

Solon the Thinker: Political Thought in Archaic Athens. By JOHN LEWIS. London: Duckworth, 2008. Pp. ix + 178. Paper, \$29.95. ISBN 0-7156-3456-9.

Lewis (L.) defines the purpose of this study of Solon's extant poems as an examination of early Greek political thought and the position Solon had in the development of political ideas in Archaic Athens. In this approach L. is concerned more with Solon's ideas than with his poetic ability or any actual political changes he brought about in Athens. As he states (p. 2): "Solon is not an extension of a genre—he is a person in his own right, with a distinct point of view, who should be read as such." Of course, L. admits that it is impossible to arrange the fragments in any chronological order, since the historical setting for the poems is lost. Nor does L. believe that we should rely on later writers for our understanding of Solon's thoughts, although he reverts at several points to the interpretations of the ancient authors who cited individual fragments and the use to which they put them. For example, L. argues (p. 91) that it is impossible to distinguish Solon's meaning in fr. 16 and 17 from Clement's Christian purpose for citing them. While primarily concerned with Solon's ideas, L. nonetheless draws upon the writings of other Archaic authors, such as Hesiod, to clarify further Solon's views on a subject, either showing his similarity or divergence from them. In particular, L.'s examination of Solon's writings investigates three major concepts: *dike* (justice), *moira* (fate) and jointly *doulosunei* and *eleutheros*.

L.'s investigation of Solon's understanding of *dike* draws information primarily from fr. 4 (*The Hymn to the City*); he helpfully begins each section of his argument by citing the appropriate lines of the poem under consideration, providing both the Greek text and his own translation. In 4.1–4, Solon states that Athens will never be destroyed by the whims of Zeus or the plans of Athena; rather its demise will be the result of the actions of its citizens. L. points out that in this cosmic view of the *polis* Solon differs greatly from Hesiod, who argued that men work and toil by the whims of Zeus. Solon's removal of the gods as the cause of Athenian *stasis* is very much a precursor to the Sophistic movement in the late 5th century. With the removal of the divine, Solon believes that Athens' problems are caused by the misguided judgments of its citizens, who are being persuaded by the *nous* (understanding) of unjust leaders, set on wealth and personal

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gain. Because of the misguided *nous* of their leaders, the people are about to suffer pains from this great *hubris*, which will result in a *stasis*. Solon makes a similar argument in fr. 6. L. argues (p. 42) that at this point in the *nous-hubris-stasis* progression, "Solon ... expands on this idea, moving from the unjust assaults of individuals to an elevated, even divine sense of *dike* that brings retribution to the entire *polis*." Unjust actions spread to the entire *polis* and afflict all the citizens. Because of this effect on the *polis*, a leader like Solon himself must teach the distinctions between and effects of *dusnomie* (lawlessness) and *eunomie* (lawfulness). After discussing Solon's understanding of these two opposites and their relationship to *dike*, L. concludes that Solon, in his writings, never really states what *dike* is. "He is on the cusp of philosophical understanding, but not yet in its camp." (p. 58)

L.'s Chapter 4 is devoted to an analysis of the structure of fr. 4 and the connection between its structure and its meaning. In Chapters 5 and 6, on the other hand, L. turns to the concept of *moira* (fate) as defined in Solon's poetry; the focus is on fr. 13 (*Hymn to the Muses*), in which Solon states that *moira* brings good and evil to mortals. L. notes (p. 74) that "Some readers have argued that a division, or split, exists in [Solon's] thought, between his revolutionary view of political matters and his traditional view of fate," and he himself explores the possibility that such a split is present. L. states that at the outset of any such discussion one must distinguish between ancient and modern concepts and remember that Solon did not have a philosophical concept of justice. In fr. 13 the *polis* is not mentioned; rather, the poem begins by asking for wealth (*olbos*) from the gods and renown (*doxa*) from mortals. Both of these are part of a person's own *bios*, "...a general term denoting a person's maintenance of life and lifestyle" (p. 77). As L.'s discussion of a possible split in Solon's thinking between *polis/dike* and *bios/moira* progresses, the problem he sees is that Solon's *moira* does not distinguish between the just or the unjust, but gives both good and evil to either. In this way a good man can suffer evil, while an unjust man may be given great rewards; *moira* thus dispenses good and evil in an arbitrary way. In the end, L. concludes (p. 107) that for Solon the causal concept of *dike* and the arbitrary nature of *moira* do "...dichotomize human life into two realms, which cannot be reconciled."

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L.'s final chapter is concerned with the concepts of *doulosuneî* and *eleutheros*, and poses the question: "Did Solon have a concept of freedom as opposed to being enslaved?" In his poems Solon distinguishes two types of enslavement: the enslavement of the *polis* and the enslavement of the earth through the placing of the *horoi* in Attica. In the first type, Solon sees slavery and tyranny as closely connected, and claims that the people through *hubris* have come under the control of a tyrant. There is also enslavement from debt that has carried Athenians abroad. Solon notes that the enslavement of the *polis* can be legal or illegal. As to the other type of slavery, Solon claims to have brought an end to the enslavement of the earth by tearing up the boundary stones (*horoi*). When he discusses *eleutheros*, it is in the context of setting someone or something free from a burden; he does not use the abstract word "freedom" *per se*. But L. believes (p. 121) that Solon did in fact have a concept of "freedom" in a political context which was the opposite of "enslavement."

The paperback edition of *Solon, the Thinker: Political Thought in Archaic Athens* is a rerelease of an earlier work (2006) with some changes; in particular L. has included a new appendix of translations of the poems. This is a valuable addition, although I would like to have the Greek texts included in the appendix, not just scattered throughout the book. A few other minor points: L. often mentions Solon's audience, but does not specify who that audience is. This is of some importance since the disposition of the audience may affect the contents of a poem. Nor does L. state how the poems were delivered: read aloud in a poetic contest, as Hesiod's poems were, or performed in private gatherings like a symposium? Overall, however, the study is stimulating and provides new insights not only to Solon's thinking but also the general state of political thought in Archaic Athens, and the bibliography is very useful.

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