John Ma (Columbia) *Political Culture in the Roman-Era Polis: Patterns and Gaps*

Focus item: Dio Oration 43
THE FORTY-THIRD DISCOURSE

THE FORTY-THIRD DISCOURSE: A POLITICAL ADDRESS IN HIS NATIVE CITY

According to the fable, a Lydian had no troubles, but he went out and bought some. Very well, the Lydian deserved to have troubles, seeing that he himself desired them; as for myself, on the other hand, although I have no desire for troubles, I have them because of ineffectual, envious fellows for no other reason than that I am thought to be fond of you, and because I have already done some good turns to my native city, having raised it to the level of the leading cities in the matter of distinction, and, God willing, shall do it other good turns in the future. And I have said this, not as a bit of idle boasting—for you know yourselves that I have never referred to these services of mine in all the many speeches I have delivered in your hearing—but rather in self-defence against those who eye with malice you and me, in order that, if such a thing is possible, they may burst with rage—which from the standpoint of the city as a whole is the best thing that could happen—or else that they may at least suffer pain. But that the same persons dislike me as dislike the city you yourselves can testify, if you

1. Doubtless he refers to his efforts to beautify Prusa, a topic to which he frequently recurs in these Bithynian addresses, and also to the concessions which he had secured regarding
Council and judiciary (cf. Or. 40. 15 and 33 and Or. 45. 7).

2 Not strictly true unless the present speech antedates Or. 40, 45, and 47. It is true, however, that he has not stressed his services unduly.
care to recollect both those who love and those who hate you. And yet they treat me more fairly than they treat you; for they accuse me here, whereas they accuse you from the witness-box.\(^1\)

Now if I am seen to employ illustrations from Greek history, as is my habit, don’t jeer at me. For I am not showing scorn for my fatherland, nor do I suppose you to be incapable of understanding such matters for yourselves, nor do I regard either Assembly or Council as ignorant. Therefore, I desire most of all that you should have the character which is Greek and be neither ungrateful nor unintelligent; but if that is asking too much, it is at least not a bad plan to listen to words which, in my opinion, might improve your character.\(^2\)

Very well then, what is my illustration? There was a certain man in Thebes called Epaminondas;\(^3\) he loved his country above all else; and, seizing such opportunities as existed at that period, he performed for it many great services.
For, instead of the craven, helpless, subservient people they had been, he made them foremost among the Greeks and contenders for leadership. For in those days these things were possible, whereas to-day the times are different—though of course goodwill and devotion are always the same. For the breed of traitors and informers and persons who do anything to harm their

1 An indication that he is speaking in Assembly and not in court.
2 Dio not infrequently draws upon Greek tradition to point a moral, as will be seen by referring to the index of this and preceding volumes. That he was conscious that by so doing he might be thought to be making a parade of learning is plain not only from this passage but from others, e.g., Or. 50. 2.
3 In spite of the rhetorical bouquet thrown to the people of Prusa in § 3, the words with which Epaminondas is here introduced make one wonder how much they really knew about him.
4 Thebes was leader in Greece from Leuctra to Mantinea (371–362 B.C.).
fellow citizens existed in the cities even then; moreover, while patriots and men who do not wish their fellow citizens to suffer any harm and who are ambitious to exalt their country were plentiful then and performed mighty deeds, they are fewer now and not able to perform as many noble deeds.

However that may be, the famous Epaminondas was hated by those who were not like him, and there were some who maligned him, and the common people—as the common people will—did not understand and were misled. And on one occasion one of the desperate, disfranchised group, a fellow who had done any and every thing to harm the city when it was in slavery and ruled by a dictator, abused Epaminondas in town meeting and said many harsh things—for every man who is a liar seeks to discover, not what he can say that is true, being unable
to say anything that is true, but rather something offensive. Now when Epaminondas himself in turn took the floor, he did not speak regarding the other matters, nor did he defend himself against a single charge, but he merely said to his accuser, speaking in his own Boeotian dialect, “May Damater be wroth wi’ ye!” But the Thebans on hearing that were delighted and burst into laughter, as well they might, recalling, I suspect, the friendliness of Epaminondas toward the people and the scurvy conduct of the man who was trying to vilify him. Accordingly, if a certain person should say to me something I do not deserve, whether in plain terms or in figurative language to win renown as an orator—though his own figure is far from comely1—I shall use toward him the reply of Epaminondas.

1 Dio is punning on σχήματος and εὐσχήμων.
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DIO CHRYSOSTOM, Discourses 43. A Political Address  
LCL 376: 180-181

Dio Chrysostom

But rest assured that they do and say these things because they are irked at my presence here in Prusa, and for no other reason; for I do not lie in wait for any of the citizens, nor do I take pay from anybody, nor do I stand ready to levy tribute on your country, nor do I make myself a nuisance to anyone in the market-place—for I am no orator—nor have I defended anyone in court, save one luckless fellow alone whom I saved from being torn to pieces by his kinsmen and guardians, after they had first stolen his documents and pillaged much of his estate and afterwards tried by false witness to ruin him; but I have spoken in no other case at law, so that I am in no respect offensive to any one. No, it is with the purpose that in case a crisis ever arises such as certain persons pray for, a crisis similar to that earlier one—the kind that is not going to arise—but supposing that it should, the purpose is, I say, to prevent my being present to aid the commons, and to insure that the victims of blackmail shall not even have any one to intercede for them or to express sympathy for them; that, I repeat, is why a certain person is incensed that I am here in Prusa. For if there were several to assume that rôle—as indeed...
there are—no one would speak more readily than I; and I can speak to you more frankly than any one else. The reason is that I have both sacrificed for you my own good fortune and also shared with you

1 See Introduction.
2 The young man is otherwise unknown.
3 The “crisis” probably occurred in the proconsulship of Bassus. At that time Dio seems to have defended certain members of the commons in town meeting. His confidence as to the future suggests that he has used his influence with Trajan, or else is about to do so.
4 On several occasions Dio speaks of sacrificing his own interests to the welfare of the state, meaning his preoccupation with public business to the neglect of his own property, e.g., Or. 47. 20; but here he may well be referring to his recent visit at the court of Trajan, when he neglected to make personal capital out of the Emperor's friendship in order to secure favours for Prusa (Or. 45. 3).
 Dio Chrysostom

8 ὑμετέρας μετέλαβον. καὶ νῦν δεὶ με ἀποδημεῖν, οὐχ ὡς πρότερον ἀλύπως, πάντων με ἀγαπώντων καὶ θαυμαζόντων, ἀλλὰ μετ’ ἐχθρῶν τινῶν· ἐπεὶ αὐτός γε οὐδέν ἔπαθον κακών·

οὐ γὰρ πώποτ’ ἔμας βοῦς ἠλάσαν οὐδὲ μὲν ἵππους.

Οὐ μέντοι θαυμάζω τὰ παρόντα πράγματα· ἐπεὶ καὶ Σωκράτης ἐκεῖνος, οὐ μέμνημαι παλλάκια, ἐπεὶ μὲν τῇ τυραννίδι τῶν τριάκοντα ἔπραττε πάντα ὑπὲρ τοῦ δήμου καὶ τῶν κακῶν οὐδενὸς ἔκοινώσει, ἀλλὰ καὶ πεμφθεὶς ὑπ’ αὐτῶν ἐπὶ Δέοντα τῶν Σαλαμίνων οὐχ ὑπῆκουσε, καὶ τοῖς τυράννοις ἀντίκρισε, λέγων ὁμοίους εἶναι τοῖς πονηροῖς βουκόλοις, οἱ παραλαβόντες ἀκριβῶς τὰς βοῦς τίτλοις καὶ πολλάς, ὀλίγας καὶ ἀσθενεστέρας ποιοῦσιν·

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The Forty-Third Discourse

your ill fortune. And now I must leave my country, not, as on that other occasion, without repining, attended as I then was by the affection and admiration of all, but rather attended by the enmity of some; since I myself have suffered no harm,

For never did they lift my cows or mares.

However, I am not surprised at my present troubles; since even the famous Socrates, whom I have often mentioned, during the tyranny of the Thirty did everything in behalf of the people and took no part in the crimes of that regime, but, when ordered by the Thirty to fetch Leon of Salamis, he refused to obey, and he openly reviled the tyrants, saying they were like wicked herdsmen, who, having received the cows when strong and numerous, make them few and weaker; but nevertheless it was by the government of the people, on whose account he then
risked his life, that later on when that government was flourishing, because he had been slandered by certain informers, he was put to death. Now his accuser was Meletus, a loathsome fellow, and a liar too. Said he, “Socrates is guilty of corrupting the young men and of not honouring the deities whom the city honours but of introducing other new divinities”—virtually the very opposite to what Socrates was wont to do. For not only did he

1 Presumably his journey to Rome to congratulate Trajan, A.D. 100.
2 Iliad 1. 154, spoken by Achilles to Agamemnon. This quotation is an indication that the coming journey to which he has just referred involved no selfish interest. It seems likely that Dio planned to go to Rome to use his influence against Bassus and his henchman in the trial which was soon to take place. That would account for the phrase “attended by the enmity of some.”
3 404 B.C.
4 Plato, Apology 32 c–d, records the Leon episode. The reproof of the Thirty is given by Xenophon, Memorabilia 1. 2. 32.
5 399 B.C.
6 Dio’s version of the charge is nearly identical with Apology 24 B.
Dio Chrysostom

honour the gods more than did anybody else, but he had composed a hymn in praise of Apollo and Artemis, this paean which even now I myself am wont to chant, and he tried to prevent, not merely the young men, but their elders too, from being corrupted, rebuking and reproving them, in case any one was greedy or licentious or tried to make money out of politics, some by arranging an acquittal for a bribe, some by blackmailing people, and some by pillaging the wretched islanders on the pretext of tribute or in connexion with the drafting of soldiers, just as some men are doing in Prusa. This is why they hated him and claimed he was corrupting the young men.

But my bill of indictment was longer and, one might say, nobler, a sort of occult bill apparently: "Dio is guilty, first, of not honouring the gods either with sacrifices or with hymns, by abolishing the festivals of our fathers; secondly, of so
misleading a wicked proconsul⁴ as to cause him to torture the people and to banish as many as possible, and even to put some to death, making it necessary for them to die a voluntary death because, old as they were, they could not go into exile or endure to abandon their native land; thirdly, of co-operating in everything even now with the man who took the role of tyrant over our nation, and of arranging, so far as it is in his power to arrange, that that tyrant shall be successful

1. Diogenes Laertius (2. 5. 22) preserves a single line from a hymn in which these deities are named, and says that Dionysodorus denied that Socrates was its author.
2. A scholium on Aristophanes, Acharnians 6, reports that Cleon was detected at that trick and made to disgorge. Presumably he had taken bribes to lower the assessment of some of the member states. “Islanders” was the usual term applied to the states allied with Athens in the fifth century B.C.
in his struggle and shall take by force the cities and their popular governments; fourthly, of spoiling even democracy itself, setting himself up as its accuser, and with his own words and tongue committing crimes against his fellow citizens, yes, the members of his own community, and doing many other things which I am ashamed to specify; fifthly, of making himself a bad example of laziness and high-living and faithlessness for both young and old; and sixthly, of bribing the masses, so that no one may reproach him with what was done in those days, but that people may instead acquire a sort of forgetfulness of his hatred and treachery.

Well then, men of Prusa, I shall defend myself against these charges, and if it seems good to you when you have heard me, condemn me; for the Athenians heard Socrates before they condemned him.

1. Apparently the henchman of Bassus is trying to marshal in defence of his master as many Bithynians as possible. The language here used by Dio is manifestly figurative.
2. I.e., in the proconsulship of Bassus.
3. As in the case of the charges which Dio disclaims in § 6, this bill of indictment also may be assumed to apply, not to Dio, but to his arch-enemy.