Solonian *Hybris*: Resurrecting Religion in the *Eunomia* (4W)

Hybris in Solon is often discussed in a legislative rather than religious context. Most often, scholars study Solon's use of *hybris* hoping to reconstruct the Solonian *Graphe Hybreos* mentioned by Demosthenes. Oswyn Murray, for example, suggests that Solon 4W (hereafter, "*Eunomia*") uses *hybris* primarily in a legal sense, neglecting the larger poetic and religious force of the term in favor of its narrow legislative implications (Murray 1990). Such a reductive approach remains common in later scholarship: N.R.E. Fisher defines Solonian *hybris* as "the activities of the greedy rich" (Fisher 1992: 71); Anhalt sees the *Eunomia* as a means of bringing about "a desired social condition, a goal of Solon's personal policy" (Anhalt 1993: 111); Blaise interprets the poem as exploring "autonomous (mortal) political action" apart from the gods (Blaise 2006: 127).

More recent publications have also focused on Solon's law of *hybris* to the exclusion of his poetry (e.g., Lambert 2011). But even if the *Eunomia* does in fact contain the secrets of the *Graphe Hybreos*, to focus on *hybris'* legislative aspect alone ignores the profoundly religious language and imagery which pervades the poem.

Comparison with Solon 13W (hereafter, "*Prayer to the Muses*" or just "*Prayer*") will demonstrate the religious depth of the *Eunomia*. The *Prayer* is explicitly and uncontestedly religious in a traditional sense. Close analysis of the terminology and imagery that the two poems share reveals that the *Eunomia* and the *Prayer to the Muses* adopt the same religious stance. The *Eunomia*, then, transcends simple allusion to Solon's political platform. The sympotic imagery which prompts Murray to define *hybris* narrowly as "drunken violence committed in the context of the symposium" (Murray 1990: 144) is in fact only the root of a

larger metaphor: the symposium represents the city, and the city is subject to the laws of traditional religion. Solon fears not only civic disruption but also divine retribution.

Such a theologically-charged poetic stance does not preclude a political agenda. It does, however, avoid notions of class struggle and oppression in favor of theo-political ideology, even anticipating pre-Socratic notions of balance and world order. (See, for example, McKirahan 2010:58-69 on "Xenophanes of Colophon.") This presentation of the poet's political views in religious rather than demagogic terms suggests an intended audience of intellectual elites gathered at a symposium rather than a popular throng gathered in the *agora*. (An interpretation accepted by Nouissa-Fantuzzi 2010: 233. *Contra* West 1974: 12. Cf. Bowie 1986; Irwin 2005; Nagy 2010.) Such a context would further elucidate the utility of Solon's sympotic metaphor: the disorder of the symposium is likened to the disorder of the *polis*, which in its turn, draws down the universal vengeance of the gods. Seen from this perspective, Solon's presentation of *hybris* is a lynch-pin connecting contemporary politics, their moral and religious implications, and the performance audience, which would presumably be a collection of powerful, sober-minded aristocrats whose influence Solon has already won or hopes to secure. Solon's *Eunomia*, then, is a persuasive manifesto, not limited to a single talking point (the *hybris* of the *komos*) or even simple politics, but presenting his larger political aim in terms of deference to the gods and morality: Solon seeks to restrain all forms of excess within the *polis* – excess which invites the retribution of the gods and so must be avoided at all costs.

Bibliography

Anhalt, E. 1993: “Poem 13: Memory and Destiny.” *Solon the Singer: Politics and Poetics*. Lanham.

Blaise, F. 2006: “Poetics and Politics: tradition re-worked in Solon’s ‘Eunomia’.” *Solon of Athens*: 114-133.

Fisher, N.R.E. 1992: *Hybris. A study in the values of honour and shame in ancient Greece*. Warminster.

Lambert, S. D. 2011: *Sociable man: essays on ancient Greek social behaviour in honour of Nick Fisher*. Wales.

McKirahan, R. 2010: *Philosophy before Socrates: an introduction and texts with commentary*. Hackett.

Murray, O. 1990: “The Solonian law of hubris” in *Nomos*, 139-146.

Nagy, G. 2010: “Ancient Greek Elegy.” In (ed.) Weisman, *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*: 13-45.

Nouissa-Fantuzzi, M. 2010: *Solon the Athenian, the Poetic Fragments.* Brill.

West, M.L. 1974: *Studies in Greek Elegy and Iambus.* Berlin-New York.