

PIETAS IN VIRGIL AND STATIUS

I have chosen *pietas* as the starting point for my comparison because it is generally agreed that it plays an important role in the *Aeneid* – I believe it is important in the *Thebaid* too – and because its role seems to me to be central to the dramatic and moral tension of each poem. Each poet asks a question in his epic; my purpose is to discover and contrast the two questions and to show how the difference between the questions is indicative of the difference in outlook of the two poets, and I believe that in each poem the poet is asking his basic question in terms of *pietas*.

Pietas for a Roman consisted in the fulfilment of obligations to family, country and gods, to one's leader or those who rely upon one as a leader and to those who had done one a service. Having undertaken a very extensive study of the usages of *pius*, *impius* and *pietas* in the Republican and early Imperial periods I am convinced that *pietas* was quite strictly limited in its range of application, that it did not approach anything like 'humanity' or 'gentleness' as some have tried to argue.

Aeneas' *pietas* is certainly confined within traditional limits; it commends the fulfilment of his obligations to his father, living and dead (1), to his companions, whether in death like Misenus (2) or in need of responsible leadership as after the shipwreck in Book 1 (3), or simply when he is carrying out ordinary administrative duties (4). Virgil's special emphasis on Aeneas' *pietas* of responsible leadership may well be an attempt to present him as a model especially suitable for Augustus to follow. The heaviest emphasis, however, is put upon Aeneas' *pietas* towards the gods, not just his observation of religious ritual or his upholding of oaths (5), but especially upon his obedience to the divinely revealed mission which Fate has laid upon him. Aeneas knows at the fall of Troy that he has been chosen to fulfil a special task, the nature of which is revealed in stages until by the time he reaches Carthage where we see him in Book 1 he knows he is to go to a certain part of Italy and found a city. It is not, of course, until the 6th Book that the full glory of the future is shown to him and it is Aeneas' willing fulfilment of the laborious task laid upon him, his willingness to follow the directions of Fate before he knows of the glorious fulfilment, Rome, to which his mission is leading which is perhaps the most basic aspect of Aeneas' *pietas*. It is, of course, a mistake to assume that Aeneas' *pietas* can be divided up into neatly labelled compartments. One word, *pius*, characterises him in the fulfilment of all his obligations, obligations the fulfilment of which are all subsumed under what we call the mission. The mission itself involves *pietas* over the whole range of its usage; it is to be *pius* in all situations which is to be the basic quality of Rome:

'hinc genus Ausonio mixtum quod sanguine surget,
supra homines, supra ire deos pietate videbis,'

12.838–9;

So not only is Aeneas *pius* in his obedience to the gods, his willing fulfilment of his mission, but his overall *pietas* is itself a model of what his mission is intended to achieve; Aeneas' own *pietas* therefore is a foretaste of the *pietas* which is to be a dominant characteristic of Rome.

Pietas in the *Aeneid*, however, is not as simple as that. When Aeneas decides to resume his mission and abandon Dido he is called *pius Aeneas* in the notorious line 4.393, *pius* for the first time in the fourth book. Of course he is *pius* since he has chosen obedience to the gods and to Fate rather than disobedience, but book four henceforth is concerned not with the righteousness of Aeneas but with the tragedy of Dido. *Pietas* involves intense suffering for Aeneas and suffering and death is the result for Dido. There is a real tension here; *pius* is not simply a mark of Virgil's approval of Aeneas' decision to put his duty before himself; its use here raises the question of whether it really was best for Aeneas to go on to Italy in view of the suffering his *pietas* occasions. So here Aeneas' *pietas* involves his sacrifice of humanity but nevertheless it is a sacrifice he makes with the deepest regret.

The tension between achievement and suffering pervades the *Aeneid* and it is crystallised in the conflict between *pietas* and humanity. This tension reaches a pathetic climax at the end of Book 10 where Aeneas is confronted with the young warrior Lausus who has intervened to save his father Mezentius. Aeneas kills him and speaks:

'quid tibi nunc, miserande puer, pro laudibus istis,
quid pius Aeneas tanta dabit indole dignum?'

10.825–6.

The phrase *pius Aeneas* recalls the whole complex of ideas associated with Aeneas' *pietas* and his mission. The fulfilment of his mission means that Aeneas has to fight and kill people like Lausus. Aeneas' sympathy towards Lausus as it was towards Dido is enormous but *pietas* demands that humanity be put aside. The tension, therefore, between Rome and the sacrifice necessary for its existence is stated in terms of *pietas*. In this situation, however, Lausus is also *pius*. Let us look back to lines 812–4:

'fallit te incautum pietas tua'. nec minus ille
exsultat demens, saevae iamque altius irae
Dardanio surgunt ductori.....

Lausus' *pietas* leads him into death at the hands of Aeneas, a fact which enhances Aeneas' tragedy (and hence the tension) inasmuch as his *pietas* demands that he kill someone whose *pietas* mirrors his own (6). It has also led Lausus into a mad charge of savage violence against the enemy and there is a very fine example of this sort of behaviour earlier in Book 10. After Turnus has killed Pallas, Aeneas charges madly into battle:

Pallas, Evander, in ipsis
omnia sunt oculis, mensae quas advena primas
tunc adiit, dextraeque datae.

10.515–7.

Aeneas had previously been subdued in fighting (Otis and Conway (7) noticed the change in his behaviour here) but with the thought of his obligations towards Evander uppermost in his mind he seizes two sets of four brothers to sacrifice on Pallas' tomb and kills many

warriors including three as they beg for mercy, one of whom, it is implied, he will not allow to be buried (8). At the climax of this scene of hideous violence comes the familiar formula *pius Aeneas* (9). Once again the word *pius* is used at a moment when the horror and suffering involved in *pietas* are being most strongly emphasised. However, whereas in the moments of confrontation with Dido and with Lausus Aeneas felt a deep regret, here he has no such scruples. He appears to have been corrupted, temporarily at least, by the very behaviour which it is his mission to stamp out. Thus Virgil has another reservation to make on the glory of the Roman mission; not only is there a tension inherent in the role of *pietas* as he presents it in the *Aeneid* but also in the character of Aeneas. We see this situation again in the notorious closing scene of the final book (10). Turnus begs for mercy as did the three victims of Aeneas in Book 10 but at the sight of Pallas' belt Aeneas kills him; the implication is, although *pius* does not occur in the text as we have it, that once again it is the demands of *pietas* which are decisive. Turnus is clad, as Aeneas puts it, in the '*spoliis ... meorum*' (11). Nevertheless Aeneas kills Turnus in *dolor, furiis accensus et ira terribilis* and *fervidus* (12). He feels no regret at that moment for the fate of Turnus. Not only does *pietas* necessarily entail violent behaviour but once more we are asked to consider whether Aeneas has really learnt to feel humanity consistently towards those that his *pietas* demands that he kill. One might also note the parallel situation earlier in Book 12, where *pietas* is instrumental in Aeneas' violence. After the breaking of the truce he is wandering over the battle-field in search of Turnus and restraining himself from promiscuous slaughter when he is treacherously attacked by Messapus:

tum vero adsurgunt irae, insidiisque subactus,
 diversos ubi sensit equos currumque referri,
 multa Iovem et laesi testatus foederis aras
 iam tandem invadit medios et Marte secundo
 terribilis saevam nullo discrimine caedem
 suscitatur irarumque omnis effundit habenas.

12.494–9.

Here too Virgil is very careful to connect the violence of Aeneas' charge with his *pius* motive; the tension is stated once more, although not explicitly in terms of *pietas*.

The rather sinister implications of Virgil's treatment of *pietas* should now be clear: Aeneas is a man of complete *pietas*, *pius* in his obedience to his mission and *pius* in fulfilling the obligations which the mission is all about, for example in his relationship towards Evander and Pallas. The exercise of that *pietas*, however, involves the abandonment of Dido and the deaths of Lausus, Turnus and others *by necessity of the role of pietas in the poem*: the Roman mission, both the inherent nature of it (illustrated by the necessary deaths of people like Turnus because of *pietas* towards Evander) and the way it has to be implemented (illustrated by the necessity of abandoning Dido and killing Latins like Lausus in the war) is incompatible with humanity, and on top of this Aeneas as a character is still liable to uncontrolled outbursts of emotion as he fulfils the demands of *pietas* rather than the regret which the necessity for violence should and frequently does occasion.

It is important, however, not to underemphasize the very positive achievement to which Aeneas' mission is leading. Certainly the means to the end involve enormous suffering and sacrifice and the exercise of *pietas* as a Roman virtue involves violence and murder but it would be wrong to suppose that Virgil felt no real pride in the achievement of Rome. Aeneas is a tragic figure placed in a difficult situation and when he does run amok it is only under enormous provocation. In restoring the balance a survey of the role of *virtus* in the *Aeneid* will, I believe, be of value.

Virgil's attitude towards *virtus* varies according to who is exercising it and according to the end towards which it is being exercised. The *virtus* of Aeneas is rarely referred to but it is always forward looking and constructive. At 8.131–3. Aeneas tells Evander that it is his own *virtus* together with the *sancta oracula divum* that has brought him to Italy, the willing follower of Fate. *Virtus*, then, is connected with Aeneas' mission, and in Book 6 it is linked closely with the glorious Roman and explicitly Augustan future, for after recounting the triumph and Empire of Augustus Anchises asks:

‘et dubitamus adhuc virtutem extendere factis?’

6.806.

The Augustan Empire, then is the ultimate consequence of Aeneas' *virtus*, and in Latinus' reported thoughts at 7.255–8 this *virtus* is projected onto Augustus himself as a descendant of Aeneas:

hunc illum fatis externa ab sede profectum
portendi generum paribusque in regna vocari
auspiciis, huic progeniem virtute futuram
egregiam et totum quae viribus occupet orbem.

At 12.827: ‘*sit Romana potens Itala virtute propago,*’ *virtus* is once more constructive and forward looking; the *virtus* of the Italians will be harnessed for Roman glory.

There is one scene in the *Aeneid* where we actually see a present action explicitly linked with the Roman future. At 9.590–644 is described the confrontation between Numanus and Ascanius and after Ascanius' killing of Remulus Apollo addresses him:

‘macte nova virtute, puer, sic itur ad astra,
dis genite et geniture deos. iure omnia bella
gente sub Assaraci fato ventura resident,
nec te Troia capit.’

9.641–4.

No sympathy is expressed for Remulus and the reference to future Rome and what appears to be the closing of the temple of Janus in BC 29 make irony unlikely here. The emphasis is all on Ascanius' *virtus* in killing Remulus as a pattern for future Roman glory; Remulus' suffering is not mentioned: here lies dead one more boasting individualistic hero who was standing in the way of Rome. I believe that there is real political significance in this

passage; the giving of the two names Remulus Numanus, the use of the word *cognomen*, the marriage alliance with Turnus and the resulting *regnum* all assist in the presentation of this man as a characteristic late-Republican aristocrat, selfish, individualistic. Men like this, Turnus, Pallas, Euryalus all have to die since they stand in the way of Rome just as did their selfish Republican successors. The lack of sympathy for Remulus coupled with the emphasis on the Roman future shows that Virgil was very much concerned with the achievement to which Aeneas' mission was leading as something glorious and worthwhile.

Virtus is by no means always directed towards the mission, the foundation of Rome. Before Aeneas becomes fully aware of his mission he fights in Book 2 a hopeless battle, scarcely for the preservation of Troy but simply to win honour by going down fighting, and with his followers participates in an orgy of meaningless slaughter leading to inevitable self-destruction (13). Moreover Dido connects Aeneas' *virtus* in the Trojan war with his *gens* (references to hereditary *virtus* occur elsewhere in the *Aeneid*), surely a recollection of the Republican aristocratic code of maintaining family honour by winning *gloria* through *virtus*. The *virtus* of Pandarus, Mezentius and Pallas too is individual and entirely destructive (14). Pallas shows absolutely no sympathy for his victims; his wars at 10.371 are *patriae....aemula laudi* and at 11.154–5 Evander reveals his son's attitude towards war:

'haud ignarus eram quantum nova gloria in armis
at praedulce decus primo certamine posset.'

For Pallas war is a glorious game of heroism for its own sake, an attitude never held by Aeneas after Book 2. It is, of course, Turnus who epitomises the old heroic, individualist attitude to war. His *virtus* is combined with heroic shame at failure, *insania*, *furiae* and love for Lavinia (15). The position of Lavinia is interesting. Turnus regards her as a major prize of battle (16) worth winning for her own sake through *virtus* (12.20) whereas for Aeneas she does not count: her only purpose is to provide a name for his new city (17). In Book 11, Turnus' *virtus* is linked with the winning of personal *gloria* (18) and at 11.336 he achieves *gloria* through family rivalry within the state, the situation which in fact prevailed at the end of the Republic. In the *Aeneid* *gloria* is sought by the same sort of people to whom destructive individualistic *virtus* is attributed: Turnus, Camilla, Euryalus (19), Entellus who seeks individual *gloria* and *laus* in the boxing match (20) and Troy and Carthage (21), outdated and anti-Roman societies. But just as there are two sides to *virtus*, so there are two sides to *gloria*. Aeneas' *gloria*, according to Jupiter and Anchises (22), consists in being the founder of Rome and in Rome's future achievement. Individual *virtus* in search of individual *gloria* as illustrated by fighters like Turnus and Pallas is useless, destructive and eventually self-destructive (as illustrated, for example, by the taking of spoils by Euryalus and Turnus) but *virtus* if harnessed to the achievement of the Roman future, Aeneas' *virtus* after Book 2, is glorious, and under these conditions even the slaughter of Remulus Numanus is apparently justifiable.

In the *Aeneid* we are constantly being reminded of the Roman future, not least in some of the passages in which *virtus* occurs and the *virtus* of Aeneas is contrasted with

the self-seeking *virtus* and *gloria* of Turnus, Pallas and the like which is entirely destructive. *Pietas*, however, does reveal a very powerful tension, for Aeneas is explicitly *pius* at those very moments when the suffering necessitated by his *pietas* is being most strongly emphasised. Not the least to suffer for obedience to his mission is Aeneas himself. Not only does he regret the abandonment of Dido and the futile deaths in the war like that of Lausus, both, of course, connected with the interferences of Juno, but he suffers more directly through events like the storm and shipwreck in Book 1 and the ship-burning in Book 5. In the introduction to the poem at 1.8–11 Virgil himself asks why Juno inflicted such suffering on a man *insignem pietate* and Venus, confronting Jupiter later in the same book, recounts Aeneas' sufferings and asks: '*hic pietatis honos?*' (23). When his ships are burning Aeneas is *pius* as he prays to Jupiter, surely a recollection of this same tension, but it is in the address to his disguised mother in Book 1 that the discrepancy between Aeneas' *pietas* and his suffering is most poignantly expressed:

'sum pius Aeneas, raptos qui ex hoste penatis
 classe veho mecum, fama super aethera notus;
 Italiam quaero patriam, et genus ab Iove summo.
 bis denis Phrygium conscendi navibus aequor,
 matre dea monstrante viam data fata secutus;
 vix septem convulsae undis Euroque supersunt.
 ipse ignotus, egens, Libyae deserta peragro,
 Europa atque Asia pulsus.'

1.378–85.

Certainly Aeneas has to suffer, but the Junonian opposition is eventually overcome and after the revelation of the future glory of Rome in Book 6 Aeneas knows he will succeed, that his *pietas* will be rewarded; Fate, after all is on his side; it is the force of anti-Fate which is making him suffer for his *pietas* and it is by means of Aeneas' *pietas* that Fate will be fulfilled. However great the suffering we know from the start that *pietas* will achieve a magnificent goal.

The main action of the *Thebaid* is the war between Argos and Thebes. Although the dispute between the two brothers Eteocles and Polyneices is the immediate cause of the war and although the brothers fight on opposite sides and eventually meet in a fratricidal duel, it is not a civil war and all the fighting apart from the duel is between members of different states. The hereditary curse on Oedipus' family which has no connection with Argos in any case is conflated with a divine plan of Jupiter, outlined in Book 1 and explicitly put into action in Books 2, 3 and 7 (24), for the destruction of the people of Argos and Thebes by means of a war, and, Jupiter tells us, such destruction has been fated since the beginning of time:

'sic Fata mihi nigraeque Sororum
 iuravere colus: manet haec ab origine mundi
 fixa dies bello, populi que in proelia nati.'

3.241–3.

A great deal of the horror of the *Thebaid* lies in the violence of this ordinary interstate war while the traditionally *impius* actions such as the fratricide provide climaxes of horror in a ghastly orgy of death and suffering. Statius' usage of words like *impius*, *nefas* and *scelus* reflects this conflation of traditional crimes against family, country, gods etc. and ordinary violence against one's enemy in war, a conflation, that is to say, of *pietas* and humanity. For example, on two occasions warriors are described as *impii* because they kill particularly pathetic victims in war (25) and *nefas* is used to describe the death of a particularly tragic young warrior (26); *scelus* too refers to the death of a warrior (27) and to the death of the infant Opheltes (28) killed by a snake sacred to Jupiter, an event also described as a *nefas* (29). Simply the defeat of one side in the war is a *nefas* (30) and even the destruction of a band of warriors sent to ambush an ambassador (31). Such usages are completely alien to Virgil who confines these words to traditional *pietas* situations. Statius, then, is concerned as much with the horror of violence as with traditional impiety and extends the usage of these words to cover ordinary suffering and death in war. The Virgilian tension, therefore, between *pietas* and the inhumanity to which it leads, a tension between the word *pietas* (or *pius*) and the context in which it is used, of necessity evaporates since in the *Thebaid* inhumanity of this sort is regularly characterised as *impius*: Statius opposes humanity to inhumanity in his usage of *pius* and *impius* and therefore cannot conceive of using the word *pius* in a situation in which inhumanity is involved. Situations just do not arise in the *Thebaid* in which the fulfilment of obligations traditionally demanded by *pietas* involves inhumanity and so there is no tension; traditional *pietas* and humanity and traditional *impietas* and inhumanity coincide.

The basic dramatic tension of the *Thebaid* is to be found rather in the role played by *pietas* in the epic. One of the most remarkable features of the *Thebaid* is the enormous emphasis placed upon the power of the supernatural, especially Olympians and Furies, and their role is decisive in the main action of the poem; the Theban-Argive war takes place within the framework of a divine plan for human destruction, ordained by Fate and organised by Jupiter and this plan and the hereditary Theban curse are conflated and work in conjunction towards the war. The fact that almost the first half of the first book (32) is devoted to the exposition of these divine plans in supernatural terms as sources of the approaching disaster is a measure of the importance which Statius attaches to the supernatural framework of his epic. Affixed to this basic plan is a plan of Pluto which takes shape in book 8, a plan involving four hideous actions within the general framework of the war explicitly directed towards the pollution of Jupiter: Tydeus' anthropophagy, Capaneus' attack on the gods, the mutual fratricide and Creon's decree forbidding the burial of the Argive dead. (33). This plan of Pluto is formulated in retaliation against Jupiter because light has been let into the underworld in an earthquake which swallowed up Amphiarus, one of the Seven, in fulfilment of the basic plan of Fate. The so-called digressions in the *Thebaid* also describe the working out of divine plans for human destruction: Apollo's destruction of Argos in the Coroebus story in Book 1, the death of Opheltes, infant son of King Lycurgus of Nemea, in accordance with Fate in Book 5 and the destruction of the Lemnians by Venus' plan, narrated in Book 5 by

Hypsipyle (34). The *Thebaid*, then, is very much concerned with the malevolence of Fate and the gods and if one looks at those usages of *impius*, *nefas* and *scelus* which decry specific events it will be seen that on very nearly every occasion either an action undertaken within the framework of one of these divine plans or simply an event (35) which occurs within that framework is being decried. Statius uses the word *impius* thirty-seven times in the *Thebaid* as against Virgil's ten times in the *Aeneid*, only five of which decry specific human actions, and in only two cases is there a feeling that a divine plan is at work, the *impietas* of Dido in abandoning Sychaeus and of Latinus in breaking his agreement for peace with the Trojans (36). In these two instances the divine plan at work is that of Juno who is working against Jupiter and Fate. In the *Thebaid* *impius* behaviour or events are involved in the plans of Fate itself or of gods working with the sanction of Fate (37). This is a very important distinction and one to which I shall return. For the present let it suffice to note that Statius was very much concerned with *impietas* in a way in which Virgil, for whom the dramatic tension lay within the implications of *pietas* itself, was not.

In the *Thebaid*, then, violent behaviour and traditional *impietas* occur within the framework of a series of divine plans, each directed towards human destruction. What is the role of *pietas*? Let us look briefly at an example of *pietas* outside the main lines of the story. In Book 6 Statius relates in a brief allusion the disaster which befell Phaethon: his father warned him against the dangers and gave him the necessary advice:

pius ille quidem et formidine cauta,
sed iuvenem durae prohibebant discere Parcae.

6.324–5.

There are a number of similar examples related to the divine plans for war and impiety. For example, in Book 12 Creon has forbidden the burial of the Argives as a sign of his monarchic tyranny and as part of the plan for *impietas* formulated by Pluto in Book 8 but Argia's *pietas* (12.186) towards her husband Polyneices encourages her to challenge the *inimiques deos regemque cruentum* (38) and she sets out to bury him against the edict; the basic opposition between human *pietas* and the joint plans of gods and kings is made explicit (39). Once Antigone and Argia have put Polyneices' body on the pyre which turns out to be that of his brother there is a supernaturally caused earthquake and the women are captured. The Furies and Fortuna (40) once again have conspired to thwart human *pietas* and manipulate it so that it leads to disaster. Examples like this could be multiplied many times, but I will confine myself to one more specific instance connected with the basic plan for the war and the curse which seems to illustrate the situation very clearly. The *pietas* of Amphiaraus, the Argive prophet, who does not want to go to war but eventually submits to Fate is frequently referred to (41); nevertheless he dies in an earthquake brought about by Fate with the sole object of killing him; his *pietas* did him no good and in two places in the *Thebaid* his *pietas* is explicitly connected with his undeserved fate, with the fact that it did indeed do him no good (42). Aeneas' *pietas* is eventually rewarded by success and it is the forces of anti-Fate which make him suffer; Amphiaraus' *pietas* is not rewarded by Fate; he dies in spite of it, not at the hands of an enemy but through Fate's direct intervention.

Significant as these individual examples are, the tension between the divine plans which necessitate *impietas* and violence and man's attempts for peace and *pietas* is most clearly felt in the dramatic structure of the plot itself. The first three books of the *Thebaid* consist of an irresistible movement towards war in accordance with Jupiter's plan outlined near the beginning of Book 1. Adrastus, the king of Argos is a pacific leader; he does what he thinks is just and best for his people. In the first three books of the epic he undertakes three major actions: he marries his daughter Argia to the exiled Polyneices in accordance with a riddling oracle of Apollo; he sends Tydeus on an embassy to Thebes to request Eteocles' abdication, a model of diplomacy; he orders Amphiaraus to consult the auspices to discover whether or not war is advisable. All these actions are well meaning attempts to do the right thing, but in fact each action only makes war more inevitable. The marriage and the embassy are both explicitly manipulated by Jupiter to bring about the conflict, and Jupiter says so, calling the marriage *belli.....semina* and the outcome of the embassy (Jupiter had suggested to Eteocles through Laius' ghost that he should refuse to abdicate) *semina pugnae* (43). The great auspices scene in which the events of the imminent war are revealed in detail to Amphiaraus indicates the success of Jupiter's scheming by showing that war is now inevitable as Amphiaraus is forced to realise:

'sed quid vana cano, quid fixos arceo casus?
ibimus...'

3.646–7.

Adrastus is prevented from acting on the information by the intervention of Mars who at this point makes the Argives madly desire war, to kill and to be killed (44). Adrastus' attempts, therefore, to prevent violence (his characterising word in the *Thebaid* is *mitis*) (45) are rendered futile by the plans of the gods. In the final human attempt to stop the Fate-ordained disaster, Jocasta's intervention in Book 7, the *pietas* of the Argive warriors is explicitly opposed to the war, for example at 7.505–6: *bellum horrescit pietas*, and the whole tragedy is well summed up by Polyneices in Book 11 as the Fury encourages him to challenge his brother to a duel. Polyneices, recounting the suffering occasioned by the war, contrasts the Argive disaster with Adrastus' reign before his arrival:

'te pacem et pia iura regentem—'

11.165.

Adrastus' own *pietas* is emphasised at the same time as the disasters which have befallen him, and Polyneices concludes his speech with a reference to the divine plan by which this has come about:

'...nec enim omnis culpa malorum
me penes, et superi mecum Parcaeque nocentes...'

11.188–9.

The eleventh book, the mutual fratricide, is in many ways a microcosmic model of the whole war with a long supernatural introduction in which the Furies decide to carry out Pluto's orders of Book 8 (46). The dramatic tension is once more between the

divine plan for *impietas* and human attempts to stop it, to preserve *pietas*. First Jocasta tries to dissuade Eteocles, then Antigone Polyneices, but each is thwarted by the direct action of the Furies (47). Adrastus then intervenes but to no avail (48) and the conflict culminates in the intervention of the goddess Pietas herself (49). She was created, she says, by Natura to oppose the *animi* of gods and men. (50). Thus like Clementia she is detached from the Olympians and enters the battle on the side of man and of humanity, complaining of *saevumque Iovem Parcasque nocentes* (51). The outcome is inevitable: she is driven off by the Fury. The tension here between *pietas* and the gods' plans reaches its climax with the sublimation of *pietas* as a deified abstraction to oppose the Fury, the embodiment of the forces of *impietas* and violence – for Tisiphone is responsible for violence in general, not just traditional impiety (52) – in the world. The routing of Pietas by Tisiphone is the culmination of the successive defeats of human *pietas* by the malevolent interventions of the supernatural powers in accordance with Fate.

There is an important difference, therefore, between the role of *pietas* in the *Aeneid* and its role in the *Thebaid*. Part of Aeneas' *pietas* was his willing obedience to the commands of Fate in the fulfilment of his mission and Fate could only be fulfilled as long as Aeneas stood firm in his *pietas*; the opposition to his *pietas* which led to his own and his mother's indignation – the storm, Dido, the shipburning, the war – was raised not by Fate but by Juno, the anti-Fate symbol. This difference is crucial for an understanding of the different degrees of pessimism in the two poems.

We saw too how the use of *virtus* in the *Aeneid* could be connected with Fate. It was strongly approved of when used by Aeneas on behalf of the Roman future, but shown to be aimless and only destructive when used for the winning of individual *gloria*. In the *Thebaid* *virtus* is always destructive and this attitude reflects the foundation of Statius' pessimism. The war has no goal except the destruction of its participants; it has no purpose beyond itself. It is a battle involving the very survival of *pietas*, an aimless orgy of destruction in which successive human attempts at *pietas* are overwhelmed by the intervention of the gods, culminating in the defeat of the goddess Pietas by Tisiphone.

We can now summarise in terms of *pietas* the questions each poet is asking and we can assess the comparative optimism and pessimism of the two poems. The basic question in the *Aeneid* is whether *pietas* which is the foundation of the glorious Roman future can be justified by the suffering which it involves, the sacrifice of individuals. There is never any doubt that *pietas* will win through as long as Aeneas stands firm in adversity – *pietas* and *fatum* are on the same side – and after Book 6 we know that he will stand firm. The question is being asked of *pietas* itself, whether the sacrifices which it demands, Dido, Lausus, Turnus, are too great a price to pay – they certainly seemed so at times to Aeneas – and at the end the question is asked of Aeneas; is he really the right sort of man for the Roman future who kills so eagerly in the name of *pietas* in an outburst of emotionalism? It is a question which I shall not attempt to answer: only let it be remembered that the great Trojan-Latin war is for a purpose, a purpose normally described by Virgil as glorious, as the end of true *virtus*, and that the alternative offered to *pietas*

is the heady violence of Turnus, the individualism that had very nearly destroyed Rome in the years of Virgil's youth. *Pietas* is far from perfect but its alternative is unthinkable. Statius poses a different question and answers it for us: he asks what significant effect *pietas* can have in the world, and his answer is 'none'. *Pietas* for him is unquestionably good, absorbing as it does gentleness and humanity, the very qualities to which it is often opposed in the *Aeneid*, but the cussedness of the universe gives the *pii* no chance; Statius' pessimism is more stifling: there is no possibility of a glorious future; the war is an aimless orgy of death and suffering ordained by Fate itself: the violence of the *Aeneid* at least has a reason, it is the necessary concomitant of that *pietas* by which Rome is to be founded and the dictates of which she is to follow, but in the *Thebaid* The general violence of the war and the specific horror of the fratricide are presented in terms of the gods' machinations in accordance with Fate to bring about destruction for its own sake, a plan which involves the crushing of human attempts for peace and *pietas* finally epitomised in the defeat of the goddess Pietas by the Fury in order that the fratricide may go ahead: Fate and *pietas* are on opposing sides.

I want to conclude by looking at an adaptation by Statius of a passage in the *Aeneid* which I hope will demonstrate the poets' different attitudes towards the place of *pietas* in relation to the human environment, the universe. Where Statius has taken over a specific Virgilian model involving an act of *pietas* and altered it we should be able to see at least Statius' attitude, and the alterations he makes will also highlight the salient points of the Virgilian model. At *Aeneid* 9.176–449 Virgil tells the story of Nisus and Euryalus, a story which Statius adapts in his account of Hopleus and Dymas at *Thebaid* 10.347–448. Let us look closely at Virgil's story. Nisus tells us that he has long wanted to dare a great deed and that he is not content with *quies* (53). Personal heroic feelings are important from the start therefore, and although the basic aim of the exploit is *pius*, the message to Aeneas that the Trojans are in dire straits, there are moments when the *pietas* of the act itself seems to be subordinated to the desire for the glory achieved through it: Nisus says:

nam mihi facti
fama sat est.

9.194–5.

and Euryalus is described:

magno laudum percussus amore.

9.197.

The opening dialogue of the pair (54) and the Trojan council (55) show that the message to Aeneas is the primary purpose of the exploit, although in his speech before the council Nisus mentions slaughter of the enemy and spoils as extra advantages (56). It is nowhere suggested, however, that the massacre itself should not be part of the *pius* plan, although as the pair set out it looks as if the massacre has rather gone to their heads and the *mandata* which Ascanius gives them to take to Aeneas are scattered by the breezes (57). In the massacre Euryalus takes as spoils a helmet and a belt and it is these very things

which precipitate the disaster, since the helmet shines in the moonlight and warns Volcens of their presence and the belt hinders Euryalus as he tries to escape through the wood. The moral is clear and accords with what we already know of Virgil's attitude towards *pietas*: the *pius* mission to warn Aeneas of necessity, apparently, involved violence — this is not questioned — and the description of the suffering of the Latin victims is characteristic of the enhancement of the tension between *pietas* and humanity. The *pius* mission, however, did not involve the taking of spoils; this was an example of the old, heroic, individualistic values, the desire for personal glory, and it was specifically the taking of spoils, not the massacre, which led to the disaster, just as it was Turnus' taking of that other belt, the belt of Pallas, which explicitly precipitated his own death. *Pietas*, questionable as it may have been in involving the massacre, would have succeeded; it was a lapse from *pietas*, the adherence to the values of a Turnus type, which brought disaster. In the *Thebaid* the situation is quite different. Hopleus and Dymas are in a party bent on a nocturnal massacre, an atrocity explicitly inspired, I need hardly add, by the gods, but they are not mentioned as belonging to that party until the massacre is over (58). It is only then that they conceive their *pius* exploit, the recovery and burial of the bodies of their dead chiefs which are still lying on the battlefield. So their *pius* mission, an idea represented as entirely their own, as we might expect, is separated from the horrible violence of the divinely inspired massacre — *pietas* having for him subsumed pacific behaviour. For Hopleus and Dymas the sole motives are grief and duty (59); they have no thoughts whatever of personal glory in contrast with Virgil's pair: they are completely *pui* and humane. They fail: a Theban cavalry squadron spots them as dawn approaches and they die — no need for a glittering helmet, the cursedness of the universe is enough. Their downfall results simply from their *pietas* in delaying to rescue the bodies of their chiefs and the hostility of their environment, the dawn, and Statius' comment, a fine summary of his attitude, is:

invida fata piis et fors ingentibus ausis
rara comes.

10.384—5.

In Virgil's Nisus and Euryalus episode Fortuna and the gods are neutral (60). Hopleus and Dymas were in the massacre party, Statius tells us, by the decree of Fate (61) and they die because of their *pietas* rather than for a lapse from *pietas* as Nisus and Euryalus do: *invida fata piis*: nowhere is it better illustrated how, in contrast to the guarded optimism of the *Aeneid*, Statius' *Thebaid* is an epic of unmitigated despair.

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NOTES

1. *Aen.* 3.480, 5.26, 6.403.
2. *Aen.* 6.176, 6.232.
3. *Aen.* 1.220, 1.305.

4. *Aen.* 5.286, 5.418, 9.255.
5. *Aen.* 12.175, 12.311.
6. *Aen.* 10.820–4.
7. Otis, *Virgil, a Study in Civilised Poetry*, p.357; Conway, *The Virgilian Age*, pp. 135–6.
8. *Aen.* 10.510–605.
9. *Aen.* 10.591.
10. *Aen.* 12.919–52.
11. *Aen.* 12.947.
12. *Aen.* 12.945, 12.946–7, 12.951.
13. For the use of *virtus* in this context cf. *Aen.* 2.367 and 2.390.
14. *Aen.* 9.741, 10.872, 11.27.
15. *Aen.* 12.677–8.
16. *Aen.* 12.17, 12.70, 12.80, 12.937.
17. *Aen.* 12.193–4.
18. *Aen.* 11.444.
19. *Aen.* 11.336, 11.444, 11.708, 9.278.
20. *Aen.* 5.394.
21. *Aen.* 2.326, 6.65, 4.49.
22. *Aen.* 4.272, 6.757.
23. *Aen.* 1.253.
24. *Th.* 1.197–311, 2.1–133, 3.218–323, 7.1–226.
25. *Th.* 7.763–5, 9.665–7.
26. *Th.* 9.882, 9.887.
27. *Th.* 10.548.
28. *Th.* 6.144.
29. *Th.* 5.592, 6.161.
30. *Th.* 3.458, 6.945.
31. *Th.* 3.54. The ambush itself is described as a *nefas* at 3.214.
32. *Th.* 1.46–311.
33. *Th.* 8.65–77.
34. *Th.* 1.557–666, 4.746 – 5.637, 5.48.498.
35. Such as the death of a warrior described as a *belli scelus* at 10.548.
36. *Aen.* 4.496, 12.31.