Solon fr. 1 G.-P.2 = 13 W.2: An Intertextual Approach

The unity of fr. 1 G.-P.2 has been a major theme in the secondary literature with no sure solution and some going so far as to suggest that the poem is free-association (Lattimore 1947). Critics have long noted three parts of the poem that seem not just distinct but disjunct: the proem, in which Solon invokes the muses and requests wealth, though only wealth that is righteously gained; lines 9-32, in which Solon likens the τίσις of Zeus to an ἄνεμος that rises from the base level of the sea up into the heavens; and lines 33-76, in which Solon concerns himself with human beings involved in various professions. In addition, scholars have had difficulty connecting the idea contained in lines 9-32, that justice is served sooner or later by an all-powerful Zeus, with the idea contained in lines 33-76, that the fate of men is ultimately unpredictable – the gifts that the gods give can be both good and bad for men, which seems to be an arbitrary enterprise. These seemingly diverse themes suggest that the poem is not a unified whole or, at least, is structured by a logic different from what we might expect as readers.

I propose that the poem does contain a coherent and logical structure. What seem to be three divergent parts constitute a whole that is unified by interdependent elements, first among which is parallelism. Two metaphors exist in the poem. The first metaphor, occupying roughly lines 9-32, compares the retribution of Zeus to a breeze that moves from the foundations of the sea up into the heavens. The second metaphor, occupying lines 33-76, illustrates justice in the human realm, and concludes that one’s ultimate fate is ultimately unpredictable. The two metaphors are united by a progressive upward motion. In the first, the breeze representing Zeus’ retribution moves from the sea up into the heavens. In the second, Solon proceeds from men who seem to be something but are not, to men who work with their hands, and finally to prophets and healers, both of whom depend upon the gods. In both cases there is a general movement towards the divine realm.

The poem is also united in theme. The two metaphors of the poem represent justice on two different levels, the level of Zeus and the level of everyday human activity (Noussia 1999). The divine justice handed down immediately by Zeus in the first half of the poem turns out to be a different sort of justice from what humans experience. The recompense of Zeus is justice on a divine level and stands in contrast to the recompense that men must usually pay, which is not necessarily immediate. I propose that Solon depicts justice on the divine level in contrast to justice on the human level in order to show that a model for justice exists in the figure of Zeus that may be emulated and crafted by divinely sanctioned kings.

The poem is most clearly united by intertextual references, especially to Hesiod, Homer, and the Greek philosophic tradition. The progression of movement upward found throughout the poem echoes the philosophic metaphor in which the heavenly realm houses the Good and the earthly realm houses only illusions. This idea, most famously explicated by Socrates in the *Republic*, can also be found in pre-Socratics such as Parmenides. The invocation of the Muses at the beginning of the poem specifically recall Hesiod’s genealogy of the Muses as the “Pierian” daughters of Zeus in the *Theogony* (Anhalt 1993). Solon’s integration of poetry and politics in this poem also strongly recalls Hesiod’s description in the *Theogony* of the good judge-king who is sponsored by the Muses and is able to settle disputes with his words. Finally, I propose that Solon’s description of professions in the second half of the poem corresponds roughly with what was to become the metaphor of the divided line in Plato’s *Republic* and prefigures remarkably Socrates’ usual progression in discussion from seeming to knowing/being.

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