The Pythagorean Letter and Virgil's Golden Bough[1]

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The meaning of Virgil's golden bough, the *aureus ramus*, which the hero Aeneas must break from an oak deep in the Cumaean woods and present to Proserpine at the entrance to Elysium, was unclear even in classical times. The fourth-century Virgilian commentator Servius Grammaticus reports that there were two interpretations of the golden bough current in his day (Serv., *A* 6.136). First, scholars who studied the rites of Proserpine argued that the golden bough represented 'something mystic' ('quiddam ... mysticum'). Secondly, 'common opinion' ('publica opinio') held that the image of the golden bough reflected the custom of the temple of Diana at Nemi, by which a fugitive, if he were able to break a bough from a holy tree within the sanctuary, won the opportunity to fight the incumbent priest and, were he to slay him, to succeed him. The association of the golden bough with this custom prepared the reader, Servius argued, for the death of Misenus, shortly to be related by the poet. Starting with Sir James Frazer, much has been written about the custom reported here by Servius and its bearing on the golden bough, understood as mistletoe; but it need not concern us now.[2]

1. This paper was first prepared while I was the recipient of a postdoctoral fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I would like to thank Dr. R.D. Crouse and Dr. D.C. Mirhady for reading drafts of this paper, and the Department of Classics, Dalhousie University, for the opportunity to present it as a lecture 29 January 1993. I must also thank two parishioners. F.J. Zigman scanned a typewritten copy of this paper into a computer and laboriously corrected the new copy thus produced. Dr. J.M.G. Fell obtained an article from an obscure volume for me through interlibrary loan at the University of Pennsylvania.

2. See D.A. West, "The Bough and the Gate," in *Oxford Readings in Vergil's Aeneid*, ed. S.J. Harrison (Oxford, 1990) 225–30, for a hilarious, if cruel, account of this 'school' of interpretation. W.A. Camps, *An Introduction to Virgil's Aeneid* (Oxford, 1969) 94, has a more balanced view: "it is not an extravagant fancy to suppose that [Virgil] knew of the religious awe with which the mistletoe was regarded by the Druids of Gaul ...." See also R.J. Clark, *Catabasis, Vergil and the Wisdom Tradition* (Amsterdam, 1979), 197–203, who uses the custom at Nemi to interpret the golden bough, but rejectsthe anthropological 'spin' of Frazer.

Dionysius, Vol. XVIII, Dec. 2000, 7–24.

However, Servius added a third interpretation. The image of the golden bough reflected, he says, the Pythagorean doctrine that human life can be represented by the Greek letter upsilon (ϒ). The stem of the letter represents childhood and adolescence, ages not yet morally determined, while the two branches—or boughs—of the letter represent the vicious and the virtuous lives chosen by adults, the former verging to the left, the latter to the right. The golden bough of Aeneas, therefore, represents, according to Servius, the righthand branch of this Pythagorean letter, the life of virtue. Not much has been written about this part of Servius' commentary.[3] However, in this paper, I hope to show that the Pythagorean letter is a fundamental image in *Aeneid*, Book 6, and that the golden bough is a symbol which complements it.

Since Servius' report of this Pythagorean doctrine is succinct, it will be well to repeat it here.

> de reditu autem animae hoc est: novimus Pythagoram Samium vitam humanam divisisse in modum ϒ litterae, scilicet quod prima aetas incerta sit, quippe quae adhuc se nec vitiis nec virtutibus dedit: bivium autem ϒ litterae a iuventute incipere, quo tempore homines aut vitia, id est partem sinistram, aut virtutes, id est dexteram partem sequuntur: unde ait Persius <V 35> 'traducit trepidas ramosa in compita mentes'. ergo per ramum virtutes dicit esse sectandas, qui est ϒ litterae imitatio: quem ideo in silvis dicit latere, quia re vera in huius vitae confusione et maiore parte vitiorum virtus et integritas latet.[4]

3. E. Norden, *P. Vergilius Maro Aeneis Buch VI*, 4th ed. (reprint, Darmstadt, 1957) 164, n. 1, calls Servius' comments "Pseudoexegese." Clark (199–200) mentions Servius' exegesis of the golden bough by the Pythagorean letter and reminds us of A.B. Cook's interpretation of the bough, based also on Servius' exegesis, as a divining rod of "underground secrets." See *Classical Review* 16 (1902): 375–76. Clark's criticism of this position can be found at 189, n. 10. W. Harms, *Homo viator in bivio, Studien zur Bildlichkeit des Weges*, Medium Aevum Philologische Studien 21 (Munich, 1970) 58ff., discusses Servius' exegesis in relation to its subsequent patristic and medieval influence. Cf. n. 16 below.

4. *Servii Grammatici qui feruntur in Vergilii carmina commentarii*, ed. G. Thilo and H. Hagen, vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1923) 30–31. The passage quoted in the text might be turned as follows. "Moreover, concerning the return of the soul there is this. We know that Pythagoras the Samian divided human life like the letter Y, evidently because childhood and adolescence are undetermined, inasmuch as these ages have given themselves neither to vices nor to virtues; moreover, the fork in the letter Y begins from early adulthood, at which time human beings pursue either vices, i.e. the lefthand part, or virtues, i.e. the righthand part. Whence Persius says, '[It] leads restless minds into the boughs of a crossroads' (5.35). Therefore, by means of the bough, which is the imitation of the letter Y, [Virgil] says that the virtues ought to be pursued. And for that reason he says that the bough is hidden in the woods, because really, in the confusion of this life and on account of the greater part played by the vices, virtue and integrity lie hid." Servius also adds a fourth interpretation: "alii dicunt ideo ramo aureo inferos peti, quod divitiis facile mortales intereunt. Tiberianus 'aurum, quo pretio reserantur limita Ditis'." The text from Tiberianus can be found in *Minor Latin Poets*, ed. J.W. Duff and A.M. Duff, Loeb Classical Library (1934; revised, 1935; reprint, 1968) 560.

As Servius notices, the first-century AD Stoic satirist Persius seems to refer to this Pythagorean doctrine in his fifth satire:

> cumque iter ambiguum est et vitae nescius error
> deducit trepidas ramosa in compita mentes
> me tibi supposui ... (5.34–36)

The ambiguous road, Servius is saying, and the ignorant wandering of restless, youthful minds are like the stem of the *Y*. The intersection of the divided ways, where a choice of direction, a moral choice, must be made, is like the divergence of the branches or boughs of the letter. Servius' interpretation of Persius can be accepted in this case because elsewhere Persius refers to this doctrine explicitly:

> et tibi, quae Samios diduxit littera ramos,
> surgentem dextro monstravit limite collem. (3.56–57)[5]

The letter with Samian boughs is obviously the *Y*, as interpreted by the 'Samian' philosopher Pythagoras. The righthand path which ascends the hill is the difficult path of virtue.

Since Persius' image would have been unintelligible to his readers, if it had not been a commonplace amongst educated Romans of his day, we are justified in assuming that the Pythagorean *Y* was part of the common stock of philosophical lore current during the late republican and early imperial periods. Support for this assumption is given by the existence of an early first-century AD gravestone from Philadelphia in Asia Minor. On this gravestone, above the inscription of a Neopythagorean epigram, one sees depicted the *Y* with a picture of *Arete* instructing a child on the righthand side of the letter's stem and a picture of *Asōtia* on the lefthand side seducing another child. Above these pictures one discovers a representation of the labour and reward of the virtuous man next to the righthand branch of the letter and a representation of the pleasure and punishment of the vicious man next to

5. The text used is *A. Persi Flacci et D. Iuni Iuvenalis saturae*, ed. S.G. Owen, Oxford Classical Texts, 2nd ed. (1908). On the form of the *Y*, see *Auli Persii Flacci Satirarum liber cum scholiis antiquis*, ed. O. Jahn (1843; reprint, Hildesheim, 1967) 156. "Cum Persius dextro limite surgentem callem dicat, et ceteri [e.g., Servius] quoque dextrum ramum arduum vocent, antiquior litterae Y forma cogitanda est [inverted 'h'], qualis reperitur e.g. in vasculo Agyllano." (*Callem* is a variant reading for *collem*. The latter is probably to be preferred. See R.A. Harvey, *A Commentary on Persius*, Mnemosyne Supplement 64 (Leiden, 1981) 94: "The variant *callem*, 'path,' is less well attested than *collem*, and, as a synonym of *limite*, makes a satisfactory translation of the phrase very difficult.") Jahn's point is that while the lefthand bough drifts lazily away to the side, the righthand bough is straight and steep. Jahn (*loc. cit.*) and Harvey (93) give further references to this image in antiquity. Ancient scholia on these lines from Persius can be found in Jahn, 302 and 324). For a discussion of the origins of the figure of the Pythagorean *Y*, see Harms, 40–49.

the lefthand branch.[6] Therefore, it is hardly to be doubted that Virgil was familiar with this image.

However, it is not clear that we may accept Servius' immediate interpretation of the golden bough as the righthand branch or bough of the Pythagorean *Y*, the road of virtue. For, while it is a 'bough,' *ramus*, and Persius calls the arms of the *Y* 'boughs,' *rami*, there seems to be no other direct connection between the images. Virgil's bough is single, Persius pictures two boughs. Virgil's bough is golden, Persius makes no mention of gold. Virgil's bough may represent virtue, then again it may not. There are, after all, any number of interpretations of the golden bough. Therefore, we must look at this image more closely.

First, then, let us see whether the golden bough may be interpreted as a representation of virtue. R.A. Brooks not long ago still maintained a version of Frazer's anthropological interpretation:

> Virgil compares the bough to the mistletoe .... Norden remarks of the mistletoe that it seems to have a double aspect, as a power of fertility, protection, and life, and as a power of death .... Loki opens the door of hell with a sprig of mistletoe, and kills Baldur with the same .... The power of life and death is a single reality. The golden bough, generically as vegetation-magic and specifically as assimilated to the mistletoe, has such a power.[7]

D.A. West calls this "balderdash,"[8] and I am inclined to agree with him. One should interpret Virgil from his own immediate sources. One should try to think as Virgil thought.[9] More recently, Robert Schilling, who stands with those who interpret Aeneas' *catabasis* in light of esoteric Roman religion and ritual, has pointed out the resemblance of the golden bough to Hermes' 'golden wand,' his *rhabdos chryseie*, in the *Odyssey* (24.2–3). In ef-

6. See A. Brinkmann, "Ein Denkmal des Neupythagoreismus," *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 66 (1911): 616–17 and 622–23. Brinkmann's argument shows that the epigram, which emphasizes *ponos* as virtuous, is Neopythagorean, and that the pictures which illustrate the U have to do with the opposition of *ponos* and *hedone* (619–20). He argues that the image of the U should not be considered as part of the original Pythagorean doctrine, but rather as a Neopythagorean pedagogical device (621). For more recent literature, see Harms, 45, n. 23. Virgil was certainly familiar with key Neopythagorean doctrines. See Diana Lanternari, "L'aspetto Neo-Pitagorico della IV Ecloga di Virgilio," *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 55, n.s., 13 (1989): 213–21.

7. R.A. Brooks, "*Discolor Aura*: Reflections on the Golden Bough," in *Virgil, A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Steele Commager (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1966) 156–57 (originally published in *American Journal of Philology* 74 (1953): 260–80).

8. West, 228.

9. Cf. P. Hardie, "Review: F. Cairns, *Virgil's Augustan Epic*," *Journal of Roman Studies* 80 (1990): 209: "However much the modern critic may protest the uniqueness of Virgil in his time, C.'s insistence on starting from patterns of thought attested as genuinely ancient is to be welcomed."

fect, Virgil "a proposé à la postérité un fascinant talisman, enveloppé de mystère."[10] This interpretation has the virtue of referring to something Virgil would have known well. Nevertheless, a 'golden wand' is not a 'golden bough.' There is at best a resemblance between the two, which will appear stronger or weaker according to one's conviction about the importance of esoterics in the background of Virgil's poem.

However, one indubitable literary source for the golden bough does exist. As Agnes Kirsopp Michels noticed in 1945,[11] there are lines in Meleager, the first-century BC epigrammatist and anthologist, whose work Virgil knew, which, as a preface to the epigrams of Plato, run:

> *ναὶ μὴν καὶ χρύσειον ἀεὶ θείοιο Πλάτωνος*
> *κλῶνα τὸν ἐξ ἀρετῆς πάντοθι λαμπόμενον*
> (*Anth. Graec.* 4.1.47–48)

Here we have not a resemblance, but an identity. A *chryseios klōn* is an *aureus ramus.* Moreover, the bough represents Plato's poetry and thought, 'all asheen with virtue.'[12] Clearly, then, the golden bough, whatever else it may represent, does represent Platonic or philosophic virtue.[13]

10. R.I. Schilling, "Romanité et ésotérisme dans la chant VI de l''Énéide'," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 199 (1982): 378. In this essay Schilling attempts to draw out the implications of Orphic and Pythagorean esoterics for *Aeneid* 6. His beginning point is the Bologna Papyrus, which seems to contain an Orphic account of a *catabasis.* See his n. 3 for references. Useful summaries of opinion regarding the golden bough can be found in Camps (93–94) and R.G. Austin, *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos liber sextus* (Oxford, 1977) 82–84. See also J.E.G. Zetzel, "Romane memento: Justice and Judgment in Aeneid 6," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 119 (1989): 276, nn. 51 and 52.

11. Agnes K. Michels "The Golden Bough of Plato," *American Journal of Philology* 66 (1945): 59–63.

12. Text and translation of W.R. Paton, *The Greek Anthology,* vol. 1, Loeb Classical Library (1969) 114.

13. Michels (61–63) and Zetzel (282–83) argue that the 'Platonic' nature of the bough taken together with Virgil's use of Plato's Myth of Er, by which Socrates hoped to save himself and his auditors (*Republic* 621B), shows that the bough is meant to represent Aeneas' *catabasis* as myth. West (236–37) thinks that the 'Platonic' nature of the bough is simply a device to show the reader that what he is to read is largely Platonic in content. West also sees the bough as the wand of an Eleusinian initiate (234–35). Zetzel (n. 52) observes that West is not aware of the difficulties involved in this interpretation. West, *loc. cit.,* gives examples of Virgil's use of Meleager elsewhere. C. Weber, "The Allegory of the Golden Bough," *Vergilius* 41 (1995): 21, n. 47, accepts Michels' identification of the golden bough with Meleager's *klōn* as plausible. However, his own argument leads to a different interpretation. In an elegant and persuasive chain of reasoning, he argues that the Cumaean oak represents a human body, while the golden bough represents a human soul (3–14). He then attempts to prove that the human soul represented is Aeneas' Trojan self, which must be so decisively overcome as if to die. The death of this self or soul is represented by the trophy-like erection of the bough on Proserpine's threshold

Servius, accordingly, is right to interpret the golden bough as a representation of virtue. However, the method by which he arrives at this interpretation—the free association in his memory of Virgil's word *ramus* and Persius' word *ramosa*—lacks rigour and fails to discover the primary source of the image. In consequence, one cannot argue that the image of the Pythagorean *Y* directly inspired Virgil's image of the golden bough. Still one wonders whether Servius, by recollecting this image of the Samian letter in his lucubrations on *Aeneid* 6, has not led us to an important image for understanding the Virgilian underworld. After all, it is possible that some implicit principle of Aeneas' *catabasis*, though unrecognized by Servius, caused him to call the Samian letter to mind. A closer examination, therefore, of the elements of the image of the Pythagorean *Y* as reported by Servius is needful.

Fundamental to the image in Servius and Persius is the notion that the moral life is like a journey upon a road. For part of life—for childhood and adolescence—the road is single, since a human being at those ages is still undetermined in character. Although he may do good deeds and bad, his character is not fixed. Wandering around, going astray, are natural and need not have a lasting effect. (This stage is well-depicted on the Philadelphian gravestone.) But in young adulthood, during his twenties and thirties, a person's character does become fixed for good or ill. The moral choices made by a person finally determine and fix his character. It is as if he had passed a junction, a *biuium*, where he chose whether to travel to the right hand or to the left, where he chose a life of virtue or of vice at last.

Now it seems obvious, although Servius seems only to have sensed it, that Aeneas' journey through the infernal regions, the regions of the spirit, is just like this. A single road leads downwards from Hades' vestibule. 'Hinc uia Tartarei quae fert Acherontis ad undas' (6.295).[14] This is the road which Aeneas follows to Styx; and beyond Styx past infant souls, past the unjustly condemned, past suicides, through the *Lugentes campi*, where lovers' souls wander and stray: 'inter quas Phoenissa recens a uulnere Dido/errabat silua in magna ...' (6.450–451).[15] But none of these, not even Dido finally, can

(14–20). I would judge this argument plausible. His reading of the text—see, for example, his interpretation of Aeneas' lustration, 19f.—is sensitive and moving. However, as I hope to show, Michels' insight is fundamental and the golden bough must be interpreted at a very basic level as representative of Aeneas' virtue. Of course, Weber's insights complement my interpretation. For example, Aeneas' self-lustration and erection of the bough as a trophy can be interpreted as having to do with the death-to-self which Aeneas' growth in virtue has required.

14. All quotations of Virgil will be from *P. Vergili Maronis opera*, ed. R.A.B. Mynors, Oxford Classical Texts (1969; reprint, 1986).

15. F. Cumont, *Afterlife in Roman Paganism* (1922; reprint, New York, 1959) 128–47, deals with the category of souls who suffered 'untimely death.' This category of souls may well underlie Virgil's choice of souls here.

draw Aeneas from the way he must follow. 'Inde datum molitur iter' (6.477). Now, however, just beyond the heroes' *ultima arua*, the way divides, as the Sibyl, priestess of Diana Trivia,[16] says:

> hic locus est, partis ubi se uia findit in ambas.
> dextera quae Ditis magni sub moenia tendit,
> hac iter Elysium nobis; at laeua malorum
> exercet poenas et ad impia Tartara mittit. (6.540–543)

Here, then, those of a character determined either to virtue or to vice, are separated. There is no longer one road, beside which the undetermined wander. Here, moral choices having given form to the soul, a person must follow the road which suits his character. As the Sibyl says, 'nulli fas casto sceleratum insistere limen' (6.663).

The infernal journey of Aeneas seems, therefore, to reflect the Pythagorean *Y* quite clearly. There is a single road, which passes through the region of those who are neither good nor bad. Then the road forks into two, the lefthand branch being for criminals, the righthand branch being for the pure. The reflection seems indeed so obvious, that Franz Cumont, almost eighty years ago, could make the following offhand observation.

> The symbol of the Y was early applied to the future life by the Pythagoreans, who transferred the roads representing the courses of the moral and the immoral life to Hades. Their stories of the descent to the nether world depicted the journey of the dead in the same way, and it is still thus described in the sixth book of the Aeneid.[17]

However, one could object that the image of the moral life as two paths diverging to virtue and vice is as old as Hesiod.

16. Austin (37, on line 13): "Hecate *trioditis*, the chthonic form of Apollo's sister Diana, served likewise by the Sibyl (35). This association in the cult at Cumae seems to be a Virgilian innovation, preparing for the Sibyl's special function, granted her by Hecate, as priestess in charge of the Underworld and so guide to Aeneas (cf. 118)." Virgil's innovation, the introduction of Diana of the Crossroads, is a further clue to the importance of the crossroads motif in Book 6. It should be noted that Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* 6.3, quotes *Aeneid* 6.540 (cited in the text above following this note) in his discussion of the Pythagorean letter. See Harms 58ff. for the subsequent history of this interpretation. It is clear from this history that Patristic and Medieval exegetes of Virgil felt that the Samian letter was a fundamental symbol in *Aeneid* 6. Cf. n. 3 above.

17. Cumont, 151. Cumont's account of the teaching does not particularly suit the *Aeneid*. As we shall see, the souls who inhabit the regions beside the common road in Virgil are not in transit, as in Cumont's account. There is no sense in Virgil that these souls will ever leave these regions. See Austin, 154.

τὴν μέν τοι κακότητα καὶ ἰλαδὸν ἔστιν ἑλέσθαι
ῥηιδίως· λείη μὲν ὁδός, μάλα δ' ἐγγύθι ναίει·
τῆς δ' ἀρετῆς ἱδρῶτα θεοὶ προπάροιθεν ἔθηκαν
ἀθάνατοι· μακπὸς δὲ καὶ ὄρθιος οἶμος ἐς αὐτὴν
καὶ τρηχὺς τὸ πρῶτον (*Op.* 287–291)[18]

Prodicus, too, as Xenephon tells us, employed this image in the tale of the choice of Heracles:

Φησὶ γὰρ Ἡρακλέα, ἐπεὶ ἐκ παίδων εἰς ἥβην
ὡρμάτο, ἐν ᾗ [sic] *οἱ νέοι ἤδη αὐτοκράτορες γιγνόμενοι*
δηλοῦσιν, εἴτε τὴν δι' ἀρετῆς ὁδὸν τρέψονται ἐπὶ τὸν
βίον εἴτε τὴν διὰ κακίας, ἐξελθόντα εἰς ἡσυχίαν
καθῆσθαι ἀποροῦντα, ποτέραν τῶν ὁδῶν τράπηται (*Mem.* 2.1.21)[19]

Here we are, indeed, very close to Virgil, who does, in fact, compare Augustus, Aeneas' antitype, to Heracles in this book (6.801–804). We have a youth, who, at that critical time when young people are no longer ruled by their parents and teachers, goes away by himself to debate the merits of virtue and vice. Moreover, as Hermann Walter has shown, Prodicus' story underlies Evander's invitation to Aeneas to enter his humble dwelling in Book 8.[20] But in commenting on this story, Cicero, an important source for Virgil, says:

hoc Herculi "Iovis satu edito" potuit fortasse contingere, nobis non item, qui imitamur, quos cuique visum est, atque ad eorum studia institutaque impellimur. (*Off.* 1.118)[21]

18. *Hesiod, The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, ed. H.G. Evelyn-White, Loeb Classical Library (1914; reprint, 1920).

19. *Xenophon*, ed. E.C. Marchant, vol. 4, Loeb Classical Library (1923; reprint, 1968). Brinkmann (618–19) argues that these same passages are also insufficient to account for the inscription on the gravestone from Philadelphia.

20. "Aeneas am Scheidewege (Verg. Aen. 8, 362–65)," in *Memores tui: Studi di letteratura classica ed umanistica in onore di Marcello Vitaletti*, ed. Sesto Prete, Sassoferrato Istituto Internazionale, Studi Piceni (1990) 197–209.

21. *Cicero*, ed. W. Miller, vol. 21, Loeb Classical Library (1913; reprint, 1968). The introduction of Cicero in the argument at this point is not arbitrary. Virgil read Cicero and his influence is significant at a critical point in *Aeneid* 6. See 6.699–702 (*Rep.* 6.14–15); 6.719–21 (*Rep.* 6.15); 6.724–26 (*Nat. D.* 2.19); 6.726–27, 730 (*Rep.* 6.15); 6.733 (*Tusc.* 4.11); 6.734 (*Rep.* 6.14); 6.750–51 (*Off.* 1.71). The influence of Cicero on Virgil has received attention in the last few decades. See E.B. Stevens, "Aeneid 6.724ff. and Cicero's Hortensius," *Classical World* 36 (1942–43): 86–87; L. Alfonsi, "Precedenti dell' incontro di Enea ed Anchise," *Aevum* 29 (1955): 374–76; C.A. Disandro, "Las Geórgicas de Virgilio, Estudio de estructura poética," *Boletin de Academia Argentina de Letras* 21 (1956): 517–601; L. Alfonsi, *Aevum* 34 (1960): 375–78; J. Hubaux, "Du Songe de Scipion à la vision d'Énée," in *Atti del I Congresso Internazionale di Studi Ciceroniani*, vol. 2 (Rome, 1961) 175–83; R. Lamacchia, "Ciceros Somnium Scipionis

That is to say, the average youth does not one day go off by himself to debate the relative merits of the way of virtue and the way of vice. The average youth is much more undetermined in his mind and behaviour than that. In fact, he makes no great choice at all, but rather imitates examples which seem good to him, and finds his character formed gradually in that way. Thus, since Virgil's account of the underworld includes a long path which passes through regions populated by souls which we have already begun to characterize as undetermined as regards good and evil, the older form of the image of the two ways found in Hesiod and Xenophon, while clearly in the background, cannot be the proximate source of the infernal ways in Virgil.

One might also object that the antecedent for Virgil's infernal roads is to be found in the Myth of Er in Plato's *Republic*, where good souls go to the right hand and aloft to heaven, while bad souls take the road to the left and down to Tartarus (614C–D), or even in the eschatological myth in the *Gorgias* where souls are judged at an infernal crossroads (*triodos*), and sent one way to the Isles of the Blest, another way to Tartarus (524A). One might even say of Virgil's roads, as E.R. Dodds says of the crossroads in the *Gorgias*, "the idea of an infernal crossroads is so natural that we need hardly postulate a special 'source' for Plato here."[22] To the latter opinion one can only reply that Virgil was a learned poet who deliberately incorporated many sources in his work.[23] To the former opinion one would say two things. First, because Virgil drew on so many sources, one can hardly insist on one source for an image to the exclusion of all others. Of course, Plato's myths are in the background here. But, (and this is the second point), one must account for

und das sechste Buch des Aeneis," *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 107 (1964): 261–78; L. Alfonsi, "Nota sulla pro Marcello," *Aevum* 40 (1966): 545; A. Setaioli, "Un Influsso Ciceroniano in Virgilio," *Studi italiani di filologia classica* 47 (1975): 5–26; R.M. Wilhelm, "The Second Georgic, The Sowing of a Republic," *Antika* 26 (1976): 63–72; A. Traina, "Cicerone tra Omero e Virgilio (tra Callimico e Catullo?)," in *Letteratura Comparate, Problemi e Metodo, Studi in onore di Ettore Paratore* (Bologna, 1981) 429–33; R.C. Monti, *The Dido Episode and the Aeneid, Roman Social and Political Values in the Epic*, Mnemosyne Supplement 66 (Leiden, 1981) 9-36; J. Bollók, "Vergil and Cicero (The Interpretation of Georgics 1, 231–258)," *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 30 (1982–84): 211–27; D.H. Berry, "The Criminals in Virgil's Tartarus: Contemporary Allusions in *Aeneid* 6.621–4," *Classical Quarterly* 42 (1992): 416–20, and J.E.G. Zetzel, "Natural Law and Poetic Justice: A Carneadean Debate in Cicero and Virgil," *Classical Philology* 91 (1996): 297–319. The pages from Monti's book are particularly interesting, as one finds there an extended exegesis of Virgilian terms by means of Ciceronian concepts. Zetzel's article is also very important as background to my argument, since it is shown there that Cicero's *De re publica* had a profound influence on Virgil's thinking about the meaning of Roman history.

22. E.R. Dodds, *Plato, Gorgias, A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford, 1959) 375.

23. See, e.g., Camps, "Making an Episode: Fusion of Inherited Materials exemplified in the Sixth Book" 84–94.

the peculiar *Y* shape of Virgil's road through Hell and for the emphasis placed on the souls who inhabit the regions along the stem. One cannot account for these things just from Plato, as one cannot just from Hesiod and Xenophon, either.[24]

This leads to a final objection, that the regions through which Aeneas passes before he reaches the junction of the two ways are not filled with children and adolescents, as we should expect from Servius' account of the Samian letter, as well as from Persius and the carving on the Philadelphian gravestone, but with a variety of souls who died in various states. But this ignores the difference between the literal meaning of Virgil's poem and the figurative nature of the image. Virgil's account of the underworld is concerned, literally, with the souls of the departed and their conditions. The various conditions or states in Elysium, Tartarus, and the regions anterior to them, are the rewards of the various choices made or not made by individuals in life. The choices were final, the conditions are static. The souls do not move from region to region in Hell.[25] Only Aeneas and his guide pass along the infernal road. However, the shape of that road, calling to mind as it does the Samian letter, helps the reader to understand the various regions to which the souls are assigned. The shape of the road is a figure by means of which the reader may understand the essential nature of the souls in each region: undetermined along the stem, vicious down the lefthand branch, virtuous up to the right.

It is therefore the indeterminate nature of the moral life of the souls in the first region of the underworld which persuades one that the Pythagorean letter is Virgil's immediate source for the *Y*-shaped road through Hell.

The argument to this point may appear as plausible to some, but not conclusive. However, the argument will appear conclusive, if we can further specify the virtue which concerns Virgil in this book of the *Aeneid.* That is to say, if one virtue informs the good in Elysium, if the opposite vice deforms the souls in Tartarus, and if the want of this virtue enervates the erring souls in the neutral region between Styx and the *ultima arua,* then it will be apparent that the book has been organized around the very simple, basic figure of

24. T. Adamik, "Die Struktur und die Funktion des sechsten Buches der Äneis," *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 35 (1994): 108f., following G.E. Duckworth, argues that Book 6 can be divided according to the Golden Section into three parts: ll. 1–235; ll. 236–547, and ll. 548–901. The second section thus includes the *Zwischenregion,* i.e., the stem of the Samian letter, and concludes with Aeneas' conversation with Deiphobus. If Adamik's analysis is correct, then the very structural proportions of Book 6 emphasize the importance of the souls along the *Y*'s stem. Cf. below, n. 45.

25. See n. 17 above.

the Pythagorean *Y*. It will be clear that the Samian letter, which is the unique figure of these three moral states, is organic to the organization and meaning of the book.

Virgil has given us separate descriptions of the kinds of vice and virtue found in Elysium and Tartarus, which will simplify our task. (Because of the verbal identities in the two passages, it is clear that Virgil meant them to be compared.[26]) In Tartarus we find the following kinds of vice:

> hic, quibus inuisi fratres, dum uita manebat,
> pulsatusue parens et fraus innexa clienti,
> aut qui diuitiis soli incubuere repertis
> nec partem posuere suis (quae maxima turba est),
> quique ob adulterium caesi, quique arma secuti
> impia nec ueriti dominorum fallere dextras ... (6.608–613)

As Austin remarks:

> Virgil now turns from myth to real life, from individuals to categories, in three pairs of parallel sins with a common basis, the violation of the laws of *pietas*.[27]

What, then, is the content of the impiety of these souls? Conington summarizes the crimes in this way:

> We have then (1) those who have violated duty to their brothers, (2) to their parents, (3) to their clients, (4) to their kindred generally, (5) to their married fellow citizens, (6) to their country, (7) to their masters.[28]

This impiety, then, essentially consists in a deliberate violation of one's sacred duty in the most important relationships of life, indeed in the relationships which constitute a civilized community.

Both Conington and Austin notice that *fides* is a conception closely connected with the last category of crime: 'dominorum fallere dextras.'[29] But according to Cicero, *fides* is the basis of *iustitia*, justice. "Fundamentum autem est iustitiae fides, id est dictorum conventorumque constantia et veritas"

26. Austin, 208f., on line 660.

27. Austin, 193, on line 608ff.

28. *P. Vergili Maronis Opera. The Works of Vergil with a Commentary by John Conington*, vol. 2 (London, 1863) 496, on lines 612, 613. Cf. Norden 287, on lines 608–17: "Das Prinzip der Gruppierung ist die Verletzung der heiligen Familiengesetze: Brüder gegen Brüder, Kinder gegen Eltern, Patrone gegen ihre Schutzbefohlenen, Geizige gegen ihre Angehörigen, Sklaven gegen ihre Herren, Ehebrecher."

29. Conington, *loc. cit.*; Austin (195, on line 613. Monti 11) writes, "The two concepts approach each other in meaning, *fides* the trustworthiness or reliability in a personal relationship, and *pietas* the steadfast observation of obligations."

(*Off.* 1.23). *Fides*, i.e., 'perseverance and truth in promises and agreements', must therefore also underlie the relationships of patron and client and of man and wife, relationships which are established by promises and agreements between consenting parties. Indeed, *fides* must also play a rôle in the other relationships mentioned in these lines by Virgil, inasmuch as even a natural relationship such as the fraternal is still essentially rational and therefore has the nature of an agreement.[30]

But all these relationships should also provide occasion for the exercise of *beneficentia*, according to Cicero. In fact, Cicero's exposition of the duties involved in beneficence involves an extended examination of all the communal relationships of which human beings are capable, with particular attention paid to the native town (*civitas*), family (*propinqui*: spouses, children, cousins, relations by marriage), friendships (*amicitiae*[31]), and the *res publica* (*Off.* 1.50–58). Since Virgil provides, in the lines under consideration, a striking sketch of the rich man who will not share his wealth with his relations ('quae maxima turba est!'), it is clear that he had in mind not only the virtues of *fides* and *iustitia*, but also of *beneficentia*, when he categorized the kinds of impiety. (A violation of *beneficentia* as well as of *fides* is also clearly present in *fraus*.[32])

Moreover, Cicero tells us that *iustitia* and *beneficentia* are the constitutive parts of that law ('ea ratio') 'qua societas hominum inter ipsos et vitae quasi communitas continetur' (*Off.* 1.20). That is to say, these two virtues—one the faithful performance of one's duty towards those to whom one stands in some contractual or rational relationship, the other the exercise of charity in the various groups, natural and political, to which one belongs—are the principles of social intercourse and common life. Since Virgil seems clearly to have had both virtues in mind when he penned his description of the impious, who neither observe these duties nor perform these charities, one can safely say that Virgil's *pietas* contains the Ciceronian notions of *iustitia*

30. Viktor Pöschl, "Fides bei Virgil," in *Studi di filologia classica in onore di Giusto Monaco*, vol. 2 (Palermo, 1991) 897–900, asserts that the Romans understood *fides* as functioning both in sworn contracts and in relationships arising out of obligations owed because of *beneficia* conferred, such as guest-friendship (897f.) Cicero holds both types together in his definition cited above. Pöschl also argues that when Aeneas leaves Dido, he choses *pietas* over *fides* (899). The force of the present argument is to show that Aeneas' *pietas* is *fides*, and that its claims are fundamental and profound over against whatever claims Dido can put forward.

31. A brief analysis of 'friendship' in classical philosophy can be found in my "Was Bernard a Friend? A Question Revisited," *Analecta Cisterciensia* 53 (1997): 17–24.

32. Cf. Cicero, *Off.* 1.24: "Maximam autem partem ad iniuriam faciendam aggrediuntur, ut adipiscantur ea, quae concupiuerunt; in quo vitio latissime patet avaritia." R. Turcan, "La catabase orphique du papyrus de Bologne," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 150 (1956): 163–65, notices the theme of avarice in the Orphic *catabasis* in the Bologna papyrus which may have been a source for Virgil in this passage.

and *beneficentia.* In addition, because Cicero sees *communitas* as a principle of human action,[33] we can take the Virgilian term *pietas* and the Ciceronian term *communitas* as equivalent expressions of that virtue which keeps men faithful to the duties, and eager in the charities, which constitute the state.[34]

When we turn to Virgil's description of the good in Elysium, we do not find a mere catalogue of duties and charities piously performed, parallel to the list of duties and charities impiously abrogated which is found in 6.608–613. Rather, we find a description of the contributions made by pious men to society:

> hic manus ob patriam pugnando uulnera passi
> quique sacerdotes casti, dum uita manebat,
> quique pii uates et Phoebo digna locuti,
> inuentas aut qui uitam excoluere per artis
> quique sui memores aliquos fecere merendo. (6.660–664)

Thus, Virgil, by avoiding a simple conversion of the vices of the previous list into their corresponding virtues, affords us a more complete understanding of community. Piety is not now merely an abstract standard of judgement. Rather, it is seen in its effects. Through it men become patriotic soldiers, spotless priests, sagacious sages,[35] inspired artificers,[36] and magnanimous benefactors. Piety now is seen to be the ground of that spirit of reciprocity which makes men useful to society. Cicero expresses the same thought in philosophical terms:

33. Cicero, *Off.* 1.152: "Nam cum omnis honestas manet a partibus quattuor, quarum una sit cognitionis, altera communitatis, tertia magnanimitatis, quarta moderationis ...." Cicero refers to the terms *cognitio, communitas, magnanimitas,* and *moderatio* as the *partes* of *honestas.* (See also 1.15.) Elsewhere he calls the cardinal virtues the *loci* (1.18) and *genera* (1.61) of *honestas.* It is this *quasi* rhetorical notion of the cardinal virtues as *topoi* which allows Cicero to expand the virtues of *iustitia* and *beneficentia* into the broad category of *communitas.* It is the *topos* or *locus* in which one looks for *argumenta* concerning these virtues. Cf. Cicero, *Topica* 1.6–8.

34. Austin (193f., on line 608) notices Ovid, *Met.* 1.144ff., where the breaking of the vital bands of society is summarized in these words: 'victa iacet pietas' (line 149).

35. *Vates* can mean either 'poet' or 'prophet,' according to Austin (209, on line 662). L. Bieler, *History of Roman Literature,* condensed and adapted from the German by J. Wilson (New York, 1966) 18, refers to the ancient, perhaps legendary, "sage (*vates*)" Marcius.

36. Austin (209, on line 663) says: "*Artis* is used in a wide sense, of any 'art' that develops man's mind and adds to a civilized way of life ...." Austin also points out the similarity between this line and a line in the orphic *catabasis* of the Bologna Papyrus. But Conington (503, on line 663) observes that "The whole of the latter part of Lucr.'s 5th Book is in fact a commentary on this line."

> Sed quoniam, ut praeclare scriptum est a Platone, non nobis solum nati sumus ortusque nostri partem patria vindicate partem amici, atque, ut placet Stoicis, quae in terris gignantur, ad usum hominum omnia creari, homines autem hominum causa esse generatos, ut ipsi inter se aliis alii prodesse possent, in hoc naturam debemus ducem sequi, communes utilitates in medium afferre mutatione officiorum, dando accipiendo, tum artibus, tum opera, tum facultatibus devincire hominum inter homines societatem (*Off.* 1.22).

Thus, the principle here, as well in Virgil as in Cicero, is the truth of moral philosophy, that men should direct their arts, deeds, and resources to the maintenance and advancement of society, since no man has an absolute claim either upon himself or upon any part of the earth's bounty. Here, then, the content of the term *pietas* is made even more concrete. It is no longer simply *iustitia* and *beneficentia*, which are themselves abstract terms, even if the duties and relationships with which they are concerned are catalogued, as in 6.608–613. Rather, *iustitia* and *beneficentia* are present here as the ground of the reciprocal duties—'the interchange of proper functions'[37]—which are the essence of community life. Virgil's *pietas* once more, then, is seen to be almost convertible with Cicero's term *communitas.*[38]

If the denizens of Tartarus are deformed by vices which offend against *iustitia* and *beneficentia*, and if the inhabitants of Elysium are informed by the mutual devotion of their arts, deeds, and resources to the common good, a devotion, to be sure, based on *iustitia* and *beneficentia*, we should expect to find the souls in the neutral region to be not vicious, but somehow lacking in that usefulness to the community which characterizes the souls in Elysium. We should expect them to be somehow undetermined in this regard. An examination of the characters of Dido and Deiphobus, with whom Aeneas has his two principal conversations in this region, should show that this is so.

One hesitates, as a postmodern person, to find fault with Dido. One is much more likely to find fault with Aeneas. But such blame misses the plain sense of the text. Aeneas is blameworthy only so long as he delays with Dido: 'heu, regni rerumque oblite tuarum!' chides Mercury (4.267). He is praise-

37. 'Proper function' is the translation of *officium* employed by A.A. Long & D.N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 1 (1987; reprint, Cambridge, 1990) 360f., 362, 364, in their rendering of passages from Cicero. *Officium*, of course, turns the Greek kathekon.

38. It is interesting to note that Macrobius, *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis* 1.8.5–6, in *Macrobius*, vol. 2, Bibliotheca Teubneriana, ed. J. Willis (Leipzig, 1970) 37, seems, by his quotation of *Aeneid* 6.664 at the end of a list of the effects of the political virtues, to interpret Virgil's whole description of the effects of *pietas* (6.660–664) as political. "et sunt politicae hominis, qua sociale animal est. his boni viri rei publicae consulunt, urbes tuentur: his parentes venerantur, liberos amant, proximos diligunt: his civium salutem gubernant: his socios circumspecta providentia protegunt, iusta liberalitate devinciunt: hisque '... sui memores alios fecere merendo'." It is at least clear that he considers domestic relations 'political.'

worthy—*pius* (4.393)—when he does his duty, however much it may go against the direction of his passion ('Italiam non sponte sequor,' 4.361; 'inuitus, regina, tuo de litore cessi,' 6.460). He is praiseworthy, in other words, when he submits to his fate and remembers his duty to his descendants (4.223–237), when he subordinates his passion in justice and beneficence to the good of the community to which he belongs. Dido, on the other hand, persists in the forgetfulness of her duty which has marked her passion from the beginning:

> uritur infelix Dido totaque uagatur
> urbe furens ...
> non coeptae adsurgunt turres, non arma iuuentus
> exercet portusue aut propugnacula bello
> tuta parant: pendent opera interrupta minaeque
> murorum ingentes aequataque machina caelo (4.68f., 86–89)

Consequently, her death is of no use to the community to which she belongs and for which she is responsible: 'nec fato merita nec morte peribat, / sed misera ante diem subitoque accensa furore' (4.696f.)[39] Her death is only the result of her fury and not of her devotion to duty. It is not vicious, but neither is it useful to the state. It is not impious, but neither is it pious. It is essentially undetermined in character.

Deiphobus is found amongst the *bello clari* in the *ultima arua* (6.477f.) In his remarks on 6.660, Austin asks, "How were these heroes in Elysium differentiated from the *bello clari* in the 'neutral' region (478)?"[40] Yet the answer seems obvious. The heroes in Elysium received their wounds 'ob patriam pugnando' (6.660). Deiphobus, on the other hand, has received his horrible mutilations through the treachery of Helen at the hand of Menelaus in an act of personal vengeance, not in defense of the city: 'sed me fata mea et scelus exitiale Lacaenae/his mersere malis' (6.511f.) His death, therefore, though fated, was unbecoming a hero and useless to the state.[41] Thus, his valediction to Aeneas is perfectly worded: 'i decus, i, nostrum; melioribus

39. Monti (37–69) argues that Dido's tragedy is essentially political, not romantic. Susan F. Wiltshire, *Public and Private in Vergil's 'Aeneid'* (Amherst, 1989) 76f. & 113–15, sees her tragedy as a withdrawal from the public to the private realm.

40. Austin, 209, on line 660.

41. Cicero, *Off.* 1.93–94, equates *decorum* with *quod honestum.* There can be no moral dignity where there is no seemliness. Perhaps this is why Virgil lingers so over Deiphobus' wounds. They have no *decorum* and confer no *decus.* It is interesting to notice, too, that the 'genus antiquum Teucri' in Elysium are 'pulcherrima proles, / magnanimi heroes' (6.648f.) Deiphobus cannot belong to their number not only because he is disfigured, but also because the cause of his death was not the magnanimous service of the state. His death lacked usefulness, which is the particular mark of magnanimity, according to Cicero (*Off.* 1.66).

utere fatis' (6.546). Deiphobus recognizes in Aeneas the 'moral dignity' of which he and his companions have been deprived by their modes of death; and he prays that Aeneas may profit by the better fate assigned him by the divine,[42] a fate not to die unbecomingly and uselessly as Troy burned, but to plant a new Troy in Italy to the glory of the whole race. Thus, as with Dido's death, Deiphobus' is not vicious and impious. It is merely unbecoming and useless to the state. Consequently, Deiphobus too is seen to be a character who represents to Aeneas the morally undetermined state through which he himself must pass, if he is to perform the duties laid on him by fate.

Our examination of the conditions of the souls in the three regions of Hades has shown that these conditions correspond to the moral states figured by the Pythagorean *Υ*. The condition of the souls beside the undivided road of the neutral region can be understood as undetermined either by virtue or by vice. Their conditions are thus figured by the undetermined nature of the moral life of children and youths represented by the stem of the Pythagorean *Υ*. The vicious in Tartarus, which lies along the lefthand fork of the infernal road, are figured by the lefthand branch of the Samian letter, which represents the life of vice. The virtuous in Elysium, which lies along the righthand branch of the infernal road, are figured by the righthand branch of the letter, which represents the virtuous life.

Therefore, we have now shown four things about the figure of the Samian letter and *Aeneid* 6. First, the figure was a commonplace of the philosophical lore of Virgil's time. Secondly, Virgil's infernal road is shaped like the Pythagorean *Υ*. Thirdly, other sources for the image of the infernal crossroads known to Virgil and employed by him do not account as well as this figure for the emphasis which Virgil places on the souls in the neutral region. Fourthly, when the conditions of the souls in the various regions of Virgil's underworld are given philosophical content, the content in each case—deaths useless to the state, deaths harmful to the state, deaths beneficial to the state—is found to be figured by the corresponding part of the Pythagorean *Υ*: undetermined along the stem, vicious down to the left, virtuous up to the right.

But if the various regions of the underworld are thus united as representations of the three fundamental moral categories into which human souls

42. J. Henry, *Aeneidea, or Critical, Exegetical, and Aesthetical Remarks on the Aeneis*, vol. 3 (Dublin, 1889) 341, on line 6.546, remarks, "Uti is the exact opposite of pati—*turn to advantage, to account.* Compare Lucan, 2.131 ..." Thus, if it be admitted that Deiphobus recognizes Aeneas' escape from Troy as a better fate than his own (cf. Austin 180, line 546), then the valediction becomes meaningful. He is bidding Aeneas to preserve the moral dignity of Troy for all Trojans.

can fall, then the golden bough, the image of philosophic morality, which is borne by Aeneas[43] as a passport through the neutral region to the threshold of Elysium, can be understood more concretely. It must represent that virtue which the souls in Elysium possess and the souls in the neutral region lack: *pietas* understood as *communitas* in the Ciceronian sense. It must represent that *pietas* which Aeneas displayed both in his escape from Troy and in his flight from Carthage, that *pietas* which neither Deiphobus nor Dido were able to display because of the circumstances of their deaths.

It has become apparent, therefore, that the golden bough and the *Y* shape of the infernal road are complementary symbols,[44] the shape of the road serving to integrate the infernal regions around a single moral principle, *pietas* understood as *communitas*, and the bough serving as evidence of Aeneas' right to make his way through Hades to Elysium, where this moral principle is rewarded. This demonstrates that the meaning of *Aeneid* 6, while it may have many layers, just as the book has many literary sources, nevertheless must be interpreted at a fundamental level according to moral philosophy. Secondly, the demonstration that the Pythagorean letter is a basic symbol in this book also shows that the book must be seen as a consistent whole. The anterior regions of Hades are not inconsistent with Tartarus and Elysium, as some have argued.[45] They are of a piece with them and serve with them to bring into relief Aeneas' characteristic virtue, which will be the virtue also of Rome.[46]

43. R.J. Cormier, "Qui détient le rameau d'or devant Charon? (Énéide, VI.405–07)," *Rheinishes Museum für Philologie* 131 (1988): 151–56.

44. Wolfgang Schultz, "Herakles am Scheideweg," *Philologus* 68 (1909): 488–99, argues for an original connection between the *Lebensweg* and the *Lebensbaum* in the form of the upsilon. If this connection is true, it supplies further support for our argument that the images of the golden bough and the *Y*-shaped road through Hades are complementary.

45. See F. Solmsen, "The World of the Dead in Book 6 of the *Aeneid*," in Harrison, *Oxford Readings* 208–23, for views on the inconsistency of the infernal regions. Solmsen has shown that a tripartite division of the book, reflecting mythological, moral, and philosophical sources and concerns, will not work. He has not shown, in my opinion, how the various regions work together to give the book a consistent meaning. (Solmsen's paper was originally published in *Classical Philology* 67 (1972): 31–41.) Adamik (114) argues that the "Hauptthema" of Books 5–8 of the *Aeneid* is "Roms Sendung." In his view, the *Heldenschau* in Book 6 especially points this theme, while the other two principal motifs of Book 6—the golden bough, which symbolizes the "Dichotomie der individuellen Leiden und der historischen Ergebnisse" (110), and the freeing from the past which Aeneas achieves in his encounter with Dido and Deiphobus—prepare for the *Heldenschau*. Thus, Adamik sees Book 6 as a consistent whole, though in a quite different way from mine. He also sees the book as tripartite (see above, n. 24), but in a different way from the scholars refuted by Solmsen.

46. Cf. J.A. Doull, "The Christian Origins of Contemporary Institutions," *Dionysius* 6 (1982): 155–159. T.S. Eliot, "Vergil and the Christian World," *Sewanee Review* (1953): 1–14, is also instructive.