BEE SWARMS AND NEW POLITIES:
THE INFLUENCE OF PLATO'S *LAWS* ON VIRGIL'S *AENEID*

LEE FRATANTUONO
Maynooth University, Maynooth
lee.fratantuono@mu.ie

ABSTRACT. The influence of Plato on Virgil has been the subject of research into the sources for the *Aeneid*. Plato's longest work, the *Nomoi* or *Laws*, has not received attention as a possible inspiration for Virgil. Close study of certain passages will demonstrate that Plato's use of bee imagery in particular as part of his metaphorical description of the process by which new polities are established may have been influential on Virgil's artistic presentation of the development and foundation of what would develop into the Lavinium of the future.

KEYWORDS: Plato, Virgil, Troy, Italy, bees.

The longest of Plato's surviving works is his *Laws*, a mammoth treatise in a dozen books that purports to describe a day's long conversation of three older men *en route* from Knossos to Mount Ida in Crete.[1] The discussants spend an imagined number of hours in philosophical reflection, inspired and evidently in full exercise of the leisure afforded by their unhurried journey.[2] The subject is the founding of an ideal state, a topic that lends itself to a wide-ranging and discursive treatment. By the abrupt, perhaps (if not probably) unfinished ending, the reader has been treated to a vast array of problems and solutions related to the establishment and cultivation of a successful new settlement.[3] Plato's last work has the inevitable quality of a valedictory to his long career of reflecting on the definition and importance of abstract concepts such as excellence and piety for politically minded

[1] For a useful introduction to the work see A. Laks (2005), and note also C. Bobonich (2010); cf. A.-E. Peponi (2013), with emphasis on the rich trove of cultural information and analyses in the text. The general reader in particular will benefit from the convenient *précis* of R.F. Staley (1983). On the significance of the Cretan setting note G.R. Morrow (1960).

[2] On how it is neither Zeus nor Apollo who inspires their musings, but "The god in us, the immortal … reason, which expresses itself in law," see D.J. O'Meara (2017), 132.

[3] For the inherent and lasting optimism with which the work is imbued, see T.J. Saunders (1970), 17.

DOI: 10.25205/1995-4328-2025-19-2-779-795

Greeks.[4] Famous for its prolix treatment of the metaphor that human beings are puppets of the immortals,[5] Plato's *Laws* has been the subject of a relatively extensive bibliography, not least with consideration of the question of whether the work betrays the fading powers of an author in decline.[6] Certainly throughout there are exegeses and analyses that invite comparison with earlier treatments of the same subjects in the Platonic corpus.

Our brief study will not revisit the major problems of scholarly engagement with the *Laws*. We shall not address questions as to the structure of the work or its relevance to the immediate political problems of Plato's Athens. Rather, we shall consider an unappreciated element of its *Nachleben*: the not insignificant influence that the Platonic text may have had on Virgil's *Aeneid*. In particular, we shall explore Virgil's possible appropriation of animal imagery from Plato's *Laws*, observing how the Augustan poet may have borrowed Plato's bee and horse metaphors in his exploration of the difficult process by which the vanquished city of Troy becomes the immensely powerful city of Rome. Close study of selected passages will reveal how Plato's *Laws* deserves to be considered among the potential sources for the presentation of major Virgilian themes, and how appreciation of Plato's possible influence deepens one's understanding and appreciation of the poet's political and socio-historical reflections.

We have no way of knowing for certain if the Roman poets of the Augustan Age were familiar with Plato's *Laws*. What follows is thus necessarily speculative in part. It aims to provoke further discussion of the Virgilian reception of Plato, and of the possible place of the *Laws* in particular among the sources for literary compositions.[7]

The first three books of the *Laws* offer general reflections on problems associated with jurisprudence and legal systems, and commentary on practices common in diverse parts of the Greek world.[8] The extended treatment of these vast concerns is marked by pervasive attention to the role of music and poetry in Greek life,[9] alongside topics both lofty and more banal. "Much of Books 1 and 2 is devoted to a

[4] Cf. J. Annas (2017), 2.

[5] 644d. On this key image note especially K. Moore (2014).

[6] Cf. G. Müller (1951), 184-90.

[7] We may note that Philodemus quotes a tag from the *Laws* in his treatise *On Anger*. While this does not prove that Virgil read Plato's work (let alone used it as a source), it does indicate that educated men in Virgil's circle were conversant with it, at least to some degree.

[8] For an introduction to the difficult problem of explicating the organizational principles of the work, see E. L'Arrivee (2008).

[9] Further on this topic see M. Folch (2015).

comparative evaluation of institutions distinctive of the interlocutors' home cities …"[10] It is only at the end of Book 3 that we learn that one of Plato's characters, Cleinias, has a practical interest in the discussion: he has been chosen to co-found a colony in Magnesia.[11] Much of the rest of the work is devoted to specific injunctions and detailed summaries of the proposed laws for this idealized Cretan migrant settlement.

In some regards, inevitably, the *Laws* invites comparisons with the *Republic*; certainly the bulk of its text is focused on exactly what the prescriptions peculiar to the new polity might and should be.[12] The tenth book diverges from the tenor and content of the lengthy focus on particular enactments; its more theological and philosophical content considers both the problem of atheism and the relationship of mortals and divinities.[13] Theology is as important to the work as is the study of law and jurisprudence.[14] But throughout, the focus of the dialogue remains on the conjuring of an idealized city that provokes ready comparison with the Kallipolis of the *Republic*.[15] If an aged Plato intended to craft an omnibus treatise to crown his career, the *Laws* succeeds in the lofty enterprise.

Cleinias' partners in dialogue include the Spartan Megillus and a nameless Athenian.[16] The Athenian asks his Cretan interlocutor about the composition of colonists in the envisaged city.[17] Cleinias indicates that it will probably consist of settlers from throughout Crete, and that the Cretans have a history of openness to Peloponnesian immigrants in particular, including Argives:

> ἔκ τε Κρήτης συμπάσης ἔοικεν γενήσεσθαι, καὶ τῶν ἄλλων δὲ Ἑλλήνων μάλιστά μοι φαίνονται τοὺς ἀπὸ Πελοποννήσου προσδέξασθαι συνοίκους. καὶ γὰρ ὃ νῦν δὴ λέγεις, ἀληθὲς

[10] S.S. Meyer, tr., *Plato: Laws 1 & 2* (Clarendon Plato Series), Oxford, 2015, p. 2.

[11] "This is perhaps the most surprising and decisive moment of the dialogue" (M.P. Zuckert (2013), 86).

[12] For a helpful overview of the relationship between the two works and their relative concerns, note S. Benardete (2000), 2-3, and cf. A. Laks (2022).

[13] R. Mayhew (2008) offers a translation with detailed commentary.

[14] Essential reading on this vast subject is M.J. Lutz (2012).

[15] For an insightful consideration of possible flaws inherent to the envisaged political entity, note M.S. Kochin (1998).

[16] On the question of the identity of the Athenian (Socrates?) see L. Strauss (1975), 2; cf. R.K. Balot (2024), 14-20, and the dense, valuable discussion of W.H.F. Altman (2016), 231 ff.

[17] L. Prauscello (2014) provides a literary-critical appraisal of Plato's treatment of the problem of how citizens interact with each other in light of religious conventions and expectations.

φράζεις, ὡς ἐξ Ἄργους εἰσίν, καὶ τό γε μάλιστ᾽ εὐδοκιμοῦν τὰ νῦν ἐνθάδε γένος, τὸ Γορτυνικόν: ἐκ Γόρτυνος γὰρ τυγχάνει ἀπῳκηκὸς ταύτης τῆς Πελοποννησιακῆς. (708a)[18]
It will probably be from the whole of Crete and of the rest of the Greeks, they seem most ready to admit people from the Peloponnese as fellow-settlers. For it is quite true, as you said just now, that we have some here from Argos, amongst them being the most famous of our clans, the Gortynian, which is a colony from Gortys, in the Peloponnese. (tr. R.G. Bury)

Cleinias' response reflects both a vision that is simultaneously Panhellenic and more restrictive.[19] Settlers will be welcome from all of Crete and from the rest of the Greeks.[20] Looming over such practical concerns is the philosopher's contemporary, fourth-century concern with Greek political life in the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War.[21] Cleinias proposes a liberal immigration policy, one that serves as a foil for the ensuing discussion and clarification.

First, Cleinias' response prompts an observation from the Athenian, in which the sending out of colonists from one clan is compared to the activity of a bee swarm:[22]

οὐ τοίνυν εὔκολος ὁμοίως γίγνοιτ᾽ ἂν ὁ κατοικισμὸς ταῖς πόλεσιν, ὅταν μὴ τὸν τῶν ἐσμῶν γίγνηται τρόπον, ἓν γένος ἀπὸ μιᾶς ἰὸν χώρας οἰκίζηται, φίλον παρὰ φίλων, στενοχωρίᾳ τινὶ πολιορκηθὲν γῆς ἤ τισιν ἄλλοις τοιούτοις παθήμασιν ἀναγκασθέν. (708b)
It would not be equally easy for States to conduct settlements in other cases as in those when, like a swarm of bees, a single clan goes out from a single country and settles, as a friend coming from friends, being either squeezed out by lack of room or forced by some other such pressing need.

The migration of a colony of bees is an image of a process that is easier to execute than the establishment of the proposed, more diverse polity.[23] "Bees are particularly famous for a cooperative and communitarian way of life."[24] "Bees do not differ

[18] Passages from the *Laws* are cited from J. Burnet (1907).

[19] For commentary *ad loc.* note especially K. Schöpsdau (2011), and E.B. England (1921).

[20] For the development of the implications of Plato's early reflections on the presence of diverse Greeks in the proposed Cretan settlement, see A.I. Orwin (2015).

[21] See further A. Nightingale (1999).

[22] For a useful catalogue of all the animals in the Platonic menagerie see J. Bell and M. Naas (2015), 249 ff.

[23] On Plato's use of the bee as an example in exploring the question of unity of substance (i.e., what makes a bee like to all other bees?) at *Meno* 72c, see R.M. Dancy (2004), 212.

[24] C. Ionescu (2007), 12.

as bees."[25] The Athenian uses the key phrase *ἓν γένος* to describe a polity that functions with the same single-minded purpose as a successful beehive.

Such a unified state is sometimes forced to travel abroad because of some crisis or necessity. Cleinias at once clarifies what might occasion such a pressing need. A single *γένος* might be compelled to find a new home because of civil strife, or on account of its being crushed in a grievous war:

> ἔστιν δ' ὅτε καὶ στάσεσιν βιαζόμενον ἀναγκάζοιτ' ἂν ἑτέρωσε ἀποξενοῦσθαι πόλεώς τι μόριον: ἤδη δέ ποτε καὶ συνάπασα πόλις τινῶν ἔφυγεν, ἄρδην κρείττονι κρατηθεῖσα πολέμῳ. (708b)
> At times, too, the violence of civil strife might compel a whole section of a State to emigrate; and on one occasion an entire State went into exile, when it was totally crushed by an overpowering attack.

When cities are compelled to set out on quests for a new future in a new home, circumstances are somewhat easier than in instances where there is no such crisis or emergency: disasters have a way of focusing attention on essentials. But there is a particular difficulty that confronts the new settlement:

> ταῦτ' οὖν πάντ' ἐστὶ [708c] τῇ μὲν ῥᾴω κατοικίζεσθαί τε καὶ νομοθετεῖσθαι, τῇ δὲ χαλεπώτερα. τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἕν τι εἶναι γένος ὁμόφωνον καὶ ὁμόνομον ἔχει τινὰ φιλίαν, κοινωνὸν ἱερῶν ὂν καὶ τῶν τοιούτων πάντων, νόμους δ' ἑτέρους καὶ πολιτείας ἄλλας τῶν οἴκοθεν οὐκ εὐπετῶς ἀνέχεται ...
> All such cases are in one way easier to manage, as regards settling and legislation, but in another way harder. In the case where the race is one, with the same language and laws, this unity makes for friendliness, since it shares also in sacred rites and all matters of religion; but such a body does not easily tolerate laws or polities which differ from those of its homeland.

Certainly when the other option is annihilation, it is comparatively easy for a *γένος* to relocate. A single *γένος* has the undeniable advantage of having one language and one set of traditions surrounding religion and related concerns (*ἕν τι εἶναι γένος ὁμόφωνον καὶ ὁμόνομον ἔχει τινὰ φιλίαν, κοινωνὸν ἱερῶν ὂν καὶ τῶν τοιούτων πάντων*). But there is a potential problem, too: such a *γένος* will also find it difficult to adapt to new ways. Typically, there will be hostility to laws and political customs/institutions that are different from its own. Implicit in all of this, too, is the fact that when one moves or relocates, usually there are already people living in the vicinity of the new home. Some degree of assimilation and corporate living is inevitable, unless a monolithic culture relocates to a completely deserted area.

[25] R.E. Allen (1970), 69.

A more diverse polity may present something of the reverse problem:

> τὸ δ' αὖ παντοδαπὸν ἐς ταὐτὸν συνερρυηκὸς γένος ὑπακοῦσαι μέν τινων νόμων καινῶν τάχα ἂν ἐθελήσειε μᾶλλον, τὸ δὲ συμπνεῦσαι, καὶ καθάπερ ἵππων ζεῦγος καθ' ἕνα εἰς ταὐτόν, τὸ λεγόμενον, συμφυσῆσαι, χρόνου πολλοῦ καὶ παγχάλεπον. (708d)
> On the other hand, the clan that is formed by fusion of various elements would perhaps be more ready to submit to new laws, but to cause it to share in one spirit and pant (as they say) in unison like a team of horses would be a lengthy task and most difficult.

In contrast to a singular *γένος*, a variegated clan (*παντοδαπὸν … γένος*) may perhaps (*τάχα ἄν* … is significant) be more amenable to new customs and traditions than a monolithic cultural entity. But to expect such a *γένος* to function more or less seamlessly, indeed to breathe together as if it were a pair of horses cooperating in unison, is the height of difficulty. It requires both supreme effort and significant length of time. If a group of Cretans from Knossos welcome Argives or Spartans to join a new foundation, tensions may arise as to the mores and habits of the nascent state. But given sufficient time and managerial acumen, there may be successful assimilation. One should never underestimate, however, the degree of challenge.

Here horses follow on bees, as zoological metaphors are employed to describe the precarious state of fledgling colonies, and the best way to ensure their success. Briefly and in passing, Plato's dialogue allows for artful, key literary images to adorn a text that is otherwise noted for its seeming preoccupation with the practical rather than the poetic.[26] At first glance, such artistic touches may seem all too rare and unmemorable in the *Laws*, notwithstanding the significance of the work for political and moral philosophy: 'It … has little dramatic or conversational sparkle; written in ungainly Greek, it stumbles oddly from one topic to another, and to read it continuously would seem to require dedication on a heroic scale … Yet its faults are very much on the surface … It contains no less than Plato's blueprint for a practical Utopia …"[27] Long after this early passage in the work, we remember the convenient, fitting pair of pictures as we proceed through the details of the foundation of the ideal state.

What do Plato's swarm of bees and team of horses signify? A unified state with common heritage and shared traditions functions like a hive; a more diverse entity requires extraordinary effort to ensure functionality on the level of a well-trained team of horses. Troubles loom, it would seem, in any colonization process. Apart from any question of the degree of the peril, the dangers are qualitatively distinct. Some entities are more or less xenophobic; others lack cultural cohesion and are

[26] Cf. here A. Nightingale (1993).

[27] T.J. Saunders (1975).

prone to social breakdown and division. It is no surprise that the Athenian stranger makes clear that lawgiving and the settlement of successful polities is the business of men perfect in the art of virtue:

> ἀλλ᾽ ὄντως ἐστὶν νομοθεσία καὶ πόλεων οἰκισμοὶ πάντων τελεώτατον πρὸς ἀρετὴν ἀνδρῶν. 708d). *But in truth legislation and the settlement of States are tasks that require men perfect above all other men in goodness.*

A reader might be forgiven for wondering if such *οἰκισμοί* could possibly exist; to be *τελεώτατος* sets a standard that leaves room for little or no failure with respect to *ἀρετή*. Mastery of virtue and excellence in this arena means the ability to navigate safely and profitably the inevitable risks of either scenario. The legislative acumen required to succeed in the business of successful city-building is exceptional; perils litter the path to fashioning an enduring political entity.

Plato's vivid imagery seems to have made an impression on Virgil, who appropriated it in his depiction of certain aspects of urban development. In the *Aeneid*, Priam's Troy suffers exactly the fate referenced by the Athenian stranger. Indeed, it is likely that Troy was the city he was thinking about as a paradigm of a polity under the pressure of necessity: *ἤδη δέ ποτε καὶ συνάπασα πόλις τινῶν ἔφυγεν, ἄρδην κρείττονι κρατηθεῖσα πολέμῳ* (708b). Overwhelmed and conquered, a new settlement is needed at once; the colonizing activities of Aeneas and his companions qualifies as an instance of the sort of pressing, ineluctable expedient that contrasts with the more leisurely establishment of new polities. The stranger's description of a people in dire straits (*ἓν γένος … ἀναγκασθέν*) accords with the plight of the Trojans as dramatically recalled in Book 2 of Virgil's epic.

Parallel to Aeneas' mission in the Virgilian vision is that of Elissa or Dido. Her Punic, Tyrian exiles are also occupied with urban planning and development, in consequence of her flight from a murderous brother and the loss of her husband Sychaeus. Aeneas' first glimpse of the work of Elissa's subjects on their new city of Carthage is embellished artfully with a bee simile; as bees labor in early summer, so the queen's citizens carry out their various tasks:

> qualis apes aestate nova per florea rura
> exercet sub sole labor, cum gentis adultos
> educunt fetus, aut cum liquentia mella
> stipant et dulci distendunt nectare cellas,
> aut onera accipiunt enientum, aut agmine facto
> ignavum fucos pecus a praesepibus arcent:

feruet opus redolentque thymo fraglantia mella (Aen. 1.430-6)[28]

> Like bees that in early summer through fields of flowers carry out their labor, when they lead forth the grown youth of their race, or pack in the liquid honey and swell their cells with sweet nectar, or receive the burdens of those arriving, or with a battle line formed, they avert the drones, a lazy herd, from their haunts; the work is afire, and the fragrant honey smells sweet with thyme. (Tr. mine).

The lovely, summer image is a portrait of efficient cooperation and meaningful, productive labor. It is exactly the way in which a unified society functions under effective management in the wake of perilous circumstances.

The bees of Book 1 are Carthaginian; in Book 7 – the first book of the second half of the poem – bee imagery recurs, this time of the Trojans. In Book 1 the bees are the subject of a memorable simile; in Book 7, bees appear portentously on a sacred laurel in King Latinus' palace in Latium (7.64-7 *huius apes summum densae, mirabile dictu, | stridore ingenti liquidum trans aethera vectae, | obsedere apicem, et pedibus per mutua nexis | examen subitum ramo frondente pependit*).[29] There is artful balance here, and with the requisite distinction to reflect reality: the Carthaginians are portrayed as a functioning hive, while the Trojans are in need of establishing a new colony. The Trojan bees have not yet achieved what Elissa's swarm has realized. The foreign bees have arrived, but one could argue that there is already a successful hive (indeed, multiple ones) in central Italy.

In Plato's dialogue, the principal concern raised by the Athenian was about the composition of the proposed new settlement. Will the colonists be selected from one place only, or will there be a welcome to people from throughout the Greek world? Will Dorians coexist with Ionians? Will Cretans and Athenians cooperate in the establishment of the proposed Magnesia? In brief, can a utopia be fashioned from diverse elements?[30]

In Virgil, the specific problem is not the composition of the group that sets out for a new home. Rather, the concern is focused on what the group encounters on arrival at its prospective home. For the Tyrian colonists in North Africa, there are hostile neighbors.[31] For Aeneas and his Trojans, there is nothing less than the war

---

[28] Citations from the *Aeneid* are taken from G.B. Conte (2019).

[29] See further here *ad loc.* N.M Horsfall (2000).

[30] For the practical ramifications of Plato's musings about the ideal state, see A. Domanski, "Principles of Early Education in Plato's *Laws*," in *Acta Classica*, Vol. 50 (2007), pp. 65-80.

[31] Cf. *Aen.* 1.338-9 and 563-4 (with Conway (1935), Austin (1971), and Stégen (1975), *ad loc.*), and *Aen.* 4.39-43 (with the notes of L.M. Fratantuono and R.A. Smith (2022)).

in Latium that will be waged with the Rutulian Turnus, the Etruscan Mezentius, and their long catalogue of allies and supporters. The second half of the *Aeneid* is dominated by this brutal and devastating conflict, the end of which is forecast by nothing less than divine reconciliation and negotiation between Jupiter and Juno in the poem's last book. Implicit to Plato's vision is that even if you ensure a homogeneous party of colonists, you must be ready to deal with what already exists in your new territory, and who will be admitted to citizenship therein. In Virgil, such problems are inherent to the parallel missions of Aeneas and Elissa, and in the case of Troy's colony, war follows soon after arrival.

Destiny dictated that Trojan exiles will establish a new city in Hesperia in cooperation with their new, Ausonian neighbors. The problem is vintage Plato: how shall such a diverse settlement be established and managed?

Before there is an end to hostilities and he can pursue the successful, irenic pursuit of the arts of legislation and city-planning, Aeneas will be driven to the limits of frustration and anger with his opponents and would-be partners in fashioning a shared polity. Bees will recur one more time as an important image. As Aeneas contemplates the extreme action of setting fire to Latinus' city and razing it to the ground, Virgil compares him to nothing less than a shepherd who tries to obtain honey by smoking out bees (12.587-92 *inclusas ut cum latebroso in pumice pastor | vestigavit apes fumoque implevit amaro; | illae intus trepidae rerum per cerea castra | discurrunt magnisque acuunt stridoribus iras, | volvitur ater odor tectis, tum murmure caeco | intus saxa sonant, vacuas it fumus ad auras*).[32] This last bee passage in the *Aeneid* is markedly different from its predecessors; the bees of this simile do not represent Trojan settlers, but the Latins. Aeneas' action is far more aggressive than that warned against in Plato's *Laws*, where the theft of another's swarm by rattling pots and pans is among the crimes that are delineated (8.843d-e).[33]

We have noted that Plato makes a distinction between states that enjoy the benefit of homogeneity in matters of language, religion, and cultural traditions, and those that are less unified in belief and custom. The risk for such states is of hesitation to accept anything novel or foreign. In contrast, states with a higher degree of diversity are less easily managed. To render them as cooperative as a team of horses is the consummate challenge. For a long list of reasons, the second half

[32] This passage is discussed *ad loc.* by B. Tilly (2012), R. Tarrant (2012), and A. Traina (2017), *ad loc.*

[33] E. Mussawir (2025) provides a rich assortment of legal lore, curious historical records, and intriguing information about ursine and apian aspects of legal practice.

of the *Aeneid* has rightly been called Virgil's *Iliad*.[34] Violence and loss abound; *pius* Aeneas succumbs to something akin to despair and bitter rage.

Aeneas' arrival in Latium marks the commencement of the long process by which Trojans and Latins will coalesce to a greater or lesser degree into what ultimately will be known as "Roman." When King Latinus receives Aeneas, he presents him with a gift of a team of horses of unique provenance:

> absenti Aeneae currum geminosque iugalis
> semine ab aetherio spirantis naribus ignem,
> illorum de gente patri quos daedala Circe
> supposita de matre nothos furata creauit. (7.280-3)
>
> *For the absent Aeneas there was a chariot and a team of horses, of ethereal seed and breathing fire from their nostrils. Crafty Circe had created them, bastards from that breed of their father, by mating them with a mortal mare.*

The sorceress Circe is associated with transformation and metamorphosis; the horses that her grandson Latinus bestows on his Trojan guest are the result of a breeding experiment.[35] They are bastards (*nothos*), the offspring of a divine stallions and a mortal mare. The gift is presented in that all too brief window before war will erupt in Italy.[36]

How is a crisis like that of the second half of the *Aeneid* to be resolved satisfactorily? In Virgil, the ultimate lawgiving, as it were, and the establishment of governing norms of the sort referenced in Plato's *Laws* is reserved not for negotiation between Trojan colonists and Latin hosts, but on the divine plane, in the lengthy exchange between Jupiter and Juno that serves to seal and to define the new polity in Italy (12.791-842). The immortals discuss exactly the problems of language and custom (12.825), of laws and treaties (12.822) that are on display throughout Plato's work. Juno's game is transparent and boldly stated: she wishes for the suppression of the Trojan element that she so detests (12.828). She wishes for the Latin element to be dominant in the future Rome, with the Teucrians relegated to a markedly junior status. Jupiter agrees to her demands without objection (12.833-40). A reader

[34] See especially here K.W. Gransden (1984).

[35] On the narrative significance of Virgil's introduction of Circe note especially V. Stoffelen (1994) and L. Aresi (2021); cf. C. Segal (1968).

[36] The gift is ominous in part given that horses are an emblem of war; cf. the equine portent of *Aen.* 3.537-47, with N.M. Horsfall (2006) and S.J. Heyworth and J.H.W. Morwood (2017), *ad loc.*

of Virgil's last book may well remember the musings in Plato's *Laws* about the status of human beings as puppets of the gods. And yet, in fact, the agreement that Virgil ascribes to the colloquy of Jupiter and Juno is nothing other than a description of the Roman reality of his time, a Rome that was Italian in *sermo* and *mores*, not Trojan.

Latinus' team of horses serves in some regards as a harbinger of this final resolution of the troubles in Latium. Circe's breeding experiments with solar stallions of supernatural provenance and all too ordinary mares worked successfully. The equation is not exact; Aeneas, after all, is the son of a deity, and he is destined himself for deification. We are not necessarily invited to parse and to weigh the divine lineages and qualifications of this or that hero on either side of the Trojan-Latin equation. We are, however, welcome to explore the implications of the impressive present. The horses that Circe's descendant Latinus offers to the absent Aeneas as a welcoming gift of honor and respect are associated with their chariot; they work in tandem. They constitute a team that is harmonious and formidable. They are the equine incarnation of what Plato warned was exceedingly difficult (*παγχάλεπον*) for a lawgiver to achieve. In a neat touch, Aeneas is not present for the supernal negotiations of Book 12, and he is not present for the bestowal of the horses and chariot in Book 7.

We may summarize and expand on certain key points. Leaving aside questions of destiny and divinity, Aeneas and his Trojans – like Elissa and her Tyrians – constitute a *γένος* in need of a new home because of the necessity occasioned by disaster. Plato in his *Laws* envisages two scenarios for such a calamity: civil strife and foreign invasion. Sibling strife is one of the most intimate types of internecine conflict; the breakdown of Elissa's relationship with her brother Pygmalion prompted her flight. In the case of the Tyrians we have one of Plato's alternatives, and in the case of the Trojans, the other.

In the case of Carthage, a more or less clear line is drawn between newly arriving *coloni* and existing peoples. Elissa faces challenges because of her suitor Iarbas and her Libyan, Barcaean, and other neighbors. Aeneas, for his part, has his own host of troubles *vis-à-vis* the denizens of Latium and the surrounding regions, and fully half of Virgil's epic is devoted to the war that erupts in Italy. Ultimately, the *Aeneid* looks to the foundation of the two great rival Mediterranean empires, and the perhaps inevitable conflict that arose. Virgil's Carthage poses a relatively simple problem in the poet's scheme. Both Elissa and Aeneas toy with the idea of a shared polity, to deadly outcome; at various points the subject will be paramount to the schemes of rival immortals.[37] On arrival in Carthage, Aeneas finds what amounts

[37] Cf. especially *Aen.* 1.561-78, 4.105-12, and 259-67.

to a Tyrian swarm, a productive colony of bees that is in the process of fashioning a new hive, productive and successful. By the close of the first third of the epic, the Trojans will flee from Carthage, and soon enough we shall hear of the portent of a swarm of bees that signals the advent of the Trojan colonists in Latium. The Trojan swarm was not destined to alight in Carthage; it is destined to find refuge in Hesperia. *Inde aerumnae oriuntur*.

What is the fate of the *examen subitum* (7.67) that seeks shelter on Latinus' laurel? Arguably, it is akin to Plato's *ἕν γένος*, a unified polity of Trojans. Initially there is a warm reception. After war breaks out in Italy between the newest arrivals to the region and the existing peoples, the Trojans (like Turnus) will find allies, including Arcadians from Pallanteum. Plato' argument is that homogenous, unified polities find it difficult to adapt to new ways and new customs. This difficulty is a two-way street; prejudice against the Trojans finds a sympathetic reception from Italian ears.[38] And if there is any destined new city that will represent a fusion (after some fashion) of Trojan and Italian, Plato wisely warns about the nearly inevitable tensions that will follow.

When Aeneas discusses the solemn details of a proposed treaty with Latinus to bring an end to the war as part of his mutual oath-taking, he speaks of an arrangement that respects the traditions of both Trojans and Latins:[39]

> nec mihi regna peto: paribus se legibus ambae
> invictae gentes aeterna in foedera mittant.
> sacra deosque dabo; socer arma Latinus habeto,
> imperium sollemne socer; mihi moenia Teucri
> constituent urbique dabit Lavinia nomen. (12.190-4)

> *Nor do I seek a kingdom for myself; let both peoples, unvanquished, make an eternal treaty. I shall grant you your gods and your rites; let my father-in-law Latinus have his arms, and let my father-in-law keep his customary command. For me the Teucrians will set up walls, and Lavinia will give her name to the city.*

[38] Note, for example, the sentiments expressed by the maddened Amata at 7.359-72. The *Aeneid* is deeply concerned with the question of the influence of the immortals on human affairs; for a succinct, sober appraisal of a topic that invites multiple monographs, see T.E. Page (1894–1900), *ad* 1.299 *nescia fati*.

[39] On this passage note F. Hickson Hahn (1999). There is useful information on the subject of the history of the practice of oaths in the Roman tradition in O. Peukert Stock (forthcoming).

The language is noteworthy. The intended nuptial alliance will occur; Aeneas will have Latinus' daughter Lavinia, and she will give her name to a new city, Lavinium. There is an emphasis on equality of law. It is of particular interest, however, that Aeneas speaks of his personal role in religious matters (*sacra deosque dabo*), with Latinus referenced specifically with respect to his military power and command (*socer arma Latinus habeto* / *imperium sollemne socer*, in neat chiasmus). The details of the envisaged arrangement seem to respond to the political concerns that risk being the occasion of conflict for any new nation or state. The laws will be equal (*paribus … legibus*); Aeneas' particular mention of his role in religious affairs may reflect his status as the *pius* devotee of the gods, while Latinus' association with *arma* may be intended to assuage any concern about Trojan hostility and threat of violence.

With Aeneas' statements at the treaty rites we may compare the very proem of the epic, where the Trojan hero is referenced both in connection to city-building and to the bringing of gods to Latium: … *dum conderet urbem* / *inferretque deos Latio* (1.5-6). The *deos* of the proem are the Trojan Penates, the household gods whose conveyance to Italy is a source of aggravation for Juno (1.68 *Ilium in Italiam portans victosque penates*).[40]

But however we parse the details of the envisaged treaty, Aeneas' declaration to Latinus invites interesting comparison to Jupiter's at 12.834-7:

> sermonem Ausonii patrium moresque tenebunt,
> utque est, nomen erit; commixti corpore tantum
> subsident Teucri. morem ritusque sacrorum
> adiciam faciamque omnes uno ore Latinos
>
> *The Ausonians will keep their ancestral language and customs; their name will be as it is. Mixed only in body, the Teucrians will sink down. I shall add sacred rites and custom, and I shall make them all Latins, with one language*

Something has not so much been changed, as clarified. The *urbs* of the proem of the epic, after all, is not Rome but Lavinium. The opening of the *Aeneid* describes a process that will culminate in Rome (1.7), a process fraught with challenges and crises, in which the establishment of Lavinium is a key stepping stone. Plato's Athenian stranger used the language *χρόνου πολλοῦ καὶ παγχάλεπον* to describe a process of this sort; such sentiments resonate with the opening summary of Virgil's poem.

In an important sense, the Trojan *ἕν γένος* that set out for a new, Hesperian home illustrated the principle enunciated by Plato's Athenian stranger. In the *Laws*, the

[40] On the Penates in Virgil see L. Fratantuono (2022).

question is of the response and reaction of the colonists (and, implicitly, of those they encounter in their proposed new home) once they experience new customs and traditions. There is inevitable tension; it is difficult to avoid conflict.

The alternative in Plato is the polity that is a *παντοδαπὸν … γένος*. This entity is more amenable to new laws and new mores. But to convert it into a manageable team of spirited horses is another matter entirely.

In Book 7 of the *Aeneid*, the bees = the Trojans in search of refuge and a new home. The Trojan bees have escaped successfully not only from their ransacked Asian home, but also from the beehive of Carthaginian. They are a single clan. Their unity is not in question, but their new, Hesperian home is already inhabited.

Latinus offers his guest Aeneas what amounts to nothing less than the other zoological metaphor from Plato's *Laws*: a team of horses. The horses in Virgil are specifically a blended team, reared by Circe from parents mortal and immortal. They embody what in Plato is the end of the process; they are a harbinger of an irenic future.[41] The horses are presented to an absent Aeneas (*absenti Aeneae* is no merely incidental detail), because they do not, as yet, reflect that ultimate reality.

In Book 12, Aeneas is willing to swear to a proposed treaty with Latinus. Aeneas the nomothete proposes something that would inspire lengthy debate were one of Plato's interlocutors to mention it. His vision is of something akin to a binary system, one in which each entity retains certain prerogatives, while receiving others from its partner. It is a recipe for an alliance sealed by nuptial union, not for a united, homogenous polity or *ἕν γένος* (at least in the immediate).

The treaty is doomed, and in the ensuing scenes of bitter conflict and renewed fighting, we find Aeneas compared to nothing less than a shepherd seeking to smoke out bees – in this case, the Latin swarm with which he is at war. The time for imagined cooperation and coexistence is a bitter memory; Aeneas contemplates invasion and destruction of the sort that Troy suffered at the hands of the Greeks.

What ultimately is decided – in Aeneas' absence – is appreciably different from the Trojan hero's vision near the start of Book 12. There will be a marriage and a union. Indeed, there will be the realization of Plato's *ἕν γένος* – at least in the Roman future. Corporally, the Roman race will be descended from the union of the Trojans and the Latins. Such a political entity would offer a classic example of Plato's *παντοδαπὸν … γένος*, a polity that is notoriously difficult to train to function seamlessly like a good team of horses. But as Jupiter and Juno agree, the future Rome

[41] Circe (not surprisingly, given her identity as a sorceress) is a polyvalent figure in Virgil as elsewhere; for a consideration of the darker aspects of her character, note E. Adler (2003) 144.

will not labor under a conflicted set of traditions or the attempt to blend successfully the Trojan and the Latin elements. Rather, the Roman composition will be Latin; it will be Ausonian in terms of *sermo* and *mores*, and not Trojan. The Teucrian contribution will be limited to biological necessity, not to cultural or linguistic practice. This clarification is presented by Virgil as the salient feature of Juno's reconciliation to Roman destiny.

In his *Aeneid*, Virgil undertook a monumental task, one that encompassed in no small part an explanation for how history progressed from Priam's eastern city to the Rome of the poet's contemporary, Augustan world. In careful, brilliant fashion, Virgil employed purposeful intertextual allusions to a wide range of poetic and prose antecedents. Among the varied sources of which he made use, one significant, thus far unappreciated text is Plato's last work. By adopting Plato's memorable imagery of both a migrating bee swarm and a well-managed, spirited team of horses, Virgil effectively portrayed the political and social aspects of his exploration of the Trojan element in Roman history. In accord with the philosopher's description of the processes by which a swarm of bees finds a fruitful new home and a potentially unruly, chaotic polity is made akin to a superlative chariot team, Virgil charts the long and arduous course from Troy to Rome, thus tinging the story that was heralded in the proem of his epic with Platonic color.

References

Adler, R. (2003) *Vergil's Empire: Political Thought in the Aeneid*. Lanham, Maryland.

Allen, R.E. (1970) *Plato's Euthyphro and the Earlier Theory of Forms* (International Library of Philosophy and Scientific Method). New York.

Altman, W.H.F. (2016) *The Guardians on Trial: The Reading Order of Plato's Dialogues from Euthyphro to Phaedo*. Lanham, Maryland.

Annas, J. (2017) *Virtue & Law in Plato & Beyond*. Oxford.

Aresi, L. (2021) "The Hidden Seduction: Circe and the Sirens in the *Aeneid*," *Vergilius* 67, 161–182.

Austin, R.G. (1971) *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Primus*. Oxford.

Balot, R.K. (2024) *Tragedy, Philosophy, and Political Education in Plato's Laws*. Oxford.

Bell, J., and Naas, M. (2015) *Plato's Animals: Gadflies, Swans, and Other Philosophical Beasts*. Bloomington, Indiana.

Benardete, S. (2000) *Plato's Laws: The Discovery of Being*. Chicago.

Bobonich, C. (2010) *Plato's Laws: A Critical Guide*. Cambridge.

Burnet, J. (1907) *Platonis Opera Tomus V: Tetralogia IX Definitiones et Spuria*. Oxford.

Conte, G.B. (2019) *P. Vergilius Maro: Aeneis* (editio altera). Berlin-New York.

Conway, R.S. (1935) *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Primus*. Cambridge.

Dancy, R.M. (2004) *Plato's Introduction of Forms*. Cambridge.

Domanski, A. (2007) "Principles of Early Education in Plato's *Laws*," *Acta Classica* 50, 65–80.

England, E.B. (1921) *The Laws of Plato … Vol. I, Books I-VI*. Manchester.

Folch, M. (2015) *The City and the Stage: Performance, Genre, and Gender in Plato's Laws*. Oxford.

Fratantuono, L. (2022) "*Vestaque mater*: divinidaes domésticas en Virgilio," (tr. M.E. Cairo), *Auster* 27, e073.

Fratantuono, L.M., and Smith, R.A. (2022) *Virgil, Aeneid 4: Text, Translation, and Commentary*. Leiden-Boston.

Gransden, K.W. (1984) *Virgil's Iliad: A Study in Epic Narrative*. Cambridge.

Heyworth, S.J., and Morwood, J.H.W. (2017) *A Commentary on Vergil, Aeneid 3*. Oxford.

Hickson Hahn, F. (1999) "The Transformation of an Oath Ritual: *Aeneid* 12.169-174," *Vergilius* 45, 213–215.

Horsfall, N.M. (2000) *Virgil, Aeneid 7: A Commentary*. Leiden-Boston-Köln.

Horsfall, N.M. (2006) *Virgil, Aeneid 3: A Commentary*. Leiden-Boston.

Ionescu, C. (2007) *Plato's Meno: An Interpretation*. Lanham, Maryland.

Kochin, M.S. (1998) "The Unity of Virtue and the Limitations of Magnesia …," *History of Political Thought* 19, 125–141.

L'Arrivee, E. (2008) "The Logical Structure of Plato's *Laws*," *History of Political Thought* 29, 27–48.

Laks, A. (2005) *Médiation et coercition: Pour une lecture des Lois de Platon* (Cahiers de Philologie, Volume 22, Série *Les Textes*). Villeneuve d'Ascq.

Laks, A. (2022) *Plato's Second Republic: An Essay on the Laws*. Princeton.

Lutz, M.J. (2012) *Divine Law and Political Philosophy in Plato's Laws*. DeKalb, Illinois.

Mayhew, R. (2008). *Plato Laws 10* (Clarendon Plato Series). Oxford.

Moore, K. (2014) "Plato's Puppets of the Gods: Representing the Magical, the Mystical, and the Metaphysical," *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 22, 37–72.

Morrow, G.R. (1960) *Plato's Cretan City: A Historical Interpretation of the Laws*. Princeton (reprinted 1993, with a new forward by C.H. Kahn).

Müller, G. (1951) *Studien zu den platonischen Nomoi* (Zetemata 3). München (second edition, 1968).

Mussawir, E. (2025) *Creatures of Jurisprudence: Bears and Bees as Juridical Species*. Abingdon-New York.

Nightingale, A. (1993) "Writing/Reading a Sacred Text: A Literary Interpretation of Plato's *Laws*," *Classical Philology* 88, 279–300.

Nightingale, A. (1999) "Plato's Lawcode in Context: Rule by Written Law in Athens and Magnesia," *The Classical Quarterly* 49, 100–122.

O'Meara, D.J. (2017) *Cosmology and Politics in Plato's Later Works*. Cambridge.

Orwin, A.I. (2015) "A Greek City that Dislikes Greeks: The Paradoxical Relationship between Magnesia and Its Fellow Hellenes in Plato's *Laws*," *History of Political Thought* 36, 401—418.

Page, T.E. (1894–1900) *The Aeneid of Virgil*. London.

Peponi, A.-E. (2013) *Performance and Culture in Plato's Laws*. Cambridge.

Peukert Stock, O. (forthcoming) *Objects, Bodies, and Places: Material Aspects of Ancient Roman Oath-taking*, Dissertation, Lund University.
Prauscello, L. (2014) *Performing Citizenship in Plato's Laws*. Cambridge.
Saunders, T.J. (1970) *Plato: The Laws*. London (corrected reprint, 1975).
Saunders, T.J. (1975) "The Penguinification of Plato," *Greece & Rome* 22, 19–28.
Schöpsdau, K. (2011) *Nomoi* (*Gesetze*). *Buch IV-VII. Platon Werke. Übersetzung und Kommentar. Band IX.2*. Göttingen.
Segal, C. (1968) "Circaean Temptations: Homer, Vergil, Ovid," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 99, 419–442.
Staley, R.F. (1983) *An Introduction to Plato's Laws*. Indianapolis, Indiana.
Stégen, G. (1975) *Le livre I de l'Énéide*. Namur.
Stoffelen, V. (1994) "Vergil's Circe: Sources for a Sorceress," *L'Antiquité classique* 63, 121–135.
Strauss, L. (1975) *The Argument and the Action of Plato's Laws*. Chicago.
Tarrant, R. (2012) *Virgil: Aeneid, Book XII*. Cambridge.
Tilly, B. (1969) *P. Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Duodecimus*. London.
Traina, A. (2017) *Virgilio: l'utopia e la storia: Il libro XII dell'Eneide e antologia dell'opere*. Bologna.
Zuckert, M.P. (2013) "It is Difficult for a City with Good Laws to Come into Existence: On Book 4," in G. Recco and E. Sanday (2013), *Plato's Laws: Force and Truth in Politics*, Bloomington-Indianapolis, 86–104.