The Laboratory of Anamnesis:

The Symbolist Poet Paul Val&#65533;ry in Search of Consciousness1 [1]

1. Literary Beginnings: From Symbolist Poetry to Val&#65533;ry's Notebooks.

The political philosopher Eric Voegelin (1901-1985) often drew upon the work of poets and novelists for exemplary concepts and pathological diagnoses in the course of his analysis of the &#65533;modern crisis.' Understanding Voegelin means appreciating this literary interest as an aspect of his holistic approach to the study of man, political order, and history, an approach in which individual political thinkers become subjects for case study, and the spiritual, moral, and psychological condition of the citizens of various &#65533;lites and other social milieux in various historical contexts are dissected and judged. The approach manifests a premise, one perhaps at best not obvious to positivistic social scientists and at worst methodologically heretical to them: that literary works provide documentary access to the complex reality of human existence in a way that statistics, legal codes, and logico-philosophical treatises cannot. There is also the likelihood that Voegelin as a writer identifies with other writers.

---

1 [1] I wish to thank Max Arnott for pointing out to me a possible parallel between EV's anamnetic experiments and Val&#65533;ry's notebook project in private comments after my Musil paper in 2004, and to thank Charles Embry and EVS for providing a venue for this kind of work. As will be evident, this paper is only a draft and my research has a long way to go.

Voegelin knows that he is himself composing a literary work of some kind as he writes *Order and History,* and faces problems and uncertainties inherent to the act of writing, to the process of intending meaning through words and to the attempt to reach an audience--problems and uncertainties faced by writers of all eras, problems not just of communication but of words-as-concepts, problems of thinking itself. And any writer worth his salt has reflected on these, at least a little. In the opening of *In Search of Order,* after posing this question as his initial topic, "Where Does the Beginning Begin?" he answers, "As I am putting down these words on an empty page I have begun to write a sentence that, when it is finished, will be the beginning of a chapter on certain problems of Beginning." Then he stops, and reflects: "The sentence is finished. But is it true?" Voegelin also has in mind that he is beginning anew a huge work called *Order and History* even in what was supposed to be its final volume, that his work over four decades (going back to the *History of Political Ideas)* has dealt with the same themes again and again in ways that have never satisfied him, that he must keep on trying new beginnings in pursuit of surer foundations.

Here are some lines in notebooks by a writer with whom Voegelin evidently identifies:

> I look at a text which I wrote in [18]94 and recognize myself in [19]38--i.e., 44 years later--from the way of forming the beginning,--of setting up the "subject,' of moving into it and of directing this beginning towards the positions which will allow me to find my way in this indeterminate region--*the area of a given* (or imposed) *subject.2* ***[2]***

---

2 [2] Paul Val"ry, *Cahiers/Notebooks,* with various translators, edited by Brian Stimpson, Paul Gifford, and Robert Pickering (Peter Lang, 2000-), Vol 2, p. 513. Paul Val"ry, *Cahiers* (Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1957-1961), XXI 379. The entry's date is 1938. Val"ry's italics. My references to the Cahiers will appear, wherever possible, with citations for the Stimson English edition ("Vol" and "p.") and for the French facsimile edition (Roman numeral volume followed by Arabic numeral page). I will also try to provide a date for the note or entry, as determined by the editors of the French facsimile edition. The English translation

> Often in these pages I write down an absurd sentence instead of an illuminating insight which couldn't be grasped or which--wasn't one.3 [3]

So Voegelin asks "But is it true?" ("A question, of course, for those who do not regard the concept of truth as "outmoded.') Then he supposes the problem of being put off the straight track of composition and communication by "new ideas" that "have a habit of emerging while the writing is going on" and that disrupt the structure already intended and make the beginning that is already on the paper "unsuitable." Then comes an elegant reference (or a pretentious one, depending on the reader's disposition), a reference that encapsulates the writer's problem of maintaining attentiveness to a philosophical or literary task while his "imagination' wants to take him in fresh directions that may or may not provide illumination on the task, if indeed he can ever force the refreshed line of his thinking back to the task: a reference to an eighteenth-century novel which inserts itself into its own age's commonly accepted discourse on mental functions, the Lockean discourse, and then tries to subvert the Lockean project for mankind. This book is known by its shorter title, *Tristram Shandy*--a novel by the Reverend Laurence Sterne, which tries to maximize its own eccentricity, and to do away with beginnings, middles, and ends. And so, after Voegelin nods to the compositional problem of being "distracted from

---

will consist of five volumes, of which three have been published as of this writing. The facsimile edition runs to twenty-nine.

3 [3] Vol 1, p. 43, III 665 (1905).

distraction by distraction﷯ (which is here my elegant or pretentious reference to T. S. Eliot),4 [4] he makes this reference which is a distraction at the same time that it warns against distraction, and thus gilds a literary apotropaion against distraction in the transitional clause, "Unless we want to enjoy the delights of a Sternean stream of consciousness﷯﷯5 [5]

Knowledgeable readers of Voegelin already know that he rejects theories that ground consciousness in a mere stream. ﷯Literary' readers know that Sterne's novel is the secret ancestor of Proust's vaster novel about time and the associative dimension of memory, a secret perhaps to Proust himself.6 [6] But Voegelin knows his antecedents. Because Voegelin prefaces the first English edition of *Anamnesis* with a memoir entitled "Remembrance of Things Past,﷯ it occurs to me that I am right in suspecting that Proust has furnished some inspiration for the

---

4 [4] *Four Quartets*, "Burnt Norton,﷯ III.

5 [5] *In Search of Order*, 1987 edition, p. 13.

6 [6] For a nice account of the Sterne-Proust parallels which also references Sterne's problems with Locke, see the section entitled "Sterne and Proust: Inverse Contemporaries,﷯ in Michael Bell's essay, "Laurence Sterne and the Twentieth Century,﷯ in *Postmodern Studies 15: Laurence Sterne in Modernism and Postmodernism*, eds. D. Pierce & P. Voogd (Rodopi, 1996), p.43ff. "Sterne is an eighteenth-century Proust, or Proust a twentieth-century Sterne, in that each wrote a *roman fleuve* attempting to transcend time and mortality﷯ (p.43). "While Sterne continually subverts Lockean values, his very doing so remains within the terms of Locke's psychology﷯ (p.44). "While from a Lockean point of view the [Sternean] hobbyhorse represents a breakdown in the communication of ideas, from an anti-Lockean standpoint it is a unique mode of emotional communication﷯ As a blend of humour, feeling, subjectivity and creation it anticipates the principal elements by which romantic thought would eventually dissolve the Lockean world view﷯ (p.45).

�anamnetic experiments' that become the fundamental demonstration for his theory of consciousness. Nevertheless I go on wondering: the anamnetic experiment looks risky; he even refers to it in a letter to an editor as a "crazy thing;� are the thought experiments of earlier philosophers (such as Descartes' *Cogito)* really sufficient precedent for it; and though he may derive a model for it somewhat from Proust, where does he get the moxie?7 [7]

In such autobiographical passages, Voegelin names modern writers associated with a school called "symbolist� or *symboliste* among the various influences which, early in his career, opened his eyes to a movement of "revolt� against the spiritual closure of modernity in general and positivism in particular. The literature and scholarship of the "revolt� assured him that he was not alone in his sense of the crisis, and novelists and poets in particular enriched his understanding of consciousness and the validity and value of its experiential contents.8 [8] The symbolist school was primarily a movement in French poetry whose grandfathers were Baudelaire and Nerval and even Edgar Allan Poe; the poet and literary theoretician who embodied it *par excellance* was Stephane Mallarm�. Mallarm�'s disciple Paul Val�ry (1871-

---

7 [7] See his 1946 letter to the editor of the *Sewanee Review*, in *Robert B. Heilman and Eric Voegelin: A Friendship in Letters, 1944-1984,* ed. Charles Embry (Univ. of Missouri Press, 2004), p. 242-3, n.25. As it appears in the 1966 letter to Heilman (p. 241), Voegelin thinks that Heraclitus provides the ultimate precedent. But let us not discount Augustine.

8 [8] "Remembrance of Things Past� in the first English-language edition of *Anamnesis*, p. 5; Chapter 5 of *Autobiographical Reflections* p. 16; "Autobiographical Statement at Age Eighty-Two,� CW 33, p. 435.

1945), a poet with a relatively philosophical bent, was a special object of Voegelin's interest,9 [9] and was the author of the journal passages I compared to the opening of *In Search of Order*.

Val&#65533;ry is often called the last of the symbolist poets. Nevertheless the movement spills over from French poetry into other genres and other countries and languages, and from its proper *fin-de-si&#65533;cle* period into the period of literary modernism. Voegelin reports that his reading of Stefan George, the German representative of symbolism, led him to the French poets. The poetic ideal of Mallarm&#65533;--his rigorous commitment to an internal structure that turns the poem into a separate and self-contained reality, to a tightly controlled use of polyvalent language, to lyrical intensity and conceptual trickery--is antithetical to the realistic and narrative foundations of the novel; and yet one can speak rather metaphorically of "symbolist&#65533; fiction as in the case of *&#65533; la recherche du temps perdu* by Proust, as Edmund Wilson did. Novelists such as Proust, Joyce, and Musil shared the interests and ideals of the symbolist movement to a great extent, although one usually calls them as "modernist.&#65533; It would be true to say that Voegelin's interest in all these writers is the same interest. Somehow T. S. Eliot's name does not appear in these memoir passages, but Voegelin's readers know Eliot's importance to the later theoretical works, and Eliot

---

9 [9] In 1926/7, Voegelin studied at the Sorbonne. "At this time I assembled my almost complete collection of the works of Paul Val&#65533;ry&#65533; I had occasion to see Val&#65533;ry when he gave an after-dinner talk at some meeting connected with the League of Nations . What interested me most about him at the time, besides the fact that he was a great artist, was his Lucretian philosophy, which I understood as a parallel phenomenon to the Lucretianism of George Santayana. The poem with which I fell in love particularly was the "Cimeti&#65533;re Marin&#65533; (*Autobiographical Reflections* (LSU Press, 1989), p. 35). On a subsequent trip to France he made a point of visiting the location of the poem, the cemetery at S&#65533;te. At some point in Vienna , he delivered a paper on Val&#65533;ry to the *Geistkreis.* (Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution* (LSU Press, 1981), pp. 37, 40.

is so much a product of the symbolist movement that one critic perceived him as "Val�ry with the difference of being an American from St. Louis.�10 [10]

These writers do not receive any extensive treatment in Voegelin's theoretical works; some of them come up for mention, while others do not. Nonetheless I believe that a deeper understanding of their inspiration to Voegelin may enrich our understanding of his intentions. These writers at least give an answer to the question: "If modernity is disease, what does health look like, at least in our age?�11 [11] The �health' of symbolism, of course, must be qualified as compromised--as when Voegelin refers to Val�ry's "spiritual fatigue.�12 [12]

---

10 [10] Donald Davie, as characterized by Denis Donoghue in *Words Alone: The Poet T. S. Eliot* (Yale Univ. Press, 2000), p. 139. See Voegelin's "Notes on T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*" in CW 33, pp 33-40, evidently from 1944. It's clear to me that Voegelin was taking an interest in Eliot in the 1920's from his reference to Poe and the French misunderstanding of him in *On the Form of the American Mind* (CW 1, pp. 13-14). Eliot returns again and again over the years to the "misunderstanding" theme when speaking of French symbolist poetics, and I assume that there is a passage from the 1920's that Voegelin saw, perhaps in *The Criterion*, though I haven't tracked it down yet. Voegelin's original interest in Poe and knowledge of such seemingly out-of-the-way Poe texts as *Eureka* and "Mellonta Tauta" derives from Val�ry. It was because of this background in the roots and shoots of symbolist literature that he was able to converse and sympathize with an American new critic such as Cleanth Brooks. I imagine that it may have come up, likewise, in his conversations with the Italian historian of literary decadence Mario Praz.

11 [11] Of course I am parodying Goethe here: "Klassik ist Gesundheit, Romantik ist Krankheit"

12 [12] See below, refs. to a letter to Leo Strauss and a passage on "phenomenalism and materialism" in the "Last Reorientation."

Someone not fluent in the culture of late romanticism might suppose that "symbolist" poetry means nothing more profound than a style or technique involving the use of stock symbols as decorative or deliberately esoteric allusions, not as vibrant images but dead tokens, as referents of the merest sort which a reader must decode by consulting some standard reference work on mythological or occult systems, in order to uncover a closed and controlled meaning intended by a poet. Although the name "symbolism" was coined by literary journalists and not fully embraced by Mallarm" and his disciples, it well sums up an attitude towards symbolization that is much closer to Voegelin's. For while the symbolist poet may indeed employ those dead tokens in a poem (and not as mere embellishment but in a complex referential strategy that gives them vibrance--or a suggestion of powerful meaning where, in fact, no meaning can be ascertained), the "symbol" for him is the poem itself: Symbol in relation to symbols as the Word is to words. The poem is a translucent and ultimately impenetrable object that breathes its own inner life in which the reader is privileged to participate (if he can), whose meaning ultimately transcends anything that can be said about it, in paraphrase or in translation from images to philosophical concepts. What lives in the poem is some expression of the poet's own living spiritual experience that has inspired the poem, but so transformed that the poem lives on its own without further reference to the poet's life; another element of the poem's life flows from systems of meaning within language itself, the common cultural inheritance over which the poet has no absolute control--from the very point of the poem's beginning when phrases (or mere rhythms which suggest moods and call for embodiment in words) erupt inside the apeirontic "imagination' of the poet, to the point when the unsupervised reader encounters the text committed by the poet to the outside world through publication and finds a meaning for it that may be something quite other than what the poet thought of as he labored. The symbolist

attitude to the poem-as-object rightly suggests a metaphysics in which things in general (natural objects and organisms, as well as artworks) have an inner life that can be participated but not comprehended, and are glimmering conduits of a numinousness radiating from some cosmic reality behind or beneath the dead Cartesian-Newtonian universe of intentionalist objects. It suggests a quasi-religion, with the poem as Catholic sacrament; and it's my theory that symbolism--even if it is only a parody of religion practiced mostly by atheists--could only have started in a Catholic country.13 [13] As Val&#65533;ry himself says in his *Cahiers* ("Notebooks&#65533;), "Between 1880 and 1900 art had a religious character--Symbolism was a sort of religion.&#65533;14 [14]

In sum, symbolism provided Voegelin with a literary oasis in which the "revolt&#65533; was manifest and where the processes of symbolization and participation and the distinction between intentionalist "thing-reality&#65533; and "It-reality&#65533; were somewhat understood. Symbolism thus provided him also with an example of an &#65533;ersatz religion,' although not as a gnostic mass-movement but as an incomplete, privatized and socially ineffective response to the crisis, a response troubled with gnostic impulses of its own.

---

13 [13] I have not read Stefan George and cannot give any account of German symbolists. I believe that this theory accounts for the thinness of the English "decadence.&#65533; In the modern period, Yeats had his occultism, and depended on magic rather than orthodox sacramentalism for the fundamental metaphor of his work. Joyce was Catholic by birth and education, while T. S. Eliot was Anglo-Catholic or, so to speak, Catholic by aspiration, enculturating himself in the related attitudes of literature and religion at the same time.

14 [14] Vol 2, p. 252, III 623 (ca. 1905).

Voegelin's attraction to the symbolist school may also have a political dimension: its rightist heritage was generally anti-utopian and anti-ideological and favored an ultimate tendency towards apolitical quietism. And what did not attract him here failed to repel him. This political dimension implies a gloomy view of modern history and a critical attitude towards modern culture. The standard academic view calls this rightist current an "irrationalist counter-enlightenment, rising as a counter-revolution to Enlightenment rationalism. Writers such as Joseph de Maistre and Ren de Chateaubriand offered a rightist romanticism to oppose the leftist romanticism of Rousseau. Consider Baudelaire's statement that his two greatest teachers or influences were Maistre and Poe.15 [15] The symbolists belong to a generation that has given up on the na ve utopianism of the original Romantics; they see that revolution and progressivist faith have resulted in the emergence of philistine social lites with no comprehension of the depths of culture or the life of the spirit. The symbolists have neither political ambitions or nor illusions about serving as mankind's "unacknowledged legislators. Their only recourse is to turn inward, to the imaginary worlds of art, disengaging from politics or resorting to deliberately incomprehensible acts of street-theatre which arouse the uncomprehending wrath of the guardians of public mores and morals (following Baudelaire's rule, "Il faut pater le bourgeois). What remains of these literary attitudes by the time of Val ry is skepticism and

15 [15] "De Maistre et Edgar Poe m'ont appris raisonner." *Mon Coeur mis nu* CXI, uvres compl tes, Biblioth que de la Pl iade (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), vol. 1, p. 669.

privacy and a contempt for the official honors that one nevertheless accepts from an uncomprehending bourgeois republic.16 [16]

---

16 [16] The school of Baudelaire becomes known as that of the "decadents.&#65533; The scandalized bourgeois uses "decadent&#65533; as a pejorative label, while the writers themselves embrace the label--not only because they bask in scandal but also because they regard themselves as the froth of the ferment of decay, the incomprehensible prophets and secret judges of the declining civilization that has produced them.

Discontent with the status quo could draw the symbolist writer towards political sentiments of left or right, but I believe the general tendency is rightwards. In France , the Action Fran&#65533;aise seemed to be the political heir of *d&#65533;cadence.* In Italy , the image and influence of Gabriele d'Annunzio, the assimilative genius of *decadentismo,* led directly into fascism. But the "right wing&#65533; ideologies of early twentieth-century Europe had their left-wing components, populism and a cynicism about religion if not an open contempt for it. The kind of alienation from the bourgeois order that gets expressed in literary politics of the time and that could go either left or right, culminates, one might say, in unsystematic political mass movements which have their aesthetic &#65533;lites and are more a matter of style, sentiment, and demagogy than an organized political pseudo-science.

To me, Barbey d'Aurevilly's catholic royalism and his cult of the Vend&#65533;en rebels against the French Revolution--and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's pride in his descent from the famous 16th-century grand master of the Knights of Malta--are illustrative of the prevailing counter-revolutionary sentiment. In the twentieth century, among the heirs of Symbolism, T. S. Eliot refused to disown Charles Maurras, and Val&#65533;ry seems to have leaned towards the antidreyfusards and loved d'Annunzio. Say what one must about the decay of political discourse and resistance to truth, they were not Nazis. The only heroic literary figure from the right known to me is Georges Bernanos, who confronted Maurras directly and spent World War II in Brazil .

See Richard Griffiths, *The Reactionary Revolution: The Catholic Revival in French Literature, 1870-1914* (NY: Ungar, 1965).

Voegelin's dislike of Maistre, quite blatant in *From Enlightenment to Revolution,* has to do with (among other things) his hostility towards the "secondary ideologies&#65533; which arise in

Val�ry rebelled against Mallarm�'s poetic absolutism which made the poet into an esoteric and self-secluded priest-prophet-mage. As the result of a personal crisis at age twenty-one in 1892, after suffering a night of fear and self-doubt which he depicted as an event in his personal mythology like the famous dream of Descartes, Val�ry abandoned poetry for years and dedicated himself to a project of contemplative self-inquiry that might result in a pure science of mind but would not result in publishable literary product. Val�ry had concluded that the poem-as-cult-object was not the intellectual *summum bonum* but only one route to the highest intellectual fulfillment; insofar as poetry could fulfill, what really mattered was the compositional process, not product. Philosophical introspection or meditation (as opposed to formal academic philosophy or discipleship or logical system-constructing) could be another such route. While Mallarm� had developed the poem as microcosmic �living' entity to the point of almost becoming a self-subsistent *res cogitans,* what really mattered was the human mind upon whose image the self-subsistent poem was modeled, the mind that gave birth to poem. Here Val�ry's endeavor starts to foreshadow that of *Anamnesis,* the project of going behind political order to the concrete consciousness that generates concrete political orders. But how much does it foreshadow, and how far?

Val�ry's new project involved rising between three and five in the morning, loading up on caffeine and nicotine, and writing down his unprompted and undigested thoughts in notebooks, recording them with as much directness as possible, in ink, without editing or

---

response to the revolutionary ideologies as an insufficient answer to the �crisis.' What Voegelin appreciated in Baudelaire he should also have appreciated in Maistre.

elaboration, without further reflection or rumination or distillation.17 [17] The general rule was that entries had be the mind's thoughts about itself.18 [18] The ⊡miracle' of consciousness, the essence of it, is self-awareness; this was Val⊡ry's belief, and so it followed, as the premise of his project, that only the mind could reveal itself experientially, intuitionally. The experience of self-awareness yielded the intuition of the *moi.* Val⊡ry's project would therefore pursue clarity about this *moi*--again, intuitively and experientially rather than logically--as something prior to thought and not as *res cogitans*--as something inherent to the person but prior to knowable personality, potential, prior to any act.19 [19]

---

17 [17] If he felt that clarification was possible later, the change would be added in pencil, to make it identifiable as an accretion.

18 [18] Although he kept it from becoming a diary, he would write concretely about his self-image, and so he wrote about conceptions of his literary career, what he thought he had accomplished in particular poems, the discrepancy between what critics and his audience thought of him and what he believed himself to be actually, what had been his relationship with his ⊡masters' and ⊡idols' (Poe, Mallarm⊡) and how he distinguished himself from them⊡ As if to give the self-image further concreteness, he drew pictures himself in the notebook pages sometimes, emblematically, as in the case of one which shows his face half-concealed in a shadow of cross-hatching. In a later volume I found a water-color portrait of himself reading in bed--without explanation.

19 [19] The Mallarmean ideal (embraced and proclaimed by T. S. Eliot) was that of the "impersonal poet.⊡ (See Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent.⊡) The poem that lives its own life or expresses only "emotions of art⊡ which are not his own emotions enables the poet to keep himself a secret from the world--and perhaps from himself as well, as he lives vicariously (as do the readers) a life that is not his own. Biographical criticism says that the ideal is a rationalization of Eliot's (and Mallarm⊡'s?) flight from inner demons. One would think that Val⊡ry, in his pursuit of his "moi⊡ through journal writing, is willing and eager to face who he is. This turns out not to be the case; the "pure⊡ or deeper moi is a pre-personal self. Hence, even as Val⊡ry is another impersonal poet like Mallarm⊡ and Eliot, so he turns out to be a rather impersonal diarist, as I will show below.

The ﷺNotebook' or Cahier project began formally in 1894 and lasted for the rest of his life; any day that began without the morning exercise was a day of unease. Writing with increasing prolificity over the years (on average around 900 pages per year after 1923) he produced some 26,600 handwritten pages in total. By 1940 Voegelin would have known as much about the project as any Valﷺry devotﷺe could have. It was no secret; in fact it was part of the poet's myth or legend. By the end of World War I, Valﷺry began to look forward to organizing his notes into some kind of summary or systematic product, and a secretary was employed to help in classifying passages by topic and copying them out. One plan involved sorting and editing the entries into a "philosophic dictionaryﷺ as opposed to presenting them in the order of a formal "system.ﷺ20 [20] A few portions were published as collections of aphorisms, in the manner of the notebooks of Joubert or Amiel.21 [21] In any event, the notebooks would be preserved as a significant part of the poet's papers.

As Valﷺry the young poetic genius withdrew from the literary world's view after 1892 (though of course he would return), in order to pursue an all-consuming project of pure intellectual self-inquiry (or self-gratification), he identified with mysterious and reclusive genius-characters in the fiction of Poe and with a version of Poe himself that had been entertained (if not fantasized) by Baudelaire and Mallarmﷺ. He conceived of himself as a new, deliberately

---

20 [20] Vol 1, p. 51, XXIV 713 (1941).

21 [21] E.g., "Rhumbs,ﷺ and chapters in the Teste cycle presented as his diary notes.

unsystematic Descartes, an identification that was perfected in 1931 when he held the skull of Descartes in his hands.22 [22] Meanwhile, the notebook as mysterious, paradoxical process-product *replaced* the ideal of the Mallarm&#65533;an poem as cult object; in 1892 he held in his hands fascicles of Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks that were owned by the Institut de France, and eventually regarded his own notebooks with the same awe. So the project of Val&#65533;ry's notebooks, and the task of interpreting them, is colored by Val&#65533;ry's self-identification (if not self-mythologizing and self-mystification) with Poe, Descartes, Leonardo, and of course Mallarm&#65533;. But Voegelin was the enemy of mystification. How, and to what extent did he identify with the Val&#65533;ry of the notebooks, insofar as he knew about the project, and what was the nature of the influence?

In order to make an effective comparison between Voegelin's anamnetic experiments and the work of Val&#65533;ry's &#65533;laboratory' of journal-writing, and also to evaluate Val&#65533;ry's conclusions about consciousness (to the extent that they can be established) against Voegelin's, I will need to present a reading of *Anamnesis* and related texts. The entries in Val&#65533;ry's notebooks are usually brief, elliptical and hardly self-evident in meaning; it will be necessary, therefore, to establish a context for them by sifting several of his &#65533;public' texts (poetry and prose intended for publication) and outlining his hypotheses on consciousness that served as premises for the notebook project. A point of intersection or transition between my survey of *Anamnesis* and my

---

22 [22] See an entry in the notebooks for 23 Nov. 1931 , XV 400. Cited in The Collected Works of *Paul Valery, edited by Jackson Matthews* (hereafter referenced as "Matthews&#65533;), a Bollingen edition (Princeton Univ. Press, 1956-75), Vol 9 p. 357-8.

survey of Valery's works will be his most-loved poem, *Le Cimeti*  *re marin,* which Voegelin cites in *Anamnesis* as an illustration of the grounding of consciousness in an authentic materialist metaphysics. I must caution the reader that my survey of the notebooks themselves is hampered by the scale of the task and is incomplete; I read French slowly, and the English translation is not yet fully published. To fulfill this task of interpretation and evaluation of the notebooks--following Valry's own premise of an ultimate evaluation and systematic closure--would be the work of many years, if not a lifetime. In a sense, reading Valry's notebooks means reliving Valry's writing of them, re-meditating them in order to pursue all their trajectories of suggestion, perhaps even studying each facsimile page of the notebooks for the implications of layout, and applying graphological analysis and looking for clues to unconscious moods and motivations in variations of the handwriting. Then there would be the problem of handling the non-verbal content: looking for the significance of gratuitous-seeming sketches and pictorial material which ranges from doodles and cartoons to elaborate scenes and watercolors; determining the intent of geometric figures, graphs, and mathematical equations and arrays; establishing linkages for these materials to themes in the verbal text. One needs to consider eventually whether the scale of this interpretative task brings the whole notebook project in question, whether the concept was simply grandiose or even fraudulent; for if he resulting text became too large for its own author to manage, and Valry's premise is that the truth of consciousness is discovered as the self yields intuitions to the self, what is the point of relying on other selves to furnish the closure of interpretation? For in the very beginning, in his *Journal de*

Bord, he writes (and it must refer to the notebook project): "I work for someone who will come afterwards.�23 [23]

Nevertheless, just when one begins questioning Val�ry's project, one finds it accorded legitimacy in the eulogistic statement by Henri Bergson that "What Val�ry has done, had to be attempted.�24 [24]

If Val�ry's project is flawed, compromised, mythical, is it the �myth' of Val�ry the kindred spirit that provides inspiration or fortifies Voegelin in his boldness? There is an ultimate question for Voegelin's biographers in the issue of Val�ry as a possible �shadow personality,' a furtive alter ego with whom one identifies deeply on some personal and temperamental level while perceiving that this other is substantially one's opposite, an alter ego that represents �the road not taken.' A more immediate goal for this paper is settling the questions of whether Val�ry's "laboratory of the spirit� becomes Voegelin's laboratory of anamnesis, and indeed what kind of anamnesis there is in Val�ry's.25 [25]

---

23 [23] "Je travaille pour quelqu'un qui viendra apr�s� (I 60).

24 [24] *Cahiers XVII* 792, Notebooks I, 177. It was reported to Val�ry by a friend. He accepts the compliment saying, "This honourable line--I'll retain it. It's a motto. My �necessity'--and my definition too�� He mentions it again at the time of Bergson's death: "very precious to me--justification, praise and very acute critique of the said V[alery].� *Cahiers XXIV* 762, Notebooks I, 225.

25 [25] The metaphorical "laboratory� was originally Descartes' "mental laboratory� where he practiced a "pitiless clean-up� of unfounded beliefs privileged by tradition and authority: "ce nettoyage impitoyable de la table du laboratoire de l'esprit� (Val�ry *Oeuvres*, ed. Jean Hytier, Gallimard, 1957-

2. **Voegelin's Theory of Consciousness and *Le Cimeti*re marin***

In 1943, Eric Voegelin performed the "anamnetic experiments,[illegible] in which he recalled the childhood experiences of "awe[illegible] that were his simplest and earliest experiences of self-awareness and "transcendence into[illegible] time, space, matter, community, and history, and that led to the conceptualization of the respective horizons, poles, dimensions, or "fields.[illegible] The "awe[illegible] is identical with the Platonic-Aristotelian [illegible]wonder,' which is the common experience of mankind as well as a philosopher's motive for philosophizing.26 [26] These childish experiences of his, Voegelin believed, were the building blocks of all later and more complex awarenesses. Every time he had an experience leading to an intuition of these fields as an adult, every time he meditated on experience as a philosopher, a kind of associational residue of the original experiences could still be tasted. The very fact that the "primary[illegible] experiences could be remembered demonstrated the fully experiential basis of knowledge. This is the beginning of an answer to the question, [illegible]What is consciousness?' "These types of experience constitute

---

60, Vol I, p. 813). See "A View of Descartes[illegible] in Matthews, Vol 9 p. 40. Val[illegible]ry believed it was his vocation and accomplishment to complete a "nettoyage de la situation verbale,[illegible] as though he was single-handedly restoring truth to language or synthesizing the purity of a true philosophical language. In general his contempt for German academic philosophy, Kant particularly, is expressed in the belief that it is only so much abuse of language--a position foreshadowed by Maistre and Joubert.

26 [26] Anamnesis (Collected Works 6) 355 on *thaumazein.* Hereafter referenced as "A.[illegible] See Plato, *Theaetetus* 155d3, and Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 2.982^{b} 12-13.

consciousness; and this is the *real* consciousness a man has, unless somebody wants to insist that my childhood was entirely different from that of any other child in the history of mankind.[27] [27]

Voegelin's "anamnetic experiments" were a philosopher's endeavor to attain scientific knowledge, like Descartes' contrived moment of doubt which leads to the famous or infamous *Cogito*--though Voegelin had no need to prove his existence as a *res cogitans.* The experiments are recorded in the context of his rejection and critique of Husserl (in his correspondence with Alfred Schütz) and so there is an implicit comparison between these experiments and those by which late-nineteenth-century psychologists sought the fundamental experience of consciousness in the mere awareness of the flow of time, usually through the perception of a tone. Voegelin speaks dismissively of these experiments: there is a reductivism in their minimalism, inherent in taking the problem of consciousness from the wrong end. But he does not dismiss them as complete nonsense, because time is still a constitutive element of consciousness, and a stripped-down awareness of "flow" may have some meditative value for the open soul.

Permit me to characterize the contrast between Voegelin's anamnetic experiment and the psychologist's time-flow experiment in classical-realist language: it is a contrast between the high and the low in terms of the hierarchy of being. To use a specifically Voegelinian phraseology, the anamnetic experiment attacks the problem from the direction of the "order of formation," while the time-flow experiment attacks it from the direction of the "order of

---

27 [27] Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections* (1989), p. 71-2.

foundation&#65533;: Voegelin seeks the *form* of consciousness while the psychologist begins with its *matter*--as though time were the *materia prima* of consciousness as it is of music. As Voegelin would say, consciousness is always consciousness of something: his experiment deals with an experience of the desire to know ultimate things, a desire which attains small fulfillments in childhood that promise greater fulfillments in the philosophical career of an adult; meanwhile, a psychologist's time-flow experiment is about an awareness of nothing much at all. Nevertheless, a Gilsonian would say that the experiment of clearing away or stripping down the contents of consciousness could also constitute a meditative procedure which yields an intuition of being qua being, of a purely factual *sum* without inference from a *cogito,* a *sum* that manifests an aspect of *exsistet,* the comprehensive intuition of being, which Voegelin calls the participatory community of being.

Memory as a constituent or dimension of consciousness is assumed, of course, in the anamnesis; and while Voegelin says nothing about its modes, "association&#65533; is part of the memory process. The primary experiences, as he reports them, are clusters of the visual, the tactile, the aural, and the specifically verbal, as well as the conceptual; they also contain imaginary or synthetic elements in the case of stories told by people or found in books.28 [28] The clusters return out of the past into the present with a contextual richness of imagery and connections, with many details that are not directly relevant to the concept or category that they

---

28 [28] But "these experiences had very little to do with objects of sense perception,&#65533; in regard to their significant content. For example, the Monk of Heisterbach story, a kind of Rip van Winkle story, is about the relativity of time in consciousness. "Such time concentrations and shortening, though obviously not problems of sense perception, constitute very relevant parts at least of my consciousness, even if they don't of Husserl's&#65533; (*Autobiographical Reflections* 71).

manifest for his philosophical inquiry. One could say that these "irrelevant" details are the broken threads left hanging when the pieces are ripped from the complete fabric of the childhood years spent in the Rhine valley. Yet it is precisely by these irrelevant details that the primary experiences manifest their presence within the later experiences.

If I am permitted here to help out Voegelin's self-explanation with a bit of "creative nonfiction'--this means that, as he thinks of invisible horizons of experience as a concept, he can still hear and see something of the imagined cannons of Kronburg.29 [29] The remembered noise of the cannons is the memory of something heard only in the mind, synthesized mentally in childhood from actual noises heard, and the remembered pictures of an empty northern country are memories of something seen only in the mind, synthesized mentally from real places or artistic depictions. Voegelin can record and analyze the primary experiences in 1943 only because he has noticed the coincidence many times before, heard the canons while thinking "horizon." And while the imagined picture of the cannons aroused "awe" the first time he thought of it in childhood, and while he still feels some glimmer of a philosopher's awe each time he uses "horizon" as a technical term which happens to be a conscious or unconscious spatial metaphor in his meditation--that is, as a symbol not for an "intentional' object but for an experience of participation--there must be a further moment of awe in the instant that he recognizes that an affective event is occurring beneath his act of employing a philosopher's language. He may even name the phenomenon something like "the Kronburg experience" or say to himself, "ah, I am having a Kronburg moment;" eventually the word "Kronburg" may

29 [29] A 97.

even underlie the word "horizon&#65533; as he reads it in his manuscript. Last of all he inscribes it as a title, "THE CANNONS OF KRON BUR G,&#65533; above the paragraph recounting the primary experience in the *Anamnesis* text.

It's this third experience of awe, the recognition of the Kronburg moment, which becomes the illuminating moment in the philosopher's life as a whole, conceived as a reflective &#65533;biography.' "The reflection is a further event in the biography of consciousness&#65533; (A 84). I said that it involves &#65533;association,' especially since the messier details of the complex are what reveal its presence. But pointing this out does not demystify memory or consciousness. A disciple of Locke or Destutt de Tracy would try to reduce Voegelin's anamnesis to a coincidental association of &#65533;ideas,' even to a purely physiological process. Voegelin may be re-hearing his imaginary or synthetic cannon blasts as he thinks "horizon,&#65533; and the relived sensation (wherever it comes from) is part of the richness of the concrete complex. Association happens: it arises from the material circumstances of experience in the order of foundation, as a concrete man experiences concrete things. The associative elements are the accidents that relate the symbol &#65533;horizon' to the experience of a particular man; they make the experience and conceptualization his.

Such was the point of the anamnetic experiment: to demonstrate that consciousness is the consciousness of an &#65533;embodied' human person; that concrete experiences are the origin of consciousness's contents, of all its awarenesses and conceptualizations which mirror the hierarchy of being at all levels; that the experiences of the person have priority, validity, uniqueness, and a richness of reference and relation to the hierarchy of being; that although the experiences belong exclusively to the concrete person, and in philosophical terms to a &#65533;self,' the

concept of ?self' or ?ego' is not a precondition of consciousness but rather something constructed within consciousness.30 [30] Furthermore, it would be wrong to devalue the experiences, either by ?explaining' them, through reductive theories of a mechanism of consciousness, as something arising from a stream of sensations or ?ideas,'31 [31] or by categorizing them as mere phenomena according to speculative systems which seek to absolutize the knowledge of a ?subject' in a realm of logical bookkeeping without reference to the concrete consciousness of a living human being.32 [32] And here it is necessary to recall the motive of

---

30 [30] "Furthermore it seems to me that there is no I that would be the agent of the constitution [of consciousness]. It is doubtful whether consciousness has the form of the I, or whether the I is not rather a phenomenon within consciousness? The ?I' seems to me to be no given at all but rather a highly complex symbol for certain determinants of direction within consciousness.? (A 67) In the "anamnetic experiments,? the awareness of self appears to arise in conjunction when the child Voegelin registers the word *monate* (rather than his name) when his mother speaks it to indicate his age. Selfhood, then, would be the "Monate experience.? (A 86)

31 [31] At one point, Voegelin referred to this kind of theoretical deformation as "psychologization,? in apparent imitation of the diagnostic or polemic charge of "psychologism? leveled by transcendentalists such as Kant and Husserl at any non-transcendentalists. "By psychologization of the self we mean the misapprehension that through reflection on the stream of consciousness, and on the experiences given in it, the nature of man or the substance of the self can become known? (History of Political Ideas Revolution & The New Science p. 165). Voegelin goes on to say that this error occurs in the context of the post-Cartesian dichotomy of self vs. world, particularly Locke and his descendants. A charge of ?psychologism' would appear to fit those phenomenologists who focus on the phenomenon of ?fleetingness' or the ?vanishing point' of consciousness, which leads "only to an understanding of the roots of consciousness in the sphere of the body.? (A 64-5) In other words, this inquiry is more psychology than philosophy.

32 [32] "The description of human consciousness as a ?pure' consciousness rests on an illusion? We cannot descriptively grasp ?pure' consciousness as a process; rather we can only interpretatively grasp a ?human' consciousness as consciousness in the body and the world.? A 79. "There is no absolute beginning for a philosophy of consciousness. All philosophizing about consciousness is an event in the consciousness of the philosopher? Inasmuch as the

Voegelin's project, not only to recover philosophy as the task of analyzing man's grasp of reality in its tentativeness, but also to find the diagnostic key to the disastrous course of modern history, which is a "loss of reality" through doctrinalization, reductionism, and the magic of gnostic speculation--varieties of the deformation of consciousness itself through the restriction of awareness and through the construction of "second realities,' as well as the construction of false theories of consciousness, with the attendant loss or suppression of the truth of man's nature.

The function of consciousness, as verified by Voegelin, is "not to flow but rather to constitute the spaceless and timeless world of meaning, sense, and the order of the soul."33 [33] The timeless dimension in consciousness is its participation in the tension towards the ground of existence, its "openness toward the divine reality." Since there is still a phenomenon of time-flow, with the "fleetingness' or evanescence of thoughts and sensations, the result is "a point of intersection of time and the timeless."34 [34] Eventually he comes to use the phrase "flow of presence" to denote this intersection. The presence consists of the "present here and now" which cohabits with the past "as a series of present points in which none is ever past, but only

---

consciousness of philosophizing is not "pure' consciousness, but rather the consciousness of a human being, all philosophizing is an event in the philosopher's life history"" 81 See also Voegelin's account of the birth of *Identit"tsphilosophie* in "The German Revolution of Consciousness" in *Order and History* V, *In Search of Order.*

33 [33] A 64.

34 [34] CW 33, 181. Voegelin gives credit to T. S. Eliot for this phrase. See *Four Quartets*, "The Dry Salvages," part V: "But to apprehend/ The point of intersection of the timeless/ With time, is an occupation for the saint""

past in relation to their present,&#65533; and with the enduring reality of the poles of the tension, present as "participation.&#65533;35 [35] So the concrete consciousness can also be called a "center of participation&#65533; or "site of participation.&#65533; Thus Voegelin's view of concrete consciousness as participating in a process that transcends the "now&#65533; and even its own duration, unlike the psychologist's view of consciousness as an empty time-continuum to be filled with contents, takes the &#65533;high' road from the order of formation rather than &#65533;low' road of the order of foundation.

My characterization of the anamnetic experiments would not be complete without reference to Marcel Proust. The first English edition of *Anamnesis* begins with an explanation of context entitled "Remembrance of Things Past,&#65533; as though to underline Voegelin's debt to the great novelist, whose name is included in a list of influences.36 [36] In an earlier paper, I surveyed the close parallel between Voegelin's remembrances and those of the narrator &#65533;Marcel' in the opening of &#65533; *la recherche du temps perdu.*37 [37] Some details of the remembrances are so similar that it's easy to imagine Proust's text stimulating some of Voegelin's recollections via association; after all, the theory of association is the most famous thing from

---

35 [35] CW 33, 181.

36 [36] Voegelin, *Anamnesis,* Gerhart Niemeyer ed. & trans. (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1978), p.3. The list of names appears on p. 5. The essay is reprinted in *Collected Works,* Vol. 12, p. 304.

37 [37] My 2003 APSA/EVS paper, based on Part III of my essay, "From Symbolism to Consciousness via Proust,&#65533; in *Modern Age* 45 no.3 (Summer 2003), pp. 224-8.

Proust's novel for those who have not read it, summed up in the madeleine which triggers the spontaneous memories of the narrator's childhood. More significant, though, is the congruence of Proust's project with Voegelin's. Proust's story is a search for the value of the self and its inner life, the value of its feelings and affections which are based on relations to self, other selves, and the cosmos, and the value of the reflections arising from this inner life that compose a structure of thought. The story becomes a meditation on death and a quest for immortality in the immateriality of thought. Hence, beneath the social novel and the psychological novel is a philosophical novel. As a youth, Proust probably received the usual Kantian-based instruction in philosophy provided in the lycee, but as an adult he studied Bergson. *Mati*  *re et memoire* lurks in the background of the novel, even if Proust's theory of memory turns out to be more quasi-Platonic than strictly Bergsonian; I believe that it also lurks in Voegelin's remarks on attention or attentiveness in "On the Theory of Consciousness,  38 [38] and that Bergson may be as significant an influence as Husserl on Voegelin's psychology of consciousness.

In Proust's more-or-less autobiographical novel, the quest results in a fictionalized account of the development of consciousness in its earliest knowable stages; yet one must note that Proust's emphasis is on the soul's affective structure, on the life of sentiment, than on the soul's cognitive structure. In a way, Proust wants to prove the unity of the person through the continuity of a life of sentiment and desire. But the quest for continuity and ultimately for immortality depends on the authenticity and power of memory, so that issues of cognitive life as something transcending mere sensation or sentiment are always present. I would add that a

---

38 [38] The 1943 essay in A which also comes from the correspondence with Schtz.

happy by-product of reading *Anamnesis* may be a richer reading of Proust's novel through a heightened awareness of the cognitive issues, the aspect which Voegelin's own reading would have emphasized. In every sense, social, artistic, and moral, Proust mixes the high and the low; and so his portrayal of consciousness does so too, in a way that is relevant to Voegelin's portrayal.

Voegelin names Val�ry (along with Santayana) in *Anamnesis* as an example of a thinker whose "materialist metaphysics" do not cut him off completely from an awareness of the mystery of being, the hierarchy of being, as it manifests itself in consciousness--despite the mistake of *pars pro toto*, of reducing the mystery to one of its poles, reducing the order of being to the order of foundation. Under the influence of Lucretius, however, Val�ry rejects the Cartesian-Newtonian 'dead matter' view, and makes matter "a substratum of the phenomenon 'nature'" so as to approach a theory of the "unity of being." Consequently, "the symbol 'matter'" can stand for an experience of illumination, in which human consciousness undergoes a "sinking" motion "into the infinite ground, from which it lifts itself enigmatically"" In the Lucretian context, this symbol, 'matter,' is "hardly distinguishable from Nirvana." Then Voegelin cites his favorite poem by Val�ry, "Le Cimeti�re Marin."[39] [39]

This *memento mori* poem about a sunlit cemetery that overlooks the Mediterranean turns out to be 'about' many things, including consciousness, the hierarchy of being, aspirations

---

39 [39] A 80-1.

towards immortality, and poetry itself. It is not simply a meditation arising from a view of nature, nor simply a preachment with a Lucretian moral, nor is it an allegory built on simple equivalences for decoding; it resembles all these things, and its richness of reference to a real place and to philosophic and religious concepts, its fluency imitative of a philosopher's stream of reflections, and its fraternal address to a "we' that includes narrator and reader all deceptively invite a too-direct reading. Yet though it seems less obscure and "defended' than a Mallarm" poem, it is still a symbolist poem and uses tricks that pull the esoteric reader into its hidden life. And yet again, as a fictionalized simulation or "creative non-fiction' about a philosopher inspired by nature to think about death and the cycle of natural existence, it obviously has its origin in the validity of "lived' experiences of wonder and reflection, so that it is "anamnetic' in the sense of reporting or replaying, and it also mediates our complex participation in the mental life of Val"ry as a Lucretian. Hence for Voegelin the poem is a path to knowing what it is to be a modern human without spiritual deformation or with less of it and to experience being. And it introduces us to the area of empathy between Voegelin and Val"ry in the search for consciousness in the very place Voegelin experienced it. For it is, above all, a poem "about' consciousness, if not a hymn to it.

The poem begins with three phases of a revelatory mood or intuition, which I will call three "epiphanies.' In stanza I, the narrator experiences the epiphany of the flux as he surveys the sea's perpetually self-reconstituting form, "La mer, la mer, toujours recommenc"e!" In stanza II, it is the epiphany of time, as he experiences the stasis of the sea's dynamic form beneath the motionless noonday sun along with the inference of "une eternelle cause," and his sense of infinity overflows into paradoxical language ("Le temps scintille"); philosophical

knowing becomes an ecstatic dream-vision as the concept is rendered visible in a kind of ultimate experiential fulfulment ("et le songe est savoir"), but stating the coincidence of dream-vision and philosophic knowledge this way also means stating the possibility that the quest for knowledge is only a dream. This complication of the intuition is resolved in stanza III by the epiphany of self-consciousness, when the stasis and the vision are internalized, subjectivized, claimed: "O mon silence!" In this wordy silence, pronoun reference becomes shifty and punning, so that the poet-philosopher who becomes "one with nature' according to the Romantic poetic myth becomes the mind of nature, specifically of the sea, thinking its thoughts in order to express them; he also contains and owns nature, becomes the host and receptacle of its static-dynamic spectacle, becomes in effect a pinhole camera without a pinhole, a temple between his temples in which the spectacle self-manifests. The dead self-regarding "eye' of the sea only sees through the consciousness of the poet as he regards the scene (with his "regard marin" so-called in st. IV) and identifies with it. Funneling the cosmos into consciousness through puns, the highest value in the poem's hierarchy becomes consciousness itself, conscious of itself within its own "edifice dans l'"me."40 [40]

---

40 [40] The first three stanzas constitute a discrete "Mallarm"an' poem in itself, from which the Val"ryan rumination can be launched. The structure is marked off by the repetition of "toit." The sparkling, wavy sea is envisioned as a pitched roof (of implied blue slates) as it rises to the horizon, then it is interpreted as the roof over the abyss of the flux, and then it is elevated to the roof over a temple of unknown or unspoken Minervan wisdom, transformed ecstatically, by the end, to a visionary roof of golden tiles. Line 1 begins with "Ce toit tranquille"" and line 18, after the temple has been transported into the soul ("Edifice dans l'"me") concludes the stanza cycle with "comble d'or aux mille tuilles, Toit!"

The "trick' of this inner poem is a circle of associations by which one word slides acoustically or etymologically into another word, starting at the top with *toit.* Moving in one

With its linguistic trickiness and speed, this opening group of three stanzas expresses the self-exalting moment of self-in-nature and nature-in-self which then begins a cycle of rumination through which the poet-philosopher gradually loses his ecstasy and faces mortality. This cycle begins as he lifts his eyes from the sea to the sky, with a mood-shift indicated by a single sigh, and an offering of "d�dain souverein� thrown at the celestial gods, an offering composed of the inexaustible gold of the sea ("Stable tr�sor� of st. II), the infinitely stable currency of serenity. Why this hostility to the gods and their celestial realm? In stanza IV he addresses the "Temple du Temps,� which is univocally the sky and himself: on the one hand the external Temple is the celestial globe whose implacable turning decrees the end of mortal life, and on the other hand the internal Temple is the receptacle of inner time which is consciousness, a consciousness which will end in death, devalued now from its earlier identity with the timeless Minervan temple of nature's glittering perpetuity. The haunting phrase "Temple du Temps� has restored with a mere sigh the haunting sense of mortality that the narrator had escaped during the poem's opening moment. It is a brave and futile-seeming gesture to sew contempt into a sky that

---

direction, *toit* becomes *toi* (especially as these are nearby rhyming words in stanza III) and then an as-yet-unspoken *moi*. Moving in the other direction, *toit* becomes *tectum* in Latin and then *testa* (thing of baked clay, pot, brick, brick-bat) which is very close to being a clay roof-tile (*tegula*, French *tuile*) which then goes on to the French *t*[illegible]*te* (punning on "Teste,� the name of Val�ry's fictional alter ego--more on that later), and leads to the punning *temple* (building as well as the narrator's own head), and links up again with *moi*. The capitalized *Oeil* of stanza III, which seems at first to equate with the sea as a watery self-knowing eye but at the same time is the narrator's eye, suggests to me a pun on English capitalized "I,� as in the famous I-eye pun that expresses Emerson's pantheism, although one would have to call Val�ry's version an 'atheistic pantheism' of pure materialism. Val�ry knew English well and English phrases pop up as spontaneous thoughts in his notebooks. At the same rate, there may be an implied English pun between "sea" and "see" in the *mer/oeil* equation.

would look on the narrator with its own contempt if it were capable of any feelings at all. And here we come to Val�ry's dilemma in the hierarchy of being.

The imagery of the poem sets up an opposition between sun and sea. The impartial, static noonday sun ("Midi le juste� of st. I) presides coldly and pitilessly in the sky and threatens to judge the world someday with fire, at the same time that it benignly lights the sea. It stands for changelessness and exposes his mutability ("Beau ciel� regarde-moi qui change!� st. VI); it illumines the embarrassment of mortality when it causes him to cast a shadow that moves like a ghost over the cemetery's tombs. If the sea represents the Heraclitean flux, the sun seems to stand for Parmenidean being. Critics name the latter "The Absolute.� A modern existentialist sees the opposition as that between essence and existence, or rather between the theories which would ground reality exclusively in either pole, between an inimical essentialism and their own existentialism, between Apollo and Dionysus. A workable, tentative reading for the poem's early portion might hold the opposition to be Platonic being vs becoming. To some extent the sun stands for a Christian God who raises false hopes of immortality, whether through dogma or Cartesian or Kantian proofs. But insofar as this sun represents reason that enlightens the world through consciousness, it is something belonging to the narrator's own nature, something that he upholds ("Je te soutiens, admirable justice�� st. VII) and restores to its proper honor ("Je te rends pure � ta place premi�re�) when he regrets his confused contempt and purifies it of misunderstanding. Respected while dreaded, this reason makes both the light and shadow in his projected world-picture, illuminates figure against ground. Accepting the gift of light means accepting the consequence of shadow--and so death comes to mind again.

Having his own consciousness as the shadow box of the cosmos is not exactly comforting. Whereas the sea echoed before with the calming voice he projected into it that called out to him, *toi, toi,* through the metaphor *toit,* and aggrandized his being through unification to a glorious unspoken *MOI,* the sky (by means of wind) drowns this out with the noise of the changing seashore ("Le changement des rives en rumeur" st. V) and then there is only a gloomy echo of *moi, moi, moi* ("O pour moi seul, moi seul, en moi-mme, st. VIII41 [41]) in the bitter, gloomy yet sonorous cistern of the self, a place of grandeur, whose echoes always promise some philosophic discovery to come. Grand, but comfortlessly lonely. I think of Eliot's self-prison image in *The Waste Land,* based on Bradleyian solipsism. In stanza IX, the self is reduced to a spark in its bodily prison, thinking of what it has already lost ("Une tincelle y pense mes absents). The glorious, scintillating external roof of the poem's beginning has turned to the confining internal roof of the cave of mundane existence, as in Empedocles' fragment.42 [42]

Among the narrator's absent things' are the dead of the cemetery, who no longer know anything, whom he claims in fraternal spirit and prefers to the angels. He longs for annihilation which he perceives as a mystical experience: "La vie est vaste, tant ivre d'absence (st. XII). He makes his peace with pitiless noon, the image of self-grounded essence or reason, which has

41 [41] The repetition of *moi* makes this line seem ripped out of the notebooks. It also sounds like a sacrilegious (egophanic?) parody of Trinitarian liturgy.

42 [42] B 120: ἠλύθομεν τόδ' ὑπ' ἄντρον ὑπόστεγον, "We have come under this roofed cave.

no life in its self-thinking ("En soi se pense et convient soi-m me st. XIII); he is its life by virtue of mutability. So he addresses both the sky-roof and the claypot roof of his cranial interior as metonym for consciousness, equivocally, as "T te compl te et parfait diad me: I am what lives in you, without which you have no life, through change ("Je suis en toi le secret changement). He declares himself to be the flaw in the diamond of essence (st. XIV).

Where do the speech, personality, and desire of the dead go? Into the abyss of matter from whence they came, courtesy of the worms, and back into the "game (st. XVI). They are the earth, and so are we. The narrator's unity with nature is a fact, a scientific fact less glorious than the scintillating vision. And the real worm gnaws the living, not the dead: "le vrai rongeur is the proverbial *ver rongeur de la conscience,* here punning on consciousness (st. XIX).43 [43] It's self-hatred as easily as self-love (st. XX). Man is host to the parasite of thinking, harbors his own intellectual destruction, just as his body contains the principle of its own dissolution. It is this parasite that poses the paradoxes of "cruel Zeno (st. XXI) which as Val ry explained,

---

43 [43] "In an extreme state of distress, how can our ever-active, ever-renascent thought be killed?--Gnawing worm [*ver rongeur*] that re-engenders itself from *the very same substance that must be gnawed away*. Fortunate indeed, if only this thought could forget itself, could be lost in the crowd and in its sequel. But how is it that it doesn't get lost? Who is the Artist and Composer of the Ill which so industriously, so easily, with a sort of frightening elegance, causes it to be reborn from all motifs, extracts it from all things, and represents it in a thousand forms? What a musician of torture! What resources at his disposal! He has the whole world to make it come back, all words rhyme for him Vol 1, p. 476, VIII 468-9. This reference from 1921 occurs during the affair with Catherine Pozzi and the entry may concern feelings about the affair.

A variant text has "*vers* irrefutable. This worm of irrefutable verse would be the ideal of absolute poetry, probably Mallarm with his "fully defended poems.

represent a kind of reflection that incites a pain "that makes too cruelly felt the gap between *being* and *knowing* that is developed by the consciousness of consciousness.[44] Thought is alienating. He might as well have said "cruel Bergson," for Bergson handles the paradoxes in *Matter and Memory* in such a way as to dissolve the pain of which Valéry wants to complain.

At this point the narrator says no to Zeno, and calls for the body to shatter the thinking "forme" ("forme pensive," st. XXII--*forma intellectualis?).* He chooses to run into the sea's waves, embrace this great mother addressed as "grande mer," to embrace the absolute of the flux (rather than the absolute of essence), which he perceives in the form of a self-regenerating alchemical ouroboros ("Hydre absolue"), and the force of Cybelean or Dionysian delirium (st. XXIII). And he finally finds a solution in his picture for the problem of essence. In its orgiastic wildness, the sea dons the chlamys of Dionysus and the skin of his panther,[45] but these garments are riven with holes, it seems (torn in the orgy?) so that they sift the light of the single implacable sun of reason into thousands of "idoles"--thus privatizing and relativizing the logos for an infinite number of individual minds, in accord with Heraclitus' fragment.[46]

---

44 [44] "But I meant no more than to borrow a little of the *color* of philosophy." Matthews, Vol 7, p. 151. Oeuvres I, p. 1506. The Zeno stanza is one of the original seven from 1916-17, and should be given due emphasis as essence and not embellishment in the poem.

45 [45] Garments that might also appear on a Greek grave stele, reinforcing the *memento mori* theme as well as the anti-Christian return to the pagan spirit.

46 [46] B 2: τοῦ λόγου δ' ἐόντος ξυνοῦ ζώουσιν οἱ πολλοὶ ὡς ἰδίαν ἔχοντες φρόνησιν ("But though the Logos is common, the many live as if they had a wisdom of their own.")

As a final insult to absolute reason, the wind shuts narrator's book (st. XXIV). Steven Shankman rightly construes this as a private reference to Mallarm&#65533;'s Hegelian ideal poem-book whose destiny was to contain "all earthly existence.&#65533;47 [47] And in a repudiation of Apollonian poetry, the narrator discards the poetic imagery and language of the Mallarm&#65533;an opening: it turns out that the pretty pigeons on the "roof&#65533; were only the sails of common fishing-boats, and he describes them in the fishermen's language, thus creating a new, un-pretty poetry of realism.

We might regard Shankman's strongly Voegelinian reading as possibly Voegelin's own: that the &#65533;essentialist' or Parmenidean or Hegelian philosophy (or is it only a philosophic mood, an aspiration towards the impossible?) represented by the noonday sun during much of the poem portrays an intentionalist, post-Cartesian view of the cosmos as &#65533;thing-reality,' and is rejected as spiritually inadequate through a sense of pain, thwartedness, and futility; and that the &#65533;existentialist' or Heraclitean philosophy (or is it some primary intuition?) represented by the sea portrays the un-deformed, pre-modern &#65533;It-reality,' and is embraced in apophatic mysticism. This &#65533;It-reality' is a unipolar cosmos with its ground, its &#65533;Beyond,' in apeirontic depths of infinite potentiality, and it generates its own logos from the human consciousness which it also generates, and thereby generates also the illusions of essentialism. A na&#65533;ve reading would

---

47 [47] "Au fond, voyez-vous&#65533; le monde est fait pour aboutir &#65533; un beau livre.&#65533; "The Evolution of Literature,&#65533; in *Critical Theorgy since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams (HBJ, 1971), p. 690. Steven Shankman, *In Search of the Classic* (Penn. State Univ. Press, 1994), p. 140.

make this *memento mori* poem into a mere *carpe diem* poem that exchanges philosophy for mindless activity: it is important to remember that the exortation to &#65533;live' calls for effort ("tenter&#65533;) after the narrator has accepted that death is the fact of life, and that the path from the false philosophy to the true is a philosophic path of knowing that leads to un-knowing.

What Voegelin sees in the poem is confirmation that

> Materialism does not imply a negation or even a contempt of the spirit. On the contrary, a great spiritual sensitiveness alone can induce the fatigue of spiritual existence, disillusionment with its symbols as substances, and their acceptance as aesthetic expressions of the substantial mystery of life. We may even suspect that the materialist who expects and desires life to end in depersonalization, that the mystic who lives in the insight that &#65533;Tout va sous terre et rentre dans le jeu!' and nevertheless can accept the game of life with courage and a smile--&#65533;le vent se l&#65533;ve!.. Il faut tenter de vivre!'--has sensed more acutely the tension of substance and accidence in the life of the spirit than many a spiritualist.48 [48]

What is the materialist spirituality evinced in the poem? There appears to be a &#65533;tension towards the ground' felt as a desire for peace from intellectual strife, as an identification with the dead, and as an unrequited love for the cosmos as the "&#65533;ternelle cause&#65533; which has given the narrator the gift of existence--a gratitude to the source of his being, a gratitude proceeding from a self-love or self-appreciation which is a recognition that human consciousness is the highest product of this ground; perhaps this spirituality contains a regret the ground cannot know itself or love

48 [48] CW 25, History of Political Ideas VII, pp. 180-1.

itself without human consciousness and has no other way of knowing this creaturely gratitude,49 [49] and also contains a stoic resignation to the disappointment and the dreadful sense, mostly kept in the background, that this godless universe echoes with a certain hollowness. But there is still a determination of dysfunction or disease, "fatigue,&#65533; which Voegelin emphasizes in this private statement:

> "With Santayana and Val&#65533;ry, I have the impression that their Lucretianism is caused by what I would call spiritual fatigue. The inclination to let oneself drop into a depersonalized nature arises from a pseudo-aesthetic weakness of spirit, in particular in Val&#65533;ry's moving &#65533;Cimeti&#65533;re Marin.&#65533;50 [50]

What is this weakness? It sounds like a lack of manly determination to wrestle with the modern &#65533;crisis,' as well as a resignation to the status quo in which flickering spiritual insight remains the private possession of an apolitical &#65533;lite whose bourgeois audience regards poetry as a divertissement or decoration. One hears the voice of Irving Babbitt attacking decadent aestheticism. On the one hand, Voegelin says, these modern Lucretians have the sensitivity to

---

49 [49] Unless there is some panpsychist mind inherent in matter, a view consistent with suggestions in *Eureka* . In his 1921 essay "On Poe's &#65533; Eureka ,'&#65533; he tells of this book's marvelous effect on him around the time of his 1892 crisis, perhaps understating it. *Eureka* may very well be the bible of Val&#65533;ry's Lucretianism; one could annotate *Le Cimeti&#65533;re Marin* with passages from it. See Matthews Vol 9 for the essay. Kenneth Alan Hovey, in "Poe's Materialist Metaphysics of Man&#65533; (*A Companion to Poe Studies,* ed. Eric W. Carlson, Greenwood, 1996, p. 347ff) decides to agree with Poe's occasional self-categorization as an Epicurean.

50 [50] Letter 24 dated March 22, 1949 , *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence Between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin,* Emberley and Cooper, et. & trans. (Univ. of Missouri Press , 2004) p.60.

know that the life of the spirit must be given room, that its reality has been denied by phenomenalism and reductionism. Yet it so happens that the only people in a declining civilization who have their antennae up are weaklings whose detection equipment is attuned to the "faint lights and faint colors" of a Yeatsian "autumn of the body,"51 [51] who are half in love with death already and only sense what is being lost as the lights go out. Here is another insight into Voegelin's affinity with the Symbolist school.

The lights were indeed going out in 1916 when Valéry started this poem. He had been working on his journal project for twenty-two years, and we may regard this poem, especially in its statement of the primacy of conciousness and its evocation of a philosopher-poet's concrete consciousness, as the fruit of the project. It is necessary now to go back to the premises of the notebook project.

3. "I propose to imagine a man" (and some women): Leonardo, Teste, Poe, Descartes, Agathe, and the Young Fate

Valéry always valued process over product: a piece of writing existed in his mind in an ideal state, as a goal, which the text on paper never achieved through revision. The existing text was

51 [51] W. B. Yeats, "The Autumn of the Body," an essay from 1898, in *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats: The Poems,* eds. R J Finneran & G M Harper (Simon & Schuster, 1989), p. 140.

only a tentative solution to a problem. Publication was a compromise with the real world. He continued to embroider on some literary projects for years or decades after publication. A "finished" project was a dead project, having nothing more to reveal to him about his own creative process; and publication was only physiological elimination. Nevertheless the the published works remain the context for understanding the notebooks, their terminology and general drift. The early published works state his premises for a search for consciousness and his suspicions of what would be found. The later works can be considered the fruit of the search as well as showing revision of the premises. The published works are, of course, distilled, elaborated, edited, whereas the notebooks were (in theory) spontaneous, free, unfiltered. Since Voegelin did not have access to the notebooks in 1943 (except for the somewhat revised, aphoristic collections that were published), the greater part of what he would have known or surmised came from published pieces to be discussed in this section of my paper.

The earliest relevant pieces were composed starting in 1893, in the aftermath of the 1892 crisis that resulted in the temporary abandonment of poetry: an essay on the "method" of Leonardo da Vinci, based somewhat on an inspection of the notebooks that became his model, and the para-novel on Monsieur Teste. Val"ry's plan for self-seclusion from the literary world somehow permitted a bit of journalistic and essayistic leakage; and what he was leaking was information on his goals and the grounds of the reclusive pose. Both pieces portray an ideal picture or plan of his search for consciousness, with Leonardo as supposed historic model, and Teste as fictional self-caricature.

Later writings, which include essays on his "heroes' Poe and Descartes, appeared after he lost the job that had given him his years of independence from publishing, and needed to

market himself within the literary establishment as an authority.52 [52] His monumental poem, *La Jeune Parque*, an allegory on consciousness, was begun as an "exercise" in 1913 and published under persuasion in 1917; a prose poem or psychological story called "Agathe, or the Saint of Sleep," which he labored over mostly in 1898-1900, seems a preparation for the Parque and I include it for relevance though he did not publish it. All these pieces portray a personage or character who is more or less imaginary or fictional; even the historic personages are used as vehicles for presenting Val"ry's views on consciousness and the project of its investigation.

The supposedly factual studies on Leonardo, Poe, and Descartes presuppose study of the personages, and raise the general question of his reading and preparation. Of course the sources of biographical fact on Leonardo are few. Poe was an object of obsession, and Val"ry says that "about the age of thirty, I spent several years reading nothing but [Poe]"--a statement characteristic not only of his devotion to that writer but also of his indifference to the task of acquiring broad literacy.53 [53] The writing on Descartes is thin, and it never appears important to him to grasp the issues of Cartesian philosophy deeply: a symbolic or mythical Descartes, who represents the birth of subjectivity and modernity itself, suffices. Then one wonders what philosophical preparation Val"ry had, beyond the basic Kantianism of the lyc"e.

---

52 [52] For many years he worked several hours a day as personal assistant to the crippled director of the Havas news agency. The "work' included reading books aloud to his employer, discussing topics of the day, and conducting his correspondence.

53 [53] Matthews V8, p. 353, notebooks II 120.

His preparation in classics was not particularly strong. He did read a friend's translation of Nietzsche's works for the sake of writing a review. Perhaps in imitation of Baudelaire he read Joseph de Maistre. He knew Pascal enough to hate him. In general he spoke dismissively of philosophical schools. As will be seen, Val�ry fended off the task of reading, with the justification or excuse that it would introduce an alien element to his consciousness and interfere with self-discovery. His contemporaries assumed the congruence of his thought with Bergson and Proust and assumed that he was influenced by them; when, as an institutional or establishment figure, he was expected to deliver official tributes to them, he admitted that he had not read much of their works and inferred the contents thereof.

In *Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci,* then, he begins by observing that other people serve as symbols for us, and that their personalities are something inferred as a unity to explain the outward or "surface" facts in a biography, something that we synthesize from our own memories. Hence for both the writer and reader, biography works because we place ourselves in the skin of the subject. But this "something inferred' which we use as the basis of potentiality from which to explain what subject X became in actuality could also be considered as the basis of potentiality for other possible actualizations, lives not lived, and so the essence of the biography, and of the man himself, is his potentiality. For Val�ry, Leonardo is the universal genius whose potentiality exploded in all directions and could never reach a worthy attainment. So he says, "I propose to imagine a man whose activities are so diverse that if I postulate a ruling idea behind them all, there could be none more universal."54 [54]

---

54 [54] Matthews V9 p. 5. Page numbers in subsequent references refer to this text.

As a student of everything, Leonardo "studies himself" (6). And his obsession with notebooks, which have left to us a glimpse of his mind, shows that he understood the value of understanding process, of examining a concept in its formation rather than its completion: "The operations of the mind can best serve our purpose of analysis while they are moving, unresolved, still at the mercy of a moment--before they have been given the name of entertainment or law, theorem or work of art, and, being perfected, have lost their mutual resemblance" (9-10). The mind generates analogies which are images and symbols. For the sake of understanding the mind, one of these images or systems of images is as good as any other: "To be conscious of one's thoughts, as thoughts, is to recognize this sort of equality or homogeneity; to feel that all combinations of the sort are legitimate, natural, and that the method [of intellectual analysis] consists in arousing them, in seeing them precisely, in seeking for what they imply" (15). Studying the intellect causes the mind to live a "double life" which "reduces ordinary thinking to something like the dream of a wakened sleeper," in that the analysis which looks for organizing principles resembles dream analysis, and pursues a "*perceptible* regularity" and "continuity" which resembles that of a "machine," a dream machine. Then comes the aspiration to manipulate or experiment with the machine's process, to make the self-consciousness of thought habitual, to carry it to a "*limit,*" after which everything will be changed." Getting behind the processes of thought also means running in the opposite direction from that of the scientific mind which abjures the particularity of the concrete and generalizes everything; it means returning to the primitive sense of the "*individuality* of objects," embracing uniqueness, identifying with them. It is absurd, "yet there is nothing more powerful in

the imaginative life" Carried too far it becomes a pathological symptom and gains a frightening ascendancy over the increasing feebleness of a decaying mind" (26-7). So this opposite direction is that of artists and madmen.

The scientific mind's goal is to establish the "continuity" of the world and its processes through generalization and probability. It is the universal genius of Leonardo's type who fills in the gaps with images from his "symbolic mind" (32). In scientific observation he is the "accountant of existence" but in imaginative explanation he is the "poet of hypothesis" (38). Insofar as this mind is fully self-aware and has a method, it is a symmetrically functioning "*system complete in itself,* or completing itself continually." The tone of the essay suggests a positivistic hubris and optimism about conquering both the world and the mind. The conquest of mind appears to mean discovering the system or code of processes, the secret of their generation.

What if the world cannot be conquered? What if we imagine another man, one who doesn't dissect cadavers or design flying machines or sculpt giant horses, who merely observes and thinks, and lives unknown without communicating his results? Most readers would think him a monster of conceit and indolence, but Val"ry supposes him only a monstrosity of extremeness, incarnating an ideal. This is Monsieur Teste, a Leonardo who achieves nothing but his own completeness and satisfaction, a man of pure potentiality without actualization, presented as a macabre comic figure in order to seek tolerant consideration for the unconscionable, perhaps an even stranger brother for Sherlock Holmes.

My detective reference is apt, because the model for "The Evening with Monsieur Teste" is Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue," a story in which a narrator becomes fascinated with an autonomous, private intellectual who solves a crime for pure divertissement and who

becomes the narrator's alter ego. 55 [55] Val&#65533;ry's &#65533;I' tracks Teste through theatres, brothels, and caf&#65533;s whose distinguishing characteristic might be a lack of characteristics: "Everything about him was unobtrusive&#65533; and no one pays him any attention.56 [56] And a lack of humanity: he lives without gusto, eats "as if he were taking a purgative,&#65533; speaks rapidly without gesture because he has "killed his puppet,&#65533; makes no small-talk, never smiles. When the narrator comes to describe Teste's living quarters (interior decoration being the great characterization device of French realistic fiction), it turns out to be a simply furnished room: "I was terrified by the infinite dreariness possible in that abstract and banal place&#65533; (18).57 [57] What draws the narrator is the mind, known through a style of conversation that is hardly &#65533;conversational,' and the enigma of how the man lives only for his mind, for its perfection as a machine. His memory is the synecdoche for his mind, and it is Teste's "singular memory&#65533; that particularly fascinates. When the narrator reports that Teste has no use for books, the reader draws the inference that books represent artificial memory, a crutch for a weak, dependent mind, and an alien life to a self-sufficient mind. Teste only reads newspapers and, as it were, reads life

---

55 [55] "The Man of the Crowd&#65533; also comes to mind for its intense pursuit of a curious individual through city streets; its narrator displays the same connoisseurship of human types as Val&#65533;ry's. In any event, Poe's fiction is Val&#65533;ry's model.

56 [56] Matthews V6 p. 10. Page numbers in subsequent references refer to this text.

57 [57] In its lack of concession to individuality or comfort to the associative mind, it is the opposite of Mallarm&#65533;'s room or other rooms of the decadent aesthetes. It expresses Val&#65533;ry's impulse to repudiate poetry itself.

through observation; through discipline only stores in his mind impressions that could never be imagined (11).58 [58] The challenge of memory is "*to keep what I shall want tomorrow*" and to perfect the mind as a "mechanical seive."

Teste has a mathematical bent: he lives on stock speculation and can discuss economics endlessly, reciting "the fluctuations of the stock market" until the sequence of numbers seems a poem to the narrator (10, 18). His papers are covered with numbers. And his method of inquiry into the functions of mind is mathematical: "He watched for the repetition of certain ideas; he sprinkled them with numbers (11)." His inquiries into consciousness are experiments, and as though he were a phenomenologist, time, "the delicate art of duration," is his field of concern. And so he waits, or "watches," for mental phenomena.

Val"ry's notebooks are strewn with numbers, equations, and graphs; critics suppose these to be analogies for mental functions, rates of mental change, mental proportionalities.59 [59] And here I must note the similitude of Teste's conversation to Val"ry's notebook style, written into the story as a secret self-satire which may also be a key to future readers of the notebooks. While he could speak with "the most artfully touching words" such that a listener would believe that "the eternal wall between minds is falling," suggesting the goal of poetry, at

---

58 [58] This focus on newspapers oddly anticipates Val"ry's employment by the director of the national news agency.

59 [59] But I have yet to find a critic who explicates them.

other times his conversation was obscure, perplexed by the oddly tentative or oddly emphatic use of words, by the absence of words upon which he had placed an inexplicable private taboo, by the substitution of "a group of abstract words and proper names for a concrete object (12-13). "To what he said there was no reply. He killed polite assent. Conversations were kept going by leaps that were no surprise to him. He is capable of odd aphorisms, always related to mental process: "No one meditates (16); "Gold is somehow the mind of society (19); "any man who talks to me, if he has no proof, is an enemy (21). In sum,

> he was muttering almost incoherent phrases. Although I tried, I could barely follow his words The incoherence of speech depends on the one listening to it. The mind seems to me so made that it cannot be incoherent to itself. That is why I was careful not to classify Teste among the mad. Besides, I could vaguely make out the thread of his ideas, and I noticed no contradiction in them; also, I should have feared too simple a solution (16-17).

Here, then, is Val ry's warning to those who would seek clarity and closure in the random thoughts of the notebooks.

Among Val ry's notebook topics are how the mind lives in and with the body and how consciousness persists through sleep in dreams. Teste experiences pain and reports how the mental image of his body becomes luminous (20); although his mind is still subject to the body, Teste ("Mr Head) has thus mastered the mysterious linkage between mind and body.60 [60]

---

60 [60] For lack of a better place, let me note here Val ry's resistance to Cartesian angelism' and the backhanded compliment he pays to St Thomas and Catholic dogma on the integrality of body and soul in the 1919 Leonardo appendix called "Note et Digression (Matthews V 8 p. 84).

This intimate revelation comes when he asks the narrator to put him to bed like a child and take away the candle as he leaves. Teste talks freely while drifting off and reports on his reveries, which concern the act of reverie itself: "I'm fond of navigating the night. Often I can't distinguish my throught from sleep" (19). He tells how he turns the act of falling into an experiment in the duration of thought, thus enacting the experiment, and his final words before snoring are, "Sleep will prolong any idea at all" (21).

In this bedtime soliloquy he mutters his mottom *que peut un homme?(18).* Teste is, in sum, a possible man, not an actual man, "for if he had turned upon the world the controlled power of his mind, nothing could have resisted him" (13). In order to know him fully, it is necessary to explore the idea of Teste by imagining him doing things he has never been seen doing, such as undergoing sickness or experiencing fright or reasoning during the sexual act (14). Having attained the age of forty, he is what Val"ry imagines becoming if he sticks to plan, for Teste "gave up books twenty years ago" when he was the author's age (11). He is an achieved negative ideal, the one who, by doing nothing, has discovered "laws of the mind we know nothing of," has brought his "inventions" to maturity and made them "his instincts." Perhaps more importantly, he is Val"ry's shadow personality brought into the open: as he says in the notebooks "Monsieur Teste is my bogey. When I misbehave, I think of him."61 [61] For if, in the pursuit of consciousness, one is to go behind personality, perhaps it is necessary to expose

---

61 [61] Matthews v9 p. 84, from notebook I 248.

and purge all possible personalities, especially the ones that have been repudiated in one's willed identity but that usurp it through unconscious action like the other half of a split.

Human personality can be dissolved in the mass of humanity, particularly in the shadow of a theatre's audience, in the captivity of a chair surrounded by others. This image fascinates the narrator and the author, as they look down on the orchestra seats from a box. Teste seems to be making a misanthropic observation on the social rivalry and snobbery of the audience members when he says, "*They* are eaten by others!&#65533; And he is almost uttering a curse on them as he watches the music affect them all in the same way: "Let them enjoy and obey.&#65533; But what he is really observing--the cannibalism by which they consume themselves and become one passive organ--is a mysterious transformation into the "dark body&#65533; of Kirchhoff's law of thermal radiation. All that is left of the thousand faces as the darkness overtakes them is a phosphorescence of pure passivity and the maximization of attentiveness in "a continuous equilibrium.&#65533; "The supreme simplifies *them,&#65533;* Teste says; "&#65533;they are all thinking, more and more, *toward* the same thing. They will be equal at the climax or common limit&#65533; (14-16). This observation on the crowd illustrates Kirchhoff's law as applied not to a physical object but to consciousness.

Gustave Kirchoff defined a theoretical &#65533;black body' as one that absorbs all light and reflects none; at a certain temperature, it emits the same quantity of heat energy as it absorbs in the form of light. This is the state of "thermal equilibrium.&#65533; Teste's "law,&#65533; as clarified in a notebook entry from 1941-2, supposes that under the stimulation of a sublime aesthetic experience, the crowd turns to a unified or simplified substance contained in the theatre as in an

oven.62 [62] The 1896 "Teste text states the equilibrium achieved is a balance between aethetic excitation absorbed by the audience and audience attention directed towards the dramatic or musical source. The actual meaning of this analogy-image intended by Valry is something other than crowd psychology and is clarified much later when he returns to the topic of Leonardo and consciousness in a 1919 appendix to the original Leonardo essay. The human mind is the "dark body.63 [63]

This appendix called "Note et Digression deserves a complete exegesis that would exceed the scale of my paper. It will suffice to point out that here, after a quarter-century with the notebook project, Valry can focus the work of his laboratory on consciousness as "pure presence (95), an entity that underlies all consciousness but is uncovered and applied as an achieved' state of "perfected consciousness (96) by a genius who "exists without instincts, almost without images (95), who cultivates mystical states (93) and "finally reduce[s] himself, deliberately, to an indefinite refusal to be anything whatsoever (98). He knows that consciousness is a process of "perpetual emptying and "detachment in an "inexhaustible act (98), and that, when mystical equilibrium is attained, his perfected consciousness "differs from nothingness by the smallest possible margin. Then it resembles

---

62 [62] Matthews V9 p. 130-1, notebook XXV 385. "Analogy? Kirchhoff's law. Apparently he is puzzling over the complexity and vanishing point of his analogy's value.

63 [63] "Teste-Memnosyne. The latter is a dark body, my mind.' Matthews V 6 p 110, Notebook XI 715 (1925-6).

> an invisible audience seated in a darkened theater--a presence that cannot observe itself and is condemned to watch the scene confronting it, yet can feel nevertheless how it creates all that breathless and irresistibly directed darkness. A complete and yet a devouring darkness, secretly organized, all compounded of creatures that press against and limit one another; a compact night in which the shadows are alive with organs that throb and pant with excitement, while each in its own fashion defends its place and function. Facing this rapt and mysterious assembly, moving and glittering in a closed frame, are all things perceptible, all things intelligible, all things possible. Nothing can be born or perish, exist in some degree, possess a time, a place, a meaning, a figure--except on this definite *stage,* which the fates have circumscribed, and which having separated it from who knows what primordial chaos, as light was separated from darkness on the first day, they have opposed and subordinated to the condition of *being seen*" (97)

The dark body now includes the stage where impressions are received (from the senses, memory, or from other realms I will mention next), and functions as a receptacle for forms like the cosmic receptacle in Plato's *Timaeus* or the mental "form of forms' in Aristotle's *De Anima.* Val"ry differs from the classical realists, however, by a doubling, so that the stage of forms is not itself the mind in the act of perception but a faculty which presents to a deeper, more inward, passive intellect which is defined as a kind of self underlying personality or the human individual as a whole: the *moi pur,* a permanent "consciousness that depends on nothing" (101), "the basic *tone* of our existence" (102), "unqualifiable," having "no name or history," "neither more tangible nor less real than the center of gravity of a ring or that of a planetary system--but which results from the whole, whatever that whole may be" (102-3).

Putting aside the problem of this doubling of perception for now, let us consider the difference of emphasis between Val"ry and Voegelin. For Voegelin, "consciousness is always consciousness of something," and the "flow of presence" means that, in addition to perception

and ratiocination in time, the timeless dimension of truth is always present as content; consciousness is an entity whose essence is its activity. For Val�ry, however, consciousness can be known (albeit mystically) in a stripped-down state of pure potency. If these views can be reconciled, Voegelin should suspect or regret Val�ry's metaphor which invokes the psychologist's tone experiment, and also the poet's need to possess consciousness in its �thingness' as instrument and possession of the ideally self-possessed man. If Val�ry is a mystic, nevertheless, he is a "mystic without God,� as Madame Teste writes tells her priest in a further installment of the Teste cycle published in 1924.64 [64]

Val�ry adds to the theatre metaphor in a marginal commentary on "Notes� from 1930, clarifying that the pure �I' of the theatre image "manifests itself� only when undergoing functional disturbances� (97). The 1919 text mentions what are called today altered states, "lasting only a moment,� "fluctuatons of psychic equilibrium� which "offer perceptions of aberrant modes of existence,� in "moments snatched from the implacable criticism of time� (92). These transient states, which would destroy us if they did not dissolve themselves, are caused by "physical weakness,� "poisons in the nervous system,� or heroic application of "the strength and subtlety� of that system's attention (93). When did Val�ry experience these states? The crisis of 1892, whose nature is only hinted at, comes to mind. Would such states occur during the morning sittings of the notebook project, simply because one waited for them to happen for fifty years? According to Poe, certain "fancies� (as he calls them "because I must

64 [64] Matthews Vol 6 p. 31.

use some word�) arise in a realm of "shadows of shadows,� "more psychical than intellectual,� and occur "in the soul only at its epochs of most intense tranquility�at those mere points of time where the confines of the waking world blend with those of the world of dreams.�65 [65] Poe says they come to him "upon the very brink of sleep� (186), whereas Val�ry, attending to his notebook project, would be at his desk with pen in hand, awakening himself with coffee and cigarettes. Poe says that, experimentally, he cannot render the point of time in which the �fancy' occurs into "more than a point,� but "I can startle myself from the point into wakefulness, *and thus transfer the point itself into the realm of Memory*�and thence "to a situation where (although still for a very brief period) I can survey them with the eye of analysis.� In 1927 Val�ry comments on this passage:

> Poe affirms that� he obtains *glimpses* of another world in which the number of sense-dimensions is extraordinarily greater than the norm. Here the question of truthfulness--of the value of the observation, of the effects of drugs or hypnotic substances--arises. That there are *rare* states, as there are rare metals, is a fat one cannot think of disputing. What can they teach us? My feeling is that they are negligible in themselves, precisely because they are rare and because those who explore them declare to us that they concern *a wholly different world.* But if such accounts are faithful, if they are precise, these experiences of the extreme poles of consciousness can give us some rather valuable insights into the conditions of normal consciousness (189-90).

So he writes skeptically, perhaps with the skepticism of age, and with an almost Bergsonian moral preference for the truth of normality, even though as a symbolist follower of

---

65 [65] Poe's "Marginalia,� text provided alongside Val�ry's 1927 commentary in Matthews Vol 9 p 185. Page numbers in subsequent references refer to this text.

Baudelaire and Mallarm&#65533; he had, for most of his life, exalted the privileged moment of poetry and identified intimately with Poe and his cult of the intensified experience, the uncanny, the abnormal. The topic of how Val&#65533;ry reads himself "into&#65533; Poe and identifies with him mythically is one deserving further development. I have touched on Val&#65533;ry's reverence for *Eureka* and noted the resemblance of Teste as shadow-ideal to a Poe character. The notebooks refer repeatedly to a phrase of Baudelaire on Poe, "that marvelous brain always on the alert,&#65533; which haunted him for years as the mantra or verbal talisman expressing his goal, and to a passage on the ideal of perfection which also haunted him although he can never quite recall it, from Poe's story "The Domain of Arnheim.&#65533; What began as a will-to-perfection, Val&#65533;ry says--referring, as he must be, to his motive for the search for consciousness which was his lifetime's unifying theme--turned to a will-to-power.66 [66]

While Poe is Val&#65533;ry's true hero, Descartes is a problematic totem, and Val&#65533;ry's tributes to him range from the begrudging acknowledgement of an explorer who accidentally discovered the continent of modernity without knowing its size, to the eulogization of an intellectual

---

66 [66] See the quoted notebook entries in Matthews Vo. 8 pp 358-9, esp. this from 1939-40: "*Arnheim.* Poe. In this fantasy of Poe's there is one of those sentences that had so much&#65533; thematic influence on me at nineteen. A sentence on the possibilities of perfection. It said that man is very far from having attained what he could, etc. The idea of perfection possessed me. It soon changed into will-to-power, or the possession of power without using it&#65533; (XXIII 188, also in Notebooks V1 p 212). The passage in Poe's story could be this: "The person of whom I speak seemed born for the purpose of foreshadowing the doctrines of Turgot, Price, Priestley and Condorcet -- of exemplifying by individual instance what has been deemed the chimera of the perfectionists.&#65533; Or this: "I believe that the world has never seen -- and that, unless through some series of accidents goading the noblest order of mind into distasteful exertion, the world will never see -- that full extent of triumphant execution, in the richer domains of art, of which the human nature is absolutely capable.&#65533;

Napoleon or Richelieu. And since the scholars cannot agree on what his system means, "each of us, then, can create a Descartes of his own.[67] [67] I bring him up in order to complete the picture of Val[?]ry's mythologizations: he seems to need a personage to be the carrier of a concept, and for Val[?]ry Descartes is the personification of the quest for the [?]I.' The *Cogito* itself does not stand up to the experiential test of Val[?]ry's notebook laboratory: in 1900 he writes, "No one could have taken the *Cogito* less seriously than Descartes--he put it at the head of his work simply because he had to put *something* there.[68] [68] In other notebook entries he parodies the *Cogito* for his own ends:

> There is a part of man that feels alive only when creating: I invent, therefore I am.69 [69]

Variation on Descartes:

> Sometimes I think; and sometimes I am.70 [70]

---

67 [67] "Sketch for a Portrait of Descartes[?] (1925), Matthews V. 9 p. 17.

68 [68] Matthews, V. 9, p.309 (II 187). Subsequent Descartes page references refer to this volume of Matthews.

69 [69] V2, p 98, IV 422, 1910.

70 [70] Parfois je pense; et parfois je suis. VII 746, 1918-21. V2 p549 n6.

> I think, therefore I am not--I distinguish myself from all that there is, I am other than that which is not, and there isn't anything in existence to compare myself to.71 [71]
>
> Descartes would have done better to write: I suffer, therefore I am.72 [72]

As a syllogism, the *Cogito* is nonsense, for the concluding *sum* has no meaning; "it is an appeal to his essential egotism;" it is no more than "his magical formula of incantation" for exorcising the demon of his famous triple-dream of 1619.73 [73] And the experimental doubt which follows it is no more than a traditional philosopher's exercise, an "artificial doubt" based on an act of will and a manipulation of language, and substituting for common sense "some reality of a second kind. The exercise has no validity to Val"ry because an exchange of dream for reality in this way has no basis in experience, not even the experience of delusion; it simply cannot be imagined, and Descartes has only pretended to imagine it.74 [74] Descartes' God is only a device to make the system work. The *Discours* itself is "really the modern novel as it

---

71 [71] Je pense, donc, je ne suis pas--je me distingue de tout ce qui est, je suis autre que ce qui est, et il n'ya pas d'etre " me comparer. IX 433, 1922-24, see V2 p549 n6.

72 [72] Descartes e"t mieux fait d'ecrire: Je souffre, donc je suis. XVIII 343, 1935-6,V2 p549 n6.

73 [73] "A View of Descartes" (1941), Matthews V.9 pp. 54, 56, 59.

74 [74] Ibid., 57-59.

might be done.75 [75] Nevertheless, the Cartesian universe is the mathematical universe of the modern world, of "civilization (in quotation marks--and Val ry has studied quantum physics but knows that its concepts have hardly touched the way human beings think about their world); and so "the daring and powerful personality of Descartes remains a powerful image, though his philosophy is forgotten, except for that universe.76 [76] But in the privacy of the notebooks, Val ry calls Descartes the "antiphilosopher, and the *Cogito* means "no more philosophy.77 [77] Obviously, though, for Val ry, Descartes remains the coincidental hero, hero in spite of himself, of the subjectivist turn which results ultimately in the psychology of the ego--as if instead he had written *Cogito ergo ego.* In any event, in order to remain a fan of Val ry, Voegelin would have to forgive the poet's indifference to the serious study of philosophical history, while agreeing with his criticism of the *Cogito* on the grounds of common sense and his skepticism of Descartes' reliance on a demoted divinity.

In the 1890's Val ry began planning a fiction that would express his views on consciousness, "Agathe. Originally conceived as a short story about a girl who falls down at

---

75 [75] Letter to Gide, 1984, Matthews V. 9, p. 356. Joseph de Maistre thought the same thing: "If [Descartes] had not left other monuments to his genius, he would pass for a novelist (Unpublished notebook on Malebranche, cited by Joseph A. Lebrun, *Maistre Studies*(Univ. Press of America, 1988), pp 224-5.

76 [76] "A Second View of Descartes, 1943, Matthews V. 9, p. 70-1.

77 [77] Ibid., p.314. XXIII 481, May 1940.

the family dinner table into a coma or "cataleptic sleep,&#65533; it turned into a prose poem ("Plus je pense, plus je pense&#65533;), directly presenting a soliloquy-narration by the comatose girl about the cycle of her dreams over days or months, with a sequence of images revolving in a continuous circle which attains its own stable state.78 [78] The unconscious speaker is a self in the middle of this circle, present to individual images or phases and their transition from one into the other, but unable to grasp the whole; she senses at intervals that she is in a bed, that she is dreaming and that noises in her environment are provoking changes in the images; she even expects one image to follow another as links in a continuous chain whose sequence she has memorized although she can never see or think more than two links at a time. She has the illusion of rational process, of almost solving a problem but never quite attaining the solution, even feels herself on the verge of discovering a law. She articulates the idea of an idea. Sensing that she is lingering on "the rim of an impenetrable circle,&#65533; she tries to express what lies at the center, an "it&#65533; which may be "a being as inviolate as the center of an orbit&#65533; (like the center of gravity at the center of the ring) or as immoveable as a boulder, or as invisible as a brightness to which the eye is unable to turn.79 [79] This is, of course, the *moi pur*. Many sentences read like entries taken from the notebooks; this dreamer speaks for Val&#65533;ry, and insofar as she speaks of a quest to solve a problem or find a law, a quest that feels as though driven by high motives but never arrives at its goal, she seems to speak of Val&#65533;ry's quest for consciousness. Val&#65533;ry lost interest and never published "Agathe,&#65533; and Voegelin could not have read it before 1956.

---

78 [78] See intro. and notes in Matthews Vol 2, also Notebook entry V2 p 459, III 106, 1903.

79 [79] Ibid., p. 210.

Still seeking the imaginative vehicle for his views on consciousness, Val�ry turned instead to a long soliloquy poem, *La Jeune Parque* ("The Young Fate�). The protagonist whose thoughts are musically narrated in Racinian alexandrines is a girl with no awareness of a past, as though she has been suddenly born or created, fully formed, into the gilt frame of a baroque evocation of classical myth. Resembling a solitary pagan Eve, she awakens to self-consciousness and mortality in a paradoxical happy-unhappy fall when a symbolism-laden snake bites her. The plan of my paper calls for an analysis of the poem as an allegorical presentation of Valery's theiries of self and consciousness as well as the 'simulation' of a mind's transactions. Like *Cimeti�re marin,* this poem is built on a rejection or renunciation of static essentialism in favor of dynamic existentialism, the former expressed in the phrase "harmonieuse moi" which is transposed to "mysterieuse moi" by the poem's end. Since Val�ry valued process over product, the task of appreciating this masterpiece as the poet desired requires an investigation of the process of its development requires a full scholarly investigation of his drafts. He saved 800 pages of them. It is a task on the order of a full investigation of the notebooks themselves. Since Voegelin had no access to such a reading, the important thing here would be to explore the poem's presentation of mental flow through its dimly lit aestheticist scrim.

What Voegelin could have inferred about the notebooks from Val�ry's published writing may well be more important to understanding his possible sense of what the poet's project was about--more important, that is, than what he might have found if he had read them.

4. **Notebook Dictation: What *le Moi* told *moi.***

> I get up. I immediately go off to make the ritual first coffee, not knowing whether it works as a substance upon my chemistry or as savour and stimulant

more by affecting the senses than by modifying my molecular make-up,--or indeed whether it has a nervous effect of chrononomic (periodic) repetition, for all 3 hypotheses can be advanced.

So, off I go, and, on the one hand I feel Ideas (very diverse ones) invading me, fighting each other for their life--etc. etc. but, on the other hand, I discern that I'm moving and acting in full automatism--and somnambulism.

I discern myself as my own phantom, my regular Ghost. Everything I do, has already been done. All my steps and gestures can manage without me[□] [1944]80 [80]

I'm like a cow attached to a post, grazing on the same questions in the meadow of my mind for 43 years. [1936]81 [81]

I write these notes a little as one practises scales--and they've been repeated on the same notes for fifty years [□] [1940]82 [82]

The task of discussing the notebooks themselves is hampered by the difficulty of reading them in any meaningful sense, even if one has the time and the access.83 [83] Looking forward to a

80 [80] V1 pp248-9, XX VII I 100.

81 [81] Ibid., p.48, XVIII 648.

82 [82] Ibid., p. 50, XXIII 8.

83 [83] For the present draft, I have been able to leaf at times through the twenty-nine facsimile volumes and transcribe and translate a few pages. For the most part I have depended on reading portions of the first three of the planned five volumes of the Gifford-Stimson translation and selected portions in the Matthews edition, on examining commonly quoted passages in critical studies and on cross-checking these whenever possible with the French texts. The notebooks have such an evanescent quality and the meaning of terms is often so elusive that one cannot rely on a translation. In this paper's ideal form, all the notebook quotations would be given in both French and English.

moment when substantial portions would be digested into an organized, ⊡systematic' presentation, perhaps as a topically arranged ⊡dictionary,' at a certain point Val⊡ry invested considerable effort in classifying entries, marking them with a letter code to indicate topic, and having a secretary transcribe entries for inclusion in topic folders. Editors of the major French editions and the English edition have tried to make the notebooks more user-friendly by grouping the entries in accord with the writer's classificatory hints and presenting them chronologically. The reader then follows a line of development on a single topic, but loses the contextuality of the original notebooks in which entries on various topics at the same period were juxtaposed. In following their chronological order, one notes that the editors have been able to date the entries usually within two years. It seems odd that Val⊡ry was careless and inconsistent in the practice of dating these ⊡lab notes'--as though to deny the resemblance to a diary.

Dealing, then, in the realm of the possible, I want to provide here some sense of what the notebooks are *not*--that they are decidedly not a diary about anything but spontaneous thoughts chiefly having to do with the search for the *moi,* that they are not even a proto-memoir which explores the distant past for significant concrete experiences for development into a developmental history,84 [84] that they certainly are not anamnetic experiments in Voegelin's sense. The anamnesis that they seek instead is a remembering of thought *now,* in its transit from some apeirontic or imaginative mental depths over a threshold to the conscious mind, from

---

84 [84] At one point he does experiment with dredging up memories as though for a memoir of his self-generation, but not very many, not at length or in any detail, probably with reluctance.

potency to act, a remembering of what feels most evanescent in the very next moment when the evanescence would otherwise be lost. So he says,

> In these notebooks, I don't write down my ⊠opinions', but the formation of my thoughts. When I write, I don't get to the end of my thinking, rather something leading to--where?--I note patterns of thought which form of their own accord, which I sometimes pursue--which I don't find any clearer, more harmonious or more exact than others. I stop before the point of writing that they have no meaning, or that I'm about to say the opposite. There's no point, since I know what their value is for me.
>
> ⊠So what I write here is frequently written not as my ⊠thought', but as possible thought, which will be mine, or else not-mine and rejected⊠85 [85]

Insofar as the notebooks are *not* a biographical anamnesis, I want to show how they manifest Val⊠ry's flight from personality, (1) in their origin as a response to the crisis of 1892 which he mentions repeatedly without providing much clarifying detail, and (2) in their proposed search for a pre-personal *moi pur*. I will provide some account of the development of his reflection on this topic, but at present I do not how to treat the relevant entries *as* notebook entries other than to warn my readers that they have a double aspect: (1) that they are tentative and provisional (consistent with what Valery says above), but also (2) that they have some privileged or oracular status, because the ⊠miracle' of consciousness is its ability to know itself, and because what consciousness is able to suppose about itself must be, to some extent, self-evidently true, in a way analogous to the self-evidentiary aspect of the ontological proof of God's

---

85 [85] Vol 1 p.43, V 753 (somewhere in the interval 1905-16!) and VI 563 (1917).

existence. Any number of philosophers might be named, of course, who would regard premise (2) as unclear, unproved, or quite nonsensical, Voegelin among them.

Since the topic of time is relevant to Voegelin's *Anamnesis,* for his rejection of the concept of conscious as an empty time-continuum that gets filled up with sensations and thoughts, as well as for the flow of presence in which time and timelessness intersect, I had hoped to survey Val﷿ry's thoughts on time in the notebooks.

MEMORY

Val﷿ry makes no attempt at constructing a theory of consciousness on the basis of memory. It "would not fit elegantly into my system.﷿86 [86] Often he makes excuses: other than the obvious necessity for it as a mechanism that makes relations possible, memory plays no impressive part in his daily experience--or so he claims. The disposition to look backward in time a matter of individual type or temperament:

> I note that if, on the one hand, I have the weakest memory in the world as regards the facts and matters of my life, which are erased immediately--
> on the other hand, I'm in harmony with this weakness. I don't like to remember. [﷿] [1936]87 [87]

---

86 [86] Vol 3 p 355, I 273 (1897-99).

87 [87] V1 p 185, XIX 625.

> I have a poor memory, or rather--a special kind of memory, a selective memory--extremely uneven--which doesn't retain facts, scenarios, and things in general--anything that doesn't concern my *personal* sensitivity. [�]
>
> No childhood memories--or very few.
>
> The past as a chronological and narrative structure has less existence for me than for others [�]
>
> The case of Proust shows that this is not a literary condition -) [�] [1935]88 [88]

Some of these remarks on memory were published as "Remarks about Myself" and Voegelin could have read them, particularly the Proust reference which was revised: "The 'Proust phenomenon' shows that, in this respect, beings of my kind are denied a great literary reserve.89 [89] People wanted to liken Valéry to Bergson and Proust as his great contemporaries in the literary field of consciousness study. In 1935 he politely tells tells a scholar who has compared his writing on sleep and dreams to Proust's, saying "I think that Proust and I have entered quite differently into the subject," Proust's path being that of the bent towards memory and his "philosophical culture," Valéry's path being that of "problems and theoretical considerations" which have resulted in "an absurd quantity of notes and rouch sketches of systems.90 [90] But as far as memory goes, Valéry is certainly capable of the

---

88 [88] V1 p177, X VII 778.

89 [89] Matthews Vol 15, p. 290. But he holds Proust and the novel itself in contempt: "Proust--descriptive "psychology"--vulgar ideas, double meanings--the fake truth of the novel" (Matthews Vol 8 p 314, Notebook XV 353).

90 [90] To Madame Pavel, *Lettres à quelques-uns* (Gallimard, 1952), p. 225.

Proustian phenomenon of spontaneous memory. As in Proust's novel, when a servant's clinking of a teaspoon brings back the childhood memory of a rail journey when workmen tested the wheels of the coaches with a mallet, so in 1920 Val﷽ry hears hammer blows and is taken back to a complete vision of a fairground in 1880 where workmen were setting up stalls:

> For this to happen, your mind must be inattentive--you have to let yourself go -- Submit. The transformation is quite natural. The going-back happens spontaneously. But if I was wanting to do it, it would become an effort and generally in vain. The simplest rhythm was all it took. The thing I was not thinking about, that was no longer mine, that had evaporated, and could have remained so forever, came alive again. Redivivus. [﷽]91 [91]

For Proust, the spontaneity in the spontaneous memory proves its absoluteness. For Val﷽ry, it is only a nuisance, something beyond the will's control.

And here is a recollection that begs for analysis, not psychological but philosophical, for the way it seems to anticipate his life-work of defining awareness and selfhood, and suggests a beginning-point in experience for the concepts:

> When as a child, I used to draw little men in my exercise books, there was always a very solemn moment. It was when I gave them eyes. And such eyes! I felt I was bringing them to life and felt the life I was bringing them. I felt like someone breathing life into clay. [1897-9]92 [92]

---

91 [91] V3 p.372, VII 569.

92 [92] V2 p. 31, I 175.

Voegelin was not artistic. If he had been, perhaps the anamnetic experiments would include an events in which images rather than words and stories played a role in the birth of concepts: when the concept of mimesis emerged, when objects of wonder such as eyes acquired a meaning in the act of representing them artistically, when the concept of 'person' acquired a foundation in the concept of 'one who knows by seeing.'93 [93]

What he denies, however, in his claims of a deficient memory, is the truth that memory for him is a painful burden. He has plenty of memories, particularly of the most torment-filled years of his life:

> Memories--the things which have left a mark-- [...]
> --Fear--Sensitivity to atrocious things. [...] [1938]94 [94]
>
> My Memories?
>
> Must I write, dictate these scraps, these mixtures of the true and the false? [...]
>
> The day of the great storm, by the window, holding my mother tightly--Saint Barbara and St Simon. I was three at the most. And the nightmare of the giant spider. [1939-40]95 [95]

---

93 [93] Val'ry wanted his notebooks to record his visual thinking--hence the drawings and diagrams. The imagery in his poetry is rich. His rejection of textual absolutism (he ridicules Flaubert's concept of *le mot juste*, and of course rejects the concept of a perfected literary work) could indicate a belief that thinking in images was naturally prior to thinking in words; could he have believed, instinctively, uncritically, that images were the true 'ideas'? More study of the notebooks may clarify this.

94 [94] V1 p194, XXI 705.

95 [95] V1 p209, XXII 780. An entry labeled 'Memoirs' from 1935 notes various childhood incidents: his near-drowning in a swan pond; his habit at six or eight of forming "a kind of

> Memories comes back to me. States of mind from 1883 and 1892, '93 are restored. [1943]96 [96]

Memories--Crises

> What happened in Genoa in 92--Lightning--bedroom visited by the flashes of lightning [] [1928-9]97 [97]

It turns out that Val ry's desire for mastery of consciousness is a desire to control the eruption of memory, not via suppression, but via a kind of transformation through analysis, and that the *moi pur* is a refuge from the pain of memory because memory has nothing to do with it.

CRISIS

Although the notebooks are no diary or memoir, still they express the outline of his life, and explain the crisis of 1892 as the cause of the system. Even before that, a trend was apparent: a need to defend oneself against feelings, against traumatic emotional engagement, against

---

sack around himself in bed with his nightshirt, and saying to himself repeatedly, "My little house; mixed feelings about observing the underarm hair of bare-shouldered ladies at the theatre; other incidents listed, along with the night in Genoa, 1892. V1 pp 178-9, XVIII 218-9.

96 [96] V1 p 246, XX VII 687.

97 [97] V1 p. 148, XIII 20. See also the summary on the 1892 crisis provided by Matthews, V9 p 361, and the quote, "My whole fate being played out in my head.

recurring memories, hence a need for control of the inner life. The *moi pur* concept seems to originate in the practice of learning to disengage emotionally from angry reprimands during his teens: "I instantly froze inside and observed with fresh and exquisite delight the mechanism of these bouts of anger—of the person who thought he was blasting me with his thunderbolts— The more clearly I saw how this dissipation of energy developed— the more I generated within myself coldness, scorn and pity— This was an *event*--one of those major events in a life— Later on, in the army, I had many an opportunity to observe this phenomenon among the officers.—98

[98] Here is the best account of the tendency on the eve of the crisis:

> I notice only today an ancient characteristic of mine
> namely a resistance to natural feelings--which is based upon their intensity--and is particularly evident in reaction to *collective* feelings. [—]
> The determination to reapraise and be independent of —my heart'--caused by defending myself against all the torments of affectivity--from which I suffered in '91-etc. and against the *terrifying* power of images (shock-)
> The intellect, its equalizing and purifying function--all that I can on one side, all that I am on the other, and what I am, rejected by the former, which tends to become the pure Self.[—] [1939]99 [99]

He provides this account of himself as he was in 1891 when he found Poe's *Eureka* , a published account which Voegelin could have read:

> I was twenty and believed in the might of human thought. At times I felt I had infinite forces within me. They collapsed when faced with problems, and the weakness of my effective powers filled me with despair. I was moody, quick,

98 [98] V1 p 196-7, XXI 769-70 (1939), cited by Crowe, p. 6.

99 [99] V1 pp 204-5, XXII 410-11.

> tolerant in appearance, fundamentally hard, extreme in contempt, absolute in admiration, easy to impress, impossible to convince. I had faith in a few ideas that had come to me; I took their conformity with my nature, which had given them birth, to be a sure sign of their universal value. I guarded these ghosts of ideas as my state secrets. I was ashamed of their strangeness; I feared they might be absurd. They were futile in themselves, but powerful by virtue of the remarkable force which I drew from keeping them hidden. My jealous watch over this mystery of weakness filled me with a sort of vigor.100 [100]

The circumstances of the 1892 crisis, which came to a head one night at Genoa in the thunderstorm, along with the solution in the form of his philosophy of consciousness, are sketched in full here:

> My entire 'philosophy' stems from the effort and extreme reaction provoked in me between '92 and '94, as desperate defensive measures.
> 1. insane love for the R[ovira] woman, whom I never knew except by sight--
> 2. mental despair in '92 discouraged by the *unique* perfection of the poetry of M[allarm] and R[imbaud]--abruptly revealed to me. Yet I didn't want to be a poet--just *to be able to be one* [].
>
> All this, alongside 2 or 3 ideas of exceptional value which I found in Poe. (Self-consciousness) []
>
> So I struggled--consumed myself--and the result was this strange formula: All such things are mental phenomena[]
>
> Essential characteristic of that period, Insularism, absolute despotism. Nothing could be sufficiently *myself,* and this 'I'--was an extreme capacity of refusal [] [1939-40]101 [101]

> My analytics of 1892, product of 'self-consciousness' applied to the destruction of obsessions and poisons, with their interconnections, repeated

---

100 [100] Mattthews V8 p. 161, "On Poe's Eureka (1921).

101 [101] V1 pp 209-10, XXII 842-43.

stages and capacity for generalization extraordinarily and acutely perceptible,--a whole *implex* of associations--with anxiety, insomnia, states of acute shaking etc.

Then I attempted to *look* these attacks *in the face,* reducing them to what the precision of my gaze could make of them--in short, constituting an *'I'* for whom the tormented 'I' would be an object, a thing observed and as a consequence, the pain would not be part of it like the *color* of things one sees [ ]

Ot was a very hard and very fruitful period--A struggle with the devils. The Night in Genoa, October '92 [ ]

And all this led me to my 'Method'--which was purity--separation of domains. φ [physis] and ψ [psyche] [ ] [1940]102 [102]

At the time when I was fighting for the body of my mind against the torments, assaults and anxieties of a sensibility overexcited by an absurd passion, I finally began to observe the mechanism of these invincible effects, its power and the imbecility of its power,--and to say to myself: This is a mental phenomenon--(which was poorly put-) - that is when the fate of my mind was settled, fixed. [ ]

[ ] The love of the period '92 evaporated But the formula of exorcizing by emans of the intellect has remained and has become an essential tool for my way of thinking--I've been holding onto it for 50 years now. [1942]103 [103]

And so he was never completely free: his 'formula' had to be applied for the rest of his life. In 1897-99, he described the cycle of recurrence:

I have been driven to regard mental phenomena rigorously like those in a train of great evils and grievous ideas. What made them so painful was their obsessiveness and their unbearable recurrence; and more unbearable still was

---

102 [102] V1 pp218-9, XXIII 757-60.

103 [103] V1 p234, XXVI 417-8.

> the very form of their recurrence, according to which one foresaw that they would recur.

He conquered them by "detaching their repetition from their signification" and distinguishing between "images that prompted them" and the distress. He subjected these "states" to "all possible transformations"--and in their subdued, transformed version they still recur "at every hour."104 [104] Transformation is, apparently, more a mathematical (hence purely mental) metaphor rather than a physical one: he means something like the algebraic manipulation of an equation from one form to another, which change appearance without changing value and "reduce' the equation to something manageable or solvable.

In another published passage, on the post-crisis period when he was writing *Monsieur Teste*, he describes the attainment of his philosophy almost as a new hubristic curse-- "at a period when I was drunk on my own will and subject to strange excesses of consciousness of my *self*. I was suffering from the acute ailment called precision" and I searched in myself for the critical points in my powers of attention. In this way I was doing what I could to extend the duration of certain thoughts""105 [105] But always sensibility or affectivity was the instigating enemy:

---

104 [104] V1 p 56-7, I 198, my translation in part. Cited by Crowe, p. 6.

105 [105] Matthews V6 p 3, 1925 preface to Monsieur Teste.

"all consciousness is compensation for a perturbation which is named *sensibility*" [1921].106 [106]

So Val"ry was a sensitive, introverted type riddled with self-doubt and protected by defensive pride, for whom common experiences rose nearly to the intensity level of trauma, and memories were therefore traumatic memories. The extent of Val"ry's emotional pain explains a great deal, and tends to explain it *away*. No wonder he became the "impersonal poet' " la T. S. Eliot, who is thus Val"ry's psychic twin with his turn to a poetry of voices which is a poetry of masks, his flight into philosophy at an early age and his resistance to biography. Fortunately Val"ry did not want to be explained away; one wonders what would be left of his *oeuvre* had he not despised Freud and had gone through analysis.

DEUX MOI

Despite the usual image of the *moi pur* as innermost or central to the moi of personality (hence "contained' inside it), in effect making it a subset in a Venn diagram, Val"ry here makes the *moi pur* the ground of the whole self, and thus its container, or even a circle like the Pascalian metaphor which makes God the circle with omnipresent center, in this case a center present to the entirety of the self:

> My person or personality is a part of *my* knowledge and the part is the person, the whole is the "I' [le moi] ["]

106 [106] VIII 3, cited by Crowe, p.9.

In this way the personality is comparable, combinable with every knowable thing. And the *I'* [le moi] is unknowable. [1918-19]107 [107]

In the entries, Val*ry states the difference between the *moi pur* and the personal *moi* as a difference between stability and change, almost as the difference between substance and accidents (despite his attempt to equalize their relationship by the terminology of functionalism), logically as the subject of relations to other subjects:

I' and *me [Moi* et *moi]*

One could write *me* [*moi*] to designate the person

And *I'* [Moi] to designate the origin in general and the no less general *field.*

Nothing is more IMPERSONAL than this *I'* [Moi].

The *me* [*moi*] is a certain individual defined by memory and subject to all the fluctuations of memory--Designated as He whenever in turmoil.

The *I' [Moi]* is invariant, origin, space or field, it's a *functional property of consciousness.*

The individual *me* [*moi*] is normally differentiated from everyone by his relation to *I'* [Moi].

No consciousness without *I'* [Moi].

The celebrated Cartesian doubt is without doubt only a mental play between *I'* [Moi] and me [moi]. [1931]108 [108]

The *I'*--which I call the pure Self (the center of the ring) can only be or not be - - It experiences no change. Madness, age, nothing alters it--On the other hand, it can do nothing--knows nothing.

It's pure sameness--no qualities, no attributes. [1933]109 [109]

---

107 [107] V1 p. 335, VII 148, my translation.

108 [108] V1 p353, XV 170. Cf note 29, p 624.

109 [109] V1 p356, XVI 680.

> The *pure Self* may be compared to an ever-instantaneous *event*--like the centre of mass.
> *Consciousness* may be compared to the equality of action and reaction.
> [1937]110 [110]

Memories are presented in consciousness to the personal *moi,* though it is unclear where they exist in the latent state; of course they are grounded ultimately in the *moi pur.* The "He in turmoil seems a mistranslation of *Il,* which should be rendered "It,to express the alienation of a person from his emotional life. The Cartesian doubt answered by the *Cogito* is an attempt to doubt existence, which means doubting the *moi pur,* but since it is the personal moi which thinks and experiences doubt, it only means committing the logical fallacy of doubting that it is grounded in a *moi pur.*

The next entry shows again how Val ry feels a need for a refuge from emotional strife within the self, and expresses the *moi pur* as an aspiration towards impassivity concept using a scholastic metaphor (the angels partake of fire). But it attributes a will to the *moi pur*, which we might call the will to indifference, anthropomorphizing' the portion of the self that by definition is beyond human' feeling.

> The scorn I feel for all that occurs within the mind' is exceptional--unbelievable - - - though still less than what I feel with regard to the emotions'.
> What remains?

---

110 [110] V1 p360, XX 9.

Precisely the part of the mind that tries to fortify itself against all this--against all that does not conform to--

To what?

Let's call it *Angelic Nature.*

--What do you mean by these words?

What is *pure in itself*--which touches upon everything, and is not touched by anything, a strange assymmetry;

what refuses to have existed--

what wants to devour everything--

Ignis sunt.

The ⊡pure act' of the scholastics. [1938]111 [111]

Is the *moi pur,* then, an internalized divinity? In a 1943 letter he refers to the moi pur as "the absolute of consciousness, which is the unique and uniform operation of automatic self-disengagement from *everything...*⊡112 [112]

The "Memories-Crises⊡ entry cited further above continued by listing a second crisis of equal weight in 1921, an event in Val⊡ry's cataclysmic affair with the brilliant bluestocking Catherine Pozzi. Her problematic personality complemented Val⊡ry's so exactly that she played every stop of his emotional instrument.113 [113] Even the notebooks became a venue for their intimacy: she read and annotated the entries concerning his erotic self-analysis.

---

111 [111] V1 p 194, XXI 596.

112 [112] Letter to R. P. Rideau quoted in A. E. Pilkington, *Bergson and his Influence: A Reassessment* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976), p. 121, and Crowe, p. 7.

113 [113] See the account of the affair in V1 p 630ff n.21, especially his character sketch which she copied into her own diary, pp630-1.

By invading the defenses of his 'system' she furnished copy, but also left them in wreckage. So the compelling need to retreat into the *moi pur* never relented, which meant liberation from personality, vocation, any specificity at all. The first two entries below are marked "Teste"; this doesn't necessarily mean they are intended as additions to the Teste novel, but that they are at least points at which Valéry identifies with his character:

> I could never endure the thought of being understood, myself, as a concept. I have rejected those acts which confer on *essence* the idea of defining itself.
>
> I have rejected the poet, the philosopher, the professional man, who were *possible* in me.
>
> I have rejected the good man and the evil man.
>
> I like myself when he seems not to be this man or that. I hate myself when I recognize me, when I am aware of my man, my property; I want to be nobody. [1913-16]114 [114]

> The aim of a thinking man seemed to me the effort to become conscious of his own structure--what it can do or can produce. Whence, reflection on the self, finally to dominate it, *once for all*, and despise it, with its world and its feelings, before giving up *all* to the All--which is nothing. [1942-3]115 [115]

> The words *I* and *Me* point to our *central ignorance* []
>
> Observation: It happens that the *knowing-knowledge moment* (which is a kind of act) may be *remarkably meaningless,* and that the *Self-function* brings in *the pure Self*, purely *functional* (of indefinite duration) with no mixture of "qualities." The objective world, or the *Phenomenon* (which "science" says is better "known" the more *foreign* it is, and even the more *strange*) is therefore a system of properties which remain through all the variations in values. [1943-44]116 [116]

---

114 [114] Matthews Vol6 p 91, V 134 (1913-16).

115 [115] Ibid., p. 135, XXVII 389 (1942-43).

116 [116] Ibid., p. 146, XXVIII 709 (1943-44).

The first entry, from the period of *La Jeune Parque*, expresses a longing for an extinction of personal characteristics and suggests a system for achieving *apathia* via renunciation. The second, from the end of his life, looks back to this sentiment and clarifies it as the aspiration for self-annihilation in the All which is Nonbeing. The third, from his next to last year, articulates his understanding of Mach's functionalism, whereby an entity is not an entity but only a set or matrix of observable phenomena understood through probability theory, uncaused and unexplained; and the human being is taken only a matrix of affects without resorting to the concepts of will or character or even nature. Functionalism gives Val�ry a new mode for expressing the negativity of the *moi* and the absolute potentiality of the *moi pur* within it.

SYSTEM

Val�ry has several recurring metaphors or near-metaphors for consciousness. His mind, in whole or in part, can be referred to as instrument, machine, implex, system. The latter is a true metaphor, and not merely an attribution to genus or category (i.e., generic set of relations), because the vehicle or compared entity is a concrete thing. As a system in rotation, it is a solar system or galaxy with a center--and of course the center is the *moi pur;* it is the subject of Poe's *Eureka.* As a system in philosophy, it is a conceptual and non-material system of intelligibilities, with self-subsistence through derivation from a central truth, though in this case its self-subsistence is augmented by self-knowledge: this knowable entity is its own knower. A

philosophical system has a material analogue in the book in which it is written, a book which facilitates its coming-to-be-known by minds other than the author's, a book through which the completeness or closure of the system can be critically tested. Here Val□ry seems to revel in the the metonymy or pun: for the notebooks as the transcript of the self-discovery of his mind, are potentially a systematic philosophical book, if the writing project can be finished and the materials edited. He finally perceives that such a book is unfeasible, and so the system remains the self-knowing set of conceptual relations, existing in the infinity of its ongoing dynamic life, infinite inamuch as it can never be comprehensively modeled or transcribed in any external organism. He is proud of the fact that he is himself the book that can never be written.

> 1892/1932--Testificatio
> The "System□--"My□ System
> This reductio ad certain and uncertain--which I have defined (in order for me to defeat imaginary and imagined evils) in '92. It's been 42 years--and from that, my whole "intellectual□ life [□]
> After all, *I am* a terribly simple system, discovered or formed in 1892--through insufferable irritation, which excited a *moi* no. 2 to detach itself from a first *moi*--like a too-centrifugalized millstone or *a nebulous mass* in rotation. Stability of the sytem□117 [117]

> I don't construct a □System'--My system--is me. [1942]118 [118]

> My □system'?--is me. But *Me*--insofar as anyone's □I' is convergence and variations.

---

117 [117] XVI 45 (1932), cited partially by Christine M. Crowe, *Paul Val□ry: Consciousness & Nature* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1972), p. 5.

118 [118] V1 p.235, XXVI 438.

> Otherwise, the system would be one system among others that I could make. But this diversity is precisely me. I am this possible diversity.
>
> How can one build a system,--an edifice of ideas which is not at the mercy of one idea? [1943]119 [119]

> I can't conceive how anyone can create a ⍰System'--But I could understand if they created a dozen.
>
> But sitting down, one day, with a piece of paper and writing the whole--of one's thought, ne varietur! [1944]120 [120]

In his published "Remarks About Myself,⍰ Val⍰ry digests his skeptical attitude on ⍰system' and notes the defect of ⍰infinite regress' in the notion of completeness:

> Let me suppose then that I begin to form a ⍰philosophy' after I have agreed with myself to give that illustrious word the following categorical meaning: *Philosophy is the art of making a system of everything that enters the mind,* that is, of giving order to a constitutionally total disorder, in which the very order that pretends to contain everything forms a part.
>
> This is not without analogy to the operation of making a map of Paris in Paris. That map would consequently be reproduced on itself and this reproduction would contain another, and so on.121 [121]

The possibility of an ⍰infinite regression' problem occurs to him as an objection to his epistemology, as of a conciousness which receives and presents to yet another level of consciousness as self-consciousness, as in this published notebook passage from *Rhumbs* about a man feeding pigeons, which Voegelin could have read:

---

119 [119] V1 p246, XX VII I 815.

120 [120] V1 p 247, XX VII I 63.

121 [121] Matthews Vol 15 p 322.

> The feed attracts the pigeons. The pigeons attract my gaze&#65533;
>
> And this makes a second spectacle, which makes itself a second spectator. It begets for me a witness of the second degree; and this one is the *supreme* one. There is no third degree, and I am not capable of forming Somebody who sees *on this side,* who sees the one who acts and the one who sees *the one who sees the pigeons.*
>
> I am thus at the furthest point of some power; and there is no more space in my mind for a little more mind.122 [122]

But this ought not to refer to the *deux moi* scheme if the *moi pur* does not know anything except as a kind of simple &#65533;omniscience' as it presides over the personal *moi.* And one may ask, what part does the unconscious play in Val&#65533;ry's system? The answer is, it's a &#65533;game'--recalling the *jeu* in *Cimeti&#65533;re marin:*

> The unconscious is the same game of consciousness
> its *incessant* functioning and its entrancement.
> Consciousness is an attempt to judge this game--to direct it and apply it. These 2 things are not opposed to each other&#65533;[1900-02]123 [123]

And then I must ask, is this unconscious the essence of the *moi pur*?

5. **Evaluating Val&#65533;ry**

> These notebooks are my vice. They're also counter-works, counter-finites. As far as &#65533;thought' is concerned *works* are falsifications, since they eliminate the

122 [122] Cited in Pilkington, p. 120 (my translation).

123 [123] II 278, cited in part by Crowe p. 13.

> provisional and the non-repeatable, the instantaneous and the mingling of purity and impurity, disorder and order.124 [124]

Val�ry's notebooks easily provide background evidence for the process and intention of his published works. They are the kind of puzzle material which makes a host of dissertations possible. They make it possible to know a particular side of a writer's personality with a degree of intimacy that no other biographical material could, almost to the point where one can relive a section of his life in �real time,' to an extent that might interfere with the living of one's own life. The question remains, though, of whether they can be read for their ultimate intended purpose, for the �science' of consciousness, whether they can be read meaningfully for this purpose by eyes other than Val�ry's. If they can't, then beyond a certain point the scholarship on them is wasted, and the only way to get whatever Val�ry got from the exercise would be to conduct our own notebook projects.

And what, then, did he get for his trouble? The prioritization of process over product means ultimately that not only is the experience of artistic creation its own justification but so is the experience of investigation. The notebook project was lived in the acts of thinking and writing, and not even in Val�ry's own direct reading of the writing afterwards. No wonder it could never be finished. It was real only while it was happening. Then there is the question of the *dulce otium* of waiting, like Teste's waiting, which may only be *dulcis acedia.* Waiting for what? In the physics laboratory, one sits in the dark beside a lucite box containing air saturated

---

124 [124] Vol 1, p. 48, XX 78 (1937-8).

with alcohol vapor, with dry ice underneath and an oblique light-source; once a second, on average, vapor trails will appear, manifestations of cosmic rays. It's called a ﬁcloud chamber.' Once you've seen a few trails, and are satisfied that gamma rays exist, and you've learned to identify particle charges with a magnet, how often do you need to repeat it? Every Halloween since 1927, fans of the magician Harry Houdini have held a sﬁance, hoping he would communicate with them on the anniversary of his death. The Catholic mass has been celebrated daily for two millenia for the sake of a divine manifestation which is an act of worship. I am inclined to say, after the present study, that Valﬁry's daily exercise of the notebooks was his daily cloud chamber session (repeated like an addiction to a thrill), his sﬁance, his daily sacrament. In his belief, what manifested itself was his *moi pur*, the invisible center of gravity within the ring of the self. As he self-depreciatingly admitted, this was his ﬁvice.' For the author of a poem called "Narcisse parle,ﬁ it may also have been an act of worship.125 [125]

Paul Gifford calls the notebooks "the log-book of an existential quest for identity pursued in analytic self-comprehension.ﬁ126 [126] Not the logical or transcendental quest for an Ich or an Ego as undertaken by a Fichte or a Husserl, but a quasi-mystical, experiential quest for self-possession. In Voegelinian terms, it seems that the concrete human consciousness is no longer

---

125 [125] I regret the lack of time to review the Narcissus poems here, where they belong in the paper's structure.

126 [126] "Thinking-Writing Games of the Cahiers,ﬁ in Reading Paul Valﬁry: Universe in Mind eds. Paul Gifford and Brian Stimpson (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), p. 49.

the sensorium of participation in the tension of existence between poles of a Beyond, rather that the interior construct of the 'I' has been hypostatized, has been turned itself into the pole of an inner Beyond, the goal of an erotic tension where philosophic wonder is to be experienced. In this case, perhaps one can plead that the deformation is mostly a private vice, and that the egophanic thinker has not deceived himself further into thinking that he has obtained absolute knowledge for a book claiming to be the final stage in the discovery of truth or for a campaign to establish a final political regime. And that Val'ry's commitment to the process as a voyage towards a destination which is never achieved,with the validity of its 'truth' attached entirely to the moment of the experience, is his mitigating circumstance--even if Val'ry never fully grasped the nature of the limits of possession, and continued to lust for it, and regarded himself as a failure for not achieving it.

Voegelin's anamnetic experiments may very well be something that needed to be perfected over a period of time, through the excitation and exploration of memory and through reflection that discovered meaning in specific memories. But once it was done, it was done. Viewed simply against Voegelin's experimentalism, Val'ry's project may look like a dismal parody. It would be fair to remember that Val'ry is his predecessor, and to suppose that Voegelin allowed him the 'mitigating circumstance.' Voegelin's identification with Val'ry may have value comparable to Bergson's concession that what Val'ry attempted had to be attempted by someone. As I supposed in the opening of this paper, Val'ry's example may have given Voegelin some of the moxie (or should I say Teste-icular fortitude) to pursue his independent line. Still, inasmuch as Val'ry's quest puts one in mind of the contemporary quests of Bergson and Proust, one is left wondering, what is the value of a Bergson without the pursuit

of balance and normality and the glorious particularity of the concrete human person,127 [127] and what is the value of a Proust without the consolations of deep memory?

Voegelin should also have regarded Val�ry--both as actual man and as Teste the fictional shadow-ideal--as an uncanny parallel to Ulrich, the anti-hero and "man without qualities� of Musil's great unfinished and unfinishable novel. The man without qualities is pure potentiality, a substance which refuses to take on accidental ‘qualities' in any socially acceptable career or morally recognizable choice of life or intelligible act; hence, as a living, breathing blank, he is a projection screen for the assumptions and fantasies of others. As has been shown, Val�ry is the man who wants to become pure potential, and to be stripped of personality. Like Ulrich, Val�ry and Teste have a bent towards mathematics, the purest and most quality-less of sciences; they are misfits through their lack of application to a single career or discipline; socially, they are nearly invisible to most of their contemporaries, partly through the choice to remain unrelated to practical life, partly through their lack of relation to most human endeavors and their practicioners. While Musil took up the formal study of psychology, and Ulrich takes a hobbyist's interest in the affairs of a mental hospital, Val�ry takes a psychological approach to philosophy and makes a private or ‘openly secret' career of self-psychology. Ulrich pursues a path of escape from first reality into the second reality of the "Other Condition (an unfallen, premodern metaphysical utopia where one achieves the *coincidentia oppositorum*), pursues it through an obsessive love with his twin sister, and attains

---

127 [127] See A. E. Pilkington, *Bergson and his Influence: A Reassessment*(Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976), Ch. 3 on Val�ry, esp. pp. 118-123 for a comparison between Bergson and Val�ry on the *moi.*

glimpses of it only in privileged mystical moments; Val&#65533;ry, the Testian "mystic with out God,&#65533; apparently pursues the "Other Condition&#65533; in the mystical manifestations of the *moi pur,* in something like Poe's realm of the "shadows of shadows,&#65533; and in a complicated affair with his emotional compliment, Catherine Pozzi. Then there are the really odd coincidences. Ulrich bails out on his ambition to become a man of genius when he reads a turf newspaper article which lauds a "racehorse of genius&#65533;; meanwhile Val&#65533;ry, who seeks to attain Poe's ideal of human perfection as supposed in "Arnheim,&#65533; identifies with a racehorse and names a section of his notebooks after him.128 [128] Ulrich's alter ego, the incestuous twin sister, is named Agathe, as is Val&#65533;ry's character who, as a kind of anima figure, reports on the hidden life of the comatose mind.129 [129]

Musil offers a diagnosis of the modern condition which he himself suffers and for which he has found no feasible program of recovery, a condition in which he suspects that there is something more to existence than modern science permits people to think about, a condition in which &#65533;reason' is a closed realm which provides no satisfying answers and drives people to seek satisfaction in affairs, crime and mass movements, a condition of alienation from the self, from external morality, and constructive political life, a condition of boredom leading to

---

128 [128] "Gladiator.&#65533; See the Notebooks, Vol 1, introduction, p. 25. "Gladiator. Heoro of the pure. Horse--diamond&#65533; (V1 p285, XI 36, 1925).

129 [129] The common theme of the "quality-less&#65533; condition, which appears in the notebook entry XXVIII 709 (see this paper's section 4) is explained by their common interest in Ernst Mach's functionalism, which was the subject of Musil's dissertation.

frenzy.130 [130] The absurdity of the condition turns you into a morally ambiguous character in a novel, an Ulrich or a Teste. The condition of being a caricature, a kind of monster,131 [131] seems to lead to involvement or entrapment in a monster project, monstrous in proportion in that it tries to contain and interpret much or all of existence on a Hegelian scale, hence monstrous also in presumption: the monster novel cannot be completed in one lifetime, and the thinker who records a lifetime of private thought in a transcript of monstrous scale dies before he can read and digest it as a whole. Nevertheless we are grateful to Val□ry, Musil, and above all to Voegelin--who profited from their lessons and examples--for asking the questions which positivism has no answers for and refuses to permit the asking.

Instead of hitting Val□ry in his obvious areas of weakness or suspicion, psychoanalyzing him or exposing him as a dilettante, I have tried to let him present himself. In a future version of this paper, I may be less merciful. Vague as Voegelin's diagnosis of "spiritual fatigue□ may be, by now the reader might have a sense of its grounds. The division between the changing *moi* and impenetrable *moi pur* as its kernel calls for analysis as a new version of the Gnostic division between the psyche and pneuma. The correct analysis of the □case' may be centered entirely on the subject's search for a center or still point to which he may escape the dynamic realm of non-being that he pretends to embrace; hence it is another case of horizontalized modern Gnosticism.

---

130 [130] See my 2004 EVS paper on Musil's novel.

131 [131] In the 1925 preface, Val□ry refers to the Testian "prodigious thoughts□ as "psychological monsters□ (Mathews V 6 p. 6). T. S. Eliot frankly refers to Teste as a monster several times.

In any event, the case study is enriched by one's identification on some level with the subject.132

[132]

[end]

---

132 [132] The Gnostic analysis is touched on by J. M. Cocking in his review of Jacques Duchesne-Guilemin's *Études pour un Paul Valéry,* in *The Modern Language Review,* Vol 62 No 1 (Jan 1967), pp 55-60. For a survey of Valéry's weaknesses with a cynical, debunking tone, see E. M. Cioran's 1970 essay, "Valéry Facing His Idols," in *Anathemas and Adorations* (Arcade Publishing, 1991).

My revision of this essay depends in part on seeing the remaining volumes of the English translation of the Notebooks/Cahiers in coming years.