

Garden of Thoughts**Two Letters of Solon****Solon to Epimenides**

It seems that after all I was not to confer much benefit on Athenians by my laws, any more than you by purifying the city. For religion and legislation are not sufficient in themselves to benefit cities; it can only be done by those who lead the multitude in any direction they choose. And so, if things are going well, religion and legislation are beneficial; if not, they are of no avail.

Nor are my laws or all my enactments any better; but the popular leaders did the commonwealth harm by permitting license, and could not hinder Pisistratus from setting up a tyranny. And, when I warned them, they would not believe me. He found more credit when he flattered the people than when I told them the truth. I laid my arms down before the generals' quarters and told the people that I was wiser than those who did not see that Pisistratus was aiming at tyranny, and more courageous than those who shrank from resisting him. They, however, denounced Solon as mad. And at last I protested: "My country, I, Solon, am ready to defend thee by word and deed; but some of my countrymen think me mad. Wherefore I will go forth out of their midst as the sole opponent of Pisistratus; and let them, if they like, become his bodyguard." For you must know, my friend, that he was beyond measure ambitious to be tyrant. He began by being a popular leader; his next step was to inflict wounds on himself and appear before the court of the Heliaea, crying out that these wounds had been inflicted by his enemies; and he requested them to give him a guard of 400 young men. And the people without listening to me granted him the men, who were armed with clubs. And after that he destroyed the democracy. It was in vain that I sought to free the poor amongst the Athenians from their condition of serfdom, if now they are the slaves of master, Pisistratus.

Solon to Pisistratus

I am sure that I shall suffer no harm at your hands; for before you became tyrant I was your friend, and now I have no quarrel with you beyond that every Athenian who disapproves of tyranny. Whether it is better for them to be ruled by one man or to live under a democracy, each of us must decide for himself upon his own judgment. You are, I admit, of all the tyrants the best; but I see that it is not well for me to return to Athens. I gave the Athenians equality of civil rights; I refuse to become tyrant when I had the opportunity; how then could I escape censure if I were now to return and set my approval on all that you are doing?

Selected from Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, printed by Harvard University Press, 1959.