How to be Philosophical about the End of the Aeneid

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Overemphasized as it has been over the past three decades, the final scene of the Aeneid is a useful paradigm both of Rezeptionsgeschichte and of Vergil’s poetic technique. There is no indication whatever that Vergil’s non-Christian, Roman readers viewed it in terms of Aeneas’ condemnation, and Vergil certainly had his share of critics. It is writers like Lactantius who criticized Aeneas’ furor and ira even while justifying the ira Dei elsewhere. In the course of the following centuries, the issue was obviated by the increasing emphasis on just the first six books of the Aeneid, and the vision of Aeneas as a good proto-Christian and textbook Stoic gained a firm hold. Quite anachronistically, he was made out to be totally different from the other heroes of antiquity and to sublimate his every emotion. In two words: sanctus Aeneas, the pilgrim progressing from furor (bad) to pietas (good).

It is understandable, though it still is bad scholarship, that any revision of this distorted characterization would cast his martial and spirited behavior in Aeneid 7–12 as a virtual fall from grace. The conceptual framework was not changed, but simply inverted. The Stoic saint was scrutinized by the Inquisition, found wanting, and in the end was demonized; I give interpreters like Michael Putnam credit for doing so forthrightly instead of resorting to the usual muttering—mussat rex ipse academicus—about “dark aspects,” “troubling ambivalences,” and the like. The point is that one skewed orthodoxy replaced the other; the only virtue of the inane “optimism vs. pessimism” sobriquet was that it appropriately reflected the parochialism and superficiality of the controversy.

1 For a collection of some of the evidence—as opposed to circumstantial speculations—see, e.g., H. Georgii, Die antike Aeneiskritik aus den Scholien und anderen Quellen hergestellt (Stuttgart 1891; repr. Hildesheim 1971).


The resulting reductionisms did little justice to the Aeneid, a unique and experimental epic that is highly complex without being diffuse. It was against this background that I discussed, a few years ago, the poem’s final scene in terms of ancient views of anger.\(^4\) I wrote the article to open up the debate, and not to close it. I wrote it because the current orthodoxy took a totally reductionist view of a complex human emotion, a one-sidedness that is validated neither in antiquity nor in modern psychology.\(^5\) The timing was fortuitous: A new edition of Philodemus’ De Ira appeared shortly thereafter, spurring more discussions of the Epicurean view of anger and its relevance to the Aeneid.\(^6\) It is useful, therefore, to return to the topic and combine it with some other perspectives.

Before doing so, I want to make another essential point: It is typical of Vergil that he ends his epic on a complex issue that was one of the most intensely debated at his time, as we know from contemporary sources. Vergil’s poetry is so great and so existential precisely because he takes on such topics and because he deals with them honestly, and not just to provide happy endings. A further reason for that greatness is the deliberate involvement of the reader. There is a constant dialogue some of which can be usefully accommodated within the hermeneutic of Michael Bakhtin, although there are some specific differences, too.\(^7\) Vergil knows there are different viewpoints on anger and readers may respond differently, but he does not leave things diffuse or ambiguous in the sense of an aporia. Instead, this so-called ambiguity is really a means to have the reader work through a multiplicity, an authorially intended multiplicity, of alternatives and nuances, so that the poet’s intentions may be understood all the better. Let me be specific.

The death of Turnus comes as no surprise. It has been assiduously prepared for\(^8\) and it is inevitable: Turnus has violated a sacred treaty—for good reason the whole treaty scene is drawn out the way it is in Book 12—


\(^5\) To the modern works now add J. Horder, Provocation and Responsibility (Oxford 1992), a study concerned with the role of anger in legal history; the influence of Aristotle stands out.


and there was no *clementia* for this kind of transgression in Rome. The usual objection is that Vergil should have made this clear in the final scene; instead, Aeneas kills Turnus in a flash of rage over Pallas. Two quick points: One is the implied reader. Great poems tend to be written not by professors or scholiasts but by poets, and it would be totally pedestrian to spell out again what happened on the day the action of Book 12 takes place. You do not have to be Wolfgang Iser to realize that the readers know all this—it is really quite fresh in their memory—and the facts do not have to be recapitulated. Servius fills that gap for us, as schoolmasters always do: Turnus dies, he says, because of *ultio foederis rupti* (12. 949). Second point: What is the alternative to Vergil’s humanization of an ineluctable outcome? To have Aeneas be totally unmotional, read the verdict to Turnus from Mommsen’s *Strafrecht*, and then solemnly kill him?

My favorite for this kind of behavior modification is the recent argument that Hercules in Book 8 should not display rage. Instead, he should fight against the monster Cacus like a Stoic hero. One wonders how that would work. Should Hercules go into that cave like a robot reading Zeno, or perhaps a few Stoic paradoxes? I am afraid we do not even find that kind of Stoic orthodoxy in Lucan, who has his good guy Pompey invoke *ultio, poena*, and the *ira vindicis patriae* in Book 2 (531–40). His speech follows an episode which is almost a take-off on the *Aeneid’s* final scene; i.e., Caesar grants *clementia* to Domitius, who is angry (*iras*) with him for doing so—he prefers the *furores* of war (2. 507–25). All this—Hercules’ angry struggle, Pompey’s wrath, Aeneas’ *furor* and *ira*—raises another perspective and exemplifies precisely the sort of process of thinking and working things through in which the many layers of Vergil’s poetry always involve the reader: Heroes get angry. It is a heroic emotion. Do not expect a martial epic without an angry hero. To apply the many Stoic bromides we find in Cicero—and his mockery of doctrinaire Stoics is clear from his characterization of Cato in *Pro Murena*—to the situation that has been carefully contrived at the end of the *Aeneid* is a dogmatic exercise that ignores non-Stoic views and the notion of appropriateness. What the popular philosophies say is that you should not be irascible over everyday stuff with your wife, kids, and neighbors. All, except for the Stoics, realize there is a rightful place for that emotion and that it can be channelled into righteous actions.

If I have been mimicking the diatribe of Hellenistic and Roman popular philosophers, it is for good reason: The first part of Philodemus’ *De Ira* (1–XXXIII) in many ways is a deliberate take-off on Stoic and Cynic

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9 Putnam (above, note 3) 30–32.

10 Mur. 60–66. Even in a more serious vein, Cicero, following Zeno and Chrysippus, denied that an actually existing true Stoic sage had yet been found (*Tusc*. 2. 51); to present Aeneas as such would have been unreal. Cf. *De Or*. 1. 220–24.
Philo demus' relevance to Vergil needs no further comment, especially since the publication of a papyrus fragment with Vergil's name which comes from one of Philodemus' ethical treatises directed against a dissident Epicurean, Nicasicrates. Nicasicrates' views are also one of the main targets of De Ira; that very fact, quite relevant to any assessment of anger in the Aeneid, shows that it would be wrong to speak even of an Epicurean orthodoxy—not surprisingly, there were divergent views of so cardinal an emotion even within one philosophical school. For these reasons, it is useful to explore the applicability of Philodemus' treatise to the Aeneid somewhat further; besides, I would have little to add to what I said about the Stoics and Peripatetics in the earlier article. Several points of relevance stand out.

Anger was viewed as a highly differentiated phenomenon. It is another instance where the blunderbuss approach of defining Vergil's poetry mostly by connecting verbal repetitions falls down because it tends to ignore shifting aspects of the same phenomenon. In plain English, each instance of furor is not the same, nor should we insist on the poet's having to use protreptic epithets like iustus to designate such shifts. In attempting to stake out some middle ground between the Stoics, who condemned anger, and the Peripatetics, who were very liberal in its defense, the Epicureans engaged in what Julia Annas has aptly called "persuasive redefinition": They do not use new terms for a phenomenon like anger, but they employ the common ones in new, distinctive ways and contexts. It should be noted how congenial this practice is both to Augustan classicism—witness Agrippa's characterization of Vergil as "novae cacozeliae repertorem, non tumidae nec exilis, sed ex communibus verbis, atque ideo latentis"—and to the Roman use of language, where words take on multiple meanings instead of new words being created for each new meaning.

The issue is directly related to the genesis of the Epicurean debate about anger. Epicurus, it seems, had made some broad pronouncements on

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14 Annas (above, note 6) 147, with n. 6
the subject that occasioned different definitions. "In fact, Epicurus makes clear in his Anaphoneseis that the sage will experience θυμός and that he will experience it in moderation" (XLV 5–8; cf. XLIII 41 and XLVI 1). This is different both from "being enraged" (XLV 20 ff.) and from θυμός as an impulse to revenge if revenge is lust for revenge and pleasurable; this latter disposition is μανία (XLIV). "For the merciless man, as Homer (I. 9. 63) says, is ‘tribeless and lawless’ and genuinely ‘is in love with war’ and vengeance on mankind, but the wise man is most merciful and most reasonable" (XLIV 22–27). There are different kinds of θυμός, then, and, to an even larger extent, this is true of ὀργή.

About the main issue there was no doubt: The wise man does experience anger (XLVI 12) and "will be liable to certain fits of anger" (XLI 30). Anger is part of human nature: "It cannot be escaped and is called ‘natural’ for that reason" (XXXIX 29–31). "Fits of rage happen to good men, if someone is wronging their friends" (XLI 17–19). But there is plenty of nuance. The anger of the sophos, therefore, is not the same as everybody’s anger.

The basic distinction Philodemus makes is that between "natural" (φυσική) and "empty" (κενή) anger (ὀργή). It is bound up with another differentiation (XXXVII 23–XXXVIII 22):

We [Epicureans] do not make any unitary pronouncement, but we teach that the emotion, taken in isolation and per se, is an evil, since it is painful or resembles what is painful, but taken in conjunction with one’s character (διάθεσις) as a whole it is something that can even be called a good, as we think; for it results [when good] from an examination of what the nature of states of affairs really is and from a completely true perception in our comparative estimation of the damage done and in our punishments of those who damage us. So that in the same way we call the pointless kind of anger (κενήν ὀργήν) an evil, because it results from a worthless disposition (παρηγαγόν διαθέσιος) of character and entails all sorts of further troubles, one must call the natural (φυσική) kind of anger a non-evil, but, as it is something painful . . . [just as, when it results from] a good (σωφρονεῖα) [disposition], it is not an evil thing, but even a good, so also we will call an evil the refusal to accept the natural kind of anger.

The distinction between natural and empty anger is akin to that made by Epicurus between natural and empty desires.17 An empty desire, for instance, resulting in empty anger is the belief that retaliation should be enjoyable for its own sake (XLII 22–34). In opposition, Philodemus states that (a) anger in general is painful rather than pleasant and (b) retaliation and punishment are not enjoyable (ηδόν); these are some of the conditions that meet the criterion of the "natural" anger displayed by the sophos: "(He is not) impelled to his revenge as to something enjoyable—because it has nothing pleasurable to offer him—but he approaches it as something most

17 Ad Men. 127; see Annas (above, note 6) 147 ff.
necessary and most unpleasurable, as he would the drinking of apsinthion or the doctor's knife" (XLIV 15–22). Anger does not exist so that we may get a "lift, so to speak, from being angry, but merely regards fulfilling the desire to retaliate as something that has to be done." Empty anger, by contrast, leads only to further follies and complications (XXXVIII 1–60; XL 7–19).

The aim of Philodemus is to give practical, common-sense advice. It is wrong or "empty" habitually to engage in anger. Anger should be short and not sweet, and it should serve the purpose of retaliation not for its own sake but because some punishment needs to be transacted. All this is connected with the disposition, the διάθεσις, of the individual. Someone with a παμπόνηρος διάθεσις will be possessed of habitual anger leading to "a myriad of further troubles" (XXXVIII 5–6). The wise man, by contrast, has σπουδαιά διάθεσις and will accept and engage in anger for good reason and only for so long. An ironic consequence can be that the person who is not angry by disposition (ἀόργητος) may come across, when angry, as even angrier than the habitually irascible individual (XXXIV 31–XXXV 5):

But generally we may suppose that a person genuinely not irascible will not give a prolonged impression of irascibility, or if he does he will not be profoundly (enraged) but just not the sort of person he seems. At any rate they appear to that extent (irascible) even when their disposition is quite opposite, so that even the wise man, for instance Epicurus even, made this sort of impression on some . . .

The relevance of all this to the role of Aeneas' and, for that matter, Turnus' anger in the Aeneid is so obvious that its needs minimal commentary. Before providing it, I want to reemphasize an important point. There was no monolithic dogma about anger in the Hellenistic ethical philosophies taken as a whole. Philodemus' own discussion is heuristic rather than doctrinaire; it reflects an intelligent and searching attempt to come to grips with an important issue without being dogmatic. Hence De Ira is sometimes "baffling, and difficult even to construe . . . for it shows us Philodemus adjusting to a changing philosophical climate,"19 and, specifically, trying to adapt Epicurean thought to the Roman mentality: for good reason, Erler views him as the Epicurean equivalent to Panaetius.20 When we add to this Vergil's own eclecticism we should not expect the poet of the Aeneid, therefore, to provide a mere textbook illustration of every viewpoint expressed in De Ira. The salient issue is that the horizon of expectation of Vergil's audience went ever so far beyond simple reliance on Stoicism.

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18 Annas (above, note 6) 162, who points out, in this connection, that the anger of Achilles would not meet that standard.
19 Annas (above, note 6) 145; Indelli's commentary certainly bears this out. Cf. Procopé (above, note 6) 367 f. on the nature of Philodemus' treatise.
20 Erler, "Orthodoxie" (above, note 6) passim.
What we can expect and must concentrate on, therefore, is not the absence of anger in Aeneas, but its modification. In essence, the methodological principle is no different from that which we use for all things Roman, i.e. the adaptation and modulation especially of Greek forms of culture or of any predecessors in general. We do not expect a Roman temple to look totally different from its Greek predecessors. Rather, the significance lies in the modifications. They are obvious in Aeneas’ case. His anger is not habitual and therefore “empty.” It does not amount to mania; Vergil underlines the distinction by using insania only to characterize Turnus and Mezentius.\(^1\) While Aeneas’ rage can be absolutely Homeric, as in his killing spree in Book 10,\(^2\) the instances of modification of Aeneas’ behavior are unprecedented for the hero of a martial epic: e.g., his reluctance to fight Lausus and his reaction to Lausus’ death, both deliberately contrasting with Turnus’ treatment of Pallas; his injunction, o cohibete iras! after the breach of the foedus (12. 314); and his hesitation before killing Turnus, “an extraordinary moment of humanity; for the epic warrior never hesitates.”\(^3\) As for Aeneas’ display of anger at the end of the epic, it is the “good” anger that “results from an examination of what the nature of states of affairs really is and from a completely true perception in our comparative estimation of the damage done and in our punishments of those who damage us” (XXXVII 32–39). Hence Propertius, in his praise of the virtues of Italy (3. 22), can aptly say that Rome, who is better at forthright warfare than suited for “injurious acts” (it is certainly legitimate to think of the breaking of agreements and treaties), does not have to be ashamed of her history, “because we Romans stand strong as much by the sword as by pietas: Anger tempers the victorious hands” (19–22):

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armis apta magis tellus quam commoda noxae:
    famam, Roma, tuae, non pudet historiae.
    nam quantum ferro, tantum pietate potentes
    stamus: victrices temperat ira manus.
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What seems at first sight paradoxical, if we subscribe to one-dimensional notions of ira, turns out to make excellent sense in the context of the Epicurean discussion of anger and of the Aeneid’s final scene: It is not


\(^2\) Even here a Roman component is not missing: While Livy suppresses atrocities committed by the Roman army (as in 7. 10, 10 f. and 33. 10. 3; see P. G. Walsh, “Livy’s Preface and the Distortion of History,” AJP 76 [1955] 369–83), Vergil is far too realistic to do the same. To call this “befremdend” (V. Pöschl, in 2000 Jahre Vergil: Ein Symposium, Wolfenbütteler Forschungen 24 [Wiesbaden 1983] 175–88) is the usual application of an anachronistic cultural norm that ignores the alterity of works like the Aeneid.

\(^3\) W. Clausen, Virgil’s Aeneid and the Tradition of Hellenistic Poetry (Berkeley 1987) 99.
clementia that restrains the Romans in victory, but anger—the right kind, of course. Such anger, in fact, is a manifestation of pietas.  

A central point of agreement even amidst conflicting Epicurean views of anger seems to have been that anger should not be pleasurable for its own sake. It is a painful emotion, and that is very much the way the final scene of the Aeneid is cast. Aeneas does not gloat; the contrast is deliberate not only with Achilles’ conquest of Hector, but also with Turnus’ of Pallas (10. 500): “quo nunc Turnus ovet spolio gaudetque potitus,” followed, of course, by Vergil’s editorializing comments that foreshadow the end of the epic. Nor is there any indication that Aeneas’ anger will be long-lived. Since it is so emphatic, however, and precisely because it is not an ingrained characteristic of Aeneas, it can also lead to the perception that Philodemus astutely observed, i.e. “a person genuinely not irascible” appearing as even more irascible than the habitual offenders when he has a fit of anger (XXXIV 31–XXXV 5). It is not Aeneas’ usual behavior and therefore it seems all the starker. The Epicurean Philodemus, a good judge of people, made due allowance for it and used the proper perspective. One wishes that Aeneas’ modern critics had done likewise.

In sum, the alignment is virtually complete between Aeneas’ behavior and Philodemus’ postulate that the wise man should approach revenge “as something most necessary”—Pallas te immolat—“and unpleasurable”—saevi monimenta doloris—and that, in contrast to the “tribeless and lawless” Homeric warrior, “the wise man is most merciful and most reasonable (ἐπεικεστατος)” in carrying it out (XLIV 18–20, 22–27). It is useful to highlight some relevant aspects of this ἐπεικεστατος.

Sentimental interpreters of the Aeneid tend to forget that the epic is about war: Arma is its first word, followed by predictions that bellum ingens geret Italia (1. 263) and of bella, horrida bella (6. 86). War is the action of Books 7–12, the maius opus. It was well recognized, however, that war, besides its own fury, also had its nomoi, hence Philodemus’ censure of the warrior, full of “empty” rage, who is ἀθέμιστος (XLIV 24). We find more discussion of this, against a considerable background of earlier debate, in authors such as Diodorus and Polybius: “All war,” as the former puts it, “having overstepped τὰ νόμιμα καὶ δίκαια τῶν ἀνθρώπων all the same has its own laws, such as not breaking a truce, killing a herald, or exacting vengeance from someone who has placed himself under the protection (πίστιν) of one who has overpowered him.” The breaking of truces—and Turnus has broken two—is reasonable and fair grounds for revenge. Connected with it is the concept of fides. In contrast to clementia,

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24 For previous interpretations of the passage, see P. Fedeli, Properzio. Il libro terzo delle elegie (Bari 1985) 643 f.
it is not just a vague moral standard but, being more normative, entails a specific legal obligation,\textsuperscript{26} in this case that of Aeneas towards the Arcadians and, not in the least, towards his son. This is part of the dialogic situation—and I will return to it shortly—into which Vergil places the reader: What if Turnus were spared? What would be Ascanius' potential fate in case Aeneas were soon to die? Vergil raises the issue by an appeal to the "implied reader" at 12. 456 and there can be little doubt about the answer.\textsuperscript{27} It is another salutary reminder that we cannot approach the \textit{Aeneid} from a perspective of comfortable hindsight. Instead, we are present at creation and that should be our primary horizon of expectations.

Nor should the expectation be that Vergil simply follows Philodemus. As stated earlier, \textit{De Ira} is an argumentative, heuristic tract; the line, e.g., between the three \textit{epilogismoi} at the end and their refutation (XLVI 16–L 8) is easily blurred.\textsuperscript{28} The third of these arguments, to give but one example, states in essence that the degree of one’s anger depends on one’s acquaintance with, or “mental notions” (ὑπολήψεις) of, the damage that is inflicted. The wise man, therefore, “being injured by someone intentionally, understands correctly that he is harmed, but just to the extent that he has been actually harmed, then of course he will be angered, but briefly, because he never receives an impression of being greatly harmed, as he never takes any external thing to be all that important” (XLVII 32–41). The refutation is that such an argument is inconclusive (ἀνέπραντος) because “it does not follow for the person who has established that ‘anger follows upon the notion of having been injured and cannot occur otherwise’ that ‘he who has received an impression of being injured will in every case be angered,’ unless someone demonstrates in addition that the notion that one is injured is an (infallibly) efficient cause (δραστικὸν αἰτίον) of anger” (XLIX 39–L 8). The scene in the \textit{Aeneid} agrees more with the stated argument than with its refutation: Aeneas is roused to anger by the acquaintance with a previous hurt, and his anger, based on a true impression,\textsuperscript{29} can be expected to be brief. But Vergil parts company with the view shared by both Philodemus and his antagonist that all such matters are external and therefore unimportant.

The \textit{Aeneid} is one of the most nuanced works of ancient literature and the differentiations in the treatment of anger especially in Peripatetic and Epicurean philosophy therefore were most congenial. They enabled the


\textsuperscript{28} An imperfect excuse, to be sure, for my earlier misreadings (above, note 4) 336.

\textsuperscript{29} As Prof. Armstrong points out, the phrase δραστικὸν αἰτίον is a unique occurrence in Philodemus and requires more explanation. Cf. R. Philippson, "Philodemus Buch über den Zom. Ein Beitrag zu seiner Wiederherstellung und Auslegung," \textit{Rhm} 71 (1916) 460.
poet to recast a standard heroic emotion in a far more subtle way. In the final scene, the process begins with Turnus’ plea (12. 931–37). Turnus is not a villain pure and simple—we are meant to empathize with him in the nightmare simile (12. 908–14)—but a believable human character, who will always proclaim one thing, and then do another when the pressure is on. Right to the end: Equidem merui nec deprecor, he begins his plea. Pace R. D. Williams, deprecor certainly does not mean simply “complain,” but, quite literally, “beg off.” Turnus denies that he does so, but it is of course exactly what he does. In the same vein, he ends his plea by putting words in Aeneas’ mouth by suggesting that Aeneas acts out of odium. Odium, in all the philosophies, is different from ira and furor in that it is a perpetual inclination. So Turnus remains true to his character until the end. He will not change. We are meant to recall the salient scenes, such as his caedis insana cupidó (10. 760) driving him on while he was forgetting to open the Trojan camp to his men, thereby prolonging the war, ultimately losing it, and causing hundreds and thousands of unnecessary deaths. What would he do to a future society that is based on a higher degree of social responsibility? Parcere suibiectis, therefore, does not amount to a blanket amnesty: “Externas gentes, quibus tuto ignosci potuit, conservare quam excidere malui.”

The dialogue continues, not only between the two protagonists, but between the text and the reader. It is typical of Vergil’s intentions (I use this term unashamedly) that he does not end his epic, in contrast to the Iliad, with an “aesthetic resolution.” Instead, life is complex and we see Aeneas once more in the throes of a dilemma. So we are asked to join him and the poet in sorting out the various possibilities and alternatives. Can Turnus be spared? Why not? Would a happy ending make the Aeneid more meaningful? Should Aeneas act with or without strong emotions? Is anger appropriate or is it not? Are any of these alternatives better or would they diminish the meaning of the work?

Vergil could have made it easy for himself when he wrote the ending of the Aeneid. We can be grateful to him that he did not. I am glad the Aeneid was written by him and not by his critics, because it would have been a vastly impoverished, one-dimensional epic. Instead, the final scene is a paradigm of many others and of his epische Technik in general: There is a plethora of evocations and associations. There is a constant dialogue with the reader to explore the limits of these associations, including, of course, the relevant Homeric scenes, and to propose, evaluate, and reject possible alternatives. The process involves both our intellects and our emotions. It

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31 Cf. Cic. Tusc. 4. 21: odium ira inveterata. As such it would be, in Philodemus’ terminology, παμπόνηρος διάθεσις.
is a remarkable polyphony, but it is by no means aimless or open-ended. There is a strong authorial and moral center, which in Ovid yields to the mere bravura of the narrator. The parallels between Vergil’s procedure and what Paul Zanker has called “Andachtsbild” in Augustan art are not coincidental. 34

Let me conclude by giving one more example of an association that may be operative in the context of the final scene of the Aeneid. Aeneas now has taken the place of Achilles, avenging his slain comrade. At the same time, and chiefly by a more nuanced presentation of his anger, Vergil portrays Aeneas as being very different from Achilles. There was a contemporary of Vergil who, on a momentous occasion, had invoked Achilles as an exemplar for the revenge he was seeking. That was Octavian, who did so during his first appearance in Rome after Julius Caesar’s assassination (Appian, BC 3. 46 f.). The monument to this private revenge was to be the Temple of Mars Ultor (Ovid, Fasti 5. 569 f.). As time went on, this private aspect of ultio was complemented with a public one: the revenge on the Parthians (Ovid, Fasti 5. 579–98) that was consummated by their return of the Roman standards in 20 B.C., the year before Vergil’s death. Similarly, Aeneas’ ultio in the final scene is both private and public. 35 It involves the obligation to Evander and Pallas, and it is ultio foederis rupti. Now when Ovid describes that temple in the Fasti, he characterizes it in Vergilian terms: It is Augustus’ maius opus (Fasti. 5. 568). And he deliberately recalls the words Vergil’s Aeneas uses before he kills Turnus: scelerato sanguine. Octavian, Ovid says, called on Mars, ades et satia scelerato sanguine ferrum (5. 575), “help me and satiate my sword with the criminal blood [of Caesar’s murderers].” Was this insatiate? Definitely not: Ovid says that Octavian did so with pia arma (569) and milite iusto (571), with pietas and iustitia. 36 Ovid, as many of us know who have written on both him and Vergil, was the most astute commentator Vergil ever had, and I think we should consider his words carefully. 37

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35 This is one of the few instances where these terms, which have been used far too often and far too schematically in recent writings on Vergil, have some validity; as can be seen, they are complementary rather than dichotomous on such occasions.
36 For similar reasons, Vergil calls Aeneas pius amidst his slaughter of opponents after Pallas’ death (10. 591; cf. 783): His war is still bellum pium et iustum.
37 Which does not mean, to comment on yet another horse that should be dead (see now P. White, Promised Verse: Poets in the Society of Augustan Rome [Cambridge, MA 1993]), that Ovid and Vergil followed Augustan “propaganda” or “ideology.” It is useful to observe the distinction between these concepts (which, moreover, are rarely defined in Augustan scholarship) and “topicality,” a distinction made, e.g., by numismatists; see C. H. V. Sutherland, The Emperor and the Coinage (London 1976) 99–101 and W. Hollstein, Die stadtromische Münzprägung der Jahre 78–50 v. Chr. zwischen politischer Aktualität und Familienthematik (diss. Marburg 1991).