

the death of the academy

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It is noontide, disparate groups of people gather near a fountain from which no water flows. Socrates is standing with Alcibiades, they look around the square at the various people coming and going. Plato stands back, leaning on the rim of the fountain, scratching notes into a small book. Diogenes approaches with his lantern, coming to harass Socrates and his coterie, as is his daily ritual.

Diogenes: (holds his lantern up to the faces of those he passes on his way toward Socrates) I am looking for an honest man. Can any of you point me in the right direction? Is any of you an honest man? (louder and toward Socrates) I am looking for an honest man! Yo there, is that Socrates I see? Have we indeed found our honest man? Are you honest, Socrates?

Socrates: (grasps Alcibiades forearm and whispers something in his ear, trying to ignore Diogenes. Alcibiades smiles and gazes at a group of youths which is approaching the fountain.)

Diogenes: (pretends to be exasperated) Oh not this again! Silence! Will you ignore me again, Socrates? Do you prefer blindness, blind force over openness, ignorance to conversation? (taunts) I thought that you were a master of discourse, of the spoken word. Has that cat over there got your tongue? Or, are you angry with me?

Socrates: (continues to ignore Diogenes, whispering in the ear of

Alcibiades, who smiles as he gazes at the youths.)

Diogenes: (mocks) And you Alcibiades, have you cured your master's bout of pig's itch, has your beauty cured his long sickness unto death, has his madness flown away that he no longer wishes to speak of truth, of wisdom? Have you indeed corrupted your master? And, you the master, Socrates, what frightens you - that I will steal your beautiful lad, take him away from you to keep for myself?

Alcibiades: (scornful) Go away old man, back to your cave! You have no business with us and we none with the likes of you! Move along from here, Diogenes, leave friends in peace to enjoy the afternoon.

Socrates: (grasps Alcibiades arm, Socrates pulls his ear toward his mouth. He shows his displeasure with Alcibiades' words to Diogenes as this was the acknowledgement which Diogenes craved).

Alcibiades: (bitter look upon his face, he tears his arm away from Socrates and quickly bolts away to the other side of the fountain.

Diogenes: (laughing jeers, mocking Socrates) Who will hide you now Socrates? Will you not talk to me, look me in the eyes? I seek an honest man, could you be that one, my dear Socrates? You must know that I have no interest in the pretty youths that flaunt themselves around you, who use you for your knowledge - no, I have no interest in these many pebbles - it is you who I seek to fathom -

Socrates: (noticeably uncomfortable, turns his head around, looking for something upon which to fix his eye. The youths see an opening and advance upon Socrates as would locusts upon a Cicada tree.)

Blond youth: (nervous, cannot make eye contact with Socrates) Beg your pardon, dear Socrates, but we have come having heard that you engage in discourse over sublime topics, here at this fountain and other places, depending on the time of day, and the seasons of the year. We were hoping to speak with you -

Socrates: (turns and begins to answer the youth, but is cut off by Diogenes, who shouts out at everyone around the fountain, he waves his lantern forcefully through the air as the lantern flame dances chaotically upon the wick).

Diogenes: (loud and obscene) Oh! Look at Socrates! As fast as his little lovely boy, Alcibiades, flees this roost, another gaggle of youths, comes to peck apart this rooster -- this cock they come to bite! (sets down his lantern, begins to applaud hopping & running fast around the fountain, dodging people, dancing...)

Brunette youth: (bewildered, nervously looking at Diogenes, then at Socrates) Please, Socrates, tell us why he treats you in such a way and why you do not respond to him, perhaps not in kind, but, surely there is more that you could do than to stand alone in silence...

Socrates: (once again he turns, raising his right index finger, but is interrupted by further provocations of Diogenes...)

Diogenes: (wild taunts and incitations) Yes, indeed Socrates! Why do I treat you in the way I do, and you in the way you do - please, for the sake of the children, these youths, let us resolve our war, and begin a discourse - let us seek a third for arbitration, let us cast chance to the wind and see where these draughts will fall, can you meet me, Socrates, a friend to a friend?

Socrates: (turns to the youths, hesitates, looks across the several gatherings of people here and there, avoids any glance at Diogenes, turns back to the youths and ends his silence) I would like to ask you on what occasion and in which situation you heard about me and the discourses which often take place, here and elsewhere. To whom did you speak - who spoke of me to you?

Blond youth: (hesitant, with increasing confidence) It is not very simple to pin point a time, or a place it is like whispers in the wind... one hears of

events, words and mouths proliferate over intricate expanses - it was in the air, we decided to come and see for ourselves, with hope in our hearts your words would shine upon the world for us and disclose the truth of that which is...

Diogenes: (taunts Socrates, grasps his cock through his garments, shouts up to Socrates, to the laughter of many standing there) It seems very clear to me that you are in love with your new friends, oh, dear master, or at least they are in love with you, that these will give you plenty of young fruit to pluck before its own proper time. Here Socrates, grab hold so it will take you up to the sky. (Diogenes throws an apple from a cart at Socrates, who, unable to avoid being hit by the apple, catches it.)

Socrates: (walking slowly to replace the apple in the cart, begins to speak to the youths who walk along with him up four steps.) The stories of old often warn about a gift of apples, my dears, surely, there is little reason to disregard these warnings even now.

Blond youth: (places his hand on Socrates' shoulder) However, when you speak of apples, do you not give to Diogenes the recognition he craves? Has not Diogenes won the battle today - precisely when you caught the apple, or, even when you turned, and made yourself ready to catch that apple. At that moment, you and Diogenes were as one.

Diogenes: (laughing and mocking, places a false crown on his head and displays his manhood proudly to anyone who will look) Oh yes, Socrates and myself, merged, mixed together as a chemists potion, with bubbles and smoke! My Desire Fulfilled!

Socrates: (quiet with a look of perplexity, questions the youth) Are you to have me believe that you consider a rejection of some thing or event under the sun, to be an affirmation of this thing? Are you saying that a no is a yes? Are these not distinct?

Blond youth: (taken aback, but seemingly resolute) But, Socrates, it is just that, as I see the situation -

Socrates: (cuts off the youth, asking abruptly) And, how do you see the situation, and what is this situation?

Blond youth: (stunned, at a loss for words, then composes himself) It seems to me that you have been studiously avoiding contact with Diogenes, despite, or perhaps because of, his provocations. This very comportment of avoidance, however, becomes in itself the way you are yourself with respect to him, unless, of course, you are prepared to deny that he in fact exists. You avoid him, pretend not to see, hear him - you seem to recoil from him -

Brunette youth: (nervous) Is Diogenes a poisonous snake, Socrates?

Blond youth: (continues) This withdrawal veils an awareness - confirmed when you turn to catch the ball... thrown from his hand. He forced you to acknowledge him, giving you no way out... (blond youth pauses as Socrates smiles ever so slightly) Socrates - that is how I remember the situation.

Socrates: (unabashed, interrogates the youth) Then, you do assert that a no is a yes! That is strange enough, but what kind of 'yes' is it? Is it a yes-no which means the presence of absence? Or, is it a no-yes which is a rejection of something, in the act of saying yes to what most concerns oneself? Is it 'something' else besides? Is it no-thing? How can a no be a yes? Is this not something from nothing? Where - is nothing? Is 'nothing' not simply anoth---

Aristophanes (leans against a pillar, chewing on a twig, looks down and then across and up, listening, when he interrupts Socrates) Oh no, here we go again! For the sake of the gods, why don't you just answer the goddamned question?! What is 'it'?

Socrates: (nonplussed) Dear man, it is not such a simple matter as you would make out - 'it' is something to be learned, all extremely complicated, most of it over your head, I would assume... (smiles)

Aristophanes: (pretending to be serious and learned, sarcastic) I am a man like the rest who wishes to know what he can stand, but I would confess that I could stand a tad more truth from you. It is tiresome and joyless to witness your incessant evasions. A simple question is asked of you, and here we go again, once more into the clouds! If only it could be wished that your love of clouds would not intimate a hatred for the light of the sky.

Socrates: (miffed) What would you know of the light of the sky, a teller of jokes, a creature of incessant ridicule and ugliness? I see no distinction between you and that over there! (He points to Diogenes who lies on his back masturbating upon the ground, people go about their ways, trying not to step on him).

Aristophanes: (suddenly exasperated, but interrupted by a stranger) You talk of ugliness ---

Stranger: (raises her hand to the sky) If you wish to seek this light of the sky, you must look to the sky, open yourself to the light of the sky, and to the light which shines amid this earth. There is no time to wallow in petty contests in this life. Many are the ways to disclose this light of the sky.

Aristophanes: (anxious to speak) Indeed, there are many voices in which we can give utterance to the truth. Surely, we are not all condemned to the servitude of your "Academy"... if only you would have let be the sacred grove to Academos as it was - from a place of contemplation, you erect a nest of talkers -

Diogenes: (pulling up a woman's cloak as she walks by, she screams as Diogenes sings an ode to womankind)

Open your blind eyes
to this fuzzy truth.
One must look behind
that dress--- veil, we
must look beneath,
between, within, get a
feel for these interstices
of a truth that loves to hide

we must infiltrate secret
places, transgress into
these hidden recesses...
consecrate Truth with
a golden shower!

Stranger: (smiles at Diogenes, who dances like a crab in a circle)
Even this man, my good teacher, expresses a truth of existence -

Diogenes: (laughing joyfully) Let us quench our thirst for truth!

Socrates: (walks over to Plato, whispers something into his ear, he turns toward Aristophanes, ranting) You mock me - my work, but you must know, you must be aware of the impetus for the work that I do, and for the decision of this place of my work. I sought to create a topos of questioning, a place away from the din for the training of the body and soul. We must move away from the square, from the marketplace, the fountain. Academos was the perfect location.

Aristophanes: (disgusted, turns away toward the sunset) Socrates, my dear Socrates, how long have I known you? Each day... never do you fail to surprise me - there is always so much talk about truth, but, as soon as one takes you at your word and seeks to express a truth in one's own manner, one receives your bark, sometimes your bite - Socrates, you will only allow for your truth and no other!

Socrates: (calm and cold, seemingly detached from the situation as he stares out into the horizon) Indeed, my dear jester, there are truths and there is Truth. And, this latter, though it may find a reflection in comedy, in the ugly, or ridiculous, has a trajectory and logic all of its own - beyond comedy... beyond tragedy -

Aristophanes: (increasingly infuriated) You speak as if you could isolate truth, hold it alone, detached, as if it were a thing, one of your possessions, as it sits beyond expression or thought - oh, please tell us wise sage, by what means have you so conquered her?

Diogenes: (he runs up to Socrates and thrusts his cock at Socrates' cloak as if it were a spear) Take that man!! Would you be so bold as to offend the goddess' sanctity with your blasphemous tortures! How dare you violate this noble woman, capture her in your "logic", discipline, punish her, inflict upon her your "Academy"!!!

Stranger: (she walks, traces spirals in this dust - her face bent toward the paving stones) You seem to be haunted by a phantom of truth, intimation of "truth" that abides behind our dancing chaos of myriad disclosures, a single Word underneath these many voices -but, dear sir, is that not the prerogative of the gods themselves? Do you possess the wisdom of the gods? Socrates, do you announce to us all that you are one of the Olympians? Are you a god, man?

Socrates: (taken aback by the question) I am the last one to claim the wisdom of the gods - in fact, the opposite! I know nothing and that is the "missing foundation" of my pursuit of truth - I possess nothing - indeed, a phantom or an intimation may haunt me, but this situation is inexplicable - I merely seek the "truth" ...

Stranger: (draws her fingers around the horizon) But, what is the truth but that which erupts into this light of existence - on what basis do you orchestrate this scenario of pursuit, of going beyond this certain specificity into that "unknown" -- what lures you on?

Socrates: (serious, waving his arms at all that is) All of this - each phantom, each singular thing is severe illusion - distraction - amid this onslaught - & with our admission of ignorance, we must seek out that which steers this all - never to exceed this extreme possibility, its narrowness and limitations - yet we seek, we will continue our pursuit, of the "truth" since we must and we can.

Aristophanes: (unbridled) How could "you" ever consider that to be an answer? This ridiculous, evasive performance -

Stranger: (bends over to pick up pebbles from the pathway) Are you not so

sure that that which you seek is "truth" at all, but perhaps a hideous vortex of nothingness, destruction, and untruth?

Socrates: (closes his eyes as he raises his hands to speak) Each of you have asserted a respective right to expression, and in the manner of each of your particular stations. Why can I not assert the same right as the rest? Do not my words count?

Stranger: (looks into Socrates' eyes) It is not a matter of right or numbers, dear Socrates, but of these phenomena that dance around us, erupt from within us, give voice to themselves. Yet, it is these phenomena, which have been implicated by yourself into the sickness - You have claimed pre-eminence, you have asserted that your Truth is supreme, that all other truths are indeed falsehoods.

Aristophanes: (angrily confronts Socrates) How can you claim common rights to expression when you have said yourself that you have an exclusive, uncommon contact with Truth - you have already rejected our truths, claiming that they are part of the sickness of life, the cure to which is the transcendence into your "nothing". Your very assertion of superiority has shattered the pretension of "rights to" expression - you have vanquished this possibility...

Socrates: (intensely passionate) That which I pursue does exist for myself - I must reserve this sacred right to disclose and to express truth, to have a place for its cultivation and expression. Perhaps such a serious pursuit of truth must occur away from the motley town and this chaos of voices. Why can you not simply let me and those who follow me to have a place of our own to pursue our truth... an outcome acceptable, since you'd soon be rid of me...

Stranger: (crouches down places her arms outstretched on each side breathes in deeply into her lower abdomen) So instead of discourse with us here and amidst this intimate topos, you will withdraw into a different situation - inexhaustibly into yourself -- have you not drowned in yourself, yet, Socrates?

Socrates: (turns & looks the stranger in the eye) I am well aware of questions surrounding the old views, but I sense that within me lies an abyss, which cannot be simply ignored for the sake of mere expediency, the logic of the herd, the knowledge of the 'many'.

Aristophanes: (disgusted, waving his hands at Socrates, "washing his hands of him) Go then to your Academy and pursue your Truth! Lost in the clouds of your "nothing", you will abandon phenomena in the world, deny the truth of the mortal, terrible truth which makes laughter so much a necessity for the weary soul... Yes!! - go away from here, leave us invalids to our disease!!!

Socrates: (resigned, but pleasant with an old adversary) I am not trying to make life worse than it already is, my friend. I simply wish to cultivate this garden of my thought in peace...

Aristophanes: (noble and ceremonial) Then go then, man! Leave us!

Thrasymachus: (having sat quietly making small boats from leaves, sailing them on a shallow skin of water in the fountain, he turns, approaches Aristophanes. Thasymachus shakes his head, warning the Comedian about the departure of Socrates) If only it could be so simple as that, my dearest Comedian! But, it is not as if Socrates is some mystical hermit monk, alone with his God in the forests of virtue. Indeed, his retreat merely masks the hidden tie that binds all of us - dear Aristophanes, you should know as well as anyone what goes on in his "Academy". It is a training ground for the sons of the wealthy, a school for political artisans! It seems that his assertion of the primacy of his own truth over the rest translates into an assertion of power over the many by the one. It is this academy which orchestrates this power! Truth for Socrates is a weapon, his arguments are his knives and spears!

Diogenes: (once again runs at Socrates with his cock out, thrusting it like a sword) I shall face weapon with weapon (Diogenes pushes into Socrates, who become increasingly agitated) I will cut you to pieces Socrates - with my cock!!!

Socrates: (loses his composure and pushes Diogenes away, who falls onto the pavement) Won't you just get away from me you perfidious buffoon - it is from you, and those like you, that we retreat away into the confines of our Academy. A blacksmith trains to learn his craft, a musician his art - why must it be any different for those who steer the craft of the city and the soul?

Thrasymachus: (responds quickly to Socrates) Whether or not there is to be a ritual of exclusion for our tribal warriors and leaders is indeed another question - after all, a more basic question must be raised: by what right do you claim to be a teacher of this craft of the polis, this special artistry of governance - by what right do you pretend to compare yourself to a blacksmith or a musician - you have none of these talents or skills? Your only artistry seems to be in idle chatter and in infecting others with the same.

Socrates: It is my daemon which propels me to seek the truth, and in this search, I have become confronted by so many who claim to know the truth - claim to know the meaning of the words they use - the meaning of justice, of beauty, of truth - my right consists, if it can be described in these terms at all, in the fact that I have asserted the question to those who know or claim to know. And what is more, in many or most of the cases, these knowers, together with their well paid teachers, have been exposed to know nothing at all.

Stranger: (walks around the two men) Socrates, your demonic act of questioning is like a wild fire that cannot be extinguished. It is not that you in fact possess any of these things which you claim to pursue - you have nothing to say, no way to defend yourself... even if you feel ---

Thasymachus: (impatient with the Stranger) It is all well and good to try to understand Socrates. However, simply because many people are either unskilled in his tortuous rhetoric or in the fact that many truths or manners of expression cannot find fertile ground in the procedural chains of his logic - these by no means establish the legitimacy of his claims. Indeed, it is not that we seek to silence his questioning, but instead to place his presumptuousness into question - he himself has no knowledge as he claims, and his methods seem to portray others as without knowledge. In this way, he claims to discredit them, but, at the same time,

suggests that at the very least, it is he alone who is "serious" about truth and the possibility of its pursuit. Often, indeed, he "proves" his utter commitment to truth by pointing out that he, unlike many of the teachers in the schools, receives no fee for his work. But, this rather bad theatre only shifts our original question of truth and the possibility of its expression into the domain of the polis. Yet, as we have seen, such a political notion of truth is wed only to interest and power, even if such interest is not that of wealth, but a daemonic interest in power itself, a will to power.

Socrates: (impatient and self-righteous) I have already confessed to my mortality, to my embeddedness amidst an horizon of limit - at one and the same moment, however, I yearn for transcendence, driven to seek that which is without limit - the unlimited...

Thrasymachus: (angry, hot-headed) Disregarding the gibberish that sometimes comes out of your mouth - and I am being very generous I think on your behalf - I fail to understand why, since you so graciously have admitted that you are embedded, finite - indeed that you are in fact ignorant - why we should accept that which you have to say about the matter - you speak vaguely of a yearning, but you are mortal, like the rest - why should we believe you and not the many others who speak of truth, wisdom. What of those who you so crassly castigate as "sophists", these teachers in the schools?

Socrates: (answers coldly, with a sign) I have never claimed to possess the truth, I merely seek the truth, one that is unlikely to be found amidst mortal existence. Yet, if there is a public claim to truth, I am obliged, as a seeker of truth to interrogate such a claim. Indeed, I am brought to the question, since if the claim is true, it would fulfill my own pursuit of transcendence. It is not the case I seek power. My inability to escape implication amid a matrix of power does not necessarily imply that my motivation is power, that I am a "will to power". My search for "truth" entails an opposite effect --- to dismantle "truths", explode these learned pretensions of power, and thus, to dissipate power. I do not seek power, but the very traces of truth.

Thrasymachus: (agitated) But why should we even believe you when you say that you know where to look for the truth. If you are a mere mortal,

what distinguishes you from any other claim of truth, even if such a claim fails in its articulation, even if it cannot conform to your method of badgering the witness. Indeed, you must harbour some pretension of your own - that you do have something that is akin to transcendence, to the truth - as you yourself admit there is an interest in your questioning, for if there was not, you would simply not be driven to ask the question. Socrates, do y--

Stranger: (cuts her off strokes her hand through the air toward the ground & towards the adjacent walls) If you possess transcendence, then you have moved beyond mortality - this would mean that you are a god. Again - are you a god, Socrates?

Socrates: (frustrated and cut off) I have never claimed to possess transcendence, or truth, or unlimitedness, but, my competing drives coalesce to allow yearning for this ecstasy to find satisfaction in the pursuit of such transcendence -

Stranger: (uncomprehending, perplexed) You seem to be a nest of snakes, Socrates, all fighting with each other. On one hand, you a mortal, but with some strange longing - your daemon drives you on to seek that which is not!

Aristophanes: (cuts off the stranger) Socrates, how are you to find that which is not, when you are here & now, as you exist. How could you have any contact with that which is not, if you would yourself have to be akin to this nothing if you were to know it - indeed, if you were to have any inkling of it in the first place?

Socrates: (suddenly inspired) Nothing is only a bad word for the transcendence which we seek - no thing, but the condition of things - One could claim that this pursuit of the condition itself gives us transcendence 'in the act' - I do not transcend interest, I do not seek to slice interest out of myself since my soul seeks that which it desires, what it craves. Driven on and incessantly moved by some inexplicable desire for transcendence, even amidst mortal existence, I am transcending -

Aristophanes: (laughing) Oh no, Socrates!, I think that you have spoken

against yourself - you'll certainly be embarrassed in front of your pretty youths! You have said that something, existence is a nothing, is nothingness - that is what you seek! You say that a no is a yes and a yes is a no - But, you won't admit the truth and that is why you are truly a seeker of power, manipulator - perhaps you are only concerned with destruction.

Socrates: (angry, but resolved) I remain interested in truth, dear jester, and it is in questioning, in "truthing", that truth is to be sought, is to exist. The question seeks truth, in the event -

Stranger: (turns with her back to Socrates) Dear Socrates, we hear what you say on your behalf, but we fail to understand... you seek that which is not, that drive which overwhelms you - what you have called your daemon. What is this daemon, Socrates?

Socrates: (distant, but deep within) I am nothing, ignorant, but I seek to be everything, to know everything - admitting however that such a goal will not be possible in this single life - this state of existence is finite, and thus, it will never allow what I seek in its primal excession. I am seeking the divine, to which I will transcend as I am cured of my mortality. In this sense, life is a sickness - my daemon answers the call of Asclepius.

Diogenes: (runs to Socrates with a single candle in his left hand) Are you sick, my dear one? Did you bring this plague on yourself? Are you so stupid as to put your pecker in a pot of poison?

Socrates: (turns around, serious, stares past Diogenes at his face) I have never denied that I am mortal ---- I do not wish to speak to you! Please just leave me b----

Aristophanes: (cuts off Socrates, seeks an answer) We all know that you are not some judge standing with your hammer over all... look at you, listen to you! You become more ridiculous each day, more ridiculous than Diogenes!!! I could never take you seriously!

Socrates: (utter desperation, turns toward the youths) For a moment we share the world - destroyed by our own impetuosity - I merely sought that, this, which is other than this that was there, here... We sought to clear a space for a cultivation of truth... wisdom ...

Stranger: (persistent) Dear Socrates, your goal is admirable, but it remains obscure... you should answer our questions --- how is it that you have an intimation of truth? How do you know that this drive is a drive to truth, and, not instead a drive to destruction, to nothingness? (While she is asking him questions, Socrates turns his face away and walks from a dry fountain, past the people toward the pathway leading to Academos. The stranger shouts out questions after him) What is your daemon Socrates - is it truly your friend, or, is it your seducer, your killer? Is it a fissure in the heart of your soul - an invasion of the world, perhaps a dissemination of being with nothingness. Again Socrates - is 'no' a 'yes' & a 'yes' a 'no'? (He continues to walk in silence, stares at the ground...)

Diogenes: (running after Socrates, hopping up & down jacking off, he circles Socrates, who simply walks on oblivious to all that is) Oh dear one, will you never speak to us again, will silence emerge amidst this existence of many selves, each one shines - Socrates - why do you persist in your pathetic distance? You know better than anyone!!! (Socrates walks unaffected) Are you an honest man?!!!

(Socrates continues to walk silently toward the grove of Academos)