

VIRGIL'S *GEORGICS*: THE THREAT OF SLOTH

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The *Georgics* is a delightful and a serious poem, drawing the reader to great sympathy with land and nature. But Virgil's underlying conception of the world is elusive. The beginning and the end of the *Georgics*, in particular, pose problems for understanding the poem as a whole. At the beginning stands the theodicy, explaining the necessity for work. As a true "theodicy," however, a "justification of the ways of god to man," its import is not clear: how is Jupiter's world an improvement over the Golden Age world? The Aristaeus-Orpheus episode, too, which occupies the last half of Book 4, is not obviously relevant to the rest of the *Georgics*. To shed light on their meaning in the *Georgics*, I want to take these two passages together as complementary expressions of Virgil's main theme, namely, labor and sloth. The part of labor has often been stated, so I will concentrate my approach on following its counterpart, sloth. The *function* of labor and sloth, Virgil's conception of the working of the world and Jupiter's provision for men, becomes completely clear only when the theme is traced through the *Georgics* from the theodicy to its culminating statement in the Aristaeus-Orpheus episode. The first thing is to be clear about what the theodicy implies.

The theodicy (1.121-59) refers to, and in some sense answers, Lucretius' contention in the *De Rerum Natura* that the world is in a state of decline leading to death. Lucretius says:

iamque adeo fracta est aetas effetaque tellus	2.1150
vix animalia parva creat quae cuncta creavit	
saecla deditque ferarum ingentia corpora partu . . .	
praeterea nitidas fruges vinetaque laeta	1157
sponse sua primum mortalibus ipsa creavit,	
ipsa dedit dulcis fetus et pabula laeta;	

quae nunc vix nostro grandescunt aucta labore,
 conterimusque boves et viris agricolarum,
 conficimus ferrum vix arvis suppeditati:
 usque adeo parcunt fetus augentque laborem.

In Book 5 Lucretius describes the slow development of the arts of civilization (though without specifically relating it to the decline of the earth). Virgil accepts the Epicurean view of an earth declining in fertility. But instead of drawing the conclusion that the earth is growing older, he makes the decline one of the conditions that Jupiter imposed on the world. Thus discovery of the arts is correlated with conditions of growing harshness and the materialist Epicurean outlook is turned into a providential one. But how does this affect the nature of the earth?

Men were lazy, but the earth bore freely in the Golden Age; now men must labor and earth gives no aid. Men and earth have in fact changed roles:

pater ipse colendi	I.121
haud facilem esse viam voluit, primusque per artem	
movit agros, curis acuens mortalia corda	
nec <i>torpere gravi</i> passus sua regna <i>veterno</i> .	
ante Iovem nulli subigebant arva coloni:	
ne signare quidem aut partiri limite campum	
fas erat; in medium quaerebant, ipsaque tellus	
omnia liberius nullo poscente ferebat.	
prima Ceres ferro mortalis vertere terram	147
instituit, cum iam <i>glandes atque arbuta</i> sacrae	
<i>deficerent</i> silvae et <i>victum Dodona negaret</i> .	
mox et frumentis labor additus, ut mala culmos	
esset robigo <i>segnisque</i> horreret in arvis	
carduus; intereunt segetes, subit aspera silva	
lappaeque tribolique, interque nitentia culta	
<i>infelix</i> lolium et <i>steriles</i> dominantur avenae.	

And in the following paragraph, Virgil adds:

vidi lecta diu et multo spectata labore	197
degenerare tamen, ni vis humana quotannis	
maxima quaeque manu legeret: sic omnia fatis	
in peius ruere ac retro sublapsa referri,	

non aliter quam qui adverso vix flumine lembum
remigiis subigit, si brachia forte remisit,
atque illum in praeceps pronò rapit alveus amni.

Jupiter did not wish men to suffer *veternus* (the sloth of old age with its implications of degeneration and sterility). As a result, the earth grew sluggish, refused to bear food for men freely, encouraged the lazy thistle, barren (*infelix*) darnel, and sterile wild oats. *Segnis* in the positive degree is an uncommon word before the Silver Age, hence strong.¹ The association of *segnis* and *sterilis* in the passage indicates the way in which the earth's and nature's laziness manifests itself. The earth is slothful in its reluctance to support crops which will sustain men, and those plants are lazy that cannot themselves nourish men and prevent ones that can from growing. The point of the *omnia in peius ruere* is that nature declines away from fruitfulness for men. The sterility that results from this slothfulness is always seen from man's point of view. It is not an indication of a weakening earth in general but of a specific reaction to men's needs. Man's labor is to oppose the sluggishness; this task, rather than fighting disasters, commands his constant attention.

By finding another explanation for the decline of the earth, Virgil has saved the world from the fate that Lucretius had foreseen. For Lucretius nothing followed the loss of early intimacy between men and earth but an ever-widening gulf, both physical and emotional, as age made its inexorable inroads. Virgil made the separation reversible, for through labor men can recall nature to its Golden Age state. The close mutual relationship is not necessarily lost; rather, it becomes a moral tie.² Men may accept or reject their new responsibility to maintain the earth's fertility. The natural world will quite directly reflect the seriousness with which they carry the burden. The new

¹ L. P. Wilkinson, *The Georgics of Virgil* (Cambridge 1969) 201; Lewis and Short, *Latin Dictionary*, s.v. *segnis*. Wilkinson thinks that the word is poetic (because unusual). I think that it is thematic. It occurs five times in the *Georgics* (three times of land or crops), ten times in the *Aeneid*, and not at all in the *Eclogues*. See M. N. Wetmore, *Index Verborum Vergilianus* (New Haven 1911).

² For a general discussion of Virgil's rejection of Lucretius see B. Farrington, "Virgil and Lucretius," *Acta Classica* 1 (1958) 45-50. Relevant here is the remark of F. Klingner, *Virgil: Bucolica, Georgica, Aeneis* (Zurich 1967) 271, that Lucretius wished to free men from fear, Virgil to free them from loss of harmony in the world.

system is therefore intrinsically neither good nor bad. It depends on how men react to the choice that they did not have before.

In the passage just quoted, Jupiter refused to condone men's torpor, but possibly he had the gods in mind also. If so, the invocation of the first proem has even more point, for great emphasis is there put on the inventors or discoverers of various things useful in agriculture. Liber, Ceres, Neptune, Minerva, and Triptolemus are all invoked as originators. And even the woodland deities, the Fauns and Dryads, have acquired duties as *agrestum praesentia numina* (1.10). In the theodicy Jupiter himself caused the wine running in rivers to dry up, so that for wine-making in the future Bacchus' help would be needed. Ceres came to men's aid at the end of the Golden Age and taught them cultivation. One is left to imagine that before this time the gods had had little to do with men. And of course Caesar Augustus must likewise learn to take on responsibility for maintaining the fertility of the earth and the moral welfare of the men who look to him.

At the same time, men have acquired responsibility toward the gods in the form of piety. Virgil continually combines practical admonitions with a reminder to call on the gods for help (e.g., 1.100, 1.155-59, 1.335-50, 2.380-96).

Virgil, then, has brought earth, men, and gods together to interact in the same moral system and has made men the central figures in the relationship, responsible for the state of the world. The earth does not pursue a course independent of men, on this view, and the Lucretian conclusion as to its future has been avoided. Virgil's view is certainly the more comforting and in itself inspires creative activity. But the Epicurean explanation has a certain cogency about it which Virgil must equal if he is to provide an intellectual alternative to Lucretius. Virgil's view must have the same force and internal consistency on a theological level as Lucretius'. And here Virgil seems to many to have failed. Scholars cannot agree on whether Virgil's view is theologically legitimate, whether Jupiter's beneficence is revealed in his reordering of the world, whether the Iron Age holds an advantage over the earlier period.

Klingner describes Virgil's choice as between embodying Lucretian pessimism in his poem, once he has accepted a declining earth, and finding an idea which will provide salvation: Jupiter's decree that work

is ennobling is the answer.³ Wilkinson also takes the theodicy to be Virgil's more optimistic answer to the problem posed by Lucretius.⁴ He too thinks that Virgil is defending the "dignity of labor." Otis, on the other hand, in discussing Wilkinson's book, cannot accept even the overall significance of the theodicy, much less Wilkinson's positive view of it. He balances pessimistic Book 1 against optimistic Book 2 as two sides of a complex picture and points out that the development of civilization is itself ambiguous.⁵ Elsewhere Otis remarks that the change from the Golden Age to the Iron Age is usually taken to be pejorative and feels that man's fall is present at the end of Book 1, even if absent from the theodicy itself.⁶ La Penna, comparing Virgil with Hesiod (in *Entretiens Hardt*), states that Virgil's justification of providence either does not exist or is very weak and suggests that in the *Georgics* as in the *Aeneid* Virgil hesitates between acceptance of divine will and pity for men.⁷ Part of the discussion after his paper centers around this question: Waszink agrees with La Penna; Solmsen feels that Jupiter's wish to develop human abilities, hence virtues, is justified in itself, and Grimal adds that it is Rome's and Virgil's originality to say that the necessity of work is an end in itself, a *telos*.⁸ Plato's implicit criticism of the Golden Age in the *Politicus* (272b-d) is adduced as a precedent for Virgil.⁹ In a recent article Buechner escapes the problem by suggesting that Jupiter is simply the world as it is in the present, difficult but god-given. Virgil, he thinks, found its sense in the labor which yields man's development through culture to his essential being and did not attempt to justify this condition, but accepted it.¹⁰

Most of these scholars accept, in one variation or another, the idea

³ Klingner (above, note 2) 199-201.

⁴ Wilkinson (above, note 1) 135 ff.

⁵ Brooks Otis, "A New Study of the *Georgics*," *Phoenix* 26 (1972) 45 and 50 ff.

⁶ Brooks Otis, *Virgil, A Study in Civilized Poetry* (Oxford 1963) 162. I disagree with this view, as will emerge later, but do agree with his statement that man must struggle against his own vice and anarchy. Vice and anarchy were a problem in the Golden Age world also.

⁷ A. La Penna, "Esiodo nella Cultura e nella Poesia di Virgilio," *Fondation Hardt Entretiens* VII (1960) 238-39.

⁸ *Fond. Hardt* (above, note 7) 258-61.

⁹ By Solmsen, *Fond. Hardt* (above, note 7) 259. Cf. his own paper, "Hesiodic Motifs in Plato," *Fond. Hardt Entr.* VII, 185-88.

¹⁰ K. Buechner, "Der Eingang der Georgica," *Vergiliana: Recherches sur Virgile*, ed. by H. Bardon and R. Verdière (Leiden 1971) 87-91.

that Virgil felt work to be justified in itself, thus admitting that Virgil provides no further reason why Jupiter should have seen fit to end the Golden Age. The conception of work as a *telos*, however, is not satisfactory, for the only specified goal of labor is a return to the Golden Age (at the end of Book 2). If work only leads one back to the state one has lost, it cannot in itself be an improvement over the old condition. And Plato's criticism of the Golden Age is foreign to the *Georgics*. Plato said that the Golden Age would be far better than the present order if the people living in it spent their time philosophizing, but indicated that he doubted they did. He did not object to the leisure *per se*. On the other hand, importing a fall of man does not help either. If one wished to relate the end of Book 1 to the theodicy, one would have to say that the punishment produced the fall, which is not helpful. One is forced to the conclusion either that Virgil could not, or did not want to, provide a cogent theological alternative to Lucretius, contenting himself with an assertion of the positive value of labor, or that the theodicy does not stand by itself, but remains to be completed.

Since the theodicy is concerned with the place of labor and sloth, the completion of its thought will be found by following this theme through the *Georgics*. The collocation of *segnis* and *sterilis* in the theodicy has already been noted. *Segnis* appears first of a field in line 72. *Sterilis* too is used in the discussion of soils early in Book 1 (lines 70 and 84), while the circumlocution *male pinguis* is used in line 105. It also underlies the advice to rotate crops and fertilize the *effetos agros* (lines 80-81).

The theme of nature's tendency toward sterility is not evident during the discussion of weather signs later in Book 1, but reappears in Book 2. The book opens with a description of the ways in which trees propagate naturally, followed by a description of artificial propagation. The latter is introduced by the line:

sunt alii, quos ipse via sibi repperit *usus* 2.22

The echo of the theodicy is picked up in the transition to the address to Maecenas:

quare agite o proprios generatim discite cultus, 2.35
agricolae, fructusque feros mollite colendo,
neu *segnes* iaceant terrae.

Do not let the lazy earth bear only wild fruit. The reason is given a few lines later:

sponte sua quae se tollunt in luminis oras, 2.47
infecunda quidem, sed laeta et fortia surgunt;
 quippe solo natura subest.

Consonant with the change in tone from Book 1, the emphasis is on the *laeta et fortia*, the exuberance of nature, but the farmer's techniques are still necessary to bring the trees to fruition.¹¹ *Steriles stirpes* will be fruitful if slipped and set out, away from the parent tree's shade (2.53–56). Even *steriles platani* can be made to bear apples if grafted (2.70). The emphasis on grafting, in fact, suits the theme very well. And indeed, grafting or slipping is necessary, for fruit trees cannot be trusted to produce equally fecund offspring:

iam quae seminibus iactis se sustulit arbos, 2.57
 tarda venit seris factura nepotibus umbram,
 pomaque degenerant sucos oblita priores
 et turpis avibus praedam fert uva racemos.
 scilicet omnibus est labor impendendus, et omnes
 cogendae in sulcum ac multa mercede domandae.

This is precisely the thought of the *omnia in peius ruere* of Book 1.

Later in Book 2 Virgil recommends soil from which the ploughsman has cleared trees:

aut unde iratus silvam devexit arator 2.207
 et nemora evertit multos *ignava* per annos,
 antiquasque domos avium cum stirpibus imis
 eruit; illae altum nidis petiere relictis,
 at rudis enituit impulso vomere campus.

The woods are lazy, i.e., unproductive, from men's point of view, though they support the birds. The rest of nature pursues its course of life in indifference to men. The farmer is set apart from this unconscious, Golden Age life by his need to labor for his keep.¹² The same

¹¹ For the alternation of pessimistic and optimistic tones through the *Georgics* see Otis, *Virgil* (above, note 6) 151–90. Also W. Liebeschutz, "The Cycle of Growth and Decay in Lucretius and Virgil," *PVS* 7 (1967–68) 30–40.

¹² D. Wender, "Resurrection in the Fourth *Georgic*," *AJP* 90 (1969) 431–32, thinks that the farmer must of necessity violate nature in order to make it productive. I would see the violence rather as part of the larger need to repress or correct slothfulness. This

notion lies behind Virgil's observation that one can spot land good for olives by the (infertile) wild olives growing there (2.179-83) and that the pasture land of Mantua pastures swans (2.198-99). Neither wild olives nor swans are useful to men, but they indicate what sort of fertility the land can furnish. The farmer's activity is related to but distinct from the processes of the natural world. Again one must not stake one's vines on wild olives lest the trees catch fire: the vines will be unable to recover, but

infelix superat foliis oleaster amaris. 2.314

The description forms one of the little peaks that give such color to the flow of advice.

After the long section on viticulture, on the other hand, Virgil changes his tone and says that olive trees need no cultivation (2.420), though he immediately adds that some ploughing is necessary to loosen the soil. Richter notes that this is not what other agricultural writers say, so suggests that Virgil is preparing for the ease of the end of the book.¹³ Fruit trees, too, once they have got their start—the grafting or slipping—barely need our help. Virgil is beginning to bring out nature's inherent strength, but his conclusion is in keeping with the earlier part of the book:

et dubitant homines serere atque impendere curam? 2.433

Emphasis on nature's fecundity leads to thoughts of useful plants found growing wild, willow and broom. Then in a final climactic paragraph, leading to the Praise of Country Life, Virgil adds:

ipsae Caucasio *steriles* in vertice silvae, 2.440
 quas animosi Euri adsidue franguntque feruntque,
 dant alios aliae fetus, dant utile lignum
 navigiis pinus, domibus cedrumque cupressosque.

tension between the earth's "downward" tendency and man's forcing it "upward" to fertility fits well with the imagery of ascent and descent in the *Georgics*, to which S.P. Bovie, "The Imagery of Ascent-Descent in Virgil's *Georgics*," *AJP* 77 (1956) 337-58, called attention.

¹³ Will Richter, *Virgil, Georgica* (Munich 1957) on 2.420 (henceforth cited as Richter).

Even the sterile forests of the Caucasus yield material to men's ingenuity. Here, though the unfruitfulness is still present, Virgil is drawing men back into the natural world as a prelude to the return to the Golden Age which comes at the end of the book. The discovery that some things come from nature without coercion can have its proper perspective only after it is clear how necessary coercion is. These lines qualify the ones quoted earlier on the clearing of woods for potential ploughland.

The new intimacy is the reverse of the old. Nature has lost the initiative to men. The movement of the poem itself so far indicates the reversal of positions. The theodicy separated men from their "mother." Then through the two books *labor* grew to a crescendo and gave way, as men matured, to revived mutual thriving. Men aid nature on the one hand and make use of what she gives on the other. But they still must exercise art on the gifts of nature to make them helpful. Men are in control over nature.

Before discussing the end of Book 2, however, I should like to go back and point out another aspect of the theme of sloth in nature. This is the sterility of overprecocious growth, the plants' expenditure of energy on producing leaves or stalks, so that the fruit suffers. If certain kinds of grain are planted too soon the expected yield will be a delusion (1.219-26). The nut tree is a prophet of the year's yield: if its leaves outweigh its flowers in the spring, the harvest will follow suit (1.187-92). Virgil repeatedly warns against *umbræ* as harmful to crops. *Umbra* appears in the lines before the theodicy as one of the things that make a farmer's lot difficult, and again at the end of the theodicy wild trees' shade will harm the crops if the farmer neglects to prune (1.156-57). Twice a year vines must be pruned (2.410). Slips from a tree must be set out in the open where the parent's shade will not stunt them (2.53-56).¹⁴ Over-rich soil, too, must be plowed frequently to inhibit weeds (1.63-73), and too rich a field is bad for wool-bearing sheep (3.385). The storms of Book 1 are perhaps another example of the same phenomenon, for the farmer's basic

¹⁴ *Umbræ* are not always harmful in the *Georgics*. They are connected with *otium* and the world of the *Eclogues*; hence their use here, I think, to carry the theme of the sloth of nature. But sometimes the pastoral world is deliberately evoked, e.g., 3.327 ff. See Richter on 3.331. Cf. also Cicero's use of a metaphor of pruning for taming and civilizing in *De Prov. Cons.* 14.34.

concern is to get enough rain (1.23 and 157). Thus in one way or another nature misdirects its energies and falls away from the task of feeding men.¹⁵

Opposing sloth and degeneration is another kind of growth seen in the *Georgics*. The same maturing process which man as a species had to go through in changing from a Golden Age to an Iron Age world must be repeated by the individual plants and animals which are used by men. Tremendous care must be given them while young so that they can accept their burden when older and resist degeneration. Truly careful viticulturists plant their young vines on a hillside similar to the nursery "lest the slips not recognize their suddenly altered mother" (2.268) and set them in the ground facing the same direction as formerly. Animals must be kept out of the vineyard also:

texendae saepes etiam et pecus omne tenendum, 2.371
praecipue dum frons tenera imprudensque laborum.

In Book 3 calves (and colts) must be trained from youth on (3.163-65), but the farmer has given them every care and breaks them in gently (3.157-73). The beautiful passage in Book 2 called the Praise of Spring ends on this note:

non alios prima crescentis origine mundi 2.336
inluxisse dies aliumve habuisse tenorem
crediderim: ver illud erat, ver magnus agebat
orbis et hibernis parcebant flatibus Euri,
cum primae lucem pecudes hausere, virumque
terrea progenies duris caput extulit arvis,
immissaeque ferae silvis et sidera caelo.
nec res hunc tenerae possent perferre laborem,
si non tanta quies iret frigusque caloremque
inter, et exciperet caeli indulgentia terras.

The last three lines refer to the present. Living things need every care in their youth so that they can be fruitful when older. This is the course that men took: earth cared for them while young so that now in

¹⁵ H. Altevogt, *Labor Improbis, Eine Vergilstudie* (Muenster 1952) 4-29, has pointed out the symmetrical contrast between excess and poverty that runs all through the first part of Book 1. He connects it with *labor improbus* and *urgens egestas* (*Geo.* 1.145-46). It may be more general, however, since the two ideas continue, not always in conjunction, through Books 1 and 2.

their adulthood they can undertake the labor of bringing fruitfulness out of the earth. The reference to the Golden Age environment enforces the parallelism of the two developments. Once a year earth reproduces its earlier state to initiate the cycle again.

Through his successful command over nature, the farmer is able to return to a Golden Age state, as the end of Book 2 describes. He is once again in rapport with the natural world, unlike those who have rejected the land and live in luxury in the city. The farmers' success in separating themselves from the deluded city-dwellers, in fact, accounts for the very different tone at the end of this book from the end of Book 1. There the farmers were dragged into the civil war as it convulsed the world (1.505-8). The farmer in Book 1 who plows in the future will find rusted equipment as the only thing sown by his predecessors (1.494-97). This "seed" bears a certain resemblance to the kind of sowing expressly disclaimed for the Italian countryside in the Praise of Italy in Book 2 (lines 140-42). In the latter book the farmer has established *secura quies* for himself (2.467) and continuity from generation to generation (2.514-15).

As observed above, the new order is intrinsically neither good nor bad. In Book 1 the course adopted was rejection of responsibility for the land and indulgence in self-destruction. In Book 2 the farmers, at least, have found the path to salvation. The parallel similes which end the two books enforce the contrast and imply that the solution to the problems of Book 1 will be found in the farmers' life of Book 2.¹⁶

However, as Otis and Wilkinson remark, the farmers' happiness is too local and too tenuous to offset the suffering and destruction that plague men in Book 1 and the city-dwellers of Book 2.¹⁷ It appears that not only does Jupiter's ordination of labor lead nowhere except back to the condition once taken for granted, but most men do not even manage to return to a happy state at all. Were this the final conclusion of the *Georgics* we would despair of Jupiter's good intentions toward men. However, we are only halfway through the *Georgics*, so the

¹⁶ Otis, *Phoenix* (above, note 5) 52-53, notes that 2.513 must be meant to recall 1.506. These lines contrast the fates of the two farmers specifically.

¹⁷ Otis, *Phoenix* (above, note 5) 53; Wilkinson (above, note 1) 145. La Penna (above, note 7) 239-40, thinks there is a hiatus between the *labor improbus* of Book 1 and the Praise of Country Life in Book 2 that cannot be bridged. The former is Hesiodic, the latter the result of centuries of idealizing country life and contemplative life.

possibility of return to the Golden Age is but part of Virgil's vision. Books 3 and 4 must be added to the account.

The theme I have been tracing, nature's tendency to degenerate in the direction of sterility, maintains itself in Book 3. The breeder of horses is advised to look for liveliness and swiftness in his stallion before he checks the pedigree (3.100-102 and 118-22). The admonition to turn away an old horse combines the threat of sterility with the greater one of death:

hunc quoque, ubi aut morbo gravis aut iam *segnior* annis 3.95
deficit, abde domo, nec turpi ignosce senectae.
frigidus in Venerem senior, frustra que laborem
ingratum trahit. . . .

The strongest statement, however, comes in the passage on the effects of passion. Personal emotions are suddenly the source of the general tendency. The lioness abandons the cubs she already has to wander in the fields in search of a new mate (3.245-46). Animals turn savage. But the worst affected are the mares, who run wild on the ridges, conceive from the wind, and give birth to nothing but the noxious hippomanes (3.271-83). Fruitful love-making, on the other hand, is a *labor* for which the farmer must prepare the stallion (3.123-28).

The plague which ends Book 3 produces worse than sterility, but it too is an extreme form of deterioration. It can perhaps be stopped by observing the first symptoms:

quam procul aut molli succedere saepius umbrae 3.464
videris aut summas carpentem *ignavius* herbas
extremamque sequi, aut medio procumbere campo
pascentem et serae solam decedere nocti—
continuo culpam ferro compesce . . .

Again, the decline takes the form of growing sloth. But here, as in the case of the aging horse, it is not decline from one generation to the next, but the individual's inevitable descent to death. This modulation of the theme is first brought out in the poignant lines near the beginning of the book:

optima quaeque dies miseris mortalibus aevi 3.66
prima fugit; subeunt morbi tristisque senectus
et labor, et durae rapit inclementia mortis.

Hitherto the decline has affected vegetable nature and was reversible through men's labor. Now individuals, man and animal, are involved. As for animals, one can still renew the herd or maintain it by prudent breeding, but this is no solution for men. The quick mention of Hero and Leander's tale brings the threat home (3.258-63). The Golden Age is no proof against the destructiveness of passion and death. By tying this destructiveness to the theme of decline, Virgil is exploring beyond the resolution of Book 2 into the nature of man himself—for it is here, not in the character of the earth, that the inadequacy of the Golden Age will be found. Fruitfulness is *labor* for men, animals, plants, earth itself, and continuous resistance to sloth, decline, sterility. But the possibilities for decline are in men themselves as well as in the things dependent on men.

The bees of Book 4 represent one attempt to escape destruction by complete adherence to the style of Jupiter's world. They are the only creatures besides men who labor to produce and have a social organization. They try to avoid the pitfalls of the animals of Book 3. They indulge in no sexual intercourse:

illum adeo placuisse apibus mirabere morem, 4.197
quod neque concubitu indulgent, nec corpora *segnes*
in Venerem solvunt aut fetus nixibus edunt.

Rather, they find their offspring on leaves and grass. The initial sloth of love and by implication all its destructive repercussions are avoided. Death, too, they make no individual attempt to flee, preferring that the hive remain safe (4.203-9).

Directly after the paragraph on the Old Man of Tarentum comes the most "elevated" passage of description of the bees. It begins with the gift of Jupiter, lines again reminiscent of the theodicy:

nunc age, naturas apibus quas Iuppiter ipse 4.149
addidit expediam, pro qua mercede canoros
Curetum sonitus crepitantiaque aera secutae
Dictaeo caeli regem pavere sub antro.
solae communis natos, consortia tecta
urbis habent magnisque agitant sub legibus aevum,
et patriam solae et certos novere penatis;
venturaeque hiemis memores aestate *laborem*
experiuntur et in medium quaesita reponunt.

Jupiter's accession to the place of Saturn is alluded to by implication. As in the theodicy Jupiter shook the honey from the leaves, so the gift of communal labor is perhaps recompense for the loss of their natural food. As a result, bees *in medium quaesita reponunt*. In the Golden Age men *in medium quaerebant* (1.127). The bees have succeeded in recreating Golden Age plenty.¹⁸

But in spite of their extreme effort, the bees' style of life is inadequate, at least as a paradigm for men. First, their labor is not the conscious act of experience and understanding. The passage that begins with the gift of Jupiter and describes their habits ends with a reference to the *pars divinae mentis* in which the bees, with all creatures, share. The doctrine is attributed to *quidam* (presumably the Stoics), but Virgil uses it, I think, to indicate that the bees' activity is instinctive, something breathed in with the simple breath of life, not chosen of free will. The "breath" is not an alternative explanation to that of Jupiter's gift, but a clarification of it. Jupiter did not grant men any such instinctive adaptation to his new order, rather the opposite.

Secondly, the bees' life style is inadequate in that the bees too are subject to the inroads of decline about which they can do nothing. They need men's help. One must discourage two hives of bees from doing battle (4.67-87) and kill the more sluggish lest he prove a wasteful impediment:

nam duo sunt genera: hic melior insignis et ore 4.92
et rutilis clarus squamis; ille horridus alter
desidia latamque trahens inglorius alvum.

Sloth is not absent from the genus of bees. And the social organization is not entirely stable, either. If a hive loses its king the bees will destroy their own work (4.212-14). This complete dependence on the king is the last thing Virgil mentions in the passage on the habits of the bees, and I cannot believe that it is meant to be entirely positive.¹⁹

The bees' lack of self-sufficiency is most evident, however, in the

¹⁸ Richter on 4.156 f., thinks that Virgil has combined the motifs of labor and the Golden Age to form a synthesis of a harmonious cosmos and the positive value of work.

¹⁹ Virgil says: *praeterea regem non sic Aegyptus et ingens / Lydia nec populi Parthorum aut Medus Hydaspes / observant* (4.210-12). The Romans did not admire, by and large, the nations mentioned.

section describing their illness and the measures to take against it. The bees themselves can only give in to the disease:

aut illae pedibus conexae ad limina pendent 4.257
aut intus clausis cunctantur in aedibus omnes
ignavaeque fame et contracto frigore pigrae.

Willingness to sacrifice oneself to the hive is of no aid in this situation; the bees have no way to fight their decline, but yield to sloth.²⁰

The all-pervading difficulty in the world of the *Georgics*, as the references cited all through this paper show, is the encroachment of sloth which prompts a decline in nature toward sterility. In grain crops the sterility manifests itself in an ever-smaller yearly yield if the largest seed is not picked out each year. Trees suffer the same loss of strength, but in addition the parent may produce barren offspring or even kill its offspring. In the case of animals there is the danger of not procreating successfully at all, and the further threat that the very possibility of procreation will be wiped out through loss of the herd, flock, or hive. Fertility is constantly endangered, and even love, which should be a creative urge, can express itself in sterility and destructiveness, so that it becomes allied to death, the completely irreversible decline. The danger increases in the course of the *Georgics*, though contained in the rhythm of changing tone. Nature has no defense against this decline, no way to heighten its own fertility.

The Aristaeus-Orpheus episode, therefore, has the double burden of completing the thought of the theodicy (whose continual reappearance in the poem has been noted) and of providing men with some bulwark against the pressures that pain of love and death bring. The epyllion is in fact the final formulation of the difference between the Golden Age and Iron Age worlds and reveals that the latter does provide men with a form of resistance as the former had not. Before turning to the epyllion, however, we can find a hint in Plato's *Politicus*, not in its criticism of the Golden Age but in its depiction of what happened at the end of that period. Plato, of course, has an idiosyncratic version to

²⁰ H. Dahlmann, "Der Bienenstaat in Vergils Georgica," *Kleine Schriften* (Hildesheim 1970) 181-96, takes a more positive view of the bees since he believes they are meant as an ideal for the Roman state under Augustus. This is certainly one element. However, he ignores the aspects that are not unambiguously positive. See his remarks on the Stoic elements in Virgil's thought in the section on the bees.

suit his own purposes. According to him the earth is at times under the direct control of god, who appoints *daimones* to be herdsmen over men, taking complete care of them: this is the age of Kronos. But when god lets the world go to move under its own initiative, then men are deserted by the *daimones* and left to look after themselves:

As for the beasts, 'twould be a long and tedious business to relate 274b-d
all the stages and reasons for the changes in them; of man we may speak more briefly and more to the point. When we were left without the care of the spirit who had owned and shepherded us, the brutes, being for the most part of ruder nature, grew savage; men left to themselves, being feeble and defenceless, became their prey; moreover, in those earliest times they were without appliances or arts, as their supply of unsought sustenance had failed them, and as yet they knew nothing of making provision for themselves, no previous need having compelled them to learn the lesson. For all these reasons they were in sore straits. Hence the old stories of gods who have enriched us with gifts accompanied with the needful instruction and training—how we received fire from Prometheus, industries from Hephaestus and his sister-artist, seed-corn and plants from yet others. This is the origin of all that has contributed to furnish forth the life of man, ever since the divine superintendence, as I said just now, failed him and he was forced to take charge of his own conduct and its supervision, like the whole world itself, whose fortunes we reproduce and follow, living and being born for one half of all time in the one wise, for the other in the other.²¹

Furthermore, men in the Golden Age were born from the earth, growing younger until they simply disappeared. There was no sexual intercourse among them. After the change men reverted to growing older and had to discover their own method of reproduction.

Here, as in the *Georgics*, there is no fall; the change is god-given. And men are completely protected in the Golden Age, even from the effects of love and a painful kind of death (for becoming more infantile cannot be tragically self-perceived). Their sterility, laziness, and helplessness therefore become critical only after the change. Virgil, however, (whose account bears resemblances to Plato's in other

²¹ A. E. Taylor's translation in *Plato, The Sophist and the Statesman* (Toronto 1961) 282–83.

respects), is not interested in the effects of a life of ease on men who are thrown out of the Golden Age but in the effects on men living in the Golden Age itself. The same faults by which the earth has been characterized throughout the *Georgics*, sloth, sterility, helplessness, the same faults which Plato attributed to those bereft of their *daimones*, will have characterized Virgil's Golden Age men if Jupiter did indeed reverse the roles of man and earth in the theodicy.²²

Let us consider the Aristaeus-Orpheus episode from this point of view.²³ Aristaeus' connection with the Jovian world of the theodicy is made explicit through the echoes in language. The narrative is introduced in lines reminiscent of the theodicy:²⁴

quis deus hanc, Musae, quis nobis *extudit* artem? 4.315
unde nova ingressus hominum *experientia* cepit?

The phrase *extudit artem* is taken up again a few lines later by Aristaeus himself:

en etiam hunc ipsum vitae mortalis honorem 4.326
quem mihi vix frugum et pecudum custodia sollers
omnia temptanti extuderat, te matre relinquo.

Aristaeus is invoked in the proem to the first book as an agricultural god (1.14-15), and he is closely connected in mythology with Zeus.²⁵

²² For a discussion of Virgil's rejection of a Golden Age type of world which takes a very different approach, see R. R. Dyer, "Ambition in the *Georgics*: Vergil's Rejection of Arcadia," *Auckland Classical Essays, Presented to E. M. Blaiklock* (Auckland 1971) 143-64.

²³ I have ignored the problem of the *laudes Galli*. The view of those scholars (e.g., Otis, *Virgil*, 408-13) who believe that a few lines, not more, may have been excised seems to me to be satisfactory, and even should Aristaeus and Orpheus refer to historical figures it would be no less necessary to seek their relevance to the rest of the *Georgics*. For bibliography on the problem see Duckworth, "Recent Work on Vergil (1957-63)," *CW* 57 (1963-64) 204, and add E. Coleiro, "Allegory in the IVth *Georgic*," *Vergiliana: Recherches sur Virgile*, ed. by Bardon and Verdière (Leiden 1971) 113-23. Richter 108 has a typical list of "difficulties" that the epyllion presents, e.g., the odd collocation of characters, the confusion over whether Orpheus or the nymphs caused Aristaeus' loss of his bees, the division of advice between Proteus and Cyrene, the strangeness of the tale in Proteus' mouth. Most of these difficulties I hope to have explained.

²⁴ The reminiscence is noted by Richter on 4.315, who agrees with E. Norden's identification of *usus* and *experientia*, "Orpheus und Eurydice," *Kleine Schriften* (Berlin 1966) 494.

²⁵ See Norden's excellent discussion (above, note 24) 488-96. On pp. 492-93, n. 47, he makes the suggestion that Aristaeus had at some point been connected with the Democritean culture theory since the theory appears, mythologized, he thinks, in Diodorus' account of Aristaeus, 4.81.2-3.

Orpheus, on the other hand, lives a Golden Age kind of life.²⁶ He is very much at one with nature, does not farm for a living. He produces nothing tangible. He is alone: he appeals to no gods for help, except those of death; he has no family, either parents or offspring, to comfort him. His marriage is barren.²⁷ His sterility, once he has lost Eurydice, is brought out by the imagery of cold and deserted places (lines 507–9 and 516–19). The lines stressing this chill surround a comparison of Orpheus with the nightingale:

qualis populea maerens philomela sub umbra 4.511
amissos queritur fetus, quos durus arator
observans nido implumis detraxit; at illa
flet noctem, ramoque sedens miserabile carmen
integrat, et maestis late loca questibus implet.

The simile adds night to the cold and emptiness, and by its position the nightingale is drawn into the frigid landscape. But the simile recalls the vignette in Book 2 quoted earlier in which the *durus arator* fells a wood, driving the birds to leave their nests but making the field shine. The woods in that passage were *nemora ignava*, and the same contrast between natural but lazy world and the farmer's activity is operative here. Orpheus' effect on wild animals has a Golden Age cast to it too:

septem illum totos perhibent ex ordine mensis . . . 4.507
flesse sibi . . .
mulcentem tigris et agentem carmine quercus.

This is the first time in the extant literature that the creation of peace among animals has been attributed to Orpheus.²⁸

²⁶ I do not want to make Orpheus a specifically Golden Age figure. I think Virgil found the myth of the Golden Age too sparse for his needs, for the tales tell of no individuals, much less any tragic ones. Instead, he made Aristaeus' connection with the development of culture clear and used Orpheus to carry the theme of lack of self-control which corresponds to his view of the Golden Age. The new form also relinquishes the attempt at an abstract, quasi-philosophical explanation in favor of the richer and more ambiguous form of myth. Virgil prefers the more symbolic, less explicit mode.

²⁷ Ovid (*Metam.* 10.1–10), following a different version of the Orpheus myth, has Orpheus lose Eurydice on their wedding day.

²⁸ Richter on 4.510. He compares Golden Age descriptions in *Georgics* 1.130; *Ecl.* 4.24; *Aen.* 8.325; Tibullus 1.3.47; Ovid, *Metam.* 1.98 ff. This is in distinction to Orpheus' ability to cause animals and trees or even all nature to move and follow him. See K. Ziegler (who makes the distinction) in *PW* 18.1 s.v. Orpheus, col. 1247–49, for citations. The difference from Apoll. Rhod. I.1144–45 does not seem to me to be great,

And being so free from Iron Age duties and ties, so oblivious, in a way, to the world he lives in, the universal nature of death and the continuing need for fertility, Orpheus is completely willful and engrossed in his own emotions. His love for Eurydice, while movingly profound, was also willful, and the same character which led him to go to Hades after her also led him to look back and thus lose her. His *furor* is an inability to accommodate himself to an external reality.

The difference in character between Orpheus and Aristaeus is mirrored in the difference between their two descents. Orpheus' descent is made by force of will and magic art (of which more later) and takes him to the region where prayers have no place (line 470), a place whence he cannot bring life. Aristaeus' journey, in contrast, is to the source of rivers—givers of life—and made at the command of his mother, a goddess. Orpheus astounded Hades, but was not himself affected, while Aristaeus marvels at his mother's home. Aristaeus engages with the world, hence is capable of learning, in a way that Orpheus is not.

The contrast between Aristaeus and Orpheus is heightened by the contrast between Cyrene and Proteus. Cyrene lives at the head waters of the great rivers of earth, while Proteus makes his abode in the "barren sea." Proteus wanders alone through the sea, pasturing seals—a completely fruitless activity from any human point of view—while Cyrene is surrounded by nymphs and engaged in very domestic activity.²⁹ Orpheus and Proteus, lonely wanderers, possessed of the

but there too there is a hint of Golden Age themes. Orpheus officiates at a sacrifice to *Rhea* who makes favorable signs appear:

δένδρεα μὲν καρπὸν χέον ἄσπετον, ἀμφὶ δὲ ποσσὶν 1.1142
 αὐτομάτῃ φύε γαῖα τερείνης ἄνθεα ποίης
 θῆρες δ' εἰλυοὺς τε κατὰ ξυλόχους τε λιπόντες
 οὐρῆσιν σαίνοντες ἐπήλυθον.

Cf. Hesiod, *Erga* 117–18. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion* (London 1935) 40, emphasizes Orpheus' gentleness.

²⁹ The much-disputed reception-scene borrowed from *Od.* 1.144 ff. and found also in *Aen.* 1.701 ff. is used to maintain the contrast between Cyrene and Proteus, hence as much in place here as the picture of the group of nymphs spinning. It need not be a hasty borrowing from the *Aeneid* at all (as those argue who believe the fourth *Georgic* was revised to omit the *laudes Galli*, e.g., Buechner, "P. Vergilius Maro," *PW* 8A, 2, cols. 1315–19). Klingner (above, note 2) 339–40, points out the ritual character of the ceremony in the *Georgics*, which also makes the description appropriate.

magic of song and vision, but without allegiances or productive activity, are balanced against Aristaeus and Cyrene, who are bound by kinship, serve the gods, are concerned with the farmer's art (compare the spinning girls in 1.390). And Aristaeus mentions his father, Apollo, his hope for immortality, and his honor. These, together with his bees, are the things that for him constitute a satisfying life, a very different ideal from Orpheus' self-centered existence.³⁰

Proteus, then, does not give *praecepta* because he is not concerned with the arts of the Iron Age world or with recalling nature from its decline: he does not know how to get a new hive of bees. Cyrene, being of Aristaeus' world, does know how bees are regenerated but not what killed them in the first place: she does not have the sympathetic penetration of the natural, Golden Age world of Orpheus and Proteus. Therefore, both the trip to Proteus and Cyrene's instruction are necessary. That the trip to Proteus has further significance will emerge later.

This explanation makes it possible to understand why Virgil picked this particular collocation of figures. Aristaeus, as a great agricultural hero, was already connected with cultivation and herds as well as bees (cf. Diodorus 4.81 f.), hence contains the themes of the *Georgics* in his person. Cyrene was already joined with him in mythology. To complement them Virgil developed two characters associated with the unreflective harmony characteristic of the Golden Age (there is perhaps a lightly hinted parallel between the two in Proteus' pasturing seals and Orpheus' attracting tigers and oaks) and with its magic, yet ultimately barren in the normal human ways of fruitfulness.³¹

³⁰ Wender (above, note 12) 433–36, thinks that the *matres* are fertilizing the fields with Orpheus' limbs. She recognizes the importance of fertility in the epyllion. Orpheus, she suggests, represents the Orphic horror of the fleshly which cannot cope with the demands of the physical world. Dirt and persistence are essential; success will come after failure. For an opposite view, which takes Orpheus as the positive character, the one released from aggression and controlling through sympathy until crushed by representatives of the work ethic, see A. Bradley, "Augustan Culture and a Radical Alternative: Vergil's *Georgics*," *Arion* 8 (1969) 347–58.

³¹ Norden (above, note 24) 522–23, emphasizes Virgil's interweaving of people to avoid an episodic quality in the narrative. Klingner (above, note 2) 342, thinks that Cyrene and Proteus are two halves of a whole, the frightful and the comforting; hence it would not be fitting for Cyrene to tell "frightful secrets." This is true from Aristaeus' point of view.

So far we have compared the two sets of characters. But the narrative is not a static contrast of two opposing types of life. The outline of the action is this: Aristaeus chases Eurydice and inadvertently causes her death. Orpheus loses his chance to bring her back from Hades through his *furor*, his uncontrollable love, so wanders off spurning companionship till torn apart in fury by the *matres*. The nymphs destroy Aristaeus' bees in revenge for Eurydice's death and Aristaeus threatens to abandon all his works for his mother to destroy. Proteus thinks that Aristaeus could appropriately suffer worse vengeance. This is the equivalent, on a psychological level, of the decline toward sterility and death to which the earth is subject. The movement here too is motivated by sloth in that the emotional labor of patience, forgiveness, faith to start anew are missing.³² Should the chain of destruction continue, human society would be threatened. The destructiveness of Orpheus' love is reiterated in the destructive passion of the *matres*, the nymphs' destructive love for Eurydice, Aristaeus' lack of faith in his mother, each a different form of destruction out of what should be the most creative of emotions. And Aristaeus is participating in this chain of negation, for he has not yet entirely accepted the Jovian world with its need to labor constantly, not given up *his* willfulness and come to maturity.

The regeneration of Aristaeus' bees, therefore, must not be simply another *ars* in the sense of technique. The farmer's relation to nature cannot be an external one; he must know the processes by which nature works. This is why Aristaeus' journey to Proteus is so important that it overshadows the giving of *praecepta*. Adam Parry states Aristaeus' real need: "the lesson which Aristaeus must learn to make his art viable, to attain by it a kind of immortality, is a lesson of poetry." Through poetry grief becomes art, the condition for the recreation of life. The art itself is the "resolution of man's confrontation with the absolute of death."³³

The poetry is Orpheus'. But Orpheus himself cannot use his poetry to metamorphose his love and subdue his *furor*; he cannot come

³² Bovie (above, note 12) 357-58, emphasizes the importance of finding energy to begin again but thinks that Orpheus does so, transforming his love into song and finally triumphing through immortality.

³³ Adam Parry's, "The Idea of Art in Virgil's *Georgics*," *Arethusa* 5 (1972) 51-52, a beautiful article.

to a resolution, so is unable to go on living. Like the nightingale, Orpheus sings out of instinct, not art. There is no *labor* involved, only the force of magic and will. So strong are these that the cold tongue can continue to sing once he is bereft of life. The song is stronger than he. But for Aristaeus the vicarious experience of the song can provide insight.

On the other hand, Aristaeus must not only comprehend what has happened but be able to stop the chain of disaster as well. The sacrifice to the nymphs and the *bougonia* accomplish that. This is Cyrene's contribution, practical understanding of the Iron Age world. She is not angered by her son's petulant accusations and later tells him somewhat brusquely, *nate, licet tristis animo deponere curas* (4.531). She rejects any self-centered indulgence in emotion which will threaten the stability of the external world. The *ars* she describes to Aristaeus is a conscious, teachable one, accomplished with labor and piety, unlike Orpheus' instinctive song.

There is, however, more to Orpheus than this. The fact that he is a poet gives him the power to express human emotion, which Aristaeus must come to know, but also opens the *Georgics* beyond the framework hitherto maintained. For in the Aristaeus-Orpheus episode the chronological relationship of Golden Age to Iron Age is no longer functional. Virgil seems to suggest that even in this Iron Age world of external commitment the poet must remain in the vulnerable and threatened Golden Age world, perhaps in order to bring tragedy to others so that the others may comprehend and cope with it. The process must always be repeated, for in a sense each man except the poet makes the transition from the Golden Age to the Iron Age of adulthood but, like Aristaeus, must look back to understand the fullness of human nature.³⁴

³⁴ C. Segal, "Orpheus and the Fourth *Georgic*: Vergil on Nature and Civilization," *AJP* 87 (1966) 307-25, gives a very sensitive comparison of Aristaeus and Orpheus, balancing their faults and virtues equally. "What emerges is the sense of the complexity of man between the two extremes of Aristaeus and Orpheus, external effectiveness in the realm of nature and devotion to man's peculiar inward capacities: emotion, art, love" (320). Klingner (above, note 2) 353 ff. also takes the two tales together to form a new synthesis, a higher unity which resolves them. They represent death in life and life out of death as the final triumph. Otis, *Phoenix* (above, note 5) 55-59, has come to feel that the whole episode has a dark cast to it. Human possibilities are "tragically limited: resurrection and restoration are possible, but they are always threatened." Aristaeus,

The point of Aristaeus' regeneration of the bees needs still to be explored. It is not compensation for the death of Eurydice, a resurrection to balance a failure. Rather, recall of the bees becomes a symbol for what man can accomplish. The bees are a part of the natural world, but of that world in its most fruitful aspect, most resistant to the current of decline. To regenerate the bees is to recall nature from destruction back to creativity. It is the final *ars* because it symbolizes man's complete understanding of and control over nature, hence ability to maintain nature at a level of productive activity that can become an inspiration to man himself, as the bees are.

Here too is the justification for Jupiter's Iron Age world. By forcing men to become responsible for something outside themselves, he has saved them from excessive involvement with their own internal life. He has not given them a way of avoiding death, but has made it possible to escape despair and destructiveness resulting from the loss, to offset the loss with new fertility. Not all men accept the burden of caring for the earth: those at the end of Book 1 and the city-dwellers at the end of Book 2 do not. They are, in a way, trying to live a Golden Age life, self-centered and irresponsible, in a world which no longer tolerates such behavior. Thus they come to grief. Virgil points the way to salvation: through emotional commitment to responsibility for nature, which *can* be regenerated, man has a bulwark against the human, emotional decline and sterility of the Golden Age world.

however, has no need to apply the warning of Orpheus' story to himself, for he has already taken on an external commitment to his farming. He must learn patience and sympathy. Then life will not be easy for him but will not be a disaster. Faith and a sense of accomplishment will sustain him.