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ETERNITY IN *DARKNESS AT NOON* AND THE *CONSOLATION OF PHILOSOPHY*

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"ETERNITY" is not only the last word in the dying mind of Nicolas Salmanovitch Rubashov; it is the final word as well in the whole of Arthur Koestler's well-known novel devoted to Rubashov's character and fate. Such prominence suggests to a reader familiar with classical literature a reference to Boethius on eternity in the *Consolation of Philosophy*. Other parallels so strengthen the suggestion as to lead serious readers to trace the lines along which Koestler and Boethius develop their emphasis upon eternity. Among the most obvious of these parallels is that both are narratives in which unjust imprisonment is a central feature of the setting for each. Yet a surprise awaits those who expect the similarity in setting to result in a resemblance on eternity. Though the topic is important in both works, it is so in very different respects. The differences need marking in a broad, introductory way before turning to the specific terms in which they are developed.

For Boethius, the possession of eternity is paramount and on the scale of possession, God is far higher than man. Yet, according to Boethius, the human capacity to possess eternity is not only large but essential to happiness. By contrast, Rubashov is thoroughly immersed in time, in struggling for power, and in reducing all thought to historical terms. To possess eternity is beyond Rubashov's conception. About eternity, Rubashov's intellect is blank, even black. Only in his last moment of consciousness, described by the narrator, is eternity's power to lift Rubashov up affirmed just as mortality sucks him down.

The role of eternity in the life of Boethius becomes great while it remains minute for Rubashov. That it exists at all for either one is the point of departure for what follows. Before perceiving eternity, each undergoes a conversion in which a forgotten or lost identity is recollected. For Rubashov, the recovery is agonizing and uncertain. The difficulty of recovery is, in turn, related to how slightly Rubashov is connected to eternity. Yet to ignore the conversion and connection altogether has brought embarrassing results to at least one prominent and otherwise careful reader.

In securing for others such a slender but important reference to eternity in *Darkness at Noon*, the conversion of Rubashov needs detailed treatment.

The context for Rubashov's conversion is the conclusion of a trial like the "show trials" in Moscow during the 1930s. Behind the trial is a revolutionary party very much like the Communist Party and a leader, called No. 1 in the novel, who is very much like Stalin. Rubashov appears in the novel as the last surviving member of the party's original central committtee. Much of the conflict in the novel turns on a revolution within the revolutionary party. On the one side is a new generation in the party, a brutal generation; Rubashov calls them "Neanderthalers" to emphasize their savagery. In the pursuit and exercise of power, this generation acknowledges no limits. On the other side is Rubashov's generation of intellectuals, who start out thinking in totalitarian terms but who remain civilized and cultured in their actions, even when they have the power to coerce. In the conflict, Rubashov is a transitional figure, formed in an earlier period but more adaptable to the brutal demands of a later one than many of his peers. He acts as though he has no conscience but, unlike the "Neanderthalers," he comes to hate himself for doing it.

The novel opens with the arrest of Rubashov, the shock and setting of his imprisonment, and his reconstruction of events leading up to the arrest. Three hearings provide titles for each third of the novel and the first third closes with an initial hearing that is conducted by Ivanov, a former friend and college classmate of Rubashov. Ivanov has gone even further than Rubashov in making compromises with the new generation of party leaders. They are in the process of consolidating power by a two-fold strategy. They execute summarily all those members of the older generation who have a perfect record of loyalty to the party and they conduct public trials of those whose record shows some deviation in loyalty. Ivanov closes the first hearing with instructions for Rubashov to confess his opposition to the party and prepare for a trial.

Ivanov's conduct of the second hearing, which dominates the middle of the novel, shows how clearly the new generation is a child of the old. The important details here will be considered later. The point is that Ivanov is not successful in getting a confession. He is executed immediately and the task of making Rubashov confess is given to Gletkin who brings to bear on Rubashov all the crude brutality of the new generation. The public trial based on Rubashov's confession is the third hearing and it concludes with Rubashov's execution. From the point of view of Gletkin, the time between the end of the trial and the execution is insignificant, but for Rubashov it forms the opportunity for conversion.

Rubashov's conversion comes in the novel's last ten pages and is presented in terms so brief and complex as to require not only extended explanation but a strong background in classical philosophy and especially Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. Before turning to these sources and beginning an explanation, the text must be allowed to speak for itself.

> For forty years he had lived strictly in accordance with the vows of his order, the Party. He had held to the rules of logical calculation. He had burnt the remains of the old, illogical morality from his consciousness with the acid of reason. He had turned away from the temptations of the silent partner, and had fought against the "oceanic sense" with all his might.[1] So now it was over. He had nothing more to do with it [the Party or its proceedings]. He no longer had to howl with the wolves. He had paid, his account was settled. He was a man who had lost his shadow, released from every bond. He had followed every thought to its last conclusion and acted in accordance with it to the very end; the hours which remained to him belonged to that silent partner, whose realm started just where logical thought ended.[2]

Eternity's place in the conversion is indicated by the reference to "oceanic sense," which

> the mystics called "ecstasy" and saints "contemplation"; the greatest and soberest of modern psychologists had recognized this state as a fact and called it the "oceanic sense." And, indeed, one's personality dissolved as a grain of salt in the sea; but at the same time the infinite sea seemed to be contained in the grain of salt. (206-207)

The connection between such an oceanic feeling and Rubashov's experience with eternity is clear from the last moment of Rubashov's consciousness, as described by the narrator. The execution is accomplished by two bullets in the back of Rubashov's head, the second, a "smashing blow hit him on the ear. Then all became quiet. There was the sea again with its sounds. A wave slowly lifted him up. It came from afar and travelled sedately on, a shrug of eternity" (216). An "oceanic feeling" is thus the last one Rubashov experiences, a far travelling wave of "infinite sea" rolls on beneath him, lifting and transporting his soul.

A glance at the German edition reveals a bit more. The final phrase, "ein Achselzucken der Unendlichkeit,"[3] or "a shoulder-shrug of endlessness" is especially rich, pointing the reader in several directions at once. The most obvious one to a German reader is the association of *der Unendlichkeit* with Romanticism but readers with a background in classical literature, and especially in *De consolatione*,

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[1] Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*, trans. Daphne Hardy (New York: Bantam, 1966), 209. Hardy's translation is the original edition, which appeared in 1941, and all quotations are taken from it, except where otherwise indicated in direct and specific terms. The reader thus has some assurance that the argument is not dependent upon equivocal or self-serving translations which an author with a point to prove may unwittingly provide.

[2] Ibid., 205.

[3] *Sonnenfinsternis* (Stuttgart: Karl M. Fraas, 1948), 216. The German edition, not published until 1946, some five years after the English translation appeared, offers the following as the final sentence: *Sie kam von ferne und reiste gemächlich weiter, ein Achselzucken der Unendlichkeit* (235). Charles Connell saved me from at least one error in working with the German edition; John Gruber-Miller helped me to avoid several others in representing Boethius' text.

may well note the parallel to *interminabilis vitae* in the famous discussion of *aeternitas* offered by Boethius at 5.6.9-15. There Boethius directs both the living and the dying alike not only to "endless life" but to the whole, simultaneous, and absolute possession of it, "interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio" (5.6.10-11). Such direction immediately raises questions, however, since the similarity of *der Unendlichkeit* and *interminablilis vitae* is compromised by the contrast between *ein Achselzucken* and *tota simul et perfecta possessio*. The prospect of possessing eternity thus fully, however distant it may be, looks very different from the "shoulder-shrug" which Rubashov experiences.

The difference may not, however, be as great as it first seems, especially given the contrast in contexts. Boethius refers to eternity at the end of his reunion with philosophy in the context of an inquiry concerning God's nature ("quis sit divinae substantiae status," 5.6.4) while Koestler's reference pertains to one who has recently been converted to thinking in terms of contemplative subjects. About eternity, the dying Rubashov is still very confused and deeply uncertain. For Rubashov, a "shoulder-shrug" is not only enough; it is, perhaps, as much of eternity as he can stand for the moment. Possession of it lies beyond his capacity to comprehend, much less experience.

Rubashov has no *Philosophia* to guide him on the long journey up the ascending path. The word "God" is out of place in the circles Rubashov has frequented and he dares not to say such a word as an affirmation. Rubashov has, instead of Lady Philosophy, only a "silent partner" whose existence Rubashov has often denied in conformity with Party-approved thinking. Rubashov thus resembles, not so much Boethius at the end of his journey where discussion of God and his nature makes sense, but Boethius as Lady Philosophy first found him, a lost, deluded figure struggling against the best in his nature.

Darkness at Noon may be read, and will here be discussed, as a gloss on the first few books of the *Consolation of Philosophy*. The cement which binds these two works together is, put in the most general terms, an agreement on what ails the central figure in each and how a cure is accomplished for them. In similarly broad terms, many of the striking and fundamental differences between these two works are due to the gravity of Rubashov's illness and the very limited scope of his recovery before death overtakes him. He is a far, far sicker figure than Boethius, as will become clear by a comparison of their conditions.

Lady Philosophy makes the diagnosis of Boethius at 1.2.12. Boethius suffers from lethargy, not in its modern sense of lacking energy but in its root sense of forgetfulness. The Latin word *lethargus* transliterates λήθαργος, derived from λήθη. The disease is especially common among those who are being prosecuted for misdeeds they did not commit. Socrates was among the first to show the course of the disease. The *Apology* opens with Socrates' admission that the prosecution has been so persuasive in pressing the charges against him that "I myself actually almost forgot myself" (ἐγὼ δ' οὖν καὶ αὐτὸς ὑπ' αὐτῶν ὀλίγου ἐμαυτοῦ

ἐπελθόμην, 17A2-4). The remedy is, of course, a process of recollection, which Socrates seems to have prescribed and administered for himself as he reviewed the charges made against him and narrated the circumstances and conduct that had been misrepresented by his accusers (18D-28B). The *Apology* is thus a preface to the full doctrine of ἀνάμνησις or remembrance that later appears more fully at *Meno* 81-86 and *Phaedo* 72-76. There Plato presents the soul forgetting its eternity while suffering the harsh imprisonment of the body but then, as philosophy draws it nearer the truth, the soul recollects the knowledge of eternity.

Lady Philosophy extends Socrates' experience to the case of Boethius. She not only diagnoses the problem in terms of forgetfulness but actually specifies what Socrates and Boethius both forgot, "quid ipse sis, nosse desisti": you have forgotten what you yourself are (1.6.40). Furthermore, the climax of *De consolatione*, in book 3 where Boethius is reintroduced to eternity by Lady Philosophy, is marked by an ode to Socrates and his pupil, Plato. The ode begins with a reference to self-knowledge and ends by referring to recollection.

> Quisquis profunda mente vestigat verum
> Cupitque nullis ille deviis falli,
> In se revolvat intimi lucem visus
> . . . . . .
> Quod si Platonis musa personat verum,
> Quod quisque discit immemor recordatur.
> (3.11.1-3, 15-16)

Compared to Boethius, much less Socrates, Rubashov's progress in recollecting eternity is painfully slow, thinly presented, and thus faintly realized. To understand why requires grasping the full wretchedness of Rubashov's condition. Boethius, even at his worst, seems almost aglow with health compared to Rubashov. The difference can clearly be seen by looking briefly at the lowest moments of each character. As the *Consolation of Philosophy* opens, Boethius is awake in his cell with pen in hand, reviewing the misfortune that has fallen upon him and framing the verses to express vividly his lament. Lady Philosophy appears above Boethius' head and he can see some of her features clearly, especially her outer garments, but her face and head are but dimly visible, partly because they rise to such heights that the clouds sometimes obscure them but mainly because the tears in Boethius' eyes prevent him from beholding what Lady Philosophy offers for him to see (1.1.44-45).

Rubashov is asleep in his prison cell, possessed by a nightmare of utter paralysis at the very moment in which his life may depend upon choice and action. The worst moment is yet to come, however, as the remembered reality of his arrest shatters the nightmare and the half-awake Rubashov is stranded between the nightmare of paralysis and the reality of imprisonment, unable to distinguish clearly one from the other, so profound is his disorientation (3-4). If the worst moment for Boethius

derives from his impaired perception of philosophical truth, the parallel condition for Rubashov is far more debilitating. Boethius may have forgotten who he is and how closely he is linked to eternity, but Rubashov has no clear, enduring self left by which he can form the basis for distinguishing between reality and illusion. The only thing real to him for years has been what the revolutionary party dictates and an ambiguous impulse for physical survival which is tied to perpetuating the party. It is the only source of durability and direction Rubashov knows. Even worse, the party, as his guide, is dedicated to abolishing the self, all references to eternity or God, and any capacity to imagine what such references might mean.

In attacking the self, the party stalked its prey without guile or subtlety. Nothing less would satisfy it than a massive assault on common use of the first person singular. "I" was such a forbidden word that Rubashov referred to it as the "grammatical fiction" (121, 205). In the prison diary Rubashov kept, he noted how the party insisted that "Questions of personal pride; prejudices such as exist elsewhere against certain forms of self- abasement; personal feelings of tiredness, disgust and shame–are to be cut off root and branch . . ." (137).

Rubashov's conversion from following the party comes as he, like Boethius, rediscovers or recollects who he is. The process begins with the entry of his "silent partner"; it is strongly advanced by the increasing importance of memory to Rubashov, and it culminates in Rubashov's acknowledgement of eternity and the "oceanic feeling" which he associates with it. An element of eternity emerges, however, even in the first moments at which Rubashov discovers "der stumme Partner" (*Sonnenfinsternis*, 99, 224), the "silent Partner" whose existence the party had denied by insisting that talking to one's self is but a vacant monologue.

> Rubashov had always believed that he knew himself rather well . . . he had no illusions about the phenomenon called the "first person singular,". . . [But now] he made unexpected discoveries. He found out that those processes wrongly known as "monologues" are really dialogues of a special kind; dialogues in which one partner remains silent while the other, against all grammatical rules, addresses him as "I" instead of "you" . . . but the silent partner just remains silent, shuns observation and even refuses to be localized in time and space.
>
> (87-88)

The refusal to be localized in time and space is initially experienced by Rubashov in the form of memory. Yet what he remembers most seems, at first glance, unrelated to ἀνάμνησις in Plato and Boethius. Few, if any, of their philosophical commonplaces surface directly and explicitly in Rubashov's experience with memory. Much of it is devoted to recalling a sexual affair he had with a subordinate named Arlova (90-98, 119-120, 125-127, 205-206). She had loved him, had trusted him, and finally, when she was arrested and tried for opposing the party, she looked to him to lead her defense. He refused. He even disavowed her publicly, justifying the betrayal to himself by the logic of time and history. Such logic will be discussed

below. What is relevant here is that the memory of Arlova eventually broke the logic of time and place and awakened in Rubashov a sense of personal responsibility and a strength of self that was sufficient to support Rubashov's conversion. Though Arlova bears little resemblance to Lady Philosophy, she is, given the circumstances, no less instrumental in breaking the chains upon Rubashov's mind and she deserves to be considered as Lady Philosophy's parallel in *Darkness at Noon.*

The chains are not easily broken, however, and the climax of Koestler's novel revolves around Rubashov's struggle with them. Even after recovering the memory of Arlova and discovering his "silent Partner," Rubashov easily slips back into his old way of thinking. "He was still fascinated by the problem as to whether to-day, after the experiences of the last few months and days, he would again send Arlova to her death. He did not know" (127).

Rubashov's uncertainity about such a "problem" is provoked and advanced by Ivanov, whose long interview with Rubashov marks the climax of the novel. The interview seems to end with the victory of Ivanov plus the moral and spiritual exhaustion of Rubashov but it is followed by the execution of Ivanov and the severe restriction in the novel of all that he represents. Extended analysis is required to explain how the anomaly relates to Rubashov's conversion and the limits of space here permit little more than a sketch of the relationship between Rubashov and Ivanov, especially its background and significance for the struggle within Rubashov.

Koestler provides Rubashov and Ivanov with a common background and an apparently common fate. They are both revolutionary "theorists" in the age before revolution becomes an excuse for tyranny and theory is still associated rather with decisions about policy than with compulsion and coercion. The new age of absolute and arbitrary rule by No. 1 in the party is represented in the novel by Gletkin, a tireless, almost mindless extension of the party *apparat*. Rubashov and Ivanov seem equally at odds with the "crudity" of No. 1 and his slavish instrument, Gletkin, who supervises the brutal elimination of all who might compete with No. 1 for power.

The point of most extreme contention between Rubashov and Ivanov emerges near the end of their interview, when Ivanov observes:

> "There are only two conceptions of human ethics, and they are at opposite poles. One of them is Christian and humane, declares the individual to be sacrosanct, and asserts that the rules of arithmetic are not to be applied to human units. The other 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."
>
> (128)

Rubashov objects:

> "To me it sometimes seems as though the experimenters had torn the skin off the victim and left it standing with bared tissues, muscles and nerves. . . ."

> "Well, and what of it?" said Ivanov happily. "Don't you find it wonderful? Has anything more wonderful ever happened in history? We are tearing the old skin off mankind and giving it a new one. That is not an occupation for people with weak nerves; but there was once a time when it filled you with enthusiasm. What has so changed you that you are now as pernickety as an old maid?"
>
> (130)

Koestler's German provides "zu einer wehleidigen alten Jungfer geworden bist" for the last line and *wehleidigen* is perhaps inadequately rendered by a word so archaic as "pernickety" is today (144). A more literal translation would offer: "you have become a whining old maid." Rubashov considers briefly a reply which invokes memory, especially the memory of friendships he has betrayed and the people who are executed or tormented because of his failure to help them. Arlova is the most promient and extended example but numerous others leap to his mind as well and each is a prospective source of regret, shame and woe to him. The more Rubashov rejects Ivanov and all he stands for the more conspicuous becomes his tendency to whine.

Rejection of Ivanov was a struggle for Rubashov and Ivanov knew it well. Ivanov even draws from Christian imagery to mock Rubashov's difficulty:

> "*Apage Satanas*!" repeated Ivanov and poured himself out another glass [of brandy]. "In old days, temptation was of carnal nature. Now it takes the form of pure reason. The values change. I would like to write a Passion play in which God and the Devil dispute for the soul of Saint Rubashov."
>
> (121)

The "reasoning" of the Devil echoes in Rubashov's mind throughout his interview with Ivanov. The following is but one of many examples, though an especially significant one because it returns attention to unexplained terms in the first quotation to appear here from *Darkness at Noon*.

> When a year ago he had sent Arlova to her death, he had not had enough imagination to picture the details of an execution. Would he now behave differently merely because he now knew some of its aspects? Either it was right– or it was wrong to sacrifice Richard, Arlova, and Little Loewy. But what had. . . [their suffering and death] to do with the objective rightness or wrongness of the measure itself?"
>
> (125-126)

When at novel's end Rubashov's conversion is as complete as his life will permit, he looks back upon his past to observe that he has lived as the Party demands, he has "held to the rules of logical calculation. He ha[s] burnt the remains of the old, illogical morality from his consciousness with the acid of reason" (209). The "rules . . . of calculation" to which Rubashov refers here determine the "objective rightness or wrongness" of any means, including

executions, and the rules are derived from what Rubashov calls "das Gesetz des historischen Kredits" (90), "the law of historical credit" (79).

"He who is in the wrong must pay; he who is in the right will be absolved . . . [such] was our law" (79). And it was a law full of surprises for many, including Rubashov. Before turning to specifics, the importance for Koestler's novel of time and history needs to be emphasized.

From the opening admonition to study history, which Rubashov gives to a young policeman who arrests him (8), to the end of Gletkin's interrogation, when Rubashov is promised that he will be vindicated according to "history's textbook" (194), the weight of time contributes much to securing both the plot for the novel as well as the line of development along which the major characters move. Certainly in Rubashov's character, only the struggle within and the theme of conversion take precedence to time and history in explaining the experiences associated with him. Furthermore, confusion about why Rubashov "gives in" to Gletkin and the party can be partially dispelled or avoided by preliminary attention to the importance of time and history.

Above all, the reference to eternity at the end of the novel remains largely inexplicable so long as Rubashov's references to time and history are discounted or neglected. While time and history remain a central issue for Rubashov, eternity, and all that it represents, lies beyond his grasp, but once "his account was settled" (205), then he gains release from the law of historical credit and turns to meet the lifting wave of eternity.

The plot of *Darkness at Noon* is explained in terms of time and history by the first extract provided by the novel from Rubashov's diary. Before turning to it, some introduction to the diary is needed. Material for the diary comes from Ivanov, who supports it as the best method to accomplish the crushing of Rubashov's resistance to the party. According to Ivanov, keeping a diary serves to advance Rubashov's thinking in ways which affirm the power of the party and thus the diary is an easy substitute for harsher methods, like torture and interrogation. As Ivanov observes to Gletkin, "When Rubashov capitulates . . . it won't be out of cowardice, but by logic. It is no use trying the hard method with him" (82). Rubashov's diary thus becomes a surrogate for Ivanov long after the mind of the man, and even the man himself, has been eliminated. The resemblance, especially in historical and temporal terms, is clear from the following lines of the diary:

> We have learnt history more thoroughly than the others. We differ from all others in our logical consistency. We know that virtue does not matter to history, and that crimes remain unpunished; but that every error had its consequences and venges itself unto the seventh generation. Therefore we concentrated all our efforts on preventing error and destroying the very seeds of it. Never in history has so much power over the future of humanity been concentrated in so few hands as in our case. Each wrong idea we follow is a crime committed against future generations.

> Therefore we have to punish wrong ideas as others punish crimes: with death. . . . We lived under the compulsion of working things out to their final conclusions. Our minds were so tensely charged that the slightest collision caused a mortal short-circuit. Thus we were fated to mutual destruction.
>
> I was one of those. I have thought and acted as I had to; I destroyed people whom I was fond of, and gave power to others I did not like. History put me where I stood; I have exhausted the credit which she accorded me: If I was right I have nothing to repent of; if wrong, I will pay.
>
> (80)

Darkness at Noon develops along lines which demonstrate the accuracy of Rubashov's observations about what time will bring, though in more subtle ways than are indicated above. As time tells, both the party and those who resist it are right at some periods and wrong at others, each alternating with the other the privileges of vengeance. At the end of Rubashov's interrogation, Gletkin confirms the point for the new age of the party. He admits to Rubashov that future ages will reverse the condemnation of Rubashov. Rubashov will be vindicated while Gletkin and his associates will implicitly be vilified, "And then you, and some of your friends of the older generation, will be given the sympathy and pity which are denied to you to-day" (194). Such an admission by Gletkin serves to fulfill the observation which Rubashov makes in his diary–"Thus we were fated to mutual destruction" (80). As one age gives way to another, each side takes its turn at being the victor and the vanquished in the temporal cycles of mutual destruction.

Rubashov's tentative affirmation of eternity enables him to begin breaking out of time's destructive cycle and his conversion in this respect parallels the development of Boethius as Lady Philosophy leads him along at the end of book one and throughout books two and three. The variability of *fortuna* is *Philosophia*'s lesson here. The rich and the poor, the powerful and the weak, the glorious and the obscure are all subject to the reverses of time. The people most in need of consolation are not those who happen now to be poor, weak, and obscure, for they are the least subject to the blindness which pretense brings. Delusion clings fiercely to the strong, rich, and glorious, however, as they project today's triumph into the prospect of a dominance everlasting. To avoid nasty surprises, the temporal goods of life are best regarded as on loan to us, subject to recall at a moment's notice. *Philosophia*'s opening appeal to Boethius in book two concludes with her own version of the law of historical credit.

> Si ventis vela committeres, non quo voluntas peteret sed quo flatus impellerent, promoveres; si arvis semina crederes, feraces inter se annos sterilesque pensares. Fortunae te regendum dedisti; dominae moribus oportet obtemperes. Tu vero voluentis rotae impetum retinere conaris? At, omnium mortalium stolidissime, si manere incipit, fors esse desistit.
>
> (2.1.55-62)

In stressing the parallel here between the *Consolation of Philosophy* and *Darkness at Noon*, caution is required to grasp the limits of Rubashov's progress in these terms. The calm of a soul quite free of the world's many distractions remains beyond Rubashov. The most that can safely be said of him is that he turns his back on the clang and clamor of contending sides as they cancel each other out across the ages of vengeance and recrimination.

Furthermore, Rubashov's aversion is by no means a source of enlightenment for him. Immediately before feeling the impact of the executioner's first bullet, Rubashov contrasts his condition to that of Moses.

> Moses had not been allowed to enter the land of promise either. But he had been allowed to see it, from the top of the mountain, spread at his feet. Thus, it was easy to die, with the visible certainity of one's goal before one's eyes. He, Nicolas Salmanovitch Rubashov, had not been taken to the top of a mountain; and wherever his eye looked, he saw nothing but desert and the darkness of night. (215)

But with the second bullet, the desert and darkness yield to a wave which, slowly coming from afar, lifted Rubashov up, a shrug of eternity's shoulder.

So small is the opening which Koestler allows to eternity here that even the most careful and serious reader may miss it altogether. Efforts to read *Darkness at Noon* in its historical and political context complicate even further any effort to understand the importance of Koestler's reference to eternity. Consider, for example, George Orwell's reading of the novel.

Few writers active in the early 1940s were better qualified to relate the novel to the events that surrounded it, especially the rise of totalitarianism and the threat it posed to nations affirming the rule of law and the protection of individuals from mistreatment by the state. From the mid-1930s on, Orwell was a first-hand observer of the kind of mentality and practices described in Koestler's novel. Furthermore, Orwell clearly demonstrated a desire to give credit to Koestler when he deserved it. Thus, Orwell observed that *Darkness at Noon* "reaches the stature of tragedy."[4] The choices Rubashov confronted were fully developed on what Orwell called an "aesthetic level" well above the "polemical tract" so characteristic of most efforts by novelists to address the issues raised by Communism and Fascism.

Yet, such an able, appreciative, and well-informed reader comes up empty-handed in an attempt to read the novel in a way that explains its end. According to Orwell, the main issue is not Rubashov's conversion or his struggle for an identity that transcends politics and finds an opening to eternity. Instead, "the whole book centres round one question: Why did Rubashov confess?"[5] Orwell

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[4] *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. Sonia Orwell & Ian Angus (New York: HarBrace, 1968), 3: 238.

[5] Ibid.

asserts that three explanations are possible for all those who confessed in "show trials" like the one Koestler represented in the novel. The accused confessed because of (1) guilt, (2) torture and blackmail, or (3) "despair, mental bankruptcy and the habit of loyalty to the Party."[6]

Orwell insists that utter despair prevails in Rubashov's soul.

> Rubashov ultimately confesses because he cannot find in his own mind any reason for not doing so. Justice and objective truth have long ceased to have any meaning for him. For decades he has been simply the creature of the Party, and what the Party now demands is that he shall confess to non-existent crimes. . . . What is there, what code, what loyalty, what notion of good and evil, for the sake of which he can defy the Party and endure further torment? He is not only alone, he is also hollow.[7]

Having thus misread the novel, Orwell goes beyond it to attribute to Koestler himself views which are an extension of Rubashov's character. According to Orwell, Koestler's disillusionment with the Russian Revolution and its consequences had resulted in a pessimism so deep that he abandoned all hope for major political change and thus all effort to organize and effect it. All that remains, as Orwell says of Koestler's position, is "to keep out of politics, make a sort of oasis within which you and your friends can remain sane, and hope that somehow things will be better in a hundred years."[8]

Closer attention to the end of Koestler's novel against the background of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* may have saved Orwell from such an obvious misreading of the novel and misrepresentation of the author. To Orwell's credit, however, he quickly corrected the mistake in an essay published a year after the erroneous account described above.[9] Koestler made the correction easier by his writings on the importance of a contemplative approach to politics. Put briefly and generally, Koestler claims that the crisis posed by Communism and Fascism is a spiritual crisis which results from decades of approaching politics in reductionistic terms that stresses little more than biological or socio-economic utility. To avoid such crises in the future, and perhaps the destructive consequences associated with them, our contact with eternity must be recognized and enlarged. Only from the perspective of eternity do the limits of political power become clear to the point that the amibition for it can be checked and contained. "Neither the saint nor the revolutionary can save us; only the synthesis of the two."[10]

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[6] Ibid., 3: 239.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid., 3: 244.
[9] Ibid., 4: 17-19.
[10] Arthur Koestler, *The Yogi and the Commissar and Other Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1945), 247.

In the very different context of classical philosophy as represented in the Platonic dialogues, Koestler's novel can be considered as an imaginative postscript to the story of Callicles or Thrasymachus. Each in a different way has embraced power as the love of his life, fully expecting that his devotion to it will insure that power will always be his. Each says with the pride of those who prevail for a day that might makes right forever (*Republic* 339A; *Gorgias* 484A). Plato does not permit us to see Callicles and Thrasymachus when the sun has set on their day in the precincts of power. We may well envision them as tyrants who have been betrayed and overwhelmed by those whose hunger for power is even greater than their own. Had we been allowed to see Callicles or Thrasymachus so abused and crushed, they may well have resembled Rubashov as he attempts to recollect an identity based on something beneath, or even better, beyond the perpetual confusion and contention ever associated with struggles for power. If their recollection reaches the point of a conversion and, like Rubashov, they find an opening to eternity, then they may well say of their past that they were "omnium mortalium stolidissim[i]," "the most foolish of all mortals" (*De consolatione* 2.1.61).

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