

THE DISCUSSION OF WEALTH AND MORALS IN SOLONS POLITICAL VERSES

needed moral, political, and legal standards by which to order their lives wealth . (I use "man" here to stress that Solon's poems are concerned with Greek males.) They were In his discussion of wealth, Solon tells us similarly: We mortals.

Those who are slaves by nature do not have the full ability to reason. Solon's poetry can be said to appear 'self-righteous' and 'pompous' at times [] and he once composed an elegy with moral advice for a more gifted elegiac poet, Mimnermus. Solon was described by Plutarch as having been temporarily awarded autocratic powers by Athenian citizens on the grounds that he had the "wisdom" to sort out their differences for them in a peaceful and equitable manner. Certainly almost everyone wants to see law-abiding citizens, but it is questionable that changing the citizens' character or making them morally good is part of what government should do. A discussion of this concept and its importance will help the reader make sense of what follows. We will have much more to say later on the topic of regimes. It is also said that a certain utterance of his which was current before his election, to the effect that equality bred no war, pleased both the men of substance and those who had none; the former expecting to have equality based on worth and excellence, the latter on measure and count. They are able to live together without determining what is just and unjust or creating laws to enforce justice among themselves. At any rate, each of these claims to rule, Aristotle says, is partially correct but partially wrong. Remember that polity is one of the correct regimes, and it occurs when the many rule in the interest of the political community as a whole. Upon this settlement of thine may she bestow favour and glory; And upon me an auspicious return to my fatherland. Generally, Solon's reforms appear to have been constitutional, economic and moral in their scope. Economic and ideological rivalry is a common theme in ancient sources. We will see shortly why Aristotle believed that the cities existing at the time did not in fact follow this principle of ruling and being ruled in turn. The proper thing would be to obey them b But the most and sturdiest of them began to band together and exhort one another not to submit to their wrongs, but to choose a trusty man as their leader, set free the condemned debtors, divide the land anew, and make an entire change in the form of government. The result was that not a man of them escaped, but all were slain, and the Athenians at once set sail and took possession of the island. And thus Solon had the reputation of saving one king and instructing another by means of a single saying. Aristotle notes that people value and care for what is their own: "What belongs in common to the most people is accorded the least care: they take thought for their own things above all, and less about things common, or only so much as falls to each individually" b Attika in Solon's time seemed to be moving towards a similarly ugly solution with many citizens in danger of being reduced to the status of helots. This, for most contemporary readers is one of the two most offensive portions of Aristotle's moral and political thought the other is his treatment of women, about which more will be said below. And the two men were at first great friends, largely because of their kinship, 79 and largely because of the youthful beauty of Peisistratus, with whom, as some say, Solon was passionately in love. The fact that ethics and politics are kinds of practical knowledge has several important consequences. If Aristotle's personal life is relevant, while he himself owned slaves, he was said to have freed them upon his death. However, two important points should be noted here. If the city exists for the sake of developing virtue in the citizens, then those who have the most virtue are the most fit to rule; they will rule best, and on behalf of all the citizens, establishing laws that lead others to virtue.