THE PHILOSOPHY OF VIRGIL

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Although Virgil never claimed to be a philosopher, and although several quotes can be found in his works showing that he was continually seeking a philosopher's answers "ad causas rerum," there are pervading ideas in his works as a great poet which can be discerned and which it is not unreasonable to describe as a philosophy. These ideas certainly do not amount to a metaphysical system; but they do seem to offer a rather striking point of view.¹

Virgil's point of view was altered somewhat as he matured and as he came into contact with various teachers and philosophical schools. Many of these contacts had little effect on his writing, while others lasted only for a short time and can scarcely be traced. There remain only five which seem to have contributed heavily to Virgil's writing of the Georgics, the Elocuæs, and/or the Aeneid. His boyhood and his extensive study of Greek writers, for example, influenced all three works; the Epicurean teacher, Siro, and Lucretius chiefly influenced the Georgics although a few Epicurean passages may be found, also, in the Elocuæs; strong Messianic traces are found in the fourth Elocuæs; and Stoic principles predominate in the Aeneid.

Taken chronologically, the experiences of the boyhood epoch made the first contribution to Virgil's philosophy of life. It is significant that he was born in a country district, that he grew up there amid country people and country occupations, "a Venetian, born of rustic parents, and brought up in the midst of bush and forest."\(^2\)

To begin with, the village and countryside exerted an influence upon the character of Virgil. The smallness of a peasant's holding—everything meant so much more than on a large estate; the beasts were more closely watched, the crop was more a matter of daily thought, and hopes and fears gathered with quicker alternation and keener edge. The growing boy was in closer and more personal contact with every part of the farm labour. On a farm, too, the close relation of work and result was perhaps clearer than in many industries. All this contributed to the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics*.

Prudentius has a beautiful and sympathetic picture of the influence on a child's mind of the very kind of training which Virgil must have had:

His first food was the sacred meal, his earliest sight the sacred candle and the family rolls growing black with holy oil. He saw his mother pale at her prayers before the sacred stone, and he too would be lifted by his nurse to kiss it in his turn.\(^3\)

Certainly the early years and the old religion of Italy exercised a strange charm on Virgil, which survived all his studies in Alexandrian literature and Epicurean philosophy.


His father was not content with one occupation, but by keeping bees and by speculation in timber he made some money. It is strange to think that Virgil owed his education to the turning of forest into lumber. It is clear that the father saw quality in his son and, with characteristic energy, determined to develop it to the utmost. Altogether, he made a strong impression upon his son which is perhaps reflected in Aeneas' strong affection for his father, Anchises.

It is a pleasant reflection that in the fourth Georgic Virgil is going back to his boyhood, when he writes with so much humour and affection of the bees. Nor was his father's other business outside his interests. Mr. Menzies in his Forest Trees and Woodland Scenery, testifies to the general accuracy of Virgil's observation of woodcraft, maintaining that he must have watched keenly the details of the work which the foresters did around him, and adding that the art is indeed little advanced since the days of Virgil. ⁴

Yet there was another important aspect of the lumberman's work in the forest which appealed to Virgil. The forest had to come down; the land on which it stood had been idle for years, and man required it. But while the axes swung and the trees fell, the young poet, watching, saw the hives made of the birds' immemorial homes; he saw the frightened birds hovering in the air over the spot where they were to build no more; and though he hailed the cultivated field that was to be, he never forgot the sorrow of the birds. In later days Virgil

⁴Ibid., p.22.
 lingered in his story of the reclaiming of the land to city
the ruin of its most ancient inhabitants. He, too, is
Truly sorry man's dominion
has broken Nature's social union. 5

It is quite clear that Virgil was a lover of trees.

Make no true lover of fair field and farm,
Of streams in lofty vales, of rivers broad
And lonely forests, far from pomp and fame.
Oh, for Thessalian wilds and mountain steeps
Where rove the maenads of Laconia,
Or in the groves of snowy Thrace to dwell
In shade of innumerable boughs! 6

The wood with its crowded life and strange solitude appealed
to him, as can be seen again and again in his poetry. To
take a striking instance, he sent his hero to find his way to
the other world by another route from that of Odysseus. The
Greek hero sailed there over the sea; the Trojan passed there
through the woods.

With this love of trees must be linked the poet's love
of water—of river, stream, and lake—no doubt likewise a
love that went back to the island home of his boyhood. Take
his picture of the waters of Italy—

Reahold the famous cities—what vast toil
Unearth them!—and the poet of strongholds piled
By hand of man in out-bewn pyramids,
While swift streams under ancient bulwarks flow.
Why tell of two salt seas that wash her shore
Above, below; her multitude of lakes,—
There, Lucious, chiefest, and Ganasses where
Are swelling floods and billows like the sea? 7

5Ibid., p. 22.

6Theodore Chubbett Williams, The Georgics and Eclatues

7Ibid., p. 52.
This love of nature, as portrayed in the Georgics, is a different, yet more profound, spirit. The poet properly presents one aspect of life which cannot be obscured—the grim realization that life involves a great deal more work than men are normally willing to do, hard work, and work all the year round; vigilance never to be remitted, and labour which it is ruin to relax. The benefits of this ceaseless toil lie in the corresponding values on which Virgil placed the emphasis—on the reverence of labour and on the consolations of Nature, the meaning of all of which is only to be reached by a true comprehension of what they are required to do. Mother Earth is a hard mistress, but she makes no scruple about paying her wages promptly and in full when the work has been done—

Oh, more than blast, if their true allies they knew,  
Are tillers of the land! whose sustenance  
From civil faction for, the righteous earth  
Ungrudgingly bestows. 3

Apart from such rewards as Earth gives him, the farmer has a reward within himself in the hardening of his fibre and the sharpening of his faculties. Using the form of an old story, the poet tells us that Jupiter chose that the culture of the land should not be easy; by cares he grant to wicken mortal hearts. He himself gave the snake its poison, and bade the wolf raven, bade the sea toss, and put fire and wine out of reach. Thus, came the arts—it was toil, unceasing toil, that won all the victories, and the pressure of want and

3Ibid., p. 64.
grinding adversity—

Work conquered all, relentless, obstinate,
While poverty and hardship urged it on.\(^9\)

But man has other sources of happiness as well, and here, the value of the *Georgics* is still unexhausted. The poet looks at Nature, and finds a pleasure and a happiness in every detail of creation which may or may not have been meant for him. The trees, with all their beauties and their feelings, too; plants and their ways, wild and cultivated; and birds, beasts, and insects—he enjoys them all, thinks about them and smiles to them. For all through the *Georgics* runs the most delicate humour. The farmer stamps out the insect and the worm as mere pests, but the poet looks at things from their point of view; the contrast is for him full of pathos and humour. The tiny mouse has her sensations and her progenies, quite as significant to her as the farmer's are to himself. How can the poet of work find in his heart anything but sympathy for the cat in her anxiety about her old age? When he comes to the bees, he enters so heartily and delightfully into their concern—their loyalty to their king, their true Italian passion for possession, their Cyclopean energy, their laws and constitution, their good looks, and those terrible convolutions that a handful of dust will quit—that one could almost believe he had been a bee himself. How much, in short, is his conclusion, "We see in nature what is ours."\(^10\)

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\(^9\)Ibid., p. 20.

\(^10\)Clever, p. 37.
The second life-long influence on Virgil's philosophy was the death of his knowledge of Greek writers, and the eagerness with which he sought to infuse his own account of things, Roman and Italian, with a spirit drawn directly from Greek sources. A simple example is the deliberate way in which he continually coupled Greek and Italian folk-lore in the *Aeneid*. Aeneas, a replica of Homer's Odysseus, is adapted to Roman mythology and becomes the sire of Alba, the future site of Rome.

There were deeply impressed on Virgil's mind some of the most typical of all Greek habits of thought. One was the dread of extremes, a faith in that most national of all Greek virtues which is variously translated as temperance, moderation, self-control, sanity, sound-mindedness; that central firmness and serenity of character which preserves men from being the victims of sudden passion in the world of action, or of wild extremes of belief in the world of thought.\(^\text{11}\)

This hatred of extremes and love of self-control was shared by Virgil's intimate friend, Horace, which he so faithfully celebrated in the *Golden Fleece*, though he did not signify quite all that Virgil meant by "servare modum." The contrast on which the whole story of the *Aeneid* is based exemplifies this view: that Aeneas does learn to practise self-control, to sacrifice his own private hopes and desires to the call of duty, even in the hardest case where it bade him abandon his love for Dido, whereas his brilliant rival, Turnus, never will make the sacrifice. He is violent from

\(^{11}\text{Conway, pp. 94-112.}\)
first to last, passionate, reckless, and contemptuous of any law or practice that would interfere with his will, impulsive will. For example, he broke through the fixed custom of what the ancient world counted honourable warfare by stripping the armour from the body of the lad, Pallas, whom he has slain, and making it his own instead of dedicating it to a god; and he persisted in his suit for Lavinia's hand in defiance both of her father and of what he himself knew and, in the end, confessed to be the command of Heaven.

The second characteristic, which seems at first less interesting, was the habit of antithesis, of considering things in pairs, such as heat and cold, darkness and light. In almost all Greek philosophers there is an implicit dualism of some kind or other: for example, the contrast in Plato between the invisible, real, existing Ideas and the imperfect copies or approximations to them which made up for him the visible world; or in Aristotle's Ethics, the conception of every courage, for example, being the middle point between the extremes of cowardice on the one hand and rashness on the other.

Virgil was rarely content to see a fact, or a feeling, or an event, in which he was interested, as something which stood by itself. He instinctively sought for some parallel event, some complementary fact, to set beside the first. One large group of these pairs consists of the cases where the second fact involves no particular contrast, only a reinforcement of the original statement: such as Italian Laviniaque litora (Italy and Lavinian shore)\textsuperscript{12} at the outset

of the Aeneid; or, in the same Book, where Dido promises—

auxilio tudos dimittam opibusque iunabo

(I will let you go protected by my support and aid you with my resources.)

There is another interesting set of cases in which

Virgil mentions a natural cause for some event side by side

with a divine cause. Moreover, he often gives us to understand

that both causes are true; or that, if a name is given to

this view of causation, it must be called not "supernatural,"

but rather "intematural." Sometimes, it is true, the

alternatives are put in the form of a question, as when

Nisus discloses to Euryalus his daring project of leaving the

Trojan camp by night and making his way through the enemy's

forces, in order to take word of their danger to Aeneas. He

asks Euryalus:

Is it gods above that breathe
This fever in my soul, Euryalus?
Or is the tyrant passion of each breast
The god it serves?

In the battle in the Tenth Book of the Aeneid, Aeneas
only just escapes destruction from a band of seven brothers,
who are all attacking him at once, because some of their

darts are beaten back from his shield and helmet and some are
turned aside from grazing him by his divine mother. This

frequent suggestion, that the will of Heaven is, after all,

carried out by the action of human beings stirred by motives

which they think to be their own, is characteristic of


Virgil's treatment of the whole idea of Providence, and shows some affinity with the Stoic doctrine of the identity of Jove and Pales.

A more sharply cut type of this dualism can be seen in the case of two points of view which are not identical or even parallel, but definitely contrasted and hostile, so that a certain surprise and consciousness, not of two parts of a single fact, but apparently of two conflicting experiences, are felt. The result is an incongruity which is either amusing or pathetic or both. Among other instructions to the bee-keeper in the Fourth Georgic for choosing a place for his beehive, Virgil warns him that it must not be near the nests of swallows:

Let not the scale-backed, painted lizard peer
To snare the bees' full hives, nor thievish birds,
Fly-catchers, or the swallow whose soft breast
By her own murderous hands was dabbled o'er.
For such take forge far and wide and bear
In ruthless seek the insect harvesters
As sweet, winged morsels to their nestlings wild.15

Why? Because they will carry off the bees to feed their young. How does Virgil describe this annoying procedure on the part of the swallows? It would have been natural for him to write "easy" instead of "sweet" morsels. That would have enforced the point, namely, the greediness of the baby swallows and the consequent danger to the bees. However, it may be objected that "sweet" for this purpose is just as good as "easy" because a sweet morsel is just as likely to tempt the swallows as an easily captured one. True; but what

15 Williams, The Georgics and Eclogues of Virgil, p. 96.
has Virgil done by choosing "sweet?" If he had also substituted the word "eclamouring" for the word "wild," it would be clear that he was expressing sympathy with the swallows and that he had forgotten to be sorry for the bees. However, by using both the word "sweet" and the word "wild," Virgil expresses his sympathy, first with the swallows and then with the bees, in one and the same line. He does the same thing in the passage where he exorts the farmer to clear away the long-standing wood and make the land subject to the plough. What is the result? The newly conquered land glows with the sheen of the ploughshare; but the birds have had to leave their ancient homes and fly aloft, deserting their young. There is no doubt of Virgil's meaning. This is the farmer's duty; but all the same it is a tragedy for the birds. 16

In all these cases Virgil practises a kind of brief quotation. He describes part of the scene for a moment, as it appeared to the eyes of one of the actors in it, and then he describes the other part. This dramatic habit of Virgil's mind, often gives an undertone of humour to the story. There is one line in the Aeneid which amounts to direct and bitter satire; in the Twelfth Book, Tolumnius persuades the Latins to refuse to let Turnus fight in single combat, and thus makes them break the truce to which their king has solemnly sworn. He had seen what he took for a portent: a flock of swans forcing an eagle to release one of their number whom it was carrying off. This the swans did by flying above the

16Conway, p. 107.
eagle and pressing him down by sheer weight of numbers.

Tolumnius cries out with pious exultation:

Lo, the sign I sought
With many a prayer! I welcome and obey
The powers divine. Take me for captain, me!
And draw your swords, ye wretches, whom th' assault
Of yonder foreign scoundrel puts in fear
Like feeble birds, and with his violence
Lays waste your shore.17

And he goes on to promise them, in virtue of his sacred authority, that the wicked invader, namely, Aeneas, shall be routed by their united effort, just as the eagle had been routed by the troop of swans. What is the casual? When the battle has begun, Tolumnius is slain. Such was the answer to his prayer.

The last example of stating things by antithesis was to Virgil the supreme paradox—that of always seeing two sides to every human event. The tragic contradiction which Virgil found beneath this lovin kindness of the world—the fact that our human affection is the source both of the only joys worth counting joys and of the only sorrows worth counting sorrows—is encountered throughout the Aeneid. Every one of the troubles, every one of the tragedies, springs ultimately from this.

The tragedy of Dido, first from the misguided affections of Juno and Venus, and then from her own; the tragedy of Juturna, from her love for her brother; the war in Latium, from Silvia's affection for her stag and her followers' affection for Silvia; and the second war, from Turnus' love for Lavinia and

17Williams, The Aeneid of Virgil, p. 425.
his followers' devotion to Turnus are striking examples. All
too essentially lie in the affection of some men or women,
ill-guided or ill-governed, or crossed by physical calamity.
Compare with this the crowning scene of the Aeneid, in which
the conquered Turnus might have been spared but for what,
to the ancient mind, was his inhuman cruelty to Pallas whose
trophy he still wore upon his own shoulder. Such an offender
could not survive into the new era; the violence of Turnus
would continue to tremble on the laws of humanity. Virgil,
however, could not do even Turnus without a note of pity,
for his violence sprang from his love. In the last words
of the whole epic the soul of Turnus passes indignant to the
shades:

The failing limbs
Sank cold and helpless; and the vital breath
With moan of wrath to darkness fled away.\(^\text{19}\)

So it was in this common source of human sorrow and human
joy that Virgil found the ultimate enigma which for him wrapped
the world in mystery. All the sorrow and all the joy of the
universe seemed to him to spring from one root, and he accepted
them both. There could be no human affection, so Virgil saw,
unless 't were such as to make its possessors capable, and
capable in equal degrees, both of the most exquisite suffering
and of the most exquisite joy. This to him was the funda-
mental fact of the universe—that all pain and all joy are to
be measured simply in terms of human love.\(^\text{19}\)

\(^{18}\)Ibid., p. 456.

\(^{19}\)Conway, p. 112.
Virgil's delight in nature is essentially Roman, though somewhat more self-conscious than that of his contemporaries. At first glance Virgil seems to care most for the obvious gifts of Italy's generous amenities—the physical pleasure in the free out-of-doors, the form and color of landscapes, the wholesome life. As one reads on, however, one becomes aware of an intimacy and fellowship with animate things that go deeper. Particularly in the second book of the Georgics the very blades of grass and tendrils of the vines seem to be sentient. The grafted trees "behold with wonder" strange leaves and fruits growing from their stems; transplanted shoots "put off their will-wood instincts;" the thirsting plant "lifts up its head" in gratitude when watered. 20

If Virgil had been questioned about his own faiths he could well have found a consistent answer. Though he had himself long ceased to pay homage to these animae, his philosophy, like that of Lucretius, also sought the life-principle in nature, though he sought that principle a step farther removed in the atom, the vitalized seeds of things, forever in motion, forever creating new combinations, and forever working the miracles of life by means of the energy with which they were themselves instinct. The memorable lines on spring in the second book are cast into the form of old poetry, yet the basis of them is Epicurean energism:

But, sooth, 'tis Spring;
Lends foliage to orchard and woodside green

---

Her holy and succor; in the Spring the earth
Swells warm and bids the seeds of life begin.
Then will the almighty Sire from heights of air
Descend in life-engendering showers to fill
Earth's bosom, his frail spouse, and mightily
With her vast holy singling birth to cover
All unborn twin's she bears.21

Virgil's study of evolution had for him also united man and
nature, making the romance of the Georgics possible; it had
shared a kind of scientific animism that permitted him to
accept the language of the simple peasant even though its
connotations were for him more complex and subtle.

Moreover, there has been discovered in Virgil's nature
poetry a very modern attention to details such as one can
hardly expect to find before the nineteenth century. Here
again Virgil is Lucretius' companion. This habit was apparently
a composite product. The ingredients are the capacity for
wonder that is found in some great poets like Wordsworth and
Plato, a genius for noting details, bred in him as in Lucretius
by long occupation with inductive methods of philosophy and
a sure aesthetic sense.22

In the Georgics Virgil expresses still more explicitly
his conception of the world's origin. A world, conceived as
sprung from the chance collision of atoms, could hardly arouse
the feelings due to an Italy that grows fair through the
efforts of her loving sons. If Italy were no more than a
fortuitous concourse of molecules, it would be hard for men
to call this senseless heap of clay "My Country." But while
to Lucretius even the stars are but atomic dust, to Virgil


22Frank, p. 164.
the very dust of the earth is star-dust. It is a thing he
speaks of reverently. The Virgilian view, the view of poetry
and of religion, while as scientifically true as the Lucretian,
expresses a further truth no less profound because it is out-
side the range of materialistic philosophy. The intellectual
delight of tracing the causes of things and overthrowing the
terrors of superstition is what Lucretius has to teach and
illustrate. He had nothing to do with the joys of living and
loving that yet beckon so alluringly from the very opening
of his mechanistic theme. Even where we find in Lucretius a
grandeur of sentiment that less came partly from his there, it
is in another sense usually inconsistent with it. His basic
principles that no Moral Power superintends human destiny,
and that death is extinction, make it unreasonable to expect
Lucretius to put a poetical garland on the brows of the guest
of life. Yet he can glorify life, not as quickening blood
and brain and soul, but as the fertilising principle in mind-
less Nature. 23

Familiar as he undoubtedly was with Lucretius, Virgil has
been influenced by him only in the way of strong repulsion in
all that concerns the relations of men with both the invisible
and the visible powers about him. For Lucretius, the cause
that moulds the universe 's a Nature that only transcends mere
abstraction to fall short of personality. It 's a blind force,
devoid of helpfulness and love, handless and heartless, a will
without directing mind, an existence, "independent of proud

rulers," pervasive of matter and void, whose obscure influence has somehow brought all the beauty of the world out of the clash of colourless atoms. 24

The Georgics bring us into a kindlier clime, all the more remarkable in its contrast with Lucretius' world in that Virgil accepts the atomic theory as accounting for the existence of the material universe. But he does not regard the original blind force as free from higher control. A Spiritual Power has used it to higher ends than man can always foresee, though some hint of their nature is within his ken:

These acts and powers observing, some declare
That bees have portion in the mind of God
And life from heaven derive; that God pervades
All lands, the ocean's plain, the abyss of heaven,
And that from him Flocks, cattle, princely men,
All breeds of creatures wild, receive at birth
Each his frail, vital breath; that whence they came
All turn again, dissolving; so that death
Is nowhere found, but vital essences
Upspringing in the vast, o'er-vaulted sky
Move unextinguished through the starry throng. 25

When the conditions of life are unfavourable, they have been made deliberately so to spur on our faculties and raise us to a life of work and prayer. The Power that caused the race from this inactive being to hence life did so to enoble it. A measure of pain adapted to this end, a toil rewarded with proportionate results, are the instruments whereby the beneficent Jove gives man the knowledge of his moral dignity.

24Ibid., p. 64.

Yet, however far all this is from Lucretian thought, he has assuredly done much to mould the Georgics. He has opened up to Virgil a vaster world than any known before, and inspired him with the delight of searching the processes that have made it as it is. He has thrilled him with the romance of unending feeling, and has, so to speak, made him add the conception of design to that of law; he is ever stirred to enthusiasm by the Lucretian mode of enquiry into the causes of earthquake and eclipse, and how the land and sea observe their place. Hinted at here and there in the Georgics, this mood grows most ecstatic in the well-known passage of the second book, where Virgil ranks the Muses that beckon ever forward into new and secret ways before those preferring to linger in places chosen for their ancient loneliness—Spercheus, or Taygete, or the cool vales of Haemus:

My fondest prayer is that the Muses dear, Life's joy supreme, may take me to their choir, Their priest, by boundless ecstasy possessed. The heavenly secrets may they show, the stars, Eclipses of the sun, the ministreries Of the laborious moon, why quakes the earth, And by what power the oceans fatherless Rise, bursting every bound, then sink away To their own bed; why wintry suns so swift Roll down to ocean's stream; what obstacle Opposes then the lingering wheels of night. But if to such mysterious domain Nature bid me my entrance, if the blood Flows not so potent in my coldest breast, Make me true lover of fair field and farm, Of streams in dawly vales, of rivers broad And lonely forests, far from pomp and fame.26

26Ibid., p. 65.
Epicurean ideas also appear in the *Eclogues* which serve as a transitional work between the *Georgics* and the *Aeneid*. At this period in his life, the poet, unsatisfied with the Epicurean dogmas and, also, more mature, be an to accept Stoicism. This explains why the *Eclogues* contain both Epicurean and Stoic lines.

The Epicureanism in the *Eclogues* has suffered a change which affects one of its most important dogmas: the enjoyment of nature. The "Nature" of the *Eclogues* invites to idleness and gives one a sense of Nature's witchery, while the "Nature" of the *Georgics* invites to work and contains a Lucretian sense of Nature's stubbornness. Yet in the latter, Nature is more of a taskmistress; the duel between husbandman and Nature ends in an alliance which guarantees bountiful increase. A Providence—which Lucretius rejects—secures the mastery for mankind, if man will work and watch and pray aright. The easier and less philosophic attitude of the *Eclogues* finds in Nature refreshment and even something like Wordsworth's "healing power." This appears in praising the first part of the song on Daednis in the fifth *Eclogue*:

> We hear thy voice of song, poet divine,  
> As when on weary readers in the grass  
> A slumber falls, as when in noon-tide blaze  
> We quench our thirst at a fresh, bubbling spring.

And the second part is praised in terms of comfort drawn from Nature:

---


Oh, for such sons what guerdon can I give?
It stirs me to such joy as when I hear
The far-off murmurs of the gathering rain,
Or willow-beaten sands, or when swift streams
Through rock-bound vales and vocal cliffs out-pour. 29

This is one of repeated touches indicative of a romantic
sentiment for wild Nature, and a passion for escape from
civilization. Less romantic, but still beautiful, is the
picture drawn in the first Eclogue:

Happy old man! by these familiar streams,
These haunted springs, enjoy thy cooling shade!
Here as of old thy neighbor's hedge-row line,
Where Hybla's bees o'er flowering willows rove,
Shall with a light-voiced whisper woo thy sleep.
On wondrous rocky slope with far-flung song
Thy bondman trims the vine; wood-pigeons wild
Thy darlings, ne'er shall silence their full cry,
Nor from the wind-swept elms the doves their song. 30

The sixth Eclogue, The Varus, might be entitled "the
song of Creation." Silenus, the wise but vinous attendant
of Bacchus, is found by two shepherds and a nymph sleeping
after the previous day's carousal, and is bound by them with
his own garlands. Moreover, Aegele, the nymph, mischievously
paints his brows with the juice of berries as he recovers
consciousness. To regain his liberty he is compelled to
carry out a promise he once made to sing the birth of the
world, as well as many of the more famous myths of its early
days. The nature of the subject proves Virgil's interest
in the philosophical speculations of the Epicurean school.
His cosmogony, in fact, is theirs. He follows them in
describing the formation of the world from the traditional

29Ibid., p. 144.
30Ibid., p. 127.
four elements, the separation of land and water, of the sky from the earth, and emergence of vegetable and animal life. Both his adoption of the atomic theory and his very vocabulary make it reasonably clear that he was portraying the influence of Lucretius.31

The fourth Eclogue, more particularly, has achieved greater fame due to its special circumstances. In the fourth century A.D., when Christianity became Rome's state religion, many Christians believed that Virgil was here prophesying the birth of Christ. This view obtained the support of Constantine the Great, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, and others among the Fathers and ecclesiastical writers who often quoted lines of Virgil in which they recognised principles of philosophy or theology which bear a certain resemblance to Christian doctrines, such as the unity, the spirituality, or the omnipotence of God. The expectation of an immediate regeneration of the world in an era of happiness, justice, love, and peace which inspires the whole of this Eclogue, the connection of this expectation with the birth of a child, and the ancient authority of the Sibyl on which the whole prophecy is based, could not fail to induce a Christian when reading it to think of the birth of Christ and the regeneration of the world which his pure and gentle teaching promised. At any rate the translation of the Eclogue into Greek verse shows evident traces of the work of the Sibyllists; in many places it alters the sense in an arbitrary manner with a view to ringing it into

31Letters, p. 53.
accordance with the Christian interpretation. The emperor examines the various parts of the poem, and finds in them a detailed prophecy of the coming of Christ, pointing out that the Virgin who returns is Mary, the child sent from the sky is Jesus, the serpent which shall cease to be is the Tempter, the balsam which will grow everywhere is the race of Christians, pure from sin, and so on.\textsuperscript{32}

It is maintained that the poet wrote with the full knowledge that he was "retelling Christ", but expressed himself darkly and introduced the concept of heathen deities to avoid affronting the organs and provoking the anger of the authorities. However, not all of the ecclesiastical writers who added this argument in favour of the Faith believed that Virgil understood the true significance of the Sibylline prophecy. Some assert that this child who is to precede a return of the Golden Age is a composite personality. To speak of Pollio's issue as "ruling the world" would be impossible, but other expressions, supported by very early tradition, are best explained with reference to one of his children. Again, the imperial language used of the infant seems proper homage to some child of Augustus. The poem was written in the consuls in of Pollio, 40 B.C., to which it refers. Indeed, in the sense that it is to be glorified by the great event it is to witness, the consulship of Pollio may be regarded as the central theme of the poem. But in the same year Octavius' wife, Sempronia, was pregnant. No doubt the

fact was well-known, or might not unreasonably be presumed, the marriage being quite recent. No doubt Octavian, who had no sons, as well as the Court, hoped there would be a male issue. In the event it was a daughter Scribonia bore him this year, the joyous anticipations of the Eclogue, in so far as they had reference to her, would be an ironical comment of Fate. But as the birth of a daughter would have proved at least an anti-climax to lyric raptures based on the assumption that a boy would be born, is it not likely that Virgil would have avoided any such embarrassing situation by carefully abstaining from complete and irreversible identification of the child of his poem with the unborn child of Augustus?33

Since the identity of this child remained unanswered in Virgil's day, certainly a conclusion can not be reached in modern times. Presently the debate concerns the possibility of Virgil's having read the prophecies of the Book of Isaiah. Again, regardless whether this is proved or not proved, it remains true that Virgil, like the earlier prophet, was reflecting a feeling, widespread in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern area, that a Saviour was about to come and rid the world of the miseries into which it had fallen. At all events, whatever the precise explanation may be, Virgil's echo of the principal theme of Christianity had an incautiable influence on many successive generations.34

33Letters, pp. 50-51.

34Michael Grant, Roman Literature (Cambridge, At the University Press, 1954), pp. 175-204.
This brings us to the last doctrine which was to influence Virgil in his writings before his death. This doctrine of Stoicism dominates the Aeneid and is most apparent in the poet's views of an overruling Providence. Echoes of the materialistic and evolutionary doctrines of Lucretius give place to teleological conceptions of the universe. Miracles, such as the finding of bones in a sarcus, and portents such as those heralding the death of Caesar, are accepted. There is a primitive piety, partly Italian, which would be anathema to Lucretius. Virgil's gods are not the far-distant dwellers in the interstices of the world, for he could not banish the bright creations of Hellenic fancy. He gives them a Roman colour. His gods care for the land and the tiller; they must be propitiated by prayer and sacrifice. Ritual, disdained by Lucretius, is dear to Virgil.

Yea, even when thy fleet has crossed the main, And from now altars built along the shore Thy vows to Heaven are paid, throw o'er thy head A purple mantle, veiling well thy brows, Last, while the sacrificial fire ascends In offering to the gods, thine eyes behold Some face of Sea, and everyacen faileth. Let all thy people keep thy custom due, And thou thyself no faithfail; let thy seed Forever thus th' immaculate rite maintain.35

Already in the Georgics, Virgil fosters the national religious sentiment which pervades the Aeneid; however, his purpose is different from that of Lucretius. The elder poet conceived the goal of his system to be a philosophic quietism of resigned aloofness. No such retirement from the work of

35Williams, The Aeneid of Virgil, p. 94.
the world is in Virgil's view. The opposition of nature
calls not for despair but for conquest. Man must exert
himself to gain the dominion.

The gifted man
Thus to Aeneas comfortably spoke:
'0 goddess-born, we follow here or there,
As Fate compels or stays. Put care what may,
He triumphs over Fortune, who can bear
Whatever she brings.' 36

It is an evan'el of work, and herein Virgil is truly national.
The Georgics proclaim the Italian's imperium over the soil,
as the Aenid proclaims the Italian's imperium over the world.

Spare not I spoke
When sudden trembling through the laurel ran
And ope the holy portals; far and wide
The mighty ridges of the mountain shook,
And from the opening shrine the tripped moaned.
Prostrate to earth we fall, as on our sors
This utterance break's: '0 breed of iron men,
Ye sons of Dardanus! the self-same land
Where bloomed at first your far-descended stem
Shall to its countious bosom draw ye home.
Seek out your ancient father! There at last
Aeneas' race shall reign as every shore,
And his sons' sons, and all their house to be.' 37

More important still is the character of Aeneas who
represents the Stoic ideal—much admired by the poet and many
of his contemporaries—of the man who presses on regardless
of the buffets and obstacles of life.

Therefore, behold, our portals are swung wide
For all your company. I also bore
Hard fate like thine. I too was driven of storms
And after long toil was allowed at last
To call this land my home. 0, I am wise
In sorrow, and I help all suffering souls.' 38

36Ibid., p. 173.
38Ibid., p. 31.
Before Aeneas reaches Italy's shores, there is a dramatic development in his character. He does not at once become the complete Stoic Wise Man. He has his weaknesses, and only gradually overcomes them.

However, in the end Aeneas does prevail over all his troubles, with the aid of Providence. He is the poetic creation of the Stoic conception of man, the finest conception before Christianity—and his Stoicism is harnessed to Roman nationalism.

The Sixth Book of the Aeneid, in which Aeneas descends into Hades, has a particular Stoic interest. Virgil, through the lips of Anchises, declares explicitly the truth of a large part of the regular Stoic creed. Emphasis is given to its anthropoistic belief in the World-Soul, that is, in the divine origin of life and the share in the divine nature which every living thing can consequentially claim.

Know first that heaven and earth and ocean's plain,
The moon's bright orb, and stars of Titan birth
Are nourished by one Life; one primal "Mind,
Sprung from 'the seed and general form,'
Fills every part and fills the filmy sphere.
Thence man and beast, thence creatures of the air,
And all the swarming monsters that be found
Beneath the level of the turbid sea;
A fiery virtue, a celestial power,
Their native seeds retain; 39

Furthermore, the root, by way of Anchises, gives notice to

39Ibid., p. 212.
but bodies vile,
With lines of clay and amber torn to tke,
Encumbered elsewhere: whence also spring
Tears and sorrows, bitterness and joy;
For those been inward: "We weep not,"
All gaze but blindly on the radiant world. 40

Although Virgil certainly commended the Stoic pursuit
of virtue for its own sake, 'tis questionable whether he
accepted their nominal 'ideal of philosophic calm, that is, of
complete indifference to joy and to sorrow, as the aim of the
philosopher's endeavour. Not even Anchises, who was the wise,
quiet patron to everyone in times of strife, could here be
commended by the Stoics. For he rejoices keenly with Aeneas
in the greatness of Rome to be--

Let now thy visionary glance look long
On this thy race, these Romans that be thine.
Here be Caesars, of Iulus' glorious seed,
Behold according to the world of Helius
Erehol, at last, the son, for this it is io,
So of the type, lustrous and splendid.
Aegle is burst. Tempted into Jula. 41

--and weep at once, 'tis to be revealed.

'Tis, Aeneas, the worth of a Roman son?
Or of his greatness some greater heir?
How his revenge proceed him, and let not bless he
But counsel well, meditate wisely on his career,'
With this beget Anchises answer me:
'Ask not, O son, that head of you
This secret. Shall be, when fate shall suit reave
This vision to his view, but yield no more.' 42

Then, therefore, Virgil puts upon the line of Anchises, the
famous Stoic doctrine that desire and fear, sorrow and joy, are
all equally the fruit of our evil material condition, he dee-
not rear every kind of sense and every kind of joy, but only the selfish kinds, akin to the selfish crew and society, which the first half of the poem concerned. This is, of course, the limit within which Virgil could accept the Stoic creed. Even joys and arts concern, as the human naively in this paper, were to Virgil the most precious part of life.

One final aspect of Stoicism which influenced Virgil was the note of universalism. The Stoics believed that all human beings belong not to one city or to one state, but to the world, and, as citizens of the universe, all are equal in the sight of God. All class distinctions are illusory, and social position is not an absolute good. An attitude of humility must be cultivated, for nothing lasts and everything is subject to the universal flux. Even the distinction between citizens and barbarians vanishes, and no contest is held for those who are not acquainted with the former’s culture. 43

This theme is prevalent throughout the Aeneid. For example, in Book VII King Latinus welcomes Aeneas, a foreigner, and offers him Lavinia’s hand although many Latin princes have sought that honour. Again in Book XII, Aeneas, while preparing for single combat with Turnus, declares before his men and the Latin people:

But if in arms of our success shall shine,
As I doubt not, it shall (May gods on high
Their will confirm), I purpose not to chain
Italian captive unto Teucrian lord,
Nor seek I kindly power. Let equal laws
Unite in Federation without end
The two unconquered nations. 44

44 Williams, The Aeneid of Virgil, p. 428.
This theme is contrary to that of the Greek philosophical writers whom Virgil so admired (Aristotle, for example, looked with great scorn upon all peoples who did not share his Greek culture), but is in agreement with that which Nature reveals every day to a keen observer—that is, that she is impartial. She does not allow a weak creature—whether it be king or slave—to survive, while a strong one, who has endured many terrors and hardships, dies in its place. The creatures exist on their own merits. Such it is also in the human kingdom. Aeneas could have given up the struggle for survival many times when he was bone-weary and tired of slaughter; however, he did not, and for such endurance he is rewarded with perpetual fame.

Virgil's philosophical tendencies ended here for he died before he completed the Aeneid. However, regardless of the many philosophical opinions the poet held during his lifetime, none existed singularly; all were fused into one composite philosophy. The only great philosophical change came when the poet began to find the Epicurean teachings insufficient and the Stoic beliefs more inviting. This departure is quite understandable, for Virgil, as a youth, was of a rich nature, sensitive, pleasure-loving, and full of the joy of life. Naturally he would be so strongly attracted by Epicureanism as he was repelled by the austerity of the Stoic teaching. In a later period his interest in Stoicism was again aroused. One reason for this was probably more extended study, and a consequent appreciation of the value of the
Stoic system to all who had regard for high ideals in life. Also, advancing years and a more serious outlook would lead to a less rigorous judgment on the merits of the sect. Still the poet never made a complete break with Epicureanism. Dominated by his religious inclinations, he abandoned only that part of the doctrine which was injurious to a religious revival. He did not feel himself bound to surrender its doctrine of pleasure. True, he no longer regarded it as the Highest Good, but he did subordinate it to the Stoic ideal of a virtuous life which in itself brings pleasure. This, then, is Virgil's philosophy of life—a composite of ideas taken from the various systems and schools which he encountered in his lifetime.


