Dio Chrysostom and the Politics of Distrust

When Dio speaks to us about politics, ethics, or myth, do we *trust* him? This paper examines two orations in which Dio warns us against putting too much trust in anyone – including, by implication, himself. In *Or.* 73, he argues that it is burdensome and even dangerous to be trusted by others. In *Or.* 74, he argues that it is prudent to distrust those who are closest to us. The recent study of Morgan (2015) surveys in unprecedented detail the values attached to *fides* and *pistis* in the first and second centuries CE*,* arguing that they formed a bond of ethical connection between individuals and communities throughout the Empire. I argue that Dio, in his early Cynic persona, preaches the virtues of distrust as a means of articulating a subject position outside of those networks of *fides/pistis*. Moreover, although the focus of these two orations is political (73) and domestic (74), the encouragement not to trust others shows parallels with the playful manipulation of belief in Dio's speeches on literary and mythical subjects (*Or.* 11, *Or.* 61). If trust is understood as part of the connective tissue of the Empire, then the strategic rejection of trustworthiness at various points in Dio's corpus can be read as a provocative expression of philosophical and political nonconformity.

My paper will examine the structure and background to the two orations; their use of myth; and their connection to other, later orations. (Presumed allusions to Domitian's court in *Or.* 73 have generally led scholars to date the works to the "exilic" period: Berardi 2016). I will also draw connections with contemporary Latin writing on the politics of trust. When Trajan came to power, Pliny in his *Panegyricus* praised the ability for Romans to trust in their new emperor, and William Fitzgerald, in a forthcoming article, shows how Latin authors of the Trajanic period variously presented themselves as believers or non-believers in the illusions of Imperial power. Although such explicit political commentary about Rome is rarer in Greek authors, it has long been noted that Greek literature of the same period has a remarkable fondness for untrustworthy narrators, who delight in leading readers down paths of disbelief in order to demonstrate their mastery of cultural learning (Lucian, Philostratus, Achilles Tatius; ní Mheallaigh 2014). *Orations* 73 and 74, I argue, offer a means of interpreting this playful cultivation of readers' distrust as a potential political gesture. In these works, Dio sets a paradigm of authorial independence from the expectations of trust on which the Empire relied.

References

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