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VIRGIL AND THE HEROIC IDEAL

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I nearly called this paper "The regal nature of the devil's friar?", because many of the amateur musings I want to present can be focussed in a few lines from George Eliot's novel Daniel Deronda. They form the epigraph to Chapter 49, and although they appear to be a quotation from a poet they were in fact written by the novelist herself:

Ever in his soul
That larger justice which makes gratitude
Triumphed above resentment. 'Tis the mark
Of regal natures, with the wider life,
And fuller capability of joy:-
Not wits exultant in the strongest lens
To show you goodness vanished into pulp
Never worth 'thank you' - they're the devil's friars,
Vowed to be poor as he in love and trust,
Yet must go begging of a world that keeps
Some human property.

George Eliot is epitomising an opposition, central to the strategy of her novel, between the regal-and-visionary nature, exemplified by Deronda himself, and the ungenerous, untrusting, self-absorbed character of Grandcourt. Something of the subtlety of her exploration can be glimpsed in the opening words of the chapter itself: 'Deronda, in parting from Gwendolen, had abstained from saying, "I shall not see you again for a long while: I am going away," lest Grandcourt should understand him to imply that the fact was of importance to her'. The novel is seriously concerned with anatomising the contrary human impulses towards, on the one hand, a vision of the larger justice which transcends resentment, and, on the other, the reductive, protected, walled-in consciousness of safety which breeds and often ensures success in life. (1)

George Eliot decides, at the end of the novel, that vision should live and that parsimony should perish, but in the long course of coming to that conclusion she has many discoveries to make about the recesses of the visionary nature and the heroic life. In Chapter 55 she says:

But were not men of ardent zeal and far-reaching hope everywhere exceptional? - the men who had the visions which, as Mordecai said, were the creators and feeders of the world - moulding and feeding the more passive life which without them would dwindle and shrivel into the narrow tenacity of insects, unshaken by thoughts beyond the reaches of their antennae.

It is because I see Virgil's Aeneas as containing within himself both the creating, feeding vision, and the narrow tenacity of the insect that I want to suggest him as the most complex attempt in ancient literature to represent the truths of the heroic nature. I shall not compare Aeneas with Odysseus, because Theodore Haecker has already brilliantly done so; ⁽²⁾ I shall try, rather, to look at a character as he is allowed to develop in what seems to me a totally non-dramatic way. Whatever he may be, Virgil's Aeneas is certainly not a "character unfolded in action".

Perhaps we may sharpen this sense of the anti-dramatic by attempting to distinguish between heroic character and heroic function in Virgil's presentation of Aeneas. We may approach the Aeneid with quite primitive expectations about heroic character, expectations which have to do with superhuman strength, valour, and physical prowess. If so, our first view of Virgil's hero is disturbing. He quails before Aeolus' storm in Book I, and wishes himself dead:

O terque quaterque beati
quis ante ora patrum, Troiae sub moenibus altis
contigit oppetere. ⁽³⁾ I.94-6.

His brief, complaining speech is set in the context of Juno's anger, and Neptune's placating zeal, so that the emphasis falls on his humanity, his weakness, his inability to control events or elements. He cannot say to the sea "Peace, be still", and he cannot even summon up gods who will. Yet, as Book I develops, Aeneas does two things which set the course of his functional heroic development. They are not in themselves dramatic, or symbolic, but they become symbolic by later accretion, and they may stand in Book I as proleptic instances of developing themes. At line 180, when he and his companions are safely ashore, Aeneas climbs a hill:

Aeneas scopulum interea conscendit et omnem
prospectum late pelago petit, Anthea si quem
iactatum vento videat Phrygiasque biremis,
aut Capyn, aut celsis in puppibus arma Caici.
navem in conspectu nullam, tris litore cervos
prospicit errantis. I.180-5.

Three things are significant here: Aeneas is alone, withdrawn, deliberately isolated in order to survey the situation; he is given a personal, particular vision, foreshadowing the future, and guaranteeing a heavenly interest in all his concerns; and he is directed towards a religious activity, which will turn the vision into accomplished fact. These three things, only dimly visible in this first instance, foreshadow the theme of Visionary Guidance and Religious response which is to run through the epic like a thread. The second significant action comes less than twenty lines later when Aeneas makes his first public utterance (his first speech is virtually soliloquy), and its tone is crucial. There is no heroic assertion in it, no emotional appeal. It is a low-toned assurance that all will yet be well (though you can't see it at present), and it rises to its only emotional peak in the last line:

durate, et vosmet rebus servate secundis.

I.207.

"Endure, and hold yourselves in". This bleak exhortation is the first statement of a theme which becomes eventually the moral basis of the entire epic: the ethical imperative of Endurance, Perseverance. One need not seek far for parallels to enforce the quality of these embryonic statements of theme. Aeneas' vision of the stags from the peak is not unlike the Mosaic vision from Pisgah - a warrant from God that the Promised Land does exist, and that the wanderers are on the true road to it. It is a vision which only the Leader is given, it is a part of his function as guide and mentor to see such visions and to interpret them. Similarly, the theme of Endurance in Obedience might be illustrated from the whole range of Christian experience, from Jesus down through all the Saints.⁽⁴⁾ It is a version of the Christian commonplace that "he who shall endure to the end shall inherit a crown of life", and of the much wider and older truth that Perseverance is necessary to establish perfection. The thematic development of the poem depends upon the development of an understanding of Aeneas' function as a hero: his visionary, vatic, and interpretative role, as opposed to his exemplary and hortatory role. Another explicatory analogy may help to discriminate the two Aeneases. In Shakespeare's Henry V King Henry, disguised, visits his soldiers in the dark, on the night before Agincourt, and he realises the responsibilities of rule:

Upon the King! Let us our lives, our souls,
Our debts, our careful wives,
Our children, and our sins, lay on the King!
We must bear all. O hard condition,
Twin-born with greatness, subject to the breath
Of every fool, whose sense no more can feel
But his own wringing! What infinite heart's ease
Must kings neglect that private men enjoy!

IV.i.226-33.

In Book I of the Aeneid, although the reader has the assurance of heaven's interest after the prophecy of Jupiter, Aeneas has not.⁽⁵⁾ He has prayed, he has sacrificed, but he has no assurance of acceptance, and so, while his comrades sleep, and the gods debate

... pius Aeneas, per noctem plurima volvens

I.305.

Aeneas lies awake, pondering and watchful. This is more than the distinction between the public and the private man, the person and the office. It contains the distinction which Shakespeare explores, but it goes further. Aeneas is not only pius but he is nate dea. He has moral human qualities, but he also has a special relationship with the divine. The problem of Aeneas' heroic nature is essentially a problem of consciousness. It is the same issue as that which perplexed so many nineteenth century theologians and historians as to Jesus' sense of his sonship to God the Father. Either this knowledge is certain, and thus it indemnifies all human activity, or it is not. Where there is postulated a single, omnipotent, omniscient Deity the problem is acute. But in Virgil's world this is not the case, and the problem does not imperiously demand solution. The Gods are manipulators of the human action,

but since they themselves are subject to the decrees of an inscrutable Fate neither their action nor their disclosures are ultimate or irreversible. Consequently Virgil may allow Aeneas a special insight into the ways and purposes of the gods without the implication that this would create certainly in the mind of Aeneas. Neither vision nor insight is enough. Aeneas' heroic function is established by these qualities, which he possesses and his fellows do not, but his heroic character must be forged, developed, and asserted by other, human means, and this is the purpose of what we may call the "surface-narrative" of the poem - a long process of preparation and education by suffering, wandering, loving, and fighting.

Brooks Otis has taught us⁽⁶⁾ to distinguish properly between the "plainness and directness" of Homeric epic and the "emphatic" attitude of Virgil to his material, but the distinction can be pressed, I think, to allow us to inspect Virgil's psychological exploration of the heroic nature more closely. The real contrast is not between Aeneas and Odysseus, but between Aeneas and Milton's Satan. The intensity with which Milton invests the character of Satan in the first three books of Paradise Lost has led many critics in the past to declare that Milton had inadvertently made Satan the "hero" of his epic. Such statements, of course, betray a very inadequate view of the heroic nature, but the debate about "who is the hero of Paradise Lost?" bedeviled Milton criticism in the first half of this century, and led a critic like C.S. Lewis to demonstrate how Milton systematically degrades Satan "from hero to general, from general to politician, from politician to secret service agent, and thence to a thing that peers in at bedroom or bathroom windows, and thence to a toad, and finally to a snake".⁽⁷⁾ This was necessary, but it was crude. Milton himself makes his vision of the heroic nature very clear in the opening of Book IX, with specific reference to classical epic:

I now must change
Those notes to tragic - foul distrust, and breach
Disloyal, on the part of man, revolt
And disobedience; on the part of Heaven,
Now alienated, distance and distaste,
Anger and just rebuke, and judgment given,
That brought into this World a world of woe,
Sin and her shadow Death, and Misery,
Death's harbinger. Sad task! yet argument
Not less but more heroic than the wrath
Of stern Achilles on his foe pursued
Thrice fugitive about Troy wall; or rage
Of Turnus for Lavinia disespoused;
Or Neptune's ire, or Juno's, that so long
Perplexed the Greek, and Cytherea's son;

IX.5-19.

Despite the complicated antithesis of "distrust", "revolt", "disobedience" and "anger" "rebuke" and "judgment" which belongs to the "surface-narrative" of Paradise Lost, the true heroic issue, as Milton states it, is the relationship between Man and God: the "alienation" is tragic, the confrontation heroic. It is this insight into the basic, ultimate nature of the heroic

which Milton shares with Virgil. The heroic nature is one which can bear contact with ultimate reality, and can translate the will of God into human action and utterance. The surface narratives of Paradise Lost and the Aeneid go in quite contrary ways, of course, and this tends to obscure the crucial link between the two poets. Milton is concerned with the Fall of Man, and the terms of his myth are established straight away:

Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree I.1-2.

Disobedience is the heart of the matter, "first" in time, and "first" in importance. Virgil, on the other hand, is very little concerned with Sin. The Aeneid might well be called "the epic of Obedience", and at the very centre of the poem, in Book VI, the nature of heroic obedience is most fully explored. The theme is stated in the opening lines. Aeneas, in his "piety" seeks Apollo's temple and the Sybil's cave. Deiphobe warns him against the distractions of art, and advises him to offer sacrifice. The response is immediate:

talibus adfata Aeneas (nec sacra morantur
iussa viri) Teucros vocat alta in ~~templa~~ sacerdos. VI.40-1.

In this small instance the point is made that knowledge and vision must be paid for by obedience: the way to wisdom lies through discipline. As Book VI progresses the theme is developed on a larger scale. Both the quest for the Golden Bough and the burial of Misenus are examples of the Obedience which the hero must give in order to obtain the guiding vision. The contrast between Milton's Satan and the Virgil's Aeneas is enforced by the parallel between Aeneas and Milton's Christ in Paradise Regain'd, where the persistent, prayerful obedience of Christ is the central, vindicating value, and the poetic means of asserting his divinity. This, together with the fact that in Book VI and elsewhere Aeneas' every act is prefaced and controlled by prayer, creates a tension peculiar to the Aeneid. Aeneas' heroic function seems to be at war with his heroic character. His separateness from his companions, his religious obedience, his unexpressive, uninspiring speech, all these are the reverse of the heroic characteristics we expect. Marlowe's Tamburlaine, for example, is closely in touch with his followers, rebelliously disobedient to all kings and gods, and his "winning words" are always irresistibly persuasive. He is a traditionally "heroic" character. But he has no function to perform; he stands for nothing beyond himself.

The non-dramatic quality of Aeneas' development is enforced by a study of the other characters in the epic. Although there are some nine hundred names mentioned in the Aeneid there are only three fully realised figures apart from Aeneas: Anchises, Dido, and Turnus. It is true that there are countless brilliant sketches, cameos, miniatures, but only these three are developed in depth, and only they significantly affect the thought and stature of Aeneas himself. We may perhaps consider them as the three "temptations" of Aeneas, if we use the word in its widest sense to imply "proving" and "testing" rather than "luring". The functions of Anchises are to keep

Aeneas aware of the past he must re-create in Italy, to establish the importance of the family as a unit, when the normal familial setting is denied (notice that in the early books there are three generations on one ship), and to act as the seer, the interpreter, and the liturgist for the entire community of wanderers. These are all functions which Aeneas himself must eventually take over, to which he must be educated, and in which he must be proved, so that the very significant exchanges between father and son at Troy, at Crete, or on the high seas, enact in a stylised way the education of Aeneas. And just as, in the psychology of any family unit, the son assumes leadership on the father's death, so Aeneas takes over and cherishes the function of Anchises, so carefully prepared and unambiguously stated in the early books. There are many ways of looking at Book V: the funeral games may be seen as an expiation for the sins of negligence committed in Book IV; or as a period of re-creation and preparation for the warfare of the later books; but there is a sense in which they are a deliberate occasion for Aeneas to assume his father's role. Aeneas acts here as the community's priest, he intercedes, and he organises. In quite a new way he "represents" his people. It is most significant that he himself takes no part in the games. His developing heroic role has nothing to do with athletic prowess. His function is to control these exhibitions of skill or power, to approve them, and to perform the kingly task of awarding prizes and distributing gifts. As Book V ends, with the sacrifice of Palinurus, "unum pro multis", it is Aeneas the father who takes over the helm:

cum pater amisso fluitantem errare magistro
sensit et ipse ratem nocturnis rexit in undis,
multa gemens casuque animum concussus amici.

V.867-9.

We may realise from this symbolic situation how much more deeply Aeneas has assumed control, and we may recall with surprise that he hasn't actually done anything worth talking about for almost a thousand lines.

Just as Anchises "tempts" Aeneas in his understanding of heroic leadership, so Dido tempts him in the double sense. Not only is she a physical temptation to lay aside the harsh task imposed upon the Trojan exiles and to prefer ease to honour, but she enforces upon Aeneas an understanding of the relative importances of the human and divine worlds which he inhabits. There is a comparison and a contrast with Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra. Antony realises much earlier than Aeneas does that

These strong Egyptian fetters I must break
Or lose myself in dotage.

I.ii.113-4.

He fails to free himself, and the outcome is tragic in both human and political terms. Aeneas triumphs over the fleshpots of his particular part of the North African coast, and, so Virgil's art creates it, we feel that he triumphs without any of the agonising that Antony endures. Human sympathies are directed firmly towards Dido - naturally enough. But if we read Book IV alertly I think we discover one of the heroic values which Virgil is at pains

to assert: the quality I can best describe in George Eliot's phrase as "the narrow tenacity of the insect". Amidst all the positive, intense, colourful distractions of Carthage there is an iron core of principle running through the Book. I have the sense that if one examined it carefully it would have to do with negatives, with negative syntactical patterns. I have in mind things like Jupiter's words to Mercury, which are later repeated to Aeneas:

si nulla accendit tantarum gloria rerum
nec super ipse sua molitur laude laborem,
Ascanione pater Romanas invidet arces?
quid struit? aut qua spe inimica in gente moratur
nec prolem Ausoniam et Lavinia respicit arva?
naviget: haec summa est, hic nostri nuntius esto. IV.232-7.

There is something in that "naviget"; this is persuasion, not command, Jupiter and Mercury may create an awareness of the heroic values, and the visionary future, but the assertion of them must be an act of the human will, and by opposing the will of the gods with all the human values and beauties of Carthage Virgil sets up a genuine and powerful enemy. It is inhuman, narrow and mean of Aeneas to act as he does. He crawls away like an insect. He crawls away with the tenacity of a hero.

The temptation represented by Turnus is prolonged, but conceptually much simpler. He is perpetually inciting Aeneas in Books VII to XI to act before his time. The later books of the Aeneid are centrally concerned with the struggle between physical and spiritual heroism in the figure of Aeneas. Milton understood this predicament even better than Shakespeare. In Samson Agonistes, when Samson faces the challenge of Harapha (a combination of Old Testament Philistine with Restoration bully-boy) the Chorus comments on his victory in these words:

O, how comely it is, and how reviving
To the spirits of just men long oppressed,
When God into the hands of their deliverer
Puts invincible might,
To quell the mighty of the earth, the oppressor,
The brute and boisterous force of violent men,
Hardy and industrious to support
Tyrannic power, but raging to pursue
The righteous, and all such as honour truth!
He all their ammunition
And feats of war defeats,
With plain heroic magnitude of mind
And celestial vigour armed; 1268-80.
But patience is more oft the exercise
Of saints, the trial of their fortitude,
Making them each his own deliverer,
And victor over all
That tyranny or fortune can inflict. 1287-91.

One of the most mysterious things in the Aeneid is the way in which it gradually becomes apparent through Books VII to XII, that there will be a moment when Turnus and Aeneas must confront one another finally. I find it impossible to say how we know when that moment is ripe, when the build-up is complete, yet there is an inevitable "rightness" about the timing of it. It comes when Aeneas knows he is ready for it. It is a matter of Aeneas' consciousness, which is assaulted, degraded, but never extinguished by the powerful concepts of Honour and Glory which Turnus represents. Turnus is to Aeneas as Hotspur is to Prince Hal, and we know, with inner certainty, that it is Hotspur who must perish.

I would like at this point to turn to the theme of Visionary Guidance and its effect on Virgil's portrayal of the heroic nature. The regal quality of Aeneas, which places him among the "creators and feeders" of the world, is established not by prowess nor by deeds, but by vision. It is his capacity to see what others do not, to interpret what he sees, and to act in accordance with the revealed divine will, that raises Aeneas above the level of ordinary mankind. And Virgil mediates this quality through what is essentially an image, or a pattern of images: the dreams and visions which pervade the poem. The vision of the three stages in Book I is only the first of an increasingly important series of dreams and visions, which rise to a climax in the poem, and then decline in importance. You will not misunderstand me when I say that Aeneas' dream in Book II is seminal. In a quite schematic way it sets out the conduct of the whole of the rest of the poem. If Aeneas remembered all that Hector said to him, if it was constantly before him, there would be no need of any other vision. Hector's instructions are clear: "fuge, nate dea", "eripe flammis":

sacra suosque tibi commendat Troia Penates.

II.293.

He is commanded to seek a city for Troy's gods, and told he shall establish such a city after long wandering over the deep. It is in obedience to this private, personal vision of the dead hero of Troy that Aeneas acts. He does not act until he has such a sanction. As Troy is falling and Trojans are dying two visions of a different kind condition the action that Aeneas takes. At the death of Priam Aeneas is directed by a kind of waking dream:

subiit cari genitoris imago,
ut regem aequaeuum crudeli volnere vidi
vitam exhalantem; subiit deserta Creusa
et direpta domus et parvi casus Iuli.

II.560-3.

What "rises before him" here is an image of living persons, people in need of his help and direction. "Subiit" could almost be rendered "pictured to myself". But when he is about to kill Helen, later in the same book, the vision which prevents him is of a different kind. Venus herself "appears" to him, and directs him to specific action in another direction. Her speech contains both an order and a promise. He must save his family and Troy's gods, and she will endow him with unique vision:

aspice (namque omnem, quae nunc obducta tuenti
mortalis hebetat visus tibi et umida circum
caligat, nubem eripiam

II.604-6.

And this promise is immediately fulfilled in part:

apparent dirae facies inimicaque Troiae
numina magna deum.

II.622-3.

Even this vision of the other world does not wholly subdue the humanity of Aeneas. Such is the strategy of Virgil's exploration of the nature of vision that the last link which must be broken is the strongest. The ghost of Creusa represents the strongest temptation to rest upon purely human motivation and energy. He tries to embrace her, despite her manifest instructions to him to take care of other things. As she vanishes, Book II ends in the dawn of a new day, and Aeneas' last line is an act of resignation to the divine will:

cessi et sublato montis genitore petivi.

II.804.

It is almost like the conversion of the unwilling sinner. Aeneas is forced against his will into a new life, under new responsibilities, and he goes forth like the patriarch Abraham, in faith. But the faith, we may feel, has a fairly solid foundation. Hector, Venus, and Creusa have severally told him which way he should go, and there is no discrepancy between their instructions. We may feel that disobedience would be absurd, and that delay is, to say the least, reprehensible. And this is in part an apt response to the pressures the book sets up. Although Virgil sets up Aeneas as a visionary he does not present him as in any way imaginative.⁽⁸⁾ He is in touch with the infinite, but he is not in the conventional sense of the word a "dreamer".

Book III is, in a way, Aeneas' apprenticeship as a seer. It is part of his education. His unfortunate experience over Polydorus betrays his lack of sensitivity in this branch of his heroic role, and it is Anchises who correctly interprets auguries, and initiates action. And even he is wrong about Crete. His error is retrieved by the "directing" dream of the Penates which is given to Aeneas. The vision of their eventual home is both precise and imprecise, but its immediate effect is to move them from Crete in the right direction. Perhaps the most important thing about the "Penates" dream is the way in which it intensifies Aeneas' personal contact with the world of the gods. Virgil is very precise:

talibus attonitus visis et voce deorum
(nec sopor illud erat, sed coram agnoscere voltus
velatasque comas praesentiaque ora videbar

III.172-4.

There is a growing sense that Aeneas is learning to inhabit two worlds. He is visited by the gods, and in a way almost "at home" with them.

The combat of flesh and spirit in Book IV is obvious enough, and the

visions Aeneas suffers are perfectly clear in their quality and intention. But the central discovery which Virgil makes about Aeneas' heroic nature comes in his defence against Dido's accusations of faithlessness and cowardice. From a human point of view his words are incredibly weak. He has been guided from Troy by a series of visions and dreams; the gods have wrestled with him to hold him true to his divinely-sanctioned mission. Yet all he can say in reply to Dido's shrewdly argued case is:

sed nunc Italiam magnam Gryneus Apollo,
Italiam Lyciae iussere capessere sortes;
hic amor, haec patria est.

IV.345-7.

There is not a word about the dreams he has dreamt or the visions he has seen. He mentions only the ghost of Anchises as having troubled his conscience. And this, of course, is magnificently true. Aeneas cannot reply to Dido by giving her a great vision of his destiny, and a purple description of the city he is to found, because if he is true to his visions there is very little he can say about them. The gods have not given him any real, concrete detail that he could communicate to others. His vision exists only within his own consciousness. I take this as an example of the marvellous and notable restraint of Virgil's art. Where he might so easily have yielded to the temptation to indulge in a dramatic display he has refrained. Aeneas does not assert the "usual" heroic qualities and rant at Dido as she rants at him. He speaks only the truth, as far as he can express it, and it is not the whole truth (as we know), because the whole of Aeneas' truth is beyond words. As a primitive "Homeric" hero this restraint diminishes his stature; as the new, spiritual, visionary, Virgilian protagonist it raises it immeasurably. His reward comes, of course, in Book VI, where faith is turned into sight and what was until then a glorious but indistinct vision is clothed in historical detail and given names. Yet before Anchises' prophecy there is a significant moment in Virgil's development of his hero. The Sybil's prophecy has been given and heard ("obscuris vera involvens"), and Aeneas finds nothing strange in it:

non ulla laborum,
o virgo, nova mi facies inopinave surgit;
omnia praecepi atque animo mecum ante peregi.

VI.103-5.

This is the first real idea we have been given of any concept of imagination in Aeneas. Throughout the poem he has been guided and directed by others - usually gods. His reaction to the Sybil's prophecy is a strange and ultimately unsatisfactory moment in the poem, because it comes as a surprise. Virgil gives us no evidence for assuming that Aeneas "keeps all these things and ponders them in his heart". He is not given to wonder; he has no creative imagination. He is given such visions as are needful for his immediate purposes, and they do not spontaneously generate others in his mind. Nevertheless, it is in Book VI that the final, fulfilling vision is granted. Aeneas' education as a seer and prophet is complete, and he is granted the future.

It is important for us to remind ourselves that the prophecy of Anchises in Book VI is, from Aeneas' point of view, strictly a vision. Yet it differs from his previous visions in that it gives him not only an aim, but a guarantee. From this point onwards, Virgil's hero has a warrant for the worth of all he does. The risk is gone, the uncertainty past, he has the gnosis, the secret knowledge which validates all his actions. This ought, of course, to rob the epic of any further interest, and in the view of some critics it does. Perhaps I can best indicate why I feel this is a totally false judgement by suggesting that Aeneas' achievement of saving knowledge in Book VI is analogous to the Christian achievement of saving Grace. Grace, in Christian theology, is essentially the free gift of God, unmerited and unearned, but bringing with it both salvation and the burden of Christian duty. The great vision of the future glory of Rome is "given" to Aeneas in precisely this way. He does not earn it by his virtue, it is given to him for a purpose. The knowledge brings with it a great burden. To know the details of the future removes some anxieties and replaces them with others. We become increasingly conscious in the later books of the enormous burden of the heroic role, and the weight of this divine responsibility which weighs Aeneas down. In human terms this "specialty of rule" would be destructive, and it very nearly is. But just as the Christian is sustained in the trials and struggles of life by the consciousness of election and Grace, so Aeneas is upheld both by the central vision he has been granted and the contingent reassurances he receives from the gods at various times. Tiber's prophecy in Book VIII, for example, is not only a much more precise time-schedule than Aeneas has had before but it tells him what to do. In the battle scenes I think it is true to say that Aeneas never makes a single decision on purely human terms. Always there is a clear omen or an unambiguous vision which gives Aeneas the right answer to the problem. His adversary, Turnus, receives only scanty supernatural help, and in the later books there is not a sense of warfare of the gods, using men as pawns; it is a matter of watching the heaven-directed Aeneas steadily, ruthlessly, and relentlessly crushing the opposition to the divine will. Our sympathies, of course, are with Turnus, and so Virgil intends they shall be. But we know that Aeneas is right. As the struggle goes on he needs less and less guidance from the gods. It is as if he has found the straight and narrow path, and no longer requires the education or the stimulus of vision. As the vision recedes from the poem so Aeneas' heroic humanity is asserted. He becomes the great warrior we have always heard he was, and what was always inevitable begins to take place. It is as if, in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's phrase, "man has come of age" and can be left to achieve the decrees of Fate without visionary interruption. (10) The heroic character of Aeneas, then, is asserted by the development of his ability to live in two worlds - by the growth, climax, and withering of his "visionary gleam".

And yet the concept of heroism in the Aeneid is not simply a matter of the educative vision. There is a sense in which the phrase "narrow tenacity" fixes on something vital in the presentation of Aeneas. He has something of the devil's friar in him. Let me remind you what George Eliot says of them. They are

Vowed to be poor as he in love and trust,
Yet must go begging of a world that keeps
Some human property.

Endurance is a heroic quality, but it is also a savagely reductive human state. One of the best modern insights into this truth is provided by Joseph Conrad's novel "Typhoon". It is a novel about the sea, and it opens with a piece of careful observation:

Captain MacWhirr, of the steamer Nan-Shan,
had a physiognomy that, in the order of
material appearances, was the exact counterpart
of his mind: it presented no marked characteristics
of firmness or stupidity; it had no pronounced
characteristics whatever; it was simply ordinary,
irresponsive, and unruffled.

The novel is concerned with the way in which Captain MacWhirr, by exercising these very qualities, brings his ship, his oddly assorted crew, and his cargo of chinamen through a devastating typhoon to harbour. He knew the seaman's rules for facing the peril of a typhoon, and he simply applied what he knew. MacWhirr had as much imagination as a pint pot, but imagination would have been useless (and even a danger) in bringing a ship through a typhoon. What is needed is a knowledge of the seaman's book, and an ordinary, irresponsible, and unruffled application of those rules to the situation. Conrad's point is that such a man has great value, but he pays a price for it. To achieve this utter reliability, this rocklike endurance you must sacrifice Imagination, and Vision, and Wit, and Love and Trust. In human terms you become a beggar, and your spiritual life, if it exists at all, must exist on the charity of other people. MacWhirr, in so far as he needs human contacts at all, is parasitic upon humanity, making his gain out of another's loss. The necessity of 'Endurance in the twelve books of the Aeneid hardly needs demonstration. The concept is more prominent at some times than at others, but it is clearly a prized quality in Book III. Apollo makes the point early in the book:

Dardanidae duri, quae vos a stirpe parentum
prima tulit tellus, eadem vos ubere laeto
accipiet reduces. antiquam exquirite matrem. III.94-6.

The Trojans are identified as "long-suffering", "much enduring", "men of endurance". They are "reliquias Danaum atque immitis Achilli", a "remnant" in almost the Hebrew sense of that word. Book III takes the hero through checks and disasters highest reared, from the Harpies and Celaeno's curse to the Cyclops, but at the centre of this there is one scene in which the effect of trial upon the human spirit is memorably caught. When Aeneas meets Andromache, and she can scarcely believe he is alive, he replies:

vivo equidem vitamque extrema per omnia duco;
ne dubita, nam vera vides. III.315-6.

It is this sense of dragging on a weary life, through all extremities, in dogged pursuit of the divine decree that constitutes the Heroic Endurance of Aeneas. The relapse of Book IV makes the effort all the more painful when it has to be made. There is a grim, irresponsive quality about Aeneas' words to Dido "non sua sponte Italiam sequor". He has used Dido, he has been parasitic upon her abundant and energetic life, he has gone begging in her world of love and trust. And under the cosmic justice which overarches the moral world of the Aeneid there is a retribution to be made, and a price to be paid. The curses in the Aeneid and their out-working form a moral pattern within the poem, and Dido's curse upon the departing Aeneas, "pugnent ipsique nepotesque" is paid home in the last six books. Martial virtues become crucial, the soldiers' qualities (11) dominate, and grim survival in the face of death becomes the only hope. Evander, in Book VIII, offering Pallas to Aeneas as a trainee, lists the sparse, desirable qualities he should attain:

sub te tolerare magistro
militiam et grave Martis opus, tua cernere facta
adsuescat, primis et te miretur ab annis. VIII.515-7.

Endurance is the only thing man can oppose to adversity. And the opposition can be successful, but it demands a price in the quality of human living. Yeats, in Easter 1916, phrases it well:

Too long a sacrifice
Can make a stone of the heart.
O when may it suffice?

What Virgil presents us with in Books VII to XII is the slow recession of individual personality. All those qualities which had marked out the heroic stature of Aeneas - his filial observance, his obedience, his creating, feeding vision, are eroded by the demands of War, and personality dwindles to the iron, irreducible core, where he who endures, inherits. The moral point which Virgil is making, on this massive scale, is that Heroic qualities are very expensive. Aeneas is drained of his life in these last books, and Rome is built at his expense. The sense of superhuman effort over a trivial death with which Book XII ends would be hard to parallel in any literature, and the sense of exhaustion at the end suggests that all that matters is that Turnus must die before Aeneas:

ast illi solvuntur frigore membra
vitaque cum gemitu fugit indignata sub umbras. XII.951-2.

And there's an end of it. There is no more to say. The artistic problem which Virgil solves in these last books is that of fusing a vision of the moral and spiritual degradation of Aeneas with an equally convincing account of his physical, heroic assertion. The solution, I think, lies in the brilliant development of the religious (and especially the liturgical) spirit in the Aeneas of the last books. In the midst of the carnage and the blood Aeneas gradually assumes the priestly, intercessory role for his people, as well as the role of the champion. He is heroic both as King and Priest.

But the religion he represents is not the ecstatic, vatic, visionary faith, but rather a formalised, ritual, almost bureaucratic pattern of observance. The quality this creates is perhaps best seen in Aeneas' great prayer in Book XII, before he goes to battle:

esto nunc Sol testis et haec mihi Terra precanti,
quam propter tantos potui perferre labores XII.176-7.

and so on. It is almost a piece of diplomatic negotiation with the gods. It is like nothing more than the patriarchal prayers of the Old Testament, or Jacob's bargain with God. The poem comes to rest in the exhaustion of Aeneas as father of his people, and in a sense of formalised, institutionalised religion as the final, enduring and triumphant value. The Heroic Ideal is as fragile as the hero's body; heroism will grow old, and cold, as the heroic man himself ages, but (to return to George Eliot's phrase with which we began) the Larger Justice, which only the gods understand, stands unmoved for ever.

NOTES

1. There is a direct line here to the novels of Henry James, and their exploration of a tyrannical self-consciousness which exists together with an oppressive awareness of the complexity of other people.
2. The chapter "Odysseus and Aeneas" from his Virgil, Father of the West is reprinted in Virgil: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Steele Commager (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.), 1966.
3. All quotations from Virgil are from the Loeb edition, with translation by H. Rushton Fairclough.
4. It is at its most acute in the Martyrs, at its most prolonged in a figure like St. Bernadette de Lourdes.
5. This point is well made by R.D. Williams, in his article in the Proceedings of the Virgil Society 1965-6.
6. See Virgil: A Study in Civilised Poetry (Oxford) 1964.
7. C.S. Lewis, A Preface to 'Paradise Lost' (London), 1942.
8. Wendell Clausen acutely describes Aeneas as "profoundly melancholy, half-paralyzed by fate". See his Interpretation of the Aeneid in Harvard Studies in Classical Philology, LXVIII (1964), revised and reprinted in Virgil: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Steele Commager.
9. It is worth noting that Aeneas hardly ever mentions his dreams and visions to anyone else. His heroic development is essentially a secret and inward process.
10. See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (London,