

# SILENUS' SONG (VIRGIL ECL. 6.27-86) —A SOURCE FOR OVID'S PYTHAGOREANISM IN THE *METAMORPHOSES* ?

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## Abstract

Pythagorean ideas in Silenus' song in Virgil's Eclogue 6 are set out. The role of music in ordering a transcendent, stable world and changing cosmos and in accessing the transcendent world is shown to be stressed by Virgil. A modern-philosophical account of musical transcendence is provided, as well as an explanation of its continued attractiveness for poets and philosophers who ponder the notion of immortality. The same ideas are then shown to be emphasised in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The conclusion is drawn that the *Metamorphoses* owe their philosophical dimension to Virgil's Pythagoreanism in Eclogue 6.

*Key Words:* Pythagoreanism, Immortality, Music, Silenus, 'Metamorphoses'.

## Resumen

Se exponen las ideas pitagóricas de la canción de Sileno en la Égloga 6 de Virgilio. Se muestra cómo Virgilio enfatiza el papel de la música como ordenadora de un mundo trascendente y estable, un cosmos cambiante y como acceso al mundo trascendental. Se proporciona una explicación moderno-filosófica de la trascendencia de la música, así como una explicación de la continua atracción que ésta tiene para poetas y filósofos que consideran la noción de inmortalidad. Después, se muestra que las mismas ideas son enfatizadas en las *Metamorfosis* de Ovidio. La conclusión es que las *Metamorfosis* deben su dimensión filosófica al pitagorismo de Virgilio en la Égloga 6.

*Palabras clave:* pitagorismo, inmortalidad, música, Sileno, *Metamorfosis*.

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In the words of Charles Kahn Pythagoreanism had always been ‘en vogue’ in Rome<sup>1</sup>.

Ennius, the father of Roman poetry, held Pythagorean beliefs<sup>2</sup>. Cicero translated Plato’s ‘Pythagorean’ dialogue *Timaeus* into Latin<sup>3</sup> and in his philosophical writings developed a ‘cosmic religion’ with Pythagorean overtones that was to have a profound influence on Virgil<sup>4</sup>. As to Ovid, with Book I’s cosmogony and Pythagoras’ speech in Book XV he certainly furnished his *Metamorphoses* with a philosophical frame<sup>5</sup>. But the poet’s philosophical seriousness, particularly his adherence to Pythagorean views, is a matter of dispute<sup>6</sup>. The parallels in structure and content between the *Metamorphoses* and Silenus’ song in Virgil’s sixth Eclogue<sup>7</sup> have been noted<sup>8</sup>. I intend to address the question whether there might not also be parallels in philosophical content to the extent that Ovid can be said to have borrowed his Pythagoreanism from Virgil.

Which ideas of the cluster of ideas known as ‘Pythagoreanism’ are originally due to Pythagoras remains a matter of debate,<sup>9</sup> as well as the

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<sup>1</sup>C. H. Kahn, *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans; A brief History* (Indianapolis, 2001), 88.

<sup>2</sup>Kahn, *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans*, 86.

<sup>3</sup>Kahn, *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans*, 73, 86.

<sup>4</sup>F. A. Sullivan, “Some Virgilian Beatitudes”, *AJPh* 82 (1961): 394-405

<sup>5</sup>E. Fantham, *Ovid’s Metamorphoses* (Oxford, 2004), chs. 2, 8.

<sup>6</sup>For M. M. Colavito, (*The Pythagorean Intertext in Ovid’s Metamorphoses* Lampeter, 1998), Ovid is a Pythagorean devotee, while for P. De Lacey, (“Philosophical Doctrine and Poetic Technique in Ovid”, *CJ* 43 [1947]: 153-161.), his philosophical efforts are a matter of poetical technique.

<sup>7</sup>All references to Virgil’s poem are based on R. Coleman’s edition (*Virgil: Eclogues*, Cambridge, 1977). See the Appendix where the entire passage is quoted as well as the respective translation by A. J. Boyle, *The Eclogues of Virgil* (Melbourne, 1976).

<sup>8</sup>B. Otis, speaks of a “striking resemblance”. Cfr. *Ovid as an Epic Poet* (Cambridge, 1966), 48.

<sup>9</sup>G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven & M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge, 1983), 331-333; Kahn, *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans*, 1, 2.

problem whether these ideas are the outcome of cult activity or serious philosophical argument<sup>10</sup>.

Two central ideas seem to be originally those of Pythagoras:<sup>11</sup> first, the idea of a mathematically structured, transcendent, ultimate reality beyond an ever cyclically changing empirical world of becoming. Second, the idea of the soul's immortality, with corollary beliefs in its possible transmigration into animal form, in recollection of prenatal existence, in the kinship of living things, and the pursuit of a way of life characterised by vegetarian dietary restrictions and purificatory exercises, involving mathematical and musical practice and the learning and frequent repetition of passwords and doctrinal propositions. The Pythagorean way of life was then believed to secure a better existence for the soul in the after-life with the hope of a final release from the cycle of recurrence governing the world of becoming<sup>12</sup>.

These two central ideas were elaborated by Plato in the *Timaeus* and *Phaedo* respectively<sup>13</sup>. The eschatological beliefs were shared with the Orphic cult tradition, but distinguished, for example, by the Pythagoreans' worship of Apollo rather than the Orphic Dionysus<sup>14</sup>. The need for purification of the soul to prepare its ascent to a stable, transcendent and timeless world indicates that while entrapped in the temporal world of becoming the soul was considered to be in perennial conflict<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup>F. M. Cornford, ("Mysticism and Science in the Pythagorean Tradition", in *The Pre-Socratics. A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. A. P. D. Mourelatos, Princeton, 1993, 135ff), detects a serious scientific strand and a cult strand in the Pythagorean tradition. W. Burkert (*Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*, Harvard, 1972), remains sceptical. See also Kirk et al., *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 235.

<sup>11</sup>Kahn, *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans*, 3, 4; and Kahn, "Pythagorean Philosophy before Plato", in *The Pre-Socratics. A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. A. P. D. Mourelatos (Princeton, 1993), 178.

<sup>12</sup>Kirk et al., *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 238; Kahn, "Pythagorean Philosophy before Plato", 165, 166; *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans*, 3, 4.

<sup>13</sup>Kahn, *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans*, 56-62.

<sup>14</sup>Kahn, *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans*, 4, 20; Cornford, "Mysticism and Science in the Pythagorean Tradition", 141.

<sup>15</sup>Cornford, "Mysticism and Science in the Pythagorean Tradition", 152-160.

How the mathematical, timeless, transcendent world and the temporal physical world of becoming are related and how the soul is to exist eventually in the former remains obscure. The 5<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Philolaos developed a cosmology along Pythagorean lines according to which both the numbers and the cosmos result from the breathing in of void from the unlimited air or *pneuma* by a primordial Monad<sup>16</sup>. The cosmos was thus likened to a living creature. Numbers provided the underlying order of cosmogony and the regularities in the cosmos, and were likened to or even identified with sensible entities, a theory much criticised by Aristotle,<sup>17</sup> particularly in its Platonic guise in the *Timaeus*<sup>18</sup>. In Philolaos' cosmology fire played a crucial role as the element of a central fire around which the planets revolve, as the element of the fixed stars at the cosmos' boundary and of the sun, which was believed to deflect the stars' caelestial light onto the planets<sup>19</sup>. Fire and stars were also symbolically associated with immortal, or divine existence<sup>20</sup>. The ideas of the cosmic significance of fire and *pneuma*, for example, were appropriated by Stoic philosophies, and through Cicero's writings remained influential in Roman thought<sup>21</sup>.

In Virgil's poem Pythagorean ideas, are, if at all, communicated by Silenus. In Greek mythology Silenus is a satyr combining traits of animal and human nature, which places him in the Orphic-Dionysian tradition. Virgil's Silenus luring the Fauns and beasts with his song, vs. 26, 27, stands in that tradition. But Silenus is also a purveyor of Apollonian wisdom, including mathematical-astronomical knowledge<sup>22</sup>. In the rhythm set by the anaphora *tum*, vs. 26, 27, and *nec tantum*, vs. 28, 29, one

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<sup>16</sup>Kahn, "Pythagorean Philosophy before Plato", 176, 183; *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans*, 25, 29ff.

<sup>17</sup>Kahn, *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans*, 25-28; "Pythagorean Philosophy before Plato", 175-176; Kirk *et al.*, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 331-333.

<sup>18</sup>Kahn, *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans*, 56.

<sup>19</sup>Kahn, "Pythagorean Philosophy before Plato", 178, 179; Kirk *et al.*, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 343.

<sup>20</sup>Colavito, *The Pythagorean Intertext in Ovid's Metamorphoses*, ch. 1.

<sup>21</sup>Kahn, *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans*, 73, 86; F. A. Sullivan, "Some Virgilian Beatitudes", *AJPh* 82 (1961): 402-403.

<sup>22</sup>J. A. Notopoulos, "Silenus the Scientist", *CJ* 62 (1967): 308-309.

might hear the incantatory repetitiveness of Pythagorean purificatory exercise. *Numerum*, v. 27, number being the key Pythagorean concept, is melodiously linked by internal rhyme, (*tum/numerum*), and elision, (*vero/in*) to Silenus' rhythm. In the high 'i' assonances of *rigidas* and *cacumina* one perceives the treetops' shivering, affected by the vibrating assonances of 'm'. Silenus' song seems to have united all living things<sup>23</sup> in a universal resonance phenomenon, manifesting their kinship.

In the cosmogony, vs. 31-44, four Pythagorean themes are prominent. First, the world's creation is likened to that of a living entity, arising from *semina*, v. 31. Life processes are emphasised throughout, and Pyrrha's stone throwing resembles an act of sowing.

Second, of the four elements fire dominates, set off from the tricolon, v. 33, into v. 34. The sun, Pythagorean symbol of immortality, is worth the personified earth's marvel at v. 37.

Third, despite the latent presence of a stable world of being, the Pythagorean world of becoming is not configured for the benefit of man. The world of vs. 37-40 appears foreign to animals erring in it, v. 40. Man is literally thrown into it, endowed with a nature that leads him to tragedy, vs. 41-44. Virgil's anthropogony delineates two seemingly inexorable destinies for man, tragedy through excessive desire symbolised by Prometheus, vs. 41, 42, and tragedy by being victim of acts so motivated, symbolised by Hylas' demise, vs. 43, 44.

Finally, the cosmogony's musicality is too striking not to imply a more than ornamental significance. Enjambements<sup>24</sup> and repetitions<sup>25</sup> set the rhythm. Prevailing 'i' assonances<sup>26</sup> indicate fire's (omni-)presence in cosmic and life processes. The 'a' sound dominates vs. 31, 32, followed by the 'o's of *ponto*, v. 35. The 'e' intrudes with a length at v. 34, (*concreverit*), and appears equally stressed in the euphonious *discludere Nerea* of v. 35. Only at v. 36 do the vowels come into full interplay with *coeperit*, v. 36, and *incipient*, v. 39, framing this symphony arising out

<sup>23</sup>At vs. 29, 30 inanimate things join.

<sup>24</sup>Vs. 31, 32; vs. 33, 34; vs. 35, 36.

<sup>25</sup>*et, omnia* at vs. 33, 34; *cum* at v. 39.

<sup>26</sup>Particularly at v. 33, v. 34, v. 39, v. 40.

of disparate tonal order and modelling the world's genesis via *coagi* out of elemental order.

At vs. 41-44 verse architecture already seals man's lot with the parallel, anaphoric alliterations *hinc/his*, vs. 41, 43, and *Caucasiasque/clamassent*, vs. 42, 44. In the harsh 'c', 'p' alliterations of "hinc lapides Pyrrha iactus", v. 41, echoed by *Caucasiasque/volucres*, v. 42, and *Pyrrha/Prometheus*, vs. 41, 42, the latter enclosing man's early history, we hear the stones hitting the ground. In the noise of man's fall following the central caesura at v. 41 we forget the Saturnian realm actually preceding it. The hysteron-proteron might even exemplify man's paradoxical, catastrophe-bound nature.

Yet, vs. 41, 42's non-musical harshness contrasts with vs. 43, 44's rhythmic-melodious flow and the euphonious vowel sequence 'y/a/au/ae' of *Hylan nautae* to be echoed in the repetition of *Hyla* at v. 44. Two caesurae enclose the first *Hyla*, while in the second, elided, (*Hyla/omne*), into the darker *omne sonaret*, we hear the echo on the beach and the spring, with the 'o' and 'n' sounds of *quo fonte*, v. 43, echoing in *omne sonaret*. The searchers' pained shouting transforms into resounding melodious echo. Virgil thus sketches a musicogony at vs. 43, 44. While the cosmogony insinuates a harmonious world of being behind the world of becoming, vs. 43, 44 suggest a musical way of salvation from the inevitably tragical integration of man into that world, vs. 41, 42.

The main part tells of transformations, (vs. 45-63, 74-81), and Gallus' insertion into an illustrious, divine poetical lineage, (vs. 64-73). The transformation stories are all tragical love stories with the transformation being the result either of the subject's excessive passions<sup>27</sup> or its being the helpless victim of those of others,<sup>28</sup> expanding on the Promethean ambition, vs. 41-42, and Hylas' innocent demise, vs. 43, 44.

Subjects are metamorphosed into plants and mostly animals. The moral and eschatological significance of animal nature remains ambiguous. On the one hand, animal nature serves as punishment, on

<sup>27</sup>For example, the *ménage à trois* of Tereus, Philomele and Procne.

<sup>28</sup>Poseidon punishes Minos through Pasiphaë.

the other hand, it serves as a model of peaceful life close to the (numerical) rhythms of nature, with periods of passion being temporally limited. The image of the bull resting on his bed of hyacinths, v. 52, or occasionally pursuing a heifer, v. 54, has symbolic quality.

The musicogony's promise of salvation from the world of transformation is fulfilled by Gallus' poetical divination with its Apolline descent being emphasised. His lovesick erring by Permessus does not degenerate into violent passion and metamorphosis but is sublimated into divine music. If the river is seen as a symbol of the endless change of the world of becoming, the poet-musician is shown to be able to transcend it towards an eternally stable world, the harmony of which resounded already in vs. 27-30 and vs. 31-40. The poet-musician might offer a cosmic perspective on love and a way of redemption (vs. 64-73), between the tragical love stories of vs. 45-63 and vs. 74-81 that recapitulate the anthropogony's seemingly inexorable dilemma (vs. 41-42, vs. 43-44).

Song and echo continue almost unisono across the physical end of the song in the coda (vs. 82-86), marked by the *caesura*, *ille canit* at v. 84. The entire passage is enjambed. The high 'i' is heard throughout, as it was in vs. 30-40. The rhythmic mellifluousness is carried dynamically by the active verb forms from *meditante*, v. 82, to *processit*, v. 86, which continue the main part's musicians' genealogy, now including the largely personified audience.

Even the darker physical echo of vs. 84, 85, framed by *pulsae referunt*, v. 84, and *numerumque referre*, v. 85, is not without cosmic significance. The shepherds counting sheep are close to nature's numerical rhythms, whilst the valleys carry the song to the stars, symbol of Pythagorean immortality. The polyptoton of *referre* relates to 'number', the key Pythagorean concept, as well as to the 'bringing back' of Pythagorean anamnesis of astral existence.

What is sung by Silenus in vs. 82-84 are Apollo's songs described via their echo on the river Eurotas. Just like Hercules' pain over the loss of Hylas, so Gallus' and the God's pain is articulated into beautiful music, finding a joyful echo. The personification is hyperbolic. The river does not listen *beatus*, but orders the trees to learn the song. Taken

as a symbol of eternal change, Apollo-Silenus' songs have echoed on the river the eternal order behind change. Eurotas is happy, hearing his nature revealed. The divinely inspired singers have wrested temporarily from the river the musical nature of a timeless world behind the eternal change the river symbolizes.

Finally, Virgil offers the image of celestial music. The heavens are unwilling to see the subcelestial sphere cause mortals to end 'their' song. Despite the lower pitched, rhythmic cadence of 'Vesper Olympo', v. 86, the suspicion is growing that the high, celestial music, with the assonanced 'i' and alliterated fricative 's' of v. 86, continues eternally in the dark, while the shepherds and mortal singers have tuned into it only temporarily.

In Pythagorean terms the cosmic significance of music is based on the fact that music, the order of cosmogony and cosmos, and ultimate, eternal, transcendent reality share a common mathematical structure. In time-bound musical experience man thus 'hears' the eternal order of creation, cosmos and ultimate reality<sup>29</sup>.

The cosmic significance of music admits of a more prosaic explanation. In hearing music, physical vibrations are heard as sounds. Their existence like that of colours depends on the listener's perceptual capacities. To hear sounds as tones, that is as elements of music, yet higher mental capacities are required which organize sounds according to pitch, harmony, rhythm, and melody, and on which the existence of music in sound depends<sup>30</sup>. Yet, sounds and music are not heard as inner processes but possess an existence and identity external to the listener and independent from their physical sources<sup>31</sup>. A shepherd who hears a flute melody somewhere in the woods can recognize it without looking for the flutist, and he can re-identify the same flute melody played on a different flute or on a lyre.

When sounds are heard as music, that is as tones, the tones seem to be organized on a tonal 'surface', according to concepts that are

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<sup>29</sup>Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford, 1999), 63, 64.

<sup>30</sup>Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, 78, 79.

<sup>31</sup>Scruton, "Representation in Music", *Philosophy* 51 (1997): 286.



borrowed from our concepts of free movement in space and of rational, intentional action<sup>32</sup>. There is 'movement' in music, music seems to move 'up' and 'down', for example. Furthermore, if in a melody tone *B* follows tone *A* it does so not in the sense of *B* being the effect of cause *A* but in the sense of *B* being somehow the 'right response' to *A*. Finally music 'moves freely', it can rest, step backwards, move ahead and set its own pace, unconstrained by the order of causation and time's arrow. Hence in the entirely temporal experience of musical listening the listener is exposed to a sensuous intimation of a way of existence according to a free, intentional order in an external realm outside the order of cause and time<sup>33</sup>.

Moreover, since the listener ascribes the harmony he hears, which is a product of his imagination, to the melody external to him, he is also capable of intimating a harmony between his imaginative mental workings and the external world, and combined with the intimation of a timeless, eternal world external to him is offered an intimation of the harmoniousness and happiness of timeless, eternal existence.

Yet, the harmony, and the free, intentional order governing tonal 'space' are products of human reason and imagination, attributed to an entirely one-directional temporal sequence of acoustic events<sup>34</sup>. A sophisticated illusion does not provide a reason to assume that there really is a timeless-transcendent world. In addition, musical experience ends after some time, evening falls, the shepherds must go home. Nevertheless, for a short time musical experience has afforded them an intimation of a timeless, eternal existence and the happiness of existing therein. The

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<sup>32</sup>Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, 78. Transferral of such concepts to the acoustic sphere requires imagination and reason, i. e. higher-order abilities. See Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, ch. 3.

<sup>33</sup>Plato and Plotinus spoke of time as the moving image of eternity. Kant believed that this intentional order, the 'causality of reason', being the ground of human freedom, is operative in a transcendent, noumenal world. See Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, 76, 77, 94, 95.

<sup>34</sup>Scruton, "Analytical Philosophy and the Meaning of Music", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 46 (1987): 172-174; Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, 75.

fact remains that the temporal experience of music has provided this sensuous suggestion of a timeless, transcendent world.

The poet/musician who offers such time-bound intimations of timeless, immortal existence to mortals, enjoys thus an enormous significance. The poet/musician provides an experiential connection with a timelessly eternal world, whilst a ruler or king can only aim at establishing an entirely time-bound eternal political order. The musical intimation does not prove the existence of the truly eternal, timeless world, whilst the time-bound political order is likely to exist truly for a long time, but not for all time.

Assent to belief in the existence of the timeless world would require rational argument, not merely the sensuous suggestion of its truth through the sophisticated illusion of musical experience. While for the philosopher suggestiveness is ultimately unsatisfactory for the musician and for the poet who has the power of music for his topic, suggestiveness is quite sufficient. With the cosmogony and coda of Silenus' song Virgil has suggested a Pythagorean frame to view the main part's tragical transformations and the musicians' redemptory role from a unitary point of view. But Silenus might be merely a drunkard,<sup>35</sup> the cosmogony might be genuinely Lucretian,<sup>36</sup> its musicality expressive of atomic dynamics, not of cosmic harmony<sup>37</sup>. The tragical transformations might constitute Gallus' or Virgil's literary projects<sup>38</sup> or Virgil's exploration of man's morality<sup>39</sup>. Or relation to nature devoid of metaphysical import<sup>40</sup>. Yet, the suggestion of music's cosmic dimension, present in the coda and cosmogony, and somehow related to the singer's divine genealogy, remains, insinuating its role in conferring immortality. Virgil has not

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<sup>35</sup>E. de Saint-Denis, "Le chant de Silène à la lumière d'une découverte récente", *RP* 37 (1963): 23-40.

<sup>36</sup>W. Spoerri, "Zur Kosmogonie in Vergil's 6. Ekloge", *Museum Helveticum* 27 (1970): 144-163.

<sup>37</sup>L. P. Wilkinson, *Golden Latin Artistry* (Cambridge, 1985), 28.

<sup>38</sup>J. P. Elder, "Non iniussa cano: Virgil's 6<sup>th</sup> Eclogue", *HSCP* 65 (1961): 109-125.

<sup>39</sup>C. P. Segal, "Vergil's 6<sup>th</sup> Eclogue and the Problem of Evil", *TAPA* 100 (1969): 407-435.

<sup>40</sup>E. W. Leach, "The Unity of Eclogue 6", *Latomus* 27 (1986): 13-32.

assented openly to Pythagorean tenets, but inasmuch as he has communicated poetically the cosmic power of music through Silenus song he has, by the same token, suggested the Pythagorean grounds of a singer's lasting fame.

Ovid's<sup>41</sup> Pythagoras, like Virgil's insular forest dweller Silenus, is freedom loving, "...odioque tyrannidis exul/ sponte erat..." ("and through hatred of tyranny was living in voluntary exile"),<sup>42</sup> vs. 15.61, 62, and derives his vatic authority from Apollo (vs. 15.143-145). But Silenus is not a figure of respect. The shepherds meet a hung —over old lecher. Pythagoras is not a figure of respect either. Ovid's introduction of him displays irony. For example, the anticlimax "quid deus, unde nives" ("what God is, whence come the snows"), v. 15.69, seems to mock Pythagoras' claim to omniscience, as does his knowing *quodcumque latet* ("and whatever else is hidden from men's knowledge"), v. 72. Furthermore, Pythagoras is not sure of his claims. For example, he adds *crediderim* ("I feel sure"), v. 15.260, but demands in his discussion of change: *mihī credite* ("Be sure"), v. 15.254. He is also prone to inconsistency, when he states: "sic dicere vates/ faticinasque feruntque sortes, quantumque recordor..." ("So, they tell us, seers and fate-revealing oracles are declaring. And as I myself remember..."), vs. 15.435, 436. Isn't he himself a *vates*? His philosophical elatedness is likened to a ride on Aristophanic clouds. He is happy about *nube vehi* ("to ride on the clouds"), and "ire per alta astra" ("to take one's way along the starry firmament"), vs. 15.146-152. His recollections are faulty. For example, Helenus fell before Troy fell, vs. 15.435-440<sup>43</sup>. Their concrete description, such as "cognovi clipeum.../ nuper..." ("Recently... I recognized the shield"), vs. 15.163, 4, scorns the seriousness of Pythagorean anamnesis. His theoretical discussion of becoming, vs. 165-175, is introduced comically via the concrete image of him at full sails on the sea of change.

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<sup>41</sup> All citations of Ovid's poem are from J. F. Miller, trans., *Ovid: Metamorphoses*, Vols. I, II (Harvard, 1984).

<sup>42</sup> The translations are taken from Miller.

<sup>43</sup> Miller, "The Memories of Ovid's Pythagoras", *Mnemosyne* 47 (1994): 473-487.

Yet Ovid's generally ironical portrayal of Pythagoras does not imply that Pythagoras' claims are generally ludicrous. His exposition of metempsychosis as a basis of vegetarianism, vs. 15.165-175, is devoid of irony, when he expounds a theory of the soul based on analogical reasoning about a piece of wax, v. 15.169-170: "utque novis facilis signatur cera figures/ nec manet ut fuerat. . ." ("And, as the pliant wax is stamped with new designs, does not remain as it was before"). His description of the pernicious pervasiveness of transience, vs. 15.186-198, is unsettling, such as the depiction of the aging of Milon and Helen (vs. 15.229-233). Even celestial bodies he shows to be subject to becoming (vs. 196-198). But such unsettling realism in portraying change might be easily available to a sincere believer in a stable, transcendent world beyond the world of change.

Ovid also develops the four Pythagorean themes of Silenus' cosmogony. The living nature of the cosmos is alluded to in the anticipation of emerging life, vs. 1.15-17, "sic erat instabilis tellus, innabilis unda" ("no one could tread that land, or swim that sea"), from the *semina*, v. 19<sup>44</sup>. Divine ordering is directed towards fertile, watered landscapes, vs. 1.34-44, with the right incubation conditions, vs. 1.50, 51. Earth's inherent fertility is shown in its repopulating itself, vs. 1.416-437, e. g. "sponte sua peperit" ("spontaneously produced"), v. 1.417, "seu natus in alvo" ("as in a mother's womb"), v. 1.420.

Light is set off, v. 1.10, from the other elements anticipating the sun's existence, and separates out first in the god's ordering, vs. 1.26, 27. Stars are lifted, admiration of which constitutes the essence of man, vs. 1.69, 70, and are characterised as living: "Neu regio foret nulla suis animalibus orba / astra tenent caeleste solum formaeque deorum, . . ." ("And, that no region might be without its own forms of animal life, the stars and divine forms occupied the floor of heaven"), vs. 1.72, 73. Fire is also the soul stuff exposed in transmigration and apotheosis. For example, Venus' handling of Caesar's soul, vs. 15.843-851, Ovid describes as: "Dumque tulit, lumen capere atque ignescere sensit/ emisitque sinu. . ."

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<sup>44</sup>See also v. 1.419, "fecundaque semina rerum".

("And as she bore it she felt it glow and burn, and released it from her bosom").

Man being a 'sanctius animal' seems to be a candidate for divine, teleological favour, yet his emergence is abrupt, "natus homo est", v. 1.78, his divine status is left unclear, "sive hunc divino semine fecit / ille opifex rerum" ("whether the god who made all else... , made man of his own divine substance"), vs. 1.78, 79, and Prometheus' shaping efforts seem improvised. One might notice the play on the word *ingere* in "finxit in effigiem" ("moulded into the form") at v. 1.83. If generally of superior or divine provenience, "mundi melioris origo" ("a more perfect world"), v. 79, and designed to dominate the world, v. 77, man is not made to respond to it favourably. The Golden Age, vs. 1.89-112, is a short episode of his early history, marked by three anthropogonies that give evidence of his proneness to destructive behaviour. The first culminates in a gigantomachy, vs. 1.150-162, reminiscent of excessive Promethean ambition, while the second, "e sanguine natos" ("sons of blood"), v. 1.162, is symbolised by Lycaon's cannibalism, vs. 1.163-252, such that Jupiter needs to save the earth from man. The third anthropogony at the hands of Deucalion and Pyrrha, vs. 1.313-415, Ovid develops at considerable length ending in a statement of man's stony nature, vs. 1.414-415: "inde genus durum sumus experiensque laborum/ et documenta damus qua simus origine nati" ("Hence come the hardness of our race and our endurance of toil; and we give proof from what origin we are sprung").

As to transcendent harmony, Ovid is more explicit than Virgil. An ordering god or nature is responsible for order and harmony: "hanc deus et melior litem natura diremit" ("God- or kindlier Nature- composed this strife") , v. 1.21. God's nature is unknown, it is not Jupiter himself, but one might suspect a wholly transcendent, supercelestial one, working by mathematical principles: "quisquis fuit ille deorum/ congeriem secuit" ("whoever of the gods it was, had . . . resolved that chaotic mass"), vs. 32, 33, "sic onus inclusum numero distinxit eodem/ cura dei, totidemque plagae tellure premuntur" ("so did the providence of God mark off the

enclosed mass with the same number of zones, and the same tracts were stamped upon the earth”), vs. 1.47, 48.

Like Virgil, Ovid offers a slim hope of redemption. Man’s essence is to make contact with the astral sphere: “. . . et erectus ad sidera tollere vultus” (“to stand erect and turn his eyes to heaven”), vs. 1.85, 86. The story of Io’s apotheosis follows immediately the tragic love story of Apollo and Daphne, and incorporates Ovid’s musicogony at vs. 1.689-712. Music plays a crucial role in Io’s apotheosis, lulling Argos to sleep, and is itself shown to be an expression of love extended: “arte nova vocisque deum dulcedine captum/ hoc mihi colloquium tecum dixisse ‘manebit’” (“Touched by this wonder and charmed by the sweet tones, the god exclaimed: ‘This converse, at least, shall I have with thee’”), says Pan to the transformed Syrinx at vs. 1.709, 710.

Ovid elaborates themes of Eclogue 6’s main part. Most Ovidian transformations are into animal, vegetal and inanimate form. Animal peace is illustrated in Pythagoras’ pledge for vegetarianism. The appeal to refrain from slaughtering the peaceful bull, “quid meruere boves, animal sine fraude dolisque/ innocuum, simplex. . .” (“What have the oxen done, those faithful, guileless beasts, harmless and simple”), vs. 15.120, 121, recalls the central image at Eclogue 6., vs. 53-54. The image of the river as the symbol of becoming Pythagoras explores in detail at vs. 15.177-185 with *cuncta fluunt* (“All things are in a state of flux”), and “momentaque cuncta novantur” (“and so the whole round of motion is gone through again”), framing the passage. Transience operates even on the caelestial spheres, vs. 15.186-198. Its essential temporality is pernicious: “tempus edax rerum. . . Paulatim lenta consumitis omnia morte” (“O time, thou great devourer. . . , you finally consume all things in lingering death”), vs. 15.234-236.

The path of salvation is narrow but existent. While Virgil described Gallus’ poetical divination and illustrated the cosmic power of song, Ovid describes deifications and astralifications, namely those of Io/Ephebus, Callisto/Arcas, Ino/Melicerta, Heracles/Hebe, Glaucus, Aeneas/Hersile, Hippolytus and Caesar, and illustrates a type of love different from passionate infatuation: the love of mother

and child, (Io/Ephebus, Callisto/Arcas, Ino/Melicerta, Venus/Aeneas, Venus/Caesar), and of marital love, (Romulus/Hersile, Hercules/Hebe). Ovid here depicts moving scenes, such as the maternal love towards the dead child at 14.606-607: “*unxit et ambrosia cum dulci nectare mixta/contigit os fecitque deum,...*” (“anointed it..., touched his lips with ambrosia and sweet nectar mixed”).

But Hippolytus' and Glaucus' reports remind us that neither intense suffering nor deep love ensure apotheosis or divine bliss. Glaucus also draws attention to the ‘*nefas*’ of the human material form he is able to strip off to the sound of purificatory music: “*et purgante nefas noviens mihi carmine dicto*” (“purged me...with a magic song nine times repeated”), v. 13.952.

Finally, Apollo's suffering and longing is transformed into music. Ovid renders his speeches, at vs. 1.504-524 and vs. 1.553-566 highly musical. The *finierat Paeon* at v. 1.566 might signal just that, the end of the first Paeon, the song for the healing god, sung by the god himself to heal his lovesickness: “*ei mihi quod nullis amor est sanabilis herbis/ nec prosunt domino, quae prosunt omnibus artes*” (“Alas, that love is curable by no herbs, and the arts which heal all others cannot heal their lord”), vs. 524, 525. Indeed, Apollo's songs as imagined by Ovid might well be among those songs of Apollo that Silenus sings. Despite its being rooted in irremediably thwarted love music constitutes a remedy.

In his short epilogue, (vs. 15.871-879), Ovid restates the pernicious temporality of becoming. Temporality, “*edax... , vetustas*” (“the gnawing tooth of time”), v. 15.872, is linked to mortality, the causal efficacy of which is described by *Iovis ira* (“the wrath of Jove”), *ignis, ferrum*, vs. 15.871, 872, as symbols of divine, cosmic and human destructiveness. The inevitable day, *illa dies* (v. 15.874), of Ovid's day of death, symbolizes the *ius* of mortality the world of becoming is subject to. But neither Ovid's immortal soul, his *parte meliore*, v. 15.875, nor his *opus*, v. 15.871, are subject to this law. His soul is carried beyond the stars even, “*super alta perennis/ astra ferar*” (“I shall be borne immortal far beyond the lofty stars”), vs. 15.875, 876, to an eternal existence, quite plausibly beyond the reach of temporality. With the details of the pro-

cess left unspecified, the immortal existence he is granted is linked to his immortal fame as an artist: “nomenque erit indelebile nostrum” (“and I shall have an undying name”), v. 15.876; just as Gallus’ divination had been linked to the echoing in song of a timeless world of being.

Verses 15.877, 878 on the other hand suggest that Ovid’s eternal existence depends on Rome’s: “quaque patet domitis Romana potentia terris/ ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama” (“Wherever Rome’s power extends over the conquered world, I shall have mention on men’s lips...through all the ages”), vs. 15.877, 878. But, as set out above, Pythagoras had not been sure of his predictions. Rome might end as other civilizations had ended before, described in vs. 15.418-430. The “perque omnia saecula” of v. 15.878 signals temporal immortality at best, granted that Rome continues to exist through time. Ovid seems to play with two notions of eternity, a temporal and a timeless one.

His final *vivam*, v. 15.878, is conditional, “si quid habent veri praesagia” (“if the prophecies of bards have any truth”, and the condition again is left ambiguous. His immortality might be conditional on Pythagoras’ being right about Rome’s temporal eternity or his being right about the timeless eternity *super astra*, that is somehow accessible and even, by immortalisation, obtainable by the human artist. Ovid’s assent to this latter, profoundly Pythagorean claim, remains suspended and suggestive, just like Virgil’s.

In conclusion, Ovid’s Pythagoreanism resembles that of Virgil in Eclogue 6. Whether Ovid lent Virgil’s a truly philosophical ear or not will remain a matter of dispute. But the echo of Silenus’ coda might have lingered in Ovid’s ear, when he was about to compose not just a long, but a long-lasting, (eternal?), *perpetuum carmen*.

### Appendix. Text. Eclogue 6.27-86<sup>45</sup>

tum uero in numerum Faunosque ferasque uideres  
 ludere, tum rigidas motare cacuminal quercus;  
 nec tantum Phoebos gaudet Parnasia rupes

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<sup>45</sup>Coleman, *Virgil: Eclogues*, 58-59.



nec tantum Rhodope miratur et Ismaros Orphea. 30  
 Namque canebat uti magnum per inane coacta  
 semina terrarumque animaeque marisque fuissent  
 et liquidi simul ignis; ut his exordia primis  
 omnia et ipse tener mundi concruerit orbis;  
 tum durare solum et discludere Nerea ponto 35  
 coeperit et rerum paulatim sumere formas;  
 iamque nouom terrae stupeant lucescere solem  
 altius atque cadant submotis nubibus imbres,  
 incipient siluae cum primum surgere cumque  
 rara per ignaros errant animalia montis. 40  
 Hinc lapides Pyrrhae iactos, Saturnia regna,  
 Caucasiasque refert uolucres furtumque Promethei.  
 His adiungit Hylan nautae quo fonte relictum  
 clamassent, ut litus 'Hyla, Hyla' omne sonaret;  
 et fortunatam, si numquam armenta fuissent, 45  
 Pasiphaen niuei solatur amore iuveni.  
 A, uirgo infelix, quae te dementia cepit!  
 Proetides implerunt falsis mugitibus agros;  
 at non tam turpis pecudum tamen ulla secuta  
 Concubitus, quamvis collo timuisset aratrum 50  
 et saepe in leui quaesisset cornua fronte.  
 A, uirgo infelix, tu nunc in montibus erras;  
 ille latus niueum molli fultus hyacintho  
 ilice sub nigra pallentis ruminat herbas  
 aut aliquam in magno sequitur grege. 'Claudite, Nymphae, 55  
 Dictaeae Nymphae, nemorum iam claudite saltus,  
 si qua forte ferant oculis obuia nostris  
 errabunda bouis uestigia; forsitan illum  
 aut herba captum uiridi aut armenta secutum  
 perducant aliquae stabula ad Gortynia uaccae.' 60  
 Tum canit Hesperidum miratam mala puellam;  
 tum Phaethontidas musco circumdat amarae  
 corticis atque solo proceras erigit alnos.

Tum canit errantem Permessi ad flumina Gallum  
 Aonas in montis ut duxerit una sororum 65  
 utque uiro Phoebi chorus adsurrexerit omnis;  
 ut Linus haec illi diuino carmine pastor  
 floribus atque apio crinis ornatus amaro  
 dixerit: 'hos tibi dant calamos —en accipe— Musae,  
 Ascraeo quos ante seni quibus ille solebat 70  
 cantando rigidas deducere montibus ornos.  
 His tibi Grynei nemoris dicatur origo,  
 ne qui sit lucus quo se plus iactet Apollo.  
 Quid loquar aut Scyllam Nisi, quam fama secuta est  
 candida succinctam latrantibus inguinal monstris 75  
 Dulichias uexasse rates et gurgite in alto,  
 a, timidos nautas canibus lacerasse marinis;  
 au tut mutates Terei narrauerit artus,  
 quas illi Philomela dapes, quae dona pararit,  
 quo cursu deserta petiuerit et quibus ante 80  
 infelix sua tecta super uolitauerit alis?  
 Omnia quae Phoebos quondam meditante beatus  
 audiit Eurotas iussitque ediscere lauros  
 ille canit, pulsae referent ad sidera ualles,  
 cogere donec ouis stabulis numerumque referre 85  
 iussit et inuito processit Vesper Olympo.

### Translation<sup>46</sup>

Then truly you could have seen in rhythmic dance the  
 Fauns  
 And wild beasts play, then even rigid oaks wave their  
 crowns.  
 Far less Parnassus' crag rejoices in Phoebus,  
 Far less Rhodope and Ismarus thrill to Orpheus. 30  
 For he sang how through great void were driven together

<sup>46</sup>The translation is that of Boyle, *The Eclogues of Virgil*, 69-73.

The seeds of earth and of breath and of ocean  
 And seeds of streaming fire; how from these elements  
 All beginnings and the world's tender orb itself took shape.  
 Then how the land began to harden and to shut Nereus 35  
 In the sea and gradually to assume the forms of things;  
 Now how the earth is dazed by the new sun's growing light,  
 And as the clouds lift to greater heights the rains fall,  
 And forests first begin to rise, and here and there  
 Living creatures wander across nescient hills. 40  
 Next he relates the stones cast by Pyrrha, Saturn's reign,  
 The Caucasian birds and theft of Prometheus.  
 To these he links the spring where sailors called for Hylas  
 Left behind, till the whole shore rang 'Hylas! Hylas!'  
 And Pasiphaë —fortunate, if cattle hadn't existed— 45  
 He consoles her in her love for the snowy bull.  
 Ah, hapless girl, what derangement has seized you?  
 Proetus' daughters filled the fields with imitation-lowings;  
 Yet not one pursued such foul copulation  
 With the herd, however much feared the plough 50  
 On her neck and often felt for horns on smooth brow.  
 Ah, hapless girl, now you wander among the hills,  
 While he, his snowy flank pillowed by soft hyacinth,  
 Under a black ilex chews the pale-hued grass,  
 Or pursues some heifer in the great herd. 'Close off,  
     Nymphs, 55  
 Dictaeon Nymphs, close off now the woodland pastures,  
 In the hope somewhere our eyes may light upon  
 The bull's wandering tracks. Perhaps, captivated  
 By the green grass or trailing after the herds,  
 He'll be led by heifers right to Gortyn's stalls.' 60  
 Then he sings the girl whom Hesperidean apples thrilled,  
 Then encases Phaëthon's sisters in moss of bitter  
 Bark and raises them from the soil as tall as alders.  
 Then he sings of Gallys wandering by Permessus' stream,

How one of the Sisters led him to Aonian hills, 65  
 And how for this man the whole choir of Phoebus rose;  
 And how Linus, the shepherd of divine song,  
 Hair garlanded with flowers and bitter celery,  
 Said to him: "These reeds —take them— the Muses give  
     you,  
 Which, once they gave the old Ascrean, who used them 70  
 To lead downhill in lean-spun song the rigid ash.  
 Use them to tell the Grynean Wood's origin,  
 So there'll be no grove in which Apollo glories more.'  
 Why should I speak of Scylla, Nisus' child, of whom the  
     tale  
 Persists that, gleaming thighs girt with barking fiends, 75  
 She vexed Dulichium's ships, and in the whirlpool's depths  
 —Ah!— ripped the flesh of trembling men with sea-dog's  
     fangs?  
 Or how he narrated Tereus' transformed limbs,  
 The feast, the gifts Philomela prepared for him,  
 The swift flight to the desert and the wings on which first 80  
 The hapless creature hovered above her roof?  
 All the themes that Phoebus once studied and joyous  
 Eurotas heard and told its laurels to learn by heart  
 He sings (the valleys catch the sound and toss it to the  
     stars),  
 Until Vesper gave the order to pen the sheep 85  
 And count them and climbed into Olympus' unwilling sky.

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