The Parable of the Generous Pasha (And the Presumption of Rejection)

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(AND THE PRESUMPTIONS OF REJECTION)
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ABSTRACT.

How can assemblies, that is, gatherings in venue, take action? Whether writing rules or taking decisions, assemblies oblige themselves to follow procedures; those assembled must prove that three presumptions of rejection have been overcome. A Pasha learns this lesson when he offers a gift to his people: Process matters. The Grand Vizier survives the lesson, proving that a sense of humor also matters.

KEY WORDS: pasha, vizier, justification for parliamentary procedure

A. THE NARRATIVE UNFOLDS. “I may as well admit defeat,” the Pasha addresses his Vizier. “Your advice would be most welcome.”

“My family has served your family loyally for many generations. It can hardly be unusual,” the Grand Vizier bows with more than his usual humility, “for you to call on my counsel, especially since you need not follow it. Indeed you have an entire cabinet of ministers, all of whom are related to your family by marriage or blood – ”

“And that’s just why my family has called on your wisdom. Because you have no agenda other than to survive. Which is the human condition. And so let us depart this magnificent audience hall by the secret door, climb the tower, as we usually do, and survey all that there is to be surveyed. Two are better than one at this sort of thing, and I believe we have the Ionian poet to thank for that observation. And now,” the Pasha allows the Vizier to catch his breath, “you can survey my realm to its fullest extent, north and south and east and west.”

“That would leave fields untilled, Majesty,” the Vizier calculates, “students without teachers, hospitals without doctors, custom-houses without their collectors, and indeed your borders unguarded. I merely suggest examples you must have in mind.”

“So with a division of labor,” the Pasha smiles, and with more than his usual cunning, “I must expect that only a fraction, an instance, indeed a sample of my people can gather in the square, below us. Why do you furrow your brow, Grand Vizier?”

“I believe Your Majesty has overlooked an important point, while touching on the division of labor.”

“What am I missing? I am going to make my people a gift.”

“Marvelous! Wunderbar!” replies the Vizier. “And if we are successful in our examination of the subject, as fully as we now survey your domains, a wonderful outcome should be assured. But it is hard to believe that — ”

“That what?” the Pasha demands.

“That they could love you more.”

“True, perhaps,” the Pasha replies. “I must take your word for it, for any lover is the last to know (otherwise) in these matters. On the other hand, they could love me less.”

“How could that possibly come about?” the Vizier asks.

“What if I give them a gift,” answers the Pasha, “and they don’t like it?”

“That’s guarded against. By procedure.”

“Aha! I knew you would say that!” the Pasha smiles. “Yes, there must always be more of my subjects gathered in the square who accept the gift than reject the gift. Absent that number, a magic number, one-half plus one, the gift is rejected.”

“That was rather obvious, Majesty,” the Vizier grimaces. “Let us not traffic in the obvious. Someone has to say ‘yes’ and if, for every nay-sayer or one tendering silence-as-dissent, there is a ‘yea’ sayer, then the single odd-person who accepts the
gift, accepts for all. That is all those who cancel each other out in the square."

"My partner in dialogue!" the Pasha smiles. "You’re saying that there’s another presumption of rejection?"

"Indeed, and if I may test you," the Vizier replies and with some warmth, "where is this second presumption to be found in action?"

"Right where we left it!" guffaws the Pasha. "More of my people are outside the square, than those inside who are doing the debating and voting on whether to accept my gift. Therefore, the mathematics – or simple arithmetic – of this distribution of my subjects is an expression of that logic as well."

"And yet a third waits to be named."

"Let me see," the Pasha computes. "Process logic has supplied a majority to mark the presumption of rejection by the assembly; a logic spatial expresses itself through the minority that assembles from nothing and no one in the square. What’s left? Discrete or predicate logic? I will plunge ahead with the logic that supplies discrete intervals. The future!"

"Precisely so, Majesty," the Vizier bows. "I never doubted you. After all, the assembly is speaking of the future in advocating, defending and attacking shouldness in any present formulations."

"How can we mortals assume that anything we say in our counsel (or council, excuse the pun) could predict the future? The future lies ahead of all, and, if I may say so, extends perfectly in its unseen and untouchable dimensions; only the Almighty can say how this perfection will appear on its devolution to mortal understanding."

"Well said," the Vizier agrees, "but the third presumption seems to have been lost."

"Good point," the Pasha coughs. "Hmm. As the assembly moves, in its own time (‘Very good,’ the Vizier nods) through various phases, conditions, or states, its work is marked by the presumption that nothing will come of nothing and that no outcome, in time, is the default result."

"The present must act and act decisively?" the Vizier counters.

"Quite so. And if the assembly does not act decisively," the Pasha concludes, "then the future and her embraces are rejected."

"Interesting turn of phrase," the Vizier considers the point. "It is not a question of the assembly being opposed to whatever is being proposed. It is a question of their being opposed to the idea of any decision or action being taken."

"And we know that," the Pasha exclaims, "because of the risks that few in venue takes for the sake of the many outside of venue."

"Another justification for indirect democracy," the Vizier answers, "to go with managing risks in venue through a division of labor."

The Pasha motions ‘after you,’ and they descend the long and winding staircase.

“So what is this ‘democracy’ that you speak about?” he asks the Vizier.

“Something which will come about. In a distant future,” the Vizier replies.

“For which we lay the groundwork and will get our share of credit,” the Pasha declares.

“Perhaps. By the way, what is the gift you will offer your people?”

“Your head on a platter,” the Pasha replies.

“And the retort you expect from a man whose head is always at risk?” the Grand Vizier asks his master in all things.

‘In this situation’,” the Pasha smiles, “‘two heads are better than one’.”

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G. Homer. The Ionian’s (Book X:220-226)

Νέστορ ἐμ᾽ ὀτρύνει κραδίη καὶ θυμὸς ἀγήνωρ
may be enjoyed, in OCL’s translation:
Ask me Nestor, great you are, ‘Could Odysseus’s mind
The fall of Troy intend and by stratagem sublime?’
With this counsel I answer Nestor’s plea.
‘With me send one more, for two together better see.
In dangerous partnership,’ I declare, ‘two will contend,
Teasing hostile promise from the darkness night pretends.’