

Category: Truth, Speech and Saying

Science, Truth, and the Speaking Subject

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In his text *Science and Truth*¹, Lacan interrogates the epistemological rupture introduced by modern science and its consequences for the subject. This tension between scientific knowledge and subjective truth finds a compelling illustration in the movie *Freud's Last Session*², a movie that stages an imagined encounter between Sigmund Freud and C. S. Lewis. The dialogue between psychoanalysis, science, faith, and suffering in the film offers fertile ground for exploring Lacan's thesis that truth cannot be fully assimilated into scientific discourse. Lacan argues that modern science emerges through a foreclosure of truth as cause. Truth, in the Lacanian sense, is not equivalent to factual accuracy. Rather, truth appears as something that "can only be half-said", emerging through speech, symptoms, and slips—effects of the unconscious structured like a language.

Freud's Last Session situates Freud at a moment when both his body and his discovery of the unconscious are under threat: he is dying of cancer, exiled from Vienna, and witnessing the rise of Nazism. This historical and bodily context is crucial. Freud, often regarded as a man of science, is shown confronting the limits of rational explanation when faced with pain and loss. Lacan's critique helps us read this Freud not as a contradiction but as the embodiment of the very split that psychoanalysis reveals: the subject of science is not immune to the unconscious.

Lacan emphasizes that science disavows its own subjective conditions of possibility. It depends on a subject who speaks, doubts, and desires, yet it excludes that subject from its formal operations. In the film, Freud's insistence on rational mastery is repeatedly undermined by his own symptoms: his pain, his dependence on others, his unresolved grief for his daughter Sophie. These moments resonate with Lacan's elaboration that truth returns precisely where science attempts to exclude it.

Moreover, *Freud's Last Session* dramatizes what Lacan identifies as the ethical dimension of psychoanalysis: not the pursuit of happiness or coherence, but fidelity to one's desire. Lacan would argue that psychoanalysis does not offer meaning instead, it confronts the subject with the lack of meaning at the core of existence.

¹ Lacan, J., 'Science and Truth', *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. trans. B. Fink, New York: Norton, 2006.

²² Brown, M. (Director). (2023). *Freud's Last Session* [Film]. Sony Pictures Classics.

The film also shows the discourse of science and the discourse of belief. Lacan's intervention is to show that psychoanalysis occupies a third position. It is born from science but subverts it by reintroducing truth as a subjective cause.

This movie can be read as a cinematic illustration of Lacan's central insight: that truth is not something one owns or proves, but something that insists, disrupts, and speaks through the subject.

Freud's final confrontation is not with God, nor with Lewis, but with the impossibility. Lacan would insist that this impossibility is not a failure but a structural condition—one that psychoanalysis, unlike science or religion, dares to sustain.