13. Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 441.

14. Pound considers these two groups of cantos, composed largely through the selection of historical materials, representing some of the best of his works. But the critical evaluations vary. Leon Surette, for instance, states that he "can think of no possible defense for the rhetoric and organization of these selections," and questions, "What has China to do with this epic of the West?" See *A Light from Eleusis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 147.

15. Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 434.

16. John J. Nolde, *Blossoms from the East: the China Cantos of Ezra Pound* (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1984), p. 16.

17. Akiko Miyake says, "Yong Tching did nothing to deserve Pound's suggestion that his work had been inherited by John Adams, since the latter was born in 1735, the year of Yong Tching's death" (p. 193). But, for Pound, the timing is important. As is discussed in this article, Pound thinks that John Adams has defended law and tradition exactly as Yong Tching did.

18. Ezra Pound, *Selected Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907–1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (New York: New Directions, 1971), p. 210.

19. See Note 4.

20. Pound's lines are based on Joseph-Anne-Marie de Moyriac de Maillia's *Historire Générale de la Chine*, in which the Emperor says, "You upset the customs of the empire, you disturb the tranquility of families, you stir up trouble between father and son." See John J Nolde's *Blossoms from the East: the China Cantos of Ezra Pound*, p. 401.

21. For all Pound's intent of representing history accurately, each representation is inevitably an interpretation, and an act of making history. Alan Durant observes, "What makes *The Cantos* significant is the way in which the poem exemplifies dimensions of a writing of the self into available positions to be occupied in the configurations of a past, a language, and a present society." See "The Language of History in the Cantos" in *Ezra Pound and History*, ed. Marianne Korn (Orono: The National Poetry Foundation, 1985), p. 34.

22. The original statement, according to Carroll F. Terrell, comes from John Adams's letter to B. Bush, in which Adams says: "I am for a balance between the legislative and executive powers" (*Companion*, p. 347).

WILLIAM FRANKE

VIRGIL, HISTORY, AND PROPHECY

VIRGIL HAS BEEN VERY WIDELY acclaimed as a prophet, but the grounds of this acclaim have shifted in the course of history. From ancient and especially from medieval times, this recognition was traditionally accorded him first and foremost, if not exclusively, on the basis of a passage from the Fourth Eclogue celebrating the birth of a new progeny ("progenies nova") from heaven and the consequent renewal of the world.[1] This passage lent itself to Christian messianic interpretations, thanks especially to its reference to a Virgin ushering in a return of the golden age of peace on earth ("iam redit et virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna"). Historical research reveals Virgil to have, in all probability, intended in this text to hyperbolically hail the birth of a son to a particular Roman consul.[2] Yet, even apart from historical intentions and inevitable doubts about them, to pin Virgil's claim to being a prophet to this text is to miss the momentous discovery that makes him truly a prophet in a way unprecedented in pagan antiquity.

Modern treatments of Virgil as prophet have not remained beholden to this Christian medieval framework and have opened suggestive avenues for more accurate elucidation of Virgilian prophecy, particularly in terms of its own historical context and the role of the Latin *vates* in Imperial Rome.[3] What I wish to propose, however, is not a more accurately historicized understanding of prophecy in Virgil, but rather a philosophical interpretation of the conception of history as prophetic that is realized in the text of the *Aeneid*. This is actually analogous to the medieval Christian misprision of Virgil in that it focusses on Virgil's potential significance in a new and different historical context, our own. The justification for this approach lies in the fact that historical research into prophecy during the Augustan Empire cannot exhaustively

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explain the significance of Virgil's text in its astonishing creation of an original conception of history as prophetic, nor in its potential to illuminate the nature of prophecy as it may concern us today. Study of Virgil can help make the concept of prophecy vital to reflection on history and the structure of time in our own post-Heideggerian era.

The question of whether Virgil foresaw the birth of Christ concerns prophecy only in the relatively banal sense of being able to foretell the future. In this, Virgil would be no different from myriad seers and divines and sorcerers with which the ancient world was rife. But the originality of Virgil, his particular claim to being an authentic prophet rather than simply, like many other major Roman authors, to have incorporated prophetic *topoi* into his works rests on his surpassing prophecy in precisely this sense. It is Virgil's single-handed invention, as if out of nowhere, of a genuinely prophetic mode of understanding history that is the seeming miracle on which his justly deserved fame as a prophetic poet has every right to rest.

Whereas the certainly rather forced Christian interpretation of the Fourth Eclogue concerns "prophecy" only in a surface sense of factually foretelling the future, the deep meaning of prophecy as it develops in Virgil and Dante and the whole lineage of prophetic poets they foster down through Tasso, Spenser, Milton, and Blake, concerns rather the interpretation of history from its endpoint and seen as a whole, so that every moment in that history receives new meaning in light of a synoptic vision. In the biblical prophetic tradition, this perspective extends even beyond history and time altogether, and this marks a crucial difference from Virgil, whose end-vision is envisaged primarily as intrahistorical rather than as eschatological or as beyond the end (*eschaton*) of history. Still, in Virgil, just as in the Bible, the prophetic vantage point transcends history in order to understand it as a whole. This transcendence is expressed, among other ways, in the claim to divine inspiration. Whether this claim to inspiration be understood as a figure for heightened human potency or as entailing something really supernatural in character, Virgil in any case discovers the purely poetic, interpretive means that make it humanly possible. Failing an appropriate appreciation of this interpretive revolution, Virgil's prophetic gift, power and achievement, even as it becomes normative for Western tradition, thanks especially to Dante, remains quite obscure in its essential significance and world-historical purport.

"Prophecy" in common parlance seems to us closely akin to a magical power and therefore something no longer to be believed in earnestly, or even perhaps honestly. Virgil's claim to prophesy may be tolerable to the extent that he is kept in his place as a writer of fiction, but actually this is a place made only by very modern consciousness and its literary categories. To do justice to this claim, we need a more adequate interpretation of "prophecy" as it can be used to qualify Virgil's poetry and, by consequence, also the tradition of "prophetic poetry" that follows in his wake. Prophetic poetry is prominent in Western literature, a cardinal strand, if not indeed the chief thread of coherence that distinguishes this tradition down to our own epoch, even in its radical secularization, for example, by James Joyce. Our own historical age, moreover, has distinguished itself also by novel, radically searching speculations about the nature of time, history and interpretation, and I intend to point out the relevance of these researches, as formulated particularly by Martin Heidegger, to a contemporary understanding of Virgil's creation of a poetic art of prophetic interpretation of history.

Prophecy, to the extent it is conceived merely as foretelling the future, is portrayed by Virgil himself as ambiguous and deceptive. This could hardly be more clearly stated than in the prophet Helenus's words describing Sibyl's cave in *Aeneid* III:

> ". . . You'll see a spellbound prophetess, who sings
> In her deep cave of destinies, confiding
> Symbols and words to leaves. Whatever verse
> She writes, the virgin puts each leaf in order
> Back in the cave; unshuffled they remain;
> But when a faint breeze through a door ajar
> Comes in to stir and scatter the light leaves,
> She never cares to catch them as they flutter
> Or to restore them, or to join the verses;
> Visitors, unenlightened, turn away
> And hate the Sibyl's shrine."[4]
>
> (III. 593–603)

Books II and III of the *Aeneid* abound in examples of ambiguous prophecies. Spurred on by them, Aeneas and his people trace an errant path all around the Mediterranean basin, from Thrace to Crete to Sicily, in quest of their prophetically, but confusingly promised new home. Such errors impress upon us how unreliable and misleading the common kind of prophesying as foretelling the future really is. These examples of prophecy in the conventional sense set into relief the epic's deeper structure and meaning as prophetic interpretation of history,

that is, as history made prophetic by poetic interpretation. For against the background of superstitious "fortune-telling" practices and various techniques of divination, prophecy in this latter sense emerges as the very foundation of Virgil's special art of signifying and its visionary power. Much more than predicting the future, prophecy consists in interpreting history in a way that reveals its final meaning. Such interpretation does, of course, also give a key to telling the shape of things to come. It means transcending the time of an isolated present cut off from past and future, and seeing time rather in its wholeness, what is aptly termed "the fullness of time" (Galatians 4. 4) in the eschatological perspective of Scripture. This enlarged, comprehensive perspective then opens action to other time dimensions beyond the present, enabling it to be leveraged particularly from the future.

The meaning of prophecy as a reinterpretation of history, as well as of the present, reframing them in terms of the future, a future open to possibilities for the sake of which everything past and present is happening, rather than a future frozen in its possibilities, closed off through sure-fire prediction of the inevitabilities of fate, is dramatized centrally in Book VI of the *Aeneid*. Meeting his father Anchises in the underworld, Aeneas is given a prophetic glimpse of the glories lying in store for the souls of his descendents. As already in Book I, with Jupiter's promises to Aeneas's mother Venus on her son's behalf, the future is revealed, but this "future" is actually the past, Roman history from its inception, passed in review, yet always with a view to what it is leading up to, the final goal that it is all directed towards. Moreover, the prophecy of future Roman glory is situated within what is implicitly a call to action in the present, a command to begin to realize the high purpose and promise for which Rome is born. What is foretold here is, after all, Roman history. Yet this history is presented as an ideal and a horizon for action and with the aim, therefore, of motivating efforts to strive to achieve what it projects as a providential plan. This plan centers on the establishment of Roman civilization and culminates in an eternal empire. But this purportedly utopic state is not itself an historical fact. It cannot have been achieved definitively already by Romulus's or Aeneas's or Iulus's or even Julius Caesar's actions in the past, except proleptically and as gesturing toward an eternal glory yet to come. These heroic figures, all of them archetypal representations of the emperor to come, are all models for Caesar Augustus and for Virgil's own contemporaries, the ones to whom the poem is actually addressed and for whom it constitutes an indirect challenge to *act* worthily of their illustrious forbears.

The vision of empire imaged in the prophecy and in its idealized interpretation of Roman history is not just plain fact, not a *fait accompli* such as the narrative pretends, but rather an ideal that Augustus is challenged to make real by his own acts of just governance in his own time. His actions in the present can open the future as full of the bounty of promise here envisaged in this glowing and transfigured image of a *possible* history, the glorious history that *will* have been achieved *if* Rome in all its promise succeeds and becomes reality. Even the Roman past has still to be secured in its triumphant meaning by what remains to be done now, in Virgil's own time (and presumably in any future time whatsoever). The Golden Age of peace and prosperity envisioned here is presented as a foreordained future, but its effectual realization depends on Augustus himself, evoked in fact at the prophecy's center:

> . . . Caesar Augustus, son of the deified,
> Who shall bring once again an Age of Gold
> To Latium, to the land where Saturn reigned
> In early times.
>
> (VI. 1064–67)

The promise of the past and the possibilities of the future all hinge on the present into which the poem speaks.

The dramatic climax of Book VI portrays Aeneas being converted from a nostalgic fixation upon the past to a resolute receptiveness vis-a-vis the future. This polarity is built into the structure of the book, with its pivotal transition from the mythological Hades—inhabited by figures out of Aeneas's past, specifically Palinurus, Dido, and Deiphobus, appearing to him here in a series that recapitulates his past in reverse order—to the philosophical Hades, based on Plato's Myth of Er, depicting souls before Lethe wiping out their past, about to be reincarnated, wholly oriented to the future. Aeneas himself symbolically, in stepping from one region to the other, takes up a fundamentally new orientation to life: he passes from an obsessive mourning over the Trojan past to a forward-looking, action-ready embrace of the Roman future. In this step, and hence thanks to history as prophecy, he becomes freed from the past and redefines its lasting significance.

opening it to a future that he is engaged in actually producing by his own free action. The past, rather than continuing to be a closed circle of lamentation and regret for him, is opened and transformed. He becomes ready to optimistically embrace what is a mythic past even to him as an ideal upon which to model his efforts to build a new civilization. During his visit to Pallanteum recounted in Book VIII, he encounters memories and monuments of the Golden Age of peace and plenty under Saturn. This recovery of a utopic past as an ideal to emulate in Book VIII is strictly connected with the discovery in Book VI of the future as openness, a space for the realization of thitherto undreamt of possibilities. Aeneas lives now in an ecstatic dimension of time, reshaping the past and bearing it forward into a future that he contributes to making possible and that also gives this past its significance in his present.[5]

The different tenses open up and communicate with each other, for future and past are connected and influence each other reciprocally through the present. This is the extraordinary "ecstatic" temporality opened up by poetic prophecy. These same fundamental features of the human and historical experience of time have been explored and illuminated with searching philosophical acumen by modern existential philosophy, particularly in the thought of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger acutely analyzes existential time as "ecstatic" and "repetitive."[6] Existence in time is "ecstatic" because of the way human existence "stands outside" the moment in which it actually exists by its awareness of a future and a past that are also lived and integrated into the present moment and into the moods and meanings by which it is essentially defined for human beings. Human existence is "repetitive" in that the meaning of any experience is shaped by past experiences which, in effect, are relived and even "revised" in it, while the future, too, will be experienced inevitably in terms of the past that it "repeats," no matter how differently. Any future recurrence will, of course, be different, but even this very difference will be capable of being discerned and experienced only in relation to something recognizable as having already been experienced and thus in the process of being repeated.

The poetic structure of Virgil's epic enacts perfectly the dynamics of historical time as discovered by Heidegger's existential analysis of our Being as temporal beings in the world. The tenses are open to interaction with one another rather than being cut off and separated from each other. In the ordinary sense of linear time, by contrast, the past can never come back, while the future is kept completely out of reach, both of them being sealed off beyond the range of present experience. In Virgil's epic, an action is presented as taking place in the historical present tense, but as framed by the prophecy of a future: and this future is in fact the historical past interpreted in a certain perspective as revealing a glorious destiny to be taken up as a challenge and a guide to action in the present. In this way, all of these time dimensions interact and mutually constitute one another.

For Heidegger, the human being is not simply *in* time, like a cork bobbing on a stream. Human being rather is constituted by time intrinsically. My being-there in the world now as a human, self-interpreting being—a being for whom its being is an issue—entails my concerns directed towards and anticipating the future, as well as retrieving and recreating the past, by how I understand their bearing upon me in an ever-new, ever-evolving present. Virgil, too, understands human being as temporal and interpretive—as intrinsically historical in nature. It is the anticipation of the future and the repetition of the past in the present made open thereby in both these directions that alone lends the present its dense consistency and complex reality.

Heidegger was very much influenced by Christian anthropology and its implications concerning the human experience of time as reflected in the New Testament, especially as this perspective was expounded by his friend Rudolph Bultmann. A primitive Christian sense of eschatological existence, that is, of existing out of the future by one's resolve in the present to live, in imitation of Christ, for the sake of God's future Kingdom, informs the repetitive and ecstatic existence that Heidegger transposes to a philosophical register and elaborates speculatively. The remarkable thing is the extent to which Virgil's epic, too, embodies, albeit without the same philosophical vocabulary, similar basic insights into human existence in time. Heidegger's term for the mode of existence that realizes the future in the present is "anticipatory resoluteness" ("vorläufige Entschlossenheit," for example, in section 61 of *Sein und Zeit*), and this could not be better illustrated than by Aeneas's determination to secure, through his action in the present, the future glory of Rome that has been revealed to him prophetically. Moreover, as a hero out of Rome's own legendary Trojan past, in establishing this model for the future he is himself reenacting a prototype out of a still more remote and idealized legendary past. This is brought out when Aeneas is being led by Evander around Pallanteum, the future site of Rome. The place where Rome will be is discovered as

the former site of an idylic Arcadian civilization steeped in peace and tranquility, as well as of archaic, archetypal heroic actions, particularly those of Hercules, who is being commemorated at the very moment that Aeneas arrives, chancing upon the legendary hero's festival.

In parallel fashion, for Virgil's own contemporaries Aeneas himself in turn is legendary history and an exemplar to spur their continuing efforts to build their civilization. They must strive after the ideal of Rome, which certainly in their present reality had not yet been fully realized. The image of Aeneas is a model, in mythic-historical form, of what Romans are called to become in the future in order to prove worthy of their heroic origins. It is in this sense that in its contemporary context Virgil's poem bears a prophetic burden. The injunction to present action as necessary and inseparable from things unveiled as still to come is written into the climax of Anchises's prophetic revelations to Aeneas in Book VI. After previewing, spell-bound, the Age of Gold to be established under the son of the deified Caesar, Anchises enjoins:

> Do we still lag at carrying our valor
> Into action? Can our fear prevent
> Our settling in Ausonia?
>
> (VI. 1084–86)

This is the crux of the prophetic revelation: not just a cinematographic preview of what will happen, of its own accord, by the dictates of fate, but a glimpse of the possibilities and imperatives for action incumbant upon Romans themselves, if they wish to act worthily of their historical destiny and calling. Such is the message for Aeneas. These are revelations for him not to passively accept but rather to realize in unreserved dedication to the cause of building Roman civilization. And such is the message of this prophecy of Rome and its greatness also for Virgil's own contemporaries, foremost among them Caesar Augustus.

Aeneas's resolute embrace of his future becomes even more fully evident at the end of Book VIII, when the prophecy of Rome's future appears depicted in the form of an *ekphrasis* upon his new shield given him by Venus from Vulcan's forge. Scenes recapitulating the various phases of Roman civilization and its purported triumphs over violence and barbarousness encircle a central panel presenting Augustus Caesar's triumph over Marc Antony and Cleopatra at sea in the battle of Actium

as the culminating instance of this history. We see Aeneas assume this destiny in order to bear it forward from the present into the future which he begins at this moment to realize.

> All these images on Vulcan's shield,
> His mother's gift, were wonders to Aeneas.
> Knowing nothing of the events themselves,
> He felt joy in their pictures, taking up
> Upon his shoulder all the destined acts
> And fame of his descendants.
>
> (VIII. 987–92)

Whereas he had been mournfully bearing his past around with him, palpably in the shape of his father on his own shoulders when he fled Troy (II. 1045), now, shouldering the burden of these prophetic images, he anticipates the future, working for its realization no longer reluctantly but with heartfelt enthusiasm and forward-looking resoluteness.

Aeneas's struggle toward understanding the human condition and understanding history thus prove to have been for the sake of achieving the resoluteness that enables the past in its essential meaning to react upon the future and vice versa. Virgil recuperates from the past a vision of the Golden Age in order that it reach into and determine the future in the present, just as future vision reaches back to shape the present and past, revealing them in a perspective that transcends the limits of linear time. Aeneas's resoluteness anticipates the future and enables him to retrieve the possibilities of the past disclosed by the revelation of the Age of Gold, and to project them as still realizable into the future. Anticipatory resoluteness is what transforms Fate into Freedom because resoluteness in the present reaches out and shapes the future, realizing the possibilities that have been revealed in the past. The events envisaged appear now no longer just as closed horizons of either fact or fate that draw curtains across past and future respectively, but as open and in process, as repetitive and ecstatic and futural in meaning all at once. Past and future are experienced by Aeneas as wide open to being decided and as fully underway and active in his present. It is, then, recursively, Virgil's own resolute interpretation of the history of Rome as it can be experienced in his own present that enables him to project a meaning into the future envisioned as a universal reign of peace and empire without end—*imperium sine fine* (I. 279).

This articulates a view of time as a human making, a *poiesis*, an ordering of all three tenses in accordance with an overarching, universal significance. What is the history Virgil composes, if not his projection of an ideal future? The reign of Saturn in pre-Pallanteum, Arcadia, is maybe a myth that never took place. Nevertheless, it stands in essence for the future age of peace that Virgil wishes to be inaugurated by Augustus Caesar. The same holds for Aeneas himself as a legendary figure. Towards the end of the epic, Aeneas enjoins his son, Ascanius, to recollect the past as a model for action on into the future. His own characteristic virtues and his essential resoluteness are summed up here:

> "Learn fortitude and toil from me, my son,
> Ache of true toil. Good fortune learn from others.
> My sword arm now will be your shield in battle
> And introduce you to the boons of war.
> When, before long, you come to man's estate,
> Be sure that you recall this. Harking back
> For models in your family, let your father,
> Aeneas, and uncle, Hector, stir your heart."
>
> (XII. 595–602)

This valedictory address illustrates how prophecy, as a call for action in the present, opens a dimension of freedom towards the future. It is not the declaration of an inevitable fate that operates externally to, and in spite of, human will and effort. So far from belonging to a deterministic outlook, in which the future is forseen as already present, prophecy is what first opens the way for a human freedom that forms the future and reforms the past, refusing to be confined to a time that can ever be merely present. Prophetic temporality in this way reaches backwards and forwards, actually changing past and future through modifying the fundamental coordinates by which history can meaningfully happen—and have taken place. Past, present and future communicate freely and openly, impinging upon and revising each other in this uncanny temporal dimension of prophecy where time is reversible. This temporality exceeds objective analysis and calculated control. It must do so because it is inextricably connected with and open to human freedom. It is this connection of prophecy with freedom that has been realized so convincingly, and apparently without classical precedents, by Virgil in his epic.[7]

The prophetic revelation centered in Book VI engenders in Aeneas the resoluteness that enables the future to react upon the past and present, making them instrumental to his fulfilling his final destiny. It all must pass through the present and through the personal appropriation of the protagonist. Indeed the attainment of a prophetic perspective takes place through personal appropriation which, however, exacts a disappropriation of the self. In order to realize his prophetically revealed mission, Aeneas must renounce his own intensely felt personal desires—starting with the loss of his wife, Creusa, before his departure for Italy. Duty before love. This creates a tension that threatens to upset the poem's official imperial program and expose it as hollow propaganda. The narrative of famous exploits instrumental to building a glorious empire can suddenly appear disfigured to a history of senseless sacrifice showing through from just below the surface. The ambiguity of everything revealed about the future belongs to the openness of what is not yet achieved fact but rather a destiny to be achieved—and its fulfillment is subject to contingency, to all the possible peripities of history, the many ways in which it may go awry, however certain the rightness of the final goal may be. Virgil, especially in his personal voice of frustration and regret that rises up whining from behind the public voice of Roman success and triumph, lets us feel all the burden of this ambiguity.[8]

Nevertheless, the future can be anticipatively grasped as a vision in the form of prophecy, and to the extent that this vision effectively enables action, everything that the past, present or future can be really changes by being subject to the significances that prophecy projects. Prophecy becomes true and real only through the resoluteness of those who act in the present, that is, in the transition from past to future. Aeneas's example is one of carrying the past on his shoulders, in the shape of Anchises, towards a future that he takes up symbolically in the images on the shield from Vulcan's smythy depicting his descendents and the glories that are in store for Rome. The present is the going-over from past to future, and on it falls the burden for shouldering both the past—symbolically one's father, who is also one's guide to future prospects—and that future itself emblematically chased on the shield. On the shoulder of the present rest "all the destined acts / And fame of his descendents" (VIII. 991–92), for only the present can make possible the future that will in fact be possible and not be just an illusory figment. Of course, the present in turn is inhabited by past and future intrinsically and cannot be isolated from them. So the point here is not to privilege the present over the other tenses, but to call attention to

their inextricable plaiting together in mutual dependence of precedent, projection, and event. It is this point of intersection from which all three time dimensions are leveraged. And it is from precisely this point of interaction that poetry such as that of the *Aeneid* springs and sets about its work of revelation.

The historical destiny revealed in the poem is an interpretation of history and, as such, a making or *poiesis*. This very act and event of interpretation transcends all predetermination of facts by erecting the overarching structures of significance that first enable facts to come to light as significant.[9] Virgil's poetic-prophetic vision gives a general form of meaning to the whole of history, along with the cosmos: every particular fact comes to light in its supposedly true and final meaning within this framework. Whatever things can meaningfully happen are circumscribed poetically by a certain projection of destiny. Poetry makes possible the future that can be meaningfully experienced, and in this sense poetry is prophetic.

Numerous prophecies operate as particular instances within the poem, but latent in its very narrative structure is a stronger claim about the form of poetry, at least poetry of the order of Virgil's epic, as *per se* prophetic. Such poetry's shaping in language of possibilities of existence and of world is the enabling condition of any future that we are going to be able to meaningfully live. Virgil's original poetic technique brings fully into the open this prophetic character and capability intrinsic to poetry. It highlights especially the way poetic narrative gives a dynamic order of temporality to events. This enables a vision of time as revelation and as an unfolding of a transcendent meaning—that is, of a significance that transcends all actual happenings. Indeed Virgil's poem has created such an order of significance in which the future can meaningfully happen as the fulfillment of a destiny demonstrated by a mythical heroic past.

To this extent, history is prophecy, and the past is the future, for the order of significance that we project upon the one is structured by what we are actually bringing about with reference to the other. Virgil's poem, of course, announces a prophecy of the future: it features an ideal world government and postulates that the purpose of history and humanity is to achieve a universal order of peace—the *pax Romana*—at the same time as it foresees how fragile and costly that order is and how endemic the forces of fury are to the human heart. The potential of human nature and therefore the design of things to come are revealed in history as interpreted by the *vates*. Equally in the case of the Hebrew

nabhi, prophecy, as interpretation of the essential meaning of history from the viewpoint of God, reveals the goal to which events should be made to conform via the active participation of free human beings. To be a holy people unto the Lord, for example, in Exodus, is no mere sterile fact but a pregnant meaning to be realized ever anew in community life. The prophet bases his interpretation of history on a transcendent view into the future, but conversely he prescribes the necessary means of living and realizing that future in the present.

It has become clear, then, that prophecy in the *Aeneid* reveals not what necessarily and automatically will happen to passive humans but a general order of significance to be freely appropriated and enacted. At the crux of the prophetic revelations in Books VI and VIII, Aeneas is called upon to *act* with resoluteness on the basis of a vision revealing the significance of history as a whole. Prophecy opens a dimension of freedom and meaning, a dimension that enables one to act not blindly as the slave of fate but freely toward a future goal shaped by one's own creative understanding and imagination of it. Both history and the future need to be *achieved*, and prophecy opens a perspective that is instrumental to achieving them freely and meaningfully, that is, with the vision of an end in view. The actual facts referred to in prophecy can even be past because its essence is to interpret the significance of life and history as they are manifest in any and at all times.

Indeed all the prophecies of Virgil's epic are after-the-fact: the facts they prophesy have already occurred. They belong to Roman history as it unfolds down to Augustan times. This is to say that prophecy here is retrospective. The same can generally be said of the historical prophecies of the Hebrew prophets. For example, Second Isaiah (chapters 40–55) prophesies the campaigns of Cyrus the Persian after they had, to a large extent, already taken place, leading to the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. This may seem to make prophecy too easy. With hindsight, anyone can "prophesy" events that have already become fact. But prophecy, fundamentally, is concerned to reveal not a series of objective facts but an order of significance. Whether prophecy refers to past, present, or future (and the three actually coincide in a prophetic perspective), its essential purpose is to reveal in each of these modalities the meaning of a specific, lived, historical existence. It projects a horizon within which alone the facts that are to really count come truly to light. In prophetic perspective, past, present, and future are no longer seen as successive and as external to one another but are all simultaneously and eternally present. Each of the tenses affords a perspective on the central

meaning of the historical world. Thus the fact that Virgil's prophecy is retrospective does not make it spurious. In the order of significance, time is reversible: the future remakes the past as it seeks to regain its possibilities, just as the past prefigures and informs and eventually makes the future.

To this extent, prophecy is based on transcending one-dimensional time and on achieving thereby a point of view *sub specie aeternitatis*. Only from outside and beyond the sequence can the final goal of a series of events be apprehended. Only from the standpoint of eternity is the meaning of time revealed. Still, it is only within time, as situated within and among human actions and events, that any such disclosure can be concretely conferred. It is not as if the Golden Age as such could ever actually arrive and be present as a fact. That would be to mistake myth for reality. The point of myth as employed within prophecy is to break open the present towards possibilities that it can never encompass but can nevertheless strive after in ecstatic self-transcendence. Prophecy achieves this by its injunction to action breaking into the present and breaking it open towards a future already impinging upon it, riving it asunder.[10] In this sense also in prophecy, even in the eschatological prophecy of apocalypse, the revelation of the other world, the eternal world, is generally, at the same time, a revelation of the essence or truth of *this* life.

The fusion and flexibility of the tenses in poetic narrative with its potential for prophecy is incipient already in Homer, where ordinary, external time is suspended and dilated by song in the endlessly open, magic moment of poetic creation. "This night is prodigiously long!" exults Alcinous on the night that he hears the narrative of Odysseus's adventures (*Odyssey*, XI. 373). The same point is made about Odysseus's narration of his odyssey to Penelope: the turning of night and the dawning of day are delayed by Athene so that the time of narrative, with its suspending of outer, worldly time, might unfold free from external constraints (XXIII. 244–45). The narrative of the *Odyssey*, of course, centers on a descent to the underworld, and this topos of the *descensus ad inferas* belongs thenceforth essentially to the prophetic enterprise in epic tradition. As exemplified again by Dante's journey to the Christian afterlife, it is from the other world, the eternal world, from outside this world of time, that the protagonist can gain an understanding of the true and final significance of his life—past, present and future.

So Homer too, after all, demonstrates an awareness of how time can be contracted or dilated—and is in any case shaped—by the art of narrative. But Virgil takes this germ of insight to another level of vision in his full-scale reconstruction of Roman history in prophetic perspective, inventing a new narrative art replete with allegorical types and their fulfillment for the purpose. In developing and exploiting this power of narrative to disclose history and make it interact with the future through the present of free action and interpretation, Virgil first fully discovers the constitution of human and historical time by prophetic *poiesis*. The poetic construction of a whole narrative discloses possible purposes and trajectories for history. Such narratives are revelatory and instrumental for the realization of historical projects by specific peoples.

Time, as it is humanly experienced, is to this extent poetically produced. Virgil thus becomes a pioneer of prophetic poetry as an overarching structure of Western cultural tradition, where claims to an all-embracing vision of truth have been perhaps most strongly asserted. This is a vision of truth for all time—yet just as much a disclosure of truth as inextricably rooted in time. For this truth is itself radically temporal: it happens only in the disclosure of future and past as transpiring in the present of action that decides fate freely. Moreover, as poetic disclosure, it is truth as what is said: literally "fatus."[11] Such saying is poetry and at the same time prophecy. It is where the two meet in revealing the truth of history and history as truth. This truth is for the present, in which we act and interpret in order to reappropriate our past, so as to actualize it and thereby open up the horizon of our future.

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1. See Domenico Comparetti, *Virgilio nel medioevo*, ed. Giorgio Pasquale (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1955; originally 1895).

2. Although identification of the *nascenti puero* is not certain, it seems likely that this is the Consul Asinius Pollio's son, Asinius Gallus, welcomed as a prodigy somewhat in the image of Alexander the Great. Virgil was personally indebted to Pollio for the attempt to preserve his lands near Mantua from confiscation, which nevertheless came to pass in 39 B.C., when Pollio was succeeded as governor of Transalpine Gaul.

3. Among notable treatments of Virgilian prophecy in recent scholarship are Denis Feeney, "History and Revelation in Virgil's Underworld," in *Why Vergil?*, ed. Stephanie Quinn (Wauconda, Ill.: Bolchaszy-Carducci Publishers, 2000); Elisabeth Henry, *The Vigour of Prophecy: A Study of Virgil's Aeneid* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University,

1989); and James J. O'Hara, *Death and the Optimistic Prophecy in Vergil's Aeneid* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). See also Philip Hardie, *Virgil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), especially pp. 63–79; 94–101.

4. Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Random House, 1983). For Virgil's Latin, see P. Virgili Maronis, *Opera*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).

5. This schema of temporal correspondences and conversion is worked out most convincingly by Brooks Otis, *Virgil: A Study in Civilized Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963). Otis illuminates the extraordinarily original conception of time underlying the epic. Of Aeneas, he writes: "It is his ultimate identification of himself with the future that constitutes the psychological meaning of his resurrection" (p. 290).

6. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1986; originally 1927), translated by J. Macquarie and E. Robinson as *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

7. Latinists have confessed themselves baffled by the phenomenal new use of history as prophecy by Virgil. According to Robert Fitzgerald, "to enfold in the mythical action of the *Aeneid* foreshadowings and foretellings of Roman history" is "drastically original" (p. 405). "So far as we can see, there are no comparable historical resonances in the Homeric poems; this dimension of meaning is entirely Virgilian" (Postscript to *The Aeneid*, p. 406).

8. Cf. Adam Parry, "The Two Voices of Virgil's *Aeneid*," in *The Language of Achilles and Other Papers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), p. 83.

9. Heidegger's essay on poetry as the setting-to-work of truth in the work of art provides a philosophically penetrating analysis of this dynamic. See *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1960; originally in *Holzwege*, 1936), translated in part by A. Hofstadter as "The Origin of the Work of Art" in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

10. Another modern hermeneutic thinker who, alongside Heidegger, powerfully illuminates this aspect of history as prophecy is Walter Benjamin, especially in his "Geschichtsphilosophische Thesen," *Illuminationen. Ausgewählte Schriften* 1 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), pp. 268–81, translated as "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968).

11. Cf. Theodor Haecker, *Vergil, Vater des Abendlands* (Bonn am Rhein: Wahlband der Buchgemeinde, 1933). The penultimate chapter expounds the far-reaching significance of this term.

IDDO LANDAU

TO KILL A MANDARIN

IN *LE PÈRE GORIOT*, Balzac has the main character, Rastignac, ask his friend Bianchon whether he would agree to the killing of a Chinese Mandarin in far-away China if this would yield Bianchon a great fortune. After some joking, Bianchon answers negatively.[1] For Rastignac, this thought experiment is connected to a practical dilemma: he is deliberating whether to agree that a man he has never seen, and who has done Rastignac no harm, should be killed so that he, Rastignac, may enjoy the wealth that the man's sister, who loves Rastignac, will inherit.

I believe that this exchange in Balzac's *Le père Goriot* encapsulates an important and interesting thought experiment that has been unjustly neglected in the philosophical literature. In this paper I will present it in a slightly adapted way (which helps abstract it from the specific details of Balzac's novel), and argue that it has disturbing implications for existentialist thought. I will show that although the thought experiment coheres with many existentialist themes, it also undermines a central existentialist notion. Section I presents the thought experiment. Section II adds clarifications and answers some questions and objections. Section III relates the thought experiment to existentialist thought; it presents the existentialist themes that the thought experiment supports and exemplifies, but also shows how it destabilizes a major existentialist theme.

I

We all want some things very badly. Some of us very much want to get married, or to marry this or that person. Others want a divorce. Some

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