Storytelling about the Lawgiver in the Athenian Orators

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In their pleadings in court\(^1\), litigants in classical Athens (ca 420-320\(^2\)) frequently evoke a lawgiver (nomothetēs) or lawgivers (nomothetai) as part of their argument. Some of the stories they tell are about lawgivers of the past, others concern contemporary Athenian lawgivers, and still others raise the possibility of being a lawgiver in the future. But in all cases the litigant calls on the lawgiver in order to serve the needs of his argument, and in most cases the speaker draws a moral or legal conclusion from his story about the lawgiver. Unlike many topics addressed by litigants, about which arguments can be made on both sides, the image of the lawgiver is in most cases consistent throughout: lawgivers of the past and the official lawgivers of the present (the Nomothetai) are always good, whereas a contemporary lawgiver is always self-serving and harmful to the city. The only ambiguous figure is the jury acting as lawgiver in the future; this may be a good thing or a bad thing depending on the needs of the argument.

I. Background

The background to these stories is that around 650, as most Greek communities were beginning to take the form of the classical polis, laws were being written all over the Greek world. These laws were inscribed, usually on stone, and displayed in public places. We have material evidence for these laws in the form of surviving inscriptions, and we also have literary accounts of a number of men who enacted legislation in some cities during this same period. The best known of these lawgivers are Draco and Solon in Athens, Lycurgus in Sparta, and Zaleucus in Locri (a Greek city in southern Italy), who was reportedly the earliest of them all\(^3\).

It is now recognized that many of these accounts of early lawgivers are

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\(^1\) The image of the lawgiver as it is presented in the pleadings of Athenian litigants has, to my knowledge, thus far escaped the attention of scholars. I am grateful to Catherine Psilakis for drawing my attention to the subject.

\(^2\) All dates in this paper are a. C.

legendary⁴, but with Draco and Solon we are on fairly solid ground. An inscription from the late fifth century proclaims itself to be a copy of Draco’s homicide law, which was originally enacted around 620, and in addition to a large amount of historical information about Solon, who wrote his laws around 590, we have some of his own poetry in which, among other things, he speaks about his legislation. So we can be fairly confident that these two lawgivers existed and wrote laws, some of which survived and were still valid in the classical period. And even if all the others are only legends, their stories taught the classical Greeks that the laws of their city were enacted by a single person, the Lawgiver.

II.
Lawgivers of the Past

Draco and Solon

As we would expect, many of the stories about lawgivers of the past that are told by Athenian litigants are about the Athenian lawgivers Draco and Solon, and the vast majority of these are about Solon. Draco is mentioned by name only eight times, five of them in conjunction with Solon (« the laws of Draco and Solon »), and twice as the author of the homicide law. Only once is anything more said about him, by Demosthenes in his speech against Leptines. In this speech Demosthenes opposes a law that Leptines has enacted that prohibits the city from awarding an exemption from liturgy service to anyone and, as Demosthenes misleadingly interprets it, prohibits anyone from even requesting an exemption that might be justified. Demosthenes argues that in the laws on homicide, which is the most serious crime of all:

Draco makes the act of taking another person’s life the object of fear and terror. He writes that the murderer is banned from lustral water, libations, bowls of wine, holy places, and the marketplace, and goes through all the other measures that he thinks will deter people from committing this crime. Just the same, he does not eliminate all considerations of justice, but specifies in what circumstances it is permitted to kill, and if one does so in the correct way, he sets him apart as free from pollution. Will your laws then grant the right to kill with just cause but take away the right to ask for a reward, whether it be justified or not, thanks to this man’s law? (Against Leptines 20, 158, trans. Harris)⁵

⁵ All translations are taken, sometimes with minor modifications, from the following volumes in the series, *The Oratory of Classical Greece* (University of Texas Press, Austin TX): V. Bers, *Demosthenes*, *Speeches* 50-59, 2003; C. Carey, *Aeschines*, 2000; M. Gagarin & D. M. McDowell, *Antiphon and Andocides*, 1997; E. M. Harris,
This example illustrates the most common type of story about the lawgiver: one that contrasts the lawgiver’s legislation (which was right and good) with the speaker’s opponent’s actions (which are wrong and evil).

Many such stories are also told about Solon, who is often said to be the author of all the laws of Athens, including laws that certainly were enacted long after Solon’s time. This attribution may have arisen because until the fifth century, laws did not include a dating formula, so that someone reading an older law would not know whether or not it was enacted by Solon. It then became a convenient fiction to attribute all laws to him. This practice also made it easy to think that all Athenian laws formed a coherent set, since they all stemmed from the same person’s mind and thus they must all have the same larger purpose.

Like Draco, Solon often serves as a contrast to the conduct of the speaker’s opponent. Take, for example, the beginning of Aeschines’ speech against Timarchus (1, 6-26). The case is a dokimasia tōn rhētorōn, an assessment of Timarchus’s fitness to be a public speaker and address the Assembly. Aeschines wants to put Timarchus’s past conduct, which allegedly includes squandering his inheritance and serving as a paid prostitute, in the worst possible light. He begins indirectly by praising democracy, which is governed by the rule of law. He then introduces the lawgivers: « Consider, men of Athens, how great a concern for decency was shown by that ancient legislator (nomothetēs) Solon, and Draco and the other legislators (nomothetai) of that period » (Against Timarchus 1, 6, trans. Carey). Aeschines begins by speaking about a group of lawgivers, but he soon abandons the plural and speaks of « the legislator » and the laws that « he » enacted (1, 8). There follows a long list of laws that, according to Aeschines, were intended to regulate the moral conduct of boys, young men, and adults (1, 8-25).

This brings Aeschines to the lesson he wants to draw: « Now observe, men of Athens, the enormous difference between Solon and those great men whom I mentioned a little earlier in my speech and Timarchus » (Against Timarchus 1, 26, trans. Carey). Aeschines then examines the law regulating the conduct of public speakers, but he speaks not about the law but about the unnamed legislator. « Which men then did he think should not speak ? » Aeschines asks (1, 28), and then answers his question with an explanation of each of the four categories of conduct that the lawgiver prohibited. For example:

« Or anyone who has been a prostitute », he [the lawgiver] says, « or has sold himself ». For the man who has willfully sold his own body would, he thought, casually sell out the interests of the city. … « Or

anyone who has squandered his paternal estate », he says, « or any other property he has inherited ». For he considered that the man who has mismanaged his private household would treat the city’s interests in much the same way; and the legislator (nomothetēs) could not conceive that the same individual could be worthless in private life and useful to the public good, nor did he believe that a public speaker should come to the platform fully prepared in his words and not in his life (Against Timarchus 1, 29-30, trans. Carey).

The reason why Aeschines here speaks of the lawgiver rather than the law is that this allows him to explain the reasoning behind the law. Aeschines, of course, had no way of knowing what Solon (or whoever wrote this law) was thinking, but this did not prevent him from explaining the lawgiver’s purpose as if it were well known. Most of the other orators do the same thing without further comment, so evidently it was an accepted practice, though one would think that at least a few members of the jury must have questioned the validity of these reports.

Demosthenes is particularly fond of contrasting Solon with his opponent in cases where he is trying to invalidate a law that his opponent has passed. In his speech against Timocrates, he gives the contrast a sarcastic turn:

These two lawgivers (nomothetai), Solon and Timocrates, are much alike, men of Athens, are they not? The former makes men better both now and in the future. The latter shows those who have committed crimes in the past the way to avoid punishment, discovers how those in the present can commit crimes with impunity, and provides for those in the future, in short, for criminals at all times, to remain safe and suffer no harm (Against Timocrates 24, 106, trans. Harris).

There are many other passages where the orators praise Solon as a lawgiver and contrast him, explicitly or implicitly, with their current opponent, but let me just cite a few more to give an idea of the variety of uses speakers make of the figure of Solon the lawgiver. Demosthenes opens his speech against Phaenippus concerning the complex matter of an exchange of property:

May many blessings fall, men of the jury, first, upon all of you, and then, too, upon Solon who set down the law (tōi nomothetēsant) about exchanges. For if he had not clearly defined for us what step those who have embarked upon an exchange must take first, and what second, and so on in order, I don’t know where the impudence of Phaenippus would have led. Even as it is, although the law prescribes all the steps, he totally disregarded its just provisions (Against Phaenippus 42, 1, trans. Scafuro).

In another passage, Aeschines, in his speech against Ctesiphon, uses Solon to explain why Athens rightly has a law against cowardice, an innate quality that one might think the law should ignore:
The ancient legislator (*nomothetēs*) Solon believed that the same penalty should apply to the man who fails to serve and the man who has deserted his post and the coward alike. For there are indictments for cowardice too. Some of you might be amazed that there are indictments for natural defects, but there are. Why is that? So that each of us will fear the legal penalties more than the enemy and so fight more bravely for his country (*Against Ctesiphon* 3, 175, trans. Carey).

And at the end of this same speech, Aeschines actually summons Solon to the speaker’s platform. Addressing the jury, he refers to the defense speech that Demosthenes is about to give:

> When just near the end of his speech he calls on his partners in corruption to speak in support, imagine that you see on the platform, where I now stand as I speak, the city’s benefactors ranged against their impudence. See Solon, who equipped the democracy with the most noble laws, a philosopher and a worthy lawgiver (*nomothetēs*), urging you in the restrained manner that befits him under no circumstances to set more value on Demosthenes’ arguments than on your oaths and the laws (*Against Ctesiphon* 3, 257, trans. Carey).

In his speech that follows, Demosthenes will not, in fact, call on any partners, but he does bring up Solon in connection with the judicial oath that all jurors swore at the beginning of each year, which began: «I shall vote according to the laws». Demosthenes adds some additional information and identifies the lawgiver whose laws should constrain the jurors’ votes as Solon:

> I charge and beseech all of you alike to listen to me fairly as I make my defense against the allegations, just as the laws demand. Solon, who first established these laws, was well-disposed to you and favored democracy. He believed that the laws would have authority not only because they were written down, but also because those who pass judgment swear an oath to uphold them (*On the Crown* 18, 6, trans. Yunis).

*The Anonymous Lawgiver*

Solon is the lawgiver most often cited by name by Athenian litigants, but they are also fond of invoking «the lawgiver» (occasionally «the lawgivers»). And this unnamed lawgiver is invoked for many of the same reasons as Solon is, most often in order to explain the purpose of the law as the speaker wants the jurors to understand it. It may, in fact, be the case that in discussing «the lawgiver» an Athenian speaker would often have Solon in mind and that the audience would also understand this as a reference to Solon.

The most concentrated group of references to this unnamed lawgiver comes at the beginning of Aeschines’ speech against Ctesiphon, from the famous
case *On the Crown*. The procedure is a *graphē paranomōn* or « indictment for illegality », in which a decree is accused of violating one or more laws. In this case Ctesiphon had proposed a decree honoring Demosthenes by awarding him a crown for his public service. Although Aeschines spends most of his speech arguing that Demosthenes does not deserve a crown, he begins by citing two laws that, he claims, Ctesiphon’s decree violates, and in this part of his speech (11-47), he invokes the lawgiver or lawgivers sixteen times. I cite only the first of these, which comes after Aeschines explains that many men used to steal public money and then escape being audited (all officials were supposed to be audited at the end of their term in office).

Aeschines continues:

Some lawgiver (*tis nomothetēs*) noticed this and passed a law, and a very good one, explicitly forbidding the crowning of men who are subject to audit. And though the lawgiver has taken this sensible precaution, arguments have been invented to subvert the law; and if you are not told of them, you will not notice that you have been tricked (*Against Ctesiphon* 3, 11, trans. Carey).

The rest of this part of the speech has many more explanations of the reasons for various pieces of legislation and the ways in which people had tried to get around the laws.

In another well-known example, Lysias, in his speech on the killing of Eratosthenes, explains the alleged severity of the law on adultery by contrasting it with the law on rape, which, he claims, is less severe:

Clearly, gentlemen, the lawgiver believed that those who commit rape deserve a lighter penalty than those who seduce: he condemned seducers to death, but for rapists he laid down double damages. He believed that those who act by violence are hated by the people they have assaulted, whereas those who seduce corrupt the minds of their victims in such a way that they make other people’s wives into members of their own families rather than of their husbands’. The victim’s whole household becomes the adulterer’s, and as for the children, it is unclear whose they are, the husband’s or the seducer’s. Because of this the lawgiver (*ho ton nomon titheis*) laid down the death penalty for them (*On the Murder of Eratosthenes* 1, 32-33, trans. Todd).

Scholars disagree about whether the Athenians really thought adultery was a worse crime than rape⁶, but there is no doubt that the speaker is misleadingly oversimplifying the situation, since there were several possible penalties for both rape and adultery, depending on the circumstances. But Lysias has provided an explanation of the lawgiver’s thinking that may have

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sounded plausible to members of the jury. Here and elsewhere, just as with Solon, invoking «the lawgiver» allows the speaker to explain the purpose of the law to the jury in the exact way he wishes.

III.

Lawgivers of the Present

The Athenian Nomothetai

I could cite many more examples of speakers invoking lawgivers of the past in order to support their case, but I want to move on from past to present. During most of the fifth century new laws were proposed by the Council and then enacted by the Assembly, in which all citizens could vote. But at the end of the century, a new, more complex procedure for legislation was instituted and an official group of Lawgivers (Nomothetai), selected annually, was created to oversee the process. A related project to examine all existing laws and reinscribe only those that were still valid began in 409 and was completed in 403. Among the first laws to be reinscribed by the Inscribers (Anagrapheis), who were in charge of this project was Draco’s homicide law; a fragment of this reinscribed law survives today and can be seen in the epigraphical museum in Athens.

Demosthenes describes the new legislative procedure in his speech against Leptines, attributing its creation to Solon. His words are directed at the jurors, who are identified with the Lawgivers because most Lawgivers were selected from the pool of jurors for that year:

You see, men of Athens, the excellent method that Solon provides for lawgiving (tous nomous tithenai). First, it comes before you, men who have sworn an oath and exercise supervision over this and other matters. Next, opposing laws are repealed so that there is only one law for each subject. This avoids confusion for private individuals, who would be at a disadvantage in comparison to people who are familiar with all the laws. The aim is to make points of law the same for all to read as well as simple and clear to understand. Even before this stage, Solon ordered that the laws be placed in front of the Eponymous Heroes [i.e. in front of their statues, which were in the agora] and handed over to the secretary and for him to read them at meetings of the Assembly. The aim was for each of you to hear the laws many times and have a chance to study them at leisure and then enact those that are just and in the public interest (Against Leptines 20, 93-94, trans. Harris).

This new group of Lawgivers and the procedure that it oversees are frequently praised by litigants as ensuring that all the laws are good and just.

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7 Inscriptiones Graecae I 104.
and beneficial.

However, there was also a sense in Athens that old laws were the best. The homicide laws, being the oldest, were regularly praised as the best, and new legislation might be considered suspect. This is the lesson Demosthenes emphasizes when he tells a well-known, but probably not historical, story about legislation in Locri. Although Zaleucus, the first lawgiver, is not named, Zaleucus’ legislation provides the context for anyone who might want to enact legislation after him in Locri. Demosthenes tells the story in his speech against Timocrates:

I wish to explain to you, men of the court, how the Locrians enact laws. (...) There they are so committed to the idea that it is necessary to follow the long established laws, to preserve the ancestral ways, and not to legislate on a whim nor to provide guilty men with a means of escape, that if anyone wishes to pass a new law, he proposes his law with a noose around his neck. If the law is judged good and beneficial, the proposer lives and walks away, but if not, he dies when the noose is drawn tight. In fact, they do not dare to pass new laws, but strictly adhere to the long established laws. For very many years, men of the court, it is said that only one new law has been enacted in their community. There was a law that if someone gouged out an eye, he was to have his own eye knocked out in return, and no monetary penalty was permitted. The story goes that a man threatened to gouge out the eye of his enemy who had just one eye. The one-eyed man, alarmed by this threat and thinking that life would not be worth living were it carried out, is said to have worked up the courage to introduce a law ordering that if anyone gouged out the eye of a person with just one eye, he was to have both his eyes gouged out in return so that both men would suffer an equal misfortune. It is reported that this is the only law the Locrians have passed in more than two hundred years (Against Timocrates 24, 139-141, trans. Harris).

Demosthenes then explains the lesson of this story:

By contrast, men of the court, the politicians in our city first pass laws (nomothetein) for their own advantage almost every month, then, when they are in office, they drag private citizens off to prison, but they do not believe that the same rule of justice should be applied to them. Finally, even as they are abolishing the laws of Solon, which your ancestors enacted and which have passed the test of time, they claim that you should obey their laws, which they are enacting to the city’s detriment. If, then, you do not punish them, it will not be long before the majority of you become the slaves of these monsters (Against Timocrates 24, 142-143, trans. Harris).

The Individual as Lawgiver

The passages just cited come from a speech in which Demosthenes is
prosecuting Timocrates for passing an inexpedient law, so one would expect him to be critical of Timocrates as lawgiver. But he has generalized his criticism to include all current individuals who enact laws. Thus, he is similarly critical of Leptines, whom he prosecutes for the same offense (*Against Leptines*, 20). I quoted a passage from this speech above, in which Demosthenes explains the new rules for enacting legislation. After the passage I cited, Demosthenes continues, « Now out of all these fair rules, this man here [Leptines] has not followed a single one. If he had, in my opinion you would not have been persuaded to pass such a piece of legislation » (*Against Leptines* 20, 94, trans. Harris).

Several other individuals are also accused of being, or trying to be, lawgivers. Most notably, in a speech prosecuting a certain Nicomachus, who was a member of the group of Inscribers during the period 409-403, Lysias alleges that Nicomachus controlled the entire project, to the detriment of all:

> Is there anyone who does not know the damage he did to the city after he was appointed an Inscriber? He had been instructed to inscribe the laws of Solon in four months; instead, he set himself up as lawgiver (*nomothetēs*) instead of Solon, and instead of four months he made his term in office six years. Every day he took money to inscribe some laws and erase others (*Against Nicomachus* 30, 2, trans. Todd).

Other individuals who are said to be wrongly legislating include the prosecutor in Antiphon’s speech *On the Murder of Herodes*, who has used an unorthodox procedure for the prosecution of homicide. The defendant accuses him of acting illegally in several ways, and sums up his argument by saying:

> The laws on homicide are the finest, and no one has ever dared change them. Only you have had the audacity to become a lawgiver (*nomothetēs*) and make them worse, seeking to ruin me unjustly in violation of these laws (*On the Murder of Herodes* 5, 15, trans. Gagarin).

And in another case, at the end of his second speech against Stephanus, much of which concerns Stephanus’ ally Phormio, Demosthenes addresses the jury: « In view of all this, I would like to ask you, according to whose laws have you sworn to judge this case, the laws of the city or the laws that Phormio has enacted (*nomothetēi*) for himself » (*Against Stephanus II* 46, 27, trans. Scafuro). And in his speech against Dionysodorus, Demosthenes accuses Dionysodorus of violating a contract for shipping grain: « Thus, he enacted a law (*nomothetōn*) for himself and rejected our just claims based on the contract » (*Against Dionysodorus*, 56, 12, trans. Bers). Someone who enacts a law for himself is obviously the wrong kind of lawgiver and will enact only bad, self-serving legislation.
Finally, looking to the future, litigants sometimes call on the members of the jury to become lawgivers themselves, by delivering a verdict that will, in effect, enact a law. For example, at the end of the speech just cited, in which he criticizes Dionysodorus for enacting a law for himself, Demosthenes addresses the jury while alluding to the many onlookers who regularly attended trials in Athens:

Apart from these matters, men of Athens, do not fail to realize that in judging one case now you will be legislating (nomotheteite) for the whole grain market, because many whose business is maritime commerce are in attendance, watching to see how you will judge this case. If you think that contracts and mutual agreements should have force and you will show no tolerance for those who violate them, then those who lend their own money will do so more readily and your market will flourish as a result. If, however, ship captains will be allowed to write contracts that stipulate putting in at Athens, but then take their ship to other markets, claiming that their ship has sprung a leak and offering pretexts like those Dionysodorus here uses, and if they are allowed to prorate the interest according to whatever itinerary they say they have completed, rather than the interest conforming to the contract, then nothing will prevent all contracts from being revoked (Against Dionysodorus 56, 48-49, trans. Bers).

Demosthenes is here asking the jury to convict Dionysodorus, thereby enforcing the current rules concerning maritime contracts, and thus (as it were) re-enacting these rules as new legislation.

Another speaker asks the jury to legislate by delivering a verdict that will (as it were) enact a new law concerning an offense not covered by the current law. Toward the beginning of Lycurgus’ prosecution of Leocrates on a charge of treason, Lycurgus acknowledges that, in fact, no law specifically addresses Leocrates’ behavior; nonetheless, he argues:

The crime that has been committed is so dreadful and so enormous that it is impossible for a prosecutor to find an appropriate charge or for the law to provide adequate punishment for his misdeeds. What penalty should there be for the man who deserted his country, failed to protect his ancestral shrines, abandoned the graves of his ancestors, and left the entire land in the hands of the enemy? The greatest and most severe of all punishments, death, which is the mandatory punishment in the laws, does not measure up to Leocrates’ crimes. The penalty for such an offense was omitted from our laws not through any oversight of the lawgiver, but because no such crime occurred in earlier times, and no one at the time expected it would happen in the future. As a result, gentlemen, you must act not only as
STORYTELLING ABOUT THE LAWGIVER IN THE ATHENIAN ORATORS

jurors for this crime but also as lawgivers (nomothetai). In cases where a law has indicated what crimes are subject to punishment, it is easy to use this as a guide and hand out punishments for those who have broken the law. In cases where a law has not specified each particular crime, however, but designates several with one name and where someone has committed greater crimes than all of them and is thus subject to all the law’s penalties, your decision must serve as an example to be left behind for future generations (Against Leocrates 1, 8-9, trans. Harris).

Lycurgus is asking the jury to convict Leocrates of treason because he left the city in a time of danger, even though the law on treason does not include this specific act. But by convicting Leocrates and thus setting an example that future prosecutors and juries can follow, the jury will, in effect, be enacting a new law, one that adds a new offense to those already mentioned in the law on treason.

These examples imply that, at least in certain cases, it is good for the jury to act as lawgivers. Another pair of examples, however, show how, as with so many issues in the orators, this point can also be argued the other way. Here I will cite two examples from different speeches, both of which were written by Lysias for the prosecution side in the same case, the prosecution of Alcibiades, son of the famous general of the same name, on a charge of desertion and evasion of military service. As in the last example from Lycurgus, it seems that no law addressed the specific acts Alcibiades is accused of. The prosecution was shared by several different speakers, and Lysias wrote the speeches for two of these co-prosecutors. In one of these, he makes an argument similar to that of Lycurgus:

Since you are deciding a case of this type for the first time since we made peace [i.e., since 403], gentlemen of the jury, it is appropriate that you should be not simply jurors but lawgivers (nomothetai). You are fully aware that in the future the city will treat such matters in whatever way you decide today. The task of a responsible citizen and just-minded juror is to interpret (dialambanein) the laws in the way that will benefit the city in the future (Against Alcibiades I 14, 4, trans. Todd).

In the other speech he wrote for this case, however, Lysias makes the opposite argument about legislating:

Furthermore, gentlemen of the jury, if anyone thinks that the penalty is substantial and the law too severe, you need to remember that you have not come here to be lawgivers (ou nomothetêsontes) but to vote according to the established laws, not to have pity on wrongdoers but rather to be angry with them and to assist the city as a whole (Against Alcibiades II 15, 9, trans. Todd).

As regards legislating, these two arguments are contradictory, but in fact,
they both convey the message that the jurors should vote for conviction. If they think that the current law may not cover Alcibiades’ crimes, then they must be lawgivers and ensure that these crimes are covered. But if they think the law does cover them, then they need to vote strictly according to the law and not innovate as lawgivers.

V.

Conclusion

This survey of the image of the lawgiver in Athenian forensic speeches reveals a clear consensus about the value of their legislation. Lawgivers of the past, whether named or anonymous, are always praised, together with the laws that they enacted. The only fault they are accused of is failing to include some offense in their legislation because they did not imagine that anyone could commit such a terrible crime; but this does not in any way tarnish their image. In addition, the present group of official Lawgivers (Nomothetai) enacts just and beneficial legislation when needed. Individuals who act as lawgivers in the present, however, have no official position and enact only self-serving legislation that is harmful to the polis. Finally, litigants sometimes ask the jury to become lawgivers by delivering a verdict that, in effect, enacts new legislation or confirms existing legislation. In such cases, the opposing litigant would almost certainly oppose the request and would remind the jurors that their duty (as confirmed in their oath) is to vote according to the existing laws, not to enact new laws.

All in all, the occasional criticisms of self-serving individuals or jurors acting as lawgivers do not diminish the high praise accorded to the lawgiver, whose legislation is in almost all cases beneficial to the polis. As the speaker in Demosthenes’ second speech against Aristogeiton tells the jury:

You would realize very precisely what a great advantage it is to obey the established laws and what a great evil it is to despise and not obey them, if you should consider the benefits that accrue from the laws separately from the consequences of lawlessness by keeping both before your eyes. You will find that from the latter [lawlessness] come madness, lack of self-control and greed, from the former good sense, self-control and deeds of justice. It is obvious: we can see that the best-run cities are those that had the best lawgivers (aristoi nomothetai). For the illnesses of the body are cured by the inventions of doctors, but the thoughts of lawgivers amputate the wildness of the soul (Against Aristogeiton II, 26, 25-26, trans. Harris).

No one, it seems benefits the city as much as the lawgiver.