

*The flip side of authority*  
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It should be remembered that the etymology of "authority" is not *auróc* [autós] but *augeo*: it makes something grow. Unlike raw power, it is delegated: judges exercise authority in the name of the law, police officers hold a warrant, teachers represent the national education system, politicians act by virtue of the powers conferred upon them, and sovereigns reign in the name of the divine. But let us go further: charisma is also a gift from God, and so-called natural authority expresses Reason or Wisdom, or is exercised on behalf of the People<sup>1</sup>, for example. Acting "on one's own authority" is a borderline case that makes up for a lack of delegation. Authority presupposes another place: at least one other person recognizes a master, a knowledge, a daimon (for Socrates...), or a real. This asymmetry leads us to what Lacan formalized under the term discourse as coherent modes of social bonding. Let us use these four-place formulas, of which the two upper ones, "the agent" (or "semblance") and "the other," are on stage and can be embodied, while "truth" and "production" are not immediately apparent. Does each of them have its own authority? Let us try a few propositions:

- A discourse that is deployed (i.e., shared) confers the position of authority: that of the agent.
- There is no indisputable authority except in not deviating from a discourse.
- Authority can only be transmitted under the same condition.

The Master's discourse<sup>2</sup>

Authority is confused with the command that legitimizes it. It presupposes a time of origin, found in myths, after which a subject finds itself divided and represented by a master signifier. A decision (cut) that nothing precedes but which can be renewed, it orders the real through the symbolic with the promise kept of a certain surplus of jouissance through the signifier.

1. Unlike the undue power of the tyrant.
2. We will leave aside the discourse of the Capitalist, where power functions but without authority.

Command, but also law and religion (not theology) fall within the scope of this discourse. Kojève defined authority as obedience without coercion, which diminishes through transmission, and saw its stages in the Father, the Master, the Leader, and the Judge<sup>3</sup>. Clavreul took medical authority<sup>4</sup> as an example: the boss exercised it and passed it on to his student, who would become boss in turn.

Paternity was the dominant mode, passed down from the previous generation along with the assumption of debt. The phallus (the scepter) was the symbol of this authority. "The dynasty of representation," as Foucault put it.

Agamben argues that authority fails when there is no one left to command<sup>5</sup>. It is therefore a discourse that unravels. So either another command takes over, either we change our discourse and the agent of authority is no longer the S1 (Melman humorously recalled the sovereigns' taste for locksmithing or sheepfolds just before the Revolution). We ourselves

remain in voluntary servitude to this authority: we rely on masters, or rather, a master, himself enthroned by his predecessor. I quoted Melman; Lacan claimed Freud as his inspiration, even naming his school after him. As for Freud, he established his authority as founder on the discourse of the science that had formed him—where the master occupies a different place. The authority conferred by the Master's discourse is now widely decried as illicit, both that of the father and even that of the elected representative of democracy, in favor of the authority of other discourses.

### The University Discourse

If the role of the agent—which we refer to as that of authority—is delegated from an S1 that constitutes its truth, this is the discourse of the University. The "master" as teacher is now merely a homonym of the former. It is then essentially collective: the S2, the University. This discourse presupposes, to put it briefly, an implicit monotheism, since there would already be knowledge in reality: a kind of Great Clockmaker (who is, moreover, bound by the coherence of his own laws<sup>6</sup>). Because it represents and transmits his knowledge (now uncovered, science), the authority of the teacher rests on this S1, "well nestled" in reality, where it finds its foundation and its universal vocation. Lacan gave the example of the "scientific socialism" of the USSR: the authority of class struggle, with its underlying teleology, takes the place of the subject supposed to know. Admittedly, there is an internal paradox in this discourse. It involves reducing this "supposed knowledge" to writings that carry irrefutable authority and have become autonomous from their authors. Authority tends toward anonymity—as long as one can invoke someone's authority, "N. asserts that...", one remains more or less within the discourse of the Master. The authority of the University's discourse is transmitted through the transfer of revealed knowledge to others, who will also become professors. It should be noted that today more than ever, the authority of the professor rests solely on his or her fidelity to the discourse of the University. If they imitate the discourse of the Master (in whose shadow they have long found shelter), they are seen as tyrants and struggle to exercise power without authority. If they identify too closely with the student, their teaching becomes baseless: they become social workers, or even service providers.

3. A. Kojève, *La notion de l'autorité* (1942), Gallimard, 2004. Although the author says nothing about it, she could probably find stability for him in the enlightened despotism of a "Little Father of the Peoples."

4. J. Clavreul, *L'ordre médical*, Seuil, 1978.

5. G. Agamben, *What is Command?* (2013), trans. Payot-Rivages, 2013.

6. The humorous dialogue between physicists is well known: Einstein believed that the probabilism of quantum mechanics could be overcome, while Bohr believed that uncertainty and probabilities were at the heart of the infinitely small. The former is said to have exclaimed, "God does not play dice!" to which the latter replied, "Who are you, Albert Einstein, to tell God what to do?"

### The discourse of the hysterical

There is an authority, difficult to dispute today, in the discourse of the hysterical—and it would be necessary to expand on the relationship it has with the power of the capitalist discourse (where \$ occupies the same place). The discourse of the Hysterical expresses the truth of the real: sincere, therefore, even if divided, and transmitted through imaginary

identification. Complaint is its dominant expression: any victim who speaks from their suffering obtains at least an audience, and sometimes a considerable one<sup>8</sup>. Charles Melman has pointed out that the place of the victim (the traditional place of Jesus) has become widespread in our era of declining Christianity<sup>9</sup>. Paradoxically, this discourse derives its authority from creating a master—admittedly powerless—to complain to or about, and endlessly revives patriarchy from its ashes. Perhaps we should fear the return of a religion that would put things back in their place with unquestionable authority located in the real thing!

7. Seminar: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, December 17, 1969.

8. Thus, it is proposed that the Nobel Peace Prize be awarded to a victim of gang rape who has received media attention.

9. See O. Baudot's "Harangue aux magistrats" (Address to the Magistrates), which tips the scales of justice in favor of the victim. supposed.

Obviously, the authority of the complaint readily focuses on sex (and against reproduction): freedom of desire, the legitimacy of all sexuality, feminism, the fight for contraception, abortion, free choice of gender. Let us add the protection of children (against polymorphous pervers, etc.). Admittedly, the authority of the Hysterical's discourse is also that of the researcher—not the teacher. It addresses dominant knowledge in order to divide it and make it produce new knowledge. A final word on the authority of the work of art (all the more indisputable in that, in its novelty, it readily provokes the master or teacher), which transcends the discourse of the Hysterical by lending a figure to the Thing.

### The discourse of the Analyst

There is an indisputable authority at the heart of the Analyst's discourse. It stems from the reality of the object that he embodies in the position of agent or semblance. It is an authority that will only last for the duration of the treatment. The truth is that of S2 knowledge, whether it be the analyst's know-how, or rather that of the knowledge supposed in the real, of which the analyst, without illusion, embodies the figure. This allows the analysand, in the position of the other, to locate the cause of his desire and produce a new S1. This discourse loses its authority if it deviates into other discourses. If it wants to participate in the University, it finds itself relativized as one expression among others of the universal Subject of knowledge. If it slips into the discourse of the Hysterical (see Ferenczi), it denounces and thus confirms the master. Changing discourse means passing at least briefly through the discourse of the Analyst, says Lacan. Because he is the only one who situates the real, silent and chaotic, in the position of agent. The analyst, by supporting his place, gives it a metastable form, but it generally shifts to another discourse.

### The transmission of authority

What about authority as it concerns us, as analysts? We find it in the preference conferred by a master, in the endless (religious) commentary on his words and writings, and

even in militant (sometimes naive) complaints. The style of our interventions bears witness to this. The little master enthroned, the logician of a monolithic theory, the "forced card" of the clinic... But at least since we should know that we cannot speak "directly," outside of discourse, authority could have a certain flexibility for us, we could play with it without making ourselves the soldiers.

I added that the authority of a discourse can only be transmitted if one does not deviate from it. This is true for the Master's discourse based on origin and begetting, the University's discourse on a kind of implicit monotheism, and the Hysterical's discourse on imaginary identification. For the discourse of the Psychoanalyst, Lacan attempted a device that sought to avoid filiation, the displacement of knowledge, or imaginary identification. This was a procedure within our discourse to account for the analytical act: the pass. Since the object does not speak, the authority of the Analyst's discourse ("discourse without words") is asserted above all by its silence.