XIII. Vergil's Golden Age

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The Hesiodic myth of the Golden Age appears and reappears with many variations throughout the history of Classical literature and philosophy, but for no ancient author did it hold greater fascination than for Vergil. The passages in which he has treated the theme include several of the most famous, and most controversial, of Vergilian *loci*, involving still unsolved problems and unsettled arguments concerning the poet's philosophical views, political loyalties, and poetic techniques. Yet it is characteristic of the most thoughtful of Latin poets to beguile his readers into perpetually renewed attempts to interpret his meaning. The present attempt is made with the conviction that a study of the passages as a chronological series casts new light on the development of Vergil's thought.

The idea of an innocent and carefree life in the far distant past, from which men have fallen, or gradually deteriorated, down to the evil days of the contemporary world, is very old in the history of thought. Its first appearance in Classical literature, in Hesiod's myth of the Five Ages, is about a century later than the Biblical story of man's fall from innocence and the consequent necessity of earning his bread by the sweat of his brow. Slight traces of the same idealization of the past are discernible in Homer,[1] and it is reasonably certain that Hesiod was developing a current legend and adapting it to his purpose of explaining the origin of work and of the misery apparent in the world about him. How much of the myth of the Five Ages was invented by Hesiod, and how much was derived from earlier sources and from folk memory of events in the Greek world, is still a matter of discussion.[2]

The tendency to idealize the past is perhaps as old as the human race. But the succession of metals was probably suggested by the actual succession of the bronze and iron ages, coinciding in

[1] E.g., *Iliad* 5.302–4.

[2] The subject is ably treated by T. G. Rosenmeyer, "Hesiod and Historiography," *Hermes* 85 (1957) 257–85, esp. 270, note 1.

Greece with the tradition of the earlier richer civilization of the Homeric heroes. It has been argued that Hesiod's purpose in using the myth was primarily historical rather than philosophical,[3] and this interpretation accords best with the nature of the account. For Hesiod's scheme is by no means one of consistent deterioration. The silver race was in certain ways inferior to the bronze, and the race of heroes makes a definite break in the pattern of decline. Moreover the characteristics which came to be associated with the Golden Age are ascribed by Hesiod not only to the first age but also to life in the Isles of the Blest where the heroes dwelt after their earthly existence.[4]

It remained for writers of a later time to develop the myth into the logical scheme of steady deterioration described in greatest detail by Ovid.[5] The stages in the fully developed pattern were four, but brief allusions are more likely to mention only the Golden and Iron Ages, which in the course of time came to epitomize the contrast between the "good old days" and the ills of the present. Lovejoy's survey of the pertinent passages from ancient authors classes these as variants differing as to the number of ages; but they seem rather to be abbreviations, implying without mentioning the intervening stages in the decline.[6] In the hands of various Greek writers the myth had gradually crystallized into a philosophical and theological doctrine, held most consistently by the Cynics, which might be termed an "orthodox" view in opposition to the "radical" theory of progress developed by the Sophists and adopted later by

[3] See Rosenmeyer (above, note 2) 274–6. The insertion of the Heroic age indicates an elaboration of the myth by Hesiod, perhaps for the purpose of adapting an already formulated series of metals to history as he knew it.

[4] *Works and Days* 109–20; 166–73. Both the Golden Age and the Isles of the Blest were ruled by Kronos. Vergil's description of *Saturnia tellus* in *Georgics* 2.136–76, which has some elements of the traditional Golden Age, draws on both of these passages. The "twice fruitful earth and flocks," for example, echoes the "thrice fruitful earth" of Hesiod's Isles of the Blest, *Works and Days* 173; cf. also Horace, *Epode* 16.41 ff.

[5] *Metamorphoses* 1.89–150.

[6] The parallel development of these two opposing views and the constant interaction between them have been analyzed and traced through ancient literature by A. O. Lovejoy and G. Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (Baltimore 1935). The several aspects of primitivism distinguished by Lovejoy, "soft" and "hard," chronological and cultural, have been traced in Vergil's works by M. E. Taylor, "Primitivism in Virgil," *AJP* 76 (1955) 261–78, with conclusions that coincide in part with those of this article. See also W. K. C. Guthrie, *In the Beginning* (Ithaca 1957) ch. 4.

Epicurus. The idea of an original perfect state of man fitted naturally into the doctrine of the divine origin of the world held by Plato and the Stoics, though both made some limited concessions to the opposing doctrine and accepted some human achievement as progress.[7] It was easily harmonized also with the Pythagorean theory of cycles of existence and with the Stoic Great Year.[8] Vergil was of course familiar with its many ramifications in Greek literature and philosophy, and several are reflected in his use of the theme.

The earliest, in the celebrated fourth *Eclogue*, draws upon and adapts the Hesiodic version, with added details from Aratus and other sources.[9] The return of the Golden Age which will begin anew the cycle of the ages is to take place within the coming generation, its three stages matching the babyhood, youth, and manhood of the child by whose birth, in 40 B.C., it will be ushered in. The characteristic features of the Golden Age are accordingly divided, with no very strict logic, into three sections, interrupted by the description of a brief renewal of wars and the wickedness of the Iron Age. Vergil develops and embroiders upon Hesiod's picture of the spontaneous fruitfulness of the earth and of the flocks, the absence of wars, ills, deceit, and work. The use of terms meaning "race" rather than "age," *nova progenies* and *gens aurea*, specifically echo the *chryseon genos*[10]; and underlying the decorative and in part fanciful detail is essentially the Hesiodic view that the development of civilization has been a decline from an originally happy and godlike existence.

With the Hesiodic Golden Age Vergil combines several other ideas, chief of which is the old Etruscan notion of the *saeculum*. This early ritual which involved the driving of a nail into the wall of the Capitoline Temple symbolized, like the closing of the *lustrum* on a smaller scale, the expiation of past guilt and a new

[7] See Lovejoy and Boas (above, note 6) 155 ff., 261 ff., and below, notes 29 and 30.

[8] Plato, *Timaeus* 226 ff.; *Critias* 109D–E; *Laws* 677A; Aristotle, *Metaphys.* 1074B; see Lovejoy and Boas (above, note 6) 79 ff.; Guthrie (above, note 6) 65–8.

[9] Cf. Aratus, *Phaenomena* 96–136, and below, notes 11, 13, 14.

[10] H. C. Baldry, *CQ* 46 (1952) 83–92, argues that Hesiod's five "races" were translated into five ages in Hellenistic versions; but Aratus consistently uses the Hesiodic term, and the Latin *saeculum* contains the idea of generations as well as periods of time. Ovid's version uses *aetas* and *proles* interchangeably (*aurea aetas*, *argentea proles*, *aerea proles*). Vergil's *nova progenies* and *gens aurea* (*Eclogue* 4.7 and 9) are still closer to Hesiod and are probably explicit reminiscences of his usage.

beginning.[11] It is attested in 363 B.C. and 263 B.C. by the Capitoline Fasti, which record the appointment of a *dictator clavi figendi caussa.*[12] It was one of the old rites underlying the Ludi Saeculares, a performance of which was probably being planned for the following year (39 B.C.) and was doubtless a topic of current interest. The recorded performances of the Games, in 249 B.C. and 149 (or 146) B.C., followed the reckoning of a *saeculum* at one hundred years. But the reckoning at one hundred ten years which was finally manipulated to justify the Augustan Ludi in 17 B.C. could, by counting only from the last performance, be made to indicate the end of the *saeculum* in 39 B.C., and there is some evidence apart from the *Eclogue* itself that a celebration of the Games was under consideration in the years immediately preceding that date.[13]

The Etruscan idea of the closing of the *saeculum* as a new beginning did not necessarily imply a repeated world cycle like that of the Pythagorean doctrine or like the Great Year of the Stoics, but it was an easy association to make[14]; and Vergil's reference to the last age of the Cumaean Sibyl, the new beginning of the *ordo saeculorum*, and the return of the *Saturnia regna* shows that such a larger cycle was also present in his mind.

Whether there was any actual Messianic prophecy behind Vergil's selection of the birth of a child as the event which would initiate the new age seems likely to remain an unsettled question. The manifestly Jewish elements in the surviving Sibylline oracles

[11] Varro, *De ling. Lat.* 6.11; Censorinus, 17.13; Livy 7.3.4 records its performance as an expiatory rite in 363 B.C. See Nilsson, *RE*[2] 2.1698–9.

[12] *CIL* I, pages 430, 434.

[13] See L. R. Taylor, *CP* 29 (1934) 221 ff.; Nilsson (above, note 11) 1710; V. Gardthausen, *Augustus und seine Zeit* (Leipzig 1891–1904) 1.1006–8. According to Censorinus' account (17.2 and 5) drawn from the Etruscan *Libri rituales* and from Varro, the *saeculum* was defined as the longest span of a human life, the end of which was indicated by prodigies. There were to be in all ten *saecula*, at the close of which there would be an end of the Etruscan name. Plutarch records a prodigy portending the end of a *saeculum* in 88 B.C. (*Sulla* 7; cf. Servius, *ad Aen.* 8.526); and Servius, *ad Ecl.* 9.46, tells the story of a haruspex who interpreted the comet in 44 B.C. as a sign of the closing of the ninth *saeculum* and the beginning of the tenth. A. Alföldi, *Hermes* 65 (1938) 369 ff., gathers from coin types of these years a significant amount of evidence that the closing of the *saeculum* was under consideration.

[14] Servius, *ad Ecl.* 4.4, attributes the doctrine of the ten ages to the Cumaean Sibyl but conflates, or confuses, it with the philosophers' world cycle by adding: finitis omnibus saeculis rursus eadem innovari, quam rem etiam philosophi hac disputatione colligunt dicentes completo magno anno omnia sidera in ortus suos redire et ferri rursus eodem motu. See Rzach, *WS* 34 (1912) 114 ff.

are too uncertain in date to prove Vergil's dependence upon them, and the case must rest with the admission of the possibility that some Messianic prophecies might have been included in the Sibylline collection and might have been used by Vergil, probably in any case without his being aware of their specific origin.[15]

Another controversial question has a significant bearing on Vergil's source of inspiration for the *Eclogue*. Almost contemporaneous with this hopeful prophecy of a coming age of peace, a bitter and satiric companion-piece was written by Horace in a mood of disillusionment after the defeat of the "liberators' " cause. Few scholars question a direct relationship between the fourth *Eclogue* and Horace's sixteenth *Epode*. But the question whether Horace's dream of a Utopia was a cynical and perhaps mocking parallel to Vergil's Golden Age, or whether the *Eclogue* was a gentle reply to Horace's poem of despair, has been end-

[15] See Rzach, *RE*[2] 4.2117–8; A. Kurfess, *Philologus* 91 (1936) 415–7; *Hist. Jahrb.* 73 (1953) 120–5. The reassembling of the Sibylline Books from various oracles in the Eastern Mediterranean world, after the destruction of the original books in 83 B.C., is mentioned by Tacitus, *Ann.* 6.12; see Rzach, 2112.

The identity of the human child which Vergil must have had in mind continues to be a subject of controversy, even in the face of the likelihood that "tuus iam regnat Apollo" in line 10 refers to Octavian, who at this time was making much of his connection with Apollo (Suetonius, *Augustus* 70; P. Lambrechts, *La nouvelle Clio* 5 (1953) 65–70; R. Hanslik, *WS* 68 (1955) 14–19). Of the three identifications that have received serious consideration, the son of Pollio, the expected child of Octavian, or the expected child of Antony and Octavia, the first is surely excluded by the whole tone of the poem with its imperial outlook and quasi-deification, though the case for Pollio's son has been argued vigorously, notably by A. Alföldi, *Hermes* 65 (1930) 369–84. The phraseology with its implications of dynastic hopes is appropriate to a child of either of the ruling triumvirs, but the probable allusion to Octavian as Apollo in line 10, and his appellation as *deus* in the nearly contemporary first *Eclogue*, make it more likely that a child of Octavian was selected as the symbol of the new age. See, *inter alia*, H. J. Rose, *The Eclogues of Vergil* (Berkeley 1942) 204–13; E. A. Hahn, *TAPA* 77 (1944) 206–12, 216–7; and more recently E. Bickel, *RhM* 97 (1954) 218–21; G. E. Duckworth, *TAPA* 87 (1956) 286 ff. The proposal that the child was that of Antony and Octavia, though cogently supported by W. W. Tarn, *JRS* 22 (1932) 135–60, esp. 153–5, has not been widely accepted. The possibility that the child is either Octavian himself or, as proposed by Norden, the new age itself, seems excluded by the homely and affectionate touches throughout the poem (e.g. the allusion to the cradle, line 23, and to the growing child's being able to read about his father's deeds, line 27; the epithet "parve puer," line 60), most of all by the "family life" atmosphere of lines 60–63, with references to the mother's pregnancy, the baby's first smile, and, with a Vergilian double meaning, to details of Roman birth ritual such as the *mensa* to Hercules. Cf. however, E. Norden, *Die Geburt des Kindes* (Leipzig 1924) 22–50, esp. 45–6, 59–67.

lessly debated. The verbal parallels between the two poems can be turned to the support of either view and are thus conclusive, on one side or the other, only to the already convinced. A careful review of the parallels and the arguments adduced from them continues to be convincing to each reviewer but not completely exclusive of the opposite interpretation. Probably for this reason recent discussions of the problem have sought the support of broader, if less specifically arguable, considerations, such as Büchner's suggestion, in favor of Horace's priority, that a cynical retort by a younger poet is an unlikely foundation for a life-long friendship.[16]

More cogent on the other side, in support of the priority of the *Eclogue*, is the evidence that, even in the lines most closely parallel with Horace, Vergil is adapting Theocritean phraseology,[17] and the fact that Horace draws upon several of the *Eclogues* (1, 3, and 8 as well as 4), thus using Vergil's poems for his single excursion into the pastoral in somewhat the same way as Vergil himself used the *Idyls* of Theocritus.[18] A further consideration is that Vergil's allusion to another war which will interrupt the progress of the new age, with another victory of West over East (lines 34–6), are fully meaningful in the *Eclogue*, both as a device for dividing the advance of the new age so as to correspond to the stages in the child's growth to maturity, and as an allusion to the recurrently threatening conflict between Antony and Octavian. Horace's parallel allusions to the Argo and the adventures of Ulysses (lines 57–60) are purely negative and essentially extraneous to the content of the *Epode*.

In addition, an examination of Vergil's relation to Hesiod indirectly throws light on this problem. While he was still writing pastorals Vergil was already absorbed in the works of Hesiod, and was beginning to regard himself as a successor to the bard of Ascra. A difficult passage in the first *Eclogue* has been

[16] *RE*[2] 8A.1204–6; cf. also Wimmel's argument from a highly subjective analysis of the techniques of the two poets in placing ideas in parallel series, *Hermes* 81 (1953) 317 ff.; 82 (1954) 213 ff. Duckworth, *TAPA* 87 (1956) 286–90, notes 33–6, and *CW* 51 (1958) 125, reviews the opinions of scholars on the problem, siding with the view opposite of that which seems convincing to the present writer.

[17] B. Snell, *Hermes* 73 (1938) 240–1; K. Witte, *Horaz und Vergil* (Erlangen 1922) 14; cf. also C. Becker, *Hermes* 83 (1955) 342.

[18] Witte (above, note 17) 7–19; A. Kurfess (above, note 14) 418–20; Snell (above, note 17) 237–40; C. Becker (above, note 17) 343–8.

illuminated by a parallel from the *Theogony*.[19] In the curious lines (44–5) describing the return of Tityrus' farm,

> Hic mihi responsum primus dedit ille petenti:
> "pascite ut ante boves, pueri; summittite tauros,"

both the puzzling *primus* and the change from singular to plural in *pueri* are explained by comparison with *Theogony* 24–6:

> Τόνδε δέ με πρώτιστα θεαὶ πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπον,
> Μοῦσαι 'Ολυμπιάδες, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο·
> Ποιμένες ἄγραυλοι. . . .

It is worth noting that the reply of Octavian to Tityrus, who is at least in part an impersonation of Vergil himself, is modelled on the Muses' address to the poet and shepherd Hesiod. Another allusion to Hesiod likewise concerns his position as a poet. In *Eclogue* 6.69–71 the Muses give to Vergil's poet friend Gallus the pipe which they once gave to the ancient bard of Ascra, by which he drew down the ash trees from the mountains. The music is still that of the shepherd's pipe, and the spokesman of the Muses is Linus, *divino carmine pastor*; but the skill attributed to Hesiod is that of Orpheus, who was master of the higher realms of poetry, and it is clear that Vergil's thought is reaching out to larger horizons beyond the limits of the pastoral. The Silenus' song in *Eclogue* 6 also constitutes a transition point between the pastoral poems and the *Georgics*. It is pastoral in form and setting, but in themes it echoes the two great didactic poems on which the *Georgics* was patterned. The first and principal theme (lines 31–40) is clearly that of *De rerum natura* 5, the creation of the world,[20] and this is followed immediately by a brief listing of three myths about the early history of man, of which two are Hesiod's, the *Saturnia regna* and the theft of fire by Prometheus (lines 41–2).[20a] If, as these passages indicate, Vergil's thoughts were already moving toward a didactic poem in the tradition of the *Works and Days*, it appears more likely that he, rather than

[19] See R. Hanslik, *WS* 67 (1954) 5–19, esp. 15–16.

[20] R. Boyancé, *REL* 32 (1954) 220–49, esp. 220–1, 227, traces in Vergil's writings the characteristic of foreshadowing the next work, as well as the foreshadowing, here and elsewhere, of an epic of nature that he never wrote.

[20a] Cf., however, E. A. Hahn, *AJP* 77 (1956) 290 and *TAPA* 75 (1944) 219, who believes that Vergil has in mind not the Hesiodic but other versions of the myths of Saturn and Prometheus.

Horace, conceived the idea of using the Hesiodic myth as a vehicle for a poem about the world situation.

While the literary inspiration of the fourth *Eclogue* came directly from Hesiod, the use Vergil made of the time-honored myth was very much his own. Whether or not the *Eclogue* was "Messianic" in the sense that assured its fame and the prestige of its author in subsequent centuries, it was Messianic within Roman horizons, a voice not only of hope but of prophecy. It was the first poetic expression of the new imperial Rome, broadened and strengthened, but not totally changed, in the culminating prophecy of Rome's destiny in the sixth book of the *Aeneid.*[21]

During the next decade, as Vergil was writing in the pattern set by the *Works and Days*, it is perhaps natural that the myth of the Golden Age was woven into the fabric of his thinking. At its next appearance, in *Georgics* 1.121–46, it serves a purpose closer to Hesiod's, that of explaining the origin of work, and its context is the famous "Hymn to Toil." The description of the early days of the world is that of Hesiod's Golden Age:

> Ante Iovem nulli subigebant arva coloni,
> ne signare quidem aut partiri limite campum
> fas erat: in medium quaerebant ipsaque tellus
> omnia liberius nullo poscente ferebat.[22]

The history of man he goes on to describe, however, is far from being Hesiodic. In place of a decline from an original state of innocence and freedom from toil, Vergil offers something very like Lucretius' theory of progress. Under the spur of necessity and by his own efforts man learned to till the fields, strike fire from flint, sail the seas, measure the stars and name the constellations, catch fish with line and net, fashion and use tools, and invent the various arts of civilization:

> Labor omnia vicit
> improbus, et duris urgens in rebus egestas.[23]

[21] See below, pp. 127 ff. If Vergil is to be regarded as the leader and inspiration not only of Augustan literature but perhaps also of the new statesmanship, as has frequently been suggested, the inspiration must be held to begin with this poem. See A. Dalzell, "Maecenas and the Poets," *Phoenix* 10 (1956) 151–62; Rand, *Building of Eternal Rome* (Cambridge 1943) 50–80; F. Altheim, *A History of Roman Religion*, tr. H. Mattingly (London 1938) 377–93.

[22] *Georgics* 1.125–8.

[23] H. Altevogt, *Labor Improbus*, *Orbis Antiquus* Heft 8 (1952), argues that *improbus* here has its usual implication of evil, and that *labor* and *egestas* imply the hostility of nature.

With Lucretian enthusiasm and a touch of Lucretian language,[24] Vergil distils into fifteen lines the essence of the Epicurean theory set forth in the fifth book of the *De rerum natura.*

But if the philosophy of history underlying this passage is far from Hesiod's, it is no less foreign to that of Lucretius. Hesiod regards the necessity of toil as a penalty inflicted by an angry Zeus. Lucretius' account of man's rise from primitive savagery and his invention of the arts is a link in his chain of argument that the world was made without the aid of the gods. Vergil accepts the Lucretian account, revealing the origin of his thought by clear echoes of the *De rerum natura*, but draws a different inference as to the ultimate truth behind the doctrine. He takes the same evidence as a sign of the wisdom and providence of God:

> Pater ipse colendi
> haud facilem esse viam voluit, primusque per artem
> movit agros, curis acuens mortalia corda,
> nec torpere gravi passus sua regna veterno.[25]

Interpreters of this passage have been inclined to be apologetic about its apparent inconsistency of thought,[26] commenting that Vergil is primarily a poet, not a systematic philosopher, and that he uses ideas as they suit his poetic purpose without being concerned whether they are in harmony with views stated elsewhere in his work. It appears to be, on the contrary, an illustration of Vergil's deep thoughtfulness, not in inventing new systems of philosophy but in thinking through problems posed by his experience or his learning.[27] So far as evidence is available, the

[24] The most striking recall of Lucretius is in lines 133–4: ut varias usus meditando extunderet artes/paulatim; cf. *De rerum natura* 5.1452: usus et impigrae simul experientia mentis/paulatim docuit. "Tum variae venere artes" in line 145 is probably a reminiscence of *De rerum natura* 5.1457: artibus ad summum donec venere cacumen. "Subigebant arva" in line 125 and "ferri rigor" in line 143 are echoes of Lucretian usage; cf. *De rerum natura* 1.212, terraeque solum subigentes, and 1.492, rigor auri.

[25] Altevogt (above, note 23) 10 f., 29–30, is forced by his interpretation of *labor improbus* to assume that Vergil's longing is for the Golden Age of the time before Jove. E. Paratore, *Virgilio* (Firenze 1954) 215–8, follows Altevogt's interpretation, carrying it to the point of assuming that Jove in the *Georgics* is a maleficent force working against the efforts of man.

[26] W. Y. Sellar, *Roman Poets of the Augustan Age. Virgil*, 203–4, 210, 213; Paratore (above, note 25) 226.

[27] I note that this is the view also of L. P. Wilkinson, *Greece and Rome* 19 (1950) 19–28, esp. 23–4. Büchner, *RE*[2] 8A. 2.1271–2, notes the importance of the passage, treating it not as an "excursus" but as containing a key point in the thought.

solution he offers for this problem was his own, though it contains elements he did not invent. In his explanation of the origin of toil he is heir to more advanced thinking than Hesiod's. Starting with the premise of divine rule of the world, Greek thought had progressed, by posing and answering such problems as those dealt with in Aeschylus' *Prometheus* and Oresteia, from the view that man's achievements were made in defiance of the gods to the stage of attributing human progress to divine benefactors and "culture heroes"—Ceres, Poseidon, Athena, Triptolemus, Dionysus—and finally to a recognition in Stoic theology of a universal divine Providence.[28] Divine aid in answer to prayer is an important theme throughout the *Georgics*, beginning at the end of this very passage with the recall of benefits conferred by Ceres. But the explanation given here represents a different level of thought.

Many of the Stoics as well as the Epicureans recognized that civilization, at least up to a certain degree, constituted progress.[29] In fact, few but the very anti-intellectual Cynics maintained a "cultural primitivism" so extreme as to regard all civilization as a sign of deterioration. Posidonius admitted to the category of "progress" the discovery and development of all the arts, which he maintained were invented and taught to others by the *sapientes*. This advance he attributed, however, to the working of Logos in individuals. Though drawing upon Democritus' idea that Necessity was the great spur to progress, Posidonius seems to have assigned to Necessity a secondary role and to have considered man's Logos the decisive factor.[30] That is somewhat different from the view of man taken by Vergil in this passage. There is in Posidonius' doctrine, as reported by Seneca, no suggestion of the concern of Providence behind the progress initiated and led by the *sapientes*.[31]

[28] See M. P. Nilsson, *History of Greek Religion* (Oxford 1949) 183–4; Cicero, *De natura deorum* 2.

[29] Panaetius, in Cicero, *De off.* 2.15–16; see M. E. Taylor (above, note 6) 264–6. For Cynic views, see Lovejoy and Boas (above, note 6) 132 ff., and, e.g., Diogenes Laertius 6.103–4, Dio Chrysostom, *Orat.* 6.25; cf. Seneca, *Epistles* 90.

[30] See K. Reinhardt, *Poseidonios* (Munich 1921) 400 on the views of Posidonius as reported by Seneca in *Epistles* 90; M. Pohlenz, *Hermes* 76 (1941) 7–9.

[31] Cf., however, K. J. Reckford, *CJ* 54 (1958) 80 and note 10, who believes that Vergil is stating a Stoic doctrine. A fragment from Xenophanes, *οὔ τοι ἀπ' ἀρχῆς πάντα θεοὶ θνητοῖς ὑπέδειξαν,/ἀλλὰ χρόνῳ ζητοῦντες ἐφευρίσκουσιν ἄμεινον* (18 Diels), might be taken to imply a view similar to Vergil's that the gods held back

In another respect too Vergil's thought is distinguished from that of the Stoics. Ancient theories on the development of civilization tended constantly to shift toward an emphasis on the moral decline that attended technological advance. This affected not only the Cynics and to some extent the Stoics, but even caused some curious contradictions in the Lucretian theory of progress.[32] Vergil here seems untouched by that confusion; the purpose of Providence in removing the ease of the earlier time is thought of purely as a spur to discovery. The passage thus expresses Vergil's divergence from both the older Hesiodic view of toil as a penalty inflicted by the Gods and from the moralization of that view in subsequent thought.

In relation to Lucretius, on the other hand, it expresses acceptance of his theory of progress and an answer to the metaphysical inference drawn from it. At the same time Vergil accepts and answers another tenet of the *De rerum natura*. The descriptions, in the lines just preceding this passage (118–21) and recurrently throughout the book, of the constant hazards and obstacles that beset the farmer cannot fail to recall Lucretius' argument that the world is not designed to suit man's needs: tanta stat praedita culpa (5.195–234). Vergil evidently shares with Lucretius the view that man's progress was a struggle against unfavorable conditions; but the existence of obstacles is given a place in the divine concern for man. Here again he is in direct conflict with the doctrine of the Stoics, who held to the teleological explanation of the physical world recorded in the second book of Cicero's *De natura deorum*. Since Vergil's world-view was strongly in conflict with the Epicurean materialism expounded by Lucretius, it has been tempting to assume that he is stating Stoic doctrine. But on closer examination it proves to be no easier to classify him as Stoic than to define Horace as Epicurean.

As compared with that of the fourth *Eclogue* the view expressed here shows a significant development in thought. While the earliest age of man is delineated in Hesiodic terms, it is regarded as a happy childhood which must be outgrown, and it is perhaps

knowledge from man to let him make discoveries for himself. But Kleingunther, *Philologus*, Suppl. 26.(1933) 41–2, taking ἀπ' ἀρχῆς as parallel in significance to ἀλλὰ χρόνῳ, interprets the passage as a forthright endorsement of the theory of progress. See Lovejoy and Boas (above, note 6) 194; Guthrie (above, note 6) 82 and note 4.

[32] See Diogenes Laertius 6.44; Seneca, *Epistles* 90. 10, 14–19, 38–40; M. E. Taylor, "Progress and Primitivism in Lucretius," *AJP* 68 (1947) 180–94, esp. 186–9.

significant that it is not specifically called "golden." It is possible that this change in point of view is dictated by the poetic purpose, since a life of idle innocence could hardly be idealized in a poem on farming.[33] But the earlier concept of the Golden Age never reappears in Vergil's works, and it seems more likely that the change marks a maturing of his thought.

The treatment of the theme in the second book of the *Georgics* shows a further development and a modification in the concept of the Golden Age itself. This famous passage (lines 458–542) in praise of the farmer's life is in a sense the climax of the whole poem. It consists really of two passages, for the praise of Italy in lines 136–76 is so closely bound up with it in thought and purpose that the two can hardly be considered separately. Several of the characteristics ascribed to Italy are identical with those commonly attached to the Golden Age: ver adsiduum (line 149), bis gravidae pecudes, bis pomis utilis arbos (line 150), the absence of savage beasts, serpents, and poisonous herbs[34]; and the association is made explicit by the selection of the epithet "Saturnia Tellus" (line 173).[35] Similarly the "Praise of the Farmer's Life" begins purely as a description of its blessings in contrast to the luxury and pretensions of the metropolis (lines 458–72), such as might be matched in the poems of Horace or Tibullus. There is no hint that Vergil has in mind the Golden Age until lines 473–4:

extrema per illos
Iustitia excedens terris vestigia fecit.

Then, having suggested the similarity of this life to that of the Golden Age, he breaks off abruptly and launches without transition into a passage on poets and his own aim as a poet, beginning with a prayer to the Muses to teach him the ways of the heavens and the paths of the stars, sun and moon, the causes

[33] See Lovejoy and Boas (above, note 6) 369–70. It has also been suggested that the Hesiodic picture adopted in the fourth *Eclogue* is essentially pastoral and that traces of it appear elsewhere in the *Eclogues*; see Reckford (above, note 31) 83.

[34] This was pointed out by N. Deratani, *Rev. Phil.* (1931) 128–9. The "twice-fruitful flocks and orchards" echo specifically Hesiod's description of the Isles of the Blest, which share the characteristics usually ascribed to the Golden Age, *Works and Days* 172–3.

[35] Many interpreters have been convinced that the epithet is intended to convey this association; see Altevogt (above, note 23) 31; Paratore (above, note 25) 199; Büchner (above, note 27) 1284.

of the earthquake and the storm and of the changing seasons. These Lucretian themes are designated as subjects proper to the loftiest poetry not only here but again in the *Aeneid*, where the bard Iopas at the court of Dido sings not songs of heroes, like the bard in the *Odyssey*, but of the wonders of nature.[36] In the present passage Vergil shows that he has Lucretius specifically in mind by an all but direct quotation of both the title and the stated purpose of the *De rerum natura*.[37] Placing the poet of the grander aspects of nature in the topmost rank, he resigns the hope of attaining that pinnacle of the poet's art and asks, for himself, the second place as poet of the country, *inglorius* but still *fortunatus* in his smaller share in the divine inspiration:

> rura mihi et rigui placeant in vallibus amnes,
> flumina amem silvasque inglorius . . .
> (485–6)
> fortunatus et ille, deos qui novit agrestes,
> Panaque Silvanumque senem Nymphasque sorores
> (493–4)

That this is specifically a statement of his own position as a poet is sometimes questioned, but it is of the same tradition as the claims made by other poets,[38] and its intent seems as clear as the allusion to Lucretius accompanying it. More than this, it matches also the passages in which Horace disclaims the ability

[36] *Aeneid* 1.742–6. The early Greek literary tradition of didactic poetry was revived in Hellenistic times, and Apollonius places it on a plane with epic by describing Orpheus singing of the heaven and the stars and the planets, *Argonautica* 1.496–502; cf. Horace's allusion to Orpheus as predecessor of Homer, *Ars Poetica* 391–407, and p. 118 above.

[37] The specific allusion to Lucretius does not exclude the assumption that as he wrote these lines Vergil was aware also of the long tradition from Empedocles to Aratus; see Sellar (above, note 26) 200–1, and Conington, *ad loc.* But the easily recognizable verbal echoes of Lucretius in lines 490–2:

> Felix qui potuit *rerum* cognoscere *causas*
> atque *metus* omnes et inexorabile fatum
> *subiecit pedibus strepitumque Acherontis* avari

make the immediate intent unmistakable. *Rerum causas* inevitably suggests *rerum natura* as well as recalling the rhythm and meaning of 3.1072, "naturam primum studeat cognoscere rerum," and 5.1185, "nec poterant quibus id fieret cognoscere causas." *Atque metus omnes* is perhaps an echo of "et metus ille foras praeceps Acheruntis agendus" of Lucretius' introduction to Book 3, which also connects, as does Vergil, the rout of the fear of death with the pleasure of knowledge for its own sake (3.28 and 37). Finally, *subiecit pedibus* recalls the powerful metaphor of Epicurus' victory over the monster Religio: quare religio pedibus subiecta vicissim/opteritur (1.79).

[38] E.g. Lucretius 1.922–34, Horace, *Odes* 1.1; 2.20; 3.30.

to write epic.[39] The fascination which the *De rerum natura* held for Vergil has often been remarked, but it has passed largely unnoticed that his tribute to Lucretius also declines the attempt to emulate him.[40] The conditional form of the disclaimer,

> sin has ne possim naturae accedere partis
> frigidus obstiterit circum praecordia sanguis,
> (483–4)

following the plea to the Muses for inspiration to sing of the wonders of nature, partially masks this intent. But it is clarified in the next lines, which place the two poets in parallel positions in the order of the rank assigned to them, first "felix qui potuit," and second "fortunatus et ille." It is interesting to note, further, that Vergil describes himself in terms of his most crucial divergence from his predecessor: his acquaintance of the country gods, in contrast with Lucretius' belief in a world made *opera sine divom.*

This abruptly inserted passage, which began apparently as a digression, is finally brought into the context as Vergil proceeds to characterize the poet in the same terms as the farmer. "Illum non populi fasces, non purpura regum/flexit," in line 495, continues with no break in thought from the lines preceding the "digression," except that now "illic" (in the country) and "illos" (farmers) have given place to "illum" (the poet). Like the country dweller he is untroubled by the struggle for power and threats of war, by the claims of either pity or envy. As in the preceding description of the lot of the farmer, his blessings are set forth by contrast with the strivings and pretensions from which he is free,[41] until finally the poet of the country and the tiller of the soil become indistinguishable as equal sharers of the good life; and the passage continues as it began, with praises of the country, adding details of the steady toil but sure reward of the husbandman, of rustic pastimes, and sacred rites. This is a Golden Age that is timeless and still accessible to anyone who chooses it.

[39] E.g. *Odes* 1.6; *Satires* 2.1.12–20.

[40] Boyancé (above, note 20) observes the fascination which Lucretian themes held for Vergil, but fails to note that this passage contains a refusal of the challenge. Büchner (above, note 27) 1290 notes that Vergil here explicitly diverges from Lucretius' aims in the direction of concern with the moral world.

[41] Lines 503–12 are similar to several of Horace's *Odes* on the poet's life and aims (1.1 and 31) as well as *Epistles* 2.1.118–38, and doubtless follow a literary tradition parallel to that of the poet's claim to fame.

Its definition is different, however, from that of the earlier passages. It is not the primitive state of man but something much closer to the Age of Jove as described in the first book of the *Georgics*, when men have developed the "various arts." Such a definition of the Golden Age was held by some Stoics, notably by Posidonius,[42] whose view may have guided this development of Vergil's thought. The change in concept might also have been suggested by Aratus' version of the myth, with which this passage shows several parallels. According to Aratus, men of the Golden Age tilled the soil but knew nothing of navigation or exchanging wares over the sea. Justice dwelt among them, dispensing the fruits of their toil abundantly to all.[43] Another influence upon Vergil's gradually developing concept may have been the *De re rustica* of Varro, which alludes to the farmers of Italy as the surviving stock of Saturn.[44] That association, together with the identification of Saturn with the Greek Kronos and the Euhemeristic interpretation of Saturn as an early king in Italy, provided the nucleus for Vergil's connection of both Saturn and the country dwellers of Italy with the Golden Age. It appears for the first time in this passage of the *Georgics*,[45] not explicitly stated until the

[42] Posidonius, quoted by Seneca, *Epistles* 90.5; Reinhardt (above, note 30) 250 f.; Lovejoy and Boas (above, note 6) 262; M. E. Taylor (above, note 32) 186–9. Taylor (above, note 6) 264–6, points out that both the Hesiodic and the "modified primitivism" lay within the range of Stoic thought. Paratore (above, note 25) 194–6, 212–3 argues that this timeless Golden Age available to the wise is a poetic version of the Epicurean *ataraxia* to which Vergil was converted by his more consistently Epicurean contemporary Horace. In view of the evidence of Vergil's gradual turning away from Epicurean doctrines in the direction of Stoic ideas, Taylor's interpretation is more convincing. But the "good life" was so similar in the views of the two schools that this can hardly be used as a criterion of his adherence to one or the other.

[43] *Phaenomena* 90–115. Forbiger (ed. 3, 1852) notes that *dulces Musae* of line 475 echoes Aratus' *Mousai meilichiai* of *Phaenomena* 16–7. To the parallels might be added the allusion in line 536 to the slaying of oxen for food as a sign of decline from the Golden Age; cf. *Phaenomena* 131–2. Aratus was associated with the Stoic school; see E. Zeller, *Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics* (London 1892) 43, note 2.

[44] *De re rustica* 3.1.4; see Altevogt (above, note 23) 31.

[45] The identification of Saturn with Kronos is attested as early as Livius Andronicus, frg. 2.15 (Baehr). Though Saturn is not connected with the Golden Age in Ennius (*Euhemerus*, frg. 3, 4, 5 Vahlen; *Ann.* 1, frgs. 19–21), the identification with Kronos made the association inevitable. The tradition that Saturn reigned as king in western lands (Sicily, Libya, Italy) is recorded by Diodorus 3.61.3, and is alluded to by Cicero on the authority of Carneades, *De nat. deor.* 3.44; cf. Ennius, *Euhem.* frg. 5. See Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*[2], 205–6; M. E. Taylor (above, note 6) 265, notes 10–11; Lovejoy and Boas (above, note 6) 55–7.

last lines of the book, where Vergil turns from his picture of life in the country to a direct comparison with early days in Italy:

> Hanc olim veteres vitam coluere Sabini,
> hanc Remus et frater, sic fortis Etruria crevit,
> scilicet et rerum facta est pulcherrima Roma . . .
> aureus hanc vitam in terris Saturnus agebat.[46]

This new turn of the idea, used here as a comparison, is developed and expanded in the *Aeneid*. Evander's account of the early history of Italy in *Aeneid* 8.314–27 presents a view that is in part that of Posidonius, except that in place of the wisest among men it is Saturn who gathered the primitive untaught folk into a community, civilized them, and gave them laws.[47] That was the Golden Age, when Saturn reigned in unbroken peace, until gradually there came into being a darker age (*decolor*) with madness of war and love of possession: et belli rabies et amor successit habendi. The deterioration from unbroken peace to a time of wars and greed is so reminiscent of the Hesiodic myth as almost to obscure the fundamental difference in the picture of primitive men. The earliest state of man is not one of natural innocence and happiness but the primitive savagery described in the Lucretian account, from which men were rescued by the teacher and lawgiver Saturn.[48] It is tacitly assumed that Saturn also taught them to cultivate the land and to practice the "various arts" described in *Georgics* 1.121–45, but the emphasis is placed on the establishment of law and order and peace.

The reason for that emphasis becomes clear when we look at the allusions to the Golden Age in other parts of the *Aeneid*. In the epic the picture of Rome's legendary past is also the image of its future, and Saturn's reign of peace and law is to be embodied in the new Golden Age to be established by Aeneas' great descendant. This final concept of the Golden Age is explicitly stated only once, in the words of Anchises in *Aeneid* 6.792–4:

> Augustus Caesar, divi genus, aurea condet
> saecula qui rursus Latio regnata per arva
> Saturno quondam.

[46] Lines 532–4 and 538.

[47] See above, notes 29 and 30.

[48] No state of primitive savagery was admitted by Posidonius, as reported by Seneca, *Epistles* 90.4; but such a doctrine was not in conflict with Panaetius' thought as reflected in Cicero, *De off.* 2.12–16. See Taylor (above, note 6) 265.

But its full implications must be understood in the light of other images in the *Aeneid.* The words were loaded with associations. The restoration of "aurea saecula" brings echoes of the hope for the return of peace and law and justice after the civil wars, of the romantic idealization of the early days of Rome, of the perhaps equally romantic longing for the simple life preached by philosophers and poets. They voice the tenacious Roman feeling for tradition that found expression in every aspect of the Augustan reorganization, in government, in religion, and in art. Augustan Rome and the *aurea saecula* are tied together also by another thread that runs through the fabric of the epic. This is the characterization of Latinus, who passes on the Saturnian heritage to his descendants. Not only is Latinus the direct descendant and successor of Saturn, but his reign is described in words almost identical with those used of Saturn's kingdom: urbes/iam senior longa placidas in pace regebat.[49] He himself describes his people in terms ordinarily denoting the Golden Age:

> neve ignorate Latinos
> Saturni gentem haud vinclo nec legibus aequam
> sponte sua veterisque dei se more tenentem.[50]

They are similarly addressed by the messengers from Diomede:

> O fortunatos gentes, Saturnia regna
> antiqui Ausonii.[51]

But if one side of Vergil's picture of Latinus is Saturnian, the other side is Roman. He appears wearing the *trabea,* the traditional garb of the Roman king; he presides over Roman customs, the opening of the Gates of War and the making of treaties; he resists the breaking of the alliance with the Trojans and will take no part in the unrighteous war.[52] This characterization is given point in *Aeneid* 12.834–40, in Jupiter's promise that the people to come will be Latin in name, speech, rites, and customs. The Golden Age is thus made part of their heritage, passed down from Saturn through Latinus.

That the new Golden Age of Augustus will embody the qualities

[49] *Aen.* 7.46–7; cf. 8.325, where Evander describes the *reign* of Saturn: Sic placida populos in pace regebat.

[50] *Aen.* 7.202–4.

[51] *Aen.* 11.252–3.

[52] *Aen.* 7.173–4, 187–8, 601–15; 12.169–74.

of the reign of Saturn is an important part, but only part, of the concept. As in all aspects of the Augustan regime, there are new elements combined with the old, and the phrase "aurea condet saecula" (6.792–3) has other overtones besides the recall of the past. "Condere saeculum" parallels the ritual formula "condere lustrum" even more closely than the common phrase "condere urbem," and it has been suggested that there is intended at least a faint echo of the double meaning.[53] If that echo is listened for it hints, with "flattering ambiguity," that the founder of the new Golden Age will be like Jupiter, the son greater than his father who brought to a close the reign of Saturn. This would be a very subtle compliment, precariously poised between the implication of divinity contained in the comparison with Jupiter and the unfortunate linking of Jupiter with the Iron Age. The use of *quondam* would suit this meaning, implying possibly a contrast with the one-time Golden Age,[54] and *rursus* might refer equally well to the restoration of the Saturnian Age or to a second succession of a son greater than his father. If this secondary meaning was in fact part of Vergil's intent, it has the effect not of cancelling but of modifying the primary impact of the prophecy: the new Golden Age will embody the old, to be sure, but will also surpass it. In support of this interpretation Getty points out that in the lines immediately following the prophecy of 6.792–4,

> super et Garamantas et Indos
> proferet imperium, . . .
> (794–5)
> et dubitamus adhuc virtutem extendere factis,
> aut metus Ausonia prohibet consistere terra?
> (806–7)

Vergil is altering his ideal of the new age, and "bringing up to date" the closing lines of the second *Georgic*:

> aureus hanc vitam in terris Saturnus agebat;
> necdum etiam adierant inflari classica, necdum
> impositos duris crepitare incudibus ensis.

He is accepting the new imperial ideal which includes "debellare superbos" as well as "parcere subjectis."

The prophecy of *Aeneid* 1.286–96 supplements the thought. There too the extension of the Roman *imperium* to the boundary

[53] R. J. Getty, *CP* 45 (1950) 11–2 and notes 66–8.
[54] See Getty (above, note 53), *loc. cit.*

of the ocean accompanies the picture of peace and justice restored and the closing of the Gates of War. The *furor impius* bound with a hundred chains and held in check by righteous laws is the madness of civil war, not the might of Roman arms that keeps the world at peace under just laws.

The same idea is expressed in the action of the last six books. The war in Latium is very carefully pictured as civil war, not foreign conquest. It is war between peoples who are meant by the gods to be kinsmen, who are friendly and have already entered into alliance, whose future is bound together by destiny. The breach of this peace is brought about by madness,[55] working to a climax in the stubborn personal ambition of Turnus, who finally sacrifices even the good of his people to his own driving wrath.[56] Latinus resists the forces of *furor* as a rock beaten upon by the waves, just as Aeneas regrets the breaking of the alliance (8.537–40) and resists the outbreak of fighting that violates the final truce (12.311–7). Both Latinus and Aeneas prefigure the ruler who strives to establish peace with justice throughout his realm.

If "aurea saecula" used of the age to be founded by Augustus is more than a conventional compliment, the term must connote not only the qualities Vergil has ascribed to the age of Saturn, but also the ideal he has outlined for the new ruler of the world. The new Golden Age as conceived by Vergil must be the *pax Romana*, but with full acceptance of the responsibilities of ruler and ruling people to govern with justice. Thus the final development of his concept of the Golden Age has advanced from an individual to a state ideal, comprising the full maturing of his hope and his pattern for the future of Rome.

The culmination of the concept of the Golden Age in the prophecies of the *Aeneid* is in one sense a return to the vision of the fourth *Eclogue*, like a restatement of a musical theme at the close of a series of "variations." Indeed, the several passages on the Golden Age are often regarded as no more than a series of variations. They have been interpreted as signs of logical inconsistency, of eclecticism or fusion of different views, of tension between two poles of attraction.[57] But this is to ignore the fact

[55] *Aen.* 7.323–551.

[56] *Aen.* 7.460–72; 9.757–61; 11.376 ff.

[57] Paratore (above, note 25) 226; Sellar (above, note 26) 204; M. E. Taylor (above, note 6) 268.

that in the two decades during which Vergil returned at intervals to the literary motif of the Golden Age, there is a steady progression in his concept of it. Starting with the Hesiodic idea of an age of innocence and ease as the perfect condition, he first discarded this as an irresponsible childishness removed by Providence for man's own good. Then gradually he endowed the traditional concept with new meaning as a way of life, still to be found in the country, but available to all, in which the poet has his place as well as the peasant. This Golden Age embodies the qualities that made Rome great in the past, and, finally, it is possible of realization by the state if the Romans—and their ruler—will fulfill the hope offered them by the new era. With no hint of an inevitable decline to another Iron Age, as was implied in the fourth *Eclogue*, Vergil envisions the new Golden Age extending into the future as far as the mind can reach.[58] That vision is written into the promise of Jupiter:

> His ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono.
> Imperium sine fine dedi.

[58] Taylor (above, note 6) 267, notes that the promise is in Book 1 but is not repeated in the prophecies of Books 6, 8, or 12. She recognizes the probability, however, that the idea of Eternal Rome may have been taken for granted in the later passages. E. A. Hahn, *AJP* 77 (1956) 288, points out that there is a clearly implied allusion to Eternal Rome in *Aeneid* 9.447–9:

> Nulla dies umquam memori vos eximet aevo,
> dum domus Aeneae Capitoli immobile saxum
> accolet imperiumque pater Romanus habebit.