

interpretation

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Volume 11 number 1

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The Invocation to the *Georgics*

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The *Georgics* opens with a brief syllabus and a long invocation before undertaking the development of its theme at l.43. Although the syllabus is clearly applicable to the agricultural content of the four books—field crops, the vine, livestock, bees—these agricultural topics do not discover for us the theme of the poem. “We are thus forced at once to look for a plan or structure of the poem which *determines* and is not *determined by* the agricultural content.”¹

In epic and didactic poetry, the expected location of a statement of the theme is the invocation. Homer is the model: Sing of the wrath, goddess; Tell me of the man, Muse. Vergil’s didactic predecessors follow Homer in this matter: Hesiod identifies the justice of Zeus as his theme in the invocation to the *Works and Days* (1–8); Lucretius identifies the nature of things as his in the invocation to the *De Rerum Natura* (24–25). Vergil follows Hesiod and Lucretius in the didactic gesture of associating the invocation to the gods with a beneficiary or pupil. Hesiod invokes the aid of the Muses in teaching the justice of Zeus for the enlightenment of Perses. Lucretius invokes the aid of Venus in teaching the nature of things for the enlightenment of Memmius. Vergil invokes the aid of all the agricultural gods and of Augustus in teaching something for the enlightenment of farmers who are ignorant of the way. But what is the something? Instead of explicitly naming his theme or doctrine as his models do, Vergil has embedded it in the very attributes by virtue of which he invokes the patronage of the gods and of Augustus. To construe the invocation is to follow the dramatic exposition of a thematic question which the body of the *Georgics* addresses.

The first half of the invocation addresses the agricultural gods. It begins with the heavenly bodies which mark out the progress of the agricultural year in the sky. Then it moves to the gods who serve, protect and improve agricultural practice on earth. In the midst of these it invokes Neptune. While the service it attributes to him is the introduction of the horse, his name here extends our framework of the agricultural world from heaven and earth to ocean; so strong indeed is this effect that Servius (*ad* l.13) reports that some early copies of the poem read *aquam* (water) for *equum* (horse) here: “you for whom earth first produced (the neighing horse / the roaring water).” The first half of the invocation moves then from heaven (5–6) to earth (7–12) to ocean (12–14) back to earth (14–22) and finally back to heaven again (23). No underworld god is invoked.

1. Brooks Otis, *Virgil: A Study in Civilized Poetry* (Oxford, 1963), p. 148.

The vocabulary of the first half of the invocation draws special attention to those services of the agricultural gods that have been innovative or revolutionary: *mutavit* 8, *inventis* 9, *prima* 12, *inventrix*, *monstrator* 19, *novas* 22. The gods' inventions caused or constituted the transition from an Old Age to a New Age. Vergil's invocation praises the new and blames the old; the gods are invoked by their services in inaugurating the New Age. But the address to Liber and Ceres sets a divergent path for our reflections about the gods' inventions:

Liber and nurturant Ceres, if it was by your gift that earth exchanged the Chaonian acorn for fat grain, and mixed Acheloan draughts with newly invented grapes, your gifts I sing. (7–9, 12)

The inventions of wine and grain are benefits to man; but Vergil specifies that these inventions replaced an original diet of acorns and water. Acorns and water are, conventionally, the diet of the race of the Golden Age.² Can Vergil mean to praise the gods for ending the Golden Age? It is only in Lucretius' account of human origins, where the first age was not the Golden Age but an age of savagery, that the acorn-and-water diet is ascribed to men who still live "like wild animals" (*De Rerum Natura* v 929, 936–44).³ Perhaps, then, Vergil is following Lucretius' teaching here, and praising the gods for ending an original age of savagery. With the question of the acorn diet, Vergil has introduced into his invocation the contention between two radically opposed views of human history—as a fall from an original paradise, and as a rise from an original savagery. In the context of this contention, Vergil's examples of the gods' innovating benefits to man seem curiously equivocal, for the same things that are signs of man's improvement from the Lucretian point of view—the plow, the heavenly calendar—are also the signs of man's decadence according to the conventional accounts of the fall from the Golden Age. The plow is the sign of man's latter-day impiety towards his mother earth, and the agricultural year which is marked out by the heavenly bodies was defined by the removal of Justice from earth to the zodiac (II 474).⁴

2. Cf. Ovid, *Met.* I 105; Tibullus II.iii.68–69; Juvenal VI 9. That the acorn itself suggests or even stands for the Golden Age here is shown by Cervantes, *Don Quixote* I.xi: "When Don Quixote had satisfied his appetite, he took up a handful of acorns, and gazing at them earnestly, held forth in the following manner: 'Happy times and fortunate ages were those that our ancestors called golden, not because gold (so prized in this our Iron Age) was gotten in that happy era without any labors, but because those who lived then knew not those two words *mine* and *thine*. In that holy age all things were in common, and to provide his daily sustenance all a man needed to do was to lift up his hand and pluck his food from the sturdy oaks that generously invited him to gather their sweet, ripe fruit . . . Our knight uttered this long harangue (that might well have been spared) simply because the acorns they gave him reminded him of the Golden Age. . . . That the acorns Cervantes has in mind here are those of the *Georgics* is indicated most particularly by Don Quixote's reference in this discourse to the republic of the bees (*Don Quixote*, tr. Walter Starkie, New American Library 1964, pp. 117–119). See also Note 13 below.

3. On the acorn diet, cf. Stanley Schechter, "The *Aition* and Virgil's *Georgics*," *TAPA* 105 (1975), p. 357.

4. On the plow: Ovid, *Met.* I 102, 108, 121–123, *Am.* III.viii.39, 41; Horace, *Ep.* XVI 43;

The body of the *Georgics* elaborates this contention between the two views of human history, developing in some detail both the traditional account of the Golden Age and the reasons for questioning whether the Golden Age ever occurred and whether, if it did occur, it was the best age. In the “theodicy” of I 118ff. we discover that the Old Age, the time before the gods’ innovations, may indeed be identified with the Golden Age:

Before Jupiter, no farmers subjugated the fields; it was not lawful to mark off a field or to divide it with a boundary; men used to collect for the common store, and the earth herself bore all things more liberally when no one exacted them from her.
(I 125–8)

Jupiter’s innovations include the introduction of venom into snakes and a predatory character into wolves (I 129–30). While this may seem to contradict the invocation’s praise of the gods’ innovations as benefits to man, Vergil asserts that Jupiter’s purpose in these innovations was meliorative (I 121–4, 133). As in the traditional account of the Golden Age, Vergil asserts that impiety is the product of Jupiter’s regime, and that the Golden Age of Saturn was superior in virtue (II 536–40). But he also throws these assertions into doubt by reminding us that it was precisely the Saturnian life that was lived by “Remus and his brother” (II 533) and that the slaughtered cattle (*caesis . . . iuencis*, II 537) which illustrate the supposed impiety of the Jovian race are the same slaughtered cattle (*caesosque iuencos*, III 23) which Vergil himself means to bring as gifts to the shrines of the gods. Vergil’s account of the plague in Book III further undermines belief in the goodness of the Golden Age by showing how much the Golden Age has in common with the occurrence of a plague: during the plague the earth is not cultivated with metal implements; the wolf is not predatory; the deer lie down with the dogs; the snake is harmless; and the arts are useless (III 534ff.).

As Vergil elaborates the contention between the two views of the direction of human history as a whole, so he elaborates the related question about the innovating roles of the gods named in his invocation. The heavenly bodies that visibly guide the year have been set to do so as a benefit to agricultural man:

To this end the golden sun rules the circuit that is measured out into fixed divisions by the twelve constellations of the world. (I 231–2)

“To this end” refers to the arts of agricultural prognostication set forth in the preceding verses, 204–230. Prognostication itself, then, one of the Jovian-age arts which experience forges by thought (I 133), is after all achieved not by thoughtful experience alone but in the first place because of a disposition of the

Seneca, *Oct.* 404–405, 414–416. On the departure of Iustitia (= Dike, Virgo, Astraea, Erigone): Aratus, *Phaen.* 96–136; Vergil, *Ecl.* IV 6; Ovid, *Met.* I 150–151, *Fasti* 250; Seneca, *Oct.* 396–399, 423–425; Juvenal, VI 19. Cf. W. H. Semple, “Notes on Some Astronomical Passages of Claudian,” *Class. Quart.* 33 (1939), pp. 3–4.

heavens benevolently furnished as a discoverable guide. On the other hand, one of the chief uses of the starry guide is to warn men of meteorological calamities which did not exist until they were introduced into the world together with the guide itself, and which, as a matter of fact, are caused by Father Jupiter himself (I 328). In the beginning there was perpetual spring (II 338); there was no use for a heavenly calendar until the end of the Golden Age brought the changing seasons. The zodiac which tells the months for the benefit of farmers was not complete until Justice abandoned the company of men (II 474) to become the constellation Virgo. The times for the harvesting of honey are indicated by the heavenly bodies (IV 231–235); but before those bodies performed this benevolent office, honey was not produced seasonally by bees but dropped perpetually from the leaves of trees (I 131).

According to Vergil's invocation, Liber improved on primitive river-water with his invention of the vine (I 9); but according to the Golden Age story, Jupiter removed the wine that originally flowed in primitive rivers (I 132). If Bacchus' invention is a benefit, it is still not so praiseworthy as the uncultivated trees whose benefits to us are independent of agriculture (II 454); in fact Bacchus is blameworthy, since intoxication has often been destructive (II 455–457). Perhaps there would have been justice or reason in the plague if the beasts had been wine drinkers; but their innocence and the plague's injustice are specially brought out by the fact that they were water drinkers (III 526–530). Indeed wine appeared to be therapeutic for the beasts once they had succumbed to the plague; but this appearance was cruelly deceptive and in fact the wine soon brought them to a specially gruesome death (III 509–514). Vergil, who begins by invoking Bacchus' aid for his poem on the grounds that new wine is better than old river-water, has been at considerable pains as it seems to show us also the opposing view, the view which must be rejected in order for the invocation to stand.

The invocation to the agricultural gods directs our attention then to a controversy about the gods' innovations, which the poem goes on to elaborate. We may formulate this by saying that the invocation to the agricultural gods introduces the thematic problem of the relative merits of the Old Age and the New Age, the preagricultural age and the agricultural age. In particular, it introduces as thematic the question whether the Old Age was the Golden Age, and, if so, whether the Golden Age was the best age. Vergil's treatment of this twofold question is itself twofold. On the one hand, he suggests that there never was a Golden Age: the first age was, as in Lucretius' account, an age of savagery and poverty, and human history as a whole has been an ascent from that first age. On the other hand, Vergil is willing to concede that the first age was the Golden Age, and even to dwell on its character, but only on condition that the meaning or value of that Golden Age be reassessed: Vergil's references to the traditional picture of the Golden Age regularly imply that it was not the best age, that it was in an important way a savage or subhuman age. Vergil's

twofold treatment of the status of the Golden Age corresponds to the twofold treatment of the happy man near the center of the poem: happy is he who knows the causes of things, but happy too is he who knows the rural gods (II 490–494)—that is, the rural gods as presented by Vergil in the poem. The twofold treatment of both the Golden Age and human happiness follows Lucretius' treatment of the gods in the *De Rerum Natura*: one may conclude that the gods do not exist, or one may continue to speak of them but only on condition that their meaning be reassessed (cf. *Lucretius*, I 1–49, II 598–660, III 18–30, 976–1021, IV 1050, V 110–246, 1159–1238; and cf. *Epicurus*, “It would be better to follow the myth concerning the gods than to be a slave to the necessity of the physicists,” *D.L.* x 134).

The invocation to the agricultural gods is balanced by an invocation to Augustus as a future god. Naturally then he is invoked not by his past services, since these have not been divine ones, but by his future services. The precise nature of these is open to speculation or prophecy, and Vergil speculates or prophesies. In sixteen lines he delineates Augustus' possible and impossible future roles, and in three he exhorts him in the name of his future role to sponsor Vergil's present undertaking. The invocation to Augustus broaches the subject of future history necessarily in relation to past history, and in particular to the question about the status of the Old and New Ages that has been raised in the invocation to the agricultural gods.

Augustus may become an earth god, solicitous of cities and lands, whom the great globe will acknowledge as author of fruits and master of climates, crowning him in recognition of this character with Venus' wreath of myrtle. If Augustus does become an earth god he will not be, like the earth gods of the first half of the invocation, the patron of a division of the earth or a division of agriculture (as wine, grain, forests, herds, flocks, olive, plow); instead, he will unite and oversee *all* these divisions. All the gods whose care it is to guard the fields (21) are subsumed under the future god who will choose the care of lands; all the gods who cultivate new fruits which have not been sown (22) are subsumed under the future god who will be “author of fruits”; all the gods who send down sufficient rain (23) are subsumed under the future god who will be “master of climates.” Servius' paraphrase minces no words: “whether you wish to be worshipped in place of Jupiter” (*ad* I 26).

But perhaps Augustus will become a sea god. If so, he will be a god of the whole extent of the sea, *immensi maris*, whose realm will reach even to the extreme border of Thule. His sailors will worship his divinity *only* (29–30). Tethys, although she has many daughters, will spend *all* her waves to procure Augustus as her son-in-law. The potential sea god Augustus is then not just an additional sea god but a prince of sea gods. Again Servius' paraphrase is straightforward: “that is, whether you wish to be worshipped in place of Neptune” (*ad* I 29); “that is, above the other sea gods, as if he were going to be better than both Neptune and the other sea gods” (*ad* I 30).

But perhaps, finally, Augustus will become a sky god. If so, the manner of his apotheosis will be marvelous indeed: he will become an additional constellation among the signs of the zodiac. This is no common translation to stellar form; the zodiac, unlike the rest of the starry sky, is *essentially* a fixed and closed system. The addition to it of any *novum sidus* must radically compromise its service to agricultural man by disrupting the calendar.⁵ Indeed not since the inauguration of the agricultural Jovian Age, with the departure of Justice from earth (II 473–474), has a new constellation been introduced into the zodiac. Will the deification of Augustus, then, be an event to match the accession of Jupiter? In the Fourth Eclogue, the return of the Golden Age is heralded by the return of Virgo from the zodiac to earth. Perhaps, if the deification of Augustus means the return of the Golden Age, his addition to the zodiac and her subtraction from it might be regarded as complementary. But, so far from suggesting that Virgo will return to earth, Vergil specifies here that Augustus will take his place beside her in the zodiac (I 33). In conformity with this, and in contradistinction from the Fourth Eclogue, Vergil in the *Georgics* in fact does not conceive of the future as a returned Golden Age, as we shall see below.

Vergil's three speculations or prophecies on Augustus' divine character cumulatively contrive to suggest that future history—a history to be inaugurated by Augustus' deification—may radically alter the Jovian dispensation. Neither a new prince of earth gods nor a new prince of sea gods nor a new sign in the zodiac is easily integrated into Jupiter's regime. These cumulative intimations of future revolution are emphasized and confirmed in Vergil's fourth speculation, the negative one concerning the Underworld kingdom. In asserting that Augustus will not choose to become an Underworld god, Vergil makes it clear that if Augustus *did* so choose, he would become not an additional god of the Underworld but its new king. The regime of Dis is secure only, as it seems, because Augustus will choose not to usurp his power (I 36).

The inclusion of the negative speculation, and its introduction by *nam*, confirms that the issue in l. 24 is not "what councils" of the gods in general Augustus will occupy but which of the four councils of the gods he will occupy. Augustus is to have his choice among the four kingdoms of the universe, those four kingdoms into which Jupiter divided the world upon his accession to the throne of Saturn (*Il.* xv 187–93). Not since the accession of Jupiter has the government of the four quarters been at issue. The future Age of Augustus is to be inaugurated by a deification whose potential effects on the government of the universe have had no parallel since the transition from the Old Age to the New Age. "For to become a god is the greatest thing, but to have it in your power [to choose] which god you wish to become is clearly more than the greatest thing" (Servius *ad* I 24). We may say then that the invocation to

5. Thus *tardis*, 32, suggests that in a twelve-month calendar each month is slower than in a thirteen-month calendar.

Augustus introduces the theme of future history in the form of a problem: how will the Augustan dispensation be related to the Jovian dispensation?

The last three lines of the invocation (40–42) finally phrase the request for which Vergil is invoking Augustus. Augustus is asked to foster Vergil's undertaking in the *Georgics*, to join Vergil in compassion for "farmers who are ignorant of the way," and to begin to assume in this life the divine functions that will become his upon his deification. These requests are so phrased as to recapitulate the speculation on the four kingdoms. "Grant an easy voyage" addresses Augustus as a potential Neptune. "Nod assent to my bold undertakings" addresses him as a potential Jupiter.⁶ "Pity, with me, the farmers who are ignorant of the way" addressess him as a potential earth god, in the sphere where the three Kronides now share power. And finally, "accustom yourself even now to be invoked with prayers" not only sums up these three possible future characters of Augustus, but also plays on the idea of Augustus as a potentially reformed Dis, that god who is presently most peculiarly unaccustomed to the prayers of men: "the awful king, the hearts that do not know how to be softened by human prayers" (IV 469–470).

Vergil discounts the possibility that Augustus, given his choice among the four kingdoms, might choose to rule the Underworld. But by putting it in last place, and discounting it at as great length as he explores each of the three probable choices, he gives it a particular emphasis. The first two lines of the Underworld section (36–37) appear to advance the praise of Caesar both by implying that Augustus' kingship would be a benefit to the Underworld ("the realms of Tartarus do not even hope to get you as their king") and by vouching for the moderation of Augustus' desire to rule ("nor would so relentless a desire of ruling come over you"). The next two lines, though, instead of filling out the Underworld section with further praise, offer an overt (*quamvis*) and weighty challenge to the wisdom of Augustus' judgment:

Although Greece admires the Elysian fields, and Proserpina does not care to follow her mother who came to get her. (I 38–9).

Augustus' rejection of the possibility of ruling the Underworld is attributed then not only to the moderation of his desire to rule but also to his holding an opinion of the Underworld which is opposed by the opinions of "Greece" and "Proserpina." His desire of ruling is more moderate than to allow him to rule a kingdom of which he entertains a bad opinion. But his bad opinion of this kingdom is contrasted with the admiration of "Greece" and the love of "Proserpina" for it. For the exposition of this disagreement Vergil has not only explicitly called attention to the un-Greek notion that the Elysian Fields are located in the Underworld, but has also baldly reversed the popular Greek estimate of the rape of Proserpina ("Proserpina was not able to return to the upper gods. . . . only Vergil attributes this necessity to the will of Proserpina," Ser-

6. Cf. *Aen.* IX 625: *Juppiter omnipotens, audacibus adnue coeptis.*

vius *ad* 1 39). The disagreement that Vergil indicates here between Augustus and Greece on the value of ruling the Underworld is richly elaborated in the body of the *Georgics*, but in such a way as not only to correct Augustus' view in the light of the Greek view, but also to reform the Greek view itself.

The admiration of Greece for the Elysian Fields can challenge Augustus' rejection of Tartarus only if the Elysian Fields are conceived as located in Tartarus; but this is not where they are usually located by the Greeks. Greek admiration for the Elysian Fields shows that these Fields are essentially a spatial analogue of the temporal Golden Age;⁷ only rarely are they located in or related to Tartarus. Homer's Elysian Fields are located at the ends of the earth, near Ocean and Zephyr, and inhabited by Rhadamanthus; they provide the easiest life for men, without snow or rain or heavy storms (*Od.* iv 561–568). Hesiod's Islands of the Blest too are at the ends of the earth, by Ocean; Kronos rules there, and there the happy heroes enjoy three growing seasons a year (*W&D* 167–169). Pindar's Islands of the Blest are the site of the Tower of Kronos, refreshed by Ocean breezes and inhabited by Rhadamanthus, and producing golden flowers (*O.* ii 68–76); but in another place (*Fgg.* 129 & 130) Pindar speaks of that place as located "below" and in juxtaposition with the rivers of hell. This rarer view is the one Vergil propounds as the grounds for Greece's admiration of the Elysian Fields. Augustus' contempt for ruling the Underworld is challenged by a view of the Underworld which sees in it the location of a permanent Golden Age. Vergil's praise of Italy (ii 136–76) and praise of Italian farmers (ii 458–74, 493–540) identifies agrarian Italy not only with the temporal Golden Age but also with the spatial Elysian Fields.⁸ Vergil shares the admiration of "Greece" for the Elysian Fields⁹ and, since he locates them in Tartarus, his admiration extends to the Underworld which Augustus contemns.

With Proserpina's refusal to follow her mother back to the Upperworld, Vergil presents us with the idea that someone may love the Underworld better than the Upperworld entirely apart from any consideration of Elysian blessedness. The twist or surprise in Vergil's line is that he improves on the popular version of the myth: not constraint or trickery but her own will keeps Proserpina in the Underworld; something in Tartarus itself inspires loyalty or affection. Such an improvement on the myth is not unprecedented, however; it is advanced at some length by Socrates in the *Cratylus*, 403a–404d.¹⁰ Vergil's Proserpina, like the Pherepapha of the *Cratylus*, is wise; she is the lawgiver of Book IV. Of her laws Vergil mentions one: that Eurydice shall follow Or-

7. Cf. H. C. Baldry, "Who Invented the Golden Age?" *Class. Quart.* 2 (1952), pp. 85–86.

8. Cf. Horace, *Ep.* xvi 39–66.

9. Vergil's favoring of Greece is already evident in the peculiarly Greek cast of the invocation to the agricultural deities of ll. 5–23; cf. Gordon Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford, 1968), p. 94. W. Y. Sellar, *The Roman Poets of the Augustan Age: Virgil* (Oxford, 1883), p. 220; M. C. J. Putnam, *Virgil's Poem of the Earth* (Princeton, 1979), p. 19.

10. G. Zuntz, *Persephone* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 400–402, discusses other possible sources for a tradition of a Persephone who does not return.

pheus back to the Upperworld (iv 487). The condition that Orpheus shall not look back at Eurydice is imposed not by Proserpina but by Dis ("the stipulations of the relentless tyrant," 492).

The disagreement between Augustus and "Greece" to which Vergil directs our attention is then full of matter, and the body of the *Georgics* explores that matter in close connection with the historical problem of the three ages. The Old Age is connected with the Golden Age, Elysium, and Saturn; the New Age is connected with Jupiter, agriculture, Tartarus, and the powers of Dis. The Future or Augustan Age is related to past history in a way that is connected with the disagreement between Augustus and "Greece" about the value of ruling the Underworld.

Vergil's revaluation of the respective claims of the Golden Age and the Jovian Age on men's hopes in the *Georgics* is the ground of his vision of a Future Age. Vergil has here moved away decisively from the cyclical vision of the Fourth Eclogue: the third age of the *Georgics* is not to be a return of the Golden Age.¹¹ The revaluated Golden Age of the *Georgics* is an understandable object of men's nostalgia but not a worthy object of their hopes. The revaluated Jovian Age of the *Georgics* is an understandable object of men's pride but not a sound object of their hopes. Vergil in the *Georgics* presents both the Golden Age and the Jovian Age as dead ends in human history, each doomed by its own internal flaw. The Future Age, if it is to set men on the true way rather than on a dead-end street, will have to avoid or transcend the internal flaws of both old ages.

The teaching of the true or best way is declaredly the aim of the *Georgics*: "Pity, with me, the farmers who are ignorant of the way" (i 41-42). Augustus, in compassion for those who are ignorant of the way, is asked to sponsor Vergil's poem which will teach the way. Vergil knows the way, but it is not clear that Augustus does. Certainly Augustus might be moved by compassion for those who do not know the way without knowing it himself; and certainly Vergil's exposition of Augustus' disagreement with "Greece" has raised a question about Augustus' wisdom.

At the center of the poem, near the end of book II, Vergil presents an explicit teaching about the best way:

Blessed was he who was able to know the causes of things, and who trampled under his feet all fears, inexorable fate, and the roar of greedy Acheron. Fortunate too is he who knows the rural gods, Pan, old Silvanus, and the sister nymphs. (ii 490-494)

But two best ways are presented here: the way of natural philosophy as represented by Lucretius, and the way of rural religion. No doubt Vergil implies

11. Vergil can be thought to have returned to the position of the Fourth Eclogue in the *Aeneid* only if Anchises' teaching (vi 791-794) is taken to be identical with Vergil's. In Evander's account (*Aen.* viii 314-327), the Saturnian Age is not the first age; the first age was an age of savagery, and the Saturnian Age is distinctly civilized (characterized by law, kingship, agriculture).

that the way of rural religion is second best: *et ille* (493) suggests concession; *fortunatus* suggests the danger as well as the delight of being favored by Fortune, as *felix* does not; and Vergil has just suggested that it is only because of his own lack of aptitude for natural philosophy that he has reconciled himself, *inglorius*, to the solaces of country life (475–489).¹²

Since the teaching of the best way is conceived in the invocation as the necessity of a special historical moment, namely the imminent deification of Augustus, the relationship of this moment to the rest of history is a principal concern of the poem. This moment is the passageway from the New to the Future Age; its unique historical predecessor was the transition from the Old to the New Age.

The Old or Golden Age of the *Georgics* is characterized by absolute security or stasis. It was precisely because he understood the heaviness and futility of human life without development that Jupiter inaugurated his new regime, replacing the dull with the sharp, the easy with the hard, the same with the different, the static with the mobile, satiety with desire (1 121–146). Jupiter ended the Golden Age because he was not willing that the way should be easy (1 122). This is the traditional myth, subverted only—but crucially—by the fact that Vergil does not attribute the origin of the hard way to human degeneration or to divine malevolence; the hard way is not a punishment. Vergil reverses absolutely the traditional value or meaning of the Golden Age, making the Jovian or agricultural age not a fall but a rise, not a punishment but a blessing. Jupiter *raised* men from leisure to labor, from a stagnant paradise to a progressive history, from sufficiency and stupidity to need and skill. Vergil's account of this transition in book I closes with a cautionary tale about the human condition in the agricultural age: successful Agricultural Man is bursting with abundant produce while failed Agricultural Man, a pathetic throwback, gnaws on his Golden Age relics, the acorns, with hunger in his belly and envy in his heart (1 158–159). While the Golden Age is the object of a poignant nostalgia in the *Georgics*, Vergil's doctrine is not a project of returning to that age or looking for its return; the nostalgia of civilized men for the childhood of the world is founded on errors of fact and of interpretation.¹³ Errors of fact,

12. On *felix* and *fortunatus* cf. R. R. Dyer, "Ambition in the *Georgics*: Vergil's Rejection of Arcadia," *Auckland Classical Essays* (Auckland, 1971), p. 148; M. C. J. Putnam, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

13. Cf. Plato, *Politicus* 268d–275b, and esp. 272b–d: Young Socrates says that he would not be both able and willing to judge whether the Age of Kronos or the Age of Zeus is happier; the Stranger suggests that in order to judge, one would need to know whether men in the Age of Kronos used their leisure and speech for philosophy. In Don Quixote's discourse on the Golden Age (see Note 2 preceding), Cervantes explicitly develops the parallel: knight-errantry is the best way of life, but it did not come into being until the end of the Golden Age brought about the departure of Justice from her "proper bounds": "Therefore, as times went on and wickedness increased, the order of knight-errantry was instituted to defend maidens, to protect widows, and to rescue orphans and distressed persons." It is a "law of nature," says Don Quixote, that "every man is obliged to favor knights-errant," though knights-errant did not exist in the Golden Age

because the childhood of the world was not a Golden Age but an age of savagery; errors of interpretation, because even the Golden Age of myth, rightly understood, was fatally flawed for man by its immemorial sluggishness, *gravis veterenus* (I 124); its security, its communal enjoyment of a freely nurturant earth without labor, was tied to the absence of culture, or the inability of men to become fully human.

The Jovian Age, on the other hand, is characterized by absolute insecurity, a principle of degeneration built into the very germ of agriculture. The Jovian regime was instituted by force and is maintained by force, but it never has had and never will have enough force to prevail absolutely; it is founded on a conquest which is in principle impossible to sustain. In his critique of the Jovian Age, Vergil propounds the view that Jovian culture is necessarily progressive but that the further it progresses the closer it necessarily comes to ultimate collapse.

The essential mark of the Jovian Age is the institution of culture by the division of man from nature. Nature includes the dull, the easy, the same, the static; culture does not. In the Jovian order, nature is an obstacle and a threat to man's development in culture; labor, art, and violence are the ways of overcoming nature. Immoderate labor (*labor improbus*, I 145), the several arts (*variae artes*, I 133), human force (*vis humana*, I 198) must be unrelenting; a single break in man's vigilance gives purchase to degeneration, the anti-Jovian tendency of nature.

From the inception of the agricultural teaching at I 43, man's life in agriculture is portrayed as a life against nature, and even as a war against nature. Spring melts and softens the world, but the farmer must respond to spring by making his ox to groan and his plowshare to be polished by friction (I 43–46). His labor on the land is like navigation, that familiar topos of fallen man's unnatural impiety ("before we cleave the unknown sea with iron," I 50). Man needs to learn nature's ways in order to know the "givens" of his task, but his task is to tease his advantage from the skillful frustration of her intentions (I 50–56, 67–70).

Agricultural man's use of the soil exhausts it (I 77–78), and therefore he must see to its continued productivity by his stratagems of laying fallow, rotating crops, burning the fields, cross-plowing (I 71–99). The farmer who uses these stratagems becomes a general, *imperat arvis* (I 99), in the war against nature. The successful farmer is not only a skilled strategist but is also prepared to enter hand-to-hand combat (*comminus*, I 104) with his fields. His combat is not only with the soil itself but with all the antiagricultural conditions of nature against which Jupiter pitted the farmer when he instituted his new regime. Man's labor in cultivation yields brilliant results, *nitentia culta* (I 153),

(*op. cit.*, p. 119). Cf. Friedrich Solmsen, "Hesiodic Motifs in Plato," *Entretiens Fondation Hardt* 7 (1960), pp. 181–188; and cf. Note 17 below.

but an anti-Jovian counterrevolution is always brewing, and the strength of sterile weeds threatens eternally to choke out the fruits of cultivation. Unremitting vigilance (*adsidua rastra*, I 155) is the farmer's only hope of continued success. As soon as he lets up, nature asserts her original wilderness, and the farmer ends up eating acorns to remind him of that Golden Age from which Jupiter has potentially redeemed him.

Since the farmer's labor is war, his tools are weapons, *arma* (I 160). But nature's underground army makes sport of the armed farmer (*inludant*, 181) unless he extends his vigilance even further: just underneath his threshing floor a subterranean community of creatures lies in wait for any moment of his laxity to emerge as "pests." The grain seed itself, which he has bred long and laboriously to a pitch of productivity appropriate to the aims of agriculture, bears within itself the natural principle of degeneration. The Fates themselves execute this principle insofar as man's lapses of vigilance allow. Time itself works for nature's cause, for degeneration: not a tranquil stream but a rushing river, it makes of Jovian progress an unrelenting rowing upstream: one stroke missed, and progressive man is reclaimed by the natural direction of that river's course, toward degeneration:

I have seen grain seed degenerate, even after the laborious selection and control of many generations, unless the utmost human effort keeps up the selection process by hand, year after year without fail. In the same way all things, constrained by a law of fate, rush back to a baser condition and are swept backwards into collapse and oblivion—just as a man who is barely managing to row upstream against the current, if he should relax his arms for just one moment, is swept headlong down the stream. (I 197–203)

Everything degenerates: everything fertile tends to become sterile, everything cultivated tends to become wild, everything sharp tends to become dull.¹⁴ Under Jupiter's regime no progress is ever secure; every human achievement must be continually defended from degeneration even while the next achievement is under way. The greater man's progress, therefore, the greater the probability that his ever-extending frontiers against the wilderness will finally prove incapable of defense, and that his whole undertaking—agricultural civilization itself—will collapse.

The forces of degeneration reside underground; in the Jovian dispensation, the Underworld opposes cultivation and must ultimately uncultivate the world. Jupiter's revolution has never been secured. He overthrew the government of Saturn, but his old opponents have never been reconciled to his regime. They survive underground, where they continue to work for the overthrow of agricultural civilization. These subversive forces and creatures obey natural laws which make it impossible for them ever to be either annihilated or converted to

14. Cf. I 148–149, 151, 154, 197ff.; II 37, 48, 53–62, 70, 207–211, 440–443; III 95–98, 100–102, 118–122, 464–465; IV 495–496 is significant for its echo of I 199–200 (*retro, fata, fero*), cf. P. A. Johnston, "Eurydice and Proserpina in the *Georgics*," *TAPA* 107 (1977), p. 166.

Jovian culture. They range from tiny subterranean insect pests to the Furies in hell, and their destructive intentions towards Jupiter's regime are everywhere in evidence.

The farmer must continually secure his fields and storage barns against the ravages of an underground network of pests, where mice and moles, toads, weevils, and ants are always threatening to undo his labors (I 180ff.). He must observe the fifth day of each month as a day of ill omen for his labors, in commemoration of the giants and titans who challenged Jupiter's authority at the beginning of his reign. Jupiter suppressed their rebellion and imprisoned them underground—under mountains in fact, for greater security. But the volcanic rumblings and eruptions of those same mountains bear witness to the continuing power and hostility of the giants and titans, who are always threatening to burst back into the daylight world (I 466–468, 471–475). Finally Tartarus itself, the abode of the dead, continually threatens to engulf the upper world in final darkness, overthrowing all the projects of Jupiter's civilization. Tartarus is not only the passive recipient of all living souls at the time of their death; it also sends into the upper world active demons of violence and insane destructiveness which hasten and multiply death through war and crime (III 551).

Jupiter's revolution has never been secured. The conquest and suppression of the Underworld is not only unachieved but impossible, because the Underworld is the source not only of death but also of life,¹⁵ as it is the abode not only of the dead but also of Elysium. The end of the Underworld would be the end of Elysium; it would also be the end of life on earth.

This pole is always uppermost for us; but the other is seen by the black Styx and the shades beneath our feet. (I 242–3)

The Upperworld and the Underworld are so disposed as to balance one another; there is no suppressing one of them without destroying the pattern and fabric of the universe. The Jovian Age is on the verge of collapse because the Jovian project of expanding the power of the Upperworld at the expense of the Underworld is necessarily self-defeating. If Augustus is to inaugurate an age which will not be a mere repetition of Jupiter's fatal error, an age which will be secured against the hostile eruption of the Underworld into the Upperworld, it is urgent that he reconsider his rejection of ruling the Underworld in the light of the views Vergil has attributed to Greece and Proserpina. Not by conquering or rejecting Tartarus but by undertaking to rule it will Augustus be able to inaugurate a future age which will not merely repeat the calamitous past.

Agricultural man has the art of breeding—of reproducing with improvements the plants and animals he finds in nature. The art of originating those plants and animals, however, belongs to Tartarus; without the Underworld, agricultural man would have no stuff to cultivate and breed. *Quippe solo natura subest*

15. Cf. G. B. Miles, "Georgics 3.209–294: Amor and Civilization," *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 8 (1976), pp. 177–197.

11 49): the force of generation resides underground. This force is the source of the spontaneous production of plants, while cultivation is the source of the reproduction and improvement of them (11 51–52). Cultivation by fire is effective (1 84ff.) because it somehow opens the soil to underground life-forces, *occultas viris*, or allows a life-juice to penetrate from below. Somehow death fosters life; manure and ashes are the fertilizers of exhausted fields (1 80–81). The loftier a plant is to be, the deeper it must be planted; the vine may be planted shallow, but the great oak derives its whole strength and longevity from driving its roots down to Tartarus (11 288ff.). Not its reaching to heaven, but the balance of its reach toward heaven with its reach toward Tartarus, is the cause why the oak is impervious to storm and outlives many generations of men (11 293ff.).

Augustus shares with Jupiter and with Jovian man a longing for the complete and final suppression of the anti-Jovian Underworld. But Vergil's teaching in the *Georgics* requires the renunciation of this longing. It is true that the longing to be freed from subjection to the Underworld is natural, in the sense that it can be satisfied; it is satisfied, in fact, by natural philosophy:

Blessed was he who was able to know the causes of things, and who trampled under his feet all fears, inexorable fate, and the roar of greedy Acheron. (11 490–492)

The “parts of nature” (11 483) an understanding of whose causes would result in triumph over Acheron are heaven (11 477–478), earth (479), and ocean (479–482). Vergil here praises Lucretius for a knowledge of heaven, earth and ocean which is accompanied by a complete mastery of the Underworld. In the invocation, though, he blames Augustus for a contempt for the Underworld which accompanies a sympathy or admiration for heaven, earth, and ocean. The philosopher's mastery of the Underworld is praiseworthy; Augustus' rejection of the Underworld is blameworthy. Augustus is not a philosopher; he will not master the Underworld through knowledge of the causes of things. Nor will he master it by annihilating it; Vergil's account of the doom of the Jovian Age has shown that this is both impossible and undesirable. Since neither knowledge nor annihilation can give the Augustan Age secure mastery of the Underworld, Augustus must reconsider its claim to his rule.

The project Vergil delineates for Augustus is the inauguration of a new regime in a Jovian world gone out of order and out of control; Augustus is to restore the proper rank of *fas* and *nefas*, to reduce crime, to restore the honor of agriculture which has been usurped by war, to mend the broken laws between cities, to pacify “impious Mars” (1 498–514). As things stand now, in the twilight of the Jovian Age, with *fas* and *nefas* reversed, it seems that virtue is confined to an apolitical rural life which imitates the Golden Age (11 458–460, 467–474, 500–501, 513–540), and vice to a political urban life which parodies the Jovian Age (11 461–466, 495–499, 501–512). But this is only the way things appear in the twilight of the Jovian Age; it would be an error to proceed,

on the basis of this appearance at this time, to end the life in cities and restore the Golden Age, nor is Augustus counseled to do this.¹⁶ The Future Age is not to be a return to one of the previous failed ages, both of which are doomed by their principles to repeat their failures unceasingly, but a turn to something hitherto unknown: the Augustan Age is to avoid the self-defeating principles of both the Golden Age and the Jovian Age while preserving the excellences of both. The excellence of the Golden Age is its *secura quies*, secure peace; the excellence of the Jovian Age is its invitation of human perfection. The self-defeating principle of the Golden Age is its *gravis veternus*, the torpor which bars, among other things, the full consciousness of its own happy state.¹⁷ The self-defeating principle of the Jovian Age is its permanent failure to reconcile its enemies to its regime, and hence its state of permanent and increasing warfare. The self-defeating principle of each age militates against the excellence of the other. But Augustus' project is to inaugurate a regime which should preserve both excellences and avoid both flaws.

If he is to avoid the self-destructive flaw of the Jovian Age, Augustus will have to insure the reconciliation of his subjects to his regime—unlike Jupiter, whose initial failure to reconcile the Giants and Titans was the seed of the present state of permanent underground insurrection. “He gives laws among consenting peoples,” says Vergil at the close of the *Georgics* (IV 561–562), praising Augustus for that part of his policy which implements Vergil's teaching. But if the consent of the peoples to the laws is to be perfect in the Augustan Age, as it has not been in the Jovian Age, that consent will have to come from the Underworld as well as from the other parts of the world; Augustus must then reconsider his rejection of Tartarus in the light of Proserpina's willingness to make laws for a consenting Underworld. And if “secure peace” is to be perfect in the Augustan Age, as it was not in the Golden Age, then Augustus must again reconsider his rejection of Tartarus in the light of its being the location of Elysium, where the good enjoy secure peace with the consciousness of their own felicity.

The victorious procession of Augustus at the close of the *Georgics* is by water, earth, and sky—Euphrates, the peoples, Olympus—but not by Underworld (IV 560–562). Although it is here contrasted with Vergil's “ignoble ease,” it is prefigured in book III by Vergil's own victorious procession through the same three quarters. Vergil will lift himself above earth and fly in the mouths of men (III 9); bring the Muses down from the peak of Aonius (III 11); and erect a temple of marble on a green field near the water (III 13–15). All of Greece—that same Greece which, in opposition to Augustus, entertains according to Vergil an admiration for Tartarus as the site of Elysium—will leave the

16. Cf. Dyer, *op. cit.*, p. 160, and Benjamin Farrington, “Vergil and Lucretius,” *Acta Classica* 1 (1958), pp. 47–49.

17. Cf. Vergil's qualified felicitation of the Italian farmers among whom remain the last traces of the Golden Age: “O all too happy the farmers, if they but knew their own good,” II 458–459.

Alpheus and the groves of Molorchus to compete in Vergil's triumphal games. Vergil himself, wearing the olive wreath (III 21; as Augustus will wear the myrtle wreath, I 28), will distribute the prizes. The temple he will dedicate will be ornamented with representations of Augustus' achievements and glories in three spheres: water (III 26ff.), earth (III 30ff.), and, climactically, the Underworld (III 37ff.).

Vergil means to enshrine in his temple representations of the Furies, the grim river Cocytus, and the punishments of Ixion and Sisyphus; not as independent scenes, but as objects of the fear of *Invidia infelix*, baleful Envy. The Underworld which Augustus rejects, Vergil means to enshrine in his temple in its role of averting *Invidia*. Unlike Jupiter's regime, perpetually threatened by the subversive *invidia* of Underworld forces, Augustus' will be secured from the *invidia* of the vanquished (III 25-33) by no other force than that of the Underworld itself. The natural philosopher is *felix*, blessed, because in his knowledge of the causes of things he leaves behind the fear of Acheron and the hope of Elysium; but the Augustan Age will be *felix* only by averting the *infelix* envy of the subject peoples through fear of punishment and longing for bliss, both of which are rooted in the Underworld. Augustus' quarrel with Greece and Proserpina about the value of ruling the Underworld is arbitrated by the conditions of Augustus' supreme project, the giving of laws among consenting peoples. The Augustan Age will not be able to redeem the Golden and Jovian Ages unless Augustus is persuaded by Greece and Proserpina.

The Aristaeus myth is Vergil's most fully developed contribution to the persuasion of Augustus to the views of Greece and Proserpina.¹⁸ The shape of the *Georgics* is determined by its theme as adumbrated in the invocation: the climax of the *Georgics* is a myth which refers to the thematic question whether Augustus is wise to reject the claims of the Underworld kingdom. The climax of the *Georgics* thereby completes the teaching of a solution to the thematic problem of the invocation: how is the hope for a redeemed Future Age affected by the disagreement between Augustus and Greece about the value of ruling the Underworld? The Underworld in the climactic myth of the *Georgics* is the unique source of the powers which complement Aristaeus' and Orpheus' arts: Aristaeus, the Jovian man, has the art of breeding but not the power of creating; Orpheus, the Saturnian man, has the art of poetry but not the power of resurrection. Lucretius trampled inexorable fate beneath his feet; but in the myth, fate is exorable and both Aristaeus and Orpheus find that the laws of fate can be bent, with the aid of religious observance and music respectively.

18. On the Aristaeus epyllion cf. esp. B. Otis, *op. cit.*, pp. 187-214, 408-413; F. Klingner, *Virgils Georgica* (Zurich and Stuttgart, 1963), pp. 193-239; C. Segal, "Orpheus and the Fourth Georgic: Vergil on Nature and Civilization," *AJPh* 87 (1966), pp. 307-325; A. Bradley, "Augustan Culture and a Radical Alternative: Virgil's *Georgics*," *Arion* 8 (1969); A. Parry, "The Idea of Art in Virgil's *Georgics*," *Arethusa* 5 (1972) pp. 35-52; P. A. Johnston, *op. cit.*; M. C. J. Putnam, *op. cit.*, pp. 271-323.

To turn aside from ruling the Underworld is to turn aside not only from the source of death but also from the source of life.

Vergil's observation that Augustus is resistant to the claims of the Underworld kingdom is not a poetic fancy. Twelve years after the publication of the *Georgics* (and two years after Vergil's death), Augustus confirmed this observation in his singular manner of celebrating the Centennial Games of 17 B.C. These games, ceremonially marking the passage from one age to the next, had traditionally been celebrated principally in honor of Dis and Proserpina. Augustus substituted Jupiter and Juno, Apollo and Diana as the tutelary gods of the festival; Dis and Proserpina did not appear at all among the group of gods to whom sacrifices were offered.¹⁹ Augustus was evidently following a policy designed to emphasize an apparent new freedom from the old forces of darkness; he shared with Vergil the conviction that he was ushering in a new age and not just the next centennium in a series. But if Augustus had been open to the teaching of the *Georgics*, he could not have abolished the ancient ritual basis of the Centennial Games, which had recognized and honored the double nature of Hades as the source of endings and beginnings, death and life.²⁰

The Vergil of the *Georgics* was the prophet of a future Roman Empire, not a partisan of the one that actually came into being. He envisioned an empire that would not require, as the Jovian regime did require, the perpetual denial and suppression of the wild, the primitive and the underground. This empire would therefore not be doomed, as the Jovian regime was doomed, by the eventual eruption of those suppressed forces into the daylight world. If Augustus had been open to the teaching of the *Georgics*, he must have founded not the Roman Empire which now belongs to ancient history, but the future empire of Vergil's vision, which was to have the same virtue that gives its strength to the sacred oak:

Foremost is the oak: as high as it stretches its crown up toward the breezes of heaven,
just so deep does it sink its roots down into the depths of hell. (II 291–292)²¹

19. For the inscriptional evidence cf. G. B. Pighi, *De Ludis Saecularibus* (Milan, 1941), pp. 73–75 and 108–119. Cf. Horace, *Carmen Saeculare*.

20. Cf. Athene's solution to the conflict between the Underworld Furies of the old dispensation and the justice of the new gods, Aeschylus, *Eum.* 778–1047; also Apollo's suggestion, 644–651, that the regime of the new gods could involve the reconciliation of Zeus and Kronos.

21. For helpful suggestions on earlier versions of this essay I am indebted to my colleague, Professor Murray Dry, and to the anonymous readers of *Interpretation*.