Toward a Georgic Ethic

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Toward a Georgic Ethic of Care: Cultivating Our Fragile Planet

Abstract: A georgic ethic includes cultivating both literary and ecological resources. Virgil’s
Georgics (29 BC) and georgic literary variations in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England
offer a peculiarly rich historical study to understand the emergence of our environmental
thinking and also a lens for our present environmental moment. This presentation grounds an
interdisciplinary audience in key passages of Virgil’s original Latin poem, highlights interpretive
struggles, and introduces concepts from care theory. The georgic verse tradition is a poetics of
care, teaching readers to become good stewards in a fallen world—in short, such poetry can
teach us and our students to care.
Virgil’s poem celebrating life and work in the countryside—farm work—begins with a brief overview of the content of the agricultural instruction covered in four books: tilled crops, vines and trees, livestock, and bees. These first five lines of the *Georgics* quite literally ground the poem in the cultivated earth by establishing relationships explicitly between the poet and his patron Maecenas and implicitly with the reader, while also telling of those non-human relationships and cares formed by agricultural practice. Such include not only the poet’s work to sing, but also work in which a reader of georgic verse learns to take part: making, turning, bringing together to join, and (in noun form), care and cultivating, *cura* and *cultus*.

The most iconic of all georgic work is plowing the soil. While a form of the verb *arare* (to plow) only appears later, Virgil emphasizes this action of turning over arable land by putting the infinitive verb *vertere* (to turn) just after the turn of the first line: The poem turns to begin another row of text while the plow turns to begin another row in the field—indeed this word for turning is the source of the word “verse” itself, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. From the very first lines of Virgil’s poem, then, the georgic tradition is concerned with cultivating both the literary and the arable fields. The georgic ethic applies to both land and language, since both appear in need of cultivation—of culture—in an age long since declined from golden. Digging in, turning over, maintaining order, intensifying growth to yield a greater harvest, such is the work of both the poet and the ploughman, whose parallel labors will become even more important to the English georgic tradition over the early modern period: “For Ploughing is an imitative Toil / Resembling Nature in an easie Soil.”

When in 1697 John Dryden expands Virgil’s parenthetical “*namque hoc imitamur*”

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arando”\(^2\) into a full couplet, he dramatically extends the reach and amplifies the claim. In context, the passage describes certain kinds of soils suitable for growing grain, distinguishing one particularly rich loamy soil from one found in reclaimed woodland; it is this rich friable (crumbly) soil, Virgil maintains, that we strive to imitate by plowing. Dryden’s version emphatically starts with the human action, classifying it as an “imitative Toil / resembling” not just this particular patch of earth but the wide sweep of unspecific “Nature.” Such change in emphasis may be due in part to Dryden’s lack of practical experience at a plough-tail, but evidence shows he intends a positive significance as well. The rephrasing is in part a deliberate attempt to elevate the ploughman’s art to the sister arts of poetry and painting, either of which is also an “imitative Toil / Resembling Nature.” In one sense, imitation—variously interpreted and contested—is broadly connected to all literary effort rooted in humanistic thought, such that: “Humanism was an imitative movement in its very root and essence: the imitation of classical, particularly classical Latin, literature was its lifeblood.”\(^3\) More particularly, these lines bear an immediate connection to Dryden’s developing critical thought. While working on this Virgil translation, Dryden also translated a neo-Latin poem, *De arte graphica*, prefacing it in the 1695 publication with his own “Parallel betwixt Poetry and Painting,” following classical rhetorical conventions: “To imitate Nature well in whatever subject, is the perfection of both arts; and that picture, and that poem, which comes nearest to the resemblance of Nature is the best.”\(^4\) In 1697, Dryden called Virgil’s *Georgics* “the best poem of the best poet”: best because it is most

\(^2\) G. 2.204. Virgil [Publius Vergilius Maro], *Georgics*. ed. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990). All subsequent quotations from Virgil’s Latin text are taken from this edition unless otherwise noted—and the rich commentary in this volume has been a valued resource. I have silently italicized all Latin and emended consonantal *u*’s to *v*’s regardless of editorial practice in the editions and secondary sources of my quotes.


finished, having the fullest “resemblance to Nature”—a resemblance more dynamic in its shifting perspectives and particularities than apparent at first glance—and of course because of the veneration accorded Virgil in the English Augustan period. By intensively and extensively engaging with Virgil’s *Georgics*, English poets and critics of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries not only transplanted a classical Roman literary form, but they also took seriously the responsibilities of cultivating both the soil and mental faculties.

This initial section has merely suggested that English georgic poets extend the reach of the original Latin verse and that the poet, ploughman, and critic are all meant to work according to some pattern outside themselves to cultivate order. Thus, this full range of georgic labor ideally is a good faith effort to represent prime conditions and processes of Nature (“resembling Nature in an easie Soil”). Most importantly, georgic labor is a struggle to cultivate—to produce and to try to bring out the best. The ethic of cultivation, surely, is for a fallen world which one can strive to make better. To cultivate is to bring mindful attention and responsible effort to nurture and improve something—in the georgic field, this might mean plowing, sowing, fertilizing, transplanting, weeding, staking, grafting, protecting, harvesting, mulching. To cultivate something is to recognize 1) the current state is not (yet) as good as it might be, 2) one’s sustained effort can make it better, and 3) such improvement or growth is not inevitable or guaranteed—or lasting (even with strenuous effort) because of entropy or other factors. These facets of cultivation, which can be summed up as improvability, agency, and indeterminacy,

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5 Competing with various other thematic or periodizing terms, “Augustan” for English poets highlights a sense of Virgilian authority and influence on English poetry in the late seventeenth century and until about 1740. While Howard Erskine-Hill’s *The Augustan Idea in English Literature* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983) and other critical works of that generation ground current studies of English Augustanism, I am particularly indebted to Robin Sowerby, *The Augustan Art of Poetry: Augustan Translation of the Classics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) for a “comparative study of the interrelation between the Roman Augustan aesthetic and its English counterpart” (1) which is invaluable for insights such as: “Any adjectival heightening in Dryden is subordinate to the overall effect of the dynamic movement created by the many verbs in which the simile abounds”; while many readers have noted the vigor of Dryden’s translation, Sowerby gives a deeper rhetorical and aesthetic analysis.
apply also to cultivating the mind. That is, to cultivate a field of wheat or a singing voice or a
moral habit would require the same factors: in each case, we would perceive a flaw or
incompleteness at hand, have some knowledge and agency to improve and grow, and yet be
limited or constrained from immediately and completely perfecting it. To cultivate is to mix
one’s own labor with something and to increase its extrinsic value; to cultivate is to imply a
value judgment—that a tilled field is better than “wasteland,” that a cultivated (and grafted) olive
tree is better than the wild oleaster, a well-educated mind better than an empty one. While the
practices and conventions of cultivation vary according to time, place, and local custom, to the
cultivator the principles and processes may seem a matter of universal taste or common sense;
these are predictable tasks to maintain order, nurturing rhythms and routines, cultivating
relationships. Because of its insistence upon such cultivation, attentive and responsible care is
key to interpreting georgic.

Consider again the iconic labor of plowing: at times Virgil and the subsequent georgic
tradition emphasize plowing as peacetime pursuit, which falls away without honor in wartime
(“non ullus aratro / dignus honos” Virgil’s 1.506-7). Farm work gives way to military strife, as
Dryden translates “crooked Scythes are streightened into Swords” (1.684). Yet even this
(classical and Biblical) image of peaceful work recalls the blade as a weapon and brings an echo
of civil strife. Plowing can be emphasized as invasive, aggressive, as it even “inflicts new
wounds” (Dryden 1.142, extending the sense of Virgil’s perrumpit 1.98). The tilled field of

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6 English georgic poets amplify and extend Virgil’s meaning for their own time and lands in various ways,
including—and following a tradition of prior centuries—Christianizing Virgil’s text by putting emphasis on Biblical
resonances. Joel 3:10 is, as some commentators noted in this period, a parallel passage, though in the imperative:
“Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears.” The image is perhaps more familiar
inverted; the peacetime phrasing is identical in Micah 4:3 and Isaiah 4:2 in the KJV: “they shall beat their swords
into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they
learn war any more.” Besides such passages as these, many agricultural metaphors, parables, and poetry embedded
in Sacred Scripture had long been “naturalized” in English rural poetry and unobtrusively inform this literary
tradition.
georgic contains—and conceals until a (future) ploughman turns the soil over—the artifacts of past battles between men (Virgil’s 1.493-7). Plowing the soil is at once a georgic imperative, a record of past failures, a strife with the land in the ongoing present, and an art of peace hopeful of future harvests.

Georgic poetry leads us to consider the scope of human endeavor; it is not an uncomplicated celebration of man’s dominion over creation nor of the processes of non-human nature, but of the ethical spaces between humans and the land. English georgic shares with the broader tradition of nature writing an “insistent open-endedness” eager to approach ecological interconnections and can always “respond to the physical creation in ways that, while scientifically informed, are also marked by a personal voice and concern for literary values.” Of all forms of nature writing, georgic verse is most insistently mindful of the human—that is, not only how human interventions shape the land, but also how identities are shaped by natural and cultural processes. Is georgic cooperative or competitive, soft or hard, progressive or conservative? Georgic can at times be each of these, for it is about the demands and dynamics of the ongoing relationship. While much classical and early modern literary scholarship continues to analyze the poem and unearth evidence favoring either side of these contrasting pairs, Juan Pellicer’s overview of the georgic mode stresses both the carefully contrastive structures and “extraordinary freedom of topical and scenic movement” of georgic verse and is a useful overview of georgic’s energetic diversity and inclusive both/and answers to such paired contrasts.

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Although Virgil’s *Georgics* defies easy categorization, it can offer a poetics of sustainability with some useful (though not comprehensive) insights on agricultural practice: a celebration of working with the land over time in a productive tilled space that is neither wilderness nor urban. The long view of georgic time allows for a change in readers’ understanding of materiality: to see through fragmentation and decomposition some promise for new growth and one’s own role. Writing in the journal *Agriculture and Human Values* in 2009, environmental historian Benjamin R. Cohen offered a comprehensive survey of recent georgic scholarship and re-engaged the georgic ethic outside of literary studies as “a place-based and experience-based ethic, one that draws from the value of practice and engagement . . . . A study of the georgic shows that interaction demands moral attention because it is about the relations between people and the land, and between one person and another.”

Before surveying the critical history, return once more to Virgil’s first line: “*Quid faciat laeta segetes, quo sidere terram / vertere…*” [What makes the crops joyous, beneath what star, Maecenas, it is well to turn the soil…] Virgil will elsewhere shift perspectives within and across passages, but what glimpse does he give first? A reader who might have heard perhaps of georgic as a potentially exploitative mode might expect an exercise of dominion in planting and harvesting crops or managing livestock. Instead, we have first the poetic expression “*faciat laetes segetes*”—in fact, a euphemism for manure—the organic fertilizer derived from livestock

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9 Benjamin R. Cohen, “The Once and Future Georgic: Agricultural Practice, Environmental Knowledge, and the Place for an Ethic of Experience.” *Agriculture and Human Values.* 26 (2009):153-165. One example of this engagement with georgic that Cohen calls for is seen in Claire Hintz’s “An Ecology of Love: Women Farmers, Sense of Place, the Georgic Ethic, and Ecocentricity.” *Journal of Sustainability Education* 9 (2015). In her grounded experience and interviews with farmers, Hintz underscores a “sense of care” and studies how “place attachment [and] place meaning . . . seem to be important drivers of active care for place.” For her, a georgic ethic develops as a sense of care even today, just as I find that early modern English georgic verse cultivates a poetics of care.

waste and spread by the human hand, the *manus*, whence it derives its name. From line 1, then, and not entirely facetiously, a careful reader may see that georgic places the human sphere of activity somewhere above manure (and giving manure its laetifacient power) and somewhere below the stars (looking up to interpret their temporal significance for scheduling seasonal work). Virgil’s *Georgics* guides readers to look attentively and see more carefully; English poets and readers in the long eighteenth century used Virgil’s passages as lenses to focus on their own immediate surroundings. My larger research project, *Cultivating Mind and Soil*, focuses repeatedly on four passages that recur in English georgic in ways that make them key to interpreting the georgic mode in eighteenth-century England: the “aetiology of labor” from book 1, the influential praises of the country life from the end of book two, the old man gardening in book four, and Virgil’s closing “signature.”

The following section introduces these four passages and glosses critical engagement with them.

**Key Passages of Virgil’s Georgics for English Letters**

1.121-146, which classicists call Virgil’s “aetiology of labor,” orients toward Iron Age cares:

\[\begin{align*}
\textit{pater ipse colendi} \\
\textit{haud facilem esse viam voluit, primusque per artem} \\
movit agros, curis acuens mortalia corda \\
nec torpere gravi passus sua regna veterno. (1.121-4)
\end{align*}\]

[The great Father [Jove] himself has willed that the path of husbandry should not run smooth, who first made art awake the fields, sharpening men’s wits by care, nor letting his kingdom slumber in heavy lethargy.] As Virgil tells the story, the ease of the Golden Age was ended by

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1 Interestingly, in the middle of the eighteenth century, English commentators turned the tables, citing and discussing in extensive notes certain passages of English poetry as lenses through which to view and interpret Virgil’s *Georgics*.

2 Mynors adds, in a note on this line, “private property in land is regarded as the first step towards agriculture; not only had this not been taken [but] the very idea was *nefas*” [lit. unspeakable, sacrilegious]. Early modernists will compare this to John Locke’s thoughts on property in a state of nature before social contracts.
Jove’s deliberate actions: pests and dangers are familiar to his Iron Age readers living in a more adversarial relationship with the earth. Georgic is a poetics of care: here we see not only how Jove “whetted Humane Industry by Care” (in William Benson’s 1725 translation) but also that our relationship can be caring; the word translated as tillage, husbandry, or cultivation, *colendi*, can more broadly mean caring [for the earth].

Be that as it may, Jove’s *artem* (121) finds its echo or fulfillment in the development of human *artes* (145):

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\begin{align*}
tum ferri rigor atque argutae lamina serrae
\text{(nam primi cuneis scindebant fissile lignum)}
tum variae venere artes. labor omnia victi\textsuperscript{14}
improbus, et duris urgens in rebus egestas. (1.143-146)
\end{align*}
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[Then came unyielding iron and the blade of the rasping saw (for primitive man used wedges to cleave wood until it split), and art followed hard on art. Toil triumphed over every obstacle, unrelenting Toil and Want that pinches when life is hard.] Immediately after these lines, Ceres teaches plowing (again *vertere terram*)—and agriculture’s never-ending struggle with weeds and pests and blights is well underway.

Some critics distinguish two senses of *labor* in the passage, both the effort of first invention and the continual daily toil. Besides this, *labor omnia victi* and its enjambed *improbus* are the most controversial words of *Georgics*. I am indebted especially to

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\textsuperscript{13} The timing of this *colendi* and of the field-moving two lines later has long been debated. In the long eighteenth century, a minority (including both Dryden and—surprisingly—some of the Georgics-as-practical-husbandry writers) suggest that Jove himself first plowed the earth. However, a magisterial majority by the 1740s insist that Jupiter did not invent tillage nor set his hand to the plow, but only that “he made it necessary to stir the ground, because he filled it with weeds, and obliged men to find out ways to destroy them” (Martyn note on p 28).

\textsuperscript{14} Mynors (page 30) notes not only how the following *improbus* carries a “note of disapproval,” which makes “honorably persistent” an inadequate translation for “pitiless, unrelenting toil”—but also that misquotations of “*Labor omnia vincit*” have persisted since the 4th century as well-intentioned encouragement: persistent effort of “honest toil” conquers all obstacles—broadly that “Necessity is the mother of Invention.”

\textsuperscript{15} Eva M. Stehle, “Virgil’s *Georgics*: The Threat of Sloth” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 104 (1974), 347-369 ends with a claim that seems prescient of environmental literary criticism: “By forcing men to become responsible for something outside themselves, he has saved them from excessive involvement with their own internal life . . . Virgil points the way to salvation: through emotional commitment to responsibility for nature, which can be regenerated, man has a bulwark against the human, emotional decline and sterility of the Golden Age world.”
two classicists who have written chapters titled “Labor Improbus,”—first, Monica Gale, who shows Virgil’s ambiguity—balanced between pessimistic and optimistic interpretive strains:

Virgil ultimately leaves it unclear in this passage whether we are to see labor as punishment or virtue, the idleness of the Golden Age as a lost ideal or a danger fortunately escaped, the curae with which Jupiter sharpened human hearts as gnawing anxieties or as spurs to industriousness and inventiveness.16

While the pessimistic reading finds georgic labor an unending punishment, optimistic readings celebrate the ingenuity of Homo faber in devising tools to secure survival and shape his environment. Richard Jenkyns who digs deeper into the progressive (so-called ‘optimist’) and ‘pessimist’ interpretations concludes that

the pessimist interpretation cannot stand. The progressive interpretation is broadly right, provided that it recognizes the twist at 146-7 and does not try to draw the sting from 148ff. It does not, of course, deny the sternness of Jupiter’s purpose or the need for unremitting hard work. 17

Jenkyns calls for critics to step out of this ongoing controversy to appreciate again “a brilliancy of poetic technique and complex, flexible rhetoric, various in tone,” saying that this much-discussed passage develops a “great picture of human progress which rises to a climax, twists,

16 162-3, Monica R. Gale, Virgil on the Nature of Things: The Georgics, Lucretius and the Didactic Tradition. (Cambridge University Press, 2000). This valuable study of georgic intertextuality will be discussed at more length in the next section.

17 Richard Jenkyns, “Labor Improbus.” In Vergil’s Georgics: Oxford Readings in Classical Studies, ed. Katharina Volk. (Oxford University Press, 2008), 128-137. Jenkyns also suggests in passing that calling this passage Virgil’s “theodicy” mistakes the focus “not only because it implies a Christian concern to justify the ways of God to men which Virgil does not have, but also because the divine motivation plays only a small part in the passage, which is centred upon the consequences for humanity.” I acknowledge that the Christianizing of Virgil has a long and rich past including such notable names as Augustine and Dante and that English poets continued to work dynamically in this tradition, with Milton of course playing a large role. As indicated in an earlier note, Biblical and classical references were both naturalized to some extent in English rural poetry: in early modern English imitations of Virgil, Christian connections are often merely implied through resonances—not developed fully or explicitly—regarding partnership with the divine act of creation and restoration, dignity of work, and stewardship of soil. Virgil’s rural and arguably environmental knowledge is referenced more specifically and persistently by Roman Catholics even into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: for example, John Henry Newman in Historical Sketches published in 1873 discusses the slow cultivation of Europe by medieval Benedictine monks, saying “such a life may be called emphatically Virgilian”; Pope Pius XII in an address to farmers in 1946 quotes from Virgil’s eclogues, Pliny’s natural history, and from the praise of country life (discussed below) in Virgil’s second georgic. For a comprehensive study of recent American Catholic thought on rural life including recognizably Virgilian themes, see also Michael Woods, Cultivating Soil and Soul: Twentieth-Century Catholic Agrarians Embrace the Liturgical Movement (Collegeville, Minn: Pueblo Books, 2010)
turns and descends again, back from god to man, from past to present, back too to that familiar
tone of wry, dour irony which was never quite absent.” Such twists and wry tones are not
unfamiliar to readers of eighteenth-century English (Augustan) poetry.

2.475-540: Poetic vocation and praises of the country life

Seventeenth-century English verse reinvested so much in these lines on contentment in rural life
that translations of this passage were much longer (three times longer in Dryden’s translation)
than Virgil’s original. This passage celebrating smallholders’ lives of quiet virtue inspired new
conventions and new subgenres of locodescriptive verse. Even now, classicists in paratexts of
editions of Virgil’s Georgics regularly mention late seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century
poetic responses to the end of book 2. In the original context, however, Mynors points out that
Virgil has already discussed the cultivation of trees and vines and the book of instructive verse
could have ended here, but “the poet for the first time reveals his own ambitions with a startling
me vero, and repeats the idyllic picture of country life in more detail and with a new depth and
brilliance . . . now deeply committed.”18 In six strongly worded lines, which will inspire James
Thomson among others in the eighteenth century, Virgil expresses an ambition to write poetry of
natural philosophy and cosmological significance (and space exploration, which Thomson will
also imagine undertaking—with the shade of Sir Isaac Newton). After these high-flying
ambitions, the earth-bound Virgil’s love for the countryside seems to be merely second choice:

sin, has ne possim naturae accedere pratis,
frigidus obstiterit circum praecordia sanguis,
rura mihi et rigui placeant in vallibus amnes,
flumina amem silvasque inglorious. (2.483-6)

[But if the chill blood about my heart bar me from reaching those realms of nature, let my delight
be the country, and the running streams amid the dells—may I love the waters and the woods,

18 Mynors, 166.
though I be unknown to fame.] These lines, which in their humility will contrast with the audacity of the poet-narrator’s immediate ambition at the beginning of book 3, also seem to be taking a rather different sort of delight in the land than the “labor improbus” and agricultural instruction that has come before. Another classicist’s interpretation may shed some helpful light: Christopher Nappa stresses that “the conditional form of these lines is important”—that we see, as it were, Virgil’s choice in process, “unformed, or at least still malleable . . . perhaps that Virgil wants us to see his role as poet as evolving through contact with his subject matter. For all its self-conscious citation of earlier literature, his pastoral and didactic poetry is cast less as a response to literary tradition than as an evolving response to the natural world itself.” Other scholars may be more skeptical of claiming for Virgil such direct—and developing—responses to the natural world, but at least the appearance of immediacy here is worth considering.

Lines 490-4 are often called the “double makarismos” [declaration of blessing] passage:

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felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas
atque metus omnis et inexorabile fatum
subiecit pedibus strepitumque Acherontis avari:
fortunatus et ille deos qui novit agrestis
Panaque Silvanumque senem Nymphasque sorores
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[Happy the man who has been able to discover the causes of things, to trample underfoot every fear, and implacable fate, and the din of greedy Acheron. Fortunate too is he who knows the rustic gods, Pan and old Silvanus and the sister Nymphs.] Some critics find an echo of the previous structure—one strong first option followed by a weaker second option—while others see these lines as complementary or somehow building on each other. The long passage following (the coda to book 2) details a harvest feast and the farmer taking his ease for once celebrating with his family, just as in less strenuous earlier ages. Precisely because the

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seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English tradition adapted these lines so frequently, early modern scholars can learn from the work of classicists to regain a sense of the “complications,” unusually ambiguous intertextualities, “highly rhetorical synkrisis between agricultural and city life” and striking juxtaposition of contrasting—even “clashing”—features. Thus, we can recover a sense of startling newness in these lines, rather than mildly inconsistent ways of praising rural life.

4.112-115 small-scale intensive cultivation

ipse thymum tinosque ferens de montibus altis
tecta serat late circum, cui talia curae;
ipse labore manum duro terat, ipse feracis
figat humo plantas et amicos inriget imbris.

[Let him to whom such care [of bees] falls, himself bring thyme and laurestines from the high hills, and plant them widely round their homes; himself harden his hand with stern toil; himself plant in the ground fruitful slips and sprinkle kindly showers.] Whereas the passages discussed so far are among the most famous (and the most contentious) of Georgics, these lines may seem

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21 Martyn, with his botanical expertise, gives an extensive note (p 337) on the Thymus capitatus of Greece contrasting with English “common Thyme” and gives full detail on the ensuing gardening passage. Most editions in early modern England have pinosque in this line and translations discuss pine. I have found two twentieth-century texts helpful especially for my understanding of Cowley’s earlier and Martyn’s different ways of engaging with Virgil’s plants: John Sargeunt, The Trees, Shrubs, and Plants of Virgil. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1920 [reprinted 1969]) and Elfriede Abbe, The Plants of Virgil’s Georgics: Commentary and Woodcuts. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965.) In this passage, for instance, Sargeunt notes (128) that tinosque found only in the Palatine manuscript is a “false reading” making no botanical sense—a non-hardy coastal tree, “it would never be so foolish as of its own accord to face a winter in the Apennines.” Abbe indeed discusses pinos (11), species, places, and elevations—with some detail on historical change. While this level of botanical and agricultural accuracy was not the primary purpose of the Loeb translator and editors, careful attention to the real-world materiality of Virgil’s plants and fine distinctions among locospecific growing practices assumed an increasing importance in the eighteenth century.
an idiosyncratic choice for a selective sampling of Virgil’s text. This portrays gardening—or even a particularly diligent and intensive pottering—but not agriculture on the scale seen throughout the poem. However, not only do English writers such as Dryden intensify the hard labor of these lines, they also scale up or down the instruction, the ethos of cultivation, and the whole scope of the poem. In the following verses (4.116-48) the poet-narrator recalls seeing the singular example of an old man making a success out of a particularly unlikely and small plot of land, specifically unsustainable for all the categories of agriculture discussed earlier—neither tilled crops, nor pastured livestock, nor viticulture. [videsse senem, cui paucu relict/c iugera ruris errant, nec fertilis . . . nec pecori opportuna seges . . . nec commode Baccho]. From this hardscrabble plot of wasteland, the old gardener cultivates a variety of produce22 which makes him, quite literally, happy as a king. He works early and late—from choice and devotedness, it seems, rather than necessity—and from his careful tending he is the first to harvest fruits and honey. Thus, his skill and persistence, even on a small scale, optimize his space and time.

Mynors gives several rhetorical reasons why this example can make such a strong positive impression; I suggest merely that the old man’s example allows Virgil to dwell for a moment on the untapped potential of more familiar growing things—flowers and herbs—and perhaps to

22 “planting a few pot-herbs among the brambles . . . returning home late at night, he loaded his table with dishes which he did not buy” (page 107) translated by James Hamilton, Virgil’s Pastorals Translated into English Prose; as also His Georgicks, With such Notes and Reflections as make him appear to have wrote like an excellent Farmer. To which is added, an Appendix, Shewing Scotland’s chief and principal worldly Interest. Edinburgh, 1742. The frugality of this gardener is especially interesting to Hamilton, a schoolmaster, who firmly believes his countrymen should gain more instruction and practice in good husbandry, since so much of Scotland still lies uncultivated. His prose translation includes digressions on his own observations in England and Scotland; he proposes establishing a model farm, with a plough and ploughman imported from Herefordshire and, having already sold two thousand copies of this book, offers to relinquish any further profit so that it might be printed and distributed freely, especially in the highlands. Even though this example is entirely a Scottish project, “English georgic” has become such an established phrase among literary critics for all imitations, translations, and new georgic poems in the English language. I will consistently refer to “English georgic,” even if the poet may be describing a regional practice specific to Scotland or Wales or, conversely, celebrating a united Britain exchanging the fruits of georgic labor in a global marketplace.
leave readers with an appealingly “doable” example. Abraham Cowley was one of the early modern poets who found here an inspiration for his own (Latin) poems on herbs and plants.

4.559-566 closing lines as Virgil’s “signature” contrasting poetic and imperial ambitions:

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\begin{align*}
Haec super arvorum cultu pecorumque cunebam \\
et super arboribus, Caesar dum magnus ad altum \\
fulminat Eurphraten bello victorque volentis \\
per poulos dat iura viamque aestectat Olympos. \\
illo Vergilium me tempore dulcis alebat \\
Parthenope, studii florentem ignobilis oti,
\end{align*}
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[So much I sang in addition to the care of fields, of cattle, and of trees, while great Caesar thundered in war by deep Euphrates and bestowed a victor’s laws on willing nations, and essayed the path to Heaven. In those days I, Virgil, was nursed by sweet Parthenope [Naples], and rejoiced in the arts of inglorious ease—I who toyed with shepherds’ songs, and in youth’s boldness, sang of you, Tityrus, under the canopy of a spreading beech.] Here, Virgil establishes a contrast between his humble, homebound, unambitious work—and Caesar’s military conquests subjugating foreign peoples to Roman rule.23 The best and most compelling translations of this passage keep the perfect tension and equipoise in these eight lines, as Addison does in 1693. On first glance the contrast is between stillness and activity, peace and war—but Virgil does give himself the last word, inserts his own name (following it up with his presumably semi-autobiographical character, Tityrus, from his “audacious” youthful pastoral verse). Cowley engaged closely with the “ignobilis oti” line, seeking to claim for Virgil (and his English successors) a special dignity in rural retirement. While the leisure (oti) may seem to suggest that Virgil was carefree, the balanced structure of these lines belies his own care and attention, even

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23 Elain Fantham’s introduction to the Oxford World Classics translation (2004) indicates that Virgil’s invocation of a living patron rather than only the Muses or Apollo was an innovation. The tropes of poetic patronage in the early modern period were thus derived (perhaps unsurprisingly) from Virgil.
as he invites his readers to pay closer attention. This brief tour of four key passages has given a sense of the range of Virgilian georgic tone and content and shows how this poem models and invites multivalent attention and care.

**Georgic slippages: problems of scope and scale**

As indicated earlier, Virgil’s *Georgics* moves easily and unobtrusively between small-scale family farming and large-scale operations. Early modern writers not only take the stated agricultural topics and the didactic and panegyric at face value, but they also rely on a biographical tradition that secured Virgil’s pride of place in the classical tradition and as, among other things, a reliable first-hand preceptor of rural practice. M. S. Spurr magisterially counters the widely prevailing notion that Virgil describes a small family farm or a “subsistence peasant farmer” showing from internal evidence, archeology, and reference to other writers such as Seneca, Varro and Columella that these are instead rich men’s villa estates cultivated by many slaves as well as hired laborers and seasonal workers. He says the farm—likely several farms—would be probably 200-2000 *iugera* while a small farm would be far less, 5-35 *iugera*.24 Even the Corycian *senex* of 4.112-5, discussed above as the old man with his herbs, is not a subsistence farmer growing just enough food for himself, blissfully free of market trends: Spurr contends (note 41) that he would be selling flowers regularly at market to buy grain and wine; his *inemptis* [unbought] foodstuffs are only the fruits and vegetables, not a complete diet.25

Still, the ideal of one yeoman farmer on a few acres became a literary commonplace (and still has an appeal in agrarian writings today). Even if “practical utility” were not Virgil’s

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24 Since a *jugera* is a unit of area measurement 5/8 acre, this would be larger holdings of 125-1250 acres rather than subsistence farming of 3-22 acres.

primary concern, it was increasingly important for English georgic. English georgic writers have their own slippages and ways of scaling up georgic’s rhetoric of rural simplicity to include the large estates of the wealthy—and even to make a global turn. This trend is uneven, of course, and there were smaller operations and even evidence in early modern England of scattered interest in a deliberate smaller-scale agricultural practice that involved a more “meticulous” cultivation—drawing from intensive horticulture efforts. Importantly for this project, in both the Latin and English versions, georgic verse retains the fiction of the singular farmer (the *agricola*) while allowing for slippage up and down the social scale, from landowning gentry to laborers (including sometimes a transient labor force or enslaved persons). While georgic verse so often leads readers to imagine a solitary and singular husbandman working a small farm, the *agricola* may well be a tenant or laborer rather than owner. Such terms are slippery in both the Latin and English traditions—and so is the figure of the poet-narrator, who is sometimes also a philosopher and who displays rural knowledge and recollections of his own.

Georgic poetry’s demands of readers are also up for critical debate—what extent of rural knowledge or agricultural effort does the poem expect? Philip Thibodeau’s chapter “*Agricolae*” interrogates how widely the term applied in Virgil’s Roman context:

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26 For such real-world experience, see the comprehensive agricultural history in the monumental volumes edited by Joan Thirsk. *Agricultural Change: Policy and Practice 1500-1750*, from *Agrarian History of England and Wales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), the section entitled “The Interaction of Horticulture and Agriculture” in Thirsk 581-7, “it was a contemporary cliché to say that gardeners produced ten times more food than farmers from the same ground”—Thirsk contrasts certain instances of “impractical” time- and labor-intensive practices in Thanet (north-east Kent) in 1723 with examples of contemporary complaints (such as by Jethro Hull) of rising labor costs; she suggests that Hull’s difficulties were due in part because his laborers were not as inclined as “family farmers . . . . [who] worked for themselves and were prepared to suffer such tedious labor.” Annotiations in eighteenth-century English editions suggest that readers of Virgil’s *Georgics* similarly blurred the line between gardening and agriculture and found, for example, the old man’s conscientious labor in book 4 to be credible and even praiseworthy.

27 For studies of the direct application of Virgil’s poem to agricultural practice starting with Dryden’s translation as a watershed moment, see Laura Sayr, *Farming by the Book: British Georgic in Prose and Practice, 1697-1820*, Ph.D. Dissertation. (Princeton University, 2002), and for further practical and scientific application, see also Franz De Bruyn, “Reading Virgil’s *Georgics* as a Scientific Text: The Eighteenth-Century Debate between Jethro Hull and Stephen Switzer.” *English Literary History* 71 (2004), 661-89.
It is not just the farmer depicted in the poem, but also the poem’s addressee whose social position varies, ranging from a comfortable landowner to an impoverished peasant and back... in 1.155-59 the addressee is a poor peasant, in 2.298-302, he is the owner of a vineyard with a staff of workers, in 2.227-31, he seems to shift from the latter to the former. This list of passages in which it is possible to infer the social position of the addressee could be expanded ad libitum. A major part of the Georgics’ charm consists of its ability to beckon the reader into a world in which he or she becomes a gentleman or a yeoman farmer or a shepherd or a stable boy or any one from a cast of authentic rustic figures. 28

Thibodeau goes on to discuss poverty as a framing device in the fictionality that he sees as so important to interpreting Virgil’s Georgics—his larger trajectory is yet another way to deflect from any real-world purchase georgic verse might make. While his larger argument does not fit easily in early modern English georgic, this passage was worth quoting above because of the slippage; such inconsistency of terminology and referents runs all through the broader English georgic tradition—sometimes drawing attention to itself as out of place, even while the rest of the passage might be carefully transplanted into English agricultural praxis. The fictional engagement Tribodeau describes (the way Virgilian georgic’s non-farming readers “become” agricultural figures) may have some ethical merit as an initial stage of concern. In the Roman roots of the georgic tradition, Tribodeau found that the agricola must be a landowner (whether in a small or large way), and must have both agricultural knowledge and “an active engagement with farming”—he sums up more succinctly as “the trio of qualities... possessio, scientia, and cura.” Agricultural land and know-how are not enough in themselves—it is crucial that there must be also engaged care, which I argue is a key feature of a georgic ethic. 29

28 Emphasis mine, Philip Tribodeau, Playing the Farmer: Representations of Rural Life in Vergil’s Georgics. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). This chapter is pages 17-37; he also explores the expectations and extent of diligence and auturgy (working with one’s own hands). I am also interested in his claim about a wider sphere of concern than hands-on work: “the farmers of literary ideal might work with their hands, but it was also generally believed that one could farm and be a farmer ‘by concern,’ providing management for one’s estates rather than sweat-labor”—this distinction seems to be similar to that which care theorists discussed below will label as caring-about vs. caring-for.

29 Ken Hiltner, 16. “...something approximating a georgic ethic is necessary to ensure a careful stewardship of our planet. Indeed, understood in the most general sense, all acts of environmental preservation are in
Positing Georgic spectrums: soft to hard labor, closed to open form

Virgil’s *Georgics* shows the labor of cultivation to be sometimes *fructus* (fruitful, with a sense of delightful ease and what I will call “soft” georgic labor) and at other times *durus* (hard, an unstinting effort with little or no reward). Identical levels of engagement, knowledge, and work can yield quite different results depending on such variables as soil, weather, and seed. The labors of the *agricola* can never be certain: the processes are in flux and a good crop may be swept away by flood, wither in pestilence, or be destroyed by others. Such dangers are, of course, still with us; that is, the Iron Age setting of this poem is that of our lived experience (rather than the golden age of peace and plenty or even the heroic era of his Aeneas). Virgil’s readers—Augustan Roman, early modern English, or twenty-first-century American—recognize the need for continued labor and the responsibility to cultivate well because of the more or less immediate threat of food insecurity. The georgic poet ostensibly takes up the responsibility of *how* to cultivate well: “soft” georgic passages (such as the end of book 2) portray both the fruits and the process of cultivation as delightful and easy whereas the “hard” passages might suggest that little would come of the cultivation—and even that little will not last long, as pessimistic interpretations have insisted. Georgic poetry portrays the kinds of attention and responsibility needed for cultivation along a spectrum from delightfully soft to strenuously hard.30

some sense georgic, as they undertake the hard work of tending to the earth. This applies both to those individuals who do the literal georgic work of preserving the countryside and to the artists who encourage such stewardship.” Emphasis mine. We can apply “careful stewardship,” learned from earlier georgic writing, in some measure to our present day. More recently, in a short chapter which appeared in *Ecological Approaches to Early Modern English Texts: A Field Guide to Reading and Teaching*. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), Hiltner cautions against a misinterpretation of the past while he considers how he and other ecocritics have been “using the past as a way of better understanding our present environmental attitudes and the crises that sometimes gave birth to them” (30).

30 This use of “soft” and “hard” to describe georgic labor—straight, un-ironic labor—is mine, and I think it can usefully extricate eighteenth-century criticism from subsuming what I call soft under the rubric of pastoral and “hard” georgic under “anti-”pastoral; Gay’s *Rural Sports*, and the gradations of mock-georgic after that do wade merrily into soft georgic, though there might be a harder edge at times. The most helpful critical statement I have found on the way Virgil shows georgic labor is again Monica Gale (159), who uses adjectives “light” and “heavy”: “the word labor appears as a kind of leitmotiv near the beginning of each of the four books . . . The chiastic arrangement of light and heavy tasks in these four passages is striking, and mirrors the ambiguity of the poet’s
John Milton’s richly imaginative rendering of prelapsarian labor in book four of *Paradise Lost* belongs here, too, as “soft” labors which influenced English georgic.\(^3\) For Milton, work is part of the human condition, not a postlapsarian curse.\(^2\) In Eden, Adam and Eve have a variety of “sweet gardening labours,” made sweeter in companionable partnership: “our delightful task / To prune these growing Plants, and tend these Flours, / Which were it toilsom, yet with thee were sweet.”\(^3\) Barbara Lewalski has influentially interpreted their work of trimming back excessively overabundant growth of such good things as analogous to the way they ought to curb their own “overarching tendencies.”\(^4\) Their “appointed” labors are a mark of divine favor, which shows the singularly human dignity of work and (earned) rest as Adam says:

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other Creatures all day long
Rove idle unimploed and less need rest;
Man hath his daily work of body or mind
Appointed, which declares his Dignitie,
And the regard of Heav’n on all his waies. (4.616-620)
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Adam’s words can help recover a sense of wonder in the postlapsarian world. Such verses and the georgic tradition—ranging from soft to hard—can transmute drudgery to dignity and wonder. Besides this sense of wondrously working *with* the earth as part of a providential design, English georgic is aligned with Christian doctrine that the earth is intended for the “use” of humanity; to stand in for a full delineation of such thought, I offer just one invocation found in the 1662 *Book*

handling of labor throughout the Georgics, although it is curious that it does not correspond perfectly to with the alternation between “light” and “dark” books which has so often been seen as the underlying structure of the poem.” (Books 1 and 3 show—or at least end on a darker note, civil war and plague respectively—than the more hopeful and flourishing books 2 and 4.)

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\(^3\) For a very brief overview of Milton’s influence on English georgic, see Pellicer 407-8.
\(^3\) John Milton, *Paradise Lost* 4.437-9
of Common Prayer: “That it may please thee to give and preserve to our use the kindly fruits of the earth, so as in due time we may enjoy them; We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.”  

Care Theory and Ethics of Cultivation

In the introduction to her new (2005) translation of Virgil’s Georgics for a twenty-first-century American readership, Janet Lembke underscores caring as the crucial component of a georgic ethic: “The poem not only gave specific instructions to Italian farmers but also passionately advocated caring without cease for the land and for the crops and animals it sustained. A message inhabits the instructions: only at our gravest peril do we fail to husband the resources on which our lives depend.” The call to sustainable care for the land abides in and “inhabits” the words of Georgics—that is, the georgic verse is the habitat for a vitally important environmental message. Working from this conviction of a georgic ethic of care, Lembke clears and restores such habitats, positing her verse translation against “men who know much about poetry and little about farming.” She defends her choices to clear away the invasive weeds of poetic diction—“Out with truncheons and buskins, in with sturdy twigs and boots!” She freshly updates names of places and of mythical characters (for instance, Phyllodoce becomes “Fancy Leaf”). In this startlingly new translation, Lembke does engage closely and sensitively with Virgil’s words and offers admirably detailed footnotes and glossary for readers who are unfamiliar with agricultural practice, making this translation immediately accessible and

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35 The Book of Common-Prayer, and Administration of the Sacraments, and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, According to the Use of the Church of England, together with the Psalter or Psalms of David, Pointed as they are to be Sun or Said in Churches. (London, John Bill and Christopher Barker, 1662) This invocation persists from an earlier Roman prayer—the fact that is not original or particularly unusual is the point.

36 Emphasis mine. xiii, Janet Lembke, Virgil’s Georgics. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). Other twenty-first-century English translations include David Ferry, The Georgics of Virgil. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), which is a bilingual Latin-English volume, and also Peter Fallon’s 2004 translation published in Virgil, Georgics. Oxford World Classics. (Oxford University Press, 2006). Ferry’s is sensitive to the epic qualities especially of book four and informed in part by Dryden’s and Fairclough’s (Loeb) versions; Fallon, also a poet and farmer, attends to the structural patterns of the poem, the “courteous framing” of a desire for rural simplicity, and that Virgil, whether as “countryman or country poet,” seeks a rural respite from political and imperial machinations.
convincing any non-specialist reader of the environmental relevance of Virgil’s message to care for the land. While Lembke, like Benjamin R. Cohen and Claire Hintz quoted above (page 8) find in Virgil’s poem a place-based “ethic of experience” and care for the land as an answer to today’s environmental crisis, an exciting critical conversation among scholars of the long eighteenth century recovers a nuanced and attentive sense of georgic care in the period.

In and through the elaborate poetic diction Lembke eschews, however, David Fairer finds a “loamy, home-grown vocabulary.” Fairer—arguing, like Sitter, for georgic’s “green credentials” against misconceptions stemming from ecocritical studies of either pastoral or Romanticism—shows the dynamics of georgic cultivation (“co-operation” rather than “mastery”) and teaches us how to read the mixed qualities of georgic showing attentive care and “composted experience.”37 His catalogue of georgic principles culminates in care: “[i]ngenuity, effort, vigilance, experience, respect and above all care in husbandry (Virgil’s curas)” (emphasis in the original). In response, Erin Drew starts from such a sense of georgic care—its “ethos of conscientious care alongside fundamental utilitarianism”—to analyze the interplay of “care and conflict” intensified in Dryden’s version. My own thinking is enriched by Drew’s georgic “dialectic of care.”38

Critical discussion of georgic has moved away from a pessimistic focus merely on “anxieties and woes” of our Iron Age and is now energized by a focus on the environmental stakes of the “nurturing and diligent” aspects of georgic care. To the ongoing critical discussion on georgic care, I bring some terms from care theory that I have found helpful for interpreting


georgic: the distinction between caring-about and caring-for from Nell Noddings, a summation of care ethics by Stephanie Collins, four ethical elements of care theorized by Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto.

**Caring-about and caring-for**

When I came to Nell Nodding’s 2013 reissue of *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, the ethical differences between more broadly “caring-about” and more directly “caring-for” made immediate sense for georgic (and for environmental thinking more broadly). Since our sphere of concern is vaster than the caring work of our hands and minds to ameliorate a situation, such as an environmental crisis, our concern is nothing more than “caring-about”—an impulse or effort which “expresses some concern but does not guarantee a response to one who needs care.” In contrast, Noddings narrowly defines the full, direct involvement: “caring-for is the direct face-to-face attempt to respond to the needs of the cared-for” and thus “we cannot care-for everyone.” For applying these insights to eighteenth-century English georgic, I return to David Fairer’s eco-georgic article: “To think of a spot of ground as having a particular ‘style and habit’ is to remind us that it has preferences, even needs, that should be allowed for.” Georgic poets from Virgil onward “allow for” such local variation and engage the reader in noticing minute differences in soil or microclimates. English georgic itself relies on

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39 Xiii-xxi, Nell Noddings, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. Second Edition, Updated. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013). The title of the first edition in 1984 *A Feminine Approach* . . . spoke to earlier feminist scholarship in response to Carol Gilligan’s 1982 *In a Different Voice*; the study of an ethic of care (of relatedness and responsibility) emerged as a validation of empathy and moral growth as an alternative to the ethics of rights and justice derived from abstract principles. Critical discussions in this first context celebrated an ethic informed by maternal relationships but cautioned against rigid gender differentiation and a bio-determinist strain of thought as a new incarnation of the “separate spheres” suitable for men’s and women’s activity. In her introduction to the updated second edition, Noddings maintains that “Ethical caring derives its strength from natural caring,” with its familial examples “motivated by love or inclination”; thus, the justification and theory of ethical caring remains relational—calling upon connection, response, and needs.

40 Fairer, 209.

41 The agrarian engagement of Wendell Berry—direct, close contact, hands-on, and limited to “a diversified farm of reasonable size” [100-200 acres] or else the care and attention dissipates—would certainly count as georgically “caring-for” the land.
this difference—not merely in time and language but in practice and caring relationship with the known land. Georgic verse at its best focuses on very particular places and familiar animals and develops these uneven relations: for every universalizing georgic principle, there are several specific local observations or appealing details delivered with a relational air of familiarity.

**Attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness**

In 2015, political theorist Stephanie Collins synthesized thirty years of scholarship in her book *The Core of Care Ethics*, in which she begins from the “central normative commitment” of “normative ethical theory” to “enter into and maintain caring relations.” In part one, she meticulously moves toward this “core” [relationships] and develops four claims. Part two crystallizes as a “slogan” the statement that “[d]ependency relationships generate responsibilities.”42 Collins invests in care theory not as an accessory to feminist or virtue ethics but a theory to be taken seriously by moral philosophy; because of the contexts in which care theory emerged, Kant and the eighteenth-century liberal philosophical tradition are bogeymen for the field. There is scope for further research not only for applying care theory to georgic and wider environmental and ethical thinking in the long eighteenth century, but also for eighteenth-century specialists to clarify the philosophical strains against which care theory defines itself.

Political theorist Joan C. Tronto claims that “the ethic of care is a practice, rather than a set of rules or principles . . . it requires some specific moral qualities. It involves both particular acts of caring and a general ‘habit of mind’ to care that should inform all aspects of a practitioner’s moral life.”43 I believe this “habit of mind to care” could include what Benjamin R.

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43 126, Joan C. Tronto. *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*. (New York: Routledge 1993.) Noddings and Tronto both connect care to a sense of “burden”: Tronto claims that “to care implies more than simply a passing interest or fancy but instead the acceptance of some form of burden.” Several of the georgic poets and translators in the following chapters find themselves beset by variously botanical or bookish burdens.
Cohen and other writers mean by a “georgic ethic.” Tronto argues that caring is a central human activity; in an article co-authored with Berenice Fisher, Tronto had earlier suggested that “caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible.” From this all-encompassing definition, Fisher and Tronto made this theoretical intervention positing four factors, worth reading several times:

The four elements of care are: caring about, noticing the need for care in the first place; taking care of, assuming responsibility for care; care-giving, the actual work of care that needs to be done; and care-receiving, the response of that which is cared for to the care. From these four elements of care arise four ethical elements of care: attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness.

At first, the two middle terms—taking care of and care-giving seemed to some degree interchangeable, but ethically the responsibility comes into clearer focus, being, as Tronto says, “both central and problematic in an ethic of care.” Responsibility seems to be of two kinds: the “dynamics of responsibility include acts of omission or commission that have brought about the need for care” (some sense of fault or blame, though Tronto does not use the word) as well as “assuming responsibility because we recognize a need for caring” (even if the need did not arise from our act or failure to act). Tronto does acknowledge that these four qualities are intertwined (for instance, that adequate responsiveness requires attentiveness) and lays special stress on attentiveness “simply recognizing the needs of those around us is a difficult task, and indeed, a moral achievement”—conversely, that inattentiveness is a moral failing. Warning

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45 Tronto, 131.
against complacency, Tronto admonishes that “Care involves conflict; to resolve this conflict will require more than an injunction to be attentive, responsible, competent, and responsive.”\(^\text{46}\)

Care theory connects both to the persnickety cares of georgic translators and classically trained pedants as well as the constant yet seasonally variable efforts to cultivate trees and vines and livestock—and finally also the cultivation and improvement of the mind, intensely cultivated with daily labor.\(^\text{47}\) At this juncture, georgic scholars, eco-critics, and eighteenth-century specialists can show the range and extent of discussions of care and of “attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness” in the period and reengage in interdisciplinary research responding to the current environmental moment. Even more, we can investigate the extent to which georgic poets cared for the land and the literary tradition and also to see how the poetry can continue to teach us—and our students—to care. These ethical elements of care offer a new set of lenses for reading georgic (and, should we choose to use them so, for evaluating our own teaching and ethical choices). Georgic care was once rooted in English soil and then made to extend further, shifting the scope and quality of a georgic ethic. How much can we learn from this past context to apply to our own environmental situation now?

\(^{46}\) Tronto, 136.

\(^{47}\) The foregoing discussion of georgic gives a rich context for Joseph Addison’s famous remark from Spectator No. 10, March 12, 1711: “The Mind that lies fallow but a single Day, sprouts up in Follies that are only to be killed by a constant and assiduous Culture.”