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VERGIL'S PHILOSOPHY IN THE GEORGICS

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Whatever the precise occasion for writing the Georgics, in Vergil's own thinking they represent an answer to problems which he was unable to solve at the time of writing the Eclogues. The Eclogues do form a patterned unity; the scheme which Maury found is there (ap. Perret: "Virgile, l'homme et l'oeuvre") by which the theme of the Eclogues rise to a climax in the fifth and decline again by the same steps to the ninth, through the subjects of land, love, music, supernatural revelation and apotheosis. The tenth eclogue is a credible counterpoint to the fifth. It is also difficult to deny that there are various numerical patterns in the totals of the lines and in the arrangements of the lines within individual eclogues, but all these patterns are superimposed from outside on a corpus of poems already written round other interests. The mystery of the Eclogues springs from Vergil's firm conviction that his ideas ultimately cohered, and his inability at this stage of his intellectual development to show that they did cohere. Therefore he imposed the external patterns by way of asserting the interrelation of ideas which were waiting to be organised round their own natural centre.

It is characteristic of Vergil's artistic expression to put his points as reflections on, or discords with, an established form already familiar in the literature of Greece or Rome. His use of these 'models' is a kind of intellectual shorthand, taking the content of the previous work for granted and significantly expressing his own thought across it. Theocritus served as the irritant and the vehicle for his thinking, and in the third eclogue in particular, his own convictions are made to float on a conventional shepherd conversation, as in the modern art style of superimposing black line drawings on an independent coloured background (like a world within a world), or like Henry Moore boring holes into his statues to explore the texture and qualities of the stone of which they are composed. Perhaps a better comparison might be the recent use of independent choreography and music (when it can be experienced in this country!) where the one is said to form a contrasting commentary on the other in a rhythmically double ballet.

The most arresting instance is in line 40 of the third eclogue, where instead of the conventional sculptures on the shepherd's cup, he has a picture of the scientist Conon and possibly Eudoxus, showing that Vergil felt there was a natural kinship between the shepherd and the scientist - some comparable awareness, perhaps, of the wonders of nature. Again in line 60, the shepherd quotes lines of Aratus: 'all the streets are full of

God.' Here Vergil seems to mean that embedded in the everyday conversations of shepherds are profundities of realisation, an awareness identical with that of the philosopher, so that shepherd, scientist and philosopher are akin. At the end of the eclogue (101) he thinks of the pains of love uniting man and beast in a common experience, which is natural enough; but more significantly speaks of a thirst in the meadows not for water but for music; a need of nature which the shepherds can satisfy (109).

In line 84, Pollio appears among the imaginary shepherds. He is a poet, an artist as well as a statesman. Vergil could be saying, with Matthew Arnold, that in the essentials of all our lives there is the simplicity of the shepherds'. But he seems rather to mean, as when Pollio appears again in the fourth eclogue, that the age of miracles is now; that poets are near the truth now and that the golden age is not a past loss but a present possibility.

Stravinsky has a fine image of the kind of achievement that Vergil looks for in his ballet Apollon Musagète. The Muses' beautiful but uncoordinated dances are first taught to the infant Apollo. Then Apollo, grown to manhood, draws all their steps together in an ordered whole. Their dancing forms a harmonious pattern under his interpretation. In the succession from Apollo, there are poets in every age taking in the experience of their times, the understanding of their fellow poets, in their youth, and at maturity finding new unity, new order where there was confusion before. In the mythical past, Daphnis had been articulate for nature. Nature had responded to him as to Orpheus. He had made nature and the relation of man to nature intelligible, but he was gone, his inspiration was lost. The shepherds are waiting for another singer like him. His work was unfinished. In the fifth eclogue, the shepherds set offerings to him alongside those to Apollo (66). All the worshipping of Daphnis is something to be done in the future. Their promises show their determination. They will bring back into the world the light that went out of it when he died (35) by their devotion to him, to his genius. No doubt Vergil saw in Caesar and later in Octavian a man who would make sense of existence, but his poetic contemporaries too had something of Daphnis' qualities. It was expected of them all to help interpret man's place in the world, to make him feel more at home in it. Gallus might have helped to do this (Ecl. X, 16-17, 35-6). Therefore Vergil laments that he is lost to this endeavour. He calls on Arethusa, whose waters were unsullied by the salt sea, perhaps to help draw Gallus back to his vocation as poet, undamaged by his yearning for Lycoris and war. He might be an Apollo to bring new order to the Muses' dancing. (Eclogue 6, lines 64 ff., especially line 66, where the chorus of Apollo rises to greet him and the Muses offer him the pipes, much as Apollo is given the lyre by the Muses in the ballet - it is for him to make nature respond to the tunes he will play on them.)

The sixth is another eclogue in which the discomfort of unsolved problems is acute. Shepherds cannot understand the world without a seer to explain it. The first simple steps of Silenus' revelation (lines 31-40) are a Lucretian, a scientific, view of matter. But there are so many other questions unanswered. Must anyone who steps beyond the barrier between men and animals be mad and suffer agonies like Pasiphae? Her effort to under-

stand, through her human love, the mind of the bull (53 ff.), to sympathise with his longing for the pastures, seems monstrous and repellent, and yet we feel for her in her madness. Why can there be no understanding? Again, why are there so many kinds of animals? (62 ff.) Can it be true that the past sufferings of men have been so painfully intense as to impress themselves on the very sounds and movements of nature? Are the cries of the birds a mournful echo of past agonies? (78) - But all this is speculation; the world of nature remains alien and unapproachable, though there is hope in Gallus, to whom the Muses have entrusted the pipes of Hesiod, who used to make the trees come down from the mountains!

This is a very surprising claim to have made for Hesiod. Probably he was thinking of the Theogony and perhaps the ages of the world in the Works and Days; the telling of the history of the world, the knowledge of its origins, all those past events about which Nature must be silent, awaken a sympathetic echo in Nature. Nature moves, remembering its own past, hearing the poet articulate for itself, revealing the secrets that it has no voice to tell but his. So the hope of the shepherds is in their singers.

At another level, song consoles them in rejection, and when the seasons as well as love seem cruel. It is some comfort to Corydon in the second eclogue to think of Polyphemus, whom he has sung so often in the shepherd tradition, as the Beast needing Beauty but unable to claim or win her. He feels that he is Polyphemus. The town cannot value the country any more than the sea the land. In the eyes of the town, the country is his ugliness. (56) The shepherd of eclogue 8, too, cannot blame his love, but is hurt that his countryside is rejected, that Nature does not help its own. Who will make the country understood by the town? Who will proclaim the values by which the shepherds live? The country needs its spokesman as well as an interpreter for itself.

And what can relieve the countryman in the distress of war, the hardships of the allotments of land? They must depend on an Octavian. The harsh reality of the first eclogue is lightened by Tityrus' thankfulness. This was something given which he could not earn or repay - as by heaven (*deus nobis haec otia fecit* 6) - and his thankfulness is of value in itself. In the seventh eclogue, too, Corydon does not win the contest so much because of his artistic skill as through his outlook on life. He is thankful, and for himself and for those who hear him, the world is a brighter place (*Ex illo Corydon, Corydon est tempore nobis* 70). The prize must go to his happiness, not to Thyrsis' complaining.

And what of those who are born into this time of civil war and suffering? The child of Vergil's own friend was born at this period of crisis and Vergil consoles him and his parents with a promise of a dawning golden age which will make him glad to be alive. This is a confident promise to which Vergil can give only mysterious substance. He knows that this is possible, that all he feels will be seen to be true, but he cannot yet give reasons for any of these convictions. He cannot give grounds for thankfulness, or confidence in a golden age, proof of the presence of Jupiter in the world, an understanding of the relationship of man and nature, or even an understanding of the kinship between the countryman, the scientist and the poet.

But he does know that the poet is the voice of nature, and Nature mysteriously responds to the truth about itself. As a poet, it is his business to seek out this truth, to be articulate for the shepherds, to speak for Tityrus.

This is what he calls in the second book of the Georgics (175) 'revealing the sacred spring'. At the end of the same book, he speaks of himself as the priest of the Muses, tells how he longs to be allowed to understand the secrets of the heavens (475). But his mind is too dull, as he puts it, to approach these parts of nature (*accedere* 483). People like Lucretius are lucky who can approach them and trample the fear of death underfoot. He must content himself with knowing the gods of the countryside. In fact his approach is different altogether from that of Lucretius; Lucretius' interpretation had not solved Vergil's problems. The understanding Vergil sought was still not found. He wished to know why, not only how.

In the same passage you can feel Vergil's conviction that he has understood and interpreted the more limited subject he assigned himself. He has dealt with reality (*in manibus terrae, non hic te carmine ficto ... II, 45*). He is interpreting the world in which the farmers actually lived from day to day. That is, he has succeeded by limiting his objective. There is an unhealthy element of self-consciousness and melodrama in Epicureanism - 'Shipwrecked Man defiantly faces an Alien Universe'. There is something of this too in the lovesick and discontented shepherds of the Eclogues, but not in the outlook of Vergil's thankful countryman.

We can only guess at the lines along which Vergil's thought advanced, but it is significant that this triumphant passage comes at the end of a book dealing mainly with trees and vines. His shepherds in the Eclogues were busy tending animals and very naturally spoke of them in an affectionate way as persons, he and she. But hearing countrymen speak of tending young trees and vines (268), propagating (23, 301) and grafting (82) them, Vergil found their language reflecting a tendency to regard even plants as persons. This is visible in the language he uses himself in the poem. Here is a very simple relationship of man and plant. The wild plant does not flourish like the cultivated one; the cultivated one would not be what it is without human care. Therefore he is making a living thing new with his own hands. He depends on it for food; it depends on him for its flourishing. It cannot by itself be as beautiful, as healthy, as prolific as it is capable of being, and here is a mutual involvement of the man and the plant: the development of it is an adventure, full of possibilities not all of which are yet realised. So in this very small part of the universe, there is need for man, an opportunity for man. Arguing from this example one would conclude that man had an essential place in nature and was invited to enjoy seeing it flourish through his help.

Obviously a tree is much more an individual than a crop of corn. It has a character and possibilities which can be understood by a skilled man. It can be known as if it were some sort of person - through experience and in time. In raising a crop of corn, it is really the land itself that needs to be known in this way; what it is capable of growing, what treatment it will respond to - Vergil himself uses the word respond (I,47). The farmer must make

himself a means of it flourishing. The food he grows on it will support him; he must serve it, know it thoroughly and individually, and give it the right treatment at the right time (208 etc.). He cannot treat it as he likes and when he likes, but must enable it to fulfil itself and must live all his life to the rhythm of nature and the seasons. He is not, like the lovelorn shepherd, conscious of the seasons and the weather as in or out of sympathy with his own mood, but thinks of the effect on his crops. He becomes aware for them so that he can act for them. So, at the very beginning of the Georgics (43) we step out onto a field at the end of winter with the spring sunshine glinting on the ploughshare, the oxen straining at the plough, and from then on there is an unending succession of tasks for the farmer to perform.

Vergil describes himself as the Italian Hesiod (II, 176). He details the labour involved in farming as relentlessly as he did, but the result is better food than nature ever produced unaided. 'Ceres', he says, 'first taught man to plough as acorns and wild strawberries failed him (149) your hard-working neighbour will have piles of produce - if you have not worked hard, you will be back on acorns (159)!'. In fact, Vergil thinks so little of the conventional golden age that he absent-mindedly calls the primitive men who saw the young world in its first springtime (II, 341) '*ferrea progenies*'. Jupiter took away this false golden age where there was no real liberty (124), no need of or place for man in nature, and introduced apparent imperfections to make nature depend on man as well as man on nature (133). If a man tends his crop to the best of his knowledge and ability, this interdependence and involvement with nature can be productive of something new. Starting from what he is given and taking care to respect its individuality, the farmer can, within the compass of his own fields, make his own golden age.

'Si te digna manet divini gloria ruris' (I, 168)

'So surely as the glory of the divine countryside shall be your rich reward.' Jupiter gave not prosperity itself, but the opportunity to prosper through involvement with nature, and Jupiter has been careful to make it possible by forming the world to man's measure in its imperfections (121-3), which are the farmer's opportunity. His labour does not simply reinstate a previous perfection but creates new perfection with the individual mark of his hands upon it. The ancient carts of Ceres (163) and the rest of the rustic equipment are a reminder of the long stages through which man's skill has been nursed by providence (133-4) and crafts have been developed to enable him to survive with less help and more freedom to fulfil himself.

The farmer must take action at the right time of year, but the time of year is marked out for him by stars which are beautiful to look at (especially the '*lucidus Arguis*', line 205) and he notices their beauty more because he has need to observe them. All kinds of human activity are measured in this way (253 ff.) and this is no idle contemplation of beauty any more than the orderliness of the fruit trees is an idle creation of beauty (I, 257; II, 285). When our needs oblige us to contemplate something beautiful in nature, we are more acutely aware of it. The farmer's involvement heightens his awareness.

It is not simply his awareness of beauty that is heightened; there is also

the awareness of danger, the danger of storms when he must fear for his crops (335). He cannot help living dangerously. But when he stands on the fresh spring grass making an offering to Ceres, he is thankful that all is well.

Sacra refer Cereri laetis operatus in herbis (339). One of the safeguards he has against the storm is the signs of impending weather (351-5). Vergil could not have included so much detail as Aratus gives without disproportion in the work as a whole, but his treatment is not only abbreviated, it is poetically developed (356 ff.). The effect of all the changes and additions is to make the reader feel, in the sounds, rhythms and words themselves, the threatening atmosphere before a storm, sense the oncoming rain; in other words to reproduce in the reader's mind what it feels like to the farmer to be anxiously observing the weather. This is true of the whole of Vergil's treatment; that it is not so much to inform a person what he must do as to allow him to feel what it is like to be a farmer carrying out these tasks; the little satisfactions of skill, the thrill of all the sights and sounds around him as he works. The treatment is friendly, almost apologetic:

*Possum multa tibi veterum praecepta referre
ni refugis.*

(I, 176-7)

Like Lucretius 1, 400:

*Multaque praeterea tibi possum commemorando
Argumenta fidem dictis conradere nostris.*

he will omit proofs rather than be tedious. He wishes to prove something about the life the farmer leads; if he were instructing, it would be less reasonable to think of omitting these details. This poetic textbook has been made a vehicle for conveying an awareness of a special kind, acquired by working in this way in and with nature.

The farmer is acutely aware of this impending weather because of the risk to his crops; there may be disaster and disappointment and he is afraid (316 ff.). The corn crop is the most exposed to the weather, the most liable to be completely destroyed by it. But this fear is not something to be removed on intellectual grounds, but to be accepted as an essential part of full awareness. It is part of thankfulness. To prevent disaster you must accept and try to know nature better. Not only is it made possible for man to have this place in nature, cooperating with it, but nature is at least partly intelligible (I, 353 *Ipse pater statuit ...*)

The farmer could work in a town where he had no need to observe and fear the weather, but his life as a farmer never lets him down (*nescia fallere vita* II, 467). He does not feel impelled to stop and ask himself why he should be doing this work. Exposed as he is, he is in touch with reality; near enough to nature to come to know it through experience. His understanding and knowledge of nature will grow as he lives, because he is awake to the life of all nature around him. If disaster does strike him, he can accept it and learn from it and say of nature 'You destroy me, you are good for me' (*Labor omnia vincit* *Improbis* I, 145), because he can be confident that he has been given his place and what he does is never pointless, but fundamentally needed (*squalent abduotis*

arva colonis I, 507).

It is through doing his work that he knows, and through living in nature that he becomes aware, and all this awareness is integrated in his own person - it is a relationship between him personally and nature itself. All that the scientist or philosopher can tell him is a supplement to this awareness, not a ground for dismissing it as invalid or misleading because not intellectually or logically but personally coherent. In effect the logic of Vergil's *Georgics* is not the subject-object, or the action-reaction logic of the philosopher or scientist, but one of giving and acceptance. The logical intelligibility of the world is itself seen as something given along with the means of livelihood, the crops, the sun and rain. All are aspects of the making of the world to the measure of man. The philosopher or the scientist makes himself a little box, puts inside it whatever parts of experience will fit neatly together and then, looking out through a window in it, interprets the world outside by what he has inside (in Lucretius' case a sort of atomic model). Vergil says No! You must go out and be in the world, tread on it, smell it, pick it up, reshape it and be yourself involved, exposed, afraid, thankful, in a word aware.

Despite the gentleness and modesty with which he expresses himself (II, 483 ff., 493 ff.) it is clear that Vergil found a fundamental contradiction in Lucretius. The philosophical argument by which he hopes to convince us intellectually is embedded in poetry whose sensitive awareness disproves it. He refuses to accept the whole of his experience in evidence and concludes in a paradox; that man, in whose eyes the world is beautiful, under whose hands it yields food, to whose mind its movements are intelligible, is shipwrecked in it and doomed to become nothing. And so, Vergil constantly uses Lucretian language in a poem whose general tendency is quite contrary to his outlook.

A farmer depends on having many things given to him. His land, good weather, a time of peace. He recognises his dependence on these gifts and is thankful for them. On either side of the temperate zones, as Vergil emphasises in Book I in his translation from Eratosthenes (233 ff.), there are the burning sands and the icy wastes. The temperate zones are '*munere concessae divom*' - the only phrase that Vergil adds to his original (238). For its climate, its variety of soil, its fertility, the richness and variety of its scenery and products, Italy will compare with any country in the world (II, 136 ff.). Your own plot of land with the right treatment will be as good as the famous lands of the mysterious East (I, 56 ff.) - only ask of it what it is best fitted to provide. This is not just patriotism, but part and parcel of Vergil's conviction that here and now are as wonderful as any other age or place, and present a challenge, offer an opportunity, which man must surely seize (II, 433 - '*et dubitant homines serere atque impendere curam?*') It was in this mood of conviction, of himself living in a wonderful age, that Vergil meant to write the work on Octavian projected at the beginning of the Third *Georgic*, and would have found this easier than the task immediately before him (III, 40, 41).

The groundwork of Vergil's reinterpretation was complete in the first two books, because it was through thinking of trees and crops that he had arrived at it. Now he must deal with the remaining important divisions of farming from

his new viewpoint. The distinction between the kinds of care needed in agriculture and those needed in tending animals is clearly drawn in the opening lines of the work. The animals have a more independent life of their own and proportionately more skill and knowledge is required if the farmer is to intervene to their benefit (*quae cura boum, qui cultus habendo sit pecori* I, 3). This applies even more to bees which possess their own highly organised way of life, where unskilled attentions may do nothing but damage (*apibus quanta experientia parcis* I, 4).

Vergil approaches Book III with misgivings. In the Eclogues he has already faced this problem of the relationship of man and beast and found himself unable to discover the essence of it. In the context of the Georgics, using the principle of interpretation which he applied with such success to crops and plants, he must look for where man has a place in the wellbeing and perfection of animal nature.

Any observer would be moved by the slow, patient strength of the ox, and exhilarated by the fire and energy of the stallion. To a farmer these are precious and perishable qualities (III, 63-8). He knows with what care and difficulty they are maintained from generation to generation, how much they represent the outcome of human discipline and the protection of the animals from the unthinking violence and self-destruction of their own passions (209-241). The farmer delights in them more, knowing this. The spectator at the circus (103 ff.) sees the stallion prodigal of its youthful strength, the fire of life bursting into flame. The farmer knows how soon this beautiful creature, in itself one of the glorious of nature. will be old and spent (95 ff.). He lives and works for these moments when the creatures he cares for can be seen one after another at their prime, so that the world is never without these paragons of the joy of living (118-9). There is a noble abandon about their passions and recklessness of death which commands admiration along with sorrow at the destruction they wreak upon themselves. They are so like men in these sufferings (262-3). The farmer is nearest to them when they respond to his praise and obey his discipline (III, 185). The female ox is 'la belle laide' - her beauty is in her strength, the toughness and endurance of her calves (51 ff.). Here again there is a glory of nature that dies so quickly in the individual, and the farmer is poignantly aware of it when it is at its height and about to decline. He thinks of his own youth, passing away more slowly but no less inexorably (66-68) and there is a strong bond of sympathy between him and these creatures who experience so much of life as we do, but can never communicate directly with us.

The farmer's awareness of life in his cattle is also full of tragedy; his helplessness to assist them when they die of disease. When the sad farmer (517) watches his ox die, he can do nothing, but in his mind tries to enter into the thoughts of this creature as Pasiphae did in the sixth eclogue, and imagine its remembrance of the soft pastures and the clear streams to which it can respond no more (520 ff.). His heart is pained by the injustice of its pitiable death after a lifetime of labouring, and in this moment he knows that he is involved in the suffering of his cattle and has somehow failed them. Man's excesses are less severely punished than this innocence. Quick action at some stage (468) might have prevented this widespread destruction. This is not a lesson in Stoic 'ataraxia', but brings a determination to devote himself more

completely and by extending his knowledge and skill, find more points at which he can intervene in the life of his flocks and herds, gladly because they have need of him (176, 319-20). Nature is not a 'moral gymnasium' but valued for itself.

So the prevailing mood of Book III is realism, toughness, the presentation of a challenge not yet met. Providence will not put things right without man's efforts (456). Vergil is not just blowing hot and cold on the reader but has succeeded in this book in a difficult task, as he puts it, '*angustis hunc addere rebus honorem* (290)', that is to show this significance, the importance of this part of farming life. The book is full of urgency and shows the farmer confronted with quickly passing lives similar enough to his own for him to be chastened and his awareness of life itself to be heightened by the inadequacy of his best efforts. So the book is sobering, real, challenging rather than triumphant, though Vergil does not forget to be thankful for Italy - so much more is possible there than for the nomad in the heat of Africa or in the icy wastes of Scythia. He thinks gratefully of the cool evening pastures:

*Solis ad occasum, cum frigidus aera vesper
temperat, et saltus reficit iam roscida luna,
litoraue alcyonen resonant, acalanthida dumi.*

(336-8)

Vergil turns to the subject of bees with a sigh of relief; he delights in contrast, and loves to turn from the very large to the very small (as from the track of the ant to the rainbow in the first book:

*Angustum formica terens iter; et bibit ingens
arcus.*

(380-1)

and so keep his reader's observation alert and comprehensive. In the general scheme of the whole work, too, he wishes to show the farmer inevitably aware both of the vastness of the heavens, the large time scale of the seasons and the weather, and of the delicate complexity of the world in miniature. It is a corrective to the comparative grossness of the farming life in other departments. And here he can make the bees' weather himself (64, 87) and create an environment for them (26 ff.) with stones for their safety in the pool and thyme beds near at hand. He should make a complete flower garden round them too if he has a taste for that kind of thing (112.). The bees will accept all this as a matter of course and make use of it '*more suo*' (55), not being able to get anything so large as a man into focus. No one could refuse to help them in their dangers and difficulties (241). The farmer himself is not exposed to much risk in this case. He finds himself almost in the position that the benevolent country spirits occupy towards himself.

Vergil can only regard the wonderful instinct and organisation of the bees as a privilege given them for some cosmogonical service to the infant Jupiter (149), but when he refers to the belief that the bees share in the 'divine mind' (219) he does so without committing himself, as if to say that this is a speculation which may well occur to anyone involved in handling bees. He pictures the farmer absorbed in his observation and reflecting on it.

In fact, by including bees in his poem, Vergil demonstrates the range of

awareness which is possible and often necessary for the farmer. What understanding he reaches through it is a personal matter - the integration must always be his own and other people's theories can be blind enclosures as well as opening vistas. But in this kind of work, given wholehearted commitment, a man can put himself in the way of enough breadth of experience to allow his thought to develop, to crystallize, dissolve and recrystallize rather than ossify within it. The most important facts - the pattern of giving and acceptance in which his life consists - he will not be able to ignore.

It remains a good way of life to the end. Having mentioned gardens in connection with bees, Vergil takes the opportunity to prove it. The old pirate is content and supports himself and surrounds himself with beauty on a very poor plot of land (127). He shows how nature can be made more perfect than you would think possible through mature skill and patient care.

It is a microcosm of farming life and Vergil could not have expanded it without repetition of points already well made. But on this scale, it does show to what extent the potentialities of a plot he knows thoroughly can be realised by a gardener, in a harmony of man and nature so complete that the two have a rather better seasonal rhythm than the imperfect world outside!

Anderson (C.Q. 1933, 36-45) proved that the second half of the fourth Georgic was not substituted for 'Laudes Galli'. It must be an integral part of the work as originally conceived and in fact round off the thought of the Georgics as a whole. It is introduced by an elaborate description of the extent of Egypt throughout which this macabre method of recovering one's hive of bees was practised. Where the river runs, there is a land of green crops and black earth (291), away from it, the red sand. As in Book I with Eratosthenes (233) he thinks of men living in the temperate zones with lands where man has no place on either side. He thinks of the river making life possible for men within the desert and of water as a gift on which man is everywhere dependent.

Aristaeus, the Daphnis of the Georgics, petulant with the failure of his skill on which he so prides himself, complains on the river bank. His mother and her sister water nymphs and wood nymphs receive him magically into their abode, in a scene worthy of Cocteau. In the dripping and echoing caves beneath the river

Speluncisque lacus clausos lucosque sonantis (364)

Aristaeus finds the sources of many other streams. Vergil names them and they prove to be rivers flowing through lands famous for their fertility. This fertility depends on their waters. Aristaeus is being introduced into a Platonic underworld not only to understand part of eternal justice, but to see the sources of life and growth and know the spirits of nature who preside over them. It is a much homelier place than Plato's (Phaedo 111 ff.). The Nymphs are spinning and being entertained as they work by stories of the loves of the Gods. Aristaeus is made welcome. The Nymphs pour water on his hands to wash them (376) but his mother prays to the Nymphs (382). Why should the same Nymphs serve him and be the object of prayers and libations on his behalf? Like water itself, they serve man's humblest needs but also have in them part of the secret of life, and make the lands flourish through which their rivers flow. Water is

ordinary and practical but also mysterious; it should be respected as the gift of the Nymphs. They do not deny it to Aristaeus; they do not forsake him altogether despite his offence against Eurydice who was their companion. Life is not taken away from him as a punishment and his skill will be restored to him, new understanding will be given to him when he again accepts the conditions under which it can be given.

This fight for self-knowledge is not easy. Vergil in his allegory of it (387 ff.) has developed the story of Proteus in the Odyssey in his own way. In the second eclogue, the world seemed alien to Corydon in the heat (12-13) and here too the dizziness of the heat is made to represent Aristaeus' feeling of being cut off from his confident everyday reality as he prepares to face the burning sea-green eyes of Proteus (451)

*'cava flumina siccis
faucibus ad limum radii tepefacta coquebant.'* (427-8)

(rather like the heat suffered by Mersault in Camus' L'Etranger).

He is to have revealed to him not only the conditions under which he has received his skill, but also Eurydice and Orpheus themselves. He will become aware of her fragile humanity, his terrible desolation, their devotion to each other, and realise the hurt he has inflicted. Like the offender in Plato's Phaedo (114) crying out from the river which bears him helplessly along to those on the bank whom he has wronged, Aristaeus must ask forgiveness. His skill counts for nothing; he cannot claim justice - it is claimed from him (455).

Aristaeus' feeling of guilt is doubled by Orpheus' failure to bring Eurydice back. The triple crash over the lake of Avernus strikes terror into him as Proteus continues his narrative (493) and after it, Eurydice's voice asking 'what madness ruined me and thee' he feels as a condemnation of himself.

*'Illa "Quis et me", inquit, "miseram et te perdidit, Orpheu,
quis tantus furor?"'* (494)

In fact he must at first have taken her to mean by *quis* 'who ruined me and thee' and found '*quis furor*' even more remorseful in his guilt. Eurydice feels instinctively for Orpheus (*et te perdidit, Orpheu*). That is why she tells him she can do nothing and explains to him how she is weak; she knows that he needs her (*heus non tua*) - it is her own helplessness that distresses her. Proteus tells Aristaeus that she no longer saw him in the moments when he was trying to reach out to her for the last time. This is a very real touch in a description of death, however extraordinary this death may be otherwise, and it is calculated to strike home with Aristaeus, whom Proteus now compares to the cruel farmer who takes the fledglings from the nest. He too has brought unbearable grief on one of nature's singers. He has taken nature's voice away. The farmer who works with nature has helped to destroy the poet who interprets it. As Proteus tells him how the ice cold stream bore Orpheus' cold dead body, it is not difficult to imagine the cold despair in Aristaeus' own heart.

The sacrifice that the Nymphs require is itself the means of restoring

his bees - this must be why Vergil repeats the instructions (295 ff. and 533 ff. without the ghoulis details) - it is dramatically effective for Aristaeus to be in ignorance while the reader recognises the formula which he already knows will give him what he is seeking. It is entirely appropriate that a separate thank-offering should be made to Eurydice (547) because her companions the Nymphs destroyed Aristaeus' bees (532). Aristaeus seeks pardon (536) and an end of their anger against him. He receives more than this - a new technique, if you can call it that, for recovering bees on any occasion. This is the discovery Vergil is explaining in the story (315-16). The Nymphs have been kindly (*faciles* 535) on Eurydice's behalf and his offering is to be a mark of respect (*venerabere* 647) and an acknowledgment of his indebtedness to her. Vergil leaves it to be assumed that he did make this offering when he saw the bees were there (554), but this is natural - the implication is that his whole attitude of mind was changed and this is the point of the story in the context of the Georgics. Vergil seems to mean that it is only with this attitude of thankfulness, or realistic humility before nature, the '*di agrestes*' (II, 493) and his fellow men that understanding is possible.

This completes a profound statement of the knowledge of the world which is attainable by the farmer through his involvement in nature. Science is not alien to this knowledge but a welcome deepening of his awareness in particular directions. There seems to be a note of relief in the last lines of the Georgics. Vergil feels that his treatment of the country life in the Eclogues has been less serious, perhaps presumptuous (*audax* 565) but now at least he has done justice to the outlook he admired in Tityrus the old man, and he has made good use of his leisure in trying to make his readers sympathetic to it; in fact trying to bring them to a fuller awareness of life than philosophies of an academic kind could offer.

