The Eschatology of Homer and Virgil

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Thesis

The ESCHATOLOGY OF HOMER AND VIRGIL

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A Study of the Eschatology of Homer's Odyssey, and of Virgil's Aeneid

I

Odyssey, Book XI.

The conception of the after life as given in Book XI of the Odyssey reflects the primitive ideas of the Greeks on that eternally mysterious subject. In the first place, the belief in a future life is taken as a matter of course by practically all nations as early as they begin to devote any thought to what comes after death, and the most natural place to locate the abode of the dead is below the earth where their bodies were buried.

Homer places the land of the dead beyond the great river Oceanus which was thought to surround the world of the living. Odysseus does not actually descend below the earth to visit the dead but summons them to him by a rite which is associated with the belief that they dwelt underground. The pit which he digs is symbolic of establishing communication with the souls in the underworld by providing for them an opening through which to come to the upper world. This rite dates far back in antiquity (1) and is said to have


"According to a rite borrowed by the Romans from the Etruscans, a pit was dug in the centre of the city, when the latter's foundations were laid, in order to make the Inferi communicate with the upper world."
Condition of the dead

been employed at the time of the founding of Rome.

The dead who come in answer to his summons conform to the early ideas of the condition of their existence in the underworld. They are reproductions, so far as appearance is concerned, of what they were in life, but they have no substance, and are unable even to converse with Odysseus until they have been permitted to take some of the blood of the sacrifice into their shadowy forms. As I have said, there is no mention of a descent below the earth by Odysseus, but rather of a gathering at the pit of the spirits from out of Erebus. And yet, after the conversation with Ajax, Odysseus seems to be looking upon Hades itself and sees Minos administering justice to the dead, Tityus, Tantalus and Sisyphus in torment, Orion hunting, and Hercules' phantom, terrible as in life.

"Now swift I waved my falchion o'er the blood; Back started the pale throngs, and trembling stood. Round the black trench the gore untasted flows, Till awful from the shades Tiresias rose."

(3) Same. L. 741-44.
"Now I the strength of Hercules behold, A towering spectre of gigantic mould, A shadowy form! for high in heaven's abodes Himself resides, a god among the gods."
Odysseus seems to be standing before the gateway of Hades as Hercules leaves him to go back in.

It may be that the pit is thought of as the gateway to Hades and that Odysseus is granted a glimpse of the judge and some of the noted dwellers there, but the reader is given only a very hazy conception of Homer's ideas of the after life. We can say that it was imagined to be spent in a distant land, outside the land of the living and probably below ground. The dead are simulacra or idola of their former bodies, a fact which seems to suggest the Neo-Pythagorean idea of the threefold combination of idolon, spirit and body.

The spirit, however, is not mentioned by Homer as distinct from the simulacrum, except in the case of Hercules whose shade is in Hades while he himself is with the gods at their eternal banquet. (3)

Neither is there any conception of judgment on a moral basis in the Homeric eschatology. As in the case of Hercules, who was rewarded as an exceptional mortal by being admitted to the ranks of the gods, likewise only noted sinners are portrayed as being punished.

To Sisyphus, Tantalus, and a few others, unusual torment is meted out, but for mankind in general there is no reward for merit or difference in degree of unhappiness such as are found in the later conceptions.
of the future life. The dead in Homer's underworld are without hope and are uniformly unhappy. Even such a hero as Achilles says that even to be ruler in the land of the dead is less to be desired than the lot of a poor man's slave on earth. Minos, sitting in judgment over the dead, seems to be a judge of the disputes among his subjects rather than of their merits and sins on earth.

In summary, then, of the eschatology of Book VI of the Odyssey, we may say that it does not contain the principles of moral judgment, retribution, purgatory, heaven or metempsychosis, which are found in the religion of later times and are definitely

(5) Rohde. Psyche, Page 238.

"Well meaning modern efforts to read a moral meaning into things Greek have sought to prove that the Greeks, too, had a genuine popular belief in a future judgment and recompense for the past deeds and character of the dead. Homer makes hardly the most distant allusion to such a belief."

(6) Odyssey. L. 595-600.

"Talk not of ruling in this dolorous gloom, Nor think vain words," he cried, "can ease my doom."

"Rather I'd choose laboriously to bear A weight of woes and breathe the vital air, A slave to some poor hind that toils for bread Than reign the sceptred monarch of the dead."
brought out by Virgil in the sixth book of the Aeneid, and that it presents no evidence of a belief in a spiritual immortality. Images rather than souls are the inhabitants of its underworld.

II
Aeneid, Book VI.

The eschatology of the sixth book of the Aeneid is much more interesting and suggestive than the primitive, bare outline that the Odyssey offers. Virgil's poetic conception of the underworld is put before us with all the clearness that is possible in the treatment of such a difficult subject.

Aeneas enters the underworld through the cave of the Sibyl at Cumae and traverses a gloomy district which constitutes a sort of antechamber (vestibulum) of the realm of Orcus and which is the abode of the abstract divinities: Grief, Conscience, Sickness, Old Age, Fear, Famine, Need, Sleep, and its twin, Death, War and the Furies. All these who bring death to mortals are placed nearest to the upper world before the entrance to Hades.

And in the same vestibulum are empty dreams and all the monsters of mythology. (8)

A road leads from here to the waters of Acheron, where the boatman Charon is ferrying the souls of the buried dead to their final resting places. By virtue of the golden bough, Aeneas is permitted to make the journey and is set down on the shore of Hades itself.

In this realm of the dead, Virgil pictures many divisions marked more by the nature of their inhabitants than by any great physical differences. First, there is the part devoted to those who died an untimely death: infants, persons unjustly executed, and suicides. Next is the dwelling place of those whose deaths were caused by unhappy love affairs, and then the road takes Aeneas and the Sibyl to the home allotted to dead warriors. Then the road breaks into the form of a Y, the left branch of which leads to Tartarus, where the wicked are confined, the right to the Elysian fields, the home of the blessed.

Aeneas is not permitted to enter Tartarus but he catches a glimpse of it, surrounded by a triple wall and a fiery stream. (4)

(8) Virgil. Book VI, line 282 sq.
(9) Virgil. Book VI, line 426 sq.
The Sibyl describes Tartarus extending twice as far into the depths of the darkness as Olympus is above the earth. Here are the usual stock examples of punishment that are found in Greek and Roman mythology and many others who are more definitely classed as moral offenders. About these, I shall speak again.

Arriving at Pluto's dwelling, Aeneas deposits the golden bough and continues on his way to the Elysian fields, the heaven of the underworld, a place more pleasant than the other parts through which the hero had come. Here there are pleasant groves and streams, a clear atmosphere and a sun and stars that belong to this heavenly land where the souls of the good dwell and enjoy the things that they loved in life.

I have not dwelt on the physical description of the underworld for two reasons: first, that it is a worn-out topic, and second, that Virgil, while describing it fairly minutely, leaves it, on the whole, surrounded by an air of mystery most appropriate to it, for he uses it only as a

(10) Virgil. Book VI, line 639 sq.
poetic conception which does not represent his own belief or that of any other enlightened man of his day.

I prefer to discuss the types of individuals pictured as occupying the various parts of the world of the dead in order to bring out the author's ideas on the subjects of judgment, retribution, purification, metempsychosis and heaven, and to contract Virgil's underworld with Homer's on that basis.

In general, we find that Virgil's eschatology the dead are judged on the basis of morality, a conception which was

(11) Franz Cumont. After Life in Roman Paganism. P. 83

"There are abundant texts to prove that from the end of the Republic this belief had lost its grip on many minds. Cicero claims that there was not an old woman left foolish enough to fear the deep dwellings of Orcus and the gloomy regions peopled by the livid dead. 'No one is childish enough,' Seneca repeats, 'to fear Cerberus and the phantoms which appear in the form of skeletons.'"
lacking in the Odyssey, or at most, barely hinted at by the mention of the infamous Tantalus, Sisyphus and Tityus.

In the Aeneid, we find the following great subdivisions of the dead: first, the unburied who must wander a hundred years in misery before they are allowed to cross the Styx and reach their final resting place. This idea was such a deeply ingrained part of the conventional religion of the Romans that we should be surprised not to find it in the Aeneid. It plays no important part in the general plan of the sixth book except to introduce a note of pathos and provide, in the person of Palinurus, a parallel for Elpenor in the Odyssey.

(12) FranzCumont. After Life in Roman Paganism. P. 76

"This judging of the dead is foreign to Homeric poetry: the idea of it was perhaps borrowed by Greece from Egypt, but from ancient Orphism onward it was an essential element of infernal eschatology."


"Such a future world could have no moral or other value; it could only hang over men as a gloomy prospect of that which awaited them when the suns of this world had forever set."
The untimely dead are grouped by themselves in recognition of the fact that they deserve different treatment from that accorded to those who had opportunity to live out the full span of their lives. While the mourning fields and the abode of famous warriors are usually considered as separate divisions, it seems more logical to consider them as grouped also with the untimely dead who are situated neither in Tartarus nor Elysium and on whom no final judgment has been given. The fork of the road that lies beyond the district of the untimely dead is symbolic of the parting of the ways which will take place when the time arrives for these who died before their

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(14) Virgil. Book VI, lines 540-543.

"Hic locus est, partis ubi se via findit in ambas:
dextera quae Ditis magni sub moenia tendit, hac iter Elysium nobis; at laeva malorum exercet peonas, et ad impia Tartara mittit."
day to undergo the final judgment. This symbol of the forked road is found in many Pythagorean inscriptions and adds to the many suggestions of Pythagorism that we find in the sixth book.

This definite parting of the ways is added proof of the theory that all those souls in the districts outside Tartarus and the Elysian fields are simply in temporary abodes assigned to them while they await the time set for their final judgment.

The moral basis of this judgment is brought out very clearly by Virgil. The first reference to it is where Minos is described as questioning the souls as to their lives and their misdeeds before alloting to

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"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 immoral life to Hades.

(16) Virgil. Aeneid VI, 431 sq.

Ne nec vero hae sine sorte datae, sine iudice, sedes; quaesitor Minos urnam movet; ille silentum conciliumque vocat, vitasque et crimina discit.
them their resting places. But, although Minos questions the dead as to their crimes on earth, it appears that his sole task is the allotment of the homes of the dead who cross the Styx.

Although it is not expressly stated that he judges and send on to Tartarus or to Elysium those who have merited those fates, this is probably a part of his duty. But the actual punishment of moral offenders is under the jurisdiction of Rhadamanthus who compels the wicked in Tartarus to confess their sins and orders their punishment.

There are all kinds of sinners here, called in general, those who failed in life to make atonement for their crimes. First mentioned are the stock characters of Tartarus, the Titans, Otus and Ephialtes, Salmoneus, Tityos, Ixion and Pirithous, all of whom were guilty of offense to the gods themselves.

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(17) Aeneid. Book VI, line 566-569.

Gnosius haec Rhadamanthus habet durrissima regna castigatque auditque dolos subigitque fateri, quae quis apud superos, furto laetatus inani, distulit in seram commissa piacula mortem.


(19) Same. Line 617. "Sedet aeternumque sedebit infelix Theseus;"
While these may be considered as allegorical representations of presumption, pride, passion and other sins, the next group is more interesting. It does not deal with mythological figures but with the average man and not with unusual and enormous sins against the gods themselves, but with the common sins of man against his fellow man.

In the list are those who have failed in their love for their brothers or in respect for their parents, those who practised fraud upon a client, misers, adulterers, revolutionists, those guilty of treason, perversion of justice and incest. They are all undergoing torment, probably for eternity, since Theseus' punishment is expressly stated as everlasting.

It is very obvious from this description of hell that Virgil is following the Orphic idea of retribution for moral offenses during life.


Orphism conceived the suffering undergone beyond the tomb as an expiation. The evil souls, whose ways nothing could mend, were immured forever in the underground prison, where they became the companions of the great criminals whom mythology plunged in Tartarus.
Heaven

a. Its pleasures

b. Classes of inhabitants

As I have said before, this idea is almost entirely lacking in the Odyssey.

Virgil's picture of Heaven is the most interesting part of the whole underworld description. Here in the fields of Elysium the good pursue the mode of life which pleased them most when they were on earth enjoying their banquets, athletics, song, arms, and horses. A few ancient heroes of early Trojan days are mentioned, as might be expected but the other inhabitants of heaven are more interesting to us. Again he mentions the classes of ordinary mortals who have deserved reward. There are the souls of those who performed in proper fashion their duties as priests, true prophets and real poets, philosophers and those who did good to their fellow men.

(20 cont.) This capital distinction between the two classes of the inhabitants of hell, those condemned for a time and those condemned in perpetuity, was transmitted down to Virgil and appears distinctly in the Aeneid.

This last classification, which is decidedly Stoic, really includes all the others and emphasizes again the moral basis upon which Virgil's eschatology is founded. He brings in also the principle of reincarnation which is found in the Orphic and Pythagorean and Platonic beliefs.

Anchises points out to Aeneas a host of souls hovering near the river Lethe, souls to whom new bodies are to be given after they shall have drunk the waters of forgetfulness.

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"Through the same Orphic channels, probably, the idea of metempsychosis, at least in a religious connection was introduced into Greece."


"Pythagoras taught that the soul, entering the round of necessity, is bound, now in one kind of living creatures, now in another."

(24) Same. Page 34.

"The eschatology of Plato is thus a combination of metempsychosis with retribution in heaven and hell."
This rebirth takes place 1000 years after the purification of the soul has been completed.

He then explains the doctrine of the "anima mundi," the spirit pervading everything. This is a fiery breath of heavenly origin confined within the body which the Neo-Pythagoreans designate as the tomb of the soul.

The principle of this all-pervading spirit of life is Stoic, but the principle of reincarnation belongs rather to the Orphic and Pythagorean beliefs.

(25) Aeneid, VI, line 748.

Has omnis, ubi mille rotam volvere per annos,
Lethaeum ad fluvium deus evocat agmine magno,


Always generation is regarded (by the Neo-Pythagoreans) as a fall and a danger for the soul. Enclosed in the body as in a tomb, it runs the risk of corruption, even of perishing.

(27) Wenley. Stoicism, Page 82.

This original substance blazes up in all things, exciting them, so to speak. Yet, although it is sometimes called an ever-living fire, as with Heracleitus, we must take this metaphorically and think rather in terms
Philosophic ideas suggested by doctrine of rebirth

The cleansing process through which these souls must pass before rebirth is described by Anchises as a purification by air, fire or water. Here we have a variation from the ideas of the Neo-Pythagoreans, who held that the only penalty for the sinning soul was metempsychosis which forced it to reincarnate itself in a fleshly prison.

Orphics held that the reincarnation itself was for the purpose of expiation, while Virgil has the reincarnation follow the purification as though it were a favor to be reborn. And yet, he has Aeneas ask Anchises whether any souls have the mad desire to return to their cumbersome bodies.

This purification by air, fire or water seems to suggest the belief of the Pythagoreans and Stoics, who said that the souls of the dead went through the purification of the air to dwell in the moon, and of the Neo-Pythagoreans, who also believed in the (27 cont.) of a tenuous breath, something elemental but not an element, something sublimated but not immaterial.

(28) Aeneid VI, 740.


(30) Aeneid VI. Lines 719-721.
passage through the zones but set the sun as the ultimate home of the souls of the good and considered the moon as the dwelling place of the idolon. These zones through which the soul ascends are air, water, and fire, the zone nearest the earth is air, the zone next higher is a watery reservoir, and the fiery zone which lights the heavenly bodies is the third.


"The Pythagoreans held that souls, when they had been purified by air, went to dwell in the moon. To the question, "What are the Isles of the Blessed?" the orthodox doctrine of the sect answered, "The sun and the moon."

Same. Page 25.

"The shade remained in the moon or was dissolved there, and pure reason rose to the sun whence it came forth, or even reached the summit of the heavens where reigned the Most High."


"The souls must blaze a path through these obstacles. After being tossed and blown about by the winds, they were drenched by rain and plunged into the
Stages of eschatological belief represented in the Aeneid.

Virgil's eschatology shows influence of every age and of many religious schools. The Epicurean alone seems to have no part in its composition.

The physical underworld is described very much as the very earliest Romans would have pictured it,—beneath the earth and peopled with empty shades, with the rivers Styx and Phlegethon and all the traditional features of the popular conception of Hades.

But we can say almost with certainty that Virgil did not believe all this story and, therefore, he used it either as allegory or as conventional poetic material. The search for allegory is always apt to bring forth some fruit, even when the poet had no thought of being allegorical.

But it is probably safe to say that the Styx, and Phlegethon, Elysium and Tartarus and the abode of the untimely dead are allegorical representations of the course and destination of the soul after death, for this allegory had been used before to reconcile the Orphic teachings with the traditional story of the after life.

(32 cont.) gulf of the upper waters. They reached at last the fires of heaven, of which the heat scorched them."
The Styx was said to represent our atmosphere through which the un­timely dead and the unburied might not pass until their proper time arrived and in which the wicked were compelled to remain and await rebirth.

Phlegethon was taken by the Greeks as symbolic of the fiery zone in which the heavenly bodies move, and through which the soul passes on its way to the moon or the sun.

There is very little, however, in the description of the Elysian fields to render it allegorical of the heaven of the Orphics and Neo-Pythagoreans. If it suggests anything it seems rather to be that old belief that the world of the dead was on the under side of our world and had a sky, sun and moon of its own.

"This idea was borrowed by the Greeks of the Alexandrian age from the astral theology of the Semitic peoples. According to this theology the world is divided into two halves by the line of the horizon; the upper hemisphere is the domain of the living and the higher gods, the lower that of the dead and the infernal gods." 

The physical description of the underworld, therefore, is representative of a rather primitive eschatology if it is taken literally, and suggests, if we use our imagination, the doctrines of the Orphics and Neo-Pythagoreans. We are led to look for some sort of symbolism in this description by our certainty that no educated man of Virgil's day believed in an actual underworld.

The traces of the beliefs of different periods which can be discerned in the physical description are evident also in the other principal phases of eschatological beliefs; namely, punishment and reward in the hereafter.

Virgil's treatment of the subject of punishment reflects the progress of thought on that subject from very earliest times up to the present. From time immemorial death has been looked on with dread by mankind and in earliest times the lot of the dead was regarded as most unhappy, regardless of their merits while on earth.

This point is clearly brought out by Achille's complaint in Homer's story of the underworld and by the early Roman attitude toward the dead which seems to
indicate that the best that could be hoped for was a sort of passive peace or "quies" after death to be secured by the performance of the proper burial rites and regular sacrifices for the spirit of the departed.

This thought—that death is a punishment for all—seems to pervade Virgil's conception of the underworld. The heroes of the Trojan and Theban (34) wars, and Dido, who might be expected to be happy to some degree, are pictured as leading a sad existence, and even the inhabitants of the Elysian fields do not impress us as being happy in a positive way.

Following the earliest conception of death bringing punishment to all alike came the natural thought that the wicked should receive worse punishment than the good. This trend of thought led to the invention of the conventional characters, the Titans, Ixion, Sisyphus and others whom Virgil includes in his Tartarus.

This idea developed later and was made to apply to all mortals and to

(34) Aeneid VI, lines 430-435.
include offenses against society rather than merely against the personal comfort of the gods themselves.

The list of moral offenders punished in Hades makes it very plain to us that Virgil is influenced at this point by the more modern ideas of eschatology taught by most of the philosophies of his time, although the Orphic idea of reincarnation as a punishment does not seem to have found favor with him.

Reward for merit would seem to be the next logical thought to that of punishment for wrong doing. It was very difficult for man in the early stages of thought to see anything desirable in death. The earliest conception of reward and the most natural was to imagine it to be a continuance of the sort of life that the soul enjoyed on earth. And in accordance with this idea the dead were buried with their weapons, food and various other things that might be of use in their future existence.

b. Reincarnation

This primitive idea is evidenced by the belief of the early American Indians in a happy hunting ground and by the discovery in ancient tombs of articles intended for the use of the dead. This type of reward by a continuance of earthly pleasures is most primitive and indicates a low stage of philosophical thought, and yet we find it serving as the symbol of heaven in Virgil's eschatology where the blessed souls in Elysium are described as having the same pleasures in death that they had in life. (36)

A later conception of reward for merit and one which seems to be a very natural one is reincarnation. This belief, too, occurs early in the process of theorizing on the future life and is found in the religions of even the most uncivilized races over the whole world. It is found in the beliefs of the Hindus and the Greeks and forms a part of the doctrine of the Orphics, Neo-Pythagoreans, and Platonists. 

(36) Aeneid VI, lines 653-5.

Quae gratia currum
armorumque fuit vivis, quae cura nitentis
pascere equos, eadem sequitur tellure repostos.
But all these groups in Virgil's time had ceased to consider reincarnation as anything but a punishment. The god of the Hindu theism was thought to release from the penalty of reincarnation those who turn to him in faith and love and all the Greek philosophers who believed in it at all looked upon reincarnation as a form of punishment.

Pindar is quoted as saying, "Those who thrice in both states have persevered to keep the soul free from evils traverse the way of Zeus to the towers of Kronos, the island of the blest, whose delights are poetically described." Plato speaks of a deliverance after ten reincarnations at intervals of one thousand years.

The Orphics believed that by their rites they freed the soul from the cycle of rebirth and restored it to heaven forever.

(38) Same. P. 27.
"Rebirth, as well as the first embodiment, was expiatory."
(39) Same. P. 29.
(40) Franz Cumont. After Life in Roman Paganism. P. 188.
The mysteries of Eleusis had this purpose also.

"and the initiated underwent an emotional experience which so confirmed their intuitional belief in immortality that they were confident of peace and happiness in this life and of blessedness in the life to come." (41)

Sophocles says, "Thrice blessed are they who have seen these rites and then go to the house of Hades, for they alone have life there, but all others have only woe." (42)

Pindar speaks also of them as follows: "Happy he who has seen these things and then goes beneath the earth, for he knows the end of life and its Zeus-given beginning." (43)

But Virgil seems to treat re-incarnation according to the primitive view as a sort of reward given to souls of the blessed one thousand years after passing through the purification of air, fire or water in Elysium.

(43) Same. Page 32.
If this is so, then Elysium is not a permanent heaven but merely a purgatory and temporary resting place for the good whose final reward is rebirth.

To make the discussion clearer, I shall quote the passage in which Anchises tells Aeneas of rebirth. He has told of the different methods of purification through which the souls pass and continues:

"Exinde per amplum mittimur Elysium, et pauci laeta arva tenemus, donec longa dies, perfecto temporis orbe concretam exemit labem, purumque relinquit aetherium sensum atque aurai simplicis ignem. Has omnis, ubi mille rotam volvere per annos, Lethaeum ad fluvium deus evocat agmine magno, scilicet inmemores supera ut convexa revisant, rursus et incipient in corpora velle reverti."

The words "has omnis" are taken by some to mean all the souls in Elysium except Anchises and a small number who dwell there forever. This interpretation is based on the following translation of lines 743-4:

"Through broad Elysium we are sent and remain, a few of us, in the joyous fields."

(44) Aeneid VI, lines 743-751.
If this translation be accepted, the words "has omnis" would refer to all the souls except the few. It seems to me, however, that this translation is somewhat strained and that a more natural one would be, "Through broad Elysium we are sent and remain, a small company, in the joyous fields."

We should have to understand that the group is called small as compared with the whole number of the dead, but the whole group is spoken of as being destined for rebirth. Still, it is hard to explain why Anchises uses the words "has omnis" instead of "nos omnis" if he intends to include himself in the category of those to be reborn. The passage may be taken either way, but I prefer to think that the more natural translation is the one which does not exclude any of the souls in Elysium from rebirth.

An added indication that reincarnation is considered a reward is the wording of Anchises' answer to Aeneas when he tells of the souls hovering about the
river Lethe, "Animae quibus altera fato corpora debentur," - "souls to whom new bodies are owed (or fated)."

The use of the verb "debeo" here does not definitely convey the impression of a punishment due to the souls that are to be reincarnated but rather has the connotation of a reward to be paid to them.

Then too we have the description of the future kings and heroes of Rome who are awaiting their turn to ascend to earth as mortals.

It would not be in keeping with the complimentary tone of the Aeneid to consider that Augustus, Marcellus, Romulus, Numa and all the other heroes of Rome's history are the reincarnations of souls that came again on earth as a punishment for a previous life that was not all it should have been.

All this seems to indicate that Virgil was following the very ancient idea of reincarnation as a reward, since he draws that sort of picture of heaven, but

(45) Aeneid VI, lines 713.
we must consider again the words of Aeneas as he hears of this rebirth:
"O, Father, must we believe that any of these souls in heaven are going from here to be given again to their deadening bodies? Why have these poor souls so mad a desire for life?"

Obviously this is Virgil's own sentiment which is voiced here by Aeneas, and in spite of his apparent treatment of reincarnation as a reward, it is plain to see that his real belief is that it is not by any means a thing to be desired or looked forward to, and that he is in sympathy on this point, as on many others, with Orphism, Platonism, Neo-Pythagorism and other similar philosophies, which, as I have already said, looked forward with hope to a release from reincarnation and eternal happiness in heaven.

But even though we recognize Virgil's more advanced ideas on reincarnation and conclude that he does not consider it in the light of a reward, we must admit that he does not put before us a very attractive picture of what he really conceives heaven to be like. He describes, as I have said

(46) Aeneid VI, lines 719-721.
before, a rather pleasant land whose occupants are pictured as enjoying the same pleasures they enjoyed on earth.

This is a somewhat disappointing description of heaven and certainly does not present to us Virgil's own ideal. He does suggest, however, some other ideals when he speaks of the cleansing of the soul and its return to a condition of pure ethereal fire.

This thought is found in the Neo-Pythagorean, Pythagorean, Orphic and some Stoic teachings, which picture the soul as ascending after death through the different zones that lie above this earth to a final resting place upon the moon or the sun. But most of the descriptions of heavenly delights are indefinite and vague. Pindar speaks of the delights of heaven which are poetically described; the mysteries speak of the blessed happiness of the Zeus-given beginnings of

(47) Aeneid VI, lines 745-747.

"Till time's long lapse a perfect orb fulfills,
And takes all taint away, restoring so
The pure, ethereal soul's first virgin fire."
life and of the happiness of those who
find their way to the islands of the
blest and the towers of Kronos.

Plato in the Phaedo, speaks thus of
heaven, "And of these, all who have duly
purified themselves by philosophy live
henceforth altogether without bodies, and
pass to still more beautiful abodes which
it is not easy to describe, nor have we
time enough."

He is more explicit, however, in the
description of the pleasure of the dead
which we read in the Apology.

Socrates is described as declaring that
he would be willing to die many times for
the favor of being able to converse with
the great poets, heroes and philosophers
who had gone before him, and he pronounces
it immeasurable happiness to be allowed to
associate and converse with such spirits as
Orpheus, Homer, Hesiod, Odysseus and count-
less others.

(48) Plato, Phaedo, 62 C. Translation
of H.N. Fowler, Heinemann, 1923.

(49) Plato, Apology, 41. Translation of
H.N. Fowler, Heinemann, 1923
Cicero gives us a description of heaven which follows along this same line and carries an appeal to the intellect rather than to the senses. He describes heaven as that place in the universe to which the soul ascends in obedience to the physical laws that cause a fiery vapor to rise until it has reached the level of substances like itself.

He says that, in that place, the soul with all its senses freed from the bodily prison will devote itself entirely and without hindrance to contemplation and investigation and that the place itself, since there is within us all a certain insatiable longing for the truth, will give us both the opportunity of learning it and an ever growing desire to learn.

This is the sort of heaven that we should expect to find Virgil describing. No doubt, it was some such conception as this that appealed to him most, but there is no suggestion in the Aeneid of any but the conventional, old-fashioned heaven. But since the Aeneid is an epic poem and not a philosophical treatise it is not to be expected that the technical discussion of

(50) Cicero, Tusculan Disputations, 1; 43; 44. Rockwood, Ginn & Co., 1903.
Virgil's own belief probably like Plato's and Cicero's

these points should be found in it to any great extent, and we are often obliged to surmise the poet's real thoughts with respect to them.

And so, bearing in mind the character of the author, we may well suppose that when he tells of the love of weapons and chariots and horses that the dead still have, he has in mind the other interests that men have; and, though he does not expressly state it, he probably means to imply that the man whose main interests on earth were the pursuit of knowledge and the study of philosophy will continue to have those interests and devote his soul entirely to them.

We find in the Georgics a passage which shows clearly that Virgil's idea of happiness lay in knowledge, and which makes it easier to assume that his real idea of heaven was, in all probability, something like that expressed by Plato and Cicero.

Some students of Virgil look upon Book VI as a symbol of the Eleusinian and other mysteries that were current in Rome in Virgil's day. C. H. Moore makes the

(51) Virgil. Georgics II, 490.

"Felix, qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas."
The Eleusinian Mysteries

statement that Book VI is the record of an initiation and gives an account of a mystic initiation as recorded by Apuleius in which he puts these words into the mouth of Lucius, who is supposed to have been initiated into the mysteries of Isis: "I approached the bounds of death; I trod the threshold of Proserpina; I was carried through all the elements and was carried again to the upper air. At the dead of night I saw the sun glowing with a brilliant light. The gods of heaven and hell I approached in very person and worshipped face to face."

This similarity between the ritual of the mysteries and the journey of Aeneas, pointed out by Warde Fowler and C. H. Moore, was seen many years before by Sainte Croix.

At this point it might be profitable to discuss that part of the ritual of the Eleusinian mysteries which resembles the journey of Aeneas through the underworld. The ritual was built around the story of Ceres and Proserpine and had as its main theme the marriage of Proserpine and Pluto. But since the scene was laid in the underworld, it was necessary to picture its scenes realistically to make the ceremony, or drama, more impressive.


The celebration of the greater mysteries began on the 15th of September and ended on the 23rd. The time up to the twenty-first was taken up by the journey from Athens to Eleusis and the various rites and purifications in preparation for the great ceremony which took place on that night.

"After sunset began the twenty-first day, and at night the liturgical drama of Demeter and Persephone was enacted in the Telesterion, constituting initiation into the first degree. Next night, the twenty-second, was devoted to the liturgical drama of Zeus and Demeter, in which the hierophant and the priestess figured in the sacred marriage. Only the epoptae (those fully initiated) were present and this second degree was mainly concerned with (56) Dionysos."

There are different opinions on what the ritual of the mysteries might have been. (59) Angus, in the "Mystery Religions and Christianity" makes the claim that the effect of the mysteries was brought about subjectively rather than objectively, but qualifies it by stating that the objective cannot be lightly eliminated.

(56) Glasse. P. 43
Glasse claims that in this drama of the underworld there was no pretended revelation of the gods (p. 43) but says, (p. 46, 47), "There was in the Telesterion in all likelihood, a representation of the lower world, and as the hierophant conducted the mystae, he gave them some short account of the incidents in their pilgrimage. Hades would move before them in a series of pictures or tableaux, and each scene would bring the necessary explanations how to escape from the way of the profane, with its mud and gloom in order to reach the fair fields of paradise."

Sainte Croix treats the subject of the mysteries much more fully, and, basing his statements on selections from the texts of many authors of antiquity, he describes the ritual as he conceives it to have been.

(57) In his description he tells us that the preliminaries to the great mysteries took place outside the temple. The candidates, in the darkness of the night and plunged in terror, waited for the doors to open. "The temple doors fly open," says Claudian, "the thunder rolls, a dazzling light announces the presence of the god;"

(57) Sainte Croix. P. 348-354.
a dull rumbling is heard beneath the earth; the temple of the sons of Cecrops groans; Eleusis raises its sacred torches; the serpents of Triptolemus hiss; in the distance is seen Hecate, etc." He quotes Dion Chrysostom as saying that "his senses were affected alternately by light and darkness; he was hardly able to take in the numberless sights that were presented to his gaze, hideous dogs and other forms designed to inspire fear and rendered more terrible by the flashes of lightning and the roll of thunder.

Sainte Croix mentions also (P. 353) Plutarch's comparison of the state of mind of an initiate to that of a dying man and gives an elaborate description of the ecstasies and terrors through which he passes.

It is generally agreed that this representation of Hades took place in a cave dug beneath the temple, or at any rate in a lower part of the temple.

Sainte Croix claims that this ceremony was done most realistically and quotes from one of the dialogues of Lucian where he introduces a cobbler who is embarking for the journey across the Styx. He holds out his hand to a cynic and says
to him, "Tell me, for you have been initiated into the mysteries of Eleusis, don't you find that everything here resembles them very much?" The cynic replies, "You are right."

Sainte Croix states (P. 355) that Virgil employs the initiation ceremonies in order to make them the subject of an episode of his poem. He has embellished them and rendered them interesting for the Romans, but had no intention of exposing the secrets of the mysteries.

The work of Sainte Croix on the subject of the mysteries is so thorough and scholarly that his conclusions are entitled to the highest respect. It would appear from his quotations that the ritual of the mysteries included, in addition to the sacred marriage of Pluto and Proserpine, a most vivid representation of all the wonders of the world to come, and that the effectiveness and realism of the scenes that he describes must have been attained by means of elaborate systems of scenery and lighting effects.

The same question then arises which is characteristic of the whole book—-to what extent may we believe that Virgil had these things in mind when he wrote his poem?
Of course, as I have said, the resemblance to the ritual of some of the mysteries is striking, but, on the other hand, we realize that the Aeneid runs parallel to the Iliad and Odyssey in a great many ways and that a descent to the underworld became a traditional part of epic after Homer. It could, therefore, very well have been included as a conventional feature of epic form without any underlying significance; but the presence of other modern philosophic ideas throughout the book make it at least a possibility that the author had in mind an initiation when he told of the journey through the underworld.

C. H. Moore, speaking of the passage where Anchises describes the cleansing and rebirth of the souls in Elysium, says, "These words express the commingled belief of Orphic, Pythagorean, Platonist and Stoic."

How extensively such beliefs were held by Virgil's contemporaries we cannot say with accuracy, but certain it is that this book and this passage would never have made the religious appeal which they made in antiquity, if they had not corresponded to widespread convictions."

SUMMARY

I have attempted, in this paper, to analyze and compare the poetic conceptions of the after life that Homer and Virgil have given to us.

The analysis of Homer's version is not difficult. In the first place, his description is so very vague that we get very little idea of what he conceived the physical form of Hades to be like. And secondly, he says very little about the life of the shades in Hades. Their only comment on their lot is in the form of a lament over the hardship and the misery of being dead.

Homer is obviously not interested in laying before us any philosophic, or eschatological principles. Poetry is his interest and poetic effect is the only one for which he strives.

What he tells us, therefore, we may take as having no hidden significance from the point of view of philosophy or religion. This is the impression which we receive on reading book eleven of the Odyssey, and it seems to be the accepted view of scholars that the impression is a true one.

Book VI of the Aeneid, on the contrary, is a never-ending source of discussion and dispute on these points.

Virgil does display in Book VI an interest in philosophy and religion, by the very fact of the completeness and detail with which he treats the subject of the underworld itself and the inhabitants of it. This method of treatment is enough
SUMMARY (Cont.)

to show us that his interests turned to the philosophic side of his subject as well as to the poetic, and leads us to assume that there are, in many of his expressions, underlying meanings which are clothed in poetic, conventional guise in an effort to maintain the balance between poetry and philosophy and prevent the book from appearing too didactic.

The difficulty which confronts us, therefore, throughout the study of Book VI is how to determine when a statement is to be taken at face value and when it may be assumed to have a hidden significance.

While there are many philosophic beliefs plainly set forth in this book, Virgil has succeeded so admirably in maintaining the balance between poetry and didacticism, that there are many points on which there still is doubt as to his real meaning. In a way which is both wise and poetic, he leaves the reader of Book VI with a vague and shadowy impression of the future life.

I feel that to attempt to settle definitely Virgil's beliefs about the next life would be a presumptuous effort to clarify what, in all probability, was not clear even in the poet's own mind.

If my discussion of the questions of Virgil's eschatology seems to arrive at no definite conclusions, it is because I feel that there are too many contradictory ideas involved for this to be a possibility.
Throughout the book there are thoughts and expressions which might be interpreted as referring to all sorts of beliefs in matters of religion, philosophy and natural science. Many of these I have mentioned at different points in the discussion, but there are a few main points, concerning which there can be no doubt and which form the basis of Virgil's philosophy. These are the principles of retribution, immortality and metempsychosis.

These three principles are enough to render the book a philosophic work, and make it distinctly different in tone from Homer's story of the journey of Odysseus to the underworld, which is a purely poetic conception without the philosophic interest.

Of these three principles the one which is most plainly laid down in the Aeneid is retribution, or reward and punishment on the basis of morality.

All other philosophic questions are subordinate to this one. This is the great point of difference between the Epicurean school and all the others of Virgil's time.

If this principle is granted, all other considerations, such as the nature of the reward or punishment, the location and nature of the places where they are meted out, their duration, and all similar questions are merely elaboration of the basic thought of retribution.
This is the idea that Virgil brings out plainly through the whole book. The subordinate ideas, the details of the operation of this general principle of retribution, were as mysterious to Virgil as they are to us today and he conveys to us that air of mystery by refusing to go into minute detail in his portrayal of them.

It is interesting and tempting to try to imagine what he really believed about the details of the administration of justice in the world to come, about where and what we shall be, but the attempt to find out is more than likely to result in a wrong conception of the poet's mind and failure to appreciate his book as a poem.
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