Retrospective

Zygon's readership, unlike the readership of most scholarly periodicals, is not trying to keep up to date in the literature of an established field but trying to establish a new field. There are no doctoral programs in religion and natural science, few in religion and social science. Those interested in these topics have usually been driven to their interest by questions which remained unresolved elsewhere. Thus the bibliographical needs of *Zygon*'s readers are not only those ordinarily met by a scholarly periodical but also, often enough, those that would more ordinarily be met by a survey course at the undergraduate level.

By way of response to this fact of intellectual life, *Zygon* is introducing, as of the present number, a new feature to be entitled "Retrospective," which will direct attention to influential contributions to the science-religion dialogue published over the past fifty years. On occasion, "Retrospective" may consider a set of works by different authors with a similar approach. More often, it will deal with the complete *oeuvre* of a given thinker. In the latter case, the feature will pretend neither to critical finality nor to bibliographic completeness but will only attempt a general orientation of modest scope. Plans are afoot for retrospective consideration of Michael Polanyi, Theodosius Dobzhansky, and C. F. von Weiszäcker. Others will surely follow. In the current issue, the first part of a two-part retrospective considers the early writings of Arthur Koestler.—J.A.M., Jr., Book Review Editor.

ARTHUR KOESTLER/PART ONE

by John A. Miles, Jr.

To most of the literate public, Arthur Koestler is a novelist, and that on the strength of his one best-seller, *Darkness at Noon.* In fact, more than half of Koestler's twenty-volume output deals with the history and philosophy of science; and his fiction itself, most of it written under the impact of his break with Communism, is of a particularly speculative and exploratory variety. In none of Koestler's novels do women or children dominate. In all of them, description is rare and characterization indicative rather than evocative. In all of them, however, the ruminations of the central, male character are reproduced at length, often in the form of diary entries; and in all of them, a climactic conversation occurs in which Koestler—as Plato in the *Dialogues*—advances his own thinking by successive identification with "pure"

John A. Miles, Jr., is assistant professor of religious studies and assistant director of Scholars Press, University of Montana.

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positions, none of which, in real life, he could adopt. As the titles of his works suggest, Koestler is a peculiarly dialectical thinker, and such fiction is often the perfect vehicle for his thought. He is, in short, not a philosopher-novelist but a thinker who employs without apology whatever literary form best expresses his thought.

Koestler's work falls into three fairly distinct cycles. The first begins in 1939 with *The Gladiators,* a historical novel expressing Koestler's first misgivings about Communism, and ends in 1954 with his two-volume autobiography. Intervening works include four novels, two volumes of prison camp memoirs, and a book-length essay on the failure of Communism as a crisis in the history of science and religion.

The second cycle, a response to the crisis identified in the first, contains five works: *Insight and Outlook* (1949), *The Sleepwalkers* (1959), *The Lotus and the Robot* (1960), *The Act of Creation* (1964), and *The Ghost in the Machine* (1967). *Insight and Outlook,* subtitled *An Inquiry into the Common Foundations of Science, Art and Ethics,* was originally conceived as the first volume of a two-volume, two-year project. The two years grew to eighteen, but the two-volume plan survives in *The Act of Creation* and *The Ghost in the Machine,* which together constitute an elaborate revision of *Insight and Outlook* and deal, respectively, with the creativity and the pathology of the human mind. *The Sleepwalkers,* subtitled *A History of Man's Changing Vision of the Universe,* and *The Lotus and the Robot,* a story of the contemplative traditions of India and Japan, were, as Koestler describes them in *The Act of Creation* (p. 22), "excursions" which "acquired a momentum of their own."

In the third cycle, Koestler, who will be seventy on September 5, 1975, attempts his boldest speculations. His *The Case of the Midwife Toad* (1972) rehabilitates the reputation of Paul Kammerer, a zoologist whose experiments attempted to prove the inheritance of acquired characteristics in amphibians. His *The Roots of Coincidence* (1972) links quantum physics and parapsychology in a holistic, a-causal cosmology. Though much briefer than *The Sleepwalkers, The Case of the Midwife Toad* is, like it, a historical essay tending toward a philosophical conclusion. There are, similarly, points of contact between Koestler's study of Eastern contemplation in *The Lotus and the Robot* and his study of extrasensory perception in *The Roots of Coincidence.* The major work, however, to which these "excursions" may lead home is at present only to be guessed at.

From a scientific point of view, Koestler's second and third cycles might be seen as his psychology and his cosmology, respectively. From a theological point of view, however, they are his attempt, by systematic reflection on the nature of man and the universe, to understand the faith which he discovered at the time of his apostasy from Communism. In *The Invisible Writing,* the second volume of his autobiography, Koestler wrote:

> I went to Communism as one goes to a spring of fresh water, and I left Communism as one clambers out of a poisoned river strewn with the wreckage of flooded cities and the corpses of the drowned. This, in sum, is my story from 1931. . . . The reeds to which I clung and which saved me from being swallowed up were the outgrowth of a new faith, rooted in mud, slippery, elusive, yet tenacious. The quality of that faith I cannot define beyond saying that in my youth I regarded the universe as an open book, printed in the language of physical equations and social determinants, whereas now it appears to me as a text written in invisible ink, of which, in our rare moments of grace, we are able to decipher a small fragment. [P. 15]

Nearly all Koestler's writing can be seen as the rational exploration of his "new faith." However, unlike Christian theologians, whose traditional terms of analysis are philosophical, Koestler has analyzed his experience through science and imaginative literature. Convinced a priori that his faith is true, he has endeavored, first, to discern its implications for the future of science and, second, to give it a provisional formulation in terms of science as presently practiced.

Koestler's faith is conservative as well as progressive, but his defense of it appears in such unwonted guise that those who read, say, only *Darkness at Noon* or only *The Ghost in the Machine* may scarcely realize that a defense is in hand at all. Koestler freely admits that the content of his faith

> . . . when put into words, . . . appears under the dowdy guise of perennial commonplaces: 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. Nothing can sound more flat-footed than such verbalizations of a knowledge which is not of a verbal nature; yet every single one of these trivial statements was incompatible with the Communist faith which I held. [*The God That Failed,* p. 68]

The verbalizations just quoted are indeed "flat-footed." The point, of course, is that Koestler does not rest with them. All science is the demonstration of truth already known: that the sun is hot, that offspring resemble their parents, etc. Koestler's has been the attempt to demonstrate certain equally familiar truths of a moral order.

The theology, so to call it, of Koestler's second and third cycles is rooted in the autobiography of his first cycle; and at the heart of that autobiography there lies an experience which the author underwent in 1937, while awaiting execution in the Fascist jail:

> I met with it for the first time a day or two after I had been transferred to Seville. I was standing at the recessed window of cell No. 40 and, with a piece of iron-spring that I had extracted from the wire mattress, was scratching mathematical formulae on the wall. . . . I tried the ellipse and the parabola and to my delight succeeded. Next I went on to recall Euclid's proof that the number of primes is infinite. . . . Since I had become acquainted with Euclid's proof at school, it had always filled me with a deep satisfaction that was aesthetic rather than intellectual. Now, as I recalled the method and scratched the symbols on the wall, I felt the same enchantment.
>
> And then, for the first time, I suddenly understood the reason for this enchantment: the scribbled symbols on the wall represented one of the rare cases where a meaningful and comprehensive statement about the infinite is arrived at by precise and finite means. The infinite is a mystical mass shrouded in a haze; and yet it was possible to gain some knowledge of it without losing oneself in treacly ambiguities. The significance of this swept over me like a wave. The wave had originated in an articulate verbal insight; but this evaporated at once, leaving in its wake only a wordless essence, a fragrance of eternity, a quiver of the arrow in the blue. I must have stood there for some minutes, entranced, with a wordless awareness that "this is perfect—perfect." [*The Invisible Writing,* pp. 350–51]

This experience—Koestler refers to it simply as "the hours by the window"—served as direct inspiration for a trilogy of novels, *The Gladiators,*

Darkness at Noon, and *Arrival and Departure,* and for a summary essay, *The Yogi and the Commissar,* in the writing of which Koestler seems to have discovered the larger intellectual task to which he was to devote his remarkable powers of insight and exposition.

The Gladiators, a fictionalization of the slave revolt of Spartacus (73–71 B.C.), serves Koestler as *Animal Farm* served Orwell, namely, as a cipher for the history of the Russian Revolution. Koestler's Spartacus is inspired to found a communist slave-city (there are allusions to this in classical literature) by an expatriate Essene. However, he borrows the Essene economic program without its religious underpinning, and the project falls victim to the "law of detours," the temporary—and then permanent—use of means which contradict the declared end. The slave army is defeated. Its victor, the Crassus of the First Triumvirate, lectures Spartacus: ". . . you should have assured the world that poverty holds blessing and distinction, while wealth is but a curse. You should have dethroned the lazy and licentious gods of Olympus, and invented new gods corresponding to your aims and interests. All this you neglected to do. Your Sun City perished because you failed to invent a new god and priests to serve him" (p. 289).

Spartacus, a semi-Asiatic Thracian, appears to represent Lenin. Crixus, the brutish but shrewd lieutenant who is carried to power by the inner flaw in Spartacus's program, is patently Stalin. Crassus, a merchant shrewd in debunking the ethics of others, may be Western capitalism. The final scene in the novel, in which the remnant of the slave army is crucified along the road that carries Crassus to Rome is the final, inevitable defeat of socialism, a defeat which Koestler, in 1939, fully expected.

Darkness at Noon is Koestler's re-creation of the 1930s interrogation and show trial of an old-line Russian revolutionary. Once again, the clash of faiths dominates the dialogue, and the subordination of means to ends is the disputed issue. During his first two hearings, Rubashov, the accused, is opposed by Interrogator Ivanov, like himself a father of the 1917 revolution. Ivanov wishes Rubashov to promote the loyalty of the people to "No. 1" (plainly Stalin) by confessing not just to the mild, academic revisionism of which he is in fact guilty but also to treason he has not committed. The confession, like the personality cult of Stalin itself, is a detour on the road to proletarian justice; but as a consistent Communist, Rubashov must—Ivanov argues—take the detour: He must sacrifice himself as he has sacrified others.

Ivanov correctly surmises that his major power over Rubashov is the latter's loyalty to "his order, the Party" (p. 209). In his prison diary, Rubashov writes:

> Politics can be relatively fair in the breathing spaces of history; at its critical turning points there is no other rule possible than the old one, that the end justifies the means. We introduced neo-Machiavellianism into this country; the others, the counter-revolutionary dictatorships, have clumsily imitated it. We were neo-Machiavellians in the name of universal reason—that was our greatness; the others in the name of a national romanticism, that is their anachronism. [Pp. 78–79]

In other words, the end does not justify the means unless the end is the rule of reason. In that one case, the refusal to employ any given means is unreasonable by definition.

Ivanov, aware that Rubashov has acted on this principle in many specific instances, uses it against him in the interrogation. When Rubashov invokes Dostoyevsky in *Crime and Punishment,* Ivanov counters:

> Since the invention of the steam engine, . . . the world has been permanently in an abnormal state. . . . Your Raskolnikov is . . . a fool and a criminal; not because he behaves logically in killing the old woman, but because he is doing it in his personal interest. . . . If Raskolnikov had bumped off the old woman at the command of the Party—for example, to increase strike funds or to install an illegal Press—then the equation would stand, and the novel with its misleading problem would never have been written, and so much the better for humanity. [P. 27]

Rubashov's only real defense is his growing skepticism about the ability of the present to decide what will be judged truth in the future. He writes in his diary: "We have thrown all ballast overboard; only one anchor holds us: faith in one's self. . . . No. 1 has faith in himself, tough, slow, sullen, and unshakable. . . . Mine has worn thin in the last few years" (p. 81).

Unfortunately, Rubashov's loss of faith strikes at more than Communism. As Ivanov objects elsewhere: "Should we sit with idle hands because the consequences of an act are never quite to be foreseen, and hence all action is evil? . . . In the opposite camp they are not so scrupulous" (p. 131).

Rubashov leaves the second hearing ready to confess. Unfortunately, by the opening of the third hearing, Ivanov himself has been killed—executed "administratively" for temporizing with Rubashov. His replacement, more given to physical than to psychological persuasion, quickly forces a confession. The show trial is held. Rubashov, simulating the repentant traitor to perfection, is sentenced to be shot. Only in the privacy of his cell, during the last hours before his execution, does he defect:

> What had he once written in his diary? "We have thrown overboard all conventions, our sole guiding principle is that of consequent logic; we are sailing without ethical ballast."
>
> Perhaps the heart of the evil lay there. Perhaps it did not suit mankind to sail without ballest. And perhaps reason alone was a defective compass, which led one on such a winding, twisted course that the goal finally disappeared in the mist. [Pp. 210–11]

In lines strongly redolent of Koestler's "hours at the window," Rubashov recalls his abandoned studies in music and astrophysics. He remembers moments when the "oceanic sense" overcame him and comes close to yielding again. He begins to dream: "a new movement . . . new flags, a new spirit knowing of both: of economic fatality *and* the 'oceanic sense.' Perhaps the members of the new party will wear monks' cowls, and preach that only purity of means can justify ends. Perhaps they will teach that the tenet is wrong which says that a man is the quotient of one million divided by one million" (p. 211). His dream is broken off by the drums of the approaching execution squad.

As *Darkness at Noon* confronts the failure of the mind adequately to predict the consequences of action, so *Arrival and Departure* confronts its parallel failure adequately to recover the origins of action. Peter Slavek, a hero of the resistance, has escaped Germany and made his way to Neutralia (Portugal), hoping through the good offices of the British consul to enlist in the British army. While waiting for his visa, he falls in love with a French girl and suffers an attack of hysterical paralysis when she leaves for the United States. A psychoanalyst friend of his family, waiting for her own passage to the States, cures him of his paralysis but is forced, in so doing, to expose the neurotic roots of his earlier heroism. The result is that, as Peter recovers his

ability to walk, he loses his desire to fight: ". . . that was over. He was cured; never again would he make a fool of himself. He was cured of his illusions, both about objective aims and subjective motives. The two lines had converged and met. No more debts to pay, no more commands to obey. Let the dead bury their dead. For him, Peter Slavek, the crusade had come to an end" (p. 127). He books passage on the next ship to the United States.

Peter's analysis is both absorbing and convincing. Like Crassus in *The Gladiators* and Ivanov in *Darkness at Noon,* Sonia, his analyst, holds what appears at all points to be the more logical position:

> She began by exposing the false trails, demolishing meaningless catchwords like "courage," "sacrifice," or "the just cause." History, she explained, was not an epos, but a chain of anecdotes. The heroic Swiss Guard died to the last man on the staircase of the Tuilleries in defence of a chicken-brained coquette against the upholders of the Rights of Man; . . . at all times people had sacrified themselves for good or bad, enlightened or stupid causes with the same fervour. Thus, if one wanted to explain why Peter had behaved as he did, one had to discard from the beginning his so-called convictions and ethical beliefs. They were mere pretexts of the mind, phantoms of a more intimate reality. . . . the real clue was this suspect craving for martyrdom. [P. 119]

Peter's fervor is further flayed in a conversation with a young Nazi agent who argues with extraordinary persuasiveness that the unification of Europe into a single Reich is not only inevitable but also, however painful in the short run, desirable. Slavek's courage is not only illusory then but also futile. And yet, as in each of the earlier novels, a less articulate certainty gradually takes command. Peter writes a fable about ancient Greece—a youth compulsively draws triangles in the sand; a wise old man explains jealousy to him and the "love-triangle":

> The young man, whose name was Pythagoras, jumped to his feet. "Praised by the gods that you have solved the riddle which haunted my mind! Instead of going on drawing those foolish triangles, as I have done for the past two years, I shall now go home and give Celia a sound thrashing, as befits a reasonable man." . . . and thus the Pythagorean Proposition was never found. [Pp. 157–58]

He boards the American ship, but before it hoists anchor, he glimpses through the porthole (or does he? we are left wondering) a Communist comrade whose courage under interrogation had once saved him from arrest. He leaps from the ship at the last instant, leaving all his belongings on board, and follows through with his initial plan to enlist in the British army.

Peter's last actions on neutral soil are the composition, first, of a short story entitled "The Last Judgment" in which a young man, a "crusader in search of a cross," is condemned to "Purgatory on probation" as one of the "eternal adolescents through whom the race matures" (p. 182)[1] and, second, of a letter to the French girl whom he now doubts he will ever see again. He speaks of their star-crossed love and then of the intuition that sends him into battle:

> Since the Renaissance, . . . scientific reasoning has obtained greater perfection than . . . intuition and ethical beliefs. For the last four centuries, the first has improved, the second decayed. But prior to that, in the Gothic age, the scales moved the opposite way; and I believe that this process will soon be reversed again. The age of quantitative measurements is drawing to its close. . . . I'll tell you my belief, Odette. I think a new god is about to be born. That is the kind of thing one is only allowed to say at certain moments, but this is the moment, because in a few minutes I shall depart. [Pp. 187–88]

In a new postscript to the 1966 reissue of *Arrival and Departure*, Koestler wrote that his trilogy on the problem of ends and means "does not provide a logical answer to its central problem, but I felt that it provided me with a sort of answer nevertheless" (p. 191). Koestler's personal dilemma in the late thirties and early forties was that the form of his defection from Communism had also alienated him from the democracies which he now wished to defend. As he wrote in a 1943 essay, "In this war we are fighting against a total lie in the name of a half-truth."[2] In the verisimilitude of *Darkness at Noon* and *Arrival and Departure* with their compelling protagonists, Koestler provided himself with a personal plausibility structure in advance of any mature theory. His Peter Slavek enlisted in the British army

> more "in spite of" than "because of." And that was how it should be. If one accepted a faith, one should not ask because of what—the "because of" should be taken for granted, beyond questioning. He who says "because of" will be open to disillusion. He has no firm ground under his feet. But he who accepts in spite of his objections, in spite of the imperfections which are manifest to him—he will be secure. [*Arrival and Departure*, p. 177]

The trilogy then was Koestler's concerted, logical attack upon his own new-found faith. Within its narrative, the attack is not logically repulsed, but outside it, the illogical perseverance of the protagonists—Spartacus, Rubashov, and Slavek—was, for the moment, the example Koestler needed both to upset his readers and to steady himself.

Eventually, of course, it became necessary to offer more reasoned argumentation that the rise of Rubashov's "new movement" and the birth of Slavek's "new god" were in fact at hand. A first draft of that argumentation appeared as "The Yogi and the Commissar" in *Horizons* (June 1942). Koestler argued that the saint and the saint and the revolutionary, representing Change from Within and Change from Without, define infrared and ultraviolet on the spectrum of possible human action. Synthesis between the two is never, or only rarely, possible. There occurs rather a periodic "spectral displacement." The present displacement is from the infrared of exteriority toward the ultraviolet of interiority. All fields of endeavor are affected, but "the most striking example is the development of physics, which was an enormously successful rational Commissar-science up to the closing years of the last century and has since become more and more of a Yogi-science" (*The Yogi and the Commissar*, p. 11).

"The Yogi and the Commissar" appeared both in its original form and in a revised and expanded form as "The Yogi and the Commissar (II)" in a 1944 collection of essays dedicated, appropriately, to Michael Polanyi. In this revision, Koestler speaks of a second duality which operates during both the Yogi and the Commissar periods of history, like the movement within the pistons of a two-cylinder motor. This second duality is that of destiny and freedom; and, significantly, Koestler's *point de départ* in discussing it is the human mind: "Destiny versus freedom, or explanation versus volition, is an eternal duality in man's mental structure. Both concepts are derived from fundamental instincts, though in different periods they are expressed in different forms" (p. 219); "each progress in explanation draws the net of cognised objective explanations tighter and narrows the scope of subjective choice" (p. 220), and yet the circle can never shrink to a dot: "The abolition of the experience of free volition leads to collapse of the individual's whole mental structure,

observable in certain forms of insanity (de-personalisation)" (p. 220). The desire for the security of explanation and for the power of free choice is both instinctually grounded and finally inescapable. Nothing can change but the form in which the duality is expressed.

Considering the history of religion, Koestler observes: "The Primitive . . . is satisfied with a rather coarse determinism of the first degree. As the human mind develops, more complete explanations are needed, the determining network becomes tighter and the divinity which operates it more perfected" (p. 211). A penultimate stage is reached in the theology of *Oedipus Rex* in which the illusory "freedom" of man is contained in the calculus of Fate. But Christianity was to carry the solution an important step further:[3] "Man's freedom is no longer an illusion but reality *on the human plane;* while divinity is omnipotent, omniscient and completely determines the world *on a superhuman plane*" (p. 222). Koestler believes that when recourse is had to such levels, the form in which the destiny-freedom duality has been expressed is reaching exhaustion. The contradiction between the two, normally on the periphery of consciousness, moves to the center. The perfected expression of determinism is recognized as the destruction of freedom and so of sanity, and a reaction occurs. A new expression is finally devised which will permit the contradiction to subside again into duality and return to the periphery of consciousness.

Turning to the history of science, Koestler discerns an approaching crisis in scientific explanation parallel to the earlier crisis in religious explanation: "The Primitive had formed anthropomorphic images of the gods; the primitive physicists made three-dimensional models of the atom-nucleus. As observation and explanation progressed, the models collapsed as the idols had" (p. 223). The crisis began when "certain atomic nuclei were found to behave like a miniature Oedipus. They conformed to a plan but at the same time seemed to enjoy freedom in their own terms of reference" (p. 225).

The crisis becomes acute as

> Science . . . renounces the idea of a homogeneous universe ruled by one comprehensive law, and replaces it by a hierarchy of "levels of organisation." This is not, as many frightened scientists believe, a regression into religious thought; it is merely an analogy *in method* to solve the paradox of freedom and determinism which remains hidden and latent as long as a type of explanation is still incomplete, but explodes into a crisis as it becomes perfected. [P. 227]

Koestler next examines the rise of the concept of hierarchy in biology and draws particular attention to the example of the Cambridge biologist, J. Needham: "his example is particularly interesting because Needham belongs to a school of scientists with a strong Marxist and even Stalinist tendency and hence is most unwilling to move into a direction which smacks, if ever so faintly, of 'metaphysics' or 'vitalism' " (pp. 227–28). Yet Needham's own work between 1928 and 1941 forced him not only to recognize the existence of such levels but to concede that there were no laws linking one level with another.[4] "It must always be remembered," Koestler quotes him, "that though we can chart out quite fully the laws existing at a given high organisational level, we can never hope to understand how they fit into the picture of nature as a whole, i.e., how they join with the next higher and next lower levels. About this there is nothing obscurantist, nothing animistic" (p. 235).

What lies beyond the recognition of the hierarchy of levels? Koestler re-

turns to the history of religion: "Religion . . . taught that there are two ways of knowing: *exploration* of the . . . planes, and *contemplation* of the vertical or transcendental order" (p. 236). Mysticism, he points out, is as suspect in organized religion as in organized science; but in either context it can deepen understanding of reality.

"The Yogi and the Commissar (II)" concludes with a discussion of the practical and ethical implications of a recognition of the irreducibility of the levels of order. But before considering these, it may be wise to indicate in more detail the relationship of Koestler's observations on the history of science and religion to his "hours by the window." He wrote in his autobiography:

> The "hours by the window," which had started with the rational reflection that finite statements about the infinite were possible—and which in fact represented a series of such statements on a non-rational level—had filled me with a direct certainty that a higher order of reality existed, and that it alone invested existence with meaning. I came to call it later on "the reality of the third order." The narrow world of sensory perception constituted the first order; this perceptual world was enveloped by the conceptual world which contained phenomena not directly perceivable such as gravitation, electromagnetic fields, and curved space. The second order of reality filled in the gaps and gave meaning to the absurd patchiness of the sensory world.
>
> In the same manner, the third order of reality enveloped, interpenetrated, and gave meaning to the second. It contained "occult" phenomena which could not be apprehended or explained either on the sensory or on the conceptual level, and yet occasionally invaded them like spiritual meteors piercing the primitive's vaulted sky. Just as the conceptual order showed up the illusions and distortions of the senses, so the "third order" disclosed that time-space and causality, that the isolation, separateness and spatio-temporal limitations of the self were merely optical illusions on the next higher level. [Pp. 353–54]

In his "hours by the window," Koestler enjoyed, briefly, direct access to this "third order." Perhaps more accurately, he underwent an experience which he later analyzed in terms of such orders and of access thereto. The ethical conclusion he derived from his experience was defection from Communism and Western utilitarianism alike and rededication to the "perennial commonplaces" of social ethics. In attempting to lead his readers to the same conclusion, Koestler had, by laborious steps, to lead them first to that recognition of logically irreducible levels of reality which had come to him effortlessly and, in fact, unintentionally in his prison cell.[5] Having done this, he was in a position to show that the ethics of Crassus, Ivanov, and Sonia violates the autonomy of the levels, while that of Spartacus, Rubashov, and Peter Slavek respects it. Koestler does not speak of the *Darkness at Noon* trilogy in "The Yogi and the Commissar (II)," but the "main types of degenerated ethical systems in our time" (p. 239) which he distinguishes in this essay correspond remarkably to the positions taken by the antogonists in the trilogy.

Thus a first degenerated ethical system is "the reduction of ethical values to the zero level" (p. 239), a nihilism which permeates crime, corrupt politics, and big business: "Everybody with some experience in social welfare work knows that most asocials have some such sort of jealously guarded private philosophy which they believe to be their unique discovery. . . . If the world is assumed as completely homogeneous, its laws must be traceable either upward to God or downward to chaos; nihilism takes the second course" (p. 239). Such was, of course, the philosophy of Koestler's Crassus.

A second degenerated ethical system is "the transfer from the physical to the ethical level of the principles of quantitative measurement," the greatest good for the greatest number, etc.: "Thus we should accept as quite logical that a given number of people should be sacrified in the interest of a greater number of people. *Ergo,* as Mr. Chamberlain said in the days of Munich, one cannot reasonably expect a great nation to take risks for the sake of a small one" (p. 242). The hitch in the argument, according to Koestler, is that there are no physical instruments capable of measuring the exact amount of harm caused the few and comparing it with the amount caused the many: "Our quantitative criteria let us down each time just at the point where the pro's and con's are balanced and ethical guidance is most needed" (p. 243). In such wise is Ivanov at length refuted.

Finally, a third degenerate system is "the reduction or debunking of ethical values to the level of psychology and psycho-pathology" (p. 241). Here again, the fallacy arises from a failure to perceive the irreducibility of levels: "The 'reduction' of *social* values like courage and self-sacrifice to the *psychological* level of masochism, the death-instinct, etc., is a process analogous to the reduction of live organisms to their chemical components. . . . In Freud's writings [the concept of 'conscience'] frequently appears in ironical inverted commas—we might just as well do the same to 'carbon' or 'fish' " (p. 241). Parental authority is not conscience but only a condition for the emergence of conscience. The fulfillment of conditions for an emergence does not explain the emergence itself. Sonia cannot explain why Peter leapt ashore at the sight, or the thought, of his comrade.

Finally, Koestler considers "Yogi-ethics" or "the attempt to transfer the values derived from passive contemplation into practical action" (p. 243). Here there are no difficulties in principle. The contemplative is, by Koestler's definition, a respecter of the levels. Sadly, however, the Yogi's vertical focus easily leads him to neglect the factual intricacy on any given horizontal plane. Witness the "yogis" of the trilogy: Spartacus is a poor organizer, Rubashov a rash orator, Peter Slavek a hopeless romantic; and all three are tortured or killed at Commissar hands. And at that, we see in them only the shortcomings of the experienced, genuine contemplative. The inexperienced aspirant is likely to fall victim to worse faults: quietism, fanaticism, or simple hebetation.

And yet, when all is said and done, Koestler believes that only contemplation can supply when the rule-of-thumb utilitarian criteria prove inadequate and that, consequently, there is no alternative to the arduous attempt to practice both the contemplative and the scientific modes of thought. "The Vedanta bores me to death and Tao doesn't mean a thing to me," he admits but adds in the next paragraph:

> If we are in earnest about the recovery of our lost halves, we have to find new ways of teaching and learning; if we are in earnest, we should not be frightened of aiming at a stage when contemplation is taught in schools side by side with Science and P.T.—and instead of religious dogma. Not to produce cranks: but to re-form man's integrity. [P. 246]

This, then, is the "new movement," the "new god" spoken of earlier in the *Darkness at Noon* trilogy. Whether the Yogi will arrive in time to prevent the last rampage of the Commissars, Koestler hesitates to say. The desire for some sort of new religion is widespread enough. As one character in Koestler's 1951 novel *The Age of Longing* comments, "The bug of longing acts

differently on different people, but we've all got it in our circulation" (p. 304). Unfortunately, the desire for religion is not enough, nor for that matter is knowledge of its functioning. One may be aware, as another character in the same novel points out, that

> The only, the one and only hope of preventing [mutual extinction] is the emergence of a new transcendental faith which would deflect people's energies from the "social field" to the cosmic field—which would re-establish direct transactions between man and the universe and would act as a brake on the motors of expedience. In other words: the emergence of a new religion, of a cosmic loyalty with a doctrine acceptable to twentieth century man. [P. 137]

But such awareness does not of itself create the new religion. "Religions are not invented"; the same character concludes, "they materialise." The age of longing then is an age of waiting. Godot will not be hurried.

Koestler's attitude toward institutional religion is one of considerable sensitivity but little enthusiasm. Institutional religion may carry some of that ethical ballast which, as Rubashov reflects, it is unwise to jettison. The religious, or the formerly religious, may—as does the central character in *The Age of Longing*—experience the general crisis of the age with particular acuteness. Finally, as an ethnic Jew who spent three years in the Palestine of the British mandate and was a strenuous publicist for the Israeli state in the first years of its existence, Koestler is more than ordinarily sensitive to the power of Judaism. His Spartacus is inspired by a Jewish sectarian enthusiast, his Peter Slavek awe-struck by the songs of the "useless Jews" in their Nazi boxcars. And yet Koestler's final judgment about the Jewish religion is that it is a function of the Jewish exile and will end as the exile ends. Those Jews who immigrate will no longer be a domestic minority; those who choose not to immigrate will be unable sincerely to continue their practice of a religion that cries: "Next year in Jerusalem!" In either case, the religio-political mainspring of the "Jewish question" is unwound by the foundation of the state. In a generation or two, the Jew about whom the question was raised will have ceased to exist.

The first step then toward a new religion will not be the revival of any existing religion, not even of Judaism. Perhaps no conscious first step is possible. There is, however, one brief hint, the only hint in the works of Koestler's first cycle, of what a possible first step might be. Toward the end of *Scum of the Earth,* a harrowing account of imprisonment in France and flight from the advancing Nazis, Koestler reports a conversation with a Dominican priest.[6] Koestler questions him about the German tank-gunners:

> "Concretely—what would you preach to those men in the turrets?"
>
> "Always the same simple word which we have preached for the last two thousand years: Love."
>
> "That is your mistake," I said. "Love is no alternative to hatred. They can live perfectly well side by side in compartments of the same mind."
>
> "Not the love *we* mean. And what is your alternative?"
>
> I had waited for this, for I thought that I had made a discovery, and wanted to try it out on him. "The remedy against hatred," I said, "is to teach them to laugh and to smile."

He began to chuckle. "*Bon Dieu,*" he said. "To make a *Boche* laugh—*c'est possible.* But to teach him to smile—that is too much, even for a Dominican." [Pp. 222–23]

Which may have been Koestler's point precisely. At any rate, his second cycle of writings opens with an extended consideration of laughter as the common foundation of science, art, and social ethics.

NOTES

1. Peter Slavek was modeled on Endre Havas, a young Hungarian poet whom Koestler knew during the war in London. Arrested during a purge in Hungary, he went insane under prison torture. Koestler quotes a Hungarian press attaché who was also arrested and wrote a book on the experience: "Havas, with his conspicuous appearance and the typical awkwardness of an intellectual, was a tempting target. They dragged him about and played football with his body. He was left lying in his excrement for days" ("Postscript to the Danube Edition," in *Arrival and Departure,* Danube Edition [London: Hutchinson & Co., 1966], p. 191). He was posthumously rehabilitated as one of the victims of the "Stalin personality cult."

2. "We Need a Fraternity of Pessimists," *New York Times Magazine* (November 7, 1943), p. 12; "The Fraternity of Pessimists," in *The Yogi and the Commissar* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1946), p. 100. This essay is one of a number, some of no particular distinction, used to pad "The Yogi and the Commissar (II)" to book length. The latter essay itself concludes a one-hundred page, self-contained pamphlet on the failure of the Soviet experiment. Koestler documents his case devastatingly from Soviet statistics and in many cases makes statistical guesses which have received a startling confirmation in Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago.* The three chapters before "The Yogi and the Commissar (II)" are "Anatomy of a Myth," "Soviet Myth and Reality," and "The End of an Illusion." The second concludes with the lines, reminiscent of Crassus in *The Gladiators:* "The Russian Revolution has failed in its aim to create a new type of human society in a new moral climate. The ultimate reason for its failure was the arid nineteenth-century materialism of its doctrine. It had to fall back on the old opiates because it did not recognise man's need for spiritual nourishment" (p. 192).

3. If the resolution of reality into discrete levels is the climactic stage of any mode of explanation, then Islam rather than Christianity would seem to be "terminal religion," a position which Koestler suggests elsewhere and with which, in fact, I am inclined to agree.

4. Koestler wrote this essay, of course, before the discovery of DNA. He seems almost to have hedged his bet against precisely such a discovery, writing: ". . . nature knows no continuity, only jumps, and a staircase never becomes a slope, even if the steps are made infinitely small. For we can always choose a correspondingly small particle which will remain at rest on the staircase but roll down the slope" ("The Yogi and the Commissar (II)," p. 237). Molecular biologists like Jacques Monod take the position that the staircase *is* a slope. A Koestler-edited (with J. R. Smythies) volume, *Beyond Reductionism: New Perspectives in the Life Sciences* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1969) was the only work by a contemporary on which Monod chose to comment in his own philosophical essay *Chance and Necessity* (trans. Austryn Wainhouse [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1971]), and he did so with considerable asperity.

5. As a polemicist against Communism, Koestler achieved his greatest success with the French translation of *Darkness at Noon.* Appearing during a postwar referendum on the future form of the French constitution, it sold four hundred thousand copies, breaking all prewar publication records, and was plainly an important factor in the defeat of that form of constitution which would have permitted the French Communist party to come to power. Koestler calls this one of "two incidents in my life to which, in the frequent hours of depression and self-negation, I turn for comfort" (*The Invisible Writing,* p. 404). The French title of the work, which was originally written in German

but only survives in translations, was, interestingly, *Le zéro et l'infini,* a much more direct allusion to the "hours at the window" and related reflections.

6. A minor irony is that the motto of the Dominican order, *contemplata tradere,* is rather exactly the translation of what Koestler calls the "Yogi-ethics," namely, "to transfer the values derived from passive contemplation into practical action" ("The Yogi and the Commissar (II)," p. 243).

PRINCIPAL WORKS OF ARTHUR KOESTLER: 1939–54
(N.B.: Page references above are all to the named editions.)

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