

READING ORDER AND HISTORY: SCORE & PERFORMANCE

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classics without walls

“The nightingale still sings its heart-rending, throat-filled song against Death.
The significance a musical composition has for me is determined by
the degree to which it brings back again this sweet state of anguish
between Death and Life.”

ABSTRACT

Ansel Adams likened the photographic negative to the composer's score, and prints made therefrom to performances of that score; Eric Voegelin was at pains to draw attention to the it-reality in which the *event* of intentionality – the relation between a subject and object of consciousness – is embedded. In making Voegelin's work the object of study, awareness of the *event* of study may at times be eclipsed. The aim of this presentation and accompanying examples is to raise questions about the structure of the event & its participants as it unfolds in time, and about parallels in the experience of participation in visual art and music.

A WORD ABOUT FORM, IN THE FORM OF AN ADMISSION OR TWO

οὐκ οὖν σχολὴν ἄγομεν, ὦ Σώκράτες;

I have referred in the above ABSTRACT to the theme of *study*. I imagine that if one were to conduct that most dispiriting of exercises, a “survey,” among the participants in our meeting, it is this word that would emerge as the most frequent answer not only to an over-formal query such as “In what activity are the participants in this

conference engaged with respect to the work of the person concerning whom this conference is gathered?" but to the more frequent informal query put to us from those outside the academy upon hearing of our travels: "So what is it that you people do with this Voegelin guy?" As one outside the academy myself, I do in fact get this latter question frequently; but in general I avoid the word, preferring simply to say that I've been "reading him" for about thirty-three years. I admit that in part this helps avoid those ticklish questions about why a civilian of sound mind should be "studying" anything of his own free will.

Furthermore, again as one outside the academy – neither philosopher nor political scientist nor good red herring, a DJ, minor species of mere aesthete at best – I must admit to paying a certain amount of attention to some aspects of these meetings that are certainly secondary; among these is one phenomenon in which I take great delight, even though it is a direct result of the lamentably severe and artificial time restrictions imposed by a conference such as this one.

The phenomenon to which I refer is the hurried presentation of an extensive paper in fifteen minutes, which often takes a form something like this:

The 50- or 60-page monograph in hand, the author notes that there's no way to "fit the whole paper" into the time allotted; therefore, "I'll just touch on the highlights." After perhaps a reading of the paper's opening statement, the highlights proceed along these lines: "I begin by surveying x and y . . . here's the conclusion of that section [reads passage] . . . then I move to a consideration of p and q . . . there's a bit of a digression here that might interest those who are concerned with i and j under the rubric of k . . . " And as the "reading" proceeds – often accompanied by a slow

acceleration, as the tour of highlights becomes ever more urgent under the benign, then blandly concerned, and finally lowering gaze of the Chair – a subtle change in form takes place: as the pace picks up, the discourse gradually transforms itself from that of the paper itself in its treatment of the subject, into something like this: “After an examination of a and b , the paper then begins to draw some parallels between p & b , and between q & a . . . then it goes on to demonstrate the extent of the relationship by means of mjb and pdq . Once this has been established it continues with . . .” The auditors have now become engaged in a presentation not of the *logos* of the author’s argument, but, in fact, in a description of the document, at one remove. There it lies, near the lectern: a neat stack of copies that will turn out insufficient to satisfy the demand stirred up by the, well, stirring description of itself – the artifact that is now the object of our studies.

Understand: I am not criticizing this procedure; far from it – I am thoroughly charmed by it, and at least a few such papers, or rather the descriptions of them after this fashion,¹ have been for me among the most engaging and indeed thrilling of these conferences. But, having noted the phenomenon for some years, I find that whether or not it bears directly upon my topic, it strongly encourages an experiment in standing the form on its head. Hence, what follows is a *description of* the actual presentation envisioned.

¹ Had I not been sufficiently instructed in the popular misapprehension of the preposition identifying the book “after the *Physics*,” I should by now most likely be referring to the “metadiscussion” or “metapresentation” of the paper. Thanks are due the late James Hoffman Day of Vassar College for early instilling the habit of avoiding this usage.

I do, however, recognize one grave defect in this plan. In the usual form, the auditors have in their sparse fifteen minutes not only to absorb the description of the paper, but also to adjust to it in short order from their necessarily continued work on the absorption of the *previous* paper – not to mention that of their lunches. It is here that the intrepid Discussants, well-chosen by an even more intrepid Chair for their ability to respond concisely to the whole paper, step in: to offer some guidance to the rest of us as to its strengths and weaknesses to be sure, but also, in the spirit of charity, some gentle further guidance into its *logos*. But in the present experiment, although the discussants' foreknowledge of the presentation's planned nature will perhaps give them a head start, they are sure to be every bit as new to its actual absorption as the audience. That this may present them with a pretty problem as they attempt to *prepare* their responses, I have no doubt; and it is, of course, asking a lot of them to respond immediately to the elephant rather than to the pieces of blind men's description I give here; my hope is to provide them with enough of a map that they will at least have a fair idea where they'll want to direct their artillery.

Whether the scrawny game after all will end up having been worth this outsized candle is unknown to all, except the God.

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

I have opened the abstract with Ansel Adams's statement about prints as performances. It is possible, just barely, that I will be able to begin the presentation with a concrete instance of an Adams score and its performances. Ideally one could simply display an Adams negative alongside two distinctly different renderings of the

negative on paper. The huge exhibition of Adams's work drawn from the Lane Collection at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts last year afforded those who had the good fortune to attend it an opportunity to experience the truth of the statement firsthand. Two renderings side by side, of different sizes and proportions, made many years apart, forced upon the viewer an experience, unfolding in time, wholly different from that of letting a single image work upon him. For this viewer, at least, a series of urges made themselves felt, along with the tensions between the urges – indeed it was *especially* the tensions that made themselves felt. The same image, twice interpreted many years apart, invited an interplay of thoughts about the passage of time in the artist's life, and the privilege of standing simultaneously in the presence of the two times; such thoughts, and many others, vied with the powerful and familiar desire to take in each image alone, in its integrity and fullness, without the intervention of thought; and all in turn contended with the urges to compare this cropping with that, this modulation of tone with that, this contrast, this texture, this line all with their counterparts. Rooted to the spot for many long minutes, with awareness of the passage of time left far behind, a mind filled with eternity or an eternity filled with mind – which is it?

The question for the presenter, then, as I indicated at the outset, is whether it is possible to offer this experience concretely to his audience. Ordinary snapshots can be reduced to the paltry resolutions of digital displays without great sacrifice; but such treatment, even at its best, not only smudges away the piercing sharpness of images like Adams's fine-grained *f/64* plates, but crushes their subtleties of color and tone into such narrow ranges that the differences so obvious on the prints may be near-

invisible on the screen. Whether such attenuated versions of the images are capable of working on our audience in the way I have described is a question I have left to the Lane Collection's curator, and his judgment will determine whether or not we look at a few slides together.

Picture-show or no, Adams's statement, though it stands entirely to one side from the argument, can inform the auditor's experience of the presentation through its simplicity and recognizability, by providing a thematic landmark for orientation. There are worse landmarks toward which to look than the face of El Capitán.

And picture-show or no, I will begin with a few words of introduction to gather our thoughts together. The temptation is strong to open with the great prayer for illumination of Ps. 51:17; but as familiar as the words are, it is likely that they would put off nearly as many as they would set at ease. And as obvious as it might seem, a setting-at-ease is indeed indispensable, especially under the conditions of "reading a conference paper." Chamber musicians, say, who have gathered for the enjoyment of the music they intend to make together, and already at ease with one another, need few preliminaries; but attend an orchestral concert, and it will immediately become clear how many small rituals and demarcations are there to provide a setting-at-ease.² The organist's or pianist's prelude, followed by a collect or call to worship, together have again this same function of setting-at-ease by setting apart; and this ease is

² Certainly the absurdly overblown, and relatively recent, rigmarole of having the concert-master or -mistress emerge with formal mien, *take a bow*, and turn to her *fellow musicians* to cue the oboist in the bi- or tri-partite tuning procedure – during all of which she will unnecessarily remain standing – can have no other purpose than such a demarcation.

“ease” only in that, now set at ease from external concerns, one is enabled to direct *more* of his *alert* – not at-ease – energies and attention to the set-apart activity upon which the ritual has focused them.

Even the foreshortened conference paper demands its own small setting-at-ease demarcation – if nothing more than conventional acknowledgments, or some references to the immediate time, place, and circumstances recognizable by the audience, or a joke that lets each one present allow that the others’ presence is as fitting as his own by the shared recognition of their laughter.

So, some sort of brief, appropriate invitation to the next few minutes’ speaking and listening is necessary, and in the absence of the psalmist’s invocation I will simply allude to some potential misapprehensions of the significance of my chosen title and leave it at that.³ Nevertheless, as I hope we shall see together, the psalmist’s words almost perfectly symbolize what our panels and roundtables – at their best – are up to; and they would form a fitting frame not only for any one paper or panel, but for our meeting as a whole.

Of course the beginning formed by some few words of introduction is not yet the real beginning – which here will be a text that begins with a few words *about*

³ After this paper’s announcement and acceptance, a generous correspondent brought to my attention that titles containing the word “reading” are, by some, assumed to indicate a paper containing deconstruction or some other species of “there-is-only-text” analysis. Those readers disappointed to find that this is not one of them I refer to my brief study *Gerund and Subtext: Predicting the Fall List* (1993, revised 2001 and 2006, available at <http://www.mtheo.net/subtext>), a programmatic précis of some observations I made while working in the academic book trade.

beginning: “As I am putting down these words on an empty page . . .”⁴ These words will be familiar to everyone present. The passage, after its initial delicately tentative reflections about the truth of speaking or writing about the very words one is speaking or writing, goes on to refer to the future reader’s judgment whether the chapter “is indeed a sermon on the sentence as its text” – speaking again, in the present tense, of the not-yet-written “sermon” as already existing – and in what follows our author alludes over and over to the process of writing, and that of reading, to the interplay among author, reader, and the texts treated, and to the irresolvable questions of language that must remain within the realm of Question. Unless one is obstinately refusing to engage the author at his word, the chapter on the beginning of the beginning cannot help but involve the reader in an *experience* of the participatory reality toward which it points; and despite the technical language, it is indeed a work of poetry in its invocation and evocation of the whole of Reality.

I have stated in the ABSTRACT that the aim of the presentation is to raise questions about the structure of this event of study in which we are engaged, and this indeed is my intention: some of the questions will be explicit, others implicit. And it here that we actually embark on the discussion.

I assume that the familiar words (“As I am putting down these words . . .”) will indeed call to mind for most of us our first encounters with “The beginning of the beginning,” and the new realm we found ourselves being drawn into. I well recall⁵ the

⁴ OH 5, p. 13.

⁵ In what follows I shall likely be in severe breach of protocol, which deserves a word of explanation. The apparent familiarity with which I refer to “Eric” is the product of the three decades’

sense of bristling anticipation at Eric's first public reading of the draft of this chapter. Whatever the audience members' individual expectations may have been, what is most memorable was the physical ripple that passed through the room at these opening words, a very palpable tremor of delight and recognition, as their very simplicity brought us in a matter of seconds into vivid contact with an aspect of our experience familiar from our earliest childhood awareness, but obscured over time by layer after new layer of cheerfully taught alienation. Our own delight in turn was mirrored in the lecturer's wry smile and, indeed, twinkling eyes, as he delivered the words in full knowledge of the surprise their simplicity would provoke. The delivery, in fact, was almost, but not quite, with a wink.

So having now repeated these words that provoke so much recognition and reawaken so much in the listener, I anticipate that they too will function something like a collect, a second step we take into the setting-at-ease of our speaking & listening together; and with this ease at the familiar words under our belts, it will only now emerge that my text is not that of *In search of order*, chapter 1, verse 1, but the nearly identical words of a stranger – my own words of twelve years ago in response to our Pizzakreis Research Group's year of reading and struggling first with *The ecumenic*

encounter with the written works, and not at all the product of the handful of personal encounters, and the few personal letters exchanged; for me, at least, in these encounters any address other than "Professor Voegelin" was unthinkable. Rather, the extraordinary physical presence of the man has provided such a vivid image that it is this memory that has become a friend and a partner in thinking, one intimate enough to be named simply "Eric" in thought alone. And the recollected personal encounters are now filled with this presence called "Eric," inextricable from the memories.

age, and then (as a not-so-light dessert) “Wisdom and the magic of the extreme: a meditation.” We had at several points along the way found ourselves particularly enmeshed in two questions. Although one of them became known informally as “the Murphy Mandate,”⁶ it was rarely – probably never – actually put in the imperative form that the moniker would suggest, but rather as a question: “What does this have to do with how we live our lives?” The other was a question *about* a question, and a fairly obvious one at that, that had been asked often enough early on that it raised the secondary question to which I refer, which is: Does the question “Is Eric Voegelin *right* about this?” actually make any sense?

My own misgivings about the need for this question, however forcefully “science” might demand it be asked, led me to write a brief meditation on the question.⁷ This meditation proceeded by considering the same question in relation to the string quartets of Béla Bartók, and in particular the sixth (Sz. 114), composed in the late summer and early autumn of 1939. Bartók’s last work written on his native soil, just before his flight to America – filled with painful tragedy and with caustic humor, but above (or below) all, with a meditative depth that evokes humankind’s metaxic participation and openness to eternity more fully than all but a handful of others in Western music – the sixth quartet seems an appropriate work in the presence of which to begin raising questions about the participatory nature of music, and from there about the nature of participation in Eric Voegelin’s work. It is this meditation,

⁶ After its most vigorous exponent, Phil Murphy of San Anselmo, California.

⁷ “Is Eric Voegelin ‘right,’ and do I care?” Read to the Pizzakreis Research Group meeting of June, 1994, Mill Valley, California.

somewhat revised seven years later, and again, minimally, for this occasion, that I will share as my contribution to our panel.

DIGRESSION: AN UNDERAPPRECIATED FACET & A CRUCIAL PRESENCE

To return briefly to the “wink” mentioned above: A few weeks ago while on line I skimmed through Robin Seiler’s 2002 paper “Eric Voegelin’s Theory of Psychopathology” on my way to tracing a reference in another paper (and making a note to reread Mr. Seiler’s!). As I passed the section titled “The Experiential Source of the Premise,” my eye read the heading as “The Experiential Source of the Pranks” – and for a few minutes I didn’t think it at all out of place. For in our author’s work lie not only delicate ironies & light-touched wit, sarcastic jabs and sardonic “grim amusement,” but also full-spirited and irreverent pranks that seem often to go unrecognized. For me at least, the pleasure of these jests is increased by their being in the service of genuine seriousness – serious play. It would be a paltry science indeed that discounted appreciating the pure fun of the jesting, or complained that the works’ seriousness is somehow marred by it.⁸

⁸ Indeed, it has long seemed to me that the truly reverent are found only among those who possess a healthy and fully-developed sense of *irreverence*. (Needless to say the condition is necessary but not sufficient.) Cf. Voegelin’s review of Jan Huizinga’s *Homo ludens*: “Those who have had the privilege of Huizinga’s company in conversation will find his last work a mirror of his personality. They will hear again the voice of the sensitive spiritualist and cultivated humanist, of the man in whose refined erudition could be felt the tradition of Erasmus, and whose sense of humor and awareness for

Indeed, for my part appreciation of the jests is heightened by the memory of the wicked smile, the narrowed eyes, and the delicately delivered bit of withering sarcasm; and of the sly, impish smile; and of the open laugh that seemed still filled with wonder. In one grand footnote, all three seem present, as he explicates the nature of the γεγναῖος ψεῦδος by telling a whopper about the nature of the γεγναῖος ψεῦδος. In alluding to this presence here I introduce a dimension to which I will again refer in my conclusion; but it bears on the choice of recording we will hear.

In the Juilliard String Quartet's renditions of the Bartók quartets is embedded the memory of the composer's living presence. In preparation for playing them, members of the Quartet – a few years before its formal creation – worked carefully with Béla Bartók before his death, painstakingly working out with the composer his intentions and his final thoughts. Many Maelzel markings were revised during this woodshedding; and more important, the composer explicitly imparted his sense of how the tempi should “breathe” – the gradual contractions and expansions of each phrase, and how their consecution formed the larger “breathing” of the whole. Although the all-too-frequent notion of a “definitive interpretation” is an absurd one, the presence of Béla Bartok has still been a living one in the playing of the Quartet, albeit by now at several removes, carried in the musicians' souls and imparted down the years to newer members; it was present in public performances like the one I heard in 1973, and it is

the importance of play made one inevitably think of the earthiness and wit of Brueghel. He was one of the rare figures in our time who imparted the impression of a fully developed man.” CW 13, p. 161.

present in the playing captured in 1963 on the LP that I hope to share with our Society.⁹

THE MEDITATION

The meditation itself is brief; it opens with reference to the score as an object, a sheaf of paper between red boards, sitting silent on the shelf, then proceeds to considering the various ways in which the inert book has actual effect in reality – in other words, considering the various ways in which one can *participate* in Bartók's quartet. Along the way it draws some parallels with ways of "studying," or participating in, Eric Voegelin's works. This it does, I sincerely hope, without belaboring the analogies or making too heavy weather of the details of comparison; if it can be heard in the light of our author's considerations about "sermon" and "text" at the opening of "The beginning of the beginning," so much the better.

It is, or should be, entirely obvious that no encounter with Bartók's score can be meaningful without engagement in the attempt to recreate it – to recreate somehow the sounds heard first in the mind's ear of the composer, wrought with considerable struggle into black figures on the page. Whether this re-creation is in one's own mind's ear, picked out fitfully at the keyboard, sawed through with fellow players in a

⁹ The uncertainty expressed here is not casual. Although I am generally indifferent to so-called "fidelity" in recordings, preferring to concentrate on the playing itself, the low dynamic levels of this 1963 LP submerge much detail unless the listening environment is very quiet; this may rule out its use under conference-room conditions. Should this be the case, the recording used will be that of the Takács Quartet.

chamber-music evening of *amateurs*, presented informally to friends or formally to a paying audience, played surrounded by the huge technical apparatus of modern recording studio, or reproduced from the product of that apparatus in home, car, or even conference room – the score is indeed inert until someone attempts to recreate the experiences it reports and shares. Similarly, the living of these works of Eric Voegelin with which we are occupied occurs “in the concrete consciousnesses of concrete human beings,” as he so often said; and if we wish to honor the works as we have them, we will certainly strive to be faithful to the multitude of pointers he placed in the works, that our task is to be actively engaged in re-creating the experiences that engendered the text, while at the same time observing the experiences engendered *by* the text. We are enjoined to *perform* the score in front of us, and only speak *about* the score after that duty has been fulfilled. In the meditation itself, I briefly touch on some parallels to the kinds of re-creation mentioned with respect to the musical score: casual reading, careful reading, careful reading with diligent note-taking & pondering, diligent following of provocative references into new reading experiences for which we may or may not thank the author, diligent following of *all* references, attempting to recreate as much of the author’s engagement with his sources as is possible for us; and beyond these readings, discussions with friends or colleagues, direct readings aloud in small or larger groups, the production of papers, poems, perhaps of drama and music,¹⁰ even unto the reading of papers and meditations at scholarly gatherings.

¹⁰ Reference to the remarkable *oeuvre* of Frank Portman, the Dr Frank of The Mr T Experience and author of *King Dork* (New York: Delacorte Press, 2006) is here obligatory.

This multiform process of “study,” then, of engagement with and re-creation of the experiences behind the text, is the parallel theme of the meditation.

DIGRESSION: ONE FREQUENT PROBLEM

We may occasionally run into one difficulty while engaged in this study that brings into sharp focus the fragility of our author’s task: of scientific penetration into a meditative process that of necessity unfolds within the philosopher’s consciousness. What we encounter is a nexus that is irresolvably personal to the philosopher, and for which he is often taken to task: he has attached to certain symbols, cast up in the meditative process by philosophers who have preceded him, a significance for which his critics find no justification. The criticism of these idiosyncrasies does make sense to be sure; but the philosopher has provided us not only with the problem, but also with some aids to understanding that, inexplicably, are all too often ignored: the anamnestic experiments of the early 1940s.

Eric Voegelin has been sternly criticized for having seized upon certain passages – most notoriously those from which he derived his frequent use of *metaxy* and *epekeina* – and assigning to them far more weight than is warranted by the text; yet if we take the anamnestic experiments seriously (and I have yet to hear a convincing argument why they should be so widely disregarded) we will recognize in them, or rather in the childhood experiences that they recover, much of the same urgency that attends the problem passages. These latter passages seem to have acquired the function of personal touchstones, encapsulating and symbolizing the experiences he wishes to explicate: in other words, they are the mature equivalents of the childhood

discoveries reported in the anamnetic vignettes – vignettes that describe “den Erfahrungen, die zur Besinnung treiben und die deshalb treiben weil sie das Bewußtsein zu Existenzschauern erregt haben”¹¹ The urgency behind the “idiosyncratic” interpretations is precisely the trace of the *Erregung* in the soul of the philosopher. Is the urgency out of proportion? does it disfigure the text in the eyes of a balanced and scientific assessment? Certainly – in a way not much different from the aesthetically unbalanced and ill-proportioned ghosts of Klezmer music and barracks fanfares in Mahler, popular tunes in Schoenberg – and Bartók – or (to return from tones to text) from Hans Castorp’s memories of the shavings from Przybysław Hippe’s pencil in *Der Zauberberg*, from Borges’s desk-drawer bar of sulphur in “El testigo,” or for that matter from the now hackneyed *madeleine*. All of these, of course, have occasioned the same complaints of disproportion from critics. Yet these personal touchstones reveal themselves as near-indispensable tools of the philosopher’s own exploration no less than of the artist who aims to keep his task in focus – *if*, that is, we also take seriously his self-declaration to a friend: “This will shock you, but I *am* a mystic philosopher.”¹²

I shall merely hint at a way of assessing such “wrong” interpretations as those of *metaxy* and *epekeina*. Perhaps they do invest far too much significance in words used

¹¹ [“the experiences that impel toward reflection and do so because they have excited consciousness to the ‘awe’ of existence.”] *Anamnesis: zur Theorie der Geschichte und Politik*, 61; CW 6, 84.

¹² Sebba, Gregor, “Prelude and variations on the theme of Eric Voegelin.” *Southern Review*, n.s. 13(1977), 665.

en passant; but they take on the significance with which our author has invested them by the fact of *his response to them* – to the experience toward which they pointed *him*, and that he now urgently undertakes to bring before us.

There is a close parallel here in the problem of opening oneself to a work of art. The work will *not* yield what it has to offer without one's complete surrender to it. Yet this surrender demands a willingness to trust the artist that one knows may not be warranted; the clear risk is that one may discover – and all too often does – that one's substance has been wasted in handing it over to the artist. Yet without the expense, neither the full untrustworthiness of one artist, nor the other's genuine evocation of luminosity and opening to the transcendence of God can be found out. Under this aspect, as Mr Quandt said some years back, the critic is free to point at the weaknesses and gain credit for his insight – as long as he fulfills at the same time his obligation to step up to the plate himself.

Although the foregoing reflections on proportion inform the meditation in part, they are not explicit in it.

DIGRESSION ACCOMPLISHED, WE RETURN TO THE MEDITATION AT LAST

The meditation closes with a brief and no doubt inadequate attempt at describing the experience of the last movement of the quartet – neither musicologically nor philosophically, but rather aiming at simplicity, and at enabling recognition of the participatory aspects of hearing it. Then in closing, the movement itself is heard, from its *mesto* introduction (itself a *ritornello* pointing back to a beginning beyond the beginning of the whole quartet); through its episodes of courage

and doubt; to its final pair of open fifths that arrive from an unexpected tonality, suspended over the cello as it quiet plucks sad, Orphic chords, and both suspended over the mute presence of the viola – an unspeaking witness – all reaching beyond, and pointing into, a silent eternity.

Più andante $\text{♩} = 116$

Tempo I. ($\text{♩} = 88$)

[82] **con sord.**

con sord. arco

pizz.

pp

p

f

ff

p

pp

p

pp

p

pp

pizz.

pp

2'40"

(Durée: 5'40")

Durée totale: 26'10"

Scanned - Budapest, 1939. VIII-XI.

REMAINING TASKS

Recalling George Steiner's characterization¹³ of the critic at his best as a "pilot fish" – whose task is little more than to alert those around him to the "giant creative specimen" behind him and try to ensure they pay attention: "Look out; something *really big* is coming along right behind me," as he put it – I shall be satisfied if this paper (or, more likely, the meditation it describes) performs in the end as no more than an earnest urging to reread the opening pages of *In search of order*, with attention first, of course, to what it evokes; but second to the art that lies behind it. Be willing – *Wissenschaft* will have to give its permission, however grudgingly¹⁴ – to observe and delight in the literary technique: the fluid movement among levels between simplicity and complexity, formality and the colloquial; the web of allusions to the process of speaking, writing, reading, and meditation, and behind them the hovering presences of mythos and dialogue.

And then further back: hovering over the words and these presences, recall, if it be available to you, the living presence of the man – the whole man, "body, mind, and spirit," with the flaws and blind spots of any human being, πάντες γὰρ ἡμᾶρτον καὶ ὑστεροῦνται τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ – for those to whom the memory of this presence

¹³ In a television interview, date unknown.

¹⁴ Stubborn, pesky facts insist on reasserting themselves. Two among them are, first, that Plato wrote dialogues – not monographs, but a poetry of the interactions among human beings engaged together in search of, or obstruction of, truth; and that it is the dialogues of Plato, not professional philosophers, and the first-century reports of good news, not professional theologians, that are read by millions seeking nourishment for the cultivation of their own islands of order.

remains available become fewer day by day. This in itself imposes upon us a duty, the same one evoked, but never spelled out, with such pathos by Jorge Luis Borges in “El testigo”:

En el tiempo hubo un día que apagó los últimos ojos que vieron a Cristo; la batalla de Junín y el amor de Helena murieron con la muerte de un hombre. ¿Qué morirá conmigo cuando yo muera, qué forma patética o deleznable perderá el mundo? ¿La voz de Macedonio Fernández, la imagen de un caballo colorado en el baldío de Serrano y Charcas, una barra de azufre en el cajón de un escritorio de caoba?¹⁵

It may well be one of us – one who is reading, speaking, or hearing these words – who will in the end carry that last living memory of Eric Voegelin. Could it be that how we choose to respond to that possibility is a question more crucial to our studies than which facet we choose to study, and to write or speak about? which source, which derailment, which theorizing? which decline, which parallel, which error, which biographical accident, which question?

At various points in Eric Voegelin’s work, the political question of the “minimum dogma” arises along the way, particularly with respect to Spinoza’s treatment of the issue. I will not go so far as to pretend competence in entering the technical debate about the question. But it does seem to me that if forced to choose such a dogma to lay down in brief compass, one could do far worse than to set down

¹⁵ [in the course of time there was a day that closed the last eyes to see the Christ. The battle of Junín and the love of Helen each died with the death of some one man. What will die with me when I die? What pitiful or fragile form will the world lose? The voice of Macedonio Fernández? the image of a roan-colored horse in the vacant lot at Serrano & Charcas? a bar of sulphur in the drawer of a mahogany desk?] J.L. Borges, “El testigo [The witness],” in *El hacedor [The maker]*, tr. Mildred Boyer, alt. MT], 1960.

the brief words from the old Shorter Westminster Catechism in answer to “What is the chief end of man?” Just as the prayer of Ps. 51:17 can provide the matrix for our studies without regard to any doctrinal component, we would do well to let the words of the Catechism guide our choices, not only of *what* we study, in the broadest sense, but – for those students of Eric Voegelin who experienced his presence – the choices we make in light of the delicate, unknown, and completely unknowable moment to which Borges gives concrete form.

May we choose well – in seeking “to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.”