

The Limits of Ideology: Koestler's Darkness at Noon (I)

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DARKNESS AT NOON, Arthur Koestler's novel of the Soviet purge trials, does not make good bedtime reading. Considered as a historical novel, moreover, it may be contended (as Irving Howe has done) that the book is "crucially flawed" both historically and artistically: Koestler's account of his protagonist's "gradual surrender to Stalinism" as the product of a purely "dialectical process within his own thought" seems "manifestly untrue to our sense of human behavior" and reduces "an enormously difficult and complex problem" to "abstract and ultimistic moral terms."¹ Despite these possible flaws, the book has been recognized, in the words of a recent interpreter, "both at the time of its original publication in 1941 and ever since, as one of the truly powerful works of twentieth-century political literature."² It will be argued here that a great deal of the work's power is due to Koestler's recognition not only that the evils of Stalinism are traceable to difficulties inherent in Marxism, but also that the latter in turn reflect the problematic orientation of modern political philosophy as a whole. It is for this reason, I believe, that *Darkness at Noon* still retains what Howe regards as its chief virtue: its immediate relevance to "the problems that most concern intelligent men."³ At the same time, I shall suggest, the novelistic form of the book is essential, not only

rhetorically but intellectually, to the accomplishment of its author's purpose. The fundamental criticism Koestler wishes to make of Marxism and of modern political philosophy can best be brought home by embodying it in the workings of an individual psyche whose possessor faces the type of personal-political crisis that the novel depicts. It may be that criticisms of the book as history and as fiction are misdirected, inasmuch as they overlook the fundamental necessity for an author with Koestler's intention to construct the work as he has done.

In a 1973 postscript to the novel, Koestler emphasizes that even though it grew out of his own experiences as a member of and gradual defector from the Communist party during the 1930s, his central concern in writing it transcended the issue of communism itself:

Darkness at Noon is the second novel of a trilogy which revolves around the central theme of revolutionary ethics, and of political ethics in general: the problem whether, or to what extent, a noble end justifies ignoble means, and the related conflict between morality and expediency. This may sound like an abstract conundrum, yet every politician is confronted with it at some stage of his career; and for the leaders of a revolutionary movement, from the

slave revolt in the first century BC to the Old Bolsheviks of the nineteen-thirties and the radical New Left of the nineteen-seventies, the problem assumes a stark reality, which is both immediate and timeless. It was the realization of this timeless aspect of Stalin's regime of terror which made me write *Darkness at Noon* in the form of a parable — albeit thinly disguised — without explicitly naming persons or countries; and which made Orwell, in writing *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, adopt a similar technique.⁴

The plot of *Darkness at Noon*, such as it is, concerns the imprisonment, interrogation, and execution of an erstwhile revolutionary leader whose efforts to institute a truly humane form of government bore fruit in the establishment of the terroristic, totalitarian regime by which he now stands condemned. As Koestler notes in the above quotation, despite his choice of fictional names for his characters and his avoidance of naming the country in which the events take place, the resemblance to real events in the Soviet Union is unmistakable. In the foreword to the novel, Koestler explicitly states that the life of its protagonist, N. S. Rubashov, "is a synthesis of the lives of a number of men who were victims of the so-called Moscow Trial," several of whom "were personally known to the author"; the book is dedicated to their memory. More specifically, we learn from a volume of Koestler's autobiography, Rubashov's "manner of thinking" was modeled on that of Nikolai Bukharin, an Old Bolshevik leader whom Lenin had described as "the darling of the entire party" and as "a most distinguished Party theoretician," albeit somewhat "scholastic" rather than "fully Marxist" in his thinking, and whose 1938 trial and execution constituted a culmination of the Soviet purges.⁵ Rubashov's "personality and physical appearance" ("short, stocky, with a pointed goatee" and a pince-nez) were "a synthesis of Leon Trotsky and Karl Radek."⁶ Rubashov's final speech at his trial as Koestler con-

structs it paraphrases parts of Bukharin's final statement at his trial.⁷

One of the points for which *Darkness at Noon* has been widely criticized is that, by representing Rubashov's confession as primarily the result of his own reasoning process, rather than of torture or threats against his family, it distorts the real causes of the confessions at the Moscow trials. In his autobiography Koestler argues that while many of the confessors "were merely trying to save their necks, like Radek; . . . were mentally broken like Zinoviev; or trying to shield their families like Kameniev . . . there still remained a hard core of men like Bukharin . . . and at least a score of others" with a long "revolutionary past" and a history of enduring "Czarist prisons and Siberian exile, whose total and gleeful self-abasement" at the trials "remained inexplicable." Rubashov, he explains, was intended to represent "this 'hard-core.'" In support of his interpretation of these men's motivation, he cites an account of the trials given by General Walter Krivitsky, the head of Soviet Military Intelligence for Western Europe prior to his defection in 1937, which he reports not having read until several years after completing *Darkness at Noon*: Krivitsky's account of why some revolutionary leaders confessed to the phony accusations against them is strikingly similar to what Koestler represents as the motivation of Rubashov's confession. At the same time Koestler emphasizes that "of the three prisoners that appear in the novel, Rubashov alone confesses in self-sacrificing devotion to the Party"; the confessions of the other two result respectively from torture and ignorant obedience to authority, while allusion is made elsewhere in the novel to "physical fear" or the hope of self-preservation as the cause of other confessions.⁸

In the case of Bukharin, at least, it appears from more recently published sources that Koestler's explanation was incorrect; the chief reason Bukharin succumbed to Stalin's demand for a public confession (albeit while arguing against

specific charges), it is now believed, was his concern to save the lives of his exiled wife and son.⁹ But in the light of Koestler's purpose in writing the novel, as described in the 1973 postscript, I suggest that this issue is largely beside the point. The true subject of *Darkness at Noon* is not the historical issue of why some victims of the purge trials confessed, but the politico-philosophic question of why a movement dedicated to the regeneration of mankind should issue in its enslavement, and of why such a movement, long after its failure has been made manifest, should retain its appeal for many thinking men. The persistent popularity of Marxism as a doctrine among well-intentioned Western intellectuals — who will bend logic in all directions to demonstrate that the flaws of Communist regimes result from accidental distortions of the doctrine, rather than flowing directly (as Koestler teaches) from the doctrine itself — indicates that we continue to stand in need of enlightenment in this regard.¹⁰ For this purpose it was a brilliant stroke on Koestler's part to present the protagonist-victim of his novel as one who still believes in Marxist doctrine at the time of his arrest, despite his recognition of the flaws of the existing regime; who argues mightily to convince himself that the evils he has witnessed and experienced do not refute the doctrine in the name of which they are justified; and who is only gradually forced — against his will, as it were — to perceive "through a glass darkly" what is wrong with the doctrine itself. It is striking that in a work that has been denounced by neo-Marxist critics for exhibiting the "irrational emotionalism" of the ex-Communist,¹¹ the bulk of the explicit theoretical argument constitutes a case for Marxism, one no less plausible than many authentically Marxist writings. As one critic reports, some readers of *Darkness at Noon* come away "with the feeling that, in the end," the arguments Koestler presents on behalf of Marxism "are so irrefutable that Koestler has acted a kind of devil's advocate who has succeeded in making the bad cause appear the good."¹² That such a reaction

to the book is at least comprehensible would seem to contradict Howe's claim that, despite Koestler's counterideological intention, his writing "is suffused with ideology."¹³ It suggests that — despite the contrary claims of Marxist critics — Koestler was able to resist the temptation, which he himself acknowledged, for an ex-Communist "to go over to the opposite political extreme" and become a simplistic anti-Communist zealot. Koestler attributed his ability to maintain his "intellectual and emotional balance" in the period just after his emotionally traumatic break with the party, when he began working on *Darkness at Noon*, to his discovery that writing could be "a purpose in itself" for him.¹⁴ The fundamental "mission" of the novelist as Koestler understands it "is not to solve but to expose"; his accomplishment of this aim requires that he maintain "a totally open window" towards the world, rather than covering it with ideological shades.¹⁵ Let us consider how Koestler achieves this mission in *Darkness at Noon*.

The English title of *Darkness at Noon* may be understood in several ways. Koestler attributes the idea for it to his translator, to whom it was suggested by a phrase uttered by the imprisoned Samson in Milton's *Samson Agonistes*: "O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon, / Irrecoverably dark, total Eclipse / Without all hope of day!"¹⁶ Literally, Samson's words accurately describe the situation of Rubashov, for whom there is no escape from the darkness of prison but the deeper night of death. At the same time, those words describe the situation of Rubashov's fellow citizens: at the moment that was to constitute their "noon" — their liberation from enslavement under the old regime and their elevation under a government ostensibly dedicated to their welfare — they find themselves the inhabitants of a mass prison, ruled by a most ruthless dictator, with no evident ground for hope of an improvement in their condition. (Hence, in the moment before his death, Rubashov compares his people's plight to that of the Jews wandering for forty years

in the desert, but sees no sign of "the Promised Land"; "wherever his eye looked, he saw nothing but desert and the darkness of night" [215].¹⁷ On the other hand, the ultimate success of Samson in destroying his Philistine captors (albeit at the cost of his own life) suggests that from Koestler's point of view, if not from Rubashov's, there remains hope for the liberation of the people from their enslavement.

Beyond its Miltonian connotations, Koestler's title must also be taken as a reference to the hour of the Crucifixion.¹⁸ As such, it is one of many allusions in the novel by which Rubashov is represented as a latter-day Christ: a "scapegoat" or sacrificial lamb executed to atone for the sins of mankind (9, 184, 205).¹⁹ From the party's point of view, such scapegoats are a useful means for absolving the party itself of guilt in the eyes of the common people (184); from the point of view to which Rubashov ultimately ascends, their necessity reflects a fundamental aspect of the human condition, the neglect of which is the root of the party's decay.

Structurally, *Darkness at Noon* is fairly simple. The titles of the first three chapters — "The First Hearing," "The Second Hearing," "The Third Hearing" — refer to the successive interrogations of Rubashov: the first two by his erstwhile friend and revolutionary compatriot Ivanov; the last by Ivanov's more brutal successor Gletkin, who may be taken to represent the reality of the heralded "new Soviet man." The greater part of the first two chapters, however, consists of Rubashov's own self-reflections, during the days of solitude in his cell, by which he reconsiders the meaning of the cause to which he has heretofore dedicated his life, in the light of his imprisonment. The course of his reflections is further stimulated by exchanges with several other prisoners and by the recollection of his previous official dealings with three subordinate members of the party. The final chapter, entitled "The Grammatical Fiction," opens with a summary account of Rubashov-Bukharin's confession at his

trial, read from the newspaper by a woman as her father mumbles Biblical passages describing the Crucifixion; the remainder of the chapter records Rubashov's ultimate recognition of the significance of his life, up to the actual moment of his execution.

By locating the novel in a solitary cell and the interrogation room of a prison, Koestler obviously forecloses the possibility of significant action (except in the form of flashbacks). The resultant focus of the novel on thought rather than action is integral to Koestler's intention, inasmuch as he represents Rubashov's former life as one in which fundamental questions that ought to have been squarely faced at the outset were set aside in favor of action grounded in blind faith that its effects would be salutary for mankind (206-8). The lack of serious reflection in the previous life of this party leader belies the claim of the revolutionary elite to be "militant philosophers," who bridged the gap between theory and practice by putting the "dreams" of theory into practice (47-48); dreamers they may have been; philosophers they were not. Not only the fact of his imprisonment but, more importantly, the suddenly imminent prospect of his own death wonderfully concentrates — as the well-known Johnsonian aphorism puts it — Rubashov's mind.²⁰ It is precisely the party-induced refusal to face the real meaning of man's mortality that Koestler will represent as the ultimate cause of the evils of twentieth-century totalitarianism.

As was indicated by the previously quoted passage from Koestler's 1973 postscript, the central theme of *Darkness at Noon* concerns the extent to which "ignoble means" may be justified by "a noble end," as well as the connected issue of the relation between morality and expediency. The former issue is brought to the fore almost at the beginning of the novel, where Rubashov is awakened in his apartment from a recurrent dream in which he recalls his arrest by "the Praetorian guards of the German Dictatorship," only to be arrested in the present by the police

of his own country's dictatorship. The means practiced by the latter and its putative ideological opponent are formally identical, so that at the moment of his second arrest, Rubashov suspects "that this awakening was the real dream" (3).²¹ Only by the difference in the ends for which they arbitrarily arrest their subjects, if at all, can the two tyrannies be distinguished. But can ends and means so neatly be separated?

From the outset of his imprisonment, Rubashov's reflections on the meaning of that event vacillate between two poles: the individual and the ideological. Upon awakening on his first morning in jail, recognizing the inevitability of his execution, he indulges in "a warm wave of sympathy for his own body, for which usually he had no liking," and experiences "that peculiar state of excitement familiar to him from former experiences of the nearness of death," despite recognizing "that this condition was reprehensible and, from a certain point of view, impermissible." As the last surviving member of the "old guard" of revolutionary leaders, he briefly recollects the personal traits of a couple of his previously executed colleagues and doubts that "history" can be trusted to "rehabilitate" them (the revolutionary equivalent of Resurrection), because history is indifferent to the characteristics of individuals. Nonetheless, Rubashov "could not bring himself to hate No. 1 [the present dictator] as he ought," in view of the horrifying "possibility that he was in the right," when judged in terms of the ultimate historical consequences of his actions. "There was no certainty; only the appeal to that mocking oracle they called History, who gave her sentence only when the jaws of the appellant had long since fallen to dust." But at this stage of his life Rubashov still looks forward to the possibility that an enhanced knowledge of the workings of the human brain could someday transform historical explanation from oracle to science and thus make politics itself truly scientific (9, 10, 12).

The critical counterpoint to Rubashov's historical reflections at this moment is sup-

plied not by any sort of argument he can formulate, but by a physical pain and an at first dim recollection, the significance of which will deepen as the book proceeds. The toothache of which Rubashov complains to a guard on the first morning of his imprisonment constitutes precisely the sort of private concern to which the party's doctrine denies significance; more importantly, it will come to represent Rubashov's conscience, a phenomenon to which the party also denies legitimacy, and will reappear and recede throughout the novel according to Rubashov's cognizance of having fulfilled his individual moral obligations (11; cf. 36, 71, 72, 89, 97-98, 144, 155, 198, 215). The troubling recollection — first suggested to Rubashov by the sight of another prisoner's bare, thin arms and his "palms . . . turned upwards, curved in the shape of a bowl" to receive bread — is of a drawing of the Pietà by an unnamed German master, in which "the Madonna's thin hands" were similarly "curved upwards" and "hollowed to the shape of a bowl" (14, 24, 27). Rubashov had seen a part of that drawing six years earlier in the art museum of a south German town, while conversing with an innocent and idealistic young party member, Richard, whom he proceeded to expel from the party — and, apparently, caused to be denounced to the German authorities who arrested him — for deviating from party directives. In the course of expelling Richard, Rubashov had remarked that the party's strength depended on its "unbroken will" and consequently required the renunciation of anyone who "goes soft and weak," whatever his motives. Rubashov's position hinged on the claim that the party, as "the embodiment of the revolutionary idea in history," could "never be mistaken"; to serve her required that one have "absolute faith in History" and be free from any scruples about obeying the directives of her spokesmen, the leaders of the party hierarchy. As he spoke to Richard, the latter's head partly hid the Pietà from Rubashov's view; he forgot to look at it before leaving the room (27, 34, 37, 39).

Rubashov's failure to examine the drawing — and his disturbing recollection of it when in prison — indicate what has been lacking in his thought up to the time of his imprisonment, as is also suggested by a quotation from Dostoyevsky with which Koestler prefaces the novel: "Man, man, one cannot live quite without pity." It is significant that Koestler represents pity in its Christian form of *pietà* (and by the figure of the Madonna); thus he recalls the original link between pity and piety.²² He thereby appears to suggest the inadequacy or insubstantiality of the "secularized" pity of which various ideologies of the contemporary Left claim to be the embodiment: pity for man cannot be adequately or reliably grounded unless the individual human being is seen as linked to a truth that is both supra-individual and supra-historical.²³ Contrariwise, the ultimate test of a theoretical or theological doctrine of human benefaction is whether it inspires its adherents to concrete acts of compassion and beneficence towards their fellow men. The party, while taking over from the Catholic Church the principle of the infallibility of its leaders (the revolutionary founder, Lenin, "was revered as God-the-Father, and No. 1 as the Son" [48-49]) and the demand for "absolute faith" and obedience towards the leader on the part of the masses, and while claiming to be the people's true benefactor, has liberated its functionaries from any operative sense of duty towards other human beings grounded in a recognition of their essential dignity as individuals. Thus, it has discarded the invaluable core of truth in the Biblical teaching.

A second incident recollected by Rubashov in the first chapter makes it clear how the claim of the party leadership to represent the sole authentic will of "history" and its consequent self-liberation from any fixed set of moral principles gives rise to consequences indistinguishable from hypocrisy. In a second mission abroad, Rubashov was called upon to demand that longshoremen belonging to the party assist in delivering

petrol from the homeland of the Revolution to a "hungry dictatorship in the south of Europe" (Mussolini's Italy) for use in its "war of plunder and conquest in Africa." The refusal of the longshoremen to carry out this demand, given its direct contradiction of the principle of workingmen's solidarity against fascist aggression, led Rubashov to order the expulsion of their union leader, Little Loewy, from the party and thence to the latter's suicide. Reflecting on this incident, Rubashov observes that despite the putative rightness of the party's principles, "our results were wrong," inasmuch as they made the party "odious and detested" by the people, who should have had cause to love it; while Little Loewy, despite his deviation from party discipline, "was not odious and detestable." The contrast between the theoretical beauty of the party's principles and the ugliness of their results inspires in Rubashov the thought that "if the Party embodied the will of history, then history itself was defective." But it does not yet induce him consciously to seek a nonhistorical standard for judging political action (50-60). While increasingly burdened by a sense of personal guilt towards those he betrayed in the service of the party's "higher" morality — he repeatedly cites the need to pay his "fare" to Richard and Little Loewy, *i.e.*, atone with his own life (39, 42, 44-46, 67) — Rubashov remains unable to bridge the gap between individual and political ethics. It is Rubashov's inability, at this point, to transcend the "historical" standard of political morality that renders him vulnerable to the arguments of his interrogator Ivanov at the conclusion of the first chapter — and that will ultimately prepare him to grant the authorities the confession to spurious "crimes" that they demand. Initially Rubashov challenges Ivanov by charging that the people's disaffection with the party undermines its claim to represent their will: "Other usurpers in Europe pretend the same thing with as much right as you . . ." Ivanov sidesteps this issue, but nonetheless begins to sap Rubashov's resistance by reviewing

Rubashov's career, reminding him of how many individuals the latter had previously sacrificed in order, presumably, "to continue your work for your own ideas," and suggesting that under the circumstances it would be mere "petty bourgeois romanticism" for Rubashov now to refuse to confess and, thus, to bring an end to his career as well as his life, rather than cooperating with Ivanov so as to secure the chance that the latter promises (whether or not disingenuously) to achieve his freedom in "two or three years" and a consequent opportunity subsequently to "be back in the ring again." Although Rubashov's immediate response is to reject Ivanov's proposition, Ivanov foresees that their conversation will have a delayed effect and grants the prisoner a fortnight for reflection (67-77).

The tension which we have already noted between the ideological and the personal poles of Rubashov's reflections becomes manifest, from this point on, in the contrast between the diary which he now begins to keep and the less "logically" expressible thoughts to which he continues to be driven by his recollections and by his encounters with other prisoners. The diary is intended to reconcile Rubashov's Marxist belief with his awareness of the present evils of his country's regime by reformulating Marxist doctrine in a way that remains faithful to its overall spirit. In an excerpt from the diary at the beginning of the second chapter of the novel, Rubashov focuses attention directly on the problem of the relation of ends and means, and emphasizes the "Machiavellian" foundation of the party's view of this problem. The party's doctrine teaches that while "the nineteenth century's liberal ethics of 'fair play'" may be practicable in the relatively tranquil "breathing spaces of history," at the "critical turning points" of history "there is no other rule possible than the old one, that the end justifies the means." While the party's "neo-Machiavellian" policies have indeed been "clumsily imitated" by "the counter-revolutionary dictatorships," the distinguishing "greatness" of the

former consists in their serving the ends of "universal reason" rather than "national romanticism," and consequently justifying their practitioners' hope of being "absolved by history" in the end. Prior to the end of history, however, the party is "thinking and acting on credit," in the sense that it must claim, without being able strictly to prove, that its actions will have the ultimately redemptive outcome it claims. To judge the legitimacy of policies purely in terms of their ultimate outcome or "consequent logic" (*i.e.*, the logic of consequences) means, moreover, that the party must disregard issues of "the subjective good faith" of a man's actions: assuming that No. 1 is right in his judgment of the best kind of agricultural fertilizer, he is entirely justified in having those who maintained a contrary opinion executed, regardless of the beneficence of their intentions. From the perspective of history, "virtue does not matter" and errors are far more significant than crimes. But since it cannot be proved that the party's reading of future history is correct, political leadership ultimately depends on "faith . . . axiomatic faith in the rightness of one's own reasoning." It is for no longer believing in his own infallibility that Rubashov now regards himself as "lost" (79-81).

The specific consequences and the rationale of the party's understanding of history are worked out more extensively in the second and third chapters by Ivanov and his assistant Gletkin. In a conversation between them immediately following the excerpt from Rubashov's diary cited above, Gletkin exhibits the degree to which that view of history enables its exponents to employ a utopian view of the future as the justification for an unmitigated brutality in the present. For Gletkin the "patriarchal mental paralysis" of the peasantry prevents them from listening to reason (*e.g.*, by going along with the policy of collectivizing agriculture) and consequently necessitates the widespread use of torture against them to prevent the Revolution from "foundering." At the same time he prom-

ises that the present crushing of the "criminal's" mind and body will pave the way, a hundred years hence, for the reign of reason and mercy: the "abolition of punishment and of retaliation for crime; sanatoriums with flower gardens for the a-social elements." Gletkin still retains the "faith" in "the logical necessity" of the party's policies that Rubashov has lost; it is this that distinguishes him, he thinks, from a "cynic" (83-85).

The other side of Gletkin's reflections — how the policies he favors appear from the perspective of those against whom they are applied rather than those who administer them — which Rubashov's recollections of Richard and Little Loewy had forced him to consider in chapter 1, Rubashov is again compelled to face in chapter 2 by the memory of his executed lover Arlova, the significance of which is deepened by an event that takes place in the prison. Remarkably for the sole "love interest" of the protagonist in a novel, Arlova appears to be devoid of any substantive personality or character. Coolly efficient as Rubashov's secretary, she accepts his advances, as he remarks, as if she "were still taking down dictation" and responds, " 'You will always be able to do what you like with me' " (93). Arlova, it appears, is the perfect raw material to serve as the instrument of the Revolution; she is pure passivity, adaptable — unlike the recalcitrant peasantry — to whatever form her superiors should choose to impose on her. In her case, at least, the party's view of the masses as inherently "formless" and "anonymous" (67) seems to be vindicated. But how can it be maintained that the process of issuing unquestioned orders to individuals like Arlova — and of breaking down the people by Gletkin's methods, so that they will all resemble her — will gradually "wean them from the habit of being ruled," as the party claims (47)?

Despite her passivity, Arlova — owing to her brother's having married a foreigner — ran afoul of the regime; when she called on Rubashov at her trial as the chief witness of her innocence, he

disavowed her (155). Never doubting "the logical rightness" of his behavior in the matter, since it was the only means of preserving his own career and hence advancing the goals of the party, Rubashov was able to avoid suffering pangs of personal guilt by regarding the death of an individual, in accordance with the party's doctrine, as a mere "abstraction." That is, the "individual" perspective is of a lower grade of reality than the intersubjective and hence "objective" course of history: in the "logical equation" of history, Arlova was "a small factor compared to what was at stake."²⁴ What shakes Rubashov's confidence in that equation, however, is the execution of an erstwhile disciple of his and hero of the Revolution, Michael Bogrov, while Rubashov is imprisoned: by calling out Rubashov's name just before his death, Bogrov makes the previously "unimportant factor" of the individual appear concrete to him and hence "absolute" (103, 115-16).

Rubashov's confrontation with the reality of death at the time of Bogrov's execution may be regarded — along with his previous recollection of the Pietà — as one of the central "epiphanies" of *Darkness at Noon*. But just as in the first chapter, he is prevented from following out its implications by his inability to refute the contrary "logic" of Ivanov. What renders Rubashov vulnerable to Ivanov's persuasion, as Ivanov remarks to him, is that the latter's "way of thinking and of arguing" is identical with that to which he himself has subscribed throughout his career; Rubashov is unable to formulate an alternative logic by which to express the reservations arising from the realm of what the party dismisses as "the 'grammatical fiction,' " the individual. Ivanov at least half-persuades Rubashov that the scruples he has been experiencing are themselves a form of moral self-indulgence, a succumbing to the "temptation" of "Salvation Army" ethics. Machiavelli and Marx, rather than Gandhi and Tolstoi, he argues, constitute the true guides towards human benefaction, inasmuch as they squarely face the "amoral" nature of history itself.

To follow the ethics of Gandhi and Tolstoi "means to leave everything as it is"; while salving the conscience of the individual, it allows mass suffering to remain the eternal lot of the race. Ivanov insists that there is no mean possible between the "Christian and humane" ethic which "declares the individual to be sacrosanct, and asserts that the rules of arithmetic are not to be applied to human units," and the opposite perspective which "starts from the basic principle that a collective aim justifies all means, and not only allows, but demands, that the individual should in every way be subordinated and sacrificed to the community — which may dispose of it as an experimentation rabbit or a sacrificial lamb." While a private individual may choose between these two ethics, "whoever is burdened with power and responsibility" cannot: the necessities of political life will inevitably compel him "to defer to another time the putting into practice of humanism." The strength of the party's doctrine lies in its self-conscious recognition of this fact and in the consequent opportunity it provides for enlightened rulers to "experiment" with humanity on a historically unrivaled level for the sake of elevating the future condition of the race: slaughtering men "in order to abolish slaughtering" and whipping them "so that they may learn not to let themselves be whipped." By this means "we are tearing the old skin off mankind and giving it a new one."²⁵ To argue against this process on behalf of particular individuals is as irrational as to contend "that a battalion commander may not sacrifice a patrolling party to save the regiment" or to oppose the kind of experimentation on animals that spawned the development of serums against cholera, typhoid, and diphtheria (121-32).

Once again Ivanov's arguments impel Rubashov to work on the theoretical elaboration of the party's doctrine in such a manner as to excuse the party's present crimes and overcome his own reservations. In another excerpt from his diary, at the beginning of chapter 3, Rubashov propounds a "law of relative maturity" of the

masses, according to which "the level of mass-consciousness" rises in a series of interrupted stages, like the water in a chain of canal locks, rather than, as "socialist theory" had formerly held, in a constant and steady sequence. According to this law, "the maturity of the masses lies in the capacity to recognize their own interests," which in turn "pre-supposes a certain understanding of the process of production and distribution of goods." Since "every technical improvement creates a new complication to the economic apparatus . . . which the masses cannot penetrate for a time," each "jump of technical progress leaves the relative intellectual development of the masses a step behind, and this causes a fall in the political-maturity thermometer." It follows that political institutions, instead of following a steady progress, must exhibit "a pendulum movement in history, swinging from absolutism to democracy" and back, depending on whether the masses at a given moment possess the degree of understanding necessary for self-government. In a complete capitulation to Ivanov's reasoning, Rubashov excuses "all the horror, hypocrisy, and degradation" of the present regime as "merely the visible and inevitable expression" of this law; only "the fool and the aesthete" would attach any absolute significance to them. For anyone who opposes the policies of the regime in such a situation where only a demagogue would appeal to the judgment of the immature masses, the sole truly honorable course is "the public disavowal of one's conviction in order to remain in the Party's ranks" (135-37).

Two encounters with other prisoners immediately following his recording of these meditations give Rubashov the opportunity, respectively, to confirm his newly discovered "law" and to affirm its moral implication regarding his own situation. When taken for exercise in the prison yard, Rubashov converses with a peasant who has been imprisoned for "reactionary" activities: refusing to allow his children to be vaccinated, destroying new farm machinery, and burning up

pieces of government propaganda. According to the peasant's understanding, as he later expresses it, the government has punished him "because the old days when we were happy must not come back." To Rubashov, who doubts the accuracy of the peasant's recollection of past happiness, the case is reminiscent of something "he had once read about the natives of New Guinea, who were intellectually on a level with this peasant, yet lived in complete social harmony and possessed surprisingly developed democratic institutions. They had reached the highest level of a lower back basin" (139, 188).

In an exchange of messages tapped through the common wall of their cells, Rubashov communicates his decision to capitulate to his monarchist neighbor, No. 402, who responds, "HAVE YOU NO SPARK OF HONOUR LEFT?" The subse-

quent exchange summarizes the opposition between "revolutionary" ethics and the moral code of the old aristocracy: No. 402: "HONOUR IS TO LIVE AND DIE FOR ONE'S BELIEF"; Rubashov: "HONOUR IS TO BE USEFUL WITHOUT VANITY"; No. 402: "HONOUR IS DECENCY — NOT USEFULNESS"; Rubashov: "WE HAVE REPLACED DECENCY BY REASON" (140).

There will be no going back on Rubashov's decision to capitulate by giving his interrogators the confession they demand. But his subsequent reflections, to be considered in the second installment of this study, will compel him to reconsider this antinomy between reason and honor or decency and thus to call into question the adequacy of the "revolutionary" ethics of utility.

(To be concluded)

This essay is a revised version of a paper presented at the 1982 annual meeting of the Southern Political Science Association. The author gratefully acknowledges the support of a research fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities during the preparation of the paper. ¹Irving Howe, *Politics and the Novel* (New York, 1957), pp. 228-29. ²Sidney A. Pearson, Jr., *Arthur Koestler* (Boston, 1978), p. 51. Probably the most direct manifestation of the book's power occurred during the French constitutional referendum of 1946. Newly translated under the title *Le Zéro et l'Infini*, the book, Koestler reports, "broke all pre-war records in French publishing history" despite a Communist campaign to intimidate its publisher and then to buy up and destroy entire stocks of it from provincial bookstores. A leading newspaper described the book as "the most important single factor which led to the defeat of the Communists in the referendum"; had they won, they would have been able to achieve "nearly absolute control of the state." Arthur Koestler, *The Invisible Writing* (New York, 1954), pp. 403-4. A later commentator judges that "for four years, from 1946 to 1950, the personality of Koestler and the success of his works [including *The Yogi and the Commissar* and other books as well as *Darkness at Noon*] played a determining role in the

modification of the French mentality towards the communist problem." Gerard Blum, "Arthur Koestler et le communisme," in Pierre Debray-Ritzen, ed., *Arthur Koestler* (Paris, 1975), p. 212. ³Howe, p. 231. ⁴Postscript to the Danube edition of *Darkness at Noon*, reprinted in Koestler's *Bricks to Babel* (New York, 1980), p. 180. The first and third novels in the trilogy are *The Gladiators* (1939), which depicts the failure of the ancient slave revolt led by Spartacus owing to the leader's unwillingness to practice the necessary unscrupulousness in the choice of means; and *Arrival and Departure* (1943), which explores the psychological roots of political commitment in a contemporary setting. ⁵*The Invisible Writing*, p. 394; "Lenin on His Successors" (excerpt from his "Testament"), in Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties* (New York, 1968), pp. 536-37. According to Koestler he "stumbled on the name 'Rubashov' while rummaging in the lumber-room of memory . . . without remembering where it came from"; he later recalled that it belonged to the editor of the newspaper published by the Palestine Labor party. *The Invisible Writing*, 394. ⁶*The Invisible Writing*, p. 294. Karl Radek, a prominent member of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist party and an associate of Bukharin's, was tried in 1957, a year before

Bukharin, and is believed to have died in prison in 1939.⁷ *The Invisible Writing*, p. 405. For the relevant text of Bukharin's testimony, see Robert C. Tucker and Stephen F. Cohen, eds., *The Great Purge Trial* (New York, 1965), pp. 666-68.⁸ *The Invisible Writing*, pp. 395-401. A Polish intellectual, imprisoned under the Soviet regime during the Second World War, remarks that among his fellow prisoners, accustomed to undergoing merciless torture, "Koestler's novel," if they had known of it, "would have been the subject of gay mockery"; but he nonetheless reports a conversation with an Old Bolshevik about the Moscow trials that confirms what Koestler represents as a secondary cause of Rubashov's confession: the defendants' consciousness of their real guilt for crimes other than those they were charged with, crimes committed on behalf of the state. Aleksander Wat, "The Death of an Old Bolshevik," in Leopold Tyrmand, ed., *Kultura Essays* (New York, 1970), pp. 72-75.⁹ Alexander Orlov, *The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes* (New York, 1953), pp. 280-82; Roy A. Medvedev, *Let History Judge* (New York, 1971), p. 187; Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution* (New York, 1973), pp. 375-76. Medvedev believes there to be "some portion of truth" to Koestler's interpretation as applied to some of the defendants at the trials.¹⁰ For an acute sociological analysis of the disposition of Western intellectuals to serve as apologists for actual Marxist dictatorships, see Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims* (New York, 1981).¹¹ Isaac Deutscher, "The Ex-Communist's Conscience," from *Heretics and Renegades*, reprinted in Murray A. Sperber, ed., *Arthur Koestler: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1977), p. 95.¹² Goronwy Rees, "Darkness at Noon and the 'Grammatical Fiction,'" in Harold Harris, ed., *Astride the Two Cultures: Arthur Koestler at 70* (New York, 1976), p. 117.¹³ Howe, p. 231. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who published *Humanism and Terror* in 1947 to refute Koestler's critique of Marxism, nonetheless observes that "the greatness" of *Darkness at Noon* "is precisely that it leads us to see that Rubashov does not always know how to evaluate his conduct and, at various moments, approves of it and condemns it"; "even in his last hours Rubashov does not disavow the Revolution"; "even in the closing pages of the book, Koestler therefore does not exactly reach a conclusion." *Humanism and Terror*, trans. John O'Neill (Boston, 1969), pp.

xxxvii, 13).¹⁴ *The Invisible Writing*, p. 393.¹⁵ "The Novelist's Temptations," in *The Yogi and the Commissar* (New York, 1945), pp. 26, 29.¹⁶ *The Invisible Writing*, p. 402; *Samson Agonistes*, 11. 80-82.¹⁷ Parenthetical citations within the text refer to the Bantam edition of *Darkness at Noon* (New York, 1966). The authorized English translation by Daphne Hardy, reprinted in this edition, was the first published version of the novel.¹⁸ Matthew 27:45.¹⁹ Cf. Pearson, pp. 66-71; Frederick J. Hoffman, "Darkness at Noon: The Consequences of Secular Grace," *Georgia Review*, vol. 13 (Fall 1959), pp. 331-45; Edwin M. Moseley, *Pseudonyms of Christ in the Modern Novel* (Pittsburgh, 1962), pp. 191-94.²⁰ Koestler reports that his own experience of facing the prospect of execution during his imprisonment by the Spanish Fascists in 1937 profoundly altered his "outlook and values" and led him to recognize "that man is a reality, mankind an abstraction; that men cannot be treated as units in operations of political arithmetic because they behave like the symbols for zero and the infinite, which dislocate all mathematical operations; that the end justifies the means only within very narrow limits; that ethics is not a function of social utility, and charity not a petty-bourgeois sentiment but the gravitational force which keeps civilization in its orbit." Richard Crossman, ed., *The God that Failed* (New York, 1965), pp. 59-60. Rubashov is brought to appreciate each of these truths in the course of *Darkness at Noon*.²¹ As Koestler notes in *The Invisible Writing*, "This symbolic assertion of the basic sameness of the two totalitarian regimes . . . returns as a *leit-motif* in the last lines of the book." P. 394; *Darkness at Noon*, pp. 215-16.²² Cf. Clifford Orwin, "Machiavelli's Unchristian Charity," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 72 (December 1978), p. 1223.²³ Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, aph. no. 60.²⁴ Cf. Merleau-Ponty, p. 28: for the revolutionary, "personal honor" is "considered an abstraction"; the individual "is what he is for others in the context of history," even though "the motive of his actions constitutes a man's worth as he himself experiences it" (p. 62).²⁵ Cf. Marx's introduction to his "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*," in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1978), p. 64: the "total loss of humanity" is a necessary prelude to its "total redemption" (emphasis in original).