

Solon 13.74ff (West)

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κέρδεά τοι θνητοῖς ὤπασαν ἀθάνατοι,
ἄτη δ' ἐξ αὐτῶν ἀναφαίνεται, ἦν ὁπότε Ζεὺς
πέμψη τειχομένην, ἄλλοτε ἄλλος ἔχει. (74–76)

“THE GODS give gains to mortals; from them *atē* appears.” Who or what is ‘them’? There are three possible referents: gains, mortals or gods. A few commentators have chosen ‘mortals’; the vast majority are content with ‘gains’. The third possibility, ‘gods’, although it deserves serious consideration, has to my knowledge never been proposed.

From time to time ‘mortals’ is suggested as the referent for ‘them’ rather than ‘gains’, but it has not won much approval.¹ Vlastos says that it “seems less likely on stylistic grounds” but does not elaborate.² Römisch argues that *atē* is made visible to mortals rather than by them and cites *Iliad* 17.244 as proof.³ Linforth gives several reasons: “the unemphatic position of the *αὐτῶν*, the ease with which it is referred to *κέρδεα*, and the statement which follows . . . all argue against this view.”⁴ Many critics either reject ‘mortals’ in favor of ‘gains’ without comment⁵ or do not even suggest that there is a choice.⁶

¹ So W. C. Greene, *Moirai* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1944) 37 n.151, citing Wehrli and Reinhardt, and, apparently, M. L. West, *Studies in Greek Elegy and Iambus* (Berlin 1974) 181: “it is to the gods that they [men] must look for increase, but their own conduct is the cause of Ate and the punishment of Zeus.” R. Lattimore, “The First Elegy of Solon,” *AJP* 68 (1947) 178 n.50, is less positive: “this is also possible, but not, I believe, necessary.”

² G. Vlastos, “Solonian Justice,” *CP* 41 (1946) 78 n.90. So also E. Römisch, *Studien zur älteren griechischen Elegie* (Frankfurt 1933) 25: “das ist schon sprachlich völlig unmöglich.”

³ Römisch, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 25.

⁴ I. M. Linforth, *Solon the Athenian* (Berkeley 1919) 242.

⁵ K. Ziegler, “Solon als Mensch und Dichter,” *NJbb* 49 (1922) 204; W. Jaeger, *Paideia* 1² (transl. G. Highet, Oxford 1945) 451 n.52; A. W. Allen, “Solon’s Prayer to the Muses,” *TAPA* 80 (1949) 60 n.21; G. Müller, “Der homerische Ate-Begriff und Solons Musenelegie,” *Navicula Chiloniensis* (Leiden 1956) 11 n.1; D. A. Campbell, *Greek Lyric Poetry* (New York 1967) 240; D. E. Gerber, *Euterpe* (Amsterdam 1970) 130.

⁶ U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Sappho und Simonides* (Berlin 1913) 267; C. M. Bowra, *Early Greek Elegists* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1938) 98; A. Masaracchia, *Solone* (Florence 1958) 239; K. Büchner, “Solons Musengedicht,” *Hermes* 87 (1959) 169; H. Fränkel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy* (transl. M. Hadas and J. Willis, New York 1975) 236.

The difficulty with taking ‘gains’ as the referent for ‘them’ is that then we have the gods giving gains which bring *atē*, whereas earlier in the poem Solon had distinguished god-given wealth, which is secure, from wealth violently obtained (to use Gerber’s phrase), which brings *atē* (9–13): “this time there is no distinction between honest and dishonest riches.”⁷ Frequently scholars interpret the latter passage in terms of the former: “it is wealth in the hands of irresponsible men that brings *ἄτη*”;⁸ “sie entsteht aus unrecht erworbenem Besitz, das erhellt aus der Beziehung zu v. 13 der Elegie”;⁹ “verses 74–76 can be brief because the point had been developed at length in 7–32.”¹⁰ Müller and Campbell cite fr.6.3f (West): “surfeit bears *hybris* when much wealth follows men whose mind is not sound.”¹¹ But then we must ask why Solon would clearly specify both agent (men) and causes (much wealth, unsound mind) in fr.6 but say simply ‘gains’ in fr.13. If these critics are correct, we must conclude of Solon that “he is too vague.”¹²

A different solution is possible, one that is much simpler and that requires no supplements by the reader. If we understand ‘gods’, not ‘gains’ or ‘mortals’, as the referent for ‘them’ (and it is the nearest of the three), we have an entirely different statement that is wholly in keeping with the rest of the poem: “the gods give wealth to mortals; and from the gods *atē* appears.” The idea is then restated more specifically: “Zeus sends *atē* as punishment,” just as earlier (53–55) Solon amplified his statement that Apollo makes one a prophet by saying that a man recognizes evil from afar (*i.e.*, is a prophet) “if the gods are with him” (Campbell’s phrase). The point of 74–75, then, is that the gods give both good (gains) and evil (*atē*), just as Solon said in 63–64: “Fate brings to mortals evil and good; the gifts of the im-

⁷ Linforth, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.4) 110. Similarly J. Stallmach, *Ate* (Meisenheim 1968) 61 n.87: “es besteht eine Unausgeglichenheit mit dem Anfang der Elegie.” Müller, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 8 n.1 explains: “der handgreifliche Widerspruch zwischen v.74f und v.9f kommt auf das Konto von Solons mühsam ringender Ausdrucksweise.”

⁸ Campbell, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 240. Many commentators simply translate *κέρδεα* as ‘lust’ or ‘greed’: Linforth, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.4) 241; Bowra, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) 98; Ziegler, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 200; Greene, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 37; A. Lesky, *A History of Greek Literature* (transl. J. Willis and C. de Heer, London 1966) 125.

⁹ Römisch, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.3) 25.

¹⁰ Allen, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 60 n.21.

¹¹ Campbell, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 240; Müller, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 12.

¹² Lattimore, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 179.

mortal gods are unavoidable.”¹³ In fact Solon has simply been alternating this idea, that the gods give good and evil (A), with the idea that man is ignorant (B) throughout the final section of the poem:

- A. Fate gives mortals good and evil (the gifts of the gods are unavoidable) 63–64.
- B. No one knows where he will hold his course once a thing is begun (risk is in all deeds) 65–66.
 - A. One trying to succeed falls into *atē*,
 - B. lacking forethought 67–68.
 - A. The gods give (even) the unsuccessful one good luck,
 - B. (and) release from ignorance 69–70.
- B. No end of wealth is clearly established for men (who always try for more) 71–73.
 - A. The gods give men gains and *atē* (which comes sooner or later) 74–76.

We find the same ideas, structure and language in Theognis 133–42:

- A. The gods give *atē* and gain (mortals are not the cause) 133–34.
- B. No mortal acts knowing whether the end will be good or bad 135–36.
 - B. Often thinking he will do evil a man does good and *vice versa* 137–38.
- C. No mortal gets as much as he wishes; “the limits of grievous helplessness hold him back” (Gerber) 139–40.
- B. We mortals know nothing and think in vain 141.
 - A. The gods complete all according to their intention 142.

A pleasant consequence of understanding ‘gods’ as the referent for ‘them’ is that the long-standing dispute over the object of *ἔχει* in 76

¹³ Clearly there is no distinction here between Fate and the gods, just as there is none between Apollo and the gods in 53–55 or, as I have argued above, between the gods and Zeus in 74–76.

can now be resolved.¹⁴ Since 'gains' is eliminated from the immediate context, the only possible object is *atē*.¹⁵

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¹⁴ For 'gains': Ziegler, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 204; Allen, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 60; Müller, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 11 n.1; Fränkel, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) 236 n.41. For *atē*: Wilamowitz, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) 263; Linforth, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.4) 241; Römisch, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 26; Masaracchia, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) 243; Campbell, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 240; Gerber, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 130. Undecided: Jaeger, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 451 n.52; Lattimore, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 178; Büchner, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.6) 169 n.1.

¹⁵ D. E. Gerber has pointed out to me that Theognis 230–31 may support my interpretation: "there ἀφροσύνη has supplanted ἀθάνατοι, and when this was done αὐτῶν was also changed to αὐτῆς. In other words, it looks as though Theognis may have taken αὐτῶν in Solon to refer to ἀθάνατοι." I would like to thank also J. H. Gaisser, M. L. Lang, R. Lattimore and P. M. Smith.