestations of autonomy, often named, with full conceit, "academic freedom" is merely the university itself being put on display. It is what must be professed such that it looks like reason; that, as Lacan remarks in *Ecrits*, a Good Housekeeping version of democracy reigns.⁷

This desire is unstable given that in slaving away like this the university retains – more and more despite itself – an access to what is not what it reproduces and thus what terrifies it: this would be the truth of this knowledge which it produces for the master in its place. "To fear death is no other than to think oneself wise when one is not, to think one knows what one does not know..." (Apol. 29a). What is terrifying about truth is that it goes about the city without qualification – it is the de-limit of reason. Socrates, for Plato at least, names this terrorist singularity.

Truth/Knowledge

I'm not saying universities are capable of truth. I'm saying that despite themselves and like anywhere at all, and so not at all especially, it is nevertheless there that truths are not-impossible, there where knowledge reproduces itself, and is produced in excess, and as such also "what it is not" – which this knowledge determines not to be. This is why the accusation in the *Apology* over the question of education directs Plato's entire corpus to think the form of it's true Republic – the city nowhere visible but not impossible whereby sophistry has

⁶ Jacques Lacan, "Seminar X, *Anxiety*, 1962-63," trans. Cormac Gallagher from unedited French typescripts, 14/11/62.

⁷ Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink with Heloise Fink and Russell Grigg, W.W. Norton & Company, New York 2006, pp. 332 & 685.

come to lack. And why Lacan considers analysis what comes onto the scene in order to overhaul the *function* of knowledge in the formation of the subject.

Putting truth in its place is what we might call the knowledge of affect – to which Lacan has a specific and not at all ambiguous relation. But and this is a question you can only ask of knowledge, “whose knowledge is this”? Hence Lacan says: “I did not take the dogmatic path of giving a general theory of affects ... we are not psychologists, we are psychoanalysts. I am not developing for you a logic [...] of this ‘unreal reality’ which is called the *psyche* but a praxis which merits a name: erotology. Desire is what is involved, and the affect by which we are urged perhaps to make emerge everything that it involves as a universal, not general, consequence on the theory of affects, is anxiety.”⁸

That’s to say, without truth, without the real of its non-place being attested, the theory of affect only has two places to go: back to bodies as such, such that every body has its very own knowledge – which, as Socrates points out, is what the prime and richest sophist Protagoras already argued for as *Truth*: hence “man being the measure – of things as they are and as they are not” and so on: thus as many truths as bodies, then. For better, as Protagoras says, or worse.⁹

Or to language, which must appear, then, as *the* transcendental guaranteeing existent all bodily affects: such that individual bodily affects speak in and through language alone, which represents them. We have the infinite paradigm or *dispositif* – language *and* the finite multiple iterations that give it cause – bodies: a logic of sense squares their circle. Total.

Language itself remains off limits to thought given that in its own terms we’d be opting for a meta-language, which is impossible, and affects are known to us but only via language which makes them first knowable and secondly transmissible or at least discursive or bound. Such that the speech of affects effects a discourse that causes affect to come to be known. What we have in this schema is a neat logic, not very original but coherent and yet, finally inconsistent because of the very totality it cannot not construct. “Thus you have only one thing

318

⁸ Lacan, *Anxiety*, 14/11/62.

⁹ See Plato, *Theatetus*, in *Complete Works*, trans. M. J. Levett, rev. Myles Burnyeat, pp. 157-234, 167ab.

to do," Lacan says to the students, which is to "weave yourselves into it along with those who work that is with those who teach you, under the banner of the means of production and, consequently, of surplus value" (A. 204).

A body is the locus of an affect or affects if you like: it is not, as Lacan reminds everyone, either "Being given in its immediacy, nor is it the subject in some sort of raw form."¹⁰ But this doesn't mean that all affects are the same. Certainly language itself, given that it operates as discernment and judgment – that is, determines from what is, what has the currency of existence – discriminates here, privileging one over another dependent on the terms dominating its procedure at any given time: what it always excludes, no matter the criteria is what it cannot know, what it cannot construct or what is indiscernible or in exception to it; call it the unconscious if you like, call it what Socrates' divine sign warns him *not* to follow. (The negation is critical.) As Lacan notes we "see that the style of approach of such a theme: 'anxiety is an affect' is proposed to us from the point of view of the teacher."¹¹

Alain Badiou names the indiscernible in its affirmative sense the *generic* – that which cannot be captured in a knowledge but which exists despite it. Ontology, "science of being qua being," provides the formal demonstration of this unknowable existence. In Badiou's terms this *inexistence* is the locus of a truth. Thus the single not-impossible possibility left over – but as exception and not surplus, thus anxiety. To make what is indiscernible belong to the situation in which it exists as nothing: that's the role of the subject for Badiou – what I call the "subject of education." Of course we get this from Plato, whose Socrates names what sophistry lacks as education *and* from Lacan whose teaching is to know-ones-credit. As with Plato, Badiou avers, Lacan is himself forced to know, at the point of his own exhaustion, that it is "mathematics alone which touches the real."¹²

319

Hence, then, the affect of a truth, which is subjective through and through, without being partial, except insofar as what is "for all," is *generically* and thus universally, against all partiality. Truth affects its subject without being inscribed in a body as cause; conversely, a truth effects a body, capable of being its support.

¹⁰ Lacan, *Anxiety*, 14/11/62.

¹¹ Lacan, *Anxiety*, 21/11/62.

¹² Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. Steven Corcoran, Continuum, London 2008, p. 243.

The truth, the matter of the subject, effects that, in the world as it is, which will be its material support.

The truth of the dead Socrates will be registered as the affect of the Platonic corpus which this truth effects. Plato gives the truth of Socrates, the only thing the man himself ever concerned himself with, the new and necessary form; a corpus or a body of truths and he registers its affect in the varia of discourses he treats. Affects, thus, are downstream of the subject they support, thus the affect of a truth is not at all the same as the knowledge of affect. The former is hazardous, truly; the latter secures itself in conformity to a rule. In some recent work Badiou will call the one happiness, the other satisfaction.¹³

Between truth and knowledge, or thought and opinion, the analyst and the university, happiness and satisfaction, there is a minimal difference that makes all the difference: “I am an orator yes, but not after their pattern” (Apol. 17a) as Socrates says, or for Lacan, “I am, like everybody else is, a liberal only to the extent that I am anti-progressive” insofar as psychoanalysis is progressive which liberalism is not (A. 208). In other words, for Socrates and Lacan truth is not impossible, even if the all of it is. Which is to say, *there is* that which all knowledge cannot know but not, not produce. This is what is in exception to it. “If I have obtained it, it’s through not giving the appearance of having laid a finger on it,” Lacan says.¹⁴ In other words, what is held too is that the exception can be thought without knowledge as such, as the impasse of language, which presents it.

What does Lacan say? Something like, “we are the animal that gets along without truth very well ...” But the truth is we don’t get along without truth very well at all and thus as Lacan notes about getting out from under the “vein scene” (or even the ARCEne):¹⁵ it is *not to present something to make someone important, but in order to say something structurally rigorous*:¹⁶ which in the end is the beginning of being able to say something of the subject not reduced to structure; the subject in doubt we might say, thinkable but unknown.

¹³ Alain Badiou, *Happiness*, trans. A. J. Bartlett & Justin Clemens, Bloomsbury, London 2017.

¹⁴ Lacan, *Sem. 17*, p. 190.

¹⁵ ARC refers to the Australian Research Council to which academics in Australia go begging every year thus following the Homeric maxim which Socrates subverts in the *Republic*. See Book VI, 489bc.

¹⁶ Lacan, *Sem. 17*, p. 191.

It is not then to oppose one to the other as such, truth and knowledge are not incompatible, Lacan says. It's not as if the thought of enjoyment one might find in Lacan is the diametric opposite of the form of truth one might find in Plato. So a *diagonal* can be made of the two, passing through the much misrecognised Descartes, the matchmaker or relay of Plato/Lacan, since for Descartes the dualism puts mind and matter on the one side and what is in exception to this One-All on the other. Plato and Lacan, by way of such a traverse, are contemporaries; bound by what is incommensurable to knowledge known as such. They are thinkable together via, if you like, as Lacan says, the sign that one found in the other or in Platonic terms, they share what is shared absolutely, the capacity for thought – that what is not known as knowledge can be thought and as thought, not knowledge, and so as what will have been true. For both (and you can read this as endlessly said in Plato as in Lacan) education to be so can only be so if it hitches its wagon to the long detour of the non-impossibility of truth: that it be *that* detour and hence what cannot just follow the signs. In *Ou Pire*, Lacan says Plato was already Lacan.

Void/Lack

The crux of things is that if you can think what knowledge professes *not to be*, on the basis of its un-knowability, then knowledge, such as it is, is undone. You have, as Lacan said, punched a hole in it. Of course, ontologically speaking there is already a hole there at the level of its conceit: that it knows what must not be knowledge; that it "overdetermines the undetermined" or worse, leaves the undetermined to be the last word. So we could say that thought, the thought of the generic, finds in knowledge the hole that knowledge necessarily produces as its own.

Socrates announces this not as not teaching but knowing nothing, and then begins the work of working through, of making manifest what is truly unknown. This gives us the subject who wasn't there before; certainly not as affect, representation's representative, and not as an effect of language – even if in Lacan, the latter, in anxiety – the affect that is different from all the others – provides it access. The speaking being, we might say, is at best half-said as subject, which is as far as Aristotle and the Aristotelians got or get in the subversion of Plato.

Socrates cannot enjoy what is enjoyed in the state: the existence of this lack voids the imperative; which is in turn the beginning of having done with the structure that supports it. *Jouissance* is what serves no purpose, Lacan says. With regard to the pedagogy of the state, Socrates's speaking the truth which is nothing more than the others desire serves no purpose. He is in a state of law whose speech he doesn't know. His *jouissance* is tested so as to impose on it its proper limit but Socrates goes on; there is the death of the body and still he goes on; not limited by knowledge to enjoyment as affect. For Socrates what is not limited by knowledge is where truth comes in. What Socrates has in truth is the pure joy of avoiding enjoyment, insofar as he acts it out every day. But he lacks the enjoyment of the state, of what is in effect *university discourse* which, after all, is what Lacan writes out for us: that in producing over and again what is of value to it, the university produces this lack as its own. The necessity of not lacking the state; the semblant of a true affect.

Which is how they both come to end: Socrates dies and the analyst disappears necessarily, having subtracted thought from the enjoyment of submitting to the limits of knowledge. Socrates says: "I go to die, you go to live. This perhaps had to happen, and I think it is as it should be... but which of us goes to the good (Apol.42a) and Lacan says simply, "good-bye for today. Bye. It's over" (A. 208).

And as over, always, it remains to recommence: should something happen.