

CLCS4009: READING ANTIQUITY: A SURVEY OF ANCIENT LITERATURE

LECTURE 11 (WEEK 5) WORKSHOP: SPEECHES, POWER AND POLITICS

WORKSHOP TASK

Choose one of the following speeches and, in groups, consider the following questions:

- ☐ What techniques does the speech writer use to persuade the Athenians?
 - ☐ How does the speech writer attempt to prove his credibility?
 - ☐ How does the speech writer attempt to disprove his opponents' credibility?
 - ☐ How does the speech writer unite the private and public spheres of life?
 - ☐ What other rhetorical techniques can see being used in your speech?
 - ☐ To what extent can these speeches be used for understanding history?
 - ☐ How successful do you think the speech writer is and why?
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[1] Demosthenes *On the Peace*

I perceive, men of Athens, that the present outlook gives rise to much vexation and perplexity, because not only have we suffered serious losses, which cannot be mended by fine speeches, but there is also complete divergence of opinion about the preservation of what is left of our empire, one favouring this policy, another that. [2] While deliberation is naturally a vexatious and difficult task, you, Athenians, have enhanced its difficulties; for all other people deliberate before the event, but you after the event. And the result is that, as long as I can remember, the man who attacks any mistakes you have made gains your applause as an able speaker, but meanwhile the events and the real object of your deliberation wholly escape you. [3] Nevertheless, although this is so, I have come forward in the belief and confidence that, if you will consent to still the noise of faction and listen with the attention that befits men who are debating the most important interests of the state, I shall be able to offer you advice which will ameliorate our present condition and redeem our past losses [4]

While I am well aware, Athenians, that to talk in this assembly about oneself and one's own speeches is a very profitable practice, if one has the necessary effrontery, I feel that it is so vulgar and so offensive that, though I see the necessity, I shrink from it. I believe, however, that you will form a better judgement of what I am going to propose, if I remind you of a few things that I have said on former occasions. [5] For in the first place, Athenians, when it was proposed to take advantage of the unrest in Euboea and side with Plutarchus in a war that would bring us more expense than glory, I was the first and indeed the only speaker to oppose it, and I narrowly escaped being torn to pieces by those who induced you for trifling gains to commit many serious errors. It was not long before you incurred disgrace and suffered indignities such as no men have ever received from those whom they have helped, and so you realized the baseness of those to whom you then gave ear and the wisdom of the advice you received from me. [6] Again, men of Athens, when I saw that Neoptolemus, the actor, enjoying safe conduct under cover of his profession, was doing his best to injure our city and was Philip's agent and representative at Athens, I once more came forward and addressed you, not out of private animosity or love of informing, as indeed my subsequent conduct has

proved. [7] And I shall not in this case, as in the former one, find fault with those who spoke in defence of Neoptolemus, for not a man defended him, but with yourselves. For if it had been a tragedy in the theatre of Dionysus that you were watching and not a debate on the very existence of your state, you could not have shown more partiality to him and more ill-will against me. [8] Yet I suppose that by this time you have all observed that after visiting the enemy, in order, as he alleged, to collect sums owing to him there which he might spend on public services here, and after making copious use of the argument that it was too bad to arraign men who were transferring wealth from Macedonia to Athens, he secured a safe conduct owing to the peace, converted into cash all the real property that he held here, and has absconded to Philip. [9] There, then, you have two of my warnings, bearing testimony to the value of my earlier speeches, and uttered by me honestly and in strict conformity with the facts. Thirdly, men of Athens—and when I have given just this one further instance, I will at once pass on to some topics that I have omitted—when we ambassadors returned from administering the oaths for the peace, [10] at that time there were some who assured us that Thespieae and Plataea would be rebuilt, that Philip, if he gained the mastery, would protect the Phocians and break up Thebes into villages, and that you would retain Oropus and receive Euboea in exchange for Amphipolis. Led on by these false hopes and cajoleries, you abandoned the Phocians against your own interests and against justice and honour. But you will find that I neither took part in this deception, nor passed it over in silence, but spoke out boldly, as I am sure you remember, saying that I had neither knowledge nor expectation of such results and that all such talk was nonsense. [11]

Now all these instances, where I appear to have had a clearer foresight than the rest, I shall not refer to a single cause, men of Athens—my real or pretended cleverness; nor will I claim that my knowledge and discernment were due to anything else than two things, which I will mention. One, men of Athens, was good luck, which my experience tells me is worth all the cleverness and wisdom in the world. [12] The second is this: on public questions my estimates and decisions are disinterested, and no one can show that my policy and my speeches have been in any way bound up with my private gain. Hence I always see accurately the advantageous course as suggested by actual circumstances. But the instant you throw money into one scale, its weight bears down the judgement with it; and for him that has once done this, accurate and sound calculation becomes utterly impossible. [13]

Now there is one precaution which I think essential. If anyone proposes to negotiate for our city an alliance or a joint contribution or anything of the sort, it must be done without detriment to the existing peace. I do not mean that the peace is a glorious one or even creditable to you, but, whatever we may think of it, it would better suit our purpose never to have made it than to violate it when made, because we have now sacrificed many advantages which would have made war safer and easier for us than now. [14] The second precaution, men of Athens, is to avoid giving the self-styled Amphictyons now assembled any call or excuse for a crusade against us. For if we should hereafter come to blows with Philip, about Amphipolis or in any private quarrel not shared by the Thessalians or the Argives or the Thebans, I do not believe for a moment that any of the latter would be dragged into the war, least of all— [15] hear me before you shout me down—least of all the Thebans. I do not mean that they regard us with favour or that they would not readily oblige Philip, but they do realize quite clearly, for all the stolidity that people attribute to them, that if they ever fight you, they will have to take all the hard knocks themselves, and someone else will sit quietly by, waiting for the spoils. Therefore they would never make such a sacrifice unless the war had a common cause and origin. [16] If we went to war again with the Thebans about Oropus or for some other private reason, I do not think we should suffer, for both their allies and ours would, of course, offer support, if their own territory were invaded, but would not

join either side in aggression. That is the way with every alliance worth considering, and such is the natural result. [17] No individual ally is so fond either of us or of the Thebans as to regard our security and our supremacy in the same light. Secure they would all have us, for their own sakes; that either nation should gain supremacy and be their master would suit none of them. What, then, is the danger that I think we must guard against? Lest the inevitable war should afford all states a common pretext and a common ground of complaint. [18] For if the Argives and Messenians and Megalopolitans, and other Peloponnesians who side with them, quarrel with us because of our embassy to Sparta and because they think that we have some interest in Lacedaemonian policy; and if the Thebans are, as people admit, hostile and likely to be even more so, because we offer an asylum to their exiles and make no disguise of our hostility to them in every way; [19] and if the Thessalians dislike us because we protect the Phocian fugitives, and Philip because we are trying to exclude him from the Amphictyonic Council; then I am afraid that these separate powers, having each a private grudge, may make common cause against us on the strength of the Amphictyonic decrees, and may then be tempted to go beyond what their several interests require, as they were in the case of the Phocians. [20] For of course you realize that in the present case the Thebans and Philip and the Thessalians have acted in complete unison, though with widely different aims. The Thebans, for instance, were powerless to prevent Philip from pressing on and seizing the passes, or from coming in at the finish and usurping the credit of their previous exertions. [21] Hence today the Thebans have been partially successful in recovering territory, but have failed lamentably to win honour and glory; for they would presumably have gained nothing if Philip had not passed Thermopylae. That was not what they wanted, but they put up with it all because they had the will, though not the power, to grasp Orchomenus and Coronea. [22] Now some people actually go so far as to say that Philip was compelled, against his real wishes, to hand over Orchomenus and Coronea to the Thebans. For my part I wish them joy of their opinion. I only know this, that Philip was less interested in those towns than desirous to secure the pass, to win for himself the credit of finishing off the Sacred War, and to preside at the Pythian games. That was the summit of his ambition. [23] But the Thessalians aimed at the aggrandizement neither of Thebes nor of Philip, because they felt that all that would tell against them; but they were anxious to control the council at Thermopylae and the Delphian temple—two clear gains for them; and it was this ambition that led them to join in the war. So you will find that each of these powers was induced for private reasons to do much that it did not wish. That, however, is emphatically what we must avoid. [24]

“Must we then,” you ask, “do as we are told for fear of the consequences? Do you of all men advise that?” Far from it. No, I think we ought so to act as to do nothing unworthy of Athens and yet avoid war; we ought to show to all men our good sense and the justice of our claims. To those who think we ought boldly to risk everything, and who do not foresee the inevitable hostilities, I suggest the following consideration. We are allowing the Thebans to keep Oropus; and if anyone should ask us to tell him candidly why we do so, we should have to answer, “In order to avoid war.” [25] In the same way by agreement with Philip we have waived our claim to Amphipolis, and we are permitting Cardia to be excepted from the rest of the Chersonese, the Carian to occupy the islands of Chios, Cos, and Rhodes, and the Byzantines to detain our ships in harbour, obviously because we think that the respite which the peace affords is more productive of advantages than wrangling and coming to blows over these points. Therefore it is sheer folly and perversity, after dealing with the powers one by one on matters of vital concern to ourselves, to challenge them all together to fight about this phantom at Delphi.

[2] Demosthenes *Second Philippic*

Whenever, men of Athens, we are discussing Philip's intrigues and his violations of the peace, I observe that all the speeches on our side are manifestly inspired by justice and generosity, and those who denounce Philip are all felt to be saying exactly the right thing; but of the much needed action, which alone would make the speeches worth hearing, little or nothing ensues. [2] Unfortunately all our national affairs have now reached to such a pass, that the more completely and manifestly Philip is convicted of violating the peace with us and of plotting against the whole of Greece, the more difficult it is to suggest the right course of action. [3] The reason, Athenians, is this. Though all who aim at their own aggrandizement must be checked, not by speeches, but by practical measures, yet, in the first place, we who come before you shrink from any definite proposal or advice, being reluctant to incur your displeasure; we prefer to dilate on Philip's shocking behaviour and the like topics; and, secondly, you who sit here are indeed better equipped than Philip for making speeches about justice and for appreciating them in the mouth of another, but, when it comes to hindering the accomplishment of his present plans, you remain utterly inactive. [4] The result is, I suppose, inevitable and perhaps reasonable. Where either side devotes its time and energy, there it succeeds the better—Philip in action, but you in argument. So if you still think it enough to employ the sounder arguments, that is easy; your task entails no trouble. [5] But if you have to devise means whereby our present fortunes shall be repaired, and their further decline shall not take us completely by surprise, and we shall not be confronted by a mighty power which we shall be unable even to withstand, then our method of deliberation must be changed, and all who speak and all who listen must choose the best and safest policy instead of the easiest and most agreeable. [6]

In the first place, Athenians, if anyone views with confidence the present power of Philip and the extent of his dominions, if anyone imagines that all this imports no danger to our city and that you are not the object of his preparations, I must express my astonishment, and beg you all alike to listen to a brief statement of the considerations that have led me to form the opposite conclusion and to regard Philip as our enemy. Then, if you think me the better prophet, adopt my advice; if you prefer those who have so confidently trusted him, give them your allegiance. [7] Now I, men of Athens, reason thus. What did Philip first get under his control after the Peace? Thermopylae and the Phocian government. Well, what did he make of these? He chose to act in the interests of Thebes, not of Athens. And why so? Because, I believe, guided in his calculations by ambition and the desire of universal dominion, regardless of the claims of peace and quietness and justice, [8] he rightly saw that to our city and our national character he could offer nothing, he could do nothing, that would tempt you from selfish motives to sacrifice to him any of the other Greek states, but that you, reverencing justice, shrinking from the discredit involved in such transactions, and exercising due and proper forethought, would resist any such attempt on his part as stoutly as if you were actually at war with him. [9] But as to the Thebans, he believed—and the event justified him—that in return for benefits received they would give him a free hand for the future and, so far from opposing or thwarting him, would even join forces with him, if he so ordered. Today, on the same assumption, he is doing the Messenians and the Argives a good turn. That, men of Athens, is the highest compliment he could pay you. [10] For by these very acts you stand judged the one and only power in the world incapable of abandoning the common rights of the Greeks at any price, incapable of bartering your devotion to their cause for any favor or any profit. And it was natural that he should form this opinion of you and the contrary opinion of the Argives and Thebans, because he not merely looks to the present, but also draws a lesson from the past. [11] For I suppose he learns from history and from report

that your ancestors, when they might, at the price of submission to the Great King, have become the paramount power in Greece, not only refused to entertain that proposal, conveyed to them by Alexander, an ancestor of Philip's line, but chose to quit their homes and endure every hardship, and thereafter wrought those deeds which all men are always eager to relate, though no one has ever been able to tell them worthily; and therefore I shall not be wrong in passing them over, for they are indeed great beyond any man's power of speech. On the other hand, he learns that the ancestors of these Thebans and Argives either fought for the barbarians or did not fight against them. [12] He knows, then, that they both will pursue their private interests, irrespective of the common advantage of the Greeks. So he thought that if he chose you, he would be choosing friends, and that your friendship would be based on justice; but that if he attached himself to the others, he would find in them the tools of his own ambition. That is why, now as then, he chooses them rather than you. For surely it is not that he regards their fleets as superior to ours, nor that, having discovered some inland empire, he has abandoned the seaboard with its harbours, nor yet that he has a short memory for the speeches and the promises that gained for him the Peace. [13]

But it may be urged, by someone who claims to know all about it, that he acted on that occasion, not from ambition or from any of those motives with which I find fault, but because the claims of the Thebans were more just than ours. Now that is precisely the one argument that he cannot use now. What! The man who orders the Lacedaemonians to give up their claims to Messene, how could he pretend that he handed over Orchomenus and Coronea to Thebes because he thought it an act of justice? [14]

“But,” it will be urged (for there is this excuse left), “he was forced to yield against his better judgement, finding himself hemmed in between the Thessalian cavalry and the Theban heavy infantry.” Good! So they say he is waiting to regard the Thebans with suspicion, and some circulate a rumour that he will fortify Elatea. [15] That is just what he is “waiting” to do, and will go on “waiting,” in my opinion. But he is not “waiting” to help the Messenians and Argives against the Lacedaemonians: he is actually dispatching mercenaries and forwarding supplies, and he is expected in person with a large force. What! The Lacedaemonians, the surviving enemies of Thebes, he is engaged in destroying; the Phocians, whom he has himself already destroyed, he is now engaged in preserving! And who is prepared to believe that? [16] For my part I do not believe that Philip, if he acted in the first place reluctantly and under compulsion, or if he were now inclined to throw the Thebans over, would be persistently opposing their enemies. But if we may judge from his present conduct, it is plain that on that occasion also he acted from deliberate choice, and everything, if correctly observed, points to the fact that all his intrigues are directed against Athens. [17] And today at any rate this policy is in a measure forced upon him. For observe! He wants to rule, and he has made up his mind that you, and you only, are his rivals. He has long injured you; of nothing is he more conscious than of that. For it is by holding the cities which are really yours that he retains safe possession of all the rest, and he feels that if he gave up Amphipolis and Potidaea, his own country would not be safe for him. [18] He knows, then, these two facts—that he is intriguing against you and that you are aware of it. Assuming that you are intelligent, he thinks you are bound to hate him, and he is on the alert, expecting some blow to fall, if you can seize an opportunity and if he cannot get in his blow first. [19] That is why he is wide awake and ready to strike, and why he is courting certain people to the detriment of our city—Thebans, I mean, and those Peloponnesians who share their views. He imagines that their cupidity will lead them to accept the present situation, while their natural dullness will prevent them from foreseeing anything that may follow. Yet men of even moderate intelligence might perceive some clear indications, which I had occasion to point

out to the Messenians and the Argives, and which may perhaps with advantage be repeated to you. [20]

“Can you not imagine,” I said, addressing the Messenians, “how annoyed the Olynthians would have been to hear a word said against Philip in the days when he was handing over to them Anthemus, to which all the former kings of Macedonia laid claim, when he was making them a present of Potidaea, expelling the Athenian settlers, and when he had taken upon himself the responsibility of a quarrel with us and had given them the territory of Potidaea for their own use? Do you imagine they expected to be treated as they have been, or would have believed anyone who suggested it? [21] Nevertheless,” said I, “after a brief enjoyment of other men's territory, they have long been robbed by Philip of their own, expelled with contumely, not merely vanquished but betrayed, bought and sold by their own country-men. For truly such close communications with tyranny corrupt good constitutions. [22] And what of the Thessalians? Do you imagine,” I said, “that when he was expelling their despots, or again when he was presenting them with Nicaea and Magnesia, they ever dreamed that a Council of Ten would be established among them, as it is today, or that the same man who restored to them the Amphictyonic meeting at Thermopylae would also appropriate their own peculiar revenues? Impossible! But so it came to pass, as all men may know. [23] You,” I said, “gaze with wonder at Philip as he gives away this and promises that, but if you are truly wise, pray that you may never find that he has deceived and cozened you. Verily,” I said, “there are manifold means devised by states for protection and safety—stockades, ramparts, fosses and the like. [24] And all these are wrought by hand and entail expense. But there is one common bulwark which the instinct of sensible men possesses within itself, a good and safe one for all, but invaluable for democracies against tyrants. And what is that bulwark? It is mistrust. Guard that; hold fast to that. If you preserve it, no harm can touch you. [25] What is your object?” I said. “Freedom. Then do you not see that Philip's very titles are utterly irreconcilable with that? For every king, every despot is the sworn foe of freedom and of law. Beware,” said I, “lest, seeking to be rid of war, you find a master.” [26]

That is what I said to them, and they shouted their approval; and they heard many other speeches from the envoys, both in my presence and again later, as it seems; but they are none the more likely to do without Philip's friendship and Philip's promises. [27] And, indeed, it is not strange that Messenians and other Peloponnesians should sometimes act against their better judgement; but you, who know, both from your own intelligence and from our speeches, how you are compassed about with plots and snares, you will, as it seems to me, find to your surprise that through having done nothing in time, you have submitted to everything. So much does the pleasure and ease of the moment prevail over that which at some future time is likely to be advantageous. [28]

On your practical measures you will, if you are wise, deliberate hereafter by yourselves; at present I will suggest the immediate answer which it would be proper for you to adopt. “Answer” It would indeed have been fair, men of Athens, to call upon those who conveyed to you Philip's promises, on the strength of which you were induced to conclude the Peace. [29] For I should never myself have consented to serve on the embassy, nor would you, I am sure, have suspended military operations, if you had imagined that Philip after securing peace would act as he has done; but his words at the time were very different from his present actions. Yes, and there are others who ought to be called upon. Whom do I mean? The men who, when peace was made and when I, returning from the second embassy—that sent to administer the oaths—found that the state was being imposed upon, and spoke out and protested and refused to give up Thermopylae and the Phocians— [30] the men,⁶ I say, who told you that I, being a water-drinker, was naturally a disagreeable, cross-grained fellow, and that Philip, if he got through the Pass, would do just what you would pray for, would fortify

Thespieae and Plataea, and humble the Theban pride, and dig a trench across the Chersonese⁷ at his own charges, and restore to you Euboea and Oropus in lieu of Amphipolis. All this was said from this very platform, as I am sure you recollect, although you are not remarkable for keeping in mind those who injure you. [31] And the crowning disgrace is that your posterity also is bound by the same peace which these hopes prompted you to conclude; so completely were you led astray. Why do I mention this now and assert that these men ought to be called upon? I vow that I will boldly tell you the whole truth and keep nothing back. [32] It is not that by descending to abuse I may lay myself open to retaliation in your presence, while I give those who from the first have fallen foul of me an excuse for making further profit out of Philip. Nor do I wish to indulge in idle talk. But I think that one day Philip's policy will cause you more distress than it does now, [33] for I see the plot thickening. I hope I may prove a false prophet, but I fear the catastrophe is even now only too near. So when you can no longer shut your eyes to what is happening, when you do not need me or someone else to tell you, but can all see for yourselves and be quite certain that all this is directed against you, then I expect you will be angry and exasperated. [34] Yes, I am afraid that, since the ambassadors have kept silence about the services for which they know they have been bribed, those who are trying to repair some of the losses that these men have caused may chance to fall under your displeasure; for I observe that people vent their wrath as a rule, not on those who are to blame, but chiefly on those who are within their reach. [35] Now therefore, while the danger is in the future and is gathering head, while we can still hear one another speak, I want to remind each one of you, however clearly he knows it, who it is that persuaded you to abandon the Phocians and Thermopylae, the command of which gave Philip the command also of the road to Attica and the Peloponnesus, and who it is that has forced you to take counsel, not for your rights and interests abroad, but for your possessions here at home and for the war in Attica, a war which will bring distress on every one of us, when it does come, but which really dates from that very day. [36] For if you had not been hoodwinked then, there would be no anxiety in Athens, because Philip could never, of course, have gained command of the sea and reached Attica with his fleet, nor could he have marched past Thermopylae and Phocis, but either he would have acted fairly and observed the Peace by keeping quiet, or he would have been instantly engaged in a war similar to that which made him so anxious for the Peace. [37]

Enough has now been said by way of reminder. May all the gods forbid that my warnings should ever be brought to the sternest test! For I would not willingly see one man suffer, even though he deserve to perish, if his punishment involves the danger and the damage of all