

# Knowledge: The True, the False, and Beyond - the Truth Reintroduced by Psychoanalysis

*Panagiotis Kosmopoulos*

*I do not discover the truth, I invent it.  
To which I add - that's it: that is what knowledge is<sup>1</sup>*

Speaking the truth is an experience of anti-certainty. It entails a wager on the *lying truth*, whose privileged instrument is the utterance of speech under transference. For Jacques-Alain Miller, subjective division is Lacan's "first intuition", even before his elaboration on the unconscious being structured like a language.<sup>2</sup> It is thus, through the *I don't know* that psychoanalytic truth begins its quest for being well said (*bien-dire*).

Let's measure truth by the yardstick of science, which aspires always to exactitude. Miller explains that the analytic truth "does not verify itself."<sup>3</sup> Truth is disharmonious to any evaluation in terms of "true" or "false" and does not need any epistemologist to evaluate it in such terms. However, Lacan, in *Science and Truth* – a text which he says he could just as well have named "Knowledge and Truth" – proposes an equation between the subject of science and the subject of psychoanalysis, on the basis of the subject being emptied of knowledge, in this sense analogous to Descartes's cogito, upon which analysis operates. Lacan reveals a keen interest in epistemology by taking up Koyré and his conception of science and Canguilhem and his critique of psychology. He interrogates the notion of a science that might include psychoanalysis, while at the same time positing truth as an extra-scientific cause that foregrounds the subjective. He plays truth against reality, moving toward a decoupling of analytic and scientific truth.

As early as 1963, in *Mise en question du psychanalyste*,<sup>4</sup> Lacan was already moving in this direction. Indeed, he was speaking about how we were encountering a refusal to decide on

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<sup>1</sup> Lacan, J., *Les non-dupes errent*, lesson of 19th February 1974, unpublished seminar.

<sup>2</sup> Miller, J.-A., "*Jalons dans l'enseignement de Lacan*", *L'Orientation Lacanienne*, a lecture delivered within the Department of Psychoanalysis, Université Paris 8, 25th November 1981, unpublished.

"In *Science and Truth*," you will see that Lacan speaks of the division of the subject – a concept that is, moreover, extremely elaborated, indeed a *matheme* – saying that "the analyst is overwhelmed by the constant manifestation of the division of the subject." Every term here carries its weight. This division is a phenomenon that occurs. It is what occurs in the form of a slip of the tongue, in the form of "I don't know what I'm saying," in all the forms through which the subject is shown to be overtaken by his speech, by what he says – and where what he does not know is revealed to him."

<sup>3</sup> Miller, J.-A., "Un voyage aux îles", *Ornicar ?*, n° 60, 2025, p.61.

<sup>4</sup> Lacan, J., "Mise en question du psychanalyste", 1963, in *Lacan Redivivus*, established by J.-A. Miller, *Ornicar ?* special edition issue, 2021.

the scientificity of psychoanalysis. Because of this epistemological impasse, “psychoanalysis has no right of citizenship – but, if we may be forgiven the *joke*, the psychoanalyst has every right to be cited.”<sup>5</sup> While the introduction to this text is subtitled “On the Difficulty of Seriousness in Our Field,” Lacan affirms that “psychoanalysis is to be taken seriously.”<sup>6</sup>

While science is pure knowledge, without relation to subjective truth, the analyst questions established knowledge by investigating “the status of truth as knowledge.”<sup>7</sup> Let us think of Voltaire’s *Zadig*, whose principal talent was to untangle the truth that all men strive to conceal,<sup>8</sup> and of Miller’s *Zadig* as well – the movement that called for the involvement of psychoanalysis in the field of politics. In this way, Miller points toward a reintroduction of the question of truth, as that which returns in life even when it is rejected – including by politics itself.

A distinction becomes apparent between a make-believe knowledge – one that is transmissible, even teachable within the university – and a knowledge-as-truth, for which the analysand pays with his own being. Science-knowledge completes this “triangle of knowledge” and in some respects, this can be considered as adjacent or distant from the two others.<sup>9</sup>

Let’s remember that in the teaching of Lacan, there is a tension between knowledge and truth, as well as a progressive transformation of the relation between them. This transformation is the passage from a truth against knowledge to a truth transformed into knowledge. With Lacan, one also encounters an about-turn with respect to his initial teaching: instead of exalting the truth, he depreciates it and promotes the function of knowledge. Truth thus passes from pathos to logic, becoming a locus.

Let us pose, by way of punctuation, that psychoanalysis relies on truth, in order to produce a saying (*dire*) on *jouissance*: Conversely, the refusal of subjective division, leads to a pretention of knowledge that hinders the invention of a new knowledge, an elucubration, and positions “the one who is installed by speech [*parole*], knowing it or not, in the place of false on the true”<sup>10</sup>. Common sense promotes knowledge as that which is *already known*,

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.38.TN: In the original there is a play in words here not evident in the English translation in terms of the word *cite*, denoting ancient city hence citizen and to cite. « la psychanalyse n’a pas droit de cité, mais, si l’on nous pardonne ce *joke*, le psychanalyste a tous les droits d’être cité ».

<sup>6</sup> Lacan J., *Le moment de conclure*, lesson of 15th November 1977, unpublished seminar.

<sup>7</sup> Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX (1972-1973), Encore: On feminine sexuality, the limits of love and knowledge*, ed. J. - A. Miller, trans B. Fink, New York: Norton, 1999, p.95.

<sup>8</sup> Voltaire., “*Zadig ou la destinée*”, Ch. VI, Paris, Gallimard, folio collection, 1999, p.53.

<sup>9</sup> Miller J.-A., “Le triangle des savoirs”, *Cahiers ACF-VLB*, n°7, Autumn 1996.

<sup>10</sup> Laurent, É., “Parler et dire le faux sur le vrai”, Text read at the conference “Question d’École. Le Fake.” 23 January 2021, videoconference, published in L’Hebdo-blog, 31 January 2021. Online <https://www.hebdo-blog.fr/parler-dire-faux-vrai/>

but without division. However, knowledge which gets articulated from *lalangue* is not already acquired, and it relies on each one to endure the ordeal of the division and to do one's part, to speak on behalf of the truth reduced to the status of the *lying truth* and create this special knowledge that touches on the unsayable.