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Arthur Koestler's hope in the unseen: twentieth-century efforts to retrieve the spirit of liberalism

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ARTHUR KOESTLER'S HOPE IN THE UNSEEN:
TWENTIETH-CENTURY EFFORTS
TO RETRIEVE THE SPIRIT OF LIBERALISM

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by

Kirk Steen

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M. A., University of New Orleans, 1986

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Arthur Koestler at his desk during the 1930s

Dedication

The efforts that produced this investigation of Arthur Koestler I offer to my wife, Christel Katherine Roesch, for her patient support and for the value and respect she holds for liberal education. The two of us share one fundamental belief that justifies the changes in our lifestyle necessitated by my earning a terminal degree and completing the narrative that follows. It is the conviction that among teachers, particularly among humanities teachers, their own personal academic growth and the deepening appreciation of the world that such growth engenders attaches to definite and positive consequences for their students.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Professor David Lindenfeld for his willingness to work with a non-traditional graduate student. Without his flexibility and his dedication to liberal arts education my work at Louisiana State University would have been impossible. I deeply appreciate the intelligence and care with which Professor Lindenfeld chose my readings for the independent study I did with him as well as the leadership he offered as I investigated Arthur Koestler and European history for this paper. The seriousness with which he treated my individuality must be mentioned. His attitude in this regard enabled me to follow my inclinations. One result of this attitude is the inquiry that follows. Throughout my studies Professor Lindenfeld left the universe open for me. The flexibility of Louisiana State University's Graduate School with regard to my circumstances as a working secondary schoolteacher is another reality without which I could not have completed this dissertation.

I must also thank the other members of my examining committee. Professor Suzanne Marchand's willingness to be part of the committee and her plea for more biographical narrative proved invaluable to the final draft of this paper. It is difficult to thank Professor Steven Ross enough for his extremely close reading of the early draft of this analysis of Arthur Koestler. His clarification of certain references in Koestler's fiction to realities of the ancient Mediterranean world saved me much embarrassment. I feel quite fortunate to have had the benefit of Professor Bainard Cowan's encouragement both during his course on science and literature and during the committee's critique of this paper. Finally, Professor David Perlmutter's insights into Koestler as a working

journalist helped me rethink my subject as I wrote the final draft of this project. Again I feel lucky, in this case to have had him appointed to my examining committee.

I have to give credit to my colleagues at Alfred Bonnabel High School for their generous attitudes and the small daily gifts of time and energy they have given me. Thanks are due to all three of my fellow teachers in the Gifted Department. I fondly recall Ann Kent's encouragement during the early stages of my doctoral coursework as well as her offer to team teach the largest class of American literature students our department has ever had. Ann's purchase of some of Arthur Koestler's books for me during the early stages of my research typifies her good will. On numerous occasions Ms. Catherine Cooke strove hard to make my teaching schedule accommodate the writing phase of my dissertation. Gwen Leonhard, chair of the department, has always been willing to find ways to make the bureaucratic aspects of our jobs less painful. Her efforts in this regard were of no little consequence as I worked on this project.

Finally I owe a great debt to the person to whom I dedicate this work. Christy, thank you for respecting my desire to study European history and for coping with my days in Baton Rouge and hours in my library. I appreciate your generous attitude and good nature that enabled you to accept the shift in our comfortable routine. Your patience with my periodic absence even when I was near you was remarkable.

Preface

I believe that the key to understanding Arthur Koestler is the tenacity with which he held certain nineteenth-century beliefs. Nineteenth-century bourgeois values formed the context of his early life. They were the cultural forces that shaped his attitudes and definitions of the world before he encountered that world during what became a turbulent time for Europeans, the period between 1914 and the 1950s. Acculturation and socialization are both channels of continuity which retain the flexibility that alone enables humans to respond and adjust to the discontinuous developments in social life. In this paper I have chosen to accentuate certain nineteenth-century continuities of values that appear in Koestler's writing as he responded to twentieth-century events. Chief among these was his devotion to the nineteenth-century conception of the innate value of the individual person in society. He was not alone during his lifetime in this plea for what have come to be called human rights. However, what distinguishes Koestler's writing is the connections he made between the nightmarish aspects of Stalinism and fascism and other, more mundane, aspects of human existence. He could create expository prose that revealed the atrocities of the Spanish Civil War as well as he could create psychological fiction that revealed how the ideals that gripped the leaders of the Bolshevik Revolution were transformed into the surrealistic deformations of the Moscow Purge Trials. He could also write pieces that possessed broader relevance. During a campaign against the death penalty in Britain, his writing revealed the contradictions of determinism and free will in justifications of capital punishment. The way Koestler put it, he could operate as a writer on the tragic plane as well as on the trivial plane. Therefore, he could just as

easily, and with just as much seriousness, write pieces that revealed the cruelties suffered by dogs and their owners in Great Britain under the tyrannical fear of rabies that maintained laws that required a six-month-long quarantine of canines entering or reentering the kingdom.

Somewhere between the tragic and the trivial were Koestler's science pieces. Generally these explored the human aspects of the practice of science. Particularly in the case of psychology and natural selection, his science pieces could expose deterministic conceptions of behavior and evolution that were tied to his fear of determinism in politics. Even his science writing could veer toward either end of the tragic-trivial continuum, however. It investigated the tragic consequences of a particular scientist's work being rejected by his peers as well as the trivial and petty jealousies of scientists who adhered to different schools of thought in academia. Koestler's broad interests are another characteristic of his life that held affinities for the nineteenth century. He was a generalist who eschewed specialization. Koestler's attraction to the possibilities that the paranormal might be verified by science gave some of his writing yet another nineteenth-century quality in that it approached the attitude of the romantic.

Koestler is remembered as a writer both about politics and science. He is recalled chiefly for his investigation of the Moscow Trials in *Darkness at Noon* and for his look at the creation of the heliocentric theory of the universe in *The Sleepwalkers*. Recently several writers have acknowledged the connections between his political and scientific writing, but Koestler is rarely viewed as addressing these subjects from the perspective of the nineteenth century. The latter is precisely what I will attempt in this narrative.

Arrival and Departure, Koestler's fictionalized account of his escape from fascism and his decision not to immigrate to the United States in 1940, discovers the root cause of middle-class devotion to radical political movements to be psychological displacement of motives. Koestler has one of this book's characters, psychiatrist Sonia Bolgar, announce to the novel's protagonist who is on the verge of a spiritual epiphany characterized by optimism, that "there is a geometry of fate which sees to it that a straight line cuts parallels always at the same angle." Bolgar's point is that even in an open universe one appears to be fated or destined at times for certain choices and behaviors, and no matter which road one chooses, they seem to all lead to the same terminus. Halfway through the present investigation of Arthur Koestler and the first half of the twentieth century in Europe, I realized that similar metaphorical tangents had cut equivalent angles between Koestler's universe and my own. Through my work I learned that the essence of Koestler's political and philosophical responses to the world in which he lived was his distaste for a shrunken, determined universe. I came to realize that the query which led to my discovery of Koestler, a desire to understand why by the early twenty-first century much of the world seemed incapable of treating socialism seriously, possessed a solution tied to the notion of a shrunken universe. My investigation of Arthur Koestler taught me that in this instance I was seeking an explanation of why the political universe in which I lived had shrunken after the 1980s. I had never conceptualized the problem that way, but after digesting Koestler's life and attaining an appreciation of his intellectual efforts as a yearning for an open universe, I found an explanation for a reality of my own time that had perplexed me. The days of the open political universe in which human imagination had allowed social democracy and market

capitalism to discover opportunities for accommodation and coexistence had disappeared a half century after the economic collapse and war that forced them together had become events relegated to quaint and distant memory. Certainly in the worlds of myth, rhetoric, and faith as well as in the commonest of public discourse, socialism had been banished as the political universe had diminished in the United States and to a significant extent in Britain as well. It is truly odd – Koestler might say fateful – that I would discover in a critique of the dangers of Stalinism that was generalized into a critique of deterministic psychology and science an understanding of the anathematizing of the New Deal and social democracy with its attendant deification of market forces. Determinism comes in various packages.

I cannot help wondering whether a similar strand of geometry connects Koestler's decision not to immigrate to the western side of the Atlantic Ocean with the notion of the shrunken political universe. He was, we will see, a European's European. As such we should not be surprised that in 1960 he would conclude in *The Lotus and the Robot* that, in spite of the turmoil of the first half of the twentieth century, European culture held positive prospects for the human race. In that volume his search for spiritual renewal in Asia came to disappointment, and he discovered reasons to justify his restored hope in Europe. As this investigation will reveal, Koestler saw distinct advantages in Burkean continuity typified by British social and political history. He did not, however, find the frontier variation on the theme of Anglo-Saxon traditions uniformly attractive. After 1945 the American consensus could diminish the size of the political universe that sprung from these traditions. Koestler would visit America and speak to the America audience, but during the 1950s he decided not to reside on the western side of the Atlantic. He

remained devoted to European civilization in its narrower sense. He looked to American military might as a counterbalance to the threat of Soviet hegemony, but he distrusted what he saw as American political naïveté. Koestler's faith remained strictly and steadfastly in Europe, in large measure due to the length and depth of its traditions.

With deliberate care I chose a photograph of my subject for the frontispiece of this project. It portrays the continental European journalist in all his traditional earnestness. I believe this image expresses an important aspect of Arthur Koestler. It shows him presumably at work editing or reviewing a piece on some sober, nontrivial topic. This photograph, while faithfully expressing the essence of its subject, is, we all know, simultaneously in large part a fiction. Its feigned or fictive quality lies in its being the result of human imagination. The photograph was, after all, conceptualized and composed by a photographer. Its subject strikes a deliberate, affected pose. Nevertheless, the photograph is a valuable rendering of Arthur Koestler because it enables us to see a man, long dead, surrounded by the things that made up some of the most significant aspects of his world. If photographs can convey truth no matter the contrived nature of their production, I believe that language, no matter how flawed by the limitations of human consciousness, possesses the ability to faithfully describe the universe. Therefore, I offer the following analysis of Arthur Koestler as an accurate description of the contemporary reality beyond the frame of the photograph that begins this investigation.

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Abstract

The analysis in this dissertation connects Arthur Koestler's nonfiction and fiction to the political circumstances that defined Europe during the early twentieth century. It draws particular attention to events in the 1930s as representing a paucity of choices that frustrated certain liberal values held by Koestler and others. It shows how after taking sides with the German Communist Party in the early 1930s, he confronted then rejected the politics of the extreme left and right, leading himself toward a dual career as social philosopher and anti-Communist.

This paper will explain how Koestler's reporting of the Spanish Civil War, combined with his description of his own attraction to and apostasy from Communism, established him as an important writer. It will look at Koestler's writing, particularly his imaginative use of analogy and metaphor, established during his early career as a journalist, as it discloses his dedication to the liberal notion of the common man's ability to understand complex ideas. This narrative will focus on Koestler's plea for an open, non-determined universe in several of his works. These include his novels, *The Gladiators*, *Darkness at Noon*, and *Arrival and Departure*, and his autobiographical works, *Scum of the Earth*, *Arrow in the Blue*, and *The Invisible Writing*. Close analysis will be given to his philosophical works, *The Yogi and the Commissar*, *Insight and Outlook*, and *The Act of Creation*. Some space will be given to the philosophy of science revealed in Koestler's *The Ghost in the Machine*. This paper will pay attention to two of Koestler's works that portray the practice of science as a humanistic endeavor. These are *The Sleepwalkers* and *The Case of the Mid-wife Toad*. The primary goal of this

investigation is to show how Arthur Koestler's philosophical writing derived from the union of liberal political values in his musings about science and psychology.

The analysis in this paper shows the central importance of Koestler's political experiences during the 1930s but also investigates the longer time frame of his life between the 1920s and the early 1980s. Its thesis is that Arthur Koestler persisted in his optimism for the longer term in the face of dehumanizing, pessimism-creating events that he experienced in the short term. This study concludes that it was Koestler's ties to values and optimistic attitudes established between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries by European culture that brought him to a hopeful attitude in humankind's future. It shows how Koestler maintained a hope in things that were not always apparent in his own lifetime. This dissertation explains that, in spite of the political events that defined the first half of the twentieth century, Arthur Koestler maintained a faith in modern European culture connected to its longer traditions of humanism.

Chapter One

Estimations and Evaluations: A Review of Criticism and Comment Regarding Arthur Koestler

Arthur Koestler, the journalist, periodic Zionist, temporary Communist, political and psychological novelist, long-term anticommunist, social commentator and critic, philosophical interpreter of science, and dabbler in the paranormal has been the object of the comment of others since he made a name for himself with the publication of his experiences during the Spanish Civil War.¹ His importance as a social and political sage was assured by his first two novels, *The Gladiators* (1938) and *Darkness at Noon* (1940). Both investigated the nature of social revolution. Forming a trilogy he followed these works with his third novel, *Arrival and Departure* (1943), based on the personal moral tensions he experienced fleeing both fascism and Communism in continental Europe as the Second World War began. All three of these books intertwined psychology with politics, helping to make Koestler's fiction known for its concentration on ideas almost to the exclusion of character development. It is the realm of ideas, political, psychological, and scientific, that constitutes the domain of Arthur Koestler's contribution to the world of letters.

Like Emma Goldman, whose eyewitness experience of politics under the Bolsheviks caused her disaffected flight from the Soviet Union one decade before Koestler joined the German Communist Party, Arthur Koestler lost his faith in the Third International and eventually in Marxism generally. In part this transformation resulted from the knowledge he possessed of atrocities committed by Stalin's machine against countless individuals including his friends, comrades, and loyal Bolsheviks. Koestler

also experienced discomfort with the mythological aura associated with the Russian Revolution among faithful communists and fellow travelers during the 1920s and 1930s. His brilliant contribution to and lead essay in Richard Crossman's anticommunist tract, *The God That Failed* (1949), helped to explain the attraction that the Soviet Union held for many workers and middle-class people during the inter-war years. Focusing on the psychological mechanisms that lured one to communism and that kept converts defensive of it as a belief system, Koestler's piece christened his career as a crusading anti-Communist. Due chiefly to his experiences as a Communist on the fringes of party activity and as a victim of fascism, Koestler came to see himself as representative of the educated, politically aware twentieth-century European. His two-volume autobiography *Arrow in the Blue* (1952) and *The Invisible Writing* (1954) was put to the purpose of painting himself as such.

Arthur Koestler saw the usual comment and criticism during his lifetime appropriate to a literary figure of some significance. Literary and political men and a few women criticized or praised, pondered, debated, and polemicized against Koestler's ideas as they were published. Most of his books garnered periodic comment thereafter. Unsurprisingly, a fairly wide and immediate response among the literary community, especially in Koestler's adopted home, England, accompanied his suicide in 1983. In that year several issues of the British journal *Encounter*, the organ of the Congress for Cultural Freedom whose founding in 1950 was dominated by Koestler himself, devoted a good amount of space to "The Life and Death of Arthur Koestler." *Encounter* allotted space to Koestler again in 1984.² These retrospective pieces, by Koestler's friends, fellow writers, acquaintances in the publishing industry, or political activists, generally stressed the positive aspects of Koestler's personality and work. They are of interest to

the historian for the insight they imply concerning Koestler's work habits, attitudes, and lifestyle. Some of the *Encounter* pieces on Koestler, however, seem protective of their subject and, therefore, must be used cautiously with attention paid, on the one hand, to inference and, on the other, to benign phrasing. At the turn of the twenty-first century, there has been a resurgence of interest in Arthur Koestler. This late interest contains themes as varied as his Communist apostasy, his place among European intellectuals, his Jewish heritage and his ties to Zionism, his novels and system of morality, his founding of the Congress for Cultural Freedom in its Cold War context, and current developments in astrophysics in regard to Koestler's estimation of the importance of Galileo in the history of science.³

For the cultural historian, some of the most relevant conclusions about Arthur Koestler's place in the intellectual and political sagas of twentieth-century Europe reside in the analyses of Maurice Cranston and William Phillips. Cranston maintains that the essence of understanding Koestler, the writer, lay in his *Realschule* education and his experience as a working journalist.⁴ According to Cranston, Koestler's literary style resulted first from his practical education which de-emphasized the kind of complex constructions and high language that training in the classics at a *Gymnasium* may have engendered. Cranston also views Koestler's writing as resulting from the imperative of the popular press to be succinct, transparent, and simple in conceptualizing ideas while working under the discipline of deadlines and word counts. Both of these conclusions may be more relevant to Koestler's early fiction and political writing than to his scientific pieces, however.

In a collective obituary of Manes Sperber, Raymond Aron, Arthur Koestler, and Ignazio Silone, all of whom died between 1982 and 1984 and all of whom were

instrumental in creating the Congress for Cultural Freedom, William Phillips comments on the political context that shaped the political attitudes of these men. Calling them “the best of their generation,” Phillips stresses that the shared experiences with fascism and Stalinism that these four friends possessed imbued their writing with “a sense of political and cultural fate” which made them wiser than their contemporaries. Phillips maintains that by 1940 these men were incapable of entertaining either idealistic utopian ideologies or ideologies of strict *Realpolitik*, never fully accepting the Left or the Right. He concludes that all four of these political and literary figures became truly independent thinkers who committed themselves to a liberal ideal as a necessary condition that could allow for the flowering of human freedom.⁵ All four of these men developed critiques of the extreme Left and the extreme Right that stressed the importance of the individual in social and political movements. Their political experiences created for all of them an axiomatic dedication to the idea that if the individual mattered for little, no true social progress was achievable in the real world. They all viewed respect for the individual member of society as a non-idealistic, practical, and necessary condition for social and political progress.

There are eleven works, biographies, philosophical and literary criticism, or scientific criticism, which must be mentioned as offering the most insightful analyses of Arthur Koestler to date. These include Ian Hamilton, *Arthur Koestler: A Biography* (1982), Mark Levene *Arthur Koestler* (1984), David Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind* (1998), Robert Blumstock, “Going Home: Arthur Koestler’s *Thirteenth Tribe*,” and Harrold Harris, ed., *Astride Two Cultures: Arthur Koestler at Seventy*. Finally, Sidney Pierson, Jr., *Arthur Koestler* (1978), and Stephen Toulmin, “Arthur Koestler’s Theodicy” investigate Koestler’s significance to literature, politics, science,

and philosophy. All eleven of these works make significant contributions to an evaluation of Arthur Koestler's conclusions about ethics, science, and a late-modern European cultural crisis.

Just before his subject's death, Ian Hamilton, Koestler's friend, publisher, and contentiously authorized biographer, relied primarily on the diaries of Koestler and two of his three wives, Mamaine Paget and Cynthia Jefferies, as well as a continuous digest of Koestler's 1952-1954 autobiography. The result of Hamilton's efforts was the recounting of a rich and active twentieth-century political and literary life. As he traces Koestler's developing ideas in *Arthur Koestler: A Biography*, Hamilton focuses on the middle period of Koestler's life and work, but occasionally visits earlier portions of that life. Quoting at length George Orwell's review of *Arrival and Departure*, Hamilton gives more evidence for the conclusion drawn about Koestler's long-term devotion to a liberal ideal. He uses Orwell's analysis to do this with a twist, however. In Koestler's case, Hamilton shows that Orwell connects the liberal ideal with a spiritual vacuum left by Koestler's inability to abide by the belief in Communism. Orwell claims that this inability to maintain faith in socialism is associated with an ultimate political optimism born of short-term political pessimism. What Orwell suggests is that Koestler's disappointing experiences with socialism and, later, with communism forced him to be politically pessimistic in the short term, that is, during the period through which he lived, while he refused to abandon his hopeful attitude about mankind's future.

In his review of *Arrival and Departure*, Orwell analyzes Koestler's philosophy as revealed in his first three novels and identifies optimism at their core. According to Orwell this would be Koestler's belief that life should be happy. Orwell associates this belief with Koestler's hedonism, his well known excessive drinking and habit of sexual

license, that function as compensation -- one might say overcompensation -- for his inability to find a satisfactory replacement for socialism's faith in humankind during his own lifetime. Orwell's analysis holds that experiencing the disappointments in human progress through the pursuance of progressive political and social goals by rational means can create a confirmed short-term pessimism. Orwell recognizes that Koestler's disillusionment with socialism, born of his experiences with the Second and Third Internationals, forced him to accept, what was in Orwell's judgement, an unwarranted belief that all revolutions represent the same political and social failure recapitulated time after time. Hamilton shows that as early as 1943 Orwell's analysis could predict that Koestler's spiritual vacuum and political blind alley would turn him into a rabid anticommunist, in Orwell's words a man "not far removed from pessimistic Conservatism."⁶ Orwell's analysis that Koestler's fiction harbored a disguised political conservatism was prescient by some four decades. By the end of his life, Koestler came to identify Britain's economic decay as symptomatic of degenerate trade union socialism. His comments in this regard were predictive of what would become known as Thatcherism.

What George Orwell describes in his analysis of Koestler's fiction is a short-term pessimism accompanied by long-term optimism concerning the human condition. This was an attitude that Koestler himself acknowledged, one that together with its possessor's fear of atomic war during the 1950s, would lie beneath the optimistic belief that somewhere, somehow there had to be the possibility of social progress, albeit something short of social utopia, in mankind's future. Such a contradictory attitude would find a place in Koestler's later fiction and scientific writing, particularly in *The Age of Longing* (1951) and *The Trail of the Dinosaur* (1955). Both books possess a grave and somber

tone while holding forth the possibility of a way out.⁷ Additionally, the attitude in Koestler identified by Orwell, although born of frustration, would help formulate Koestler's hope for a pharmaceutical palliative to what he determined was the dyssynchronous evolution of man's cerebral and limbic systems that embodied a struggle between reason and emotion. The formulation of this pharmacological remedy to the liberal disappointments of twentieth-century political history typifies Koestler's long-term optimism as hope in the unseen.

Mark Levene's *Arthur Koestler* (1984) utilizes psychology and literary criticism to achieve an analysis that puts Koestler in the company of contemporaries such as George Orwell, André Malraux, and Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Levene identifies an artistic shortcoming in Koestler's fiction. He shows that this flaw is usually tied to Koestler's "political isolation and messianic instinct" that denied his fiction "detachment and independence." In spite of this flaw, Mark Levene concludes that Koestler's political novels will remain relevant. He bases this conclusion on the depth of Koestler's psychological and political appreciation of the modern world which is so convincingly put forward in his fiction.⁸ Levene's book reveals a spiritual continuity between Koestler's fiction and his scientific writing that derived from angst over the future of mankind. According to Levene, Koestler held tenaciously to a yearning for the discovery of some spiritual grounding or faith because he refused to view himself as being at the end of a stage in human history. Levene stresses that the notion of the future is central to understanding Koestler's state of mind. He implies that Koestler's consciousness derived first from great anxiety about the vagaries of market forces, later from the perceived dangers of nationalism in both capitalist and Stalinist forms, and

finally from an anxiety about the dangers to Europe of a international clash of super powers.⁹

Levene portrays Koestler's fears as rooted in an unwinding of nineteenth-century liberalism. He maintains that Koestler's early experience as a journalist gave him the opportunity to witness the collapse of European liberalism from the inside. The Ullstein group of newspapers, for which Koestler became a leading contributor between 1929 and 1933, was itself a casualty of liberalism's political impotence as this particular news organization was deformed and ultimately destroyed by the Nazi state.¹⁰ But in spite of twentieth-century setbacks, Levene shows that Koestler maintained a faith in liberalism and a hope in the future of mankind that revealed itself to David Astor, editor of the British newspaper *The Observer*. Astor's memory of meeting Koestler in the late 1930s was that of meeting a man who "radiated a heightened sense of liveliness and a sense of reality... the embodiment of an uncompromised , unafraid international idealism."¹¹

Levene's analysis indicates that Koestler's idealism could be tempered by what he saw as the necessities of the real world. This was probably the "sense of reality" that revealed itself to Astor. Koestler took sides and refrained from the contemplativeness of a yogi when he, for instance, supported the Israelis' right to use terror against Palestinian Arabs. In *Thieves in the Night* (1946), a novel about the establishment of Israel, Koestler argued that, in the absence of British protection, the Israelis were justified by the Holocaust and by their right to a national home to employ violent means to build their state. The novel nevertheless conceives of the piecemeal program of annexing new territories in Palestine by Zionist Kibbutzim as thefts perpetrated in the dark of night.

So Koestler periodically showed a willingness to shed idealism when he judged that the real world forced one to take sides.¹² He seems to have shown this same

willingness when he courted and maintained amicable relations with the men who founded the CIA during his first trip to the USA in 1946 while he was ostensibly still a socialist of the Orwellian or British Labour party stripe. This cooperation appears enigmatic until we recall the depths of Koestler's hatred for Stalinism. This hatred was born of his first-hand knowledge of former friends and comrades murdered during and after the Great Purge as well as Koestler's direct experience of the vertiginous zigzags of the Soviet Union's foreign policy between 1933 and 1939. Koestler's cooperation with the CIA was also an indication of his fear of the Comintern as the instrument in the Soviet Union's control of Communist Parties throughout Europe as well as a gauge of his profound anxiety over the possibility of nuclear war. Furthermore, we must recall that even a Marxist-turned-social democrat could not necessarily have predicted that the CIA might employ dubious means in the pursuance of an end that Koestler viewed as necessary to thwart another ominous potentiality. That potentiality was the presumptive Soviet domination of Europe, a possibility that he saw looming over the horizon. The realization of this particular limited political option, part of the post-Second World War political reality, had begun for Koestler in 1942 when he recognized that the Allies would defeat fascism. Then he formulated the necessity for the left to support the liberal democracies' struggles against the Nazis as the support of the "half-truth" of liberal capitalism in negation of the "total lie" of fascism. By 1945 and throughout much of his later life Koestler would turn that formulation in another direction as it would become the foundation of his anti-Communism.

It was on his first visit to the USA that Koestler warned American liberals who tended to maintain a view of Stalin as an anti-fascist ally to "grow up" and recognize the threat that he believed the Soviet Union represented to world peace and human

freedom.¹³ This same practical nature drove Koestler to seek aid and financial support from the United States government in the establishment of the Congress for Cultural Freedom in 1950 when he identified an imminent necessity to demonstrate to Western intellectuals the need to acknowledge and address Soviet propaganda. In return for this aid and financial support, Koestler would weather intense criticism by French intellectuals and even implicit death threats from the French Communist Party organ, *L'humanite*.

Levene believes that obstinacy within Koestler constituted the spiritual continuity that connects his early political novels with his later focus on science. Koestler's long-term optimism survived the traumas of fascism, World War Two, and the Cold War because he would defy his contemporaries, survive his own "profound theological frustration," and contradict the lack of any evidence that there was a "new god evolving through the ethical consciousness of men."¹⁴ Arthur Koestler seems to have maintained a long-term faith in the unseen.

While the suggestion that mankind's salvation from its political recklessness lay in biology may seem ludicrous to those in the early twenty-first century, such a suggestion was simply a measure of the sense of crisis and frustration felt by Koestler. Levene shows that Koestler interpreted the Cold War's "politics of last resort," its dancing with Armageddon, as a signal that mankind's mind must be altered, if not biologically, then pharmaceutically.¹⁵ The question posed is one of discovering mood-altering or psychoactive drugs that reduce the likelihood of mass hysteria and irrational aggregate behavior in the political realm just as medical science had discovered chemical means to cure somatic disease. This was a shift away from Koestler's earlier, transitory belief that social problems had revolutionary solutions. It was a certain retreat from the

resolutions to the problems of capitalism proposed in Marxist theory. Koestler suggested that the political problems mankind faced during the early Cold War might be solved by a cumulative, mass change in the consciousness of individuals affected through a social pharmaceutical program presumably carried out by an activist state authority.¹⁶ At the philosophical level, it would appear that Koestler abandoned the Marxist belief that existence determines consciousness for the opposite notion that consciousness determines being. However, we must recognize that if Koestler believed human reason was not up to the task of protecting humankind from itself, he nevertheless maintained the hope that human agency in the form of pharmaceutical planning and socially-administered medication could, possibly, protect the human species from itself. So, if consciousness determined being, it could do so only with the aid of reason, social planning, and social discipline. The question of how close such an attitude verged on totalitarianism, particularly the kind described by Aldous Huxley, is one that seems to be absent from all discussions of Koestler's philosophy.

The apparently quixotic and impractical prospect of substituting a chemical means for a slower, natural evolution of human consciousness in order to achieve a survivable species had its own optimistic logic. Faced with the brinkmanship of the Cold War, the experience of two global hot wars and the accompanying growth of fascism in their interim, Koestler witnessed the capitulation of reason to emotion in politics. Consequently, he grasped for any means to save humankind and posited hope in pharmacology. He lived in a time when the prospect of genetic manipulation was not yet even dreamed, so pharmacology appeared to Koestler as the most likely short-term means to allay nuclear holocaust. This was the stage upon which he made his transition from political fiction to imaginative musings about the state of science as social convention

and the necessity of free creativity in the pursuit of knowledge through science. By the early 1970s Koestler would explore various means to protect mankind from nuclear holocaust in his novel *The Call Girls: a Tragi-Comedy* in which participants in a scientific symposium offer various solutions to problems of antisocial behavior that ranged from operant conditioning to genetic modification of the human species.

The insecurities of the ideological conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States of America were the point at which Koestler's optimism and hopefulness for the salvation of Europe turned away from politics and in the direction of the potentialities of science. One could interpret this development as an indication of political cynicism or, conversely, as an indication of a faith in reason that defied the uses to which the Nazis put "science." Levene, however, sees it as a personal "spiritual ferment" that spawned biological speculations which, if they were ultimately rejected by most professional practitioners of the life sciences, nevertheless, made some of the great questions of scientific theory more accessible to lay readers.¹⁷ Accordingly, Levene does not give much thought to the theoretical or practical viability of medication as a cure for mankind's over-excited emotionalism. He recognizes in Koestler's proposal the belief that the common man, that unanointed, nonmember of the coterie of professional scientists, could understand the theories and conclusions of science. This belief in the abilities of the common man is its own sort of liberal ideal. According to Levene, a refusal to relinquish optimism about mankind's potential is the thread that runs through all of Koestler's work. This optimism is the longer-term kind acknowledged by Orwell. In Levene's judgement it constitutes the common theme that runs from *The Gladiators* to *The Ghost in the Machine*.¹⁸ It is his contextualizing of his subject by connecting Koestler with his contemporaries and connecting Koestler's works with their historical

background as well as with each other that makes Levene's book a worthwhile contribution to intellectual history.

The most recent and by far the most exhaustive biography of Arthur Koestler is that written by David Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind* (1998). This six-hundred-page volume achieves a detailed picture of its subject through the extensive use of personal letters. It is largely through these letters that Cesarani achieves a revision of earlier laudatory accounts of Koestler's life. He pays attention to his subject's personal life while constantly connecting the milestones and habits of that life to its proclivities and idiosyncrasies as well as to the social and historical forces that formed the background upon which they played. Cesarani's account is psychological, sociological, historical, and unflattering. He shapes his analysis around the notion that Koestler's wandering from cause to cause, from ideology to ideology, from residence to residence, and crusade to crusade is what defined the essence of the man.¹⁹ And if one were to leap to the conclusion that this biography implicitly plays to the stereotype of the "wandering Jew," Cesarani assures us he is not engaged in such a pursuit. The thesis of *The Homeless Mind* is that Koestler's restlessness is more connected to its secular and personal contexts, the social, familial, and political forces that shaped Koestler, than to any real or imagined propensity for some Jews to wander.²⁰

Cesarani explains how non-religious parents, the anti-Semitism of *fin-de-si cle* Europe, the Zionism of Alexander Herzle and then of Vladimir Jabotynski, and the Holocaust informed Koestler's identity as that of a Central European, secular, and assimilationist Jew. Cesarani's assessment focuses on what he deems Koestler's tendency toward "deracination," or the construction of himself as a Central European intellectual who by the end of the Second World War and after the establishment of Israel

could de-emphasize his Jewish heritage. Cesarani accuses Koestler of presenting himself as simply a representative educated, twentieth-century European and of trivializing or denying his Jewish roots.²¹

Cesarani is not entirely fair. It is true that Koestler acknowledges the Holocaust at the end of his autobiography without mentioning the members of his extended family that perished at the hands of the Nazis. However, Koestler did respond in an agitated and outraged manner in a letter in *Horizon* when a reviewer of *Arrival and Departure* questioned the novel's reference to Nazi death camps and their Jewish extermination program implying that there was little incontrovertible evidence of genocide.²² If we look at Koestler's references to his Jewish origins over his entire lifetime, we see that he makes them merely episodically. Koestler, nevertheless, clearly acknowledges his Jewish heritage in his autobiography. He mentions his early interaction with his Jewish grandfather, and he gives a detailed account of his attraction to and involvement in the Jewish *Burschenschaft* Unitas and to Jabotinsky's Zionist movement.²³ Koestler is not timid in analyzing his response to the internment and murder of certain Austro-Hungarian Jewish family members killed at the hands of the Nazis.²⁴ It seems unjustified to find in Koestler's secular experience and non-religious life a simple and singular longing not to be Jewish. Koestler was a man of international experience and culture, a secular intellectual living in a secular world, a man concerned with profane politics (nationalism, communism, anti-communism, socialism, and finally the British Conservative Party) and secular science (materialism and determinism with its variants behaviorism and positivism). Cesarani attempts a psychological analysis for Koestler's presumptive shyness and lack of feeling at home or being accepted by others that is not completely satisfying. Cesarani offers an understanding of Koestler's aimlessness which is centered

around his subject's cold, Victorian mother, his distant, ineffectual father, and the social isolation Koestler experienced as the only child in a family that entertained middle-class pretensions. Arthur Koestler was a person whose habit of often changing his residence may have been less typical than that of his contemporaries. However, one could argue that his experience was predictive of late twentieth-century domestic mobility and international migratory patterns in which the number of people who have come to change their residences often or to live multinational and multicultural existences has grown sufficiently to attract little attention.²⁵

Twelve years before Cesarani's tome, Robert Blumstock provided a convincing explanation of Koestler's apparent rootlessness. In "Going Home: Arthur Koestler's *Thirteenth Tribe*" (1986), Blumstock connects Koestler's searching for an ideological, spiritual, and physical home with Hungarian nationalism. This article responds to Koestler's thesis that East European Jews did not descend from the Hebrews who undertook the Diaspora after the destruction of the Temple in 70 C. E. Koestler maintained that European Jews really descended from Khazars who, for political reasons of independence from Byzantium and Islam, had converted to Judaism after 70 C. E. Blumstock shows that Koestler's theory about Hungarian Jews was not original and fit a pattern, known the world over, in which diffuse and relatively open definitions of nationality and citizenship encourage first generation immigrants to acculturate their children to their host nations. In the process of this acculturation, these immigrants forge a new identity for their offspring. This is another social and psychological pattern that became increasingly common during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.²⁶

Blumstock links Koestler's theory that European Jews were not Semitic people to debates in the Hungarian Parliament. During the 1920s Hungarian Jews searched for a

place in the new, post-Versailles nation. In pursuance of this object, Jewish representatives in the national assembly pointed to a presumed origin of Hungarian Jews among Turkish Magyars as well as their long-established pattern of assimilation in Hungary that distinguished them from ghettoized Jews of Eastern Europe.²⁷ Blumstock cites other investigators of Koestler's identity. For instance, he points to Mihaly Sukosd's claim that Koestler's aimlessness resulted from a void in his identity that facilitated Koestler's substitution of shifting beliefs and his messianic behavior for feelings of belonging.²⁸ Blumstock also reiterates Hyman Maccoby's thesis that the establishment of Israel gave Koestler the option to be the Gentile integrated into Europe that he had always desired. According to Maccoby, anti-Semitism had forced Koestler to acknowledge his Jewishness and led him to become a Zionist.²⁹

Blumstock maintains that the three generations of Koestlers, beginning with Arthur's grandfather, recapitulated the modern Jewish Hungarian experience of welcome, followed by success and failure, and ending in flight from Hungary during the inter-war years. While Koestler may have typified his generation of Hungarian Jews in many ways, Blumstock concludes that Arthur Koestler should have made the focus of his response to anti-Semitism a complaint against his various "Stepmotherlands'" rejections of him. Koestler's devaluation of his own Jewishness with its accompanying explicit emphasis of his Hungarian or Central European identity was, according to Blumstock, therefore misplaced.³⁰ David Cesarani draws a fairly detailed picture of Arthur Koestler's nuclear family. His father was a frustrated businessman, usually in the textile trade, whose continually worsening economic failures, particularly in Hungary, during the interwar years, created the necessity of moving from dwelling to dwelling. That necessity was an embarrassing practice for his wife who desired middle-class

respectability associated with a permanent residence in Vienna, not Budapest. Both parents recognized that their son's best prospects lay in being educated in Vienna, and the family made every sacrifice to see to it that Arthur's higher education took place in that city or its suburbs.³¹ In her social-historical description of the migration of European intellectuals during the 1930s, *Illustrious Immigrants: The Intellectual Migration from Europe, 1930-1941*, Laura Fermi ends a section entitled "The Dictators and the Intelligentsia" with some of Koestler's remembrances of interwar Hungary from the first volume of his autobiography. She cites Koestler's claim that one-fourth of the people he knew before he was thirty had been killed either in struggles against fascism in Spain, by Nazi genocide, or at the hands of Stalin's machine after their deportation to the Soviet Union.³² Koestler also suggests that some of this group perished indirectly through economic circumstances, either by suicide or by a state of permanent exile wandering the globe as the result of dislocation that diminished their prospects.³³ Fermi also concludes that special circumstances existed in Budapest at the turn of the nineteenth century that offered opportunities to a middle class that filled needs in a vacuum left by the nobility and the peasantry. This successful Hungarian middle class was largely Jewish, she notes, and when anti-Semitism hit Europe with a vengeance during the 1920s this group was first impelled more strongly to succeed and later to emigrate and flourish outside their homeland.³⁴

In the introduction to the volume he edited in 1975, *Astride Two Cultures: Arthur Koestler at Seventy*, Harold Harris observes that, contrary to his claim in *The Invisible Writing*, Arthur Koestler was anything but the typical twentieth-century European, neither "in his work, nor in his life, nor in his outlook."³⁵ Harris's view of Koestler confronts Cesarani's judgement when it reiterates the conclusion of some of the volume's

contributors that there is no evident dichotomy or aimless spirit that divides Koestler's fiction from his science writing.³⁶ The thread that Roy Webberley sees running through all of Koestler's writing is a struggle between determinism and creativity which, ironically or not, Webberley suggests constitutes a tension in Koestler's own *oeuvre* that can account for much of its apparent inconsistency.³⁷ For Webberley, it is clear that the connection between Koestler's work in the humanities and the sciences is his concern for freedom born of what Koestler perceived as the frightening consequences of determinism. It is Webberley's interpretation that Koestler came to fear the materialistic, causal explanations that enabled man to exploit nature after the Scientific Revolution because they led to consequences that manipulated and exploited the individual person. Webberley claims that Koestler's fear of determinism grew from his recognition of the abundant evidence during his lifetime that man could exist as a conditioned automaton, and if this reality remained unchecked by mankind's positive creative abilities, the future looked dimmer than the present that constituted Koestler's own experience. Webberley summarizes this interpretation of what he views as the continuity in Koestler's work to be the belief that "The determinist with a microscope is to be watched as closely as the determinist with a gun."³⁸

Webberley contends that Koestler's genius lay in his demonstration, through his writing about psychology and evolution, that hierarchies need not be oppressive, but can indeed be responsible for the liberating potential of creativity. Others have commented on Koestler's notion of the role of creativity in nature and of human will in society. For instance, Reed Merrill, in his introduction to the work he and Thomas Frazier edited, *Arthur Koestler: An international bibliography* (1979), shows that Koestler discovered a way out of determinism by proposing a purposeful world in which the creative

potentialities of nature, including the human mind, spontaneously generate heterogeneous complexity. Merrill concludes that for Koestler, nature's complexity must be teleological and might follow laws of seriality which embody multiple, open-ended possibilities as opposed to singular linear continuities posited by determinism.³⁹

In his analysis of *The Sleepwalkers*, Mark Graubard finds the key to appreciating Koestler's contribution to science as stemming from the latter's understanding of the creative mind which can open new suggestive vistas capable of unveiling nature's secrets.⁴⁰ According to this analysis, the connection between Koestler's two interests, politics and science, rests in the relationship between the imagination of the artist and the pedestrian achievements of the scientist. Graubard sees in Koestler's work recognition of the reciprocity between empirical science and the insightful psychology that often resides in fiction. It follows, Graubard stresses, that the contributions of the fiction produced by Sophocles, Dostoevsky, and Faulkner amplify, humanize, and deepen the insights achieved by experimental psychology.⁴¹

Another aspect of Koestler's attempt to enrich an understanding of the universe, his search for a new cosmology, can be found in Koestler's lifelong belief in the power of destiny. His autobiography is built on the notion that certain events in his life show the hand of destiny. Chapter One, "The Horoscope," begins by casting astrological predictions based on the alignment of heavenly bodies on the day during which its subject was born. The title of the book's second volume, *The Invisible Writing*, casts destiny as one way to interpret the events of the middle years of its subject's life. By the late stage of his life, Koestler's concern with destiny led him to publicly broach the possibilities of the paranormal and search for ways to verify the existence of nature on more than one plane. In 1973 Koestler would co-author a volume that investigated the plausibility of

telepathy, serendipity, and coincidence entitled *The Challenge of Chance*. He contributed two parts in this enterprise. The first dealt with the importance of anecdotal evidence as provided by events recorded as part of human psychology, and the second dealt with suggestions on where to take investigations of problems that seemed to be beyond the understanding of science.⁴² Koestler's 1978 compendium and cross-referencing of ideas with which he worked during his writing career, *Janus: A Summing Up*, includes references to the plausibility of extra-sensory perception which are linked with the counterintuitive twentieth-century developments in theoretical physics. Koestler, claiming only to desire that an open mind be maintained in regard to telekinetic and telepathic phenomenon, could and did couch the paranormal in terms that suggested that these indeed existed and that only patience was required for their validation.⁴³ In his willingness to entertain the possibility of paranormal phenomena, Arthur Koestler certainly did not typify the educated Central European of the twentieth century. One can take this idiosyncrasy as an overwrought imagination, a dedication to science as a fluid human pursuit, or as a propensity to hope in the unseen. The present investigation will show that it was both his personality and his intimate knowledge of developments in twentieth-century science that enabled Arthur Koestler's world-view to be flexible enough to take empirical science on its own terms while refusing to discount out of hand reports of paranormal events.

Renée Haynes maintains that Koestler's belief in multiple universes, or a complex universe of multiple levels, served him as an explanation for why twentieth-century physics lacked unified theory.⁴⁴ It follows that his own longing for unity within the cosmos gave Koestler hope that paranormal phenomena, usually attributed to nondeterministic coincidence, could be established as evidence of another universe

existing parallel to the physical one. Haynes looks at Koestler's fascination with the paranormal and extrasensory perception as the interplay between two modes of thought present in his outlook. The first of these is the notion that the world is made of objective phenomena that sometimes seem mysterious but eventually come to be understood by civilization in the process of humankind's existence and collective experience. The second mode of thought is the idea that nature sometimes reveals its hidden and elusive meaning to certain individuals through a level of consciousness that is distinct from reason.⁴⁵ Robert Merrill summarizes Koestler's philosophy as one maintaining that nature is trivalent. The first level is that of sensory perceptions, the second is that of concepts or phenomena, like gravity, which are not directly perceivable, and the third is that which facilitates human understanding of the second, unperceivable level of reality.⁴⁶ Haynes notes that in his autobiography and elsewhere Koestler reported feelings that indicated he was being affected by phenomena outside the physical world as far back as his childhood. He reminds his readers that in the hope of verifying a mystical level of nature, Koestler launched a project in 1931 that sought reports of paranormal experiences from his Ullstein readers that could be tested to possibly verify the existence of cosmological forces unknown to science.⁴⁷

Multiple writers have commented on Koestler's fascination with mysticism. In his analysis of Koestler's *Weltanschauung*, John Beloff determines that Koestler's focus on the paranormal was within the bounds of a materialist conception of the universe. According to Beloff, Koestler was not willing to ignore or discount out of hand the coincidental, events he thought of as confluent. While Koestler recognized that ostensibly coincident, but what he believed to be ultimately determined, events did not fit within a materialistic theory of the human mind, Beloff believes that he sought a third

way to deal with them already employed by psychologist Carl Jung and biologist Paul Kammerer. Koestler attempted to make sense of what he suspected was meaningful coincidence by collecting as much parapsychological evidence as possible in the hope that one day it could be integrated into and reconciled with theoretical physics.⁴⁸ It is Beloff's conclusion that Koestler never completely abandoned Enlightenment materialism or the optimism of nineteenth-century positivism. He sees Koestler simply as a disenchanted humanist in the secular tradition of the West who never replaced his Marxism with religion and who maintained a belief in the benefits of technology. Beloff argues that, not being able to accept the horrors of the twentieth century as the sole result of flawed civilization and history, Koestler held hope for his postulated pharmaceutical means to harmonize emotive and rational human behavior. But when evidence did not vouch for the efficacy of such a cure, he came to eschew the drug-induced euphoria portrayed by Aldous Huxley and later advocated by Timothy Leary.⁴⁹

Sydney Pearson, Jr. is another writer who, from the standpoint of political science and literary criticism, discovers Koestler's work to possess continuity and integrity. He finds contiguity among Koestler's works of fiction and between his fictional pieces and his musings about science. Pearson's *Arthur Koestler* (1978) is the finest explication of Koestler's writing presently in existence. It reveals a rich set of connections among Koestler's books and essays and convincingly accounts for the development of Koestler's ideas. The volume identifies the basis of the integrity in Koestler's work to be the ancient question of whether there exists any measurable, objective truth. But Pearson sees this question to be associated in Koestler's work with a longing to discover that reason is valid and truth is objective and verifiable. This attitude, Pearson reminds us, is essentially optimistic and contradicts the nihilism that characterized so many late

twentieth-century European intellectuals.⁵⁰ According to Pearson, it is Koestler's own contemplative yogi and activist commissar dichotomy that permeates the entirety of Koestler's thinking. Koestler articulated this dichotomy in an anthology of essays written between 1942 and 1945 collectively published in 1945 under the title *The Yogi and the Commissar*. This work identifies the split between two approaches to life, contemplation and active human agency, as symptomatic of a spiritual crisis in European civilization. It connects contemplative and active approaches with the question of means and ends in political life, and *The Yogi and the Commissar* concludes, rather pessimistically, that there is no possibility that the two approaches can be combined. It portrays the struggle between personal non-involvement and social activism, change at the individual level and change at the social level, as a conundrum that cries for solution. Pearson sees no break between Koestler's novels and his concentration on science after 1954. He concludes that Koestler's writing career is unified by the tension between relativism and determinism. It is the notion of deterministic science in the commissar that Koestler modulates into a search for a less rigid, more yogi-like philosophy of science.⁵¹

Stephen Toulmin begins his 1979 inquiry into Arthur Koestler, "Arthur Koestler's Theodicy: On Sin, Science, and Politics," by questioning how Koestler could abandon the political novel for science. Acknowledging Koestler's success as science editor for *Vossische Zeitung* during the 1930s, Toulmin concludes that Koestler's twenty-five-year abandonment of the political novel was no less enigmatic by the late 1970s than it had been in the mid 1950s.⁵² By the end of his article, however, the attentive reader can see in Toulmin's analysis a two-fold connection between Koestler's two genres. These are Koestler's messianic personality on one hand and his political experience on the other hand. In combination these helped him maintain a distrust of authority. In the course of

his investigation Toulmin locates what he identifies as a paranoid streak in Koestler's critique of science that he maintains most plausibly derives from Koestler's political experience during the 1930s.

Toulmin further explains that Koestler apparently empathized to the point of identification with two men of science whose stories he told. Both of these men, Johannes Kepler and Paul Kammerer, living in different centuries, experienced the existence of the outsider in their respective scientific communities. The way Koestler tells the story of the latter, it was the ridicule of Kammerer's experiments and conclusions by the British scientific establishment precipitated his suicide. Toulmin's reference to Koestler's putative paranoia is likely connected to Koestler's claim that he personally felt the slights of other people and that these feelings spurred him into crusades or causes designed to ameliorate such slights. The paranoia to which Toulmin calls attention, like all paranoia, it is an unrealistic or exaggerated fear, but in Koestler's case, Toulmin claims, the paranoia for the scientific community is vague in its object. As we have already seen, Roy Webberley shows Koestler's distrust of the scientific establishment to be the transference of a distrust of historical determinism to a distrust of scientific determinism, a shift from politics to psychology. The experiences that result in the psychological mechanism of transference are quite capable of creating a general sense of wariness in their possessors. So, giving *The Sleepwalkers* the credit that warranted its use as a science textbook in certain liberal arts colleges, Toulmin nevertheless questions its author's attitude. He accuses Koestler of posing as a romantic savior whose polemical tone insinuates, but never precisely identifies, a "cabal" of old-fashioned scientists whose goal is to force their orthodoxy on the public. After "St. Arthur" saves the "Public Mind" from presumptive self-serving, careerist scientists, Toulmin wonders

how any “cabal” could be capable of hoodwinking and disciplining “fresh generations of hard-nosed and highly counter-suggestive apprentices” year after year.⁵³

Toulmin’s appraisal of aspiring young scientists may verge on the romantic itself, but his observation that Koestler strikes a messianic and a bit over-dramatized pose against the established scientific community deserves notice. In order to substantiate the conclusion that his departure from political writing was neither abrupt nor complete, Toulmin’s fine article entertains six theses in Koestler’s science writing. First, there are three “negative postulates” used to make way for a new approach to science: 1) the reductionism of behaviorist psychology, 2) the determinism of neo-Darwinian evolution, and 3) the misplaced belief in historical coincidence. Second, there are, again three, “positive postulates” that embody Koestler’s constructive contribution to science. According to Toulmin, these include: 1) the concept of bisociation, Koestler’s term for paired, complimentary options, 2) a complex primordial holarchy, Koestler’s term for hierarchical relationships based on a mutual dependence of parts, and 3) the hypothesis that a paranoid streak in human behavior exists as an evolutionary flaw.⁵⁴ Toulmin carefully examines and critiques these six postulates to prove that Koestler is part of a long tradition of philosophical determinism. Toulmin bases this conclusion on his readings of Koestler’s attempts at philosophy in *Insight and Outlook* (1949) and *The Act of Creation* (1964).

Toulmin believes Koestler’s critique of behaviorism to be impressionistic. Based on simplified generalizations of B. F. Skinner’s *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (1971), a book, like Koestler’s own books, written for a popular audience, Toulmin argues that Koestler’s rejection of behaviorism and his prima facie equation of behaviorism with reductionism is unjustified. Toulmin’s point is that there is no reason for Koestler to

dismiss random behavior as incapable of leading to informed, purposeful action. He points out that a careful reading of J. B. Watson, for instance, reveals that behaviorists conceived of creativity as a sequence of random, instructive attempts followed by purposeful choices. Toulmin believes that Koestler misstepped in this regard by identifying a simple target, that of random animal responses, in behaviorism's total approach to psychology that offended him because it privileged successful behavior over responses guided by foresight.⁵⁵

The flaw in Koestler's critique of neo-Darwinism as well as his attribution of mystical powers to coincidence, says Toulmin, resides in his lack of a true appreciation of statistics, especially random events in large numbers.⁵⁶ There is no reason to believe that Arthur Koestler was familiar with chaos theory, and there is little reason to believe that he could have been so. Not until he was quite old and no longer writing much that was new, could he have become familiar with chaos theory. It is understandable that he failed to recognize that indeterminism alone could bring order to the universe. It is more than likely that Toulmin's criticism in this regard is unfair and should not be leveled at a man born in 1905, educated in the early 1920s, and whose writing career took place between the 1930s to the 1970s.

Toulmin suggests that Koestler is, together with Newton and Leibniz, part of a long tradition of philosophical determinism that requires that nature be situated within a larger system of theodicy where reason and propriety are justified by some divinity, not by chance or indeterminacy.⁵⁷ But before he pronounces this verdict, Toulmin accuses Koestler of employing a double standard in his criticism of scientists and philosophers. It is apparent to Toulmin that when Koestler finds fault with scientists, he focuses on the philosophical level at which their work begins, but when Koestler puts forth his own

theories about science, he does so singularly from the philosophical level without regard to empirical validation. In the first case, Koestler's critique of science involves saying no to or rejecting scientific theory from the perspective of philosophical objections. In the second case, the theories that Koestler himself presents lack experimental proof. According to Toulmin, Koestler merely "strikes a scientific pose, and asks only that his novel ideas prove their worth in the explanations of the future."⁵⁸

Koestler's response to Toulmin's article in the March 1979 edition of *Encounter* constituted a non-response that did not even grope for the level of philosophy. In a two-paragraph letter to *Encounter* readers Koestler says that an answer to Toulmin's charges would make for boring reading because it would necessarily consist of rebuttals followed by paraphrases of what is already in *The Sleepwalkers* and other of Koestler's books. Rather than respond to each of Toulmin's criticisms in a systematic fashion, Koestler simply advises those interested to reread his books. It appears that Arthur Koestler was a tired man by 1979. Within three years of his non-response to Toulmin he would become afflicted with Parkinson's Disease and then commit suicide.⁵⁹

The fairly thorough analyses of Koestler's work presented by the writers summarized above, while generally well argued and convincing, provide multiple opportunities for further research. No one has reviewed Koestler's approach to science when he was a young journalist working as the science editor for the German newspaper *Vossische Zeitung* between 1929 and 1933 to see if patterns in his thinking carried into his novels and philosophical writing. It would be instructive to test the conclusions about Arthur Koestler made by the above eleven biographers and scholars in order to determine whether any of their characterizations of him had precedent in his earlier life. Can we

find a pattern in regard to these writers' conclusions about Koestler that goes farther back than their investigations of the mature writer and scientific thinker?

Answering any of these questions should contribute to a better understanding of more than an individual with a unique approach to science. Such answers would undoubtedly speak to some of science's central questions as well as to the importance of the social and political context in which man constructs his understanding of and relation to the universe. In Arthur Koestler's case this background included fundamental determinants such as a Victorian, petty bourgeois upbringing as the only child of a doting mother and a father who failed at his occupation, business. This background also included a formal education in which the effects of modern thinkers like Einstein and Freud were felt as well as the intensified European political turmoil of the first half of the twentieth century.

End Notes

¹ In 1937 Koestler wrote one propagandistic piece that documented German and Italian fascist complicity in the murder of civilians during the Spanish Civil War in two translations for Willie Münzenberg's Popular Front organization, the World Anti-Fascist Congress. They were entitled *Menschenopfer Unerhört* and *L'Espagne ensanglantée*. A heavily edited English version of this account for the Left Book Club in Great Britain appeared under the title *Spanish Testament*. In 1942 Koestler published *Dialogue with Death*, a reworking of his Spanish Civil War experience in a Nationalist prison and his near execution.

² *Encounter* Vol. 6, No. 1 and Vol. 63, No. 2.

³ This paper will not be of sufficient breadth to cover all of the attention paid Koestler. Its focus is his intertwining of politics, ethics, scientific theory, and philosophy. The following list, however, may serve those interested in seeking a more general reception of the ideas of Arthur Koestler. On Koestler's flight from Communism, see Jeffery C. Isaac, "The Road to Apostasy," *East European Politics & Societies* (Vol. 16, #2, 2002, pp. 564-571) and Sandra Goldstein, "Red Days: Intellectuals and the Failing Gods," *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für Deutsche Geschichte* (vol. 24, 1995, pp. 157-178). For Koestler as a European intellectual, see Czeslaw Madajczyk & Hubert Krzyzanowdk, "En Rang serre, les intellectuels d'Europe?: Les Fonctions des Congres Mondiaux d'Intellectuels," *Acta Poloniae Historica* (vol. 72, 1995, pp. 92-123) and Mark Levene, "Arthur Koestler: On Messiahs and Mutations: On Sin, Science, & Politics," *Modernist Studies* (vol 2, #2, 1977, pp. 38-72). On Koestler's Jewish rination or his connections to Zionism, see Sandra Goldstein, "Intellectuelle Utopien: Arthur Koestler und der Zionismus," *Judischer Almanach* (1998, pp. 158-169) and David Ceasarani, *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind* (NY: Free Press, 1999). On Koestler's novels and system of morality, see Marine Poulain, "A Cold War Best-Seller: The Reaction to Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* in France from 1954-1950," *Libraries & Culture* (vol. 36, # 1, 2001, pp. 172-184) and Robert L. King, "Arthur Koestler's Moral Logic and the Duty to Know," *Mass. Review* (vol. 41, # 1, 2000). On the Congress of Cultural Freedom in its Cold War context, see Fritz Keller & Elisabeth Hirt, "Die CIA als Mäzen: Oder: Wie Autonom Ist Autonome Kunst?," in *Zeitgeschichte* (Vol. 13, # 9-10, 1986, pp. 311-318). On current astronomy and Koestler's evaluation of Galileo, see David Topper, "Galileo, Sunspots, and the Motions of the Earth Redux," *Isis* (vol. 90, # 4, 1999, pp. 757-767.)

⁴ “In the Tradition of Daniel Defoe,” *Encounter*, July-August 1983, p. 16. Cranston goes as far as aligning Koestler with the empirical tradition in Great Britain.

⁵ “The Last Generation,” *Partisan Review* (vol. 15, # 2 (1984)), pp. 167-169. Consonant with Koestler’s own estimation of himself, Phillips calls Koestler “the most representative figure of the [twentieth-century] European intelligentsia.”

⁶ *Arthur Koestler: A Biography*. NY: MacMillan Pub Co, 1982, pp. 86-87. Hamilton’s method is to refrain from citing the material he quotes. This can be a source of frustration, especially when, lacking any reference to the quoted material in Hamilton’s text, the reader does not recognize it from his own reading of Koestler to sufficiently pin it to a particular Koestler source. It is doubly frustrating when a source type for a quote about Koestler is mentioned by Hamilton without any specific citing of where the material can be located.

⁷ *The Age of Longing* pleads for continental intellectuals to rediscover the confidence that alone will change their apparent willingness to fatalistically succumb to Soviet hegemony. *The Trail of the Dinosaur*, a collection of essays Koestler wrote between 1946 and 1955, ends on a grave, if not outright pessimistic, note. Nevertheless, the first two-thirds of this book reads like a recipe for action that identifies flaws among European intellectuals and political forces while it points a way forward.

⁸ Mark Levene, *Arthur Koestler* (NY: Frederick Unger Publishers, 1984), p. 149.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.* P. 7.

¹¹ *Encounter* (Vol. 61, No. 1, 1983), pp. 31-23, quoted by Levene, p. 19.

¹² Koestler’s first novel, *The Gladiators*, investigates the tension between revolutionary ideals and political necessities. In the novel political necessities represent limits placed by *Realpolitik* on ideal goals. That may be the sense in which to read Koestler’s guarded defense of the early Zionist expansion in Palestine.

¹³ Speech delivered at Carnegie Hall, March 26, 1946 at the invitation of the International Relief and Rescue Committee. See Levene, p. 22 and Cesarani, *Homeless Mind*, pp. 304-305.

¹⁴ Levene, p. 150.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Koestler would continue to entertain the idea of a pharmaceutical palliative to nuclear war as late as 1973. See *The Call Girls*, p. 140.

¹⁷ Levene, p. 151.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ David Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind* (London: William Heiman, 1998), pp. 248 & 571-572. One could add to this list, following Koestler from serial drunk to drunken tirade, automotive mishap to car crash, and woman to woman to woman again.

²⁰ In his thorough psychological analysis of Koestler’s alienated self-image through shifting interests and changing causes, Amos Handel reveals that Koestler claimed awareness in his 1954 autobiography of his own lack of a centered personality which at that time lasted from age 16 to age 43. Handel also shows that in 1976 Koestler, rejecting the notion of his own complete aimlessness, could acknowledge a circuitous line of reasoning that connected his published works, a line which was characterized only by an apparent discontinuity in approach from concrete politics to scientific abstractions. See Handel, “The Sense of

Estrangement from One's Previous Self in the Autobiographies of Arthur Koestler and Edwin Muir," *Biography* (vol. 9, #4, 1989), pp. 307-316.

²¹ Ibid. 4-6 & 37-39. For another analysis of Koestler's aimlessness, attachment to Zionism, and his self-identification as Jewish, see John Milfull, "Die Wonnen der Gewöhnlichkeit," *Jahrbuch des Instituts für Deutsche Geschichte. Beiheft* (vol 14, 1985), pp. 359-370. Milfull views Koestler's ideological and physical wandering and his apparent inability to commit himself to things simply as an indication of an impatient and restless personality, not as a symptom of deracination or any general inability to feel accepted by other people.

²² *Horizon*, Dec. 1943.

²³ Arthur Koestler, *Arrow in the Blue*, pp. 23-24, 55, 142-143, 123-124.

²⁴ Koestler, "The Moral Duty to Know," *Horizon*, March 1944, p. 15. Cited by King, "Arthur Koestler's Moral Logic & the Duty to Know," *Massachusetts Review* (Vol. 1, LXI, #1, spring 2002), p. 45 and Cesarani, 207-208 and 224-225.

²⁵ On this very point, see Cesarani, p. 571.

²⁶ Robert Blumstock, "Going Home: Arthur Koestler's *Thirteenth Tribe*," *Jewish social studies* (vol. 48, #2, 1986), 96.

²⁷ Ibid. Pp. 94-96 & 98.

²⁸ Sukosd, "Sors es Sorstalansag" ("Destiny and Lack of Destiny"), *Valosag* (No.12, 1983), pp. 109-117.

²⁹ Hyman Maccoby, "Jew," *Encounter* (vol. 61, Sept.-Oct. 1983), p. 53.

³⁰ Blumstock, pp. 101-102.

³¹ See Cesarani, Chapter One, "A Good Jewish Child," particularly pp. 23-32.

³² Laura Fermi, *Illustrious Immigrant: The Intellectual Migration from Europe, 1930-1941* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 53.

³³ Arthur Koestler, , *The Invisible Writing* (vol. 2 of *Arrow in the Blue*) (Collins with Hamish Hamilton, Ltd., 1954), p. 428.

³⁴ Fermi, pp. 57-59.

³⁵ Harold Harris, ed., *Astride Two Cultures: Arthur Koestler at Seventy* (New York: Random House, 1975), p. xviii.

³⁶ Ibid. P. xvii.

³⁷ Roy Webberley, "An Attempt at an Overview," *Astride Two Cultures*, p. 4.

³⁸ Ibid. 3.

³⁹ Reed Merrill and Thomas Frazier, *Arthur Koestler: An international bibliography* (Ann Arbor: Ardis Publishers, 1979), p.20-23. Cf., Arthur Koestler, *The Case of the Mid-wife Toad* (New York: Random House, 1971), p.137.

⁴⁰ Mark Graubard, "The Sleepwalkers: Its Contribution and Impact," *Across Two Cultures*, pp. 35-36.

⁴¹ Ibid. P. 32.

⁴² The title of Koestler's contributions were "Part Three / *Anecdotal Cases*" and "Part Four / *Speculations on problems beyond our present understanding.*" See Alister Hardy, Robert Harvie, and Arthur Koestler, *The Challenge of Chance: A Mass Experiment in Telepathy and Its Expected Outcome* (New York: Random House, 1973).

⁴³ Koestler could say, for example, "The dogmas and taboos of nineteenth-century materialist science relating to space, time, matter and energy, contained within a rigid framework of causality and determinism, still dominate the habits of thought of the educated public which prides itself on its rational outlook, and feels compelled to deny the existence of ESP-type phenomena which seemingly contradict the 'Laws of Nature' and replacing them with obscure mental constructs which cannot be represented in three-dimensional space, and whose quasi-mystical implications are hidden in technical jargon and mathematical formalism. If Galileo were resurrected, he would certainly accuse Heisenberg, Pauli *et al.* of 'dabbling in occult fancies'." See *Janus: A Summing Up* (New York: Random House, 1978), pp. 258-260.

⁴⁴ Renee Haynes, "Writing Jacob: Koestler and the Paranormal," *Astride Two Cultures*, p. 185.

⁴⁵ Ibid. P. 177.

⁴⁶ See Merrill and Frazier, pp. 13-14.

⁴⁷ Ibid. P. 175 and 177. David Cesarani notes Koestler's fascination with the paranormal during his early years as a journalist at *Vossische Zeitung*. He also cites Koestler's requests to readers for accounts of paranormal experiences as late as 1972 in two British journals, *Sunday Times* and *New Scientist*. See *The Homeless Mind*, pp. 69 and 520.

⁴⁸ John Beloff, "Koestler's Philosophy of Mind," *Astride Two Cultures*, pp. 80-81.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Pp. 69-70. Cf. Arthur Koestler, "Return Trip to Nirvana" (1961) reprinted in *Drinkers of Infinity* (London: Hutchinson, 1968).

⁵⁰ Sydney Pierson, Jr., *Arthur Koestler* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), p. 32. See also Merrill and Frazier, pp. 11&13.

⁵¹ Ibid. P. 31.

⁵² Stephen Toulmin, "Arthur Koestler's Theodicy," *Encounter* (London: vol 52, # 2), p. 46.

⁵³ Ibid. P. 47. One must connect this question with Koestler's witness of the atrocities of Stalin and its consequent enforced conformity, even if Toulmin does not. There is little evidence that Koestler vehemently distrusted authority and received social convention before his experience with Stalinism.

⁵⁴ Ibid. Pp. 48 and 50.

⁵⁵ Ibid. Pp. 48-49.

⁵⁶ Ibid. P. 50.

⁵⁷ Ibid. P. 54. Cf., Merrill and Frazier, pp. 23-24. If Toulmin's appraisal of Koestler in regard to his intolerance for determinism unattached to some overarching plan or power is correct, Koestler held similar ideas concerning coincident, serendipitous, or confluent events as did one contemporary, Carl Jung.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 52. Cf., Cesarani on Koestler's sententious and flaccid prose may be relevant here. See *Homeless Mind*, 56-57.

⁵⁹ *Encounter* (vol. 52, #3, March 1979), p. 91.

Chapter Two

The Universe Breathes: Personal, Social, and Historical Determinants, 1905-1937

Like other people's, Arthur Koestler's world expanded and contracted. In his youth his world was relatively small, consisting of a nuclear family of a father, a mother and no siblings. This group was augmented by a nanny and the occasionally a grandfather. As he came of school age, his world began to expand. He discovered books and literature, then girls. By his teenage years, attending school in Vienna would further expand his awareness. With his formal higher education during the early 1920s, Koestler's world came to include the ideas of science and Zionist nationalism. During his twenties, Koestler's Zionist ideal would lead him to adventures in the Middle East and eventually to a writing career. This career further broadened his sphere to include Paris and Berlin. In these cosmopolitan cities he would work as a journalist for a large-circulation German daily whose assignments stretched his intellectual universe to include not only discussion of cultural events in European cities and scientific developments across the globe, but the vast northern regions of Europe to the North Pole. When he became a member of the German Communist Party, Koestler's world came to include the Soviet Union, particularly its Central Asian parts and, in a symbolic sense, the entire planet. This was because he believed he was participating in an international movement that held the potentiality of building truly global social and political progress. There was a distinct irony in this reality because Koestler's attraction to Communism was the result of diminished political options or, metaphorically, of a shrinking universe.

After the Nazis came to dominate German society, Koestler's world began to shrink. By 1933 he lost his job as a Berlin journalist, and as the result of his travels in the

Soviet Union he began to lose his faith in Communism. Retreating to Paris he found only periodic employment as a journalist. Then he met Willie Münzenberg. The latter introduced Koestler to the art of using the press to court and motivate the public in pursuance of social and political causes. Koestler's world began to expand once more when Münzenberg hit upon the idea of utilizing Koestler's press credentials to send him across the Pyrenees to report the fascist complicity in the dismantling of the first Spanish republic. It was in 1937 that Koestler's personal universe began to accumulate the proportions it would hold throughout most of his lifetime. His reporting of events in Spain, his narrative of his own brush with death at the hands of Spanish fascists, and the publication of his first two novels, all within the span of three years, breathed life into his writing career. These accomplishments determined that Arthur Koestler would have the world's eyes and ears in a very broad sense until the 1970s when the subject of his investigations verged away from both politics and what was accepted as science and followed a tangent toward the paranormal. It was not until just before his death in 1983 that Koestler's world exhaled and shrunk even further as he failed to inspire the confidence in his insights into the world upon which his readership was based. By then the members of his largely secular and rationalistic reading public began to see less of what had originally attracted them to Koestler's writing.

Arthur Koestler was first an educated, middle-class European male. In some ways he was a man of the "long nineteenth century." In others ways he was a man of two new twentieth-century worlds, one of hopeful, idealistic imaginations, the other of disappointments and harsh realities. In the most fundamental sense we can interpret much of Koestler's writing as derivative of the intersection of these three worlds. His professional training, although incomplete, was in the engineering sciences. His father,

although plagued by the frustrations of circumstances largely beyond his control that spelled economic failure, was, like many of his relatives, a businessman usually in the textile trade. Before Arthur Koestler could embark upon a career as a writer about science and philosophy, he would first become embroiled in the politics of nationalism that were combined with circumscribed prospects for the European petty bourgeoisie after 1918.

As an adolescent Koestler was first swept up in the hopeful, if quixotic, politics of Hungarian nationalism under the Marxist and pro-Bolshevik Béla Kun. Subsequently, while attending university, he would be attracted to and devote some years to Zionist nationalism. Responding to what many men of his social origin and experience would come to recognize as the limitations of nationalism during the 1920s, Koestler would eventually succumb to the seductions of the ostensible internationalism of the Bolshevik Revolution. For a time he responded to the optimism of the apparent successes of Soviet economic and social development. Then he, like many other people who had been sympathetic to the idea of international proletarian revolution and rational social planning during the 1920s would, by the late 1930s, suffer profound disappointment and disillusionment.

Koestler was among those who discovered that the Soviet Union, while appearing to build socialism in one country, proved incapable of acting as the vanguard of international socialist revolution. Some, but by no means all, Communists and their fellow travelers would recognize that under Stalin the Soviet Union's international rhetoric was attached to a *Realpolitik* that pursued the national interests of greater Russia, while ruthlessly protecting the power of its cultic ruler. Under Stalin's leadership the Third Socialist International, or Comintern, used its influence within the international

working class's political movement to safeguard Soviet interests and Stalin's domestic power with little real concern for the broader interests of international socialism. By the late 1930s these two conservative motivations of Soviet policy, the maintenance of Stalin's power and the securing of Soviet borders, were made starkly clear by Soviet conduct during the Moscow Purge Trials and the Spanish Civil War. Some thoughtful people during the "pink decade" of the 1930s would realize that the Soviet Union's economic progress was impressive as much for the rudimentary conditions under which it had begun as for how far it had come. The perceived social progress of the "workers' state" proved to be part real, part illusion, and part greener pastures that those who were disappointed by the capitalist order were all too ready to idealize. The men and women whose social and economic experiences paled before what the nineteenth century had taught them and their parents to expect as possible would either defend the Soviet Union blindly or slowly, in piecemeal fashion, develop a critical attitude toward the Comintern. For those leftists in the latter group, disappointment in Communism would make their frustration with the capitalist order all the more difficult to bear. By 1938 Arthur Koestler was sliding into that very group.

The liberalism embraced by men of Koestler's background during the nineteenth century -- a political philosophy that looked so promising only fifty years before Koestler's birth -- seemed to have evaporated in the Europe of the 1920s and 1930s. For many middle-class Europeans, liberalism's hopefulness seemed illusory and idealistic as they experienced the economic depression of the interwar years, the growing popularity of fascism, and the unwillingness of the liberal democracies to combat the violence and political oppression of the right. In the longer term, liberalism's helplessness and embarrassment of scant achievements in the face of the Great War, the Bolshevik

Revolution, Weimar Germany's hyperinflation, and, later, the hysteria of corporatist states and fascist parties combined to discredit it as a viable political philosophy. Liberalism had lost its luster for many an educated, middle-class European. So the universe for Koestler and his contemporaries had held its breath, withholding, in this instance, political options. For many Europeans the only viable political attractors had become the extremities of ideology. Although they existed at opposite ends of the political spectrum, fascism and Communism both looked increasingly appealing to many of these people. Frustration and various forms of romanticism contributed to their allure by the 1930s. Liberalism appeared prostrate, if not completely irrelevant, to the forces of either the logic, the imagined prospects, or the real political power of the political extremes.

In his contribution to *The God That Failed*, Arthur Koestler explains that his own existence in a social order that had been disintegrating since the end of the Great War created in him a thirst for a faith that was quenched by reading Marx, Engels, and Lenin.¹ He explains that reading these men "brought a new revelation, and an intellectual delight" theretofore experienced only when he had read Freud for the first time.² In order to understand Koestler, we must keep in mind that the limited political options he confronted as a young adult resulted in a flirtation with Communism followed by an intense rejection and fear of the Soviet Union that defined the larger part of his writing career. These were the primary determinants of his outlook. As we will see, they were what united his political novels and his ideas about science.

In her book *Chronicles of Conscience* (1968), Jenni Calder puts Arthur Koestler in the company of writers like Paul Nash, Siegfried Sasson, Wilfred Owen, C. E. Montague, Robert Graves, and George Orwell. All of these men, she claims, had little

choice in responding to the extremity of social and political chaos which started during the Great War and expressed itself most ferociously during the 1930s as it led to the Second World War. Calder believes that Paul Nash best expressed the situation through which these writers lived. In his autobiography, Nash describes himself as a man who had been irrevocably affected by his experiences in the trenches during World War I. Consequently he claimed that as a writer, he could not afford to simply follow his inclinations and create purely from the heart. “I am no longer an artist, interested and curious,” he wrote, “I am a messenger who will bring back word from the men who are fighting to those who want the war to go on forever.”³

Arthur Koestler was born too late to fight in the Great War. However, the realities of the 1930s created writers whose direct experience with the atrocities committed by Stalin and the fascists forged them into Cassandras warning of new stark political realities. In this aspect, Koestler’s circumstances were hardly different from those experienced by Paul Nash and his fellow men of letters. Like this previous generation of writers, populated by men like Nash, Arthur Koestler learned his politics and developed his own way of using historical and autobiographical fiction in order to inform his contemporaries of political truths many of them would face either directly or indirectly. Koestler, like other European writers of the 1930s, would write about his own experiences in order to present realities and interpret their immediate meaning. He would make sense of his experiences in order to show how private responses to horrible, dehumanizing conditions could be universalized and form the basis of political understanding and political action. For Koestler the 1930s was the decade that gave birth to his larger writing career. His experiences during this decade created the social philosopher and activist that we have come to recognize as Koestlerian. Koestler

employed his experiences during that decade in fiction designed to affect his fellow Europeans' political and social consciousness.

* * *

Arthur Koestler, the respected European journalist, novelist, and essayist, was the only child born to Jewish, East European parents, Henrik Koestler of Budapest and Adele Zeitel of Prague. Arthur was born in Budapest on September 5, 1905. Even though he grew up in Hungary and Austria, his own account of his upbringing in a proper bourgeois home by nannies and a strict mother was rather typical of what the English-speaking world describes as Victorian. Arthur remained at home until the age of seventeen when he entered the Technische Hochschule in Vienna, but he describes his relationship with his father as one of distinct remoteness. His relationship with his mother, on the other hand, seems to have been based on an admixture of doting attention and the distance from their children that governesses afforded middle-class women. His education, especially during his college years, gave Arthur the strong nineteenth-century “manly” approach to life embodied in the centuries-old traditions of dueling, carousing, and whoring. The latter two behaviors would stay with him his entire life.⁴ It was at the Hochschule where Arthur joined the Jewish *Unitas Burschenschaft* that combined the German rapier dueling tradition with fraternity-like socializing, and Zionist politics.⁵

By Koestler's own account, his Jewish ethnicity played a minor role in his life. His memoirs refer to his paternal grandfather as Leopold X because Arthur claims not to have known how Leopold came to adopt the Koestler surname. Koestler describes his grandfather as a man who observed some Jewish traditions, but who remained rather secular in his attitudes toward life.⁶ According to Koestler, his parents were completely secular. As indicated in Chapter One of this investigation, Koestler's latest biographer,

David Cesarani, interprets Arthur's de-emphasis of his Jewish origins as dishonest. He accuses Koestler of passive as well as willful deracination, of deliberately downplaying his cultural and ethnic origins. According to Cesarani, Leopold was an important figure in Arthur's early life, and he was much more religious than Arthur claimed him to have been.⁷

The long view of Koestler's life tempts the biographer to dismiss him as an impetuous, impulsive, and reckless character who liked to start things, then burn bridges and either abandon them completely or leave them with hopes that others would finish them. In 1925 after an all night argument with a Russian student over the role of fate in peoples' lives, Arthur decided to prove that, within certain limits, men determine their own prospects. He did this by burning his matriculation book, a document necessary for his graduation from the Hochschule.⁸ The question of the limits between human agency and social or historical determinism was one on which Koestler would focus his entire lifetime. The impulsive demonstration of human agency represented by the burning of his matriculation book was typical of Arthur Koestler. This he did a mere four months from finishing an engineering degree, determining that he would abandon formal higher education and possibly a secure middle-class life style. A few months later he emigrated to Palestine to devote himself to the Zionist movement only to find that he was incapable of living the austere and disciplined existence of the Kibbutzim. Six years later Koestler became a member of the Communist Party, two years after that a critic of Communism, and finally, during the Cold War, an ardent anti-Communist.⁹ By the middle 1940s Koestler initiated a search for a new European spirituality and began to write on topics as arcane as the role of man's intuition and existence of the paranormal.

Like a generation of writers before him which included men like Stephen Crane as well as like George Orwell, a writer of his own generation, Koestler may have been attracted to the idea of escaping the predictability and a perceived bareness of middle-class life. In his case, and unlike Orwell, Koestler never experienced life among the underclass. During the inter-war years, the 1920s and 1930s, Koestler lived among educated middle-class Zionists in Palestine as well as educated middle-class journalists and leftists in continental Europe. His sympathy for the working class, if he had any, did not include direct experience of its social reality. Koestler did, however, embark upon a period of tramping, albeit of a middle-class type, through the Middle East. He was attracted to a romantic notion of living a simple existence at life's fundamental level and dedicated to the ideal of building a Jewish state.¹⁰

During the early 1930s Koestler traveled throughout the Soviet Union, attracted in a similar fashion to an idealization of life in the new "workers' state." The purpose of these travels was to write a book that described the transformation of Russian life in a positive manner. Koestler's romantic attitude drew him intellectually toward another fundamental level of life, that of agricultural reform and rudimentary industrial development taking place in the Soviet Union. He witnessed, but could not truly see and verbalize, the social realities caused by forced collectivization of agriculture and the first Five Year Plan.¹¹ The volume written by Koestler which resulted from these travels, *Von Weissen Nachtchen und Roten Tagen* (1933), was conceived as global publication by the Comintern, but was published by the Soviet Communist Party in heavily edited form only for the German-speaking minority living in the Soviet Union.¹² Koestler's travels in the Soviet Union were, however, instrumental in the development of his first novel which, in

part, can be employed to reach certain conclusions about Arthur Koestler's relationship to the social world in which he existed during the 1920s and 1930s.

In his first novel, Koestler investigated what could be perceived as fate, or the limitations of human agency upon history. His fictionalized account of the Spartacus-led slave uprising in ancient Rome, *The Gladiators* (1939), investigates the role of the unexpected and the counterintuitive in revolutionary political movements as well as the readiness and worthiness of the masses of men to pursue and accept collective goals. In the course of this investigation, Koestler developed the notion which he called the Law of Detours.¹³ According to this idea, revolutionary leaders are forced by the unwillingness of many of those whom they lead to act alternately in a pure, selfless, principled manner or in selfish ways necessitated by their own self-preservation. Leaders usually have little choice but to abandon a consistent, straightforward struggle for social ideals and goals. The limitations of history and human consciousness channel the actions of revolutionary leaders in directions they may not want to go which are, nevertheless, fated or determined for them. In *The Gladiators* Koestler sees this as a fact of social life and of history. *The Gladiators* views this "fact" as being associated with pre-modern revolutions whose leaders and participants lack any consistent revolutionary political theories which can guide their actions. Because the novel is largely allegorical and inspired by the Russian Revolution, it implies that social revolutions in all periods of history experience pressures from what Koestler labels the Law of Detours. Koestler would directly connect this "law" to the development of Stalinism in later novels, *Darkness at Noon* (1940) and *Arrival and Departure* (1943).

The protagonist of Koestler's first novel, the slave Spartacus, does not have the will to drive his followers down a lofty and rational path to revolutionary ends that he

knows to be direct, consistent, and less likely to fail than the path that tempts his followers. The masses that Spartacus leads desire to go in directions that are determined to a large extent by a need they feel for immediate gratification of desires which are more fundamental than any distant revolutionary, utopian end. Pushed onto the crooked path his followers demand, Spartacus consciously, if reluctantly, betrays his revolutionary goals. Against his better judgement, he attacks the city of Capua, a Roman stronghold, that his followers desire to conquer without the siege machines that he knows are necessary to defeat the town.¹⁴

Through a flawed act of will, Spartacus hesitates to isolate and destroy his shortsighted followers who become his political adversaries. He pays with his life as constricting social and historical forces obviate his idealized ends. Ultimately history frustrates his humanizing motivations for social justice and his slave republic expires at the hands of a pragmatic land speculator, Marcus Crassus, to whom the threatened Roman ruling elite turns to save their society. Wolfe Mays has interpreted the crux of *The Gladiators* to be this inability of the masses to recognize and understand the Law of Detours which they were determined to follow and which led, in the novel, to a conflict between means and ends.¹⁵

One can interpret Koestler's attraction to Communism as a variation of the Law of Detours. In his autobiography Koestler explains that for him and many middle-class Europeans during the 1930s, the attraction of Communism resulted from a lack of options. The First World War had proven the limitations of liberalism while it simultaneously allowed socialism to discredit itself. The only political option that seemed to offer a hopeful view of the future was the experiment initiated by the Bolsheviks in 1917 which, by 1930, looked so promising in contrast to the rampant

unemployment and the cold, free-market logic that flagrantly contradicted social need in the rest of Europe.¹⁶ If we look at Koestler's transitory flirting with Communism in this light and realize that in the long term he acted like a liberal whom history had frustrated, we can apply a version of the Law of Detours to the political life he led after 1930. Liberal ideals as well as the Communist utopia would prove incapable of directly attaining even abbreviated expressions of their desired ends. This notion of the political and historical detours, like other ideas Koestler developed in the books he wrote after 1939, shows how history's limitations channeled his own response to the tumultuous events that impinged upon his life.

While in Palestine in the 1920s, Koestler made contact with leaders in the Zionist movement who steered his strivings in the direction of journalism. Koestler was a talented enough writer, and by 1927 he had already served in Cairo as an interim editor of a German international trade magazine and had written Hebrew fairytales for the Jewish National Fund designed to introduce Jewish children to their cultural history. He had by that time also contributed light articles to the respected Viennese *Neue Freie Presse*. In the same year he found work as a freelance reporter for the German-language Hungarian newspaper, *Pester Lloyd*. By 1929 Koestler became a correspondent for one of the most prestigious West European Liberal newspaper trusts, the German-Jewish Ullstein Press. The advantages Koestler had as the only child in a petty bourgeois family would serve him well throughout his career as a writer. His knowledge of the Bible, Western literature, and European languages would combine with his higher education at the Hochschule and its engineering focus to make him as comfortable when writing about cultural and spiritual subjects as he was when writing about the physical world.¹⁷

In 1931 Arthur was making a respectable living as the science editor for Ullstein. He wrote on theoretical, experimental, and applied subjects for several Ullstein periodicals aimed at various audiences. On the last day of 1931, while living in Berlin, he joined the German Communist Party (KPD) with the conviction that both history and science had determined Europe's best hopes lay with Communism. In his typical zealous fashion, Koestler urged his contacts in the Party to allow him to go to the Soviet Union in order to drive a tractor to help develop collectivized agriculture. It is characteristic of Koestler that when he decided in 1931 to devote himself to the cause of world revolution directed by the Comintern, he at first wanted to emigrate to the Soviet Union. In romantic fashion, he desired to work as a tractor driver, helping build socialism in an elemental manner from the ground up. Remember that his attraction to Zionism in the 1920s had elicited a similarly enthusiastic response in which he attempted to live and work on a kibbutz. His KPD comrades, however, saw little value in such an endeavor; educated, middle-class journalists did not typically make good farmers. The Party's chief of the Department for Agitation and Propaganda, Ernst Schneller, convinced Arthur that his most fruitful contributions to proletarian revolution could be achieved if he stayed with Ullstein. This would avail the Party an ear on mainstream bourgeois society and the opportunity to produce occasional articles sympathetic to the Soviet Union and the Communist cause in a large-circulation, respectable newspaper.¹⁸

Inspired by the struggle for an egalitarian future and excited by the conspiratorial intrigue, perceived intellectual stimulation, and camaraderie of the day-to-day life of the Communist cadre, Koestler would spend the first part of 1932 in devoted work for the Party. As a member of the KPD he found some of the social integration and sense of belonging that he claimed he had been missing since his childhood.¹⁹ By 1932 he

confronted a variety of what he would in 1939 define as the Law of Detours as his own willfulness shaped the options that history seemed to have offered him. As the result of human agency, Arthur's role in party work had already to be redefined during his first year of Comintern life. A political contact he had made in his office at Ullstein, a man his autobiography refers to simply as Von E., suffered pangs of patriotic conscience about some work he had done for the Party which he believed compromised his German fatherland. In Von E. nationalism had defeated internationalism and helped to alter Koestler's political path. After a short argument with Koestler, Von E. came clean with his employers and submitted a letter of resignation to Ullstein which exposed not only his own, but also Koestler's, political affiliations.²⁰

By the middle of 1932 Koestler's function as KPD mole in a respectable, "bourgeois" newspaper had ended. Because the Nazis had become a significant force in the German government after 1932, a Jewish-owned publishing concern could not afford the political consequences of admitting it had kept a Communist on its staff. Koestler and the Ullstein organization saved each other from public scandal. The newspaper quietly terminated Koestler, giving him a severance sum that allowed him to send money to his parents and to live for several months without working. Formally the Ullstein publishers told Arthur he could continue contributing to their papers as a freelance journalist – although nothing he wrote ever again appeared in their publications. Whether Koestler never desired to write again for his former employers or Ullstein editors never really intended that Koestler again appear in print in their papers is impossible to determine. More likely than not, both possibilities described the reality of the situation. Koestler's pride and embarrassment would have mitigated against his willingness to write for his former employer once his political affiliations were revealed. Having KPD cadre

actively, even if only occasionally, contributing articles as a freelance journalist was certainly a liability that Ullstein could ill afford by 1932. The quiet termination and formal, but unimplemented, offer to let Koestler episodically write articles for Ullstein papers spared both employer and employee public shame. It also kept Koestler's reputation as a first-rate liberal journalist intact.²¹

Fishing for a new way to serve the Party, Koestler determined to put his unstained press credentials to use. He and Comintern officials decided to have him travel throughout the Soviet Union to serialize articles and eventually publish a book on the strivings of the Soviet people to build socialism under the first Five Year Plan.²² His reputation as a respectable journalist would give his positive articles about the Soviet Union credibility in continental Europe, thereby serving the movement in its propaganda battle with conservative political forces.

Reflecting Germany's fascination with the Graf Zeppelin, Koestler had already in the summer of 1931 traveled to the polar region of the Soviet Union on his way to the North Pole. This trip had resulted in what was in 1932 the latest group of serialized articles in *Vossische Zeitung* designed to attract readers by following zeppelin expeditions across the globe. The Comintern planned to follow the Ullstein paper's project with a scheme to further its own contest for adherents and sympathetic fellow travelers. Granting Koestler permission to travel through the Soviet Union in 1932 provided him the opportunity to augment his 1931 narratives about the zeppelin's trajectory over the Soviet Union. The Party planned for him to write what amounted to a follow-up piece to his travels with the zeppelin's international crew of scientists that included Soviet scientists. The Comintern planned Koestler's account of life in the Soviet Union to be published as a mass-marketed book in which a respected journalist reached a

complimentary verdict on Communist development. To his earlier sympathetic chronicle about development in the Soviet north produced during the Graf Zeppelin expedition, Koestler, now a clandestine member of the KPD, was to add accounts of the economic progress in the Ukraine, the Soviet Middle East, and Soviet Central Asia.²³ It was in 1932-1933, his first full year as a Communist, during a twelve month long sojourn in the fledgling “workers’ state,” that Koestler began to question Communism and develop new political attitudes.

Koestler’s wide interests and shifting devotions to varied causes along with his habit of burning bridges draws the biographer’s attention to a tendency toward dilettantism. Concluding that Koestler was merely a dilettante would be hasty, however. In a chapter of *Arrow in the Blue* entitled “Of Charlatans and Cranks,” Koestler explains that his job as science editor for the Ullstein Press necessitated that he be versatile and broadly read in science and philosophy.²⁴ Wide reading in order to write articles about theoretical and applied science for the relatively short period that Koestler worked at Ullstein may explain the usefulness of broad interests to a particular profession, but it is also emblematic of Koestler’s personality.²⁵ Thorough and extended reading was a habit that is evident throughout Koestler’s life. He probably established this habit in his early years, and it serves as a partial explanation for a lifetime of scattered preoccupations and apparent aimlessness. In an older nineteenth-century fashion, a fashion typical of a time when breadth of knowledge was common, Koestler would maintain a habit of relating science and philosophy to the mundane as well as to the sublime aspects of his own social, political, and psychological experiences. This habit is one indication of Koestler’s yearning for integrity in European philosophy as he eschewed the characteristic fractured compartmentalism of the modern world. A desire to discover a relevant spirituality that

could be attached to science and rationalism became a constant in Koestler's writing by the 1940s.

Associated with many of Koestler's changing devotions was a tendency toward self-destructiveness. We must not forget the impetuous and reckless manner in which he ended his higher education. Koestler describes his termination at Ullstein as an act of will similar to burning his matriculation book. His KPD recruit at Ullstein, Von E., had warned Koestler that he would expose their KPD affiliations. By his own admission Koestler willfully chose not to talk sense to him and refused any attempt to convince Von E. to change his mind.²⁶ He failed – and he claims to have done so consciously – to exercise his will and maneuver within established social constraints. Koestler admits to feelings of inferiority during much of his life that could explain his self-destructive behavior as stemming from low self-esteem. In *Arrow in the Blue* he attributes his characteristically awkward social responses to his lonely childhood and a consequent defensive, over-compensating attitude accompanied by a general atrophy of social skills.²⁷ Disappointment in one's self-confidence can result in self-destructive behavior. In Koestler's case, there may very well have been a nexus between low self-esteem and a tendency to tempt fate's darker side.

It can be argued that another self-imposed compensation for Arthur Koestler's lonely childhood was his appetite for work. Koestler's verbalized striving for hard physical labor like that of the Kibbutzim or of driving a tractor on a Soviet collective farm apparently was no more than an ideal he felt obliged to express. He did, however, possess a large capacity for other kinds of work. His work schedule at the Ullstein Paris bureau was grueling, affording him only short periods of fitful sleep.²⁸ It should also be noted that an acquaintance he made during his 1932-1933 trip to the Soviet Union, a

fellow writer, commented on what he identified as Koestler's unbalanced need to work and feel productive. This description suggests the existence of a guilt response in Koestler when he felt he was not working toward some achievement. Koestler met this writer, Langston Hughes, in the Soviet Middle East and, according to David Cesarani who paraphrases Hughes' account of events, Koestler revived Hughes's own journalistic project for American readers by imploring him that writers had a social responsibility to write for their publics.²⁹ David Cesarani explains that Hughes acknowledged the positive influence that Koestler had on his own project and that Koestler's energy and driven personality consumed Hughes's energy to the point of exhaustion. Hughes's estimation of Koestler was that he was unable to relax and was dedicated to work to such an extent that it made him eccentric.³⁰

By 1938 Willie Münzenberg, whose Paris-based operation in the service of the Comintern was able to preserve a modicum of independence from Moscow, had sent Koestler to Spain twice. Koestler, working for Münzenberg's World Anti-fascist Congress, traveled under his Hungarian passport and recently-obtained British press credentials in order to report on fascist Germany's and Italy's support of Franco's attack on the liberal Spanish republic. Reminiscent of the ending of his formal education and his career at Ullstein, Koestler's behavior seems clearly self-destructive during his second trip to war-torn Spain in 1938. He had already been forced to flee Spain during his first trip in 1937 after a German fascist had blown his cover as a liberal journalist. The German officer had recognized Koestler through earlier political encounters in Berlin and exposed him to Spanish rebels as a German leftist. Furthermore, on his return to France in 1937, he had published a stinging expose of the atrocities committed by the Right in Spain. Nevertheless, when it was clear in 1938 that the rebels were closing in on Malaga

and Republicans were in retreat, Koestler would again expose himself to danger. He jumped from the car in which he was escaping and walked back to Malaga to be the only non-fascist journalist in the occupied city.³¹

It would be easy to explain Koestler's attraction to Communism as a simple impulse motivated by an idealistic yearning for meaning and focus in his life or as a deep-seated desire for justice. Such a simple explanation would necessarily ignore all the nuance present in Koestler's personality and experiences. So what exactly was it that attracted him to the Soviet Union? First, he cites a feeling that there was a paucity of alternatives in Europe as fascism developed during the 1930s. In *The God That Failed* (1950) he claims that, "Even by a process of pure elimination, the Communists, with the mighty Soviet Union behind them, seemed the only force capable of resisting the onrush of the primitive horde with its swastika totem."³² In describing how similar the conversion experiences to Communism were for people of different psychological makeup, Koestler draws our attention to the plight of middle-class Central Europeans who had gone through the ruinous inflation of the 1920s and the wasteful unemployment of the 1930s. He explains that the Communist Party's cadre had come to be augmented by, "a mass migration of the sons and daughters of the European bourgeoisie [attempting] to escape from the collapsing world of their parents." Furthermore, during the 1930s, "The economic and moral disintegration of the middle strata of society led to the fatal process of polarization..."³³

Koestler says his conversion to Communism was not the result of a self-conscious trajectory from social decline to social polarization that led to a choosing of political alternatives. It resulted, he maintains, from a, "piecemeal kind of reasoning, until the final conclusion was...rebellion and faith."³⁴ Several scholars who have written

about Koestler have been compelled to comment on this aspect of his life. Some focus on the reasoning; others on the faith. In her description of the forces attracting young European writers to produce documentary pieces as calls to action, Jenni Calder explains how many of these men harbored feelings of frustration because they had missed the Great War. This frustration was exacerbated by an awareness that there was little to choose from in politics outside the far right and far left. Calder suggests that in this lack of political alternatives many of these men found ambivalence and confusion. They may have resented their restricted political menu, but many found solace in the fact that they recognized unavoidable prospects for another war. Calder points out that they were ripe for a book published by John Strachey in 1932. This book, *The Coming Struggle for Power*, showed how an inevitable monopoly capitalism would logically lead to social decay and force a generation to choose between fascism or some form of corporatist state on the one hand, and Communism on the other. Calder considers Koestler a part of the generation of writers who consciously took sides, reasoned, and produced literary efforts to address the working class in an attempt to make it aware of the coming struggle between fascism and Communism.³⁵

For his part Koestler, in *The God That Failed*, *Arrow in the Blue* and *The Invisible Writing*, gives central importance to faith. In the last of these three books, Koestler describes his conception of the Soviet state's building of socialism as, "a super-America, engaged in the most gigantic enterprise in history, buzzing with activity, efficiency, enthusiasm."³⁶ In the latter two books he explains the importance his faith in the Soviet Union and its collectivized property which he believed could alone solve the contradiction between human need and private profit. In these books Koestler's own faith springs out of a desire to see the economic wrongs that he witnessed be righted and

out of an optimism to see progress and technique bloom. Between 1932 and 1938 this faith is resistant to evidence that the Soviet Union's achievements were much less than Koestler's conceptualization in his Utopian ideal.³⁷

Sydney A. Pearson, in *Arthur Koestler* (1978) draws our attention to some episodes in Koestler's fiction in which the lack of political alternatives exhibits itself as a conflation of fascism and Communism. In some of Koestler's writing, the two become indistinguishable. One such episode occurs in *Darkness at Noon* with the arrest of the book's protagonist, Rubashov. In a half asleep, groggy state of mind, Rubashov experiences confusion and cannot decide if he is dreaming of a past arrest by fascists or a present arrest by his own Communist comrades. Pearson's point is that one thread the reader can see in Koestler's work is evidence of the European dearth of political alternatives during the 1930s. And this dearth was a concrete expression of the death of God, the lack of a transcendent ordering principle in the West that so concerned Arthur Koestler, Pearson stresses.³⁸

The God That Failed poses the question of the search of middle-class Europeans to find a political home during the 1930s in terms of the attractions and repulsions of extant organized political forces. Koestler explains how young people then simultaneously experienced attraction to the utopian goal of collectivist ideals and revulsion from a decaying society. The result of such pushes and pulls for many, including Koestler, was a belief in Proletarian Revolution.³⁹

A key attraction that Communism held for young Europeans during the 1930s was the appearance of action in the face of generalized European torpor. Koestler claims that after the Nazis made significant electoral gains in the Reichstag in 1930, he found it impossible to motivate colleagues at Ullstein to take decisive collective action in their

own defense. For instance, there was a move to “Aryanize” the Jewish-owned press which no one on the Ullstein staff opposed even after continuous waves of dismissals. Koestler comments in *The Invisible Writing* that, “liberals in Germany – and elsewhere – have rarely understood that there are situations in which caution amounts to suicide.” On the other hand, the Communist Party’s assertive action as in the case of militant efforts to end evictions of helpless unemployed tenants, “gave [the KPD] considerable moral advantage over their soft and undecided progressive allies.”⁴⁰ And in the period between 1918 and 1930, Koestler recognized a consistency in Communist Party action that made Socialists as well as liberals appear wishy-washy and limp.⁴¹

It would not be until the Communist Party’s period of dizzying twists and turns between 1936 and 1942 that it slowly became impossible for Koestler to abide by the Party’s directives. And when compared to what Koestler describes as the unprincipled compromises of the Socialists, the Communist Party in the early 1930s appeared as a beacon to those who hoped for what they considered a civilized and just society. In contrast to the Communists, the Socialists had for Koestler,

only their dismal reputation of having stifled the German Revolution and made a mess of their Republic. Since 1918, each time they were faced with a choice between allying themselves to the *bourgeois* parties or the radical wing of the working class, they had opted for the former; and whatever the controversial details, this basic fact weighed heavily against them.⁴²

In discussing the psychology of conversion to Communism in *Arrow in the Blue*, Koestler explains that after reading Engels’s *Feuerbach* and Lenin’s *State and Revolution*, he entered a new world with all the ardor of converts to any intellectual or spiritual system. He says, “the whole world [fell] into patterns like the stray pieces of a jig saw-puzzle assembled by magic in one stroke.” And little could disturb his newfound inner peace and serenity, except the periodic fear of losing his faith in this system. The

problem, as Koestler described it in the 1950s, was that he had entered a closed system that entertained pretensions of explaining all phenomena under the sun and thereby holding the key to ameliorating all that ailed mankind. When he accepted the Marxism practiced by the Comintern, Koestler continues, he felt he had discovered, “a system that refuses to be modified by newly discovered facts but has sufficiently elastic defenses to neutralize their impact...”⁴³

Koestler also speaks of the Communism’s closed universe as being inimical to a revolutionary party’s existence in the day-to-day world. He explains that the Communist Party’s conception of “bourgeois morality” was one born of the overriding necessity to maneuver among revolutionary and right-wing political organizations in strategic steps toward revolutionary ends. The Communists saw themselves as agents of historic necessities that put them outside conventional definitions of ethical and wrong behavior, fair and unfair tactics.⁴⁴ This reality created a mentality not unlike that of the medieval Scholastics, he maintains, in which a self-contained universe in the context of a struggle for existence leads to a rationalized philosophy where the prospects for apocalyptic or messianic ends must justify transient means. In such a social environment, Koestler claims his, “feelings toward art, literature, and human relations became reconditioned and... [his] vocabulary, grammar, syntax gradually changed...[as he] learnt to avoid any original expression, any individual turn of phrase...Language, and with it thought, underwent a process of dehydration, and crystallized in the ready-made schematic...”⁴⁵

In this state of mind, Koestler describes “internal censors” that kept his perception of faults with the Soviet Union or with Comintern strategy in check and which, because they were internalized, were far more effective than any official censorship.⁴⁶ During his 1932-1933 visit to the Soviet Union, Koestler encountered a regime which he believed

was at the crossroads of progress and disaster caused by forced collectivization and what he would later describe as over-centralization of industry and agriculture. Although he could not verbalize a revulsion to what he witnessed while traveling in the Soviet Union, Koestler chronicles a nightmare he had while there which brought him back to a mountain climbing event during his youth when he discovered the corpse of a fallen climber. He interprets this dream to be symbolic of his subconscious recognition of flaws in the Soviet system which he saw as indicative of intellectual death but which he could not verbalize for more than a decade.⁴⁷

When Koestler's year in the Soviet Union was over, he could express relief that the Party ordered him to Paris with other exiled German Communists. Looking back to experiences in the Soviet Union in his memoirs, he claimed that in 1933 he was still a convinced Communist, but that he "found life in Russia terribly depressing." Particularly, he claims to have recognized intuitively, although he could not yet express it, that a shabbiness and poverty together with a "grim pomposity of everything said and written" revolted him. He viewed Russia as a reform school cut off from the rest of the world. He complained of a distaste for the boredom of Russian newspapers, "which contained nothing critical or controversial, no crime, no sensation, no gossip, sex, scandal, human interest," and of an, "overwhelming bleakness of an industrialized Neanderthal."⁴⁸

In spite of his subconscious reevaluation of Communism, Koestler would continue in the movement in different capacities and levels of commitment until 1938. His experience of being boxed-in with a paucity of political choices seems to have forced him to suppress his criticisms of Communism. And if he had trouble writing in the lexicon of the closed universe, Koestler was still able to produce articles for Comintern

organs and leftist journals. During 1935, writing for *Das Neue Tage-Buch*, a left-wing weekly published in Paris, Koestler contributed six articles. Five of them dealt with humanistic subjects centering on contemporary men of letters and science, nevertheless drawing political conclusions pertinent to the developing European crisis. The sixth was a purely political piece on the plebiscite in the Saarland. Each and every one of these articles evinces an inability within Koestler to function as a hard-nosed political bureaucrat or a slavish apparatchik. Their tone, while militantly anti-fascist and clearly socialistic, exhibits a broader appreciation of mankind that seeps out beyond a purely economic conception of humanity. In a review of Julian Green's *Geisterseher*, Koestler manages to stick to a socialist interpretation that relates the novel's plot and character development to useful political praxis. His efforts in this instance rely heavily on philosophical antecedents, literary traditions, psychoanalysis, and mechanical metaphors. The review is far from two-dimensional.⁴⁹

In the February 32 edition of *Das Neue Tage-Buch* Koestler wrote a short intellectual and political biography of the eminent professor of psychiatry, entomologist, and socialist, August Forel (1848-1931), in which he traces a mind that spanned the nineteenth and twentieth centuries while remaining active and flexible into its eighties. Without excluding politics, the article stresses the great man's humanity as it follows the various aspects of his thought from Darwinism to Freudianism to Socialism.⁵⁰ In broad strokes again, Koestler praised the prose of the activist journalist of leftist causes, Egon Kisch, while drawing attention to the impossibility of complete objectivity in journalism. That impossibility would be a theme Koestler would later stress as he reported the fascists' bombing of civilians in Madrid. Koestler's article, "*Der unbekannte Kisch*" ("The Unknown Kisch"), concludes that journalists need a consistent world-view in order

to paint meaningful economic, political, and psychological portraits of mankind. Ending his evaluation of Kisch with a word about the clarity of his prose – “Sein Stil ist zwar blendend, aber ausserdem auch klar...” (“His style is admittedly dazzling, but outwardly clear as well...”) – makes the article address good reportage as much as political integrity.⁵¹

But Koestler could not get away from extremities and limited options. What he was able to recognize as the only other social and political alternative to Communism during the 1930s offered, for different reasons, as bleak a picture as the one he saw in the Soviet Union. Germany after 1931 was a place where jingoism and intolerance flourished alongside fear and intimidation. And it was evident that the rest of continental Europe was moving in the same direction. Mussolini was dominating Italy, France seemed to be in permanent state of malaise crying for extreme solutions, and in Spain a progressive political situation was taking a tragic turn. By the second half of the 1930s, it was crystal clear to leftists like Koestler that the Spanish Civil War had become the test tube for world reaction. The editor’s note that begins *L’Espagne ensanglantée*, (Blood-soaked Spain) an account of the Spanish Civil War written in the fall of 1937 calculated to elicit a response from European public opinion and governments, establishes the tone of that work. This tone is the self-evident awareness that the Spanish Civil War was the dress rehearsal for an approaching European war. “*Chacun sent que la guerre civile d’Espagne,*” it cautions, “*contient les germes d’une nouvelle guerre européenne; la peur d’un nouveau carnage mondial se double de l’effroi provoqué par les massacres qu’on va accomplir par les armées de mercenaires du general Franco.*”⁵² This book and its German translation, *Menschenopfer Unerhört* (Unheard-of Human Sacrifices), published in January 1937, is much more militant and outraged in its approach to the Spanish Civil

War than what would become, in late 1937, its English treatment, *Spanish Testament*. The latter book was largely purged of its propagandistic tone because Koestler and his publishers at the Left Book Club aimed at a leftist British reading public traditionally less militant than its counterparts on the continent. *Spanish Testament* offers a sense of the gravity of the fascist atrocities as they were perceived on the European mainland in contrast to the disconnected attitude of the British and their consequently poorer understanding of events in Spain.

Koestler's original account of fascist complicity in the crimes of the Spanish Civil War were written under the direction of Willi Münzenberg. Münzenberg wanted the story told in *L'Espagne ensanglantée* and *Menschenopfer Unerhört* to fit his purpose of exposing, in as militant a manner as possible, the fascist aid from Italy and Germany to the like-minded Spaniards under Franco. In the fall of 1936, when Koestler composed the French and German books, both he and Münzenberg still maintained an allegiance to Communism. It should be recalled that events in Spain took place long before the Hitler-Stalin Pact which was such an important event that confirmed Koestler in his abandonment of Communism. David Cesarani explains that by the time Koestler was freed from a fascist prison in Spain, his militant tone in *L'Espagne ensanglantée* and *Menschenopfer Unerhört* had become an embarrassment, due in large part because his personal allegiance to the Comintern was over. So during the late summer of 1937 when Koestler put his experiences in Spain into the new book, he strove for a more balanced tone, if not a completely objective one. Koestler fully recognized that the atrocious actions of the fascists prevented a completely objective response. He nevertheless felt it incumbent upon himself to strive for a tone that would achieve a grave warning without resorting to shrieking like Cassandra.⁵³

There is an awareness in the French and German versions of Koestler's accounts of the Spanish Civil War just as there is in the English version that propaganda is important.⁵⁴ In the French book, Koestler and his editors from Willi Müzenberg's World Anti-Fascist Congress, still nominally associated with the Comintern, stress the connection among the Spanish rebels, Italian Fascists and German Nazis. It is in his description of the terms in which Franco must couch his propaganda that we can see Koestler assimilating a sense that liberal democracy may be a third way. Koestler tacitly expects that Franco will become bellicose in his charges that the choice in Spain is between the Reds and himself. The predictable nature of this alarmist attitude makes it almost meaningless to Koestler. Explaining how fascists in Spain could not directly acknowledge their reactionary program as an assault on the desires of the Spanish populace for the civil and political freedoms taken for granted in France and Great Britain, Koestler begins to have a new appreciation for liberalism.⁵⁵

There is, however, no abandonment of the notion that the world is fundamentally made of two opposing political forces. In *Spanish Testament* Koestler stresses the idea that the rightist rebels in Spain were born in an atmosphere that made one of their key imperatives the eradication of the Left.⁵⁶ Koestler stresses that the assassination of Socialist Juanita Rico by Primo de Rivera's sister and the refusal of Spanish courts to prosecute the murderer was a sign to the Right that extermination of the Left was tolerable.

Spanish Testament tells the history of the Spanish conflict by focusing on the manner by which the forces of the right encroached on the civil and political liberties of the new Spanish Republic. It is a violent story, but less so than the one told in *L'Espagne ensanglantée* and *Menschenopfer Unerhört*. *Spanish Testament* is more an account of

political betrayal and treachery. Both versions of the story give an excellent description of the backwardness of Spanish agriculture, the rudimentary state of its industry, and the reactionary nature of the hierarchy among the Spanish Catholic clerics. But the French version of the book demands in a flamboyant oratorical style a response to the fascist atrocities. Romain Rolland's *Annex* to the book shrieks,

*"...Humanité! Humanité! Appel a toi! Appel a vous, hommes d'Europe et d'Amerique au secours de l'Espagne! Au notre secours! A votre secours! Car c'est vous, c'est nous tous qui sommes menacés! Ne laissez point perir ces femmes, ces enfants, ces tresors du monde..."*⁵⁷

Compared to this, the prose in *Spanish Testament* appears rather staid. The French and German versions of the account also contain graphic photos that record the bestiality of the war. These are lacking in the English version. The photos of tagged corpses of women and children and photos of adolescent male inmates of the rebel prisons being walked to their deaths by firing squad call for an emotional response from the viewer.

In English as well as in French and German, Koestler shows outrage and recognizes the horrible significance of Madrid being the first European city to be bombed from the air. He describes the helplessness of surprised civilians on the ground who are killed on their way to church or in parks on Sunday outings as they experience fascist air raids. He tallies the dead from the bombing to be 1,000 and the maimed to be 3,000. He reports the barbarity of bombing of the Prado.⁵⁸ Koestler notes that Europeans, so incensed over atrocities committed against Armenians in the beginning of the century, were almost unaffected by the Spanish situation in the 1930s:

...the Europe of 1937 was apathetic and stupefied – who could still bother about what was happening in a remote country beyond the Pyrenees?... ‘The end justifies the means’ is the principle of modern dictatorship.⁵⁹

According to Jenni Calder, few realities of social and political life in England could produce writers who employed a tone of immediate danger, but the Spanish Civil War became the event that imbued Britain with an awareness of the urgency of the political situation on the continent.⁶⁰ Koestler played a key role in transmitting this new awareness to the English. After his return from Spain in 1937, Koestler spent time in Paris working with Willie Münzenberg's propaganda circle as part of the Spanish Relief Committee. Then in 1938 he completed a month-long speaking tour of Britain for the Left Book Club. His topic was events and atrocities in Spain, and Koestler's first biographer, Ian Hamilton, claims that Koestler was impressed by the unreal conception that the British had of political life on the continent. The British tended to view the war in Spain as humanity's rearguard effort to save Western democracy. Koestler knew it to be by proxy a struggle for power between fascists and the O. G. P. U. And though he could not yet verbalize it, Hamilton claims that Koestler recognized the nationalist tint of this struggle because he had witnessed the Comintern's efforts to defeat its leftist allies who offered an alternative to the Moscow-dominated Communist Party.⁶¹ Koestler also devoted some of his time in Britain to working with the London-based Commission of Inquiry into Alleged Breaches of the Non-Intervention Agreement in Spain. The Commission's primary task was to hold show trials that exposed fascist complicity in the Spanish Civil War. *L'Espagne ensanglantée*, *Menschenopfer Unerhört*, and *Spanish Testament* were instrumental in these efforts.⁶²

Koestler's time in England coincided with what Jenni Calder sees as the end of political naiveté on the island. She claims that the Spanish Civil War spelled the beginning of the end of any residue of political idealism that the 1930s may have possessed.⁶³ In Britain the maintenance of its traditional mind-set of isolation from

continental affairs made this idealism die a hard death. Even the British became aware of the continent's dwindling political alternatives as reports like Koestler's helped to steer political consciousness with the testimony of personal tribulations.⁶⁴

Koestler's Spanish experience cannot be underestimated. In his account of his three months in a Spanish prison, *Dialogue with Death* (1942), Koestler reports witnessing the entire human race's attitude toward political oppression in a sheepish gesture made to him by a Phalangist torturer. That grin seemed to be saying, "'The world's like that, and neither I nor you will ever change it.'"⁶⁵ Koestler began his jail time in Seville with a mixture of despondent hopelessness and militant outrage. He would end it in an altered spiritual state and a tentative new political outlook. At first he became sad to the point of depression. He had not been told what he was being held for or what his sentence was likely to be; he simply expected to be executed at any minute. Once he entertained the possibility that the English paper that he purported to represent in Spain, *The News Chronicle*, would by the second week of his captivity launch a campaign of protests and scandals. But then he concluded that nothing would have come of such a campaign if one had actually been launched. His response to this knowledge was to acknowledge a bitter truth about Europe in the 1930s. He asked, "But what would Franco care about protests? Not a brass farthing. It had become a tradition during the last few years that dictators acted and democracies protested, a division of labour which seemed to please everybody."⁶⁶

After he learned the system by which inmates were picked and circulated for execution, and after he developed friendships and ties with his fellow inmates, Koestler found a connection to humanity that became the catalyst for spiritual, and later political, change. He claimed in a hyperbolic but poignant manner that his camaraderie with his

fellow prisoners resulted in a realization that it would be harder to part from them than from his friends and relatives.⁶⁷ He also reported an ironic feeling of freedom during his daily walks in the prison court yard with the shadow of death on his shoulder, where things were brought to their purest and simplest forms.⁶⁸ Koestler's latest biographer, David Cesarani, concludes that it was not the *Realpolitik* of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, nor was it the Comintern's failed struggle with fascism, that Koestler claims in *The God That Failed* was the force that turned him against Communism; it was his own coming face to face with death and with time in a prison cell that occasioned his political metamorphosis.⁶⁹

In *Dialogue with Death* Koestler claims that while in prison in Spain, he experienced another consciousness, a different level of spirituality where words and logic seemed to either fail or to be irrelevant. Drastic and dramatic situations, he claimed brought people face to face with the fundamental. During times like these, we find ourselves acting like "characters in a penny novelette," he concluded. In life's great or defining moments, words fail because:

The virtue of the word lies in the sphere of abstractions; before the concrete and tangible, language fails [and] becomes a completely useless instrument when it is a question of describing such horribly ordinary and naked facts as the fear of a human being in the face of death.⁷⁰

It was under the extraordinary, yet basic circumstances of prison existence that Koestler again began to pine for a way out of the constricted nature of his existence. He longed for the open universe of infinite possibilities that he had conceptualized as an adolescent. He began to reject the conception of life as being "printed in the language of physical equations and social determinants." He began to think of his existence as

something revealed in a, “text written in invisible ink of which in our rarest moments of grace, we are able to decipher a small fragment.”⁷¹

Long before his internment in Spain, Koestler claims that he recognized an inability to write in Marxist terms. He tells us in *The Invisible Writing* that he, “was capable of making speeches in the orthodox Party manner and of keeping them strictly on the level of the ‘backward masses’, while [his] esoteric truth and private opinion remained locked away in an air-tight compartment of the mind.” When he tried to write in what Orwell would come to conceptualize as “double speak,” however, Koestler says that he got lost in syntax, distracted by beauty, and became short on concentration. He was, by his own admission, a “mediocre Marxist,” meaning that he could not operate in the closed universe that was, in his experience, the essence of twentieth-century Marxism. In the introspective passages of his memoirs, Koestler registers surprise that, “in spite of ...growing misgivings [he] stuck to the Party through seven years.” In 1954 he viewed his persistent Communism as the result of subconscious rather than cerebral or rational strivings. He maintains that he persisted in seeking infinity and perfection and, “chasing after the arrow in the blue, the absolute cause, the magic formula which would produce the Golden Age.”⁷²

David Cesarani concludes that Koestler’s claim that he wasn’t ready to accept freedom until his Spanish imprisonment and similar claims that life’s meaning was found in unseen forces such as “invisible writing” or “the language of destiny” were the first steps toward a rejection of Historical Materialism and an exchange of one type of determinism for another.⁷³ In Koestler’s case at least, the shift from materialism to the spiritual may simply have been a transition from one type of mysticism to another. Cesarani suggests that it is a short distance from romantic notions of historic imperatives

to what Koestler describes as the “oceanic feeling” in which one gives himself up to intuition and a an awareness of unity with nature.⁷⁴

* * *

One of the questions investigated in Koestler’s first novel, *The Gladiators*, a fictionalized account of the Spartacus Rebellion, is that of the nature of revolutionary leadership and the social pressures to which it is subject. The novel is set in a decadent Rome during the first century before the Christian era. The narrative describes men of various social classes who are unsatisfied with life as it is. The plot begins with an unlikely stroke of fate that allows a slave rebellion to succeed and make some progress in the direction of egalitarianism. Spartacus’ slave rebellion spreads and becomes popular at least on the lips of men in un-liberated areas of Italy. But very quickly the movement becomes isolated in the area around Mount Vesuvius. This is the site where Roman legions eventually defeat the rebellious slaves. The curve of the action in *The Gladiators* is determined by attempts of Spartacus and his generals to break free and spread their revolution and by a wider yearning for freedom in a limited, corrupted world. It ends tragically as the corrupted world gains the upper hand when Roman legions destroy the slaves’ utopian, egalitarian Sun City and, with it, any possibility to spread the revolution.

In the world of *The Gladiators* most men long for what Koestler calls a Golden Age when life was simple, justice reigned, and men lived under a sort of primitive, egalitarian communism. In the novel men of various social classes harbor a secret yearning for this Golden Age, and yet none are capable of attaining it, least of all Spartacus, who is pure, disinterested, completely unselfish, and altruistic. When rebellion goes awry, the masses are willing to follow men who claim to fight for their

interests. These same masses of men find themselves eventually resenting their leaders. In defeat, the masses come to wish these agitators had left well enough alone.

In any epoch man is reluctant to give up what he has in return for an uncertain hope for something better. In *The Gladiators* Koestler explores the human condition through the use of twentieth-century conceptualizations. Throughout the novel he employs modern economic and political analysis. At one point Koestler uses Freudian ideas to propel the narrative forward. In this piece of fiction, the Hall of Dolphins, a public restroom, functions as a site where more than bodily functions occur. We should not be shocked, therefore, to discover that in *The Gladiators* one central character, Quintus Aproponius, the quintessentially appropriate middle-class Everyman, states a desire to write a treatise that shows the source of all revolution to be constipation. Quintus Aproponius knows that mankind is driven by a guttural yearning for social justice. Given Koestler's familiarity with Freudian psychology, it is clear that the reference to constipation is to be taken on two levels, that of a psychosomatic response to injustice as well as a symbol of an awareness of a society out of balance.

The Hall of Dolphins is a social setting where gossip, news, conversation, and philosophy are exchanged. It is one place where Koestler has characters address the reality that, for them, politics is a fundamentally corrupt shell game perpetrated on the masses by cynical men of power and influence. So in this novel Koestler gives the motive forces of history an origin that is more fundamental than logic and which is simultaneously some distance below the head and yet still in the frontal lobes of the brain. The guts of his characters respond to and seem to motivate the action. Their desires and their need for stability act reciprocally on each other as volition becomes

limited and often held in suspicion and as limitations of society, unseen by most participants, channel the options given to men.

Koestler paints a picture of rebellion continuously being subverted by the polluted society from which it necessarily springs. Many of the downtrodden participants in revolution are incapable of thinking in terms of collective interests; they are degraded and impatient, so they are distracted by selfishness and an attraction to the immediate gratification of their long denied needs. Leaders find it impossible to come to collective decisions. Historical circumstance – the most potent of which is a consciousness among most men to seek selfish, short-term gains – confronts Spartacus, and by implication all leaders of movements that seek social change, with Koestler’s Law of Detours.

In *The Gladiators* Koestler names a lawyer Fulvius. He is a character who, in typical lawyerly fashion, bends unquestioningly with the serpentine flow of society’s shifting river of definitions of the conventional, remaining outside the rebellion until he was sure who would win. Fulvius is, however, not a dull man. Koestler has him attempt to find reason in the slave rebellion by writing an historical and sociological account of the uprising. We follow Fulvius’s thinking as he formulates and reformulates various social, psychological, and historical propositions. At one point he concludes that the question of following class or individual interests is simply a matter of social pressure. When men are isolated, they find it easy to forget they have class interests and act in ways that are individualistic and self-serving. Fulvius states this proposition in the title of a chapter in his larger work: “On the Causes which Induce Man to Act Contrary to the Interests of Others When Isolated and to Act Contrary to His Own Interests When Associated in Groups or Crowds.”⁷⁵

Fulvius brooded over the above formulation and wished that the slaves could consistently act from their class interests. The more he pondered his experience with people before the rebellion and recalled how careful and tenacious they were, “ever ready to hound their neighbors to dungeon or scaffold for the sake of a stolen goat,” the more he concluded that isolated men have no instinct for class solidarity. As he watched the rebellion itself run amuck before him in the streets, Fulvius remembered how often he had wondered “what made man act contrary to his interests where great issues were concerned, whereas he guarded his advantage with so much cunning and obstinacy when small matters were at stake.”⁷⁶ He later decides that the mass of men are not mature enough, patient enough, or clever enough to achieve the lofty longings they may have felt in their guts for an egalitarian “Golden Age.” Fulvius makes the pronouncement that man is bound to the present. He remarks in his chronicle that, “man is not allowed to shape his existence independently of the system, conditions and laws of his time.”⁷⁷ Later in *Darkness at Noon*, Koestler would investigate this idea as the “Theory of Relative Development” which holds that the masses are always a step or two behind the productive capacities unleashed by social revolution, and it is that retardation or misalignment that seems to doom social revolution to failure.

By 1954, when Koestler wrote *Arrow in the Blue*, he reached a point where he could verbalize a theory that negated the tenets of Historical Materialism. He charged that Marxism was a typical product of the nineteenth century that was in keeping with a clockwork conception of the universe. He claimed that twentieth-century developments in physics, biology, and psychology had made Historical Materialism an anachronism by the time he himself had discovered it. With this realization, Koestler acknowledged that his concern became “that of individual responsibility in politics and the related question

of ethical values.” The tentative solution to these problems, he claimed, could be deduced from a new conception of science, which Koestler acknowledged had become less rigid, more open, and less rational than it had been in the nineteenth century. Such a science, based on the notion of a finite, but expanding, universe, capricious evolution, and variant human psychological responses, would produce a notion of historical trajectory and political movement based on statistical probability rather than on the certitude that Marxist philosophy demanded.⁷⁸

David Cesarani interprets Koestler’s retreat from Historical Materialism as symptomatic of his fear of his own mortality. Accordingly, it was fear of dying, or the knowledge that he might have to give his life for a cause, that sent Koestler in search of new politics and ethics that would rescue men from the obligation of becoming the living means to abstract ends. Cesarani construes Koestler’s change as a self-centered rationalization of circumstances too bleak for Koestler to bear. He maintains that,

It took him thirty-three years to discover that all men are mortal, that they feel pain, that they bleed, and that words kill. He had been playing at revolution; others had been paying with their lives. Now the game was for real he didn’t want to play any more. Having experienced what it is to be disposable, the means to an end, Koestler was repelled by doctrines that held life worth nothing for the sake of realising a certain cause. He embarked on the search for a new politics and a new ethics, which did not render human suffering an acceptable means for the achievement of political goals....Because he rejected religion as unreason and saw reason as dangerous, he was condemned to an individual odyssey that led to science and then to mysticism...⁷⁹

In *Arrow in the Blue* Koestler complains that Marxism’s inflexibility left him with an unsatisfying caricature of man as a one-dimensional economic creature. This lack of satisfaction, he claims, led him to compensate by turning his conception of science and his articles about science in a romantic direction that attributed noble qualities to nature’s

forces and made some fantastic analogies. For example, one piece he wrote for *Vossische Zeitung* began in the following manner:

Philosophy is the gaseous state of thought, Science is its liquid state, Religion its rigid state. In all three states doubts are expressed regarding the necessity, and even the possibility, of absolute death. We shall discuss this doubt only in its liquid state...⁸⁰

From a flat caricature of mankind, Koestler used the notion of Proletarian Revolution as palliative that could solve the problems of capitalism which were so evident to him in the 1930s. He saw Marxism as a way for mankind to escape the realm of necessity for that of freedom, a way to realize infinite social possibilities, “to ‘lift the earth from its axis’, and tie it to the arrow in the blue...” Over the years, he claimed to have seen numbers of his comrades lose their similar idealistic and optimistic fervor and focus exclusively on means as the ends seemed to escape their grasp.⁸¹

* * *

It could be argued that Arthur Koestler was always a political liberal caught in historical circumstances that did not bode well for liberalism. He claims to have recognized the failure of liberalism in the Weimar Republic and the inability of the Socialists to struggle consistently for their espoused vision of the world. His disappointment in the SPD’s paralysis when given the opportunity to act as “trustees of the heirs of the Judeo-Christian tradition of the Hebrew prophets and the Sermon on the Mount, of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity,” embittered Koestler most harshly against the Socialists. “To listen to their booming, complacent voices,” he said, “made one feel sick with despair and exasperation.”⁸²

Koestler’s outrage at the crimes committed against humanity in Spain reveals a devotion to liberal democracy. He came to recognize that for most Spaniards, the

struggle in the late 1930s was one of liberal democratic reforms against a feudal, clerical social order. More Spaniards wanted free speech, freedom of religion, separation of church and state, secular education, and distribution of Church lands than wanted socialism. When in *Spanish Testament* Koestler referred to himself as, “a journalist of liberal convictions and author of fragments of pacifist novels,” we should not dismiss this statement as the pandering of a Communist to a public not ready for social revolution.⁸³ Similarly, we should take with all seriousness his declarations in *The Gladiators* that, “nature has bestowed, not wealth on one man and poverty on the other, but strength and talents; the abhorred difference between master and slave was not instituted by Her, no more than She wanted the strong to serve the weak, the Few to rule the Many.”⁸⁴ We should understand this statement as a declaration of the liberal notion that all talent should express itself unhindered by social privilege.

In his characterization of his own psychological essence in *Arrow in the Blue*, Koestler stresses his projective imagination and tendency to regard injustices perpetrated on others as indignities suffered by himself. He characterizes Arthur Koestler as a chronically indignant rebel who, to the dismay of his friends, takes on cause after cause. He draws the distinction between rebels of this sort and revolutionaries who single-mindedly stick to one cause and dedicate their lives to it and it to their lives. He defines the rebel as an enthusiast and the revolutionary as a fanatic. The former he sees as quixotic, the latter as a “bureaucrat of Utopia.”⁸⁵ In *The Homeless Mind* David Cesarani discounts Koestler’s analysis that he was essentially a rebel and enthusiast. Cesarani charges that Koestler’s claim that he had found in Communism escape from the guilt instilled in him during childhood and the dedication to a cause that would keep him from becoming a pitiful, “neurotic intellectual stewing in his private limbo,” is a fiction created

to rationalize both adherence to Communism and his apostasy from the movement. Cesarani insinuates that the above claim is self-deceiving, self-serving, self-congratulatory, and self-promoting. For, according to Cesarani, Arthur Koestler was a chameleon, incapable of sticking to one set of beliefs for any length of time.⁸⁶ If we conceive Koestler as a frustrated liberal or a liberal living in frustrating political circumstances, Cesarani's conclusion, while true on the surface, disguises the more fundamental truth of Koestler's political essence and obscures the importance that limited options played in the lives of men like him.

In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, George Orwell stressed that literary men in the nineteen twenties possessed a luxury denied their counterparts ten years later. They could follow their souls and investigate arcane subjects like baroque architecture and remain aloof and removed from politics. But in the harsh and extreme 1930s, he claimed, "The fence on which the literary gent sits, once as comfortable as a plush cushion of a cathedral stall, is now pinching his bottom intolerably.." ⁸⁷ If not fateful, it was certainly inevitable that the political realities of Europe during the 1930s would force Arthur Koestler to fall to one side or the other of liberalism. Political fence sitting was simply not a viable option.

For many, simple economics or fundamental social traditions and values would draw their political allegiances to the far left or to the far right. For a few, the spiritual vertigo caused by the apparent inability of human agency to apply reason to the amelioration of social problems determined that one or the other of political extremes would become a point of polar attraction. In this context Arthur Koestler's role was that of identifier and publicizer of the irrational aspects to both the many as well as the few in these political attractions. Importantly, he aligned this acknowledgement with the

religious-like faith to which men and women adhered and with which they rationalized their beliefs in one or the other political pole. One result of Europe's climate of irrationality and extremity was that when Arthur Koestler sat down to muse about human agency in politics, he would again think in terms of two diametrically positioned end points. These were his yogi and commissar approaches toward the world, which, in his analysis, held the poorest of possibilities for merging or meeting somewhere in the middle. It was difficult for a political liberal existing amidst the frustrations of the twentieth century to see a way in which the yogi and the commissar could find common ground on questions of means and ends in state policy.

End Notes

¹ Richard Crossman, ed., *The God That Failed* (New York: Harper and Row, 1949), p. 17.

² Ibid. P. 20.

³ Paul Nash, *Outline, an autobiography and other writings*, p. 210. Quoted in Jenny Calder, *Chronicles of Conscience: A Study of George Orwell and Arthur Koestler* (Pittsburgh: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), p. 11.

⁴ If we count aggressive automobile driving as equivalent to dueling, all three habits remained with Koestler during his lifetime.

⁵ Arthur Koestler, *Arrow in the Blue* (London: Collins with Hamish Hamilton, Ltd., 1954), pp. 28-31 and David Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind* (London: William Heineman, 1998), pp. 34-36, 37, 45, 56.

⁶ In *Arrow in the Blue* Koestler gives his paternal grandfather the appellation "X" in order to underscore the uncertainty of his origins which he describes as somewhere on the eastern frontier of Europe, vaguely within the Russian provinces. See *Arrow in the Blue*, p. 10.

⁷ Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, pp. 4-5, 9-23.

⁸ See *Arrow in the Blue*, pp. 128-132.

⁹ The most succinct narrative of these events in Koestler's life appears in Cesarani, *The Homeless Mind*. See Chapters One through Four. The entire first volume of Koestler's *Arrow in the Blue* provides an account of its subject's life from his school days to his apostasy from Communism after his Spanish Civil War experience.

¹⁰ See Koestler, *Arrow in the Blue*, Chapters Sixteen and Seventeen.

¹¹ Cesarani, *The Homeless Mind*, pp. 85-86 and Koestler, *The Invisible Writing* (volume two of *Arrow in the Blue* (London: Collins with Hamish Hamilton, Lt., 1954), pp. 66-69.

¹² Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, p. 85.

¹³ Arthur Koestler, *The Gladiators* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1947). See "Book Two," particularly Chapters Three and Five.

¹⁴ Ibid. Pp. 153-160.

¹⁵ Wolf Mays, *Arthur Koestler*, in *Makers of Modern Thought* series, Rev. Dr. A. D. Galloway, ed. (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1973), p. 10. Also see "Gladiator's Uprising," unsigned review in *Times Literary Supplement* (London: February 11, 1937).

¹⁶ Koestler, *Arrow in the Blue*, pp. 269-271.

¹⁷ See Cesarani, *Homeless Mind* pp. 50-55. In his first year at Ullstein, 1929, Koestler wrote on topics as varied as archeological finds in the Middle East, (*Vossische Zeitung* (VZ, April 14) to Tel-Aviv municipal electricians (VZ, January 26) and John D. Rockefeller's visit to Jerusalem (VZ, March 14). In an article that appeared on June 19, "Die Krone Davids," Koestler praised the premier performance at the Hebrew Brinah theater in which he enthused about the play's spirituality. According to Koestler, the play treated the Bible not as mere myth, but as living historical existence. Treating the Bible as relevant continuity, he claimed, makes religion come alive to the extent that he predicted a Hebrew Renaissance. Only six weeks later, on July 17, Koestler wrote "Arbeitparadies im Hollental," an article that bragged about the technical progress of a hydroelectric plant in Jordan while recording in equally positive tone the social progress made in the workers' colony that operated the generator.

¹⁸ Arthur Koestler, *The Invisible Writing*, p. 16.

¹⁹ Ibid. P. 21.

²⁰ Ibid. Pp. 17-19.

²¹ Ibid. Pp. 18-20.

²² Ibid. P. 45.

²³ Ibid. Pp. 43-44 and Cesarani, pp. 96-98.

²⁴ Koestler, *Arrow in the Blue*, p. 301.

²⁵ Upon Koestler's Ullstein posting to Paris in 1929, his daily duties consisted of what seems like an inordinate amount reading including 16 French daily newspapers in order to prepare a nightly 1,000 word summary to Berlin by telephone. Such voluminous daily reading could have only salutary effect on Koestler's already wide education. See Cesarani, pp. 64-65.

²⁶ Koestler, *The Invisible Writing*, pp. 18-19.

²⁷ Koestler, *Arrow in the Blue*, pp. 41-43, 46 and Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, p. 5.

²⁸ Cesarani, *The Homeless Mind*, p. 64.

²⁹ Recall that such responsibility, felt as an imperative to act, is certainly what Jenni Calder points to as so characteristic of European writers after 1918. See p. 4 of this paper.

³⁰ On this characterization of Koestler, David Cesarani on p. 87 of *The Homeless Mind* cites Langston Hughes, *I Wonder as I Wonder* (New York, 1956), pp. 113-114. For Koestler's description of the meeting of the two writers in the Soviet Union, see *The Invisible Writing*, pp. 11-112.

³¹ Arthur Koestler, *Dialogue with Death* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1942), p. 39.

- ³² Koestler in Crossman, ed., *The God That Failed*, p. 23.
- ³³ Koestler, *Arrow in the Blue*, pp. 270-271.
- ³⁴ Ibid. P. 271.
- ³⁵ Jenni Calder, *Chronicles of Conscience: A Study of George Orwell and Arthur Koestler* (Pittsburgh: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), pp. 17-19. It can be argued that Koestler's warnings against the dangers of fascism were directed more at the middle class than at the working class.
- ³⁶ Koestler, *The Invisible Writing*, p. 50.
- ³⁷ Koestler in Crossman, ed., *The God That Failed*, pp. 15-23 and Koestler, *Arrow in the Blue*, pp. 277-278 and *The Invisible Writing*, p. 53.
- ³⁸ Pearson, *Arthur Koestler*, p. 19. Also see Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1941), p. 15.
- ³⁹ Koestler in Crossman, ed., *The God That Failed*, p. 16.
- ⁴⁰ Koestler, *The Invisible Writing*, 38.
- ⁴¹ See Koestler, *Arrow in the Blue*, 258.
- ⁴² Koestler, *Arrow in the Blue*, pp. 257-258. From the vantage point of the late 1940s, Koestler could recognize that neither the SPD nor the KPD had been the vanguard of world revolution. As he put it, the KPD was really "the rearguard of the disintegrating workers' movement." See *The God That Failed*, p. 54.
- ⁴³ Ibid. Pp. 259-260. Also see Koestler in Crossman, ed., *The God That Failed*, p. 23.
- ⁴⁴ Koestler would develop this idea extensively in *Darkness at Noon*.
- ⁴⁵ Koestler, *The Invisible Writing*, pp. 25-26.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid. P. 27.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid. P. 68.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid. P. 153.
- ⁴⁹ Koestler, "Menschen fern der Gegenwart," in *Das Neue Tage-Buch* (Paris, January 26, 1935), pp. 92-94.
- ⁵⁰ Koestler, "Aus einer anderen Zeit," in *Das Neue Tage-Buch* (February 23, 1935), pp. 179-180. It is interesting to note that Forel provided some of the basic work in human psychology and brain physiology that influenced Sigmund Freud. In 1887 he published a description of how neurons transmit signals in the brain, and his work in human brain physiology included detailed descriptions of various types of neurons in the hypothalamus. Furthermore, Forel's work in ant behavior, summarized in *The Mental Capacity of Ants* (1907), was starkly deterministic, equating thinking solely with molecular activity in the central nervous system, an approach to psychology that Arthur Koestler would oppose in the latter phase of his writing career.
- ⁵¹ Koestler, "Der unbekante Kisch," in *Das Neue Tage-Buch* (April 27, 1935), p. 403. Egon Erwin Kisch, twenty years Koestler's senior, was, like Koestler, a central European. He was born in Prague, participated in the Great War, and then became a journalist of world stature. After the war he practiced journalism in

Berlin as a writer for socialist papers. He spoke seven European languages and put them to use in his global travel accounts. Again, like Koestler, he was present in Spain during its Civil War.

⁵² Koestler, *L'Espagne ensanglantée: un livre noir sur l'Espagne* (Paris: Editions Du Carrfour, 1937), p. 7.

⁵³ Cesarani says that “*Spanish Testament* was written for a different sort of audience. Instead of crude Marxist reductionism, although there is a good deal of that, Koestler plays up Popular Front themes that would appeal to liberal-minded English readers.” See *Homeless Mind* pp. 118-123 and 135-138.

⁵⁴ See *Espagne ensanglantée* Chapters 9 and 10, “Des faits qui se passent de tout commentaire” and “Les reporters de Goebbels compte --.” Also see *Menschenopfer Unerhört*, Chapter 9, “Tatschen ohne Kommentar” and *Spanish Testament*, Chapter 6, “Propaganda.”

⁵⁵ For instance, see *L'Espagne ensanglantée*, p. 136, “Les fauteurs des troubles.”

⁵⁶ In his zeal to expose the treachery of the fascists, Koestler idealizes the Terror of the French Revolution. Claiming that Robespierre was an expert at terror, he distinguishes twentieth-century terror by stating, “Nowadays, the aim is no longer to defeat the political opponent, but to destroy and exterminate him.” (*Spanish Testament*, pp. 82-83.)

⁵⁷ Koestler, *L'Espagne ensanglantée*, pp. 171-172.

⁵⁸ Koestler, *Spanish Testament*, pp. 164-173.

⁵⁹ Ibid. P. 60.

⁶⁰ Calder, *Chronicles of Conscience*, p. 25.

⁶¹ Ian Hamilton, *Koestler: A Biography* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1982), p. 44.

⁶² Ibid. P. 38.

⁶³ Calder, *Chronicles of Conscience*, pp. 27-28.

⁶⁴ Ibid. P. 20.

⁶⁵ Koestler, *Dialogue with Death*, p. 54.

⁶⁶ Ibid. P. 111.

⁶⁷ Ibid. P. 180.

⁶⁸ Ibid. P. 204.

⁶⁹ Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, p. 124.

⁷⁰ Koestler, *Dialogue with Death*, p. 62.

⁷¹ Koestler, *The Invisible Writing*, p. 15.

⁷² Ibid. P. 31.

⁷³ Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, p. 117.

⁷⁴ Koestler would develop these ideas further in the last two novels of his political trilogy comprised of *The Gladiators*, *Darkness at Noon*, and *Arrival and Departure*. In the latter two works he uses the idea of a

continuum between activism, represented by the commissar, and passivism, represented by the Yogi. Each of these bipolar types is capable of ethical transgressions; one through sins of commission and the other through sins of omission. Koestler's yogi and commissar are in diametrical opposition. He portrays the reality that man is forced to choose between only these two ethical systems, neither of which embodies the totality of ethical imperatives, as a fact of twentieth-century life. See Sydney A. Pearson, Jr., *Arthur Koestler*, p. 22 and Koestler, *The Yogi and the Commissar*, p. 6.

⁷⁵ Koestler, *The Gladiators*, p. 149.

⁷⁶ Ibid. Pp.149-150.

⁷⁷ Ibid. P. 273.

⁷⁸ Koestler, *The Invisible Writing*, Chapter 32, "The Exploding Universe." See p. 295.

⁷⁹ Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, p. 142.

⁸⁰ Koestler, *Arrow in the Blue*, p. 290.

⁸¹ Koestler, *The Invisible Writing*, p. 280.

⁸² Koestler, *Arrow in the Blue*, p. 256. The beginning of the *Vossische Zeitung* article is here translated into English and offered as evidence of Koestler's approach to science.

⁸³ Koestler, *Spanish Testament*, p. 18.

⁸⁴ Koestler, *The Gladiators*, p. 188.

⁸⁵ Koestler, *Arrow in the Blue*, pp. 271-272.

⁸⁶ Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*, p. 101. Also see Koestler, *The Invisible Writing*, pp. 249-251.

⁸⁷ George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, p. 211.

Chapter Three

Literature as the Imagination's Plea for an Open Universe, 1938-1944

During the summer of 1937 the British *News Chronicle* sent Koestler to interview Thomas Mann in Switzerland and then to Greece to write an article about the Metaxas dictatorship. Finally the *News Chronicle* sent Koestler to Palestine to report on political unrest there. He spent six weeks in Palestine, saw some old Zionist friends from his residence in the Middle East during the 1920s, and managed to interview the king of Jordan for the paper.

During early 1938 Koestler was engaged in speaking tours of Great Britain for Victor Gollancz's Left Book Club. Koestler's description of events in Spain and his account of his imprisonment there, *Spanish Testament*, published in September 1937, was the book club's choice pick for that year. That book, the focus of Koestler's lectures, allowed him to characterize and answer questions about the suffering of common people in Spain at the hands of the extreme right and describe his own subjective experience as a prisoner of the right awaiting execution in a corporatist jail for 102 days. He spoke to both English and German audiences as there was a sizable group of Germans already exiled in Britain.

Koestler finished his novel about failed revolution, *The Gladiators*, in July 1938 and by the fall of 1938 he was back in France. There Willie Münzenberg put him in charge of weekly anti-fascist paper, *Die Zukunft* (The Future). The paper published only a few issues and expired. Living hand to mouth, Koestler was lucky to get work from his cousins in the publishing trade, Willie and Siegfried Aldor. Between April and May of 1939 Koestler took the pen name Dr. Willie Costler and contributed to a French tome on

sexuality entitled *L' Encyclopédie de la famille* published by the Aldors which was simultaneously anthropological, clinical, neo-Freudian, and titillating in tone and exposition.

In the summer of 1939 Koestler met the English-born and continental-educated sculptor Daphne Hardy who became his companion for four years. She and Koestler resided in a small villa in the French Alps during August and then, cutting their stay short because of what was clearly the approaching war, returned abruptly to Paris. In Paris they confronted Fifth Column hysteria among local and national authorities who, taking the Nazi invasion for granted, began to fear non-nationals, leftists, Jews, and anti-fascists, especially those known to have supported Republican Spain in 1937. Koestler fell into all four of these categories. In early October the French arrested Koestler transporting him to Le Vernet, an infamous prison camp on the Spanish border where he would spend more than three months before the efforts of Hardy and Koestler's British publishers were able to free him.

By late January 1940 Koestler was back in Paris attempting to get permission to leave France. His Hungarian passport and his British press credentials were of no help in this effort, and a cautious and fearful French bureaucracy frustrated his attempts to gain entry into Britain. On March 12 police ransacked his apartment, confiscating his manuscripts and other papers. Koestler saved his latest project from confiscation, however. He continued work on *Darkness at Noon* and was able to send it to his publisher on May 1. On May 22 his re-arrest occurred. Held in Parisian sports stadium awaiting transport to an internment camp, a drunk Koestler convinced his jailer he had been mistakenly arrested. He was luckily and, perhaps willfully, perhaps fatefully, released. Koestler then joined the French Foreign Legion under an assumed name. He

and Hardy began to search for a way out of France during the chaos of its capitulation to the Nazis. They had to separate before they would ultimately be reunited in England, however. Koestler made his way from Limoges through Marsailles and Casablanca to Lisbon. He finally entered Britain in early November 1940 without the proper papers and was, therefore, interned at Pentonville Prison and not released until December.

After his release from the English jail, Koestler began work on his account of his escape from Europe, *Scum of the Earth*, which he was able to publish in May 1941. During that year he did propaganda work for the British war effort. As a member of the Pioneer Corps Koestler wrote plays for ersatz productions for soldiers and factory workers, he wrote factual and fictional radio productions, he composed essays, and he made speeches all with the goal of keeping British morale high.

In 1942 Koestler began writing *Arrival and Departure*, a fictionalized account of his time in Portugal awaiting entry into Britain. He continued working on many projects including a short film for the BBC, and he continued making literary contacts in Britain until March 1944 when exhaustion necessitated a retreat from London into the countryside. 1944 was the year he wrote the first essays that would be central to and help structure *The Yogi and the Commissar*, his investigation into the intersection of morality and politics which would form the core of his later philosophical writing.

Yogis, Commissars, and Gladiators: The Pessimism of Philosophy and the Cynicism of Universal Human Types

For Arthur Koestler the struggle between means and ends in politics had to focus on the individual. If he could not completely solve the problem of exactly what justified or limited state authority, the question which he could ponder and the solution he could hope for was that of blending the consciousness of a contemplative holy man, or yogi,

with that of a political activist, or commissar. According to Koestler, the awareness of the yogi functioned at the level of the individual or in his terms, the holon, that acquiesced in its place in the cosmic order. The awareness of the commissar, on the other hand, functioned at the level of collective or system in order to bring human agency to the world. Commissar consciousness held that, when understood, any social system could become subject to human manipulation. Direct and vicarious experience had taught Koestler to be distrustful of the authority of the state irrespective of the ideology it represented. He perceived a particular threat in the state's and its commissars' tendencies to discount the individual. Koestler believed that "Commissar ethics has still to learn that the individual stands in the social equation both for zero and the Infinite."¹ That was, indeed, the conclusion of his novel *Darkness at Noon*, entitled *Zero et l'Infini* in France, concerning its explanation of how Stalinism had gone wrong. To a nineteenth-century liberal, twentieth-century politics seemed to be a zero-sum game. The 1930s had taught Koestler just how threatening that game could be to the individual.

By 1945 Koestler saw his "yogi ethics" as "the attempt to transfer the values derived from passive contemplation into practical action," and he recognized the latter as possible, but "extremely difficult."² Koestler's work, itself taken as a whole, should be viewed as an effort to humanize both politics and science, an effort which questioned the certitude engendered in determinism while it maintained a long-term optimism for human potentiality. His hopeful attitude attempted to disclose science as a developing human endeavor so that reason could combine with spirit in order to point the way toward ethical possibilities in politics and society. It might seem ironic that his fear of overarching intellectual systems, which he believed tended in human terms to ossify into orthodoxies, was accompanied by the creation of his own philosophical system which was strongly

universal and cosmological. This apparent irony, however, could be made real only if Koestler's system gained wide acceptance and universal application. He could always argue that his stress of intuition and spirituality were factors that might work to mitigate the prospects of any system, including his own, from becoming orthodox.

Arthur Koestler identified the significance of twentieth-century science as residing in its recognition of its own limitations which required it to "make room again for the other way of knowing, whose place it has usurped for almost three centuries."³ He saw not an end to, but a shift in, traditional, mechanistic materialism in which stratification introduced depth to an otherwise two-dimensional view of the world. He understood what others had already recognized, that in science hierarchy could enhance the descriptive power of numbers and that hierarchical models ultimately lead to a more refined appreciation of nature. *The Yogi and the Commissar* was where Koestler first linked science, human psychology, and philosophy in nonfiction prose. In that volume he was able to say,

The quantitative method is approaching perfection and with it saturation; its aggressiveness is beginning to change into the modesty of achievement. The flat, two-dimensional plane of nineteenth century [sic] mechanism is gaining depth and height by erection of the new hierarchy of levels, and the validity of the 'vertical' approach is beginning to be recognized again.⁴

Koestler explicitly linked the above description of the approach of post-Newtonian science with his own view of human psychology and his grand scheme for understanding the universe.⁵

It was important to Koestler that the philosophical scheme he hoped to create be grounded in Western science. *The Yogi and the Commissar's* purpose, most starkly presented in its four concluding essays on the Soviet Union and Communism, was the linking of science, there understood as empiricism and reason, to a humanistic political

and ethical system that he hoped could lead benignly to social progress. Such a system was in Koestler's experience, as yet, unseen. The progress for which he pined might have narrower horizons than the idealistic notion of progress presented by the Enlightenment; it would, nevertheless, represent forward historical motion in the broadest humanistic sense. Koestler hoped that his system could replace Comintern dogma and its nineteenth-century philosophical basis, Historical Materialism. In "The Yogi and the Commissar (II)," he proceeded logically by exposing the contradictions and falsehoods contained in the myths of the Soviet Union as, first, a true workers' state and, secondly, as the representation of historical progress in the twentieth century. He finally posited a new approach to ethics that attempted to account for both the individual as a part of the social unit and society as an integrated system.⁶ It is interesting that the last of these essays, written when Koestler's anti-Sovietism had not yet morphed into a general anti-communism, would portray the shortcomings of Soviet society not as a failure of socialism, but as failures due to harsh local conditions. Koestler delivered this conclusion in the language of science: "The Russian experiment neither proves nor disproves the possibility of socialism; it was an experiment carried out under the most unsuitable laboratory conditions and hence inconclusive."⁷ Koestler would necessarily address the most ubiquitous of local conditions, human volition in both its limitations and its potentialities, in order to universalize his conclusions about the prospects for true human progress. Unable to completely abandon his nineteenth-century heritage of universals and materialism, Arthur Koestler, therefore, had ultimately to face the question of the relationship between free will and determinism.

In 1945, when Koestler began writing "The Yogi and the Commissar (II)," the final essay in *The Yogi and the Commissar*, he decided to open it with an epigraph taken

from C. C. Pratt's *The Logic of Modern Psychology*. The quote he chose stressed the limits of science that are based in its simultaneous existence as a human endeavor and a social institution. That epigraph announced that "Science is a vast and impressive tautology" that, like all human institutions, tends toward self-rationalization and self-justification.⁸ If science, and by extension psychology and sociology, were all tautological, Koestler's plan for an integrated and cosmological philosophy faced a formidable obstacle. How could his conception of free will, which he articulated by 1957, as "a useful and necessary illusion for both the functioning of the individual and society," fit into an integrated philosophical system that ostensibly described the cosmos without seeming entrapped in multiple self-reflecting mirrors?⁹ Just what was the relationship between volition and determinism? What was determined, and what was chosen? Could Koestler create a system that maintained the separation between subject and object while satisfactorily describing the universe?

Koestler's attempt at solving the above mysteries employed the use of a hierarchical model in which boundaries between distinct levels restricted the ability to predict events in one level through the use of the laws that governed other levels. Local autonomy would exist in order to assure global survival. Intellectual representations of the structure of the cosmos were already becoming more complex and nuanced. Koestler recognized that simplistic, mechanistic conceptions of nature were no longer of much utility in theoretical physics. Twentieth-century physics had already demonstrated that "the hope for a complete explanation of the universe by quantitative measurements proved as fallacious as deistic explanations in the past."¹⁰ Indeterminacy and probability having already replaced the clockwork model of the universe, Koestler could see that the utilitarian penchant for quantification had become less and less useful. Discovering how

the greater good was to be defined and achieved was a much more complicated enterprise than nineteenth-century thinkers had conceived. The Utilitarians' project was ultimately fraught with ethical dangers, he concluded. Europe's twentieth-century political history had shown materialism to have been scientifically, politically, and philosophically wanting. In all three of these areas of human endeavor, science, politics, and philosophy, only a sharing of hierarchical structure could unite reason with ethics and point in the direction of humane social progress, Koestler hoped.

A valid understanding of the relationship of determinism to freedom or of destiny to volition in political or moral terms was, therefore, a hierarchical one, "the freedom of the whole [existing as] the destiny of the part."¹¹ Koestler turned in the direction of an organic understanding of the universe, and organism was much less subject to manipulation from the outside than was machine. Koestler found a new approach to ethics in twentieth-century physics in that mankind no longer could view nature or social engineering as being guaranteed. He perceived a link between the material universe and traditional, pre-scientific spirituality. "The only way to comprehend destiny," he claimed, "is to comprehend one's part-ness. That is precisely what the mystics said. But that does not mean a victory of mysticism over science; only the recognition of science within its own terms of reference."¹² Science and ethics were both human pursuits; neither could be conceived as absolutes. Their relation to each other and the internal stratification of each were what Koestler emphasized as he groped for a new moral order based in logic, but not tied exclusively to quantification or mechanistic conceptions of causation. Although human behavior could not be quantified and predicted by any formulae, he believed that the commissar or the social scientist, each in his capacity as political, policy, or historical agent, should nevertheless, be able to act ethically.

Koestler recognized science as a human and social pursuit. For this reason both determinism in science and historical determinism in “scientific socialism,” involved free will and the need for humans to feel in control. “The Yogi and the Commissar (II)” presents a nexus among science, psychology, and philosophy that defines both determinism and free will as being grounded in the human need to believe that the individual or that mankind exerts some authority over the events that constitute human existence. Determinism and free will are both, therefore, illusory but useful, Koestler maintains, one facilitating an ability to predict future events, the other facilitating a feeling of authority over the circumstances of one’s life. Koestler held that determinism or “explanation” and the belief in free will are each nothing more than human instinct in different expressions.¹³ He further postulated that the notion of destiny results from the human need to discover some order or “organizing principle” behind the chaos in nature which seems unrelenting in its ability to threaten us. Destiny’s or determinism’s “instinctual root,” he concluded, “is probably the feeling of insecurity, a cosmic anxiety, which craves for reassurance by ‘explanation’, that is, the reduction of the strange and threatening to the familiar.”¹⁴ The first instinct, determinism, instantiated during the modern period in materialistic science, tempts us to deny the existence of the second instinct, human volition, for if precedent events or strict laws determine outcomes, human will is dissipated and emasculated. Determinism and volition, as instincts, Koestler maintained, continually vie for our attention and substantiation. “The conflict between freedom and determinism is a conflict between two instinctual beliefs, experienced in alternation and with equal intensity,” he claims.¹⁵

Typically, Koestler began his discussion of the yogi-commissar dichotomy with a metaphor from physics. He likened the approach of the yogi, which he operationally

defined as “change from within,” and that of the commissar, defined as “change from without,” to opposite ends of the light spectrum. He equated the consciousness of a yogi with the cool ultraviolet bandwidth and the consciousness of a commissar with the hot infrared one. Both ends of the light spectrum exist independently and defy blending, his analogy continued, each being mutually exclusive and contradictory of the other. In Koestler’s analogy the bipolar characteristic of the two approaches to life acted more like an electrical diode than points on a continuum. The difficulty of the constituent parts of this diode, or the end points of the light spectrum, to compromise or meld is what Koestler held responsible for the twentieth-century political turmoil through which he had lived.¹⁶

In 1942, when Koestler wrote what was to become *The Yogi and the Commissar’s* lead essay, he presented an explanation of the failure of the commissar’s approach to attain human progress as one based on a reading of Kant’s “Antinomies of Applied Reasoning.” He had already presented these ideas in his first two novels, *The Gladiators* and *Darkness at Noon* in the language of the poet. In the 1942 essay, he presented them in that of the philosopher. He constructed the “Commissar’s Dilemma” as one in which the prospects for changing the human condition “from without” were dim. He reminded his readers that evidence of the incapacity of “change from without” existed in all failed social revolutions from the Spartacus Rebellion through the Inquisition and Reformation to the Russian Revolution. He explained these failures in terms of two antinomies, one of the “serpentine,” the other of the “slopes.”¹⁷ The “antinomy of the serpentine” confronted both revolutionaries and reformists. In Koestler’s estimation, it forced revolutionary leaders upon a switchback road determined by the momentum of the revolutionary potential of the masses behind them. The twists and turns in this road,

careening the revolution off its natural and direct tangent, obscures the noble and idealistic ends from both the leaders' and the masses' views. Any leadership with a revolutionary agenda necessarily becomes a vanguard on a road to "nowhere," he would pessimistically conclude.¹⁸

Reformist movements might achieve limited success, Koestler maintained, but at the expense of their own articulated maximalist goals. For them the "antinomy of the serpentine" operated to put them on a downward regression that ultimately brought them farther from their goal than any particular reformist visionary had ever thought possible for his cause. Thus, reformist movements like trade unionism, lacking revolutionary momentum, a fact presumably determined by their own short-sightedness or lack of imagination, quickly succumb to the gravity of social tradition to find themselves sliding backwards as they get farther from their goal of social justice.¹⁹

Choosing means over ends or vice-versa, results in another kind of backward regression that Koestler characterized as "antinomy of the slopes." The unavoidable choice of which method to employ in goal-seeking efforts always resulted in responsibilities being placed on leadership that defy practical purpose. Revolutionary leadership finds it impossible to attain its ultimate object of social justice and peace because that object is human. Remember Spartacus' options in *The Gladiators*. He could put ends over means and run rough-shod over his followers' desires preventing them from attacking Capua. Attaining his utopian end would have necessitated his denial of his followers' desire for their shortsighted goal of the immediate gratification of capturing the city and its riches. Spartacus could put means over ends – which is what, against his better judgement, he did – and accommodate his followers' will by attacking Capua in a mission that would guarantee the ultimate defeat of the revolution. Social

revolution involves the complexities of multiples of individuals and of social structures based on tradition. In the case of either of the commissar's available repertory of revolutionary leadership, the accentuation of ends over means or of means over ends, social progress seems illusory and quixotic. Koestler reached this pessimistic conclusion in 1942, but by 1945 he granted, optimistically, that long-term social progress was a reality in European history worth acknowledging.²⁰ However short-term, Koestler's pessimism impelled him to recognize no practical way out for the commissar. Both approaches, means over ends or vice versa, seemed destined to discover only blind alleys in the search for social and political justice. It was, however, the accentuation of ends over means that truly frightened Koestler. Historical determinism was his *bête noire*. In 1942 he would say,

If you have chosen to subordinate the Means to the End, the slope makes you slide down deeper and deeper on a moving carpet of common-sense propositions, for instance: the right of self-defense – the best defense is attack – increase of ruthlessness shortens the struggle, etc. Another well-known slope-pattern starts with the “Healer's Knife” and ends with the Moscow Purges.²¹

What Koestler saw as “The Yogi's Dilemma” led to no surer place as regards social progress. The sum of individuals' changes from within might attain social progress, but the impracticality of waiting for its collective self-actualization rendered the yogi's approach of ends over means dangerously fraught with prospects that leadership would advance their followers down the path of self-destruction. In contrasting the commissar and yogi approaches, Koestler's pessimism led him to cite contemporary events in India:

Obviously the prospects for the masses of common people are not brighter under this inverted Machievellianism [Gandhi's proposal of passive resistance to Japanese imperialism] than under the leadership of the Commissars. One slope leads to the Inquisition and the Purges, the other to passive submission to

bayonetting [sic] and raping; to villages without sewerage, septic childbeds and trachoma. The Yogi and the Commissar may call it quits.²²

Koestler identified a rhythm in European history that he claimed Marxist analysis failed to appreciate. Although he refrains from specifically identifying them, he claims to have recognized a sequence of oscillations between the yogi and the commissar diodes throughout European history, presumably necessitated by the inability of the two approaches to meld or compromise. The reader is left to determine whether Koestler's reference to a "strange minuet" between yogi and commissar, or between the passive and the active, approaches to the solutions of social problems constitutes European historical reality or merely a rhetorical device. In any event, Koestler defines this "minuet" as one of history's "more exciting aspects."²³

Bringing the discussion back to the perspective that united science and politics, Koestler would conclude that contemporary science could not be as confident or intransigent as the twentieth-century commissar had been. This observation served as the identification of a false or antiquated point-of-view that political man had acquired from what had by the twentieth century become an irrelevant philosophy of science. He maintains that post-Newtonian physics' tendency was one that was moving away from absolute statements about time, matter, substance, and causality. New discoveries in the physics laboratory had pushed twentieth-century scientists in the direction of the yogi.²⁴ By the early twentieth century a humbler science than what Koestler viewed as its arrogant nineteenth-century precursor caused its practitioners to shift their sights away from pretensions of absolute understanding and deterministic manipulations of nature. Scientists had begun, after all, to conceive their empirical results and inductive predictions as mere statistical probabilities. This new humbled version of reason and

willfulness Koestler modulated into what he believed was a realistic approach to free will, human agency, and morality in politics. Justifying what were, by the standards of nineteenth-century materialism and liberalism, slightly abridged hopes in mankind's ability to rationally forge its destiny, Koestler saw the physicist as a commissar who, through the consequences of the developments in his science, suffered an attraction to the perspective of the yogi:

What really matters is that the physicist's instruments of measurement indicate the presence of physically unmeasurable [sic] factors. And this is the reason why the physicist travels perhaps more cautiously than anybody else towards the ultra-violet.²⁵

By the middle section of *The Yogi and the Commissar*, a section entitled "Exhortations," Koestler would seek ethical soundness through a search for some vertical means that would allow philosophy or spiritualism to act as a hierarchical, integrative nexus among what he viewed as Europe's helpless horizontal structures. None of Europe's cross-cultural institutions had proven capable of mediating the swing between yogi and commissar ethics. The League of Nations, the Second and Third Internationals, the Catholic Church had all been unable to soften the struggle between ideological extremes or to point toward an integrated view of man and society. By 1942 Koestler could see that any sentiment for progress and cooperation among the Allies would become quixotic after the war. He predicted that "co-operation between the competing partners who tomorrow will rule the world" were "naïve and pointless." "Governments," he claimed, possessed scant possibilities or "narrow margins for manoeuvring [sic] within the fatal automatism of economic and social forces behind them."²⁶

Again, Koestler saw limitations presented to human will by material forces. He could not completely discount determinism, but hoped to see progress brought by some

integrative vertical force. He longed for some trans-institutional value that would prove capable of stitching European culture and society together. He concluded that “*The outstanding feature of our day is the collapse of all horizontal structures. That our truths are half-truths is a direct consequence of it.*”²⁷ Neither science nor history could any longer grant certitude. Koestler could only hope for a yet-to-be-seen spiritualism to provide a desperately needed center for European civilization and retrieve some order for the post-war world.

* * *

In “The Novelist’s Temptation,” originally delivered as a speech to the Seventeenth International Congress of the PEN Club in September 1941, Koestler defined the role of the artist to include the responsibility of engaging his readers on the social level. In this role Koestler saw an inescapable tension between a retreat from the “dim light of eternity” in yogi fashion and the necessity of the responsible writer to meet the world, if not like a commissar, at least like a man of action.²⁸ “The author is no leader; his mission is not to solve but to expose, not to preach but to demonstrate.”²⁹ “The Novelist’s Temptation” concludes with a digression that, employing the metaphor used as the title for the second volume of Koestler’s autobiography, *The Invisible Writing*, comments on the relationship between destiny and a novelist’s volition. Koestler paints the writer of socially significant novels as a ship captain charged with delivering sealed orders to contemporaries at the terminus of a voyage. The sealed orders are, furthermore, written in invisible ink so that the novelist as ship captain could not read them if he opened them before his voyage’s end. His free will cannot alter or violate his destiny. If the novel’s plan is not stilted or predetermined by ideology or simple reportage, its creator cannot know, when he begins, exactly how his message to his

readers will be delivered. The novelist, being the captain of a “war ship” rather than a “pleasure cruiser,” is, furthermore, conscious of his responsibility to deliver the “indecipherable yet imperative” orders as part of his own fate. “This,” Koestler concludes, “is the greatness of the writer’s mission; this is his predicament.”³⁰ It is easy to read this description of the novelist as Koestler’s view of himself and the warnings he delivered about the temptations, dangers, and betrayals of Stalinism as well as of brutal corporatism and fascism in Spain.

Koestler’s political novels all rely on interplay among the psychological, the political, and the social-psychological. If we briefly look at key characters in his novels we can see how, even before he created his philosophical system, Koestler was making connections between determinism and the social nature of politics as well as between individuality and the autonomy of the constituents of systems. These characters were drawn in large part from Koestler’s own experiences, so like his description of the significant novelist, they represent parts of himself. His first three novels dealt with different aspects of the crucible of European politics during the inter-war years. His use of metaphor as a political novelist continued the skill established in his journalistic voice, if in a somber, minor key with a darker, foreboding timbre.

His first novel, *The Gladiators* (1939), was an allegory. It employed the first-century B. C. rebellion in Rome led by the slave Spartacus as a vehicle for the exploration of the possibilities of the survival of both the promises of the Bolshevik Revolution and the sheer existence of the Soviet Union. It is in this novel that his short-term pessimism stretches into the pessimism for the longer term recognized by George Orwell. By 1917 the French Revolution had for some time been the template used to interpret all modern political revolutions. Koestler’s early fiction transfers that function

of pattern to the Bolshevik Revolution. Out of pessimism and cynicism, his novels establish the idea that all revolutions are determined to fail for the same reasons of universalized human character traits. The idea of the impracticality of social revolution is the seat of Koestler's tendency to privilege yogi contemplativeness over commissar agency. His belief in this impracticality stems from his experiences with and disappointments in the Comintern as well as his understanding of how Nazism fulfilled certain human proclivities for the irrational.

In *The Gladiator's* fifth chapter, entitled "The Man with the Bullet-Head," Koestler employs a shaved-headed character to foreshadow the ultimate demise of Spartacus' rebellion. By implication, the fated failure of the slave rebellion suggests that the ostensible workers' state established by the Bolsheviks would degenerate in one way or another and renege on its promises to establish a just social order. Chapter Five of *The Gladiators* progresses through a conversation between two men in the wee hours of the morning. Spartacus, one of these men, alternates between sleep, half-sleep, and fully conscious states. His instinctual and rational states of mind are both operating during this discourse, so Spartacus is in a highly suggestive state. There is a hint in the way Koestler constructed this part of the novel that Spartacus' unconscious mind is being instructed by his preconscious ideations. Indeed, the similarity of the man with the shaved head's name with that of the protagonist lends the discourse between the two characters a definite psychological aspect in which Spartacus can be viewed as conversing with his alter-ego while dreaming. There is another variant and quite plausible reading of the discourse between Spartacus and the character with the bullet-shaped head. The latter's bald, pointy, and elongated head suggests the cephalic trauma of birth. Taken as the characteristic of a newborn infant, the bullet-head enables the reader to view its bearer as

the personification of the primal level of human consciousness, thus representing a guttural yearning within Spartacus for social justice accompanied by an instinctual wisdom at the level of the Freudian id. At the cultural level, this chapter introduces certain precepts of existential philosophy, particularly the notion that the traditional conception of God is irrelevant to the more complex and developed levels of civilization. Thus, Chapter Five of *The Gladiators* treats the psychological as well as the social while it intertwines essence with existence in its investigation of the relationship among the instinctual, the volitional, and the political. The context of the treatment of these ideas is one in which, void of values imposed on mankind by the supernatural, men are left to their own devices and condemned to a freedom aggravated by utopian instinctual yearnings and truncated social possibilities.

Spartacus' interlocutor possesses an accented speech that betrays a certain Semitic origin that the character verbally denies. His name, Zpardokos, Prince of Thrace, appears to be connected in some way with Greece, and that is not insignificant given the Hellenistic setting of the novel. However, like Spartacus' homeland, Zpardokos' kingdom is in the area of modern Germany. Zpardokos claims to be an Essene whom most readers can understand as the essential, fundamental man. The Essenes, however, were a real, ancient Jewish people who practiced collectivism on the shores of the Dead Sea after the destruction of the Second Temple. Koestler draws Zpardokos as an ex-slave who became known as a vigorous freer of his downtrodden fellows as the first-century rebellion in the Roman Empire progressed. He acted as a revolutionary when history provided him the opportunity to do so. This man with the bullet-head waxes eloquent on the motivations of all classes of people regarding their understanding of social order as well as their own places in it. Spartacus initiates conversation with Zpardokos as others

in the tent sleep. During this interchange, the bullet-headed character lists social types, presumably extant for all time. These include the middle class whose mind-set Zpardokos summarizes as “mine is mine; thine is thine,” more humble classes whose philosophy of life is “thine is mine and mine is thine,” pious men whose mantra is “mine is thine and thine is mine,” and, finally, wicked men whose approach to living is “mine is mine and thine is mine.”³¹ By the end of Chapter Five, moonlight obliterates the darkness just enough for Spartacus to recognize that the man with whom he had such a long exchange of ideas on the possibility of justice and human freedom is actually quite aged, perhaps, the attentive reader concludes, primordial.

Zpardokos is more than simply old, his age lends him a certain experience. Wisdom resides in him whether he be Semitic or Hellenistic by way of Thrace, and this wisdom indicates an undeniable pessimism about liberal as well as socialist goals because the picture which Zpardokos paints is one in which social classes are the expression of universal human types. These types, or the aspects of human nature that they seem to express, are what the bullet-headed man, as well as the novel in its entirety, contend are unchanging, universals of human nature. This reading of *The Gladiators* suggests several ideas. First, the similarity in identity and place of origin, that is Jewish and German, tends to equate Zpardokos with Koestler if age doesn't. Koestler was, after all, only thirty-three years old when he wrote the novel. Furthermore, although born in Hungary, he was culturally German, his education having taken place in Vienna and his early career having been spent working for a German-Jewish newspaper in Berlin. Secondly, it is apparent that in 1939 Koestler gave a nod to a conservative construction of social psychology that created a political pessimism. This dark attitude was based in the idea that unchangeable patterns in the way individual men in any social setting relate to one

another make fundamental reforms in any society nearly impossible. During his early career as a novelist, Koestler seems to have believed that either mankind's essential egocentrism puts free will on the side of social conservatism or, conversely, that men and women are fated to exist only in predetermined types that make social reform at a minimum impractical. Zpardokos is a contradictory figure. He seems to exhibit a wisdom that can distinguish between the practical and the impractical, and yet he allowed himself to be swept up in a doomed social project. Zpardokos is a fated character. He sees himself as a professional revolutionary, a man who has received a calling to await the time when slaves would rise so that he could lead them. Personality, not any historical force, is responsible for this calling. Through the Essene's insights, Koestler makes history as determinism largely irrelevant.

Zpardokos is a literate man, but when captured by the Romans and enslaved he refused to reveal to his captors that he could read and was thereafter employed as a masseur at a public bath. He kept his literacy secret so that the Romans could not "force [him] to teach lies."³² Spartacus holds a desire to have Zpardokos help establish a university in the utopian Sun State of the liberated slaves that the former hopes to build. The bullet-headed man, however, refuses to entertain any such prospect because, in the world defined by the novel, he is too wise to believe in such impractical or quixotic dreams. In spite of himself and his calling to revolutionary leadership, Zpardokos knows that the Sun State will never be. The novel suggests that, in his role as masseur, the bullet-headed character massages the psyches of men as well as their bodies. For those who, like Spartacus, will listen, he offers his insight that social order will remain imperfect and that schemes to revolutionarily transform it are idealistic traps. Most of Zpardokos' time, however, is spent not in preaching revolution or warning about its

futility. He whiles away his life as a cynic in Rome's baths. One must question whether Koestler was here abandoning his hopeful liberal attitude concerning mankind's prospects or if he was simply narrowing the limits in which he believed social transformation could succeed. If through Zpardokos' speech Koestler was painting intellectuals, particularly the ones he could see in inter-war Europe, as socially redundant, this speech can be read as an allegorical indication that the thoughtful Europeans attracted to socialism during the 1920s had little to offer but cynicism by the late 1930s. We can take their defeat by the real world around them as the reason for the cynicism or hopelessness that Koestler felt for what he perceived as idealistic and deterministic leftists. If they correctly interpreted the social and historical realities that confronted their idealism, Koestler suggests, European leftists of the 1930s might realize that their optimistic attitude should necessarily degenerate into a rotten pessimism. *The Gladiators* demonstrates that whether the revolutionaries of the inter-war years believed their theory and method scientific seems to have made little difference.

Zpardokos' avocation is neither that of teacher nor philosopher. With a jaded attitude he is content to melt in the background of society and remain obscure. He does not believe in prophecies, but knows that certain men in messianic fashion are subject, out of their own selfless convictions, to lead others when the others choose a time to strike at their oppressors. There is an indication of ambivalence in the pessimism about mankind that Zpardokos' view of the world reveals. For if he truly believes that reform is impossible, one must ponder why he gets actively involved in the rebellion led by Spartacus. Koestler insinuates that the solution to this riddle lay in individual psychology. What matters, Zpardokos counsels Spartacus, is not prophecy, but the match of leaders to the readiness of their followers:

‘It is the same with prophecies as with clothes. There they hang in the tailor’s shop, many men pass them, many a man they would fit. One comes and takes the robe. And so it is made for him – for he has taken it unto him... What really matters is, that it suits the fashion and period. It must fit in with the taste of the time – the wishes of many – the need and longing desire of many...’³³

Zpardokos is, after all, an Essene, a group who lived up to the ideal shared by all men of the “Golden Age” of social justice, the novel informs the reader. When he explains to Spartacus that his people practice collectivism, Spartacus is incredulous. And yet this Essene is conscious of the fact that time after time men, in their yearning for social justice, have been incapable of achieving it. He tells Spartacus of several examples of men who found masses to lead and who were frustrated either by the guile of the powerful or by the incompetence and crudity of their followers. He advises Spartacus that it is never changing, that “Again and again one man arises, recognizes the sign and receives the word, and goes on his way with the great wrath in his bowels; and he knows of the people’s homesickness for the buried times of old that were ruled by justice and kindness...”³⁴

The Essene continues by recounting the outlines of a slave rebellion in Sicily that gathered 70,000 men and still was defeated by Roman Legions. When he tells Spartacus that these rebels were culpable for their own defeat, Spartacus is once more incredulous as well as outraged. Expressing his consternation, he wants to know what made the Sicilian revolutionaries responsible for the defeat that was theirs. Zpardokos replies simply that they allowed themselves to be beaten.³⁵ Koestler indicates here and elsewhere that man may be doomed to repeat failed attempts at deep, drastic, and quick social and political reform because the masses of men cannot ever be ready for responsible freedom. Idealized notions that the masses of people are capable of

egalitarian consciousness and action is the fundamental culprit in all revolutionary projects. Through Zpardokos Koestler tells his readers that revolutionaries and restive masses will, nevertheless, go on repeating futile attempts at social reform and do so with vigorous and defiant élan.³⁶

The question of human agency is broached early in *The Gladiators*' fifth chapter when Zpardokos contends that actors in history are indeed responsible for their willful actions. Perplexed, Spartacus fails to understand how the Essene is able to believe that rebellious slaves can be either outside the order of the cosmos or held accountable to the laws of man when pursued and attacked by the forces of counterrevolution. Zpardokos replies by tossing a pebble down a hill and asks Spartacus, "Had you asked this stone whither it rolls it would have answered that it had been pushed. The stone believes that the only thing that matters is the particular push it got. Yet it obeys unwittingly the common law that everything is pulled downward."³⁷ Koestler offers multiple meanings here. First, we cannot really tell what is volition and what is fate or some historical force that motivates the actions of mankind. Second, the leaders of mass movements are subject to the realities of social leveling and are doomed to come down to the level of their followers. It is difficult to tell whether the engine is pulling or the momentum of the cars behind the engine is pushing as together revolutionary leaders and masses provide the forward force in a moving train of historical progress. Third, and perhaps most important, Koestler suggests a hierarchical relationship here. The stone is aware of only one level of reality, that of being pushed, while at another level, the laws of gravity can explain the stone's trajectory down the hill. Whether Koestler was aware in 1939 of a the still another reading of this passage, that of the intertwining of events at two levels of

hierarchy, limited freedom at the local level and determinism at the cosmic level, remains a mystery.

Zpardokos warns Spartacus as well as the twentieth-century reader that man's belief in a "Golden Age," an idealized and mythical past, when society was fair and just is an unfortunate wish-fulfillment phantom. As a warning the "bullet-headed man" gave Spartacus the account of the details of the failure of revolution in Sicily. All rebellions, Zpardokos counsels Spartacus, suffer from the intersection of mankind's "Great Wrath," its longing for justice, with the incontestable fact that the masses of men hate the revolutionary leaders. The sin of these leaders, which seems to contradict Zpardokos' earlier warning that the masses pull their leaders into impossibility, is that the leaders bring their unprepared followers to rebellion only to be defeated at the hands of the superior forces of the established order.³⁸ Zpardokos claims that those leaders who are called by prophecy should be wary because the traditional gods of earlier times possess prophets and scriptures that preach the "Golden Age" of social justice which cannot speak to modern man. When Spartacus pronounces "Yahve," [sic] the Essenes' God, a God of slaves because He "curses" at the oppressors and is "so wild at the rich," Zpardokos responds that Yahve is neither a slave's God nor an oppressor's God. He is an irrelevant God:

'Yahve is dead. And he was no slave God, he [sic] was a desert God. He was good at things of the desert: he knows how to open up springs in the rocks and how to make bread rain from the heavens. But he knew nothing of industry and agriculture. He could not make the vineyard bear fruit, nor the olive tree and wheat, he was no luxuriant God, he was hard and just like the desert itself. Therefore he scolds at modern life and gets lost in it.'³⁹

Here the Essene articulates, for the first time, Koestler's developing notion that spirituality and rationality are misaligned, developing at different rates. He identifies a

spiritual vacuum in the culture of the first-century B. C. Mediterranean world that helps make revolutionary social progress an impossibility. Projecting this spiritual vacuum backwards and the notion of universal human types forward, accentuates Koestler's pessimism and extends it beyond his habit of relegating it only to the short term.

Arthur Koestler was beginning to believe that long before A. D. 1939 Europe's reliance on and attachment to reason had outlived its usefulness. By 1942 he could articulate his belief that the Enlightenment's idealization of the prospects for science to rationalize and perfect social life was fraught with dangers. He was beginning to investigate the problems of free will and determinism through what he believed was mankind's primal desire for social justice. Arthur Koestler had started his work toward a conclusion that the connection between science and politics had to find a new spirit to replace antiquated certitudes in both. This would become his remedy for Europe's slide down "antinomies of serpents and slopes" between 1917 and 1940.

*Darkness at Noon: The Pessimism of Liberalism Eclipsed and
the Dangers of Determinism*

Arthur Koestler continued his analysis of revolution and the prospects for social justice in 1941 with the novel that made him a significant and respected writer of fiction. That novel, *Darkness at Noon*, is rich beyond what it is generally remembered for. It is not solely an explanation of why loyal revolutionaries invariably admitted to crimes against the movement to which they dedicated their lives; *Darkness at Noon's* subject is not restricted to the Stalin's Purges. Koestler divided the novel's psychological approach into three interrogations and one concluding treatise on the individual's role in society, politics, and history. As the novel begins, its protagonist, Nicholas Salmanovitch Rubashov, awakens in a solitary-confinement cell. He knows that he is charged with

some crime against the Revolution, but does not know precisely what it was. Through his solitude, infrequent encoded communication with other inmates, and his interrogation by two party men, Rubashov arrives at a solution to the puzzle of how the Revolution could have gone so wrong. It is through his introspection, his dialogs with himself, that Rubashov eventually gains an understanding of the twin nature of his own predicament. The first part involves an understanding of how he sustained his dedication to a movement taken as self-evidently progressive and moral while its achievements became disappointments and its ethics unalterably tarnished. The second part is the attempt to explain how he was able to rationalize his own role in the Revolution's degeneration while his unconscious questioning of his part in these political events made him a criminal in the eyes of the new established order. Koestler portrays Rubashov's introspection as an exchange between his ego and his id which occasionally receives nudges in the right direction by his communication with inmates and his interrogators. Rubashov thinks, dreams, and remembers his way to an understanding of twentieth-century Europe's politics of faith in revolutionary social change and that faith's manifestly betrayed ideals in the case of the Soviet Union.

Darkness at Noon begins with an investigation of the role of determinism in history. Rubashov feels perplexed by the party's relationship to history. He desires to understand how what he still believes to be a noble cause could have gone astray. Thinking about the leadership of the Revolution, he asks himself, "When and where in history had there ever been such defective saints? Whenever had a good cause been worse represented? If the Party embodied the will of history, then history itself was defective."⁴⁰ In spite of his long subscription to a theory of historical determinism, he finds himself forced to question both the validity and the morality of that self-same

determinism. He needs to discover where the Revolution went wrong before he can determine why he is in jail. To this effort Koestler has Rubashov think,

The cause of the Party's defectiveness must be found. All our principles were right, but our results were wrong. This is a diseased century. We diagnosed the disease and its causes with microscopic exactness, but wherever we applied the healing knife, a new sore appeared. Our will was hard and pure, we should have been loved by the people. But they hate us so. Why are we so odious and detested?⁴¹

So, early in the novel as he weighs determinism in history against human agency or free will, Koestler returned to his notion of the Law of Detours developed in *The Gladiators*. The "antinomy of the serpentine" is apparent as leaders of the Revolution seem fated to earn the ire of their followers and doomed to wander in search of goals of which they have lost sight.

Rubashov's thoughts continue with a listing of the Party's very own dialectical contradictions. He enumerates them without being yet able to account for them. His efforts collect only a vague notion that in the beginning the party leader of the innocent and pure revolutionaries somehow knows that things will go in a direction that only he can foresee. Koestler indicates that that very direction was one which was pre-determined to derail and betray the Revolution's goals. It was the same direction with which his character Zpardokos in *The Gladiators* was so familiar. Rubashov remembers the Revolution's original purity of purpose and articulates its disappointments as stunning lies perpetrated by men like himself upon their followers:

We brought you the truth, and in our mouths it sounded like a lie. We brought you freedom; and it looks in our hands like a whip. We brought you the living life and where our voice is heard the trees wither and there is a rustling of dry leaves. We brought you the promise of the future, but our tongue stammered and barked...⁴²

Describing what is plainly to be taken by the reader as Lenin, Rubashov remembers a photograph of party leaders posing for posterity during the initial stages of the Revolution. He recalls that all but one of the subjects of the photo, whom he collectively acknowledges as the saints of the Revolution, possess halos along with a number that refers the viewer to a key that identifies each by name. It is the photo's subject with "slit Tartar eyes" that possesses a "sly and amused grin" that indicates he knows something, perhaps about human nature or about history, of which the others remain unaware. Of this photo Rubashov muses, "They were at the time a handful of men of an entirely new species: militant philosophers."⁴³ One of these practitioners of active and positivistic philosophy, a twentieth-century Philosophe to whom history had given the power of the state, presumably possesses knowledge of the Law of Detours. Without naming the revolutionary state by its Marxist term, the dictatorship of the proletariat, Rubashov thinks about the ironies recognized and justified by the Party as part and parcel of history's dialectic:

They [the subjects of the photo] dreamed of power with the object of abolishing power; of ruling over the people to wean them from the habit of being ruled. All their thoughts became deeds and all their dreams were fulfilled. Where were they? Their brains which had changed the course of the world, had all received a charge of lead. Some in the forehead, some in the back of the neck. Only two or three of them were left over, scattered throughout the world, worn out.⁴⁴

At this point Rubashov appreciates these contradictions as flaws in history's determinism. He will later revise this interpretation in favor of one that sees the flaw in Historical Determinism as its theory of how human events unfold at the political level. Rubashov longs for something, even if it is teleological uncertainty, to account for contradiction between the motives and results of the Revolution.

The fact that the derailed revolution was about to eliminate him becomes of secondary or tertiary importance to Rubashov. He needs to understand the historical process. At the novel's beginning Rubashov acknowledges what was Zpardokos' Law of Detours as he concludes that the purges and violence committed by the state against civilians turns human agency and free will both into inflated concepts. The Revolution was amoral: being "without scruples," she "rolled towards her goal unconcernedly and deposited the corpses of the drowned in the windings of her course," he thinks.⁴⁵ Anyone who could not follow the Revolution's twisted course found himself "washed on to the bank."⁴⁶ Human will counted for naught because, "The motives of individuals did not matter" as the revolution did not consider what was in any individual's head or heart. The Party recognized only a single crime that concerned the individual. That crime was for an individual to refuse to follow the Revolution's path, a path, which in typical commissar fashion, the party had determined that history required. Punishment for this crime was also singular: death. And death was neither mysterious nor was it praised, Rubashov stresses. In the Party it simply existed as "the logical solution to political divergences."⁴⁷

Whether history determined the Revolution's path or whether the Party had miscalculated it is, for Rubashov, a moot point. He takes what the Bolsheviks called democratic centralism for granted. He knows that what the Party plans, its cadre must accept and carry out. When Rubashov begins his soliloquy about where the revolution went wrong, he enunciates a reality with which he was familiar: individuals are fallible, the Party is infallible. He recounts an accepted article of faith among the revolutionary cadre, that the Party represents determinism in history:

The Party is the embodiment of the revolutionary idea in history. History knows no scruples and no hesitation. Inert and unerring, she flows towards her goal. At every bend in her course she leaves the mud which she carries and the corpses of the drowned. History knows her way. She makes no mistakes. He who has not absolute faith in History does not belong in the Party's ranks."⁴⁸

Constructing the Party, the Revolution, and History as parts of a single trinity, Koestler was simply reiterating a belief that during the 1920s and 1930s blinded many Europeans who needed to believe in the Russian Revolution and who unwittingly needed to excuse Stalin's betrayals, caprices, and barbarities as tactical necessities.

Rubashov's early construction of this trinity was of little help to him as he tries to understand his and the Revolution's predicament. In his mind this trinity was still all too self-evident. He had to tie this belief to other realizations before he could understand why he was willing to admit to crimes against the movement in which he had such great faith and ebullient hope. But by stating what was for Rubashov a tautology, that is that "No. 1," the Party's strongman, represented the forces of historical progress, Koestler gives the reader a key to understanding the power that the Comintern had over so many committed and optimistic people during the 1930s. Koestler and other leftists knew that Historical Materialism had found history's laws. They knew that the Bolsheviks were empiricists who had implemented these laws in Russia. Koestler would show that by Stalin's time this knowledge was held through a faith that was, like most faiths, blind to certain facts. With the development of fascist reaction in Europe, the faithful had to believe that Historical Determinism could produce only the hardest morality. As the Revolution unfolded, the faithful confronted a bewildering and twisted road to the "glorious future." Rather than confront these twists in the road according to its own class-struggle doctrine, the Party accommodated its rightist opponents abroad. In Koestler's scheme, the Law of Detours did not have to be reasonable. It accounted for

social developments that defied logic because they issued from emotion, not reason.

However, in *The Law of Detours* Rubashov would eventually find a reasoned explanation for his and other Party leaders' conduct.

Darkness at Noon fully develops this idea of requisite detours on the path of revolutionary transformations of society. In this novel Koestler links the Law of Detours with the sophistication of the masses of people who are affected by social revolution. Rubashov's monologue turns to the importance of the political maturity of most people in relation to the economic productive techniques unleashed by any and all revolutions. On the twentieth day of his imprisonment, Comrade Rubashov makes a lengthy entry into his diary that focuses on the consequences of the misfit between the masses' cultural level and the economic and social advances unbound during a true social revolution.

What Rubashov realizes is that the political maturity of the masses of mankind develops haltingly. That their development may be generally in a positive direction is of little consequence because it is always one step or more behind advances in productive technique. What becomes significant, Rubashov realizes, is not absolute social and political maturity, but maturity relative to particular developing economic forces. His seminal conclusion is that "it is comprehensible that the relative political maturity of the nations in the first half of the twentieth century is less than it was 200 B. C. or at the end of the feudal epoch."⁴⁹ Koestler has Rubashov reach this conclusion through a short description of the age of steam power. Rubashov writes, "The discovery of the steam engine started a period of rapid objective progress, and, consequently, of equally rapid subjective political retrogression. The industrial era is still young in history, the discrepancy is still great between its extremely complicated economic structure and the masses' understanding of it."⁵⁰ Rubashov continues his diary entry with a judgement of

the socialist movement's theoretical foundation: "The mistake in socialist theory was to believe that the level of mass-consciousness rose constantly and steadily."⁵¹

During Rubashov's second hearing, his two interrogators differ on how to treat him. One of middle-class origins, Ivanov, argues for patience and restraint, giving Rubashov enough time to reason his way to a capitulation to what the Party needs of him. The other of peasant origin, Gletkin, argues for the use of terror because it will quicken Rubashov's confession. Koestler takes the opportunity to explain that Gletkin's point of view is rooted in a cultural level that is below the middle-class morality of the nineteenth century. Gletkin is a pragmatist, not a messiah. The Party in hands of men like him is a different institution than it would be if left totally to men with cultural umbilical cords which connect them to the bourgeois values of the past. It is their methods only that differ, Koestler explains, because the Law of Detours and the law of relative maturity of the masses determine that the trajectory of both groups will be the same. Long before Chairman Mao's Great Cultural Revolution, Koestler had Gletkin explain the necessity of terror, the ineffectiveness of "cricket ethics" or idealized norms of fair play, and the need to instruct the common man through brutal example. The effectiveness and necessity of Gletkin's method results from the realities created by the Revolution, by objective conditions as well as any commissar's subjective level of culture. Koestler makes this point clear when he has Gletkin argue about how to deal with peasants that resist collectivization:

Several years ago a little peasant was brought to me to be cross-examined. It was in the provinces, at the time when we still believed in the flower-garden theory, as you [Ivanov] call it. Cross-examinations were conducted in a very gentlemanly way. The peasant had buried his crops; it was the beginning of the collectivization of the land. The peasant had his head drawn into his shoulders when he was brought into my room, expecting a beating... When instead of beating him, I began to reason with him as an equal and call him "citizen," he

took me for a half-wit... I went on talking, although I saw he held the whole thing for a superb joke and was not listening at all. Arguments simply did not penetrate his ears. They were blocked up by the wax of centuries of patriarchal mental paralysis.⁵²

When forced by his methodological opponent, Ivanov, to end his solicitation Gletkin emphasizes, "You asked me how I came to discover my theory... What matters is, that one should keep in mind the logical necessity of it all; otherwise one is a cynic like you..."⁵³ Koestler manages to disclose more irony as he has his character, who is a hardheaded pragmatist, label his more refined, principled, and ostensibly moral comrade a cynic.

As Rubashov extends his revelation in his diary, he notices that the party that assumes state power in the name of the masses must rule its followers with an iron hand because the latter are out of step with economic forces. A simple explanation of the world, demanded by the limitations of the masses, is what revolutionary leaders must give their followers. Until the masses attain a level of consciousness consonant with the productive techniques brought about by their own revolution, democratic government remains an impossibility, and the revolutionary state can offer even less individual liberty than in nations still in the sequential chain of traditional social relationships. Koestler admits through Rubashov's ruminations that "Measured by classical liberal standards, this is not a pleasant spectacle. Yet all the horror, hypocrisy and degradation which leap to the eye are merely the visible and inevitable expression of the law [of relative maturity] described above."⁵⁴ Koestler admonishes liberal idealists and leftists alike with the warning that the channeled or restricted freedom of action left to men by history seems to demand its due. Liberals should not expect too much of the common man, and leftists who attempt to stay on the straight path to utopian goals should look over their

shoulders. He has Rubashov write, “Woe to the fool and aesthete who only ask how and not why. But woe also to the [left] opposition in a period of relative immaturity of the masses...”⁵⁵

While what Rubashov unveils is certainly applicable to the Russian Revolution, Koestler presents it as universally true for all times and places. The question that must be pondered is whether Koestler’s critique of socialism, which seems evident and valid enough in regard to developments in Soviet Russia, represents a support for or rejection of liberalism’s traditional faith in human potential. It must be remembered that this analysis comes from a member of the educated middle class, the repository of liberalism during the nineteenth century, and this class cannot be accused of harboring romantic notions about the potentialities of the peasantry or even of the unskilled portion of the working class. Like Leon Trotsky, who complained about the skein of history unwinding from its backward, Eastern end, Koestler’s insight into the relative backwardness of the Russian masses should be taken as a liberal acknowledgement of the limited potential of rural or, in late twentieth-century parlance, developing people.

Rubashov’s ruminations in his diary are leading him to a partial answer to his own dilemmas. Recall that he must discover why the Revolution aborted its original purposes, what his part was in its missed opportunities, and why the Revolution has eaten its parents as well as its children, victimizing its dedicated leadership in Party purges and repressing its mass followers in remote re-education camps. Rubashov’s twentieth-day-of-interment diary entry ends with a plausible explanation as to why in “over here,” the novel’s putative socialist fatherland, limited options necessitated the loyal adherent of the Revolution to sacrifice his convictions to the necessities of party rule. Facing the great problems of its isolated economic development and its promulgation of foreign policy

under the difficult conditions created by its siege mentality and developing fascist threats, Rubashov summarizes the tragic response exacted by history from loyal party men. He thinks,

As the only moral criterion which we [the Party officials and leaders] recognize is that of social utility, the public disavowal of one's convictions in order to remain in the Party's ranks is obviously more honourable than the quixotism of carrying on a hopeless struggle... Questions of personal pride; prejudices such as exist elsewhere [outside "over here"] against certain forms of self-abasement; personal feelings of tiredness, disgust and shame – are to be cut off root and branch.⁵⁶

During Rubashov's first interrogation, Koestler had established that the rules of the nineteenth century did not apply to revolutions in the twentieth century. The fair play of "cricket rules" had to be replaced by a new ethic that did not allow the application of traditional liberal ethics. What was important in revolution, Koestler explains, is winning. Those who win have right on their side. Following another deterministic law that Koestler recognized in communist doctrine, what he termed the "law of historical credit," Rubashov's thoughts record that "He who is in the wrong must [always] pay; he who is in the right will be absolved."⁵⁷ Victory and "historical correctness" exist as a political tautology for those faithful to a ruling revolutionary party. Rubashov recognizes that the ruling political principle in his world had to be that of the end justifying the means. In this deterministic scheme, the end existed to pronounce the final verdict of history.

There was no honor in playing fair. The new generation of leaders like Gletkin who held state power was better adapted to this new ethos than was Rubashov's generation. The novel explains that Gletkin, and men like him, had no frame of reference except the new revolutionary social order. Irrespective of their individual class origins, they bore no experience with or connections to the traditional ethos of the previous

century. These men had been children during the social upheaval. They were the generation “that had started to think after the flood,” the narrative voice instructs. Their generation possessed no traditions or memories to tie it to the values of the old regime.⁵⁸ This was one reason that honor had been redefined. Survival bested tradition in the ethical hierarchy. Men like Gletkin constituted, “a generation born without an umbilical cord...And yet it had right on its side.”⁵⁹ Just before *Darkness at Noon* makes it clear that Rubashov’s crime was his liberal values, the novel characterizes the new code of honor as one being void of any notion of the sanctity of the individual. “One must tear that umbilical cord, deny the last tie which bound one to the vain conceptions of honour and the hypocritical decency of the old world...” the book explains.⁶⁰ Then Rubashov, willing to sacrifice himself for the Revolution, confesses to having unwittingly committed thought crimes that were counterrevolutionary. However, he falls short of what the Party requires because he holds on to his traditional notion of honor and refuses to admit falsely to industrial sabotage. Rubashov defiantly pronounces his guilt as being that of placing the individual in too high esteem. His true crime is his liberalism: “I plead guilty to having rated the question of guilt and innocence higher than that of utility and harmfulness. Finally, I plead guilty to having placed the idea of man above the idea of mankind...,” he says.⁶¹

Rubashov notices that class distinction is connected through tradition to the concept of honor. His bourgeois neighbor in Cell 402 defines honor as the ability “to live and die for one’s beliefs.” For men of the Revolution like Rubashov, honor must be defined as the ability “to be useful without vanity.” As Rubashov realizes that he and his men “have replaced decency with reason,” he can only pine for the options that history, through social heritage, has left for his neighbor in Cell 402. Prisoner 402 is a member of

the traditional military caste and presumably a true enemy of the Revolution. Koestler offers us a poignant irony as the revolutionary who accuses the traditional social order of gross indecencies comes to covet the decency he recognizes in its simple, traditional concept of honor.

Koestler also investigates the reality that history exists as continuity as well as a chain of development that includes discontinuities such as social reforms and revolutions. He ties his discussion of social continuity with the siege mentality of newly created revolutionary states. It dawns on Rubashov that unlike his prison mate in Cell 402, who possesses a continuous tradition which helps define and sanction his behavior, he, as leadership cadre of a new social order, possesses no sure pattern from which to define his actions. Rubashov's reception of a note from the outside that counsels him to "Die in silence," triggers his memory of an earlier prison term and interrogation suffered "over there," the novel's putative advanced fascist state. During that experience with state-sponsored torture, he recalls that the Party intoned him to loudly hurl back his interrogators accusations and, if he must die, to do so in loud defiance. This is the point at which Rubashov recognizes that the inmate in Cell 402 has distinct advantages as a constituent of a tradition. Society, or ultimately history, provides him with guideposts that define proper, culturally sanctioned action. This is what Rubashov envies as he complains to himself that lacking a "caste code" by which to live and die, the Left have to improvise their political response without the aid and certitudes provided those who fight on the side of existing social orders. Rubashov comes to value the continuity that his own middle-class roots have instilled in him but which his revolutionary participation have granted him only the most restricted use. He will eventually discover that his options within the Party are limited by his middle-class ability to see nuances in politics

which are insignificant to the masses the Party controls. The Revolution, through the Law of Detours, holds educated leadership hostage as the inexperience of the masses asserts control and partially determines the Party's path.

In the case of Rubashov's question of how he should die when he acknowledges that it is inevitable that the Party will execute him, Koestler has his protagonist reason that for Leftists who lead revolutionary states, history provides no etiquette for dying. "What was more honourable," Rubashov ponders, "to die in silence – or to abase oneself publicly, in order to be able to pursue one's aims?"⁶² The reader understands that the concept of honor used here is one based on admitting to falsehoods, to crimes against the Revolution that, if he committed, were mere "thought crimes" of which any reasoning, free-thinking, and critical mind was capable. Honor becomes its opposite in its guise as revolutionary requisite and Party etiquette. Koestler connects this conclusion that Rubashov is denied alternative ways to go to his death to the notion that he is part of a movement that is preparing for a new golden future. Revolution denies Rubashov the certitudes of extant tradition because he sees himself as one with history's instrument of change and progressive development. Tragic as it may be, Rubashov has to accept this reality.

Nicholas Salmanovitch Rubashov remembers various comrades whose lives he had sacrificed to Party necessities because, adhering to the belief that the Party was the instrument of history, he was convinced that he had to save himself in order to help achieve the golden future. He thinks, "the duty to keep oneself in reserve for later on, was more important than the commandments of petty bourgeois morality. For those who had changed the face of history, there was no other duty than to stay here and be ready."⁶³

When it became time for Rubashov to die, ostensibly for the Revolution, he asks, “Why should he treat himself with any more consideration,” than the men and women he was responsible for killing?⁶⁴ He has the obligation to die. It is the honorable course, if not for the Revolution, social progress, or the Glorious and Radiant Future, then out of respect for the comrades in whose sacrificial deaths he was complicit.

One of his Party counterparts, still in the graces of the organization, another middle-class cadre named Ivanov, was Rubashov’s first interrogator. Rubashov recalls that Examining Magistrate Ivanov had reminded him that “The coming decade will decide the fate of our era.”⁶⁵ Rubashov takes Ivanov’s insight as the springboard from which he brings his thoughts about the absolute power of the revolutionary state in its context of restricting social and historical circumstances to its logical conclusion:

Could he [Rubashov] abscond out of mere personal disgust and tiredness and vanity? And what if No. 1 were in the right? If here, in the dirt and blood and lies, after all and in spite of everything, the grandiose foundations of the future were being laid? Had not history always been an inhumane builder, mixing its mortar of lies, blood and mud?⁶⁶

In *Darkness at Noon* Koestler indicates that it is possible to understand his Law of Detours as an unpredictable mix of contradictory actions necessitated by a need to be flexible in regard to what history presents to threaten the Revolution. Indeed, he adduces the Law of Detours as a requirement of revolution in both *The Gladiators* and *Darkness at Noon*. Accordingly, for social revolution to survive, its leaders must follow the twists that particular time-bound human limitations project in its path. *Darkness at Noon* shows that the Law of Detours can require that the original leaders of a revolution change one mode of operating for another. The Law may require the original leadership to disband itself in individual acts of ritualized self-flagellation and willing suicide as they are forced down a crooked path toward less accessible and more elusive utopian goals. What

these men must do, the world of *Darkness at Noon* explains, is to define and interpret the Law of Detours according to their longing for a radiant future. Koestler has Rubashov notice that the time of the “Old Guard,” the original leaders of revolution, must pass. Their highly philosophical, intellectual, and broadly competent political understanding necessarily wanes as their social revolution, like all revolutions, consolidates its victories in order to defend its gains, Koestler claims. Rubashov can convince himself that the betrayals that he sees around him must be viewed in terms of the Revolution protecting itself from its own culturally immature masses. He realizes that there exists a “logic of history” which “ordained that the more stable the regime became, the more rigid it had to become, in order to prevent the enormous dynamic forces which the Revolution had released from turning inwards and blowing the Revolution into the air.”⁶⁷ Under such circumstances Rubashov recognizes that revolutionary theory and practice degenerate into a “dogmatic cult, with simplified easily graspable catechism” lessons for the masses. He understands why speeches of the Party’s great leader, No. 1, regressed to become formulated “into question and answer, with a marvelous consistency in the gross simplification of the actual problems and facts.”⁶⁸ There is irony in No. 1’s “instinct for applying the ‘law of the relative maturity of the masses’.”⁶⁹ But Rubashov identifies finesse and elegance in the crude regression of Party doctrine when he realizes that “dilettantes in tyranny had forced their subjects to act at command,” but that No. 1 “had taught them to think at command.”⁷⁰

One mechanism through which the Party attempts to secure its control of social revolution is the acquired habit of its cadre to role-play, to think through the minds of others. Rubashov cannot abide by this convention. He betrays the inculcated Party habit to think like one’s opponent. By the second half of *Darkness at Noon* Koestler has

shown it to be just as impossible for Rubashov to think like his neighbor in Cell 402 as it was for him to think like Party cadre of peasant origin. Prisoner 402's two years of solitary confinement have given him a heightened sense of awareness that augments his possession of tradition as a means to cope. Koestler indicates that this heightened sensitivity is a new way of knowing that Rubashov would do well to learn and utilize.

Ivanov had given Rubashov two weeks during the period of his second interrogation in which to acquiesce in the Party's demands and admit to crimes against the Revolution including industrial sabotage. Ivanov held that a fortnight would be sufficient time for Rubashov to see the logic, if not the morality, in confessing to these crimes. Seeing morality in the confession is not necessary, but there will be a twisted ethic in Rubashov's last act of willing sacrifice of his body along with his reputation to posterity. All this will be done in the name of a radiant future for mankind as the totality of Rubashov's first person singular, his individuality, will be sacrificed in messianic fashion for a presumptive greater good.

Through his heightened sensibilities, Prisoner 402 is able to perceive an end to Rubashov's dilemma before Rubashov himself learns exactly how the Party will construct his guilt in a public trial and confession. Prisoner 402 announces by tapping to Rubashov that "Tonight political differences are being settled." Multiple political executions are imminent as the necessity for Rubashov to confess approaches. Prisoner 402 has learned that the character Harelip had been made essential to the web that will account for Rubashov's crimes against the Revolution.⁷¹

There are two implications at this point in Koestler's analysis. First, long-isolated men find ways to communicate among themselves, and, through their isolation, some attain an extra sense born of contemplation capable of discerning unexpected details of

prison life. This extra sense speaks to Koestler's concern for a new and useful spirituality that he so longed for. Second, Koestler's depiction of the fateful and tragic realities that provide a lack of positive alternatives for Rubashov and which logically necessitate his acquiescence to the Party speak to the notion that liberalism's belief in human progress is at times as idealistic as it is completely unrealistic. What had begun with such progressive intent had taken quite a few steps backward in terms of freedom and opportunities for the individual.

As Rubashov's execution approaches, as he gives in to himself, to his personal history, and realizes the logic of his and the Party's past actions, he attains a new way of knowing that is simultaneously logical and intuitive. Koestler has Rubashov take note of either his own ability or that of others to grasp the meaning of things in manners that are outside the logical realm of thought. Early in the novel he describes the elemental, and yet honest and no less valid, way that common working class adherents to the movement understand the forces that define their lives. This Koestler contrasts with the arrogantly confident means used by the movement's educated adherents to interpret history in attempts to steer social forces. Rubashov recalls when he witnessed this contrast during a meeting among leftists eager to hear news of the successes and achievements of the Revolution "over there." The meeting takes place in either Belgium or possibly Bremerhafen. The place is simply referred to as "B" in the novel. Rubashov takes note of how the sophisticated comrades seem to know so much about the statistical quantification of the Revolution's positive impact on the economic development of its people. Only Little Lowey, the uneducated, but loyal and dedicated advocate of justice for the working class and a local proletarian leader of the stevedores' union, knows the high position in the Party occupied by Rubashov. At this informal pub meeting the

middle-class advocates of socialism hunger for news of the positive developments from “over there.” Knowing that Rubashov is from “over there,” they pester him with questions. As this occurred, Rubashov recalls, “Everything they said revealed a surprising knowledge of technical detail, coupled with equally surprising ignorance of the general situation and political atmosphere ‘over there.’”⁷²

Little Lowey’s simple way of knowing things, born, the reader learns, from horrid Party betrayals of his safety and loyalty accomplished in the pursuance of the nationalistic motives of “over there,” enables him to characterize the Party to Rubashov as “fossilized”. Little Lowey’s knowledge that the international movement is acting out of the narrow nationalism defined by No. 1 brings him to suicide. But before he takes his own life, he tells Rubashov, “The party has got gout and varicose veins in every limb. One cannot make a revolution like that.”⁷³ It later becomes clear that Rubashov recalls this episode because he realizes that he always had trouble with the self-deception necessitated by the Party’s possession of state power in an atmosphere of defensiveness, if not paranoia. As Rubashov works to appreciate his and the Party’s predicaments, he is slowly realizing that his middle-class and liberal values are once more at odds with what history has apparently demanded of him. He finds it difficult to accept the idea that the individual counts for nothing.

It is Koestler’s method to have Rubashov recall the twists and turns of “third period” Stalinism when his protagonist is beginning to assemble an understanding of the lies and sacrifices the Party demanded of him and others. In the real world, Stalin’s policies, designed to placate the Nazis, produced a series of ambiguous and contradictory actions. Whether these twists and turns in Soviet policy were necessary is still debatable. But Koestler’s experiences during the Spanish Civil War had taught him two lessons

simultaneously. He gained intimate knowledge of the Comintern's betrayal of the Left while his witness of the bombing of Madrid and his arrest and imprisonment in Malaga taught him the seriousness of the fascist project. Remember that Koestler's Spanish prison experience ignited what his autobiography describes as being already gestating, that is, his Comintern apostasy. Arthur Koestler knew first-hand how many an adherent of Communism learned to accept Stalin's positions by convincing himself that the crooked, rationalizing logic presented by the Comintern possessed a "dialectical" validity. Like Koestler, who professed to have had a hard time accepting Comintern foreign policy during the 1930s, Rubashov had difficulty rationalizing No. 1's policies to the fascistic "over there." Each, however, had a harder time rejecting it and acknowledging the policy for what it was. As he takes his last steps toward finding an understanding of the political events of his life, Koestler has Rubashov wonder at one revolutionary virtue that he had learned but could not internalize, "the virtue of self-deception."⁷⁴

The context of his last meeting with Little Lowey is what really jolts Rubashov's memory and sets him on his path to complete understanding of his own and the Party's actions. When he had last seen Little Lowey, he had been sent to do the Party's dirty work. International considerations had caused "over there" to change its position on a boycott of raw material and petrol to an aggressive and "hungry" fascist dictatorship that had invaded Africa. Rubashov had to announce the new policy to exasperated dock workers who desperately wanted to continue the boycott out of their simple understanding of the oppression that an end to the boycott would facilitate.⁷⁵ In defiance of what the Party characterized as its response to the determinants of history, these workers strongly desired to remain faithful to what they understood as the progressive

principle of international proletarian solidarity. They knew instinctually that such solidarity served humanistic and ethical ends. In the novel the abandoning of the boycott serves as the catalyst of Little Lowey's suicide. He could not take one more counterintuitive policy that so clearly contradicted his understanding of the interests of the international working class, and he did not have the complex mental apparatus possessed by Party leaders and middle-class cadre that served to excuse and rationalize betrayal. By the end of *Darkness at Noon* Rubashov comes to feel that he had a part in Little Lowey's suicide.

By the middle of his narrative, Koestler propels Rubashov into an understanding that the individual has to count for something in society, in state policy, and in history. Koestler achieves this realization in his protagonist by having Rubashov experience the Cartesian starting point. Involuntary exchanges between his id and his ego, with episodes of Ivanov standing in for his ego when it takes the form of rationalizations of Party doctrine and policy, comprise Rubashov's introspection. As his dialogs with himself continue, Rubashov arrives at the postulate that, in spite of what the Party or history may require, he is a conscious individual. From that postulate will follow the solution to his dilemma which, in tragic consequence, will lead him to a willing acceptance of his execution and a participatory attitude toward it. Rubashov learns that the first person singular, I, may be a grammatical fiction for the Party, but it is a reality for himself. His tragic circumstances will demand, and he will believe that history also demands, that he interpret his realization in a manner that may shock the reader. Rubashov, the individual, counts for something, he concludes, only so that he can consciously make a final sacrifice to the movement and the Party to which he had dedicated his life.

By the end of the novel, upon the completion of his epiphany, Rubashov is left with an equation that does little but reiterate a dialectic of history's unfolding. He becomes aware that history's removal of socially-based human suffering necessitated the gargantuan increase in biologically-based suffering of a mass of individual party and civilian persons. The individual was a fiction, according to the novel, for both the Party and the deterministic view of history.

* * *

“The Grammatical Fiction” is the title of the section that brings Arthur Koestler's allegorical tale about the Moscow Trials, *Darkness at Noon*, to completion. It allows the reader to understand how Communist Party members could conform to the irrational demands of party leaders and admit to crimes against a revolution to which they remained dedicated. It investigates the question of how men in pursuit of an ideal could sacrifice themselves to a dark system that in no way matched the image of the society that was their original goal. This book assumes a knowledge of Marxism and an awareness of some of the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Direct and oblique references to both make continual appearances in the text. The work is, however, not a simple political allegory. *Darkness at Noon* is also quite instructive for any reader regardless of his knowledge of the Russian Revolution.

The novel's narrative voice in “The Grammatical Fiction” provides a psychological and social-historical space in which to teach the reader certain political and philosophical lessons. Any reader will relate to the betrayal or powerlessness described in the text by recalling his own experiences and emotional responses to treachery. Readers who can recall or who have been educated about the horrors of the Moscow Trials will be forced to empathize with men like Zinoviev as they identify with the

experiences and thoughts of *Darkness at Noon*'s protagonist. The description of Rubashov's attempts to make sense of his predicament, his arrest and guilty plea to charges of crimes against the revolution, in light of his active and positive history with the Party draws the reader into the text via recollections of direct or vicarious experience. Rubashov's thoughts and memories are what compel the reader to yearn for an understanding of the source of the dissonance created by Rubashov's sentiments, his own actions against other party members, and the party's actions toward him.

One salient feature of "The Grammatical Fiction" is its organization. Even though Koestler refrains from labeling *Darkness at Noon*'s four parts as chapters, he divides the book's final part into three sections, merely numbering each one. These divisions draw the perceptive reader's attention to the narrative structure of this text, created and numbered in order to represent the rational. Beginning with a poetic epigraph by Ferdinand Lassalle concerning the nature of means and ends in human endeavors, the narration in part one of "The Grammatical Fiction" supplies an account of Rubashov's public trial. During this trial Rubashov admits he is guilty of counter-revolution while realizing that his real guilt lay in the liberal crime of existing as an independent, thinking individual in possession of a traditional sense of ethics.

The second part of "The Grammatical Fiction" is psychological. Its didactic function is that of informing the reader what it means for a movement to lose sight of the individuals who constitute it. Its narrative function is to describe Rubashov's epiphany and inform the reader of the meaning of the concept of a "grammatical fiction." The physical setting of this second part is Rubashov's cell after his death sentence has been announced. The solitude of the cell here enables the text to be all the more intensely psychological. Rubashov refrains from communicating with his prison mates through

tapping on the wall and resigns himself to his fate. He is relieved that the excruciatingly exhausting ordeal of learning to understand his and the Party's predicaments is over. Rubashov is at once elated that his end is near and depressed about his conclusions concerning the utility of the individual to the Party and to history. In his desperation, Rubashov is able to let himself go and abandon his concern for the here and now. He has discovered that he does indeed exist as an individual, but he attains an awareness of, what is in cosmic terms, his own insignificance.

Separated from the Party, reviled by society, and cognizant that his earthly existence will soon be over, Rubashov achieves a peace that alone enables him to be the essential individual that social and historical life with their reasoned irrationality had impelled him to deny. Equations and inequalities appear to him, instinctively enabling Rubashov to understand what was wrong with the project that the Party pursued. In his intense awareness of himself, a self to the exclusion of all else, Rubashov discovers that he is indeed one with the universe. He realizes that the first person singular, I, the ego, or that "grammatical fiction" eschewed so bitterly by the Party, was not fictional at all. At this point Rubashov understands how the Party's philosophy of history denied the individual free will only to extract the individual's willing self-sacrifice.

Able to acknowledge his individuality and bask in the mystical "oceanic feeling" that enables him to experience connection to humanity and the universe, Rubashov realizes that when the Party made the revolution into an abstraction, void of its human constituents, it created other fictions that reduced individuals to nonentities. Rubashov is able to describe the Party's conception of the individual as the mass of mankind divided by the same mass, or "X divided by X." The quotient of this operation, Rubashov realizes, is zero. Remembering his own complicity in party treachery against various

individuals, Rubashov concludes that the entire project of the social revolution directed by the Party was pursued as an historic imperative, ostensibly for the benefit of society. He concludes that the project aborted for lack of a moral compass and an over reliance on a deterministic view of history as a process. The didactic voice of the text expects the reader to experience these same realizations.

The third and final part of “The Grammatical Fiction” serves to instruct the reader that the sane individual is part of society until he departs the physical world in death and that metaphysical questions somehow become real at the point of an individual’s departure from the living. Here the text reveals how Rubashov’s state-imposed physical isolation and his self-imposed psychological isolation must be mediated by social connections as he faces execution. His prison mate in Cell 402 initiates communication with Rubashov by encoded tapping on his cell wall. He draws Rubashov out of both his depression and his “oceanic” trance. The text’s narrative voice makes it clear that the purpose of 402’s renewed contact with Rubashov is a selfless act effected in order to help the condemned man die. The narrative instructs the reader that Rubashov could find peace on his own, but it will take the fractured society of prison inmates, who communicate with each other in spite of the obstacles presented by the prison, to give him a dignified death. Prisoner 402 reminds Rubashov to urinate before the guards take him away in order that his death be as dignified as possible. 402 then presents a wish that he too would be executed if only to shorten his own sentence and end his isolation. A bourgeois army officer from the opposite side of the ideological barricade, 402, offers this wish as comfort to a dying fellow human being.

Rubashov makes himself ready to die, and as he is walked down the corridor by prison guards to his point of execution, he is aware of the support the other prisoners are

giving him. The text creates a realization in the reader of how these men, some of whom have informed on each other, find solidarity when the end of one of them is at hand. They are all aware that each one is a victim of the same forces. The narrative voice created by Koestler in “The Grammatical Fiction” enables the reader to feel time slowing as Rubashov realizes the peace, the termination of social isolation, and unity with the universe that death will give him in just a matter of seconds. Shot in the head without warning, Rubashov is at first aware of the momentary physical pain of his execution. He is nevertheless able to move outside his physical consciousness, observe his collapsed body, and cognize his existence as well as his predicament one more time before a second shot makes him again aware of his insignificance in the universe and returns him to his oceanic feeling for eternity.

Arthur Koestler used a fictionalized account of an historical event to concretize a vicarious experience for the reader. Making sense out of facts that crush the logical and personal constituents of reality to the extent that they defy even twisted rational explanation is the problem *Darkness at Noon* seeks to solve. Division of the narrative structure of “The Grammatical Fiction” into three parts enables Koestler to address this task. This division reveals the simultaneity of individual and social existences. It imparts certain philosophical lessons to its readers. The text’s first part underscores the perception of Rubashov’s trial and conviction as an individual and as a social act. In this part of the text, Rubashov, as well as the public, have multiple and opposing responses to the event. The second part of “The Grammatical Fiction” brings the reader to an acute awareness of what constitutes an individual in the universe and of the dangers of losing sight of the individual in social endeavors. The third part of the end to *Darkness at Noon* recapitulates a description of the tension between society and the individual as it brings

Rubashov and the novel to an end. The character Rubashov's end is final and yet infinite. The novel's end is final, but it is unlikely that the author expects the reader to believe the questions posed by the text will ever become dead letters. If history is non-deterministic and human progress not guaranteed, individualism is a possibility each generation is free to experience in various cultural contexts and geographic spaces.

Arrival and Departure: The Optimism of Psychology and the Surprising Integrity of the Irrational Spirit of Individualism

Arthur Koestler's investigation of the role of the individual in history did not end in 1941 with his publication of *Darkness at Noon*. In 1943 he published a short novel, *Arrival and Departure*, that brought his investigation of the political dedication to humanistic ideals of Europe's "pink generation" to the intersection between personal psychology and social responsibility. Like his other works of fiction, the material in *Arrival and Departure* was gained largely from his own experiences. In this case the novel delved into the problem of why middle-class men like Arthur Koestler would have been attracted to Soviet Communism. Another, and really the central question, for *Arrival and Departure* is that of why Koestler and many of his "pink" counterparts did not choose to immigrate to the America, leaving crumbling European society to itself. After living through the betrayals of the Comintern, including its significant accommodations with fascism, Koestler investigates how and why men like himself could, after 1939, choose to stay in Europe and ally themselves with liberal democracy in Great Britain in order to fight the Nazis. By 1941 Koestler had already formulated the necessity of a leftist contribution to the Allies' war effort as a struggle for a half-truth against a total lie.⁷⁶ *Arrival and Departure* would tie that imperative to the victimization of the Jews in continental Europe as well as a general defense of European liberal

values.⁷⁷ This novel provides a psychological and political explanation for Koestler's conclusion that the choice of lesser, and perhaps a necessary, evil, which is a less than ideal means to a less than ideal end, was the singular honorable and ethical course of action that might result in a relative positive good.

Koestler organized *Arrival and Departure* into five parts which accommodate its psychological focus and its psychoanalytical method: "Arrival," "The Present," "The Past," "The Future," and "Departure." The novel opens as its protagonist, Peter Slavek, jumps from the ship on which he had stowed-away during his escape from fascists in his homeland. The ship, the *Speranza*, represents the hope not only of Peter, but that of all refugees fleeing Nazi-dominated Europe. The novel indicates, however, that in contemporary Europe hope is not all bright and radiant. Koestler connects Peter's surreptitious use of the ship and the uncertainty of hope in Europe as the Second World War began. He characterizes the *Speranza* as "a black and hostile spot in all that radiance" of Peter's first morning of successful escape and freedom from tyranny.⁷⁸ As Peter swims the several hundred yards to land he becomes aware of his temporality and cosmic insignificance. Peter's recognition of his insignificance is ironic as well as crucial because it takes place between his furious struggle to escape fascism and his energetic effort to understand the entirety of his past actions. These intensive exertions of his will frame Peter's momentary sense of continuity with the cosmos. His exertions contradict his cosmic insignificance and passing sense of peace. Comforted by an integrative "wave of emotion" and soothed by the rhythm of the surf that the novel describes as "the slow heart beat of space," Central European Peter Slavek enters the novel.⁷⁹ Peter becomes one with the universe as his arrival on land represents his rebirth, the beginning of his

discoveries that transform him from a man broken by fascist torture and separated from familiar surroundings into a whole person.

Koestler has the *Speranza* anchored off the beach of a nation on Europe's Atlantic coast called Neutralia which is assumed to be Portugal, Koestler's own way-station during his escape from France to Britain in 1941. Neutralia bustles with activity as a transient community of people fleeing fascism are collecting in order to make arrangements to abandon the continent for America. It is in this context and through the medium of psychiatry that a battered, toothless, and physically, emotionally, and spiritually tortured Slavek discovers why he so habitually adhered to what the reader understands to have been the Comintern. Peter also discovers why, unlike other middle-class refugees in Neutralia, he cannot leave Europe for the relative social and political freedom and the absolute martial peace of the United States of America of 1940. During his stay in Neutralia Peter Slavek meets and avoids acquaintances and friends from both sides of Europe's ideological barricade, he falls in love, and he suffers through a psychotic episode which leads to a deeper understanding of himself and to his counterintuitive decision to remain in Europe.

Early in the story Peter's path crosses that of one of his countrymen and spiritual kin, psychiatrist Sonia Bolgar. Like Slavek (and Koestler), Bolgar is cosmopolitan by nature, a person without any real country. She, however, is more at home in the world, no matter the state of its politics, than is Peter. After complaining that she is tired of all the refugees' excited, hopeful talk of the future, Bolgar tells Peter that, contrary to her patients and friends who consider her rootlessness a liability, her freedom from nationality, "by nature and education," is an asset. Bolgar associates her freedom from place with Peter's own and celebrates it. She claims they are both "like plants with aerial

roots... we are not worse nourished than the others, nor do we stand less firmly on earth.”⁸⁰ An inability to stand on earth will become the psychosomatic symptom of Peter’s emotional and spiritual crisis.

Koestler employs Sonia Bolgar and her craft, psychotherapy, to unify his concept of the positive value of liberal individualism. He does this by once again substantiating the first person singular as a grammatical fact and, through Bolgar’s “dream surgery,” connecting Slavek’s ego to a vital volitional power over his past, present, and future. *Arrival and Departure* portrays Sonia Bolgar and her profession as apolitical. “...in her profession she made no political distinctions,” the narrator tells the reader, “She was a specialist in that modern branch of confessional psychology and dream-surgery which made the secret obvious and surrounded the obvious with a halo of secrecy.”⁸¹ Koestler portrays psychotherapy as functional at the individual level and potentially socially progressive when harnessed by a subject aware of the social aspects of his life and willing to modulate psychoanalytic insights to social purposes.

During the course of Bolgar’s cure of Peter, whose right leg has inexplicably gone dead, escaping the control of his willful exertions, the insightful psychiatrist cites a messianic complex among the “pink generation” of the 1930s. Koestler uses this insight to comment on the subjective in history and to peek at the spiritual integrity within and among individuals. He alternately critiques the utility and limitations of psychiatry. While Peter lay helpless in bed, Bolgar has a physician, a Dr. Huxter, visit him to treat his high fever. In discussing Peter’s case with this physician, Sonia questions the latter’s perplexed response to developments in Peter’s health. She criticizes his incredulity toward psychiatry and his inability to believe that Peter’s unresponsive leg possesses psychosomatic origins. Stressing her interpretation that Peter’s physical dysfunction

reflects his psychological turmoil, Bolgar asks Huxter, “Why should a rupture in the mind be more fantastic than a rupture of the groin? Especially in a young fool, who runs about balancing spiritual weights much too heavy for him?”⁸²

Huxter, an old-fashioned Jewish physician, persists in his inability to believe that Peter’s symptoms are not purely somatic. He is repulsed by psychiatry because he sees psychotherapy as riddled with contra-indicatory therapeutic methods that threaten to spread Peter’s affliction. Its search for generalized origins, he believes, frustrates more efficacious efforts to localize and treat Peter’s problem. Of the patient he tells Bolgar, “He seemed such a robust and courageous youth...He didn’t crack when they [fascists] tortured him. He had all the best qualities of his generation: their balance of skepticism and devotion, their unsentimental self-sacrifice, and now [this]...”⁸³ Although Huxter’s complaints indicate a belief that psychiatry is a false science, his comments to Bolgar do reveal a fundamental acceptance of psychiatry’s theoretical basis when he believes that her treatment might result in spreading Peter’s condition beyond his leg. He implicitly accepts the idea that the mind is capable of spreading Peter’s symptoms.

Taking advantage of Huxter’s warnings about the dangers of spreading Peter’s condition, Bolgar postulates that his condition is already generalized beyond his own body. She recognizes in Huxter’s characterization of Peter’s generation’s “best qualities” a “debunked” hero whose circumstances, unlike others of his generation, merely coalesced into the observed symptoms.⁸⁴ In his present condition she sees Peter’s symptoms as the stigmata of an entire generation of politicized individuals. She belittles Peter’s heroism when he was tortured by fascists and characterizes him as “Branded, stigmatized, disgraced.” Bolgar continues, “And only by a combination of circumstances he revealed certain disorders which are concealed in all the others of his generation.”⁸⁵

Sonia considers Peter lucky because his manifest symptoms could be used to cure him of deeper maladies.

In spite of what the perceptive reader can identify as his mixed feelings about psychiatry, Huxter persists in expressing his disbelief to Sonia in her system. “But for God’s sake,” he responds, “you don’t mean to say that there is always latent morbidity behind the values we admire?” That is exactly what Sonia Bolgar holds as factual. “‘Values!’,” she spits at Huxter. Then she slowly and emphatically expresses her rejoinder to him as she reaches her conclusion about Peter’s long-term predicament with a certain amount of disdain:

‘Devotion...’ ‘Self-sacrifice...’ ‘morbidity...’ I didn’t use any of these words. They belong to the dramatic vocabulary of your prophets – though I am told even they occasionally had foam at the mouth. I merely wanted to say that in this age all crusaders are stigmatized. They try to hide it by being doctrinaire, matter of fact and tough, but when they are alone and naked they all sweat little drops of blood through their skin...

If he gets away with it, he will have grown up. A crisis like this is like a plunge into some mythological well: it either kills you, or you emerge reborn...⁸⁶

For Sonia Bolgar, the pink generation’s ideals were not expressions of desires for social justice; they were simply symptoms of misplaced and over-determined traumas at the personal level.

At this point in the narrative Koestler begins to indicate that one’s political beliefs can be psychological responses to a troubled past. If these beliefs trigger behavior that is selfless beyond the point of reason, they probably express a spiritual malaise which requires a personal, yogi-type solution before their possessor can become socially effective or, in Koestlerian terms, “self-transcendent.”

Peter did exhibit a willfulness beyond reason when he refused to finger comrades when tortured by fascists in his home state. In his talking therapy and “dream surgery”

with Sonia Bolgar, Peter admitted that he had acted in these interrogations “correctly for all the wrong reasons.”⁸⁷ He recalls that back at home while he had been tortured for distributing leftist literature to workers Peter had been aware that his interrogator, Chief of Political Department Raditsch, knew half of the names of the people in Peter’s University caucus of the revolutionary party. He also knew that no matter what he, Peter, said or did not say, Raditsch would know the other half within a few hours. Peter appreciated Raditsch’s understanding of the inner workings of the Party; he was aware that the Right had spies inside the organization. Raditsch further impressed Peter with his understanding of party dogma and Peter’s own doubts and subconscious apostasy about that dogma. When Raditsch quotes Luxemburg’s polemics with Bukharin and expresses a nuanced explanation of where the labor theory of value went wrong and how Marxist analysis had oversimplified psychology and misunderstood proletarian class-consciousness, Peter knew nothing would be gained or lost to the Party if he named his comrades. When Raditsch analyzed the Moscow Purges and Rubashov’s trial, Peter knew his silence was mere obstinacy. Silence could, in this instance, be only the symbolic victory of an honorable martyr or saintly messiah.

But how truly honorable was the silence of the martyr? Koestler addresses this question a few pages later when he introduces the idea that the mind and body are not always one. Peter recalls that after his first episode of torture he was able to conclude that the manner in which most people conceive torture is itself idealized. Torture had not been an abstract political experience. It had been nothing like the romantic paintings of the sufferings of Christ or the saints. Torture was a corporeal experience in large part divorced from exertions of the will. Noting the mistaken equation of suffering and love, the narrative voice explains that during his passion, Christ lost all awareness of courage

and faith. It was his flesh, not his spirit, that yelled his inquiry about his father having forsaken him. Koestler has the narrative voice in *Arrival and Departure* conclude that the flesh is more the repository of “cunning” than of any will our consciousness might impose on it. The novel instructs that the flesh “[wants] to survive with a savage will of its own; and in a crisis it could only survive by turning against the spirit, by deriding and fouling it, to prove that further resistance was useless. The inquisitors knew that their real ally was not the victim’s spirit but his flesh.”⁸⁸ There is a common confusion in the West between the lust of the flesh and the despair of the flesh, *Arrival and Departure* concludes. There is complexity and nuance in the pain and pleasure principle which torturers systematically exploit. Those who engage in torture come to recognize a cunning of the flesh that conspires against the intellectual principles of the tortured. In order to cope with pain the tortured are forced to improvise stratagems that ignore their cerebral principles. They are generally inexperienced with the power of the body to dictate the avoidance of pain once it passes a certain threshold. As regards these cerebral stratagems or tricks, *Arrival and Departure* concludes that if the victims of torture survive, they are too embarrassed ever to mention them.⁸⁹ Earlier in the novel when Peter dreams and consciously recalls his interrogation and torture by Raditsch, he remembers an incident that brought him understanding of how the working class can resent the leadership of the left. Here we see Koestler revisiting, confirming, and exemplifying an important idea first broached but left undeveloped in *The Gladiators*. In that novel when Zpardokos, the Essene, explains that the oppressed can come to feel hatred for their idealistic and knowledgeable social betters when these men lead them to victory only to make social life more confounding. On the third day of his imprisonment and after two episodes of torture, guards throw an abused and beaten peasant into Peter’s

cell. The reader can assume that Raditsch is behind this act in an attempt to demoralize Peter. This humble country man takes one look at Peter and with utter shock and surprise, says, “Jesus, look at the little Spec. They have messed him up even worse than me.” “Serves you right,” he curses, “You Specs started the whole trouble by inciting us. Without you we would all live in peace and happiness.”⁹⁰ Peter stresses the pitiful conditions under which the simple people lived under the old regime by uttering, “At sixpence for a twelve-hour day?” to which the peasant responds, “Damn... you just can’t change things by stirring up trouble. Jesus, I was a damned fool, but I won’t be any more.”⁹¹

Regardless of his anger at the revolutionaries as a group, the peasant can’t help but admire Peter’s suffering when, after seeing his physical condition, he learns that Peter did not confess, recant, or inform to his torturers. He kisses Peter’s hand and expresses the wish that the wise, steadfast, principled, and disciplined Peter had focused his efforts on educational uplift rather than on social revolution. “Holy virgin, blessed flower of my heart,” concludes the peasant, “why didn’t you give me an education, instead of making me into a damned fool?”⁹² The peasant apparently begins to view Peter as a saint or a holy, yogi-like man whose endurance deserves notice and whose example might hold spiritual significance and, thereby, warrant emulation. It seems that on the social level, revolutionaries, and in this case Peter in particular, can become martyrs irrespective of the cunning of their flesh. However, the respect paid them by their followers is contingent upon the social betters teaching the truth to their humble comrades. To be absolved by their society, if not by history, Koestler here suggests that leaders of revolution should defy the Law of Detours.

Having relieved Peter of the guilt of the petty bourgeoisie for the plight of the working class, Koestler employs a fascist acquaintance of Peter to expose the idealism inherent in his belief in a “Golden Age” of social justice. This man, named Bernard, engages Peter in a long conversation that underscores the Left’s fundamental mistake as one involving a misidentification of the essential urges of mankind. He explains as Peter listens and resists silently. Peter decides that there is no point in arguing politics or philosophy with a fascist. The working class, Bernard explains, simply does not possess a need for justice and freedom. Not recognizing this basic fact of social life, Bernard concludes, doomed the Left to exist as a group of “neurotics, intriguing and squabbling from defeat to defeat.”⁹³

Bernard’s analysis of revolutionaries strikes a positive chord with Sonia’s analysis of leftists. The true source of one’s adherence to the cause of social revolution, he explains, is the feeling of being an outsider that usually afflicts one during adolescence. Bernard admits to Peter that men and women of the Left were “brilliant and clever,” brighter than the people who made up his cohorts on the right, he continues. These typical middle-class leftist intellectuals arrived at their commitment to social change only after they felt some guilt, usually born of pity for their social inferiors. They were not convinced by social theory; they were psychologically and morally ready to receive its message, Bernard advocates. “Hence it is not the theory which shapes the rebel’s character, but his character that makes him susceptible to rebellious theories,” he concludes. Bernard points to a nihilistic origin for many leftists. They start as “Cinderellas who want to overthrow a society in which nobody asked them to dance” as they suffer “some defective quality which prevents them from completely growing up.”⁹⁴

Through Bernard, Koestler reaches a crescendo of description of the revolutionary personality of the inter-war years as a psychological cripple and social misfit:

They were the timid fanatics of violence, the blushing libertines, gauche Dantons. There were the hair-splitting dialecticians advocating proletarian simplicity, the atoning Oedipuses, the jealous younger brothers in search of an abstract fraternity; the male spinsters to whom Poser had never proposed. And they all wanted to cut down the tree because the fruits were too high for them...⁹⁵

Bernard also identifies a fundamental selfish opportunism in the character of mankind. The best of the Left, he maintains, were “those who came from the ranks of the poor – and they mostly preferred the short cut to the ministerial chair or a comfortable desk as civil servants of the revolution.”⁹⁶ The workers do not really want social revolution as much as they want to individually rise from their class. But when social revolution succeeds, the poor who find themselves in positions of power are harnessed by their cultural disability. Their crudity necessarily denigrates the higher aspirations of the lofty goals of social reform. Koestler explored this idea earlier in *Darkness at Noon* in the person of Rubashov’s second interrogator, Political Commissar Gletkin, who being of peasant origins advocated the crudest, quickest means of torture to enforce social discipline.

Peter recalls that his torturer, Raditsch, had expressed the understanding that twentieth-century messiahs cannot win because their ideals are hated on both sides of the ostensible class barricades. This recollection still does not convince Peter to cooperate, identify his comrades, or recant. Peter can understand the following from Raditsch and yet not utter a sound:

...fifty years ago a boy of [Peter’s] age could play at being a world reformer and it didn’t matter, it was just like measles. But times had changed and nowadays he who caught the bug, caught not measles but leprosy. All frontiers will be closed to him and wherever he turns he will be put behind iron bars; a fugitive and a

vagabond will be on earth. For what ever a country's colour is, red, or white, or yellow or green, they all protect themselves against the bug; and if Don Quixote were to rise, he would have to carry a leper-bell on the point of his spear, and his Sancho would be a fat sleuth in a [gangster's] bowler-hat.⁹⁷

Peter now realizes that without sound reasoning, he had persisted in his obstinacy and had suffered severe physical pain for what, under Bolgar's care, was beginning to appear to be, at best, a whim or, at worst, irrational and childish willfulness.⁹⁸

Bolgar had already revealed to Peter his own hidden awareness that immobility in his leg resulted from the intersections of his childhood humiliation by his father for injuring his younger brother, and his cigar burn behind his right knee during the torture directed by Raditsch. Koestler has Sonia go a step further and discount political principles and morality as empty "pretexts of the mind, phantoms of a more intimate reality." Belittling courage and sacrifice, she explains that history "was not an epos, but a chain of anecdotes."⁹⁹ The reader takes Sonia Bolgar as either cynical or as aloof when she scolds at Peter that throughout history men had sacrificed themselves for "enlightened" or "stupid" causes with the highest dedication and to little if any purpose. To understand Peter's ailment one must delve into the actions that habitually preceded it throughout his past, and to do this, Bolgar claims, "one has to discard from the beginning his so-called convictions and ethical beliefs." "It did not matter," she continues, "whether he was a hero of the Proletariat or a martyr of the Catholic Church; the real clue was this suspect craving for martyrdom."¹⁰⁰ She believes that Peter persists in his self-sacrificing habit because he has displaced the behavior's true cause. This true cause has developed a momentum, Bolgar explains, that keeps it stuck to Peter like centrifugal force keeps a cyclist pinned to his bike as he rides upside down inside a circus globe.¹⁰¹ Unveiling her solution, Bolgar tells Peter, "The clue to your past adventures is that

feeling of guilt which compelled you to pay all the time imaginary debts.”¹⁰² Bolgar explains to her patient that he was under no obligation to his proletarian comrades. He could not help it if he had not been born in a slum. And he need not feel guilty for having worried his doting mother with his involvement in the movement. She would have worried about him for any number of things anyway because “there is a geometry of fate which sees to it that a straight line cuts parallels always at the same angle.”¹⁰³ Not being cognizant of this fate, Bolgar explains, Peter remained in the movement after his mother’s death despite his failing appetite for it. He felt compelled to continue his life in the movement to prove that his mother’s worry for him in life had not been suffered in vain.¹⁰⁴

Peter accepts Sonia Bolgar’s analysis of the motivation behind his past action as being one of guilt, an emotion that that began in childhood and thrived into adulthood. The real motive behind Peter’s life in the movement had never been a deep dedication to an egalitarian ideal. Koestler describes Peter’s acceptance of the conclusions drawn by Sonia Bolgar’s practice of psychoanalysis as transformative. *Arrival and Departure* records that Peter felt “the exaltation of his early student days, when he had suddenly grasped the principle of Kepler’s laws of planetary movement and the chaotic world around him was tamed, and transformed into an orderly, harmonious system.”¹⁰⁵ Koestler here uses fiction to substantiate his belief that determinism is really only an aspect of human instinct, one that expresses the desire to understand the chaos of the universe in order to feel safe and, to some extent, in control.

In awe of the efficacy of Bolgar’s talking cure and entranced with the singular focus on the working of his mind, Peter rediscovers his body like a newborn babe. He marvels at a reawakened awareness of his ego. Koestler reintroduces his notion of the

first person singular that he had developed in *Darkness at Noon*. There he defined the personal pronoun I as a fact denied by the commissar consciousness of the Comintern and questioned by that novel's protagonist, Rubashov, as possibly existing only as a fiction.

Koestler allows the narrative voice of *Arrival and Departure* to report the following responses in Peter:

He watched his fingers move on the blanket and told himself: Now I move my fingers, now my thumb. But even while the finger moved he wondered which had been first: the movement or the command; and who or what was it gave the command, that made his lips whisper the words? In the movement he had known nothing of these problems; now he could not understand how people could busy themselves with anything else. The working of his mind, which through all the years he had taken for granted, became a permanent source of surprise. The first person singular which he thought he knew all about, was losing some of its firm outlines, became wavering and fluid in time and space; it reached back into a past beyond its proper limits and ended above the knee of the dead leg which it disowned. That such things happened, he knew from books; but he had never believed they could happen to him. An yet here he was, unable to walk, crippled beyond doubt; and the strangest thing was that he didn't even really mind, that his thoughts eddied around quite different matters, were completely absorbed in his new discoveries, in exploring sunken islands of the past to which only that immovable leg gave one access..."¹⁰⁶

Being reconnected with his past, Peter achieves an awareness of both the self-assertive and self-transcendent aspects of his personality. His being is united in both his ego and in his "oceanic" connection with the cosmos. He is not simply becoming whole; Peter is becoming integrated.

Earlier in the novel Koestler portrays the recovery of Peter's leg as an assertive natural response of Peter's body to the healing which has taken place in his mind. Interpreted in one way this seems to be a confirmation of the mind-body split. The narrative voice of *Arrival and Departure* describes the leg as if it has a consciousness of its own. As Peter begins to walk again, albeit carefully and haltingly, his leg "moves smoothly and all of its own accord."¹⁰⁷ Interpreted in another way, the autonomic

recovery of Peter's leg seems to be an integrative phenomenon: a union between his mind and body effects his healing. The reader can understand Koestler to be suggesting that Peter's leg exhibits independence when looking downward but dependence when looking upward to his being's system level. The passage can be taken as a blending of both of the above interpretations. Peter's mind and body are simultaneously separate and united in a hierarchical relationship. But because it is Peter's psychotherapy that leads to the change in his somatic symptoms, it is evident that in the instance he created in *Arrival and Departure* Koestler privileged mind over body. Peter's leg responded to the new insights achieved by Peter's mind. The active nature of the leg in Peter's recovery, however, becomes consonant with Koestler's proposition that nature is assertive and that evolution is comprised of active responses of various intelligences to the challenges presented by the environment. It becomes believable that we can know with both our cerebral and our corporeal beings in a dual and hierarchical psychic and somatic consciousness.

By the final part of the novel, a part entitled "Departure," Peter achieves a victory of spirit over reason in which we see Koestler privileging human volition over determinism. Everything uncovered through Sonia Bolgar's patient elicitation of introspective recollection and ordering of perceptions and feelings argues for Peter to follow the woman with whom he has fallen in love, Odette, to America. The discovery of irrational responses to events in Peter's past and his equally irrational, habituated responses to events in his adult life might suggest that Peter begin to act rationally. In no ambiguous terms, Bolgar and *Arrival and Departure's* narrative voice indicate such is warranted. However, Koestler allows Peter to follow his gut feelings and decide to stay in Europe in order to fight fascism.

Peter's letter to Odette, explaining why he must remain in Europe and not join her on the opposite side of the Atlantic, comments on the belief in the overdeveloped rational aspect of the human brain and the underdevelopment of intuition and ethics by European society since the Renaissance. Koestler devalues reason in a search for balance in human awareness. He resorts again to the red color of the commissar and the blue of the yogi, but this time as references to litmus paper's disclosure of opposing indications of acidic and basic chemicals. Peter writes,

Since the Renaissance, the red tissue-paper of our scientific reasoning has obtained greater perfection than the blue of our intuition and ethical beliefs. For the past four centuries the first has improved, the second decayed. But prior to that, in the Gothic age, the scales moved in the opposite way; and I believe that this process will soon be reversed again.¹⁰⁸

To Odette Peter justifies his decision to stay in Europe by explaining that he needs to balance reason with emotion. He feels a fundamental moral imperative to remain in Europe and suggests that it is symptomatic of the end of an age in which "salvation will not come by an improved laboratory formula" because "The age of quantitative measurements is coming to its close..."¹⁰⁹ Announcing to Odette and to the reader the impending birth of a new deity, Peter ends his letter with a benediction. "Praise the unborn god," he writes. "Don't try to divine his message or the form of his cult. The mystics of to-day are as trite as the political reformers. For we are the last descendants of Renaissance-man, the end and not the beginning..."¹¹⁰ These words, however, represent the invocation of the hopefulness of birth. They act as an implicit Annunciation. God is not dead; spirit is in the process of becoming redefined and reinvigorated. Both yogi and commissar take second place to Peter's emotion.

A type of existentialism brings the novel to a close as uncertain and abstract values force Peter to trust his instincts, to act according to their non-guaranteed direction, and to parachute back into Europe under the “incurious stars.”¹¹¹ In cosmic terms, Peter’s activity is like Koestler’s arrow in the infinite blue, or Zpardokos’ pebble sliding down the hill. Given a nudge, they both move, and, as their movement continues, each seems to progress under its own momentum. Peter has regained both physical and psychic mobility and yet his renewed and purposeful activity is meaningless to the universe. It has meaning only for the first person singular, Peter’s ego, but meaning derived solely in its relation to the social integrity that motivated Peter’s decision to stay in Europe. Against all reason and with absolutely no guarantees other than the right to assert his will, Peter’s decision brings *Arrival and Departure* to a hopeful, nondeterministic conclusion.

Koestler ends the novel with Peter jumping into troubled Europe as he revels in both his new understanding of his past and his assertion of his efforts to fight against the Right. Presumably Peter will act this time without any messianic illusions or guilt-ridden displacement of motivations. He returns to the disquietude in order to fight the good fight with the double vision of his significance to himself and of his insignificance to the cosmos. His descent to earth is portrayed as a blissful reentry into the incertitude of life. Peter can imagine no power capable of vouchsafing the success or failure of his past actions or the wisdom in his present volition. Peter feels hopeful that his decision to return will achieve the objective that motivated it, and yet Koestler describes Peter’s descent as a “gentle swaying and falling, as a leaf falls to the ground.”¹¹² *Arrival and Departure*’s conclusion is an admixture of willfulness and fatefulness, Peter’s assertive volition acting within the same determinism that controls the destiny of a falling leaf.

End Notes

¹ Arthur Koestler, *The Yogi and the Commissar and Other Essays* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1945), p. 243.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid. P. 245.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ David Cesarani identifies *The Yogi and the Commissar* as the “keystone” of Koestler’s subsequent political and scientific critique. See *The Homeless Mind* pp. 230-233.

⁶ See the essays that comprise Part III of *The Yogi and the Commissar*, “Anatomy of a Myth,” “Soviet Myth and Reality,” “The End of an Illusion,” and “The Yogi and the Commissar (II).”

⁷ Ibid. P. 183.

⁸ Ibid. P. 218. Cited simply as C.C. Pratt, *The Logic of Modern Psychology*.

⁹ Arthur Koestler, *Reflections on Hanging* (American edition) (New York: MacMillan Co., 1957), p. 90.

¹⁰ Koestler, *The Yogi and the Commissar*, p. 227.

¹¹ Ibid. P. 232.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid. P. 219.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid. P. 227.

¹⁶ Ibid. Pp.4-5.

¹⁷ Ibid. P. 5.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ While critiquing the left in “The Anatomy of a Myth,” Koestler admits that the social reforms made during the nineteenth century were real and worthwhile and did not deserve to be denigrated by doctrinaire leftists who eschewed all but maximalist achievements. See *The Yogi and the Commissar*, p. 121.

²¹ Ibid. Pp. 5-6.

²² Ibid. P.6.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. Pp. 10-11.

²⁵ Ibid. P. 12.

²⁶ Ibid. P. 101.

²⁷ Ibid. Original emphasis.

²⁸ Ibid. Pp. 22-23.

²⁹ Ibid. P. 29.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Arthur Koestler, *The Gladiators* (New York: MacMillan, Co., 1939), p. 90. It is quite interesting that Koestler, ostensibly an anti-Stalinist Marxist when he wrote *The Gladiators*, refrained from identifying men who live by the credo "mine is mine and thine is mine" with a social class based on wealth or some relation to productive forces. This social type, being simply wicked or depraved, indicates a nod toward psychology and away from sociology on Koestler's part. It may indicate a fundamental aversion in Koestler to the idea that class struggle acts as a historical determinant.

³² Ibid. P. 86.

³³ Ibid. P. 89.

³⁴ Ibid. P. 95.

³⁵ Ibid. P. 96. With this allusion to a Sicilian slave rebellion, Koestler is making reference to the failed Eunus Rebellion in Sicily which preceded the Spartacus Rebellion by sixty-five years and struck terror in the hearts of the Romans.

³⁶ Ibid. Pp. 96-97.

³⁷ Ibid. Pp. 91-92.

³⁸ Ibid. Pp. 95-96.

³⁹ Ibid. Pp. 93-94.

⁴⁰ Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*, p. 58.

⁴¹ Ibid. Pp. 43-44.

⁴² Ibid. P. 58.

⁴³ Ibid. P. 59.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Pp. 74-75.

⁴⁶ Ibid. P. 75.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid. Pp. 43-44.

⁴⁹ Ibid. P. 169.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

- ⁵¹ Ibid.
- ⁵² Ibid. Pp. 103-104.
- ⁵³ Ibid. Pp. 105-106.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid. P. 170.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid. Pp. 170-171.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid. P. 99.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid. P. 185.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid.
- ⁶¹ Ibid. Pp. 189-190.
- ⁶² Ibid. P. 126.
- ⁶³ Ibid. Pp. 126-127.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid. P. 127.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid. P. 176.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid. Pp. 176-177.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid. P. 177.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid.
- ⁷¹ Ibid. P. 135.
- ⁷² Ibid. P. 67.
- ⁷³ Ibid.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid. Pp. 68-69.
- ⁷⁶ Koestler, *The Yogi and the Commissar*, p. 100.
- ⁷⁷ Arthur Koestler, *Arrival and Departure* (New York: MacMillan, 1943). See pp. 66-71.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid. P. 4.

- ⁷⁹ Ibid. P. 3.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid. P. 30.
- ⁸¹ Ibid.
- ⁸² Ibid. P. 59.
- ⁸³ Ibid. P. 61.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid. Pp. 61-62.
- ⁸⁷ Ibid. P. 90.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid. P. 99-100.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid. P. 100.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid. P. 101.
- ⁹¹ Ibid.
- ⁹² Ibid. P. 102.
- ⁹³ Ibid. P. 131.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid. P. 129.
- ⁹⁵ Ibid. Pp. 129-130.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid. P. 131.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid. P. 91.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid. Pp. 90-99.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid. P. 110.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid. P. 111.
- ¹⁰¹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰² Ibid. P. 112.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid. P. 116.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid. P. 79.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid. P. 121.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. P. 178.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. P. 179.

¹¹¹ Ibid. P. 180. Also see Jean-Paul Sartre's description of existential uncertainty in his essay "Existentialism is a Humanism," translated by Philip Mairet and collected by Walter Kaufmann, ed. in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* New York: Meridian Books, 1975, p. 355.

¹¹² Ibid. P. 180.

Chapter Four

Arthur Koestler's Liberalism: From Metaphors for Science, Politics, and Society towards Cosmological Hierarchy

Given his tendency to shift passions and his impetuous nature that bordered on the self-destructive, Arthur Koestler was fortunate to find his life's work at all. He was all the more fortunate to find it by his mid twenties. Through the practice of journalism he would develop his already wide interests and make his mark in the world through writing. Writing during the early twentieth century to the literate, but not necessarily artistically nor scientifically trained, that is for a lay readership, Koestler's journalism and, later, his novels can be conceived as expressions of a liberal ideal. In general Arthur Koestler would aim high in terms of the content of his pieces, refraining from diluting the complexities of subjects he would present and analyze. He learned to craft the ideas he presented to his readers with clarity and with facile and memorable analogies. When considering the audience to whom he wrote, the combination of these two attributes of Koestler's writing, its relatively high level of content and its facile expression, indicate a faith in the common person's ability to grasp the complexities of a world being defined increasingly by experts. It was not simply that the training of the twentieth-century expert could overwhelm the non-professional novice with jargon. The experts' descriptions of the world were being created by increasingly sophisticated and sensitive instruments that measured nature in the minutest of detail which required increasingly arcane and, in some cases, counterintuitive theories.

Koestler wrote about a world whose perception of its own cultural, political, and scientific sophistication seemed to be imploding. It was during Koestler's lifetime that the common, literate individual, the constituency of his early readership, would be treated

with increasing disrespect and abuse by governments whose power and efficiency were in ascendancy. These powers and efficiencies were in no small part dependent upon the heightening sophistication of physical and psycho-social science, the same sophistication that by 1945 attained the potential to alter, through nuclear fission, the planet that Koestler and his readers inhabited. It was largely for these reasons that Koestler would come to distrust the expert for whom he could, by the latter part of his life, entertain a strong disdain. Although he would question some of the basic premises of the world as constructed by the experts of his own time, Koestler would never refrain from giving to his lay readers his own kind of nuanced description and critique of what he saw. This critique would ultimately bring the reader backward in time to the foundations of Western intellectual traditions. Koestler's writing exhibits an old liberal faith that his reader, the common man, could understand, digest, and appreciate the world as constructed by experts. It is also clear that Koestler had faith in his readers' abilities to somehow affect the world they inhabited.

* * *

One biographer has commented that Arthur Koestler needed the discipline that journalism imposed upon him. It was the demands of deadlines and word counts that would force him to control his tendency toward aphoristic and overblown constructions.¹ It is easy to agree with this same biographer that of all the genres Koestler would produce, "nothing was as consistently excellent as his journalism."² He developed an ability to engage the reader and express complex ideas in an understandable fashion. It was in the liberal newspaper chain owned by the German, Jewish brothers Ullstein that Arthur Koestler honed his ability to write concise, descriptive prose that was accessible to the literate German-speaking mass audience. The Ullstein's numerous newspapers,

published in Berlin, included morning and afternoon dailies. These necessitated foreign bureaus in various European and Middle Eastern capitals, as well as correspondents in North American cities on both the east and the west coasts and in Chicago.

Koestler's first permanent position at Ullstein, which he took in 1929, was in its Paris bureau. There his responsibilities included reading more than fifteen French dailies and telephoning summaries to the Berlin office in the wee hours of every morning. His other responsibility in Paris included that of theater criticism. This helped put him squarely in one of the two worlds he would inhabit until his death, that of the humanities.³ The other world that would become Koestler's realm, the world of science, came to him partially as a result of his engineering training at *Hochschule*. Due to his formal education experience, when his interest in science germinated, he was conversant in the latest scientific developments. He continued to nurture these interests after his formal education ceased and would return to them as a matter of wonder as well as of literary and social comment during the last half of his life.⁴

David Cesarani reports the direct cause of first planting his foot into the world of science in the role of a professional writer as the fortuitous meeting of the Duc de Broglie whom Koestler interviewed during his first year working for Ullstein in Paris. The article that resulted from this meeting focused on the discoveries made by the great scientist concerning the nature of light. Dr. Franz Ullstein, part owner of his family's newspaper trust, read this article with delight and became convinced that Koestler should be appointed science editor for Ullstein in 1930. The appointment necessitated its recipient's moving to Berlin and began a career in which Arthur Koestler would read, ponder, and express science's discoveries and constructions of the world for the non-professional, knowledgeable public until shortly before his death.

Koestler showed an ability to succinctly capture the essence of things in his pieces on the theater, museums, human interest, as well as on scientific subjects. But it was his ability to strike the imagination of readers with the use of metaphor that made his writing engaging. In his first article about science for his Ullstein editors, entitled “Das Mysterium des Lichts beim Nobelpreis-herzog” (The Mystery of Light According to the Nobel-Prize Duke),⁵ Koestler augmented his power of description with his imaginative ability to equate the incompatible. The motivation and result of his use of metaphor was always that of calling his readers not simply to a sense of wonder, but creating an ability to appreciate extremely complex issues. After he describes the personal life and education of a young French nobleman from a good family, bored with the study of history and excited by the fundamental question of what constituted light, Koestler discussed the newest post-Newtonian developments in physics. He explained that de Broglie decided to postulate his answer to the question concerning the nature of light by combining the contradictory theories of Newton and Huyghens. Here, out of necessity, he tackled some of the most difficult concepts of physics for the common reader in order to impart an understanding of the findings of developing science. The new, twentieth-century physics created what seemed to most people to be anomalies and what Koestler himself in the article admits were statements about the sub-atomic universe that seemed to be beyond human understanding. He prepared his readers for a description of the fantastic in the following manner: “At first glance, light seems to be simple, but with a closer look, the human brain can’t comprehend it.”⁶ Koestler expressed the difficulty of understanding the transmutation of matter into energy as something lost on human consciousness because the precise findings of theoretical and empirical science created a “cosmic emptiness” in mankind.⁷ Einstein’s theory dealt the

death blow to the notion of a material medium through which light waves pass, the hypothetical ether. According to previous physics, in Koestler's words, "Without ether there can be no waves and the whole theory experiences euthanasia if we ignore one for the other."⁸ By demonstrating the precise speed at which matter changes into energy (300,000 km. per second), Einstein provided a mathematical description which amounted to this mercy killing of the intuitively appealing notion of the ether. Yet this created an unbearable tension between mathematical precision and commonsensical views. It was this condition that necessitated the combination of contradictory theories on which the article focused. Koestler characterized the new understanding of microphysics as a *Hexentanze*, a witch's dance on Walpurgisnacht, the mythological annual black Sabbath in the Harz Mountains.

These chaotic waves and the microcosmic Walpurgisnacht night of matter and movement and of being and non-existence come together and the reader can see that de Broglie's waves are made of nothing – where are we, in the material world or the Broglie world?

In the theories of physics our understanding can't keep up with all of that. All we can feel about it is goose bumps that run down our backs, and we are ashamed that we know so little about light.⁹

But Koestler's formulation of the fantastic in the new physics could go in an opposite direction as well. In the context of the "witchcraft" of post-Newtonian physics, his article on de Broglie characterizes the apparently exact and concrete practice of mathematics as a mystical entity. He explains that, on the theoretical level, the mathematics of Einstein imparts a distinct rationality to the otherwise fantastic spirit-world created by the new physics. If, as physicists believed, mathematics could achieve this apparent impossibility, Koestler makes explicit the hidden mysticism of the presumably hardheaded science of mathematics. "But there is a place where it all comes

together in a concrete and precise situation. That is in the mystical area of mathematical formulae,” he said. Einstein’s theory acts as a “crutch,” Koestler claimed, to describe the “different and simultaneously similar” order of the world.¹⁰

In his attempt to make the contradictory aspects of twentieth-century physics understandable to the common man, Koestler’s description of the state of science utilized a combination of the concrete and the fantastic. His metaphorical conjuring of the spirit world helped his readers imagine the fantastic projections of theoretical physics. The practitioners of science, probably like Koestler and his readers, were longing for some unified theory but getting used to the idea that theoretical unity might get in the way of understanding experimental results. Koestler ends the article on de Broglie with a statement that is optimistic about the eventual ability of humankind to understand quantum theory. “...future generations will digest the seeming incongruities of quantum theory,” he concludes.¹¹ But the more general tone of Koestler’s article seems to nod in the direction of the mystical as he admitted that human consciousness might be ill equipped to fathom the cosmos. This was a conclusion that would both attract and repel Arthur Koestler for most of his life.

Koestler put metaphor to good use throughout his writing career. In *Scum of the Earth*, his non-fiction account of his own escape from collaborationist France in 1941, he would use scientific metaphor to characterize the state of fascist Europe as it destroyed any semblance of liberal society. He painted this reality as being as icy as the one he had already witnessed in Stalin’s Comintern during the 1930s. Koestler was secure in his conclusion that liberalism was dead by 1941 because the individual counted for nothing throughout much of Europe.¹² *Scum of the Earth* characterizes one of the concentration camps, Le Vernet, in which Koestler had been interned by the French government as

having been at a freezing point similar, yet different from the point of freezing at Dachau. To do so Koestler uses two scales that measure the same phenomenon, temperature, as he explains metaphorically that the distinction between the two internment camps lay not so much in extent as in competence, efficiency, and intent.

In the Liberal-centigrade, Vernet was the zero-point of infamy; measured in Dachau-Fahrenheit it was still 32 degrees above zero. In Vernet beating-up was a daily occurrence; in Dachau it was prolonged until death ensued. In Vernet people were killed for lack of medical attention; in Dachau they were killed on purpose. In Vernet half the prisoners had to sleep without blankets in 20 degrees frost; in Dachau they were put in irons and exposed to frost.”¹³

One result of the Hitler-Stalin Pact was that the French government, beginning in late summer, 1939, began to treat both Left and Right politicians with grave suspicion. The final acts of the Third Republic, which was ostensibly in the liberal tradition of the French Revolution, alienated this very government from its own past and customary values. For its program of rounding-up anti-fascists and others defined as undesirable by fascism in preparation for the Nazi onslaught, Koestler reserved the measure of zero. By reserving for the Nazis a measure of the freezing temperature that was a relative 32 degrees above zero on a different scale, he shows that there was little objective difference in the treatment that any individual might experience in the detention camps of France or Germany in 1941. However, it was in the latter, where no pretense of liberalism existed, that less was left to chance. It was more likely that Nazi Germany's victims would be persecuted with intent. Koestler, therefore, trusts that the perceptive reader will understand that there is really no irony in scaling the cold at Vernet with a lower digit than the cold at Dachau. Because it so blatantly contradicted the general philosophical and political legacy of its government, the random maltreatment of detainees in liberal France was colder, no matter how it was measured, than was the systematic maltreatment

of political prisoners in fascist Germany. One cannot help but wonder if there was any implication in the use of this metaphor that the treatment of those who counted as less than human would worsen and reach a point of absolute zero in Europe under the Third Reich. This would become a worry for Koestler as the war continued, and the prospect of liberal society disappearing in an ice age of absolute zero of Stalinist hegemony over Europe would become his black thought when the war was over.

Much later, with *The Ghost in the Machine*, in an attempt to show that war in the twentieth century resulted in large measure from the loss of individuality, Koestler put the Freudian conception of condensation to use to describe a social, rather than an individual, phenomenon. His point was that when individuality is subsumed by some mass force like nationalism or is channeled by nationalism's expression, state propaganda, what obtains is something that seems to contradict the typical Freudian conception of the ego: "...*the self-assertive behaviour of the group is based on the self-transcending behaviour of its members...*"¹⁴ Put another way, "*the egotism of the group feeds on the altruism of its members*" so that war is merely "a deadly ritual, *not the result of aggressive self-assertion, but of self-transcending identification.*"¹⁵ What condenses are not ideas exclusive to any individual, but ideas that coalesce in a particular social atmosphere that is subject to unpredictable forces greater than any individual person. These ideas and the feelings associated with them "materialize as the humidity in the atmosphere condenses into clouds, which subsequently undergo transformation of shape" as emotion steers thought away from reason and toward the irrational.¹⁶ Condensation is the metaphor Koestler chooses to describe the "stampede" of emotion of the Great War, of Stalinism, of Nazism, all of which the rationalism and optimism of the Enlightenment could never call into account because, as he tells his readers, "Beliefs are

not invented.”¹⁷ They show a definite independence from the rational workings of the mind.

What comprises the human brain in Koestler’s analysis were both the “ice” of logic and the “steam” of emotion, one crystal clear and sharp, the other opaque and diffuse.¹⁸ In Koestler’s estimation what accounts for the twentieth century’s expression of irrational political acts is a dual mentality in mankind which was guaranteed to be out of balance in its European cultural context by Saint Thomas Aquinas giving equal weight to reason and faith. By the twentieth century, Koestler concluded, secular, religious, or political ideologies, rooted in an ancient “utopian craving for an ideal society” would create social consequences caused not by individuals’ tendencies toward aggression, but by self-transcending identification of individuals with some group cause. Conformity, not the seeking of self-interest, had become the fly in the ointment of European civilization. Accordingly, twentieth-century ideology and an older idealism combined in the form of a base level of intelligence and an elevated state of emotionality. This combination, Koestler concluded, represented “pathological manifestations [of a] split between reason and belief,” that could only end in catastrophe as the ideas that constituted belief condensed in a chaotic social and political atmosphere.¹⁹

Long before he wrote *The Ghost in the Machine* or *The Yogi and the Commissar*, Koestler used various metaphors from the material world to characterize social and political events. For instance in *Thieves in the Night*, his 1946 novel that describes the preparations of leftist Zionists for the foundation of the state of Israel, he used a physics metaphor to characterize the problem of how Zionists and Palestinian Arabs should relate. In the novel the leftist members of the fictitious Ezra’s Tower Kibbutz debate this question as they deal with the chaos that the realities of communal strife impose on their

belief that working-class Jews and working-class Arabs should relate as class brothers. One Zionist character, Mosha, quips that the debate is “not a discussion, but a spiral nebula [which is] heated and vaporous, and has no beginning and no end...”²⁰ No matter that their beliefs issued from a secular political tradition based in a rational construction of progress defined along class lines, these nation builders, like their Socialist spiritual predecessors in 1914, support a national collective against a class collective. Here and elsewhere in this novel Koestler concludes that in the struggle for progress, certain traditions are privileged over others, the nation over the tribe, the practices of the industrial age and rational science possessed by the Zionist pioneers over the pre-industrial social habits possessed by the Palestinian Arabs.

By the mid twentieth century two world wars and the disappointments over the assumed progress of industrial society had put into the realm of the ludicrous Thomas Babington Macaulay’s belief that one shelf of a British gentleman’s library was worth all the literature of Asia. Arthur Koestler became part of a reversal of the trend established during the late eighteenth century of the imposition of European technique and value systems on Asia. Europeans had brought the steam engine and the ban on suttee to Asia but they would later, if only episodically, seek enlightenment in Asian philosophy. In 1958 Koestler’s appreciation of the crisis of Western society caused him to leave Europe in a quest for broader understanding. He spent the better part of two years between 1958 and 1959 in India and Japan in an effort to determine whether Eastern philosophy and spirituality held any solutions to the problems that he felt confronted Western culture. He collected his account of his interviews with Indian holy men and his observations of Japanese society into a series of essays entitled *The Lotus and the Robot* (1960). This volume is an intriguing European travel account of the expression and origin of

sociological, historical, and philosophical facts in post-war Asia. Koestler viewed this publication as the sequel to his 1945 philosophical collections of essays, *The Yogi and the Commissar*, which explored two approaches to the crisis in Western culture, one contemplative and philosophical, the other positivistic and political. He initiated his 1960 investigation of Eastern philosophy by reflecting on the role of formal education in the West in the following manner:

The respect for hard, obstinate facts which a scientific education imparts, does not necessarily imply the denial of a different order of Reality; it does imply, however, the obligation to exhaust all possibilities of a natural explanation of phenomena before acknowledging that they belong to a different order.²¹

In this volume, Koestler would conclude that the gulf between Eastern and Western spirituality was practically unbridgeable and that the East had little to offer in the way of solving the West's spiritual and philosophical crisis. He would end it in a hopeful tone, one that expressed disappointment in the East and confidence in the long-term prospects or the West.²²

By its end *The Lotus and the Robot* celebrates European achievement and defines its progress as "organic" when most people would think China, for instance, to be the paragon of organic historic development. But Koestler carefully distinguishes between historical development, which can evince stasis, and social evolution, which implies dynamism. Putting Europe in the broadest context, one that is associated with an implicit Euro-centric attitude, he compares European culture favorably to that of Asia as well as to the cultures of the newer societies of the Western Hemisphere.

Continuity-through-change and unity-in-diversity seem to be the pre-conditions of a living culture. Continuity without change was characteristic of some highly sophisticated Asiatic civilizations; change without a deep awareness of continuity with the past is a characteristic of new continents such as America. I started my journey in sackcloth and ashes and came back rather proud of being a European...And yet a detached comparison with other continents of the way

Europe stood up to its past trials, and of its contribution to man's history, leaves one with a new confidence and affection for that small figure riding on the back of the Asian bull."²³

Before he reaches his conclusion about the long-term optimism concerning the West's prospects, Koestler described another social development consequent of industrialization, the society created by the Meiji reforms in Japan. Like his comparison of the Zionist and Arab responses to questions of modernity and tradition, Koestler once again chose a point of comparison, this time a simile, from physical science. This comparison issued from the life sciences as he compared the industrialized Japanese Everyman to a mutant bumblebee.²⁴ Koestler's conclusion in Part Two of *The Lotus and the Robot* is that the twentieth-century Japanese, having grafted industrial technique to their traditional feudal social values, were an unhappy and confused people. He sums up the problem with Japanese culture as being one of the persistence of a "stubborn" rather than a "triumphant" survival of tradition. *The Lotus and the Robot* views Japanese attempts to hitch modern European and American language to their own situations as an awkward expression of a misuse of form by the vestiges of irrelevant but persistent cultural survivals. The Japanese, Koestler claims, use of "mobo" for modern boy and "apuregeru" for *apres guerre* girl miss the salient points implicit in the languages of their origin. They may sound Japanese, but are merely inauthentic attempts by tradition-bound youths to sound up to date. Japanese adolescents and young adults, Koestler observes, cannot conceive of themselves as angry or "beat," even though they themselves are acutely aware that they possess a confused identity.²⁵

In a similarly shallow manner, the post-war Japanese became enamored of T. S. Eliot simply because he wrote "The Wasteland," says Koestler, and the Japanese held an attraction for the title only as a phrase. Koestler reduces what he brands the superficial

attempts of late twentieth-century Japanese people to be modern to a stubborn reliance on tradition and a refusal to develop their own new traditions. Lacking truly new social forms and values built from indigenous Japanese culture in a natural, organic manner, Koestler saw the Japanese of 1959 as "an imaginary species of bees which mutated by irradiation...only attracted by bitter flowers, yielding bitter honey."²⁶ In this estimation, the Japanese seemed doomed to slave away at industrial tasks reaping only thin satisfactions without any deeper, socially rooted values securely attached to their work in the modern world. In such a cultural context, Koestler suggests, the daily grind on the industrial treadmill becomes the equivalent of bitter honey.

Koestler ends his essay on the Japanese by painting these modernized Asian people as frustrated by a yearning for the traditional spirituality which modernity seemed to have rendered irrelevant, but which, nevertheless, held an unrelenting attraction for them. "They hate the robotland in which they live," Koestler says, "and they hate themselves for succumbing to its temptation." So homesick for their traditional lotus land that the Japanese recognize as an anachronism, "they are unable to struggle free from its ancestral grip."²⁷ As he comments on Japan's rapid industrialization during the nineteenth century and the legacy it left during the twentieth century Koestler equates Japan with a skin diver swimming to the surface too quickly. He contrasts the Japanese deep-sea diver with the small, westernized Indian elite who accepted modernity more slowly, less actively, and, thereby, more organically. Koestler pictured the Japanese as suffering from the intense and persistent pangs of the bends in need of therapeutic decompression while the elite of Indian society, who harbored a desire to modernize more patiently, could observe their own efforts at modernization with an air of contemplation, if not utter control.

The opening up of the country after a quarter-millennium of segregation made the nation resemble a diver suddenly breaking the surface. The brutal change of pressure causes bubbles to form in his veins, and he suffers the agony known as the bends. In contrast to the small elite of westernized leaders in India, whom I compared to travelers in a bathyscaphe isolated from their surrounding, the Japanese are a nation of skin divers. Unfortunately, they cannot go back to the pressure chamber to dissolve the bubbles by getting gradually de-pressurized. They must find some original cure for a malaise without precedent.²⁸

Fifteen years before he wrote *The Lotus and the Robot* Koestler took a look at social change in the Middle East. There he investigated the phenomenon of Zionist development and modernization of Palestine as modern European confronted Arab traditionalists. In his novel about the establishment of Israel, *Thieves in the Night*, Koestler reflected back to his experiences with Stalinism and Nazism during the 1930s in order to describe the motivations behind Zionist demonstrations against the British White Paper on Palestine in 1939.²⁹ These demonstrations degenerated into riot void of any program or conscious leadership. Returning to ice as a metaphor, he recalled a “political ice age,” the 1930s, that he believed established a habit in people of moderate views of forgetting how to find and follow good political leadership. While liberals, who defended free ideas, proved politically unimaginative, Communists and fascists, who denied free thought, were ingenious in the ways in which they manipulated masses of people at political rallies and demonstrations, Koestler recalls. He accounted for the unexpected imagination of oppressive systems and the pedestrian inaction of systems that espoused freedom by suggesting that, like the material world, the world of ideas, could also be subject to conditions that cause phenomena to act in unexpected, uncommon ways.³⁰ With a reference to material phenomena, Koestler expressed the lack of political imagination among the politically moderate as the equivalent of a “political ice age.” He concluded the metaphor by stating, “Exposed to temperatures approaching absolute zero

point, all matter experienced a curious and irregular behaviour.”³¹ If matter could change its behavior under extreme physical conditions, why couldn't people change their behavior under extreme social and political conditions?

Arthur Koestler could put metaphor that related to the physical world to almost any use. After quoting various concepts of Eastern philosophy from texts given to him by Indian holy men during his 1958-1959 trip to Asia, he resorted to a chemical metaphor to express his insight that language was an inadequate tool in translating certain feelings, beliefs, and experiences. To help substantiate his judgement that the East offers no solution to the philosophical dilemmas of the West, Koestler explains why the West must use language in the expression of spiritual ideas. He argues that Aristotle created his table of categories and tied the cosmos to Greek grammar, that Christianity made Christ, part God and part linguistically proficient man, the mediator between the human and the divine, and, finally, that science created a language far too precise for the expression of spiritual states. These three Western traditions enable and necessitate the use of language in expressing European spirituality, he figures.³² However, the precise language of science and even the poetics of Christianity are not capable of rendering the experiences and convictions of a true mystic, the type whom Koestler encountered in India. The mystical experiences of Indian yogis, he claimed, are the

undiluted acid, extracted from the mythological symbols of Eastern philosophy: the wheel, the veil of Maya, the secret of the golden flower...Eastern philosophy cannot be de-mythologized and conceptualized. Every attempt to distil its essence produces an unpalatable acid; and every attempt to translate it into the verbal concepts and categorical structures of Western language leads to logical monstrosities.”³³

Buddha's smile transforms Western thought's categorical structure into an “opaque [sic] screen” that obscures from the mind certain realities experienced by exponents of Eastern

cultures and equally prevents, in a metaphorical manner, the culture-bound Westerner from tasting the mystical spirituality of India.³⁴

Koestler could be not only clever in his use of metaphor, but also humorous. After explaining how Johannes Kepler could meet Tycho Brahe only when the latter unexpectedly migrated to Prague, Koestler employs a basic metaphor from physics that is literally grave, but is nonetheless light-hearted, to characterize the auspicious meeting:

The circumstances which made them both exiles, and guided them towards their meeting, can be attributed to coincidence or providence, according to taste, unless one assumes the existence of some hidden law of gravity in History. After all, gravity in the physical sense is also merely a word for an unknown force acting at a distance.³⁵

With tongue in cheek, Koestler conceived social and intellectual universes as being subject to unavoidable attractions that result from unseen forces.

Koestler reviewed André Koyre's *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (1957) for the British *Encounter* (Nov. 1957). He entitled his review "The Walls of Jericho." In it Koestler employs a poetic beginning that expresses the shift from the geocentric universe of the Babylonians to the heliocentric universe of Pythagorus with a delightful metaphor. To trace the development of Western conceptions of the universe, as seen in Koyre's book, Koestler describes the Babylonian universe as an oyster surrounded by water and a vaulted, luminescent ether. This small and safe universe he likens to a fetus in a womb which Greeks of the Heroic Age pried open to set its oyster-like earth rotating on its axis and revolving around the sun. The latter Pythagorean universe, Koestler explains, would be subsequently collapsed and then enclosed by Plato and Aristotle with the earth at the core of an onion-skinned system of nine spheres. Continuing the metaphorical description of man's developing construction of the solar system, Koestler referred to a 2000-year geocentric deep freeze from which the European

conceptualization of the cosmos would not emerge until seventeenth century. Again by analogy, he shows how understanding the cosmos as a limited or bounded system of concentric rings implied an order that was hierarchical and unchanging, and which was reflected in the social values of Medieval Europe. On the other hand, Koestler told his readers, the new heliocentric construction of the universe implied an open, boundless reality.³⁶

At another, much earlier, point in his life, when his liberal tendencies were tied to an acceptance of a more pristine conception of Enlightenment positivism, Koestler may have associated the construction of a heliocentric universe singularly with an optimistic spirit. In those days his hope for and consequent disappointment in socialism and, then, his later advocacy of Communism still encapsulated a simpler, nineteenth-century social optimism. Before the mid-1940s, he would have left it to the reader to draw the conclusion that the heliocentric conception of the universe could only be mirrored in a positive fashion by the social and political values of liberalism. However, by 1957, when Koestler's experience had forced upon him a new, nuanced appreciation of uncertain, and possibly diminished liberal potentialities, he felt obliged to reveal to his readers a dual nature embodied in the heliocentric conception of the solar system and the infinite nature of the cosmos. Implicated in the unbounded conception of the universe were both positive and negative social potentialities. A continuous and open construction of the cosmos suggested a potential social freedom that could result in liberation of the human spirit. But the same construction could imply un-centered, anomic social and, by extension, political chaos that could become oppressive. Koestler's formulation of this Janus-faced universe can be read as a distillation of his earlier political experiences, and

as such, it can be understood as a warning about a latent threat inside the West's modern relativistic world-view:

To put it in a pointed manner: a bounded universe, with its concentric series of shells, implies a rigid, hierarchical natural and social order where every (living and inanimate) item in the cosmic inventory has quite literally a 'place' assigned to it in the hierarchy of space; whereas in an infinite or merely unbounded universe, without centre and circumference, no 'place' takes precedence before another – homogeneous space implies a quasi-democratic cosmos. But it also implies on the debit side, the absence of any obvious, or 'natural' scale of values. Thus the new cosmology was bound to alter the whole pattern of social and moral ideas...³⁷

Koestler was not shy when it came to the comparisons he made. He could just as easily bring God into his metaphors as not. In a 1960 BBC broadcast, entitled *Third Program*, Koestler began by telling his listeners that in the "year 15 P.H." (post-Hiroshima) mankind could not comprehend the importance of the exploding atom bomb. The ability to understand and appreciate what the new military technique implied was beyond most mortals, he claimed. It obliterated "the assumptions on which all philosophy, from Socrates onward, was based," a presumed "potential immortality of our species." This significant change was simply too difficult to grasp in such a short time. Koestler stated this in Freudian terms: "The unconscious mind has its own clock, and its own ways of digesting what the conscious mind has rejected as indigestible."³⁸ He suggested that there might be a divine intergalactic insurance company in which the "Lord Almighty" did actuarial projections regarding the likelihood of the survival of the species Homo-sapiens. He continued with a description of species suicide that he would harp on for some years. Its essence was that humankind's evolution was mistimed, that is, that the species was intellectually precocious but emotionally underdeveloped.

Koestler repeatedly quotes the divine actuary for his radio audience in order to drive home his warnings about nuclear annihilation:

...nature nursed and protected you before you reached maturity, [God says,] even to the extent of producing a surplus of male births to replenish your stock depleted by wars. Now you are stronger than nature and entirely on your own...By learning to live with the sober awareness of its possible extinction, your race may derive the same spiritual benefits which the individual derives from coming to terms with its own mortality.³⁹

The voice of God continues by stressing that death, or mortality and transience, is important to philosophy and other significant creations of mankind such as cathedrals and pyramids. Koestler has God explain to mankind that the possibility of nuclear annihilation may, therefore, hold some spiritual benefits:

...you deny Thanatos as the Victorians denied Eros; you shrink from the facts of death as they shrank from the facts of life. And yet the philosophy of man, the art of man, the dignity of man is derived from his brave endeavours to reconcile Eros and Thanatos.⁴⁰

Whether or not he was as personally shy as he claimed to be, Arthur Koestler was not reticent when putting words into God's mouth. These words suggest Koestler's need for theodicy.

It is almost platitudinous to stress how the role of the deity diminished in Europe after the seventeenth century. This commonly understood fact, of course, was not an immediate discontinuity in Western thought. Neither was it, however, a flash in the pan. The diminishing necessity of God in European thought was a slow and persistent development that by the twentieth century had reached the point that many Westerners entertained the notion of God as quaint, if not completely irrelevant. Arthur Koestler's early life was certainly part of the West's trajectory away from religion. His family was already in the tradition of non-religious Jews who saw themselves as part of secular

Central Europe, and, when history and politics combined after the Great War to offer the possibility, they saw themselves as Hungarian nationalists.

It was nineteenth-century liberalism that formed the core beliefs that stayed with Koestler throughout the turbulent twentieth century. In his autobiography and in his essay in *The God that Failed* Koestler describes his disenchantment with liberalism and with what proved to be its social democratic cousin by 1914, the socialism of the Second International. Socialism's affinity for liberalism was represented in its struggle in electoral politics for values that claimed to protect the individual from the disabilities of birth. The disappointments achieved by liberal and socialists did not obliterate Koestler's devotion to fundamental liberal precepts, however. These included the intrinsic value of the individual and the individual's right to better his condition through honest effort or natural talents. Such precepts implied the aid of state policies that guarded the rights of the individual in the context of mass society with its relatively new associations with mass politics, mass communication, and popular culture.

Koestler's attraction to Communism resulted from frustrated liberal achievements during the inter-war years. He was not attracted to Marxism simply by the logic of its arguments and analysis. During the 1920s he witnessed a European order that was chastened by dwindling economic achievements. Cheated by a business associate and by shrinking prospects for the small, Central European entrepreneur, his father's petty bourgeois pretensions could not be sustained by vanishing income. And while Arthur was himself quite prosperous and moving in exciting and privileged circles by 1930, one can imagine his own sense of guilt caused by his awareness of his father's and huge numbers of his contemporaries' dim existence and, what at the time, were perceived as even dimmer prospects.

Gradually the combination of Godless Europe and the abuse of the individual by political forces on both the Right and the Left determined that Koestler would spend the longer part of his life defending liberal precepts. As already noted, devotion to liberalism would also put Koestler on a crusade against what he viewed as the tyrannies of specialization in the modern world. He would question establishment science with its coterie of what Koestler believed were narrow-minded, turf guarding professionals who represented a block to what he would maintain was the necessity of creative thought and instinct in the practice of science. As we shall later see, Koestler's critique of nineteenth-century and twentieth-century practitioners of Western science would be couched in terms of liberal ideals that privileged individuality and creativity.

Koestler's defense of the sanctity of the individual and his search for a spirituality that could fill the void left in Western culture by the collapse of the traditional conception of God would consume the energy of the longest portion of his life. Both of these projects, the struggle for individuality and the longing for a new spirituality, would come to form the essence of his philosophical system. But before he could begin building such a system, Koestler had to tell the story of his last and most humiliating experience with the defeat of liberal values after 1939. This is his task in *Scum of the Earth*.

We have already seen how Koestler attested to the insignificance of the individual in France by 1939. His account in *Scum of the Earth* gave eyewitness testimony to the commonplace maltreatment of political outcasts by a government that, in its recent past, had been the heir of a long liberal tradition. On the surface this book can be understood as a warning against an attitude of temerity in the English-speaking world, which possessed deeper and longer-standing liberal traditions than continental Europe, about the potentialities of vanishing safeguards for individuality. If masses of people could

become accustomed to maltreatment at the hands of government in France, why couldn't the same occur in Great Britain or the United States? Liberalism was on the run in the capitalist West as well as in the anti-capitalist East.

In "Agony," the first chapter of *Scum of the Earth*, Koestler describes the agonizingly slow death of liberal spirit in continental Europe after 1918. In order to protect her identity because she was still on the continent when the book was published, the account refers to Koestler's female companion, Daphne Hardy, simply as G. She is shown to possess a fatalism that takes for granted a degeneration of society into meaningless and alienating chaos. Of this woman's psychology and political expectations, Koestler says the following:

She had the post-Versailles generation's typical way of taking for granted that this world was a hopeless mess; but this innate lack of illusions, instead of making her cynical, produced a sort of cheerful fatalism which made me, with my chronic political despair, feel like a sentimental, middle-aged Don Quixote.⁴¹

The fatalism that Koestler described as so typical of the post-Versailles generation had its roots in what Koestler believed was a lack of integrity within individual Western governments that had been cut from liberal cloth during the nineteenth century. He complained that these governments' loss of integrity in their non-response to the Spanish Civil War constituted a deepening betrayal of their own political traditions and values. By 1937 it was too late in liberalism's development to consider this abstentionist response to tyranny as liberalism's original sin. It was, however, in Koestler's view, a significant milepost in a continuing loss of political innocence.

Liberalism in the English-speaking world had certainly achieved its own embarrassment of paucity through its particular inaction during the Spanish Civil War. *Scum of the Earth* updated this narrative with its description of untouchables in what

Koestler calls the “Leper Barracks” at the French internment camp at Le Vernet. This particular barracks was special and segregated. It housed what, in the society that comprised the camp, was considered the lowest of the low, the refugees who had been members of the International Brigade. These men got the worst treatment that the French government dealt to the refugees among which Koestler found himself in 1941. These 150 degraded specimens were once “the pride of the European revolutionary movement,” Koestler claimed. They were “the material for the first experiment since the Crusades to form an army of volunteers which would fight for a cosmopolitan creed.”⁴² Koestler paints the interned men of the International Brigade as pawns of the struggle between the extreme Right and extreme Left that began in the late 1930s. As this ideological struggle pushed moderate governments to the right, the murder of men from the International Brigade became bereft even of symbolism, leaving only an embarrassing stench for those who could recall more optimistic times:

The heroic horde [the International Brigade] was but an unconscious tool of power politics, and when it played its role was sacrificed in an immense holocaust, the memory of which would linger on and make all lofty aspirations a stink in the nostrils of the common man.⁴³

The International Brigade represented the last hope of not just the Left, but in the way Koestler relates the story of their treatment in 1941, it represented the best proof of liberalism’s inability to protect the dignity of the individual Everyman.

When Koestler is released from Le Vernet and reaches Limoges he reports feeling as if he were in a surrealistic dream. Chapter Three of *Scum of the Earth*, “Apocalypse,” chronicles the final farcical segment of Koestler’s escape from France. In that chapter we see that common people in France, many of whom were expecting the worst since 1918, were in a numb state when Petain announced his government’s capitulation to the Nazis.

Koestler paints French citizens in Limoges hearing Petain's speech over the radio as sleepwalkers, drinking aperitifs like zombies not knowing how to react to the content of the announcement even though they had been subliminally aware for a very long time that it was coming.⁴⁴ By the time he leaves Limoges, Koestler characterizes France as a "waxworks" where people in stunned disbelief only go through the motions of everyday life with an air of fatalism waiting to see what would happen next as Europe's best chance for liberalism descended into fascist collaboration.

By *Scum of the Earth's* end, it is clear that Koestler's mourning for the incapacity of liberalism to protect individual rights has not made him any more friendly toward capitalism or imperialism than he had been during the early 1930s when he was a member of the KPD. In the book's epilogue he included letters he wrote alternately to a fictitious British Colonel Blimp and an equally fictitious Comrade Blimp in which he formulates a necessity to fight with the liberal democracies while retaining a critical attitude towards capitalism. In the letter to Colonel Blimp, Koestler says that he does not desire to die for "Hong Kong," (read imperialism) or for "a third Versailles" (1871, 1919, and one post-WW II: read liberalism). Speaking for some remnant of the Left, he continues,

Neither have we any enthusiasm for an economic order which burns the crops it produces, and reminds one of a certain goose, which instead of golden eggs, lays a time bomb every day and then settles down blissfully to hatch it.⁴⁵

In the letter addressed to Comrade Blimp, Colonel Blimp's cousin, Koestler concludes that a third way, one other than fighting with the Allies or with the fascists, may exist in theory, but not in practicality. So he chooses to fight with the liberal democracies in spite of their shared economic system which he criticizes.⁴⁶ He sees no demons in the German character as the British government was then propagandizing, but accepts that a defeat of

Germany is necessary before the true solution, a united Europe, could become an eventuality.⁴⁷

Koestler concludes *Scum of the Earth* on a note that predicts ideology's lack of fashion during the 1950s:

We have seen that a Socialist economy can associate with autocracy (Russia), and that capitalism can be combined with an efficient planned economy (Germany). I am afraid that in a few years our battle-cry, 'capitalism or socialism', will have as much bearing on reality as theological disputes about the sex of angels.⁴⁸

After an interim on the side of socialism, an interim that resulted from his disappointments with liberal achievements, Arthur Koestler was by 1941 firmly on his way through a Communist apostasy that led toward a renewed dedication to unadulterated – or perhaps sullied and promiscuous -- liberalism. He would pursue this political trajectory if not with theological disputes, certainly with philosophical ones from which he would attempt to create his own integrated construction of the world.

In the course of his creation of a philosophy that represented a holistic interpretation of his own experiences, Arthur Koestler would come to build an integrated interpretation of the past. In *Insight and Outlook: An Inquiry into the Common Foundations of Science, Art, and Social Ethics* (1949), his first attempt at creating an operational philosophy, Koestler would reach for much and succeed in somewhat less. This tome of over 400 pages begins with what he considered a safe area, the humanities, an area in which he had already achieved recognition. The book's sequel, *The Act of Creation*, which purported to complete the Koestlerian philosophical system would, by way of psychology and the behavioral sciences, extend his theories into the realm of empirical science. That book, however, would not appear until 1964. *Insight and*

Outlook begins with an analysis of comedy and laughter. Koestler's analysis of comedy or what makes people laugh, that is, what in many ways makes them people, establishes the two fundamental concepts of his system.⁴⁹ The first, "bisociation," is the dual vision or consciousness, which many times exists as a flash of insight experienced by the individual, and which connects two hitherto unconnected ideas, thoughts, or conclusions in some novel manner.

The second pivotal concept in Koestlerian philosophy is the "holon." It exists as parts of systems that simultaneously exhibit autonomy, subservience, and dominance in hierarchically ordered wholes. With these two fundamental concepts Koestler was able to posit an explanation of existence that could be generalized into a workable philosophy. *Insight and Outlook* would work its way from the comic to the human capacity for creation and invention. *The Act of Creation* would focus on the reciprocity that exists between art and discovery and conclude with a discourse on habituation and its opposite, originality, from prenatal human existence to the development of motor skills and from there to learning and the human ability to speak and to think. It would conclude with a discussion of learning theory. Both books, Koestler's first tries at writing philosophy, are examples of his writing at its flaccid worst. They are, however, attempts at philosophical discourse and hence are in a tradition of dense and beguiling expression. As systems of philosophy go, Koestler's journey from the comic to the cosmic is surprisingly successful. It exhibits integrity; it holds together as it eventually describes the universe.

During the course of his system-building project in *Insight and Outlook*, Koestler would critique Europe's positivistic mind-set. He would conclude that reason was not what liberals believed it was. Reason did not constitute a sufficient base upon which to build progressive social integration and hope. The twentieth century had already

demonstrated the emptiness of optimism about progress based solely on beliefs concerning the positivistic capacity of reason. What undoubtedly surprised some readers was Koestler's separation of the concept of self-interest from the liberal conception of progress. "Social integration cannot be achieved by a merely rational appeal to enlightened self-interest," he proclaimed.⁵⁰ He would go further and conclude that socialism, in many ways the logical extension of liberalism during his lifetime, was rooted in the unrealistic optimism and idealized power of reason subscribed to by the Enlightenment. Koestler could personally attest that neither liberalism nor socialism "could... fill the emotional vacuum created by the decline of Christianity."⁵¹ The emotional appeals of nationalism, then of Stalinism and Nazism bested all of liberalism's and socialism's Enlightenment-grounded optimistic appeal to reason.

If the reader suffered from some short-term political amnesia, Koestler unambiguously pronounced his recognition of an "optimistic fallacy": the inter-war years, the Spanish Civil War, the growth of fascism and the betrayals of Stalinism all proved that mankind was not progressing toward intellectual or social perfection. In 1949 he summarized recent political history in the following manner: "...the optimistic fallacy leads to the belief in democracy as an absolute panacea, while in fact, it may be a means of self-destruction (as when the German nation in its last free elections voted National Socialism into power)."⁵² One of the fundamental conclusions of *Insight and Outlook*, the central tenant of Koestlerian philosophy, was the need for balance in which the self-assertive tendencies and the self-transcendent tendencies of individual people would allow the creation and maintenance of a sustainable, integrated society. If men and women were too self-assertive they threatened social peace; if they were too self-

transcendent, their willingness to conform to crowd pressures could equally spell socially disintegrative disaster.

It was necessary for Koestler to renounce the eighteenth century's fetish for reason. It was just as necessary for him to renounce Europe's nineteenth-century hubris, its self-proclaimed and self-serving rationalizations for imperialism. It was his position, developed in the section of *Insight and Outlook* entitled "The Neglect of the Self-Transcending Emotions," that Western psychology of all stripes tended to give short shrift to the calming result of certain emotions of self-transcendent origin. Psychology in the West gave far too much attention to emotion as an expression of self-assertive tendencies in mankind, Koestler believed. Accordingly, "The social conditions during and after the Industrial Revolution increasingly thwarted the integrative impulses of modern man, discouraged contemplation, atrophied his oceanic [connected, Nirvana-like] feeling, and tended to transform him into a purely self-assertive animal."⁵³ Such a negation of any positive value in balanced self-transcendent behaviors and the privileging of self-assertion over the former was simply the legacy of a culture of acquisitive competition and Darwinistic survival-of-the-fittest rationalizations.⁵⁴

By the twentieth century, Koestler claimed, a transformation occurred in which the West privileged conformity over the individual's tendency toward self-assertion. What was needed in this new context was a restoration of balance in the direction of self-assertion. The West's inability to come to some homeostatic accommodation is what Koestler saw as its primary flaw during the period between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. He makes vague references to "degenerative forces" in Western society which have frustrated this balance.⁵⁵ A clear, concise description that locates the flaw in Western history is difficult to locate in *Insight and Outlook*. But the patient reader will

find one. In the part of his discussion entitled “Utilitarian Ethics or Fallacy,” Koestler points to a crisis in Western culture that began in the seventeenth century and by the twentieth century expressed itself in institutions as diverse as Freudian psychology and the welfare state. In the older tradition of liberalism, Koestler argues that all individuals lack the discipline to sacrifice for the greater good. Neither the welfare state, which Koestler claims relies on self-transcendence, nor Freudian psychology, which he assumes accentuates self-assertion, can lead to social balance. They both point inevitably to nihilism.⁵⁶

Koestler places the origin of crisis in Western culture in the 1600s when the Scientific Revolution trumped religion. Religion, or “guidance from above,” surrendered too much to science, or “guidance from below,” he claims.⁵⁷ Critiquing determinism, Koestler puts flesh on the bones of this insight into Western cultural development. He says,

Before the change [from religion to science], man’s relation to his destiny, that is, to the deity who determined his fate, was primarily one of humility, of emotive self-transcendence. After the shift to ‘determinism from below’, it became one of domination – after all, if atoms determined man’s fate, he could manipulate atoms in the laboratory. Before the change, enlightenment about the why and wherefore of existence could be obtained by passive contemplation; now it seemed that active research would yield better results – knowledge became externalized and divorced from oceanic feeling.⁵⁸

So a sea change in the West’s approach to questions of existence and man’s power over nature was Koestler’s prescription for the realization of order and balance in society. A belief in hubris possessed by the West and its scientific culture lay at the heart of this critique. As we shall see, humility and an orderly retreat from determinism as well as positivism -- or a willingness of the individual to succumb to the requisites of a hierarchical order -- would form the heart of Koestler’s constructed ideal of social

relations. In his system individuals or parts are seen as dominant or recessive according to circumstances determined by the needs of the hierarchy of which they are a part. This ordered and ranked organization exists so as to insure the survival of the complete organism, be it biological or social.

In “Some Aspects of the Behaviour of Social Wholes,” Chapter Eleven of *Insight and Outlook*, Koestler diverges to discuss evolution. He does this with the object of explaining how systems develop chronologically while maintaining balance and viability. He has in the back of his mind a prescription for how the West can achieve balance and return to what was in Koestler’s experience a persistently absent societal stability. His remedy is inferred from the politics of liberalism that put a high value on individual rights:

It is nevertheless true that wherever in evolutionary hierarchy we find relatively stable systems, their stability is maintained by the equilibrium of antagonistic tendencies – an antagonism which can be expressed in general form: the part has, on the one hand, to preserve its individuality lest the whole lose its articulation, and must, on the other hand, subordinate itself to the functional whole.⁵⁹

The liberal inference is, however, nuanced. In the above formulation of a stable, vital and developing system, there is no libertarian tipping of the scale in the direction of reckless individualism. Experience had taught Arthur Koestler that only some form of finesse, some delicacy, refinement, or subtlety, some elegance, could resurrect the liberal ideal. He located a fine-tuning apparatus in man’s attitude toward nature and in his attitude toward and definition of individualism. Koestler’s philosophy would take as its starting point a focus on the individual person in society. From that beginning Koestler would reach conclusions about how autonomous parts, individual persons, could constitute healthy social wholes. We will see later, that Koestler would go as far as

modulating his theory of integrated hierarchical structures into a suggestion that individual organisms could affect their own evolution.

Already by the beginning of the second third of the book that represented Koestler's first foray into philosophical system building, he would generalize his postulates to a description of nature as a whole and, through nature, to the system of thought Westerners called science. In Chapter Eleven, he proclaims the following:

The autonomous or self-assertive tendencies of the parts or sub-wholes of such stable systems appear on various levels as inertia, centrifugal momentum, free valencies [sic], and so on; the integrative tendencies in the various forms of attracting or binding forces: internuclear, gravitational, electromagnetic, and so on.⁶⁰

In a scant 150 pages of philosophy which sprung from a need to justify liberalism and began with an analysis of laughter, one of mankind's supposedly unique qualities, Arthur Koestler made general pronouncements about nature that spread from the forces of astrophysics to those of sub-atomic particles. Only a man with a certain hubris of his own could have possessed the nerve to attempt such a feat. It will be the duty of the next chapter in this paper to reveal the details of how Koestler assembled his system and the manner in which he conceived its operation. The following chapter will also attempt an analysis of what motivated the system builder and the psychology behind the system's projective conclusions about the state of Western science.

End Notes

¹ David Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind* (London: Heimemen, 1998), p. 56.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid. Pp. 63-64.

⁴ For example, Koestler's interest in the work of biologist Paul Kemerer (1880-1926) which would become the subject of his 1971 examination of the role of chance and agency in the process of evolution, *The Case of the Mid-wife Toad*, can be traced to his study of Kemerer during his secondary school years. See *The Case of the Mid-wife Toad*, p. 14.

⁵ Arthur Koestler, “Das Mysterium des Lichts beim Nobelpreis-herzog” in *Vossische Zeitung*, (Berlin, November 19, 1929 (No. 271)), “Unterhaltungsblatt” (culture section).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid. In the original German: “...da befindet man sich schön jenseits des gesunden Menschenverstandes. Unsere gewohnten Anschauungen verlieren ihre Gültigkeit, die exakte Forschung greift in kosmische Leere, die Gegensätze berühren sich, verschwimmen...”

⁸ Again in the original language: “Wenn es aber keinen Aether gab, so tönte er auch keine Wellen werfen und die Undulationstheorie hatte ausgedient; andere Versuche erteilten ihr den Gnadenstoss.”

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ In the German: “Es gibt aber eine Ebene, in der diese Zusammenhänge eine konkrete and präzise Fassung gewinnen: das ist das mystische Gebiet der mathematischen Formel, die... theoretisch imstande wäre, aus der restlosen Erschliessung sämtlicher Geschehnisse in einem, Sandkorn, mit hilfe von Differenzialgleichungen die allgemeinsten Weltgesetze zu formulieren...”

¹¹ Rendered in German as: “Heute sind uns diese Dinge zur Selbstverständlich versagte. Einer kommenden Generation, einige Jahrhunderte später, werden die Brogilieschen Entdeckungen, die Relativitätstheorie und die Quantenlehre, ebenso in Fleisch und Blut übergegangen sein wie uns das Gravitationsgesetz.”

¹² Arthur Koestler, *Scum of the Earth* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1968), pp. 102-103.

¹³ Ibid. P. 103.

¹⁴ Arthur Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine* (New York: MacMillan C., 1967), p. 251. Original emphasis.

¹⁵ Ibid. Pp. 251 and 253. Original emphasis.

¹⁶ Ibid. P. 255.

¹⁷ Ibid. Pp. 256 and 255.

¹⁸ Ibid. P. 259, cf. *The Yogi and the Commissar*, p. 121.

¹⁹ Ibid. Pp. 261 and 265-266.

²⁰ Arthur Koestler, *Thieves in the Night: Chronicle of an Experiment* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1946), p. 160.

²¹ Arthur Koestler, *The Lotus and the Robot* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), p. 12.

²² One could read *The Lotus and the Robot* as a negation of some of portions of Voltarie’s critique of the West in *Candide*. The Age of Science and the Enlightenment had by the twentieth century altered the identification of religion with superstition. By Koestler’s day institutionalized religion in Europe had long since accepted the outlook of empirical science. Science and religion allowed each other sufficient breadth in distinct philosophical realms. The spiritualism of the East, Koestler concluded, could not be counted on to either fix Europe’s spiritual malaise or lead humankind forward intellectually and technologically.

²³ Ibid. P. 285.

²⁴ Ibid. Pp. 187-188.

²⁵ Ibid. P. 188.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Koestler begins the fourth part of *Thieves in the Night*, “The Day of Visitation (1939),” with a description of the May 17 Parliamentary Statement of Policy on Palestine known as the White Paper of 1939. This document constituted the British government’s final pronouncement on Palestine and was designed to stop in its tracks the building of a Jewish state in the region. Koestler quotes it on the negation of any attempt to build a Jewish state: “His majesty’s government therefore now declare unequivocally that it is not part of their policy that Palestine should become a Jewish state.” Koestler explains that the White Paper instructed the High Commissioner for Palestine to halt all land sales to Jews and to keep Zionist land purchases to five percent of the total land area in Palestine. In spite of Conservative Churchill’s and Liberal Archibald Sinclair’s objections, the British government’s new policy was enforced between 1939 and 1944 in defiance of the fact that the League of Nations never gave it the force of law under Britain’s mandate to govern Palestine. According to Koestler the White Paper’s enforcement meant the drowning of Jews attempting to flee to Palestine as the ships they were in were sunk in the Mediterranean. Perhaps less malign, but no less consequential was the arrest and internment of Jewish refugees that made it to land in the British-ruled region. See *Thieves in the Night*, pages 311-313.

³⁰ Ibid. Pp. 332-335.

³¹ Ibid. P. 335.

³² Ibid. PP. 50-51.

³³ Ibid. P. 49.

³⁴ Ibid. Pp. 50-51.

³⁵ Arthur Koestler, *The Sleepwalkers: A History of Man’s Changing Vision of the Universe* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1959), p. 296.

³⁶ Arthur Koestler, “The Walls of Jericho,” for the British *Encounter* (Nov. 1957). Reproduced in *Drinkers of Infinity: Essays, 1955-1967*, (London: Hutchinson, 1968), pp. 14-15.

³⁷ Arthur Koestler for *Encounter* (London), Nov. 1957. Collected in *Drinkers of Infinity*, pp. 14-15.

³⁸ The BBC interview is reproduced as “The Age of Discretion” in *Drinkers of Infinity*. See p. 40.

³⁹ Ibid. Quoted on pp. 41-43.

⁴⁰ Ibid. Quoted, p. 44.

⁴¹ Arthur Koestler, *Scum of the Earth* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1941), p. 34.

⁴² Ibid. P. 128.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid. P. 196.

⁴⁵ Ibid. P. 284.

⁴⁶ In regard to the Soviet Union as one of the Allies, Koestler would conclude in 1945 in the final essay of *The Yogi and the Commissar*, an essay entitled “The Yogi and the Commissar (II),” that the Soviet Union was not socialistic as much as it was “state capitalistic.” See *The Yogi and the Commissar*, p. 193.

⁴⁷ Koestler, *Scum of the Earth*, pp. 284-286.

⁴⁸ Ibid. Pp. 286-287.

⁴⁹ Arthur Koestler, *Insight and Outlook: An Inquiry into the Common Foundations of Science, Art, and Social Ethics* (New York: MacMillan, 1949). For a description of the human psychology of laughter, or the functioning of and evolution of what is taken as innately and uniquely human, see *Insight and Outlook*, pp. 68-70.

⁵⁰ Ibid. P. 229.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid. P. 230.

⁵³ Ibid. P. 206.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid. P. 172.

⁵⁶ Ibid. P. 231.

⁵⁷ Ibid. P. 232.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid. P. 157.

⁶⁰ Ibid. P. 156.

Chapter Five

Philosophy as the Union of Politics, Psychology, and Science, 1945-1971

Between 1944 and 1949 Arthur Koestler resided in Great Britain and France. He also made lengthy visits to Palestine and the United States of America. As the Second World War ended and he became concerned about the plight of the Jews in Europe, he revitalized some of his older Zionist principles. It was late 1944, just as the militant Zionists of Menachem Begin's Irgun and the Lehi of the Stern Gang declared war on British policy in the Middle East, that Koestler traveled to Palestine. Between December 1944 and August 1945, he spent more than seven months there, researching his novel about the struggle to build a Jewish state, *Thieves in the Night*. While in Palestine, even before Clement Atlee and Ernest Bevin of the Labor party assumed control of the British government in August 1945 and rejected British support for Jewish emigration to the mandate, Koestler would witness Zionists choosing ends over means. He was in Palestine as Zionists began to engage in assassination and acts of war against both British and Arabs opponents. It is simultaneously fitting and ironic that *The Yogi and the Commissar* would appear in publication while Koestler was residing in Palestine during this politically active and violent period. There indeed seemed to be no compromise between commissar and yogi approaches to politics.

Koestler would write *Thieves in the Night* in Britain during the fall and winter of 1945-1946. As 1945 came to a close, he found himself engaged with George Orwell in an attempt to defend human rights by reviving the League for the Rights of Man. Koestler and Orwell wrote a manifesto for free thought and free expression that they hoped could seed an anti-Stalinist movement in continental Europe. It would be circulated during

1946 to over one hundred men of letters throughout the globe. These attempts would come to fruition during 1950 with the establishment of the Congress for Cultural Freedom in Berlin.

Living in a residence he bought in Wales, Koestler began his first book-length effort at science and philosophy, *Insight and Outlook*, in 1946. He would not complete it until December 1947. Koestler interrupted his work on the volume with two brief stays in Paris. The first one was between October and November 1946. The purpose of the first visit was to help Jean Vilar stage the play Koestler had written in 1933, *Twilight Bar*. The other interval in Paris occurred in early October 1947. These trips to Paris allowed Koestler to engage post-war French intellectuals and literati while he spent some of the royalties the successful French translation of *Darkness at Noon* had earned. Koestler's interaction with André Malraux, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir was alternately serious, playful, debauched, and contentious. By 1948 Koestler and the latter two personalities were bitter political enemies, parting ways over Koestler's anti-Sovietism cum pro-Americanism and Sartre's and de Beauvoir's defense of the Soviet Union.

Koestler followed his completion of *Insight and Outlook* with a celebratory automobile trip through continental Europe that began and ended in Paris. Embarking in early January and terminating in February 1948, this recreational excursion included frenetic driving episodes and drinking bouts in Fontainebleau, Burgundy, Lyons, Avignon, Aix, Nice and the Riviera, Genoa, Pisa, Florence, Perugia, Assisi, and Rome. In Italy Koestler met Ignazio Silone and Carlo Levi. It was during this trip that political differences had developed to the extent that Koestler could hardly speak with Sartre and de Beauvoir.

The spring of 1948 saw Koestler on a speaking tour of the United States. There he met American intellectuals and journalists as he spoke or traveled through New York, Washington, Los Angeles, Palo Alto, San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Chicago, Boston, and Princeton. The trip's main event was Koestler's March 26 speech in New York for the International Relief and Rescue Committee (IRRC). That organization had been created in 1933 to aid those fleeing Nazism. After 1945 it continued its mission by helping those fleeing Eastern Bloc totalitarianism. In his speech to the IRRC Koestler intoned American leftists and liberals to enter adulthood and abandon their World War II idealization of the Soviet Union. He argued that since the war and the consequent necessity for the anti-fascist alliance were over, Americans should recognize and fear the Russians as an imminent threat to world peace and freedom. Anti-Communism was the theme of Koestler's first trip to the United States of America. This fact, his assertive Communist apostasy, and his cooperation with the CIA in the establishment of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) two years later in Berlin would assure Koestler's entry into Cold War and McCarthyite America after 1948.

Back in Europe by 1949, Koestler effected his move from the rural cottage he had purchased in Wales, Bwlch Ocyn, to the property he bought with his royalties from French translations of his recent works. This, his French residence, Verte Rive, was near Paris at Fontaine la Port. It was during his residence at Verte Rive in 1950 that Koestler married his second wife, Mamine Paget and engaged in the preliminaries for organizing the CCF whose formation he would lead in Berlin later that year. His first speech to the group forming the CCF, entitled "The False Dilemma," postulated a developing meaninglessness in humanistic terms of the political labels left and right. The twentieth century had proven, Koestler maintained, that both ends of the political spectrum were

capable of planned economic production as well as unspeakable crimes against humanity. Failing to acknowledge that social production is not necessarily realized as social appropriation of value created, this speech ignored the various senses in which planned production could be considered to be a social enterprise. Abstaining from addressing this nuance did not hinder Koestler's opportunity to secure the chairmanship of the committee that drafted the CCF's manifesto. However, his relatively long history of firm anti-Sovietism on both sides of the Atlantic and his organizational efforts at Verte Rive, as well as those in Berlin, to put the conference in motion had already secured his role in that committee. Typical of Arthur Koestler's habit of beginning things and leaving them for others to complete as well as his difficulty operating organizationally, his conduct in the CCF assured that by 1951 he would no longer be involved in its leadership. After all his preliminary efforts with the CIA and with Western intellectuals in America, France, and West Germany, by the middle 1950s Koestler would participate in the CCF only peripherally.

Between 1951 and 1952 Koestler was back in the USA. During this stay in the United States, Koestler established his international fund for refugee writers, the Fund for Intellectual Freedom. He conceived this fund as a project that would aid displaced writers by buying them typewriters and paper while providing these men with a small stipend to enable them to be settled in their new surroundings. While in America Koestler also began writing *Arrow in the Blue*, the first volume of his autobiography. In 1951 he published *The Age of Longing* and met with CIA men in the United States at the home of the man who controlled secret operations in the Soviet Union, Frank Wisner. Before he became disaffected by American lawmaking which he observed as Congress crafted a private bill granting him permanent residence status in the country, Koestler

purchased Island Farm, in the Delaware River. Then before he could turn this property into a proper domicile, he became so disillusioned by the insular political ignorance he witnessed in the United States, that he abandoned the project and returned to Europe. He would eventually disencumber himself of Island Farm.

Koestler was back in Europe living between Great Britain and France by the spring of 1952. He sold his French residence that year because its damp climate aggravated his wife's asthma. The first volume of his autobiography appeared in Britain and the USA in 1952 just as he began writing its second volume, *The Invisible Writing*. Mamaine Koestler died in England during 1954 of complications of her respiratory condition.

In 1955, with the publication of *The Trial of the Dinosaur*, Koestler swore off politics and announced that he would devote his energies to writing about scientific and philosophical topics. He, however, became embroiled two political events in 1956. One was a campaign against capital punishment in Great Britain and serialized articles that became a short book in 1956, *Reflections on Hanging*. The other was the Soviet invasion of Hungary which Koestler vigorously protested in Great Britain. Between 1958 and 1959 Koestler managed to keep his promise to eschew politics in favor of both science and philosophy. In 1958 he traveled Asia in order to research the possibility that Eastern philosophy and religion might hold answers to what he identified as Europe's spiritual crisis, and in 1959 he published *The Sleepwalkers*, his investigation into the human aspects of the science practiced by Kepler, Copernicus, and Galileo. But even then Koestler diverted some of his energy to a political cause. In 1959, together with the British Home Office, Koestler established an annual award for exemplary writing to inmates in British prisons. This prize, the Koestler Award, was granted annually to one

incarcerated author of prose or fiction judged to have written the best of all pieces submitted. The committee that made this determination was appointed by an agency of Parliament, and Koestler served on it for several years. The Koestler Award Trust survived its founder.

* * *

It was in 1949, in *Insight and Outlook*, that Arthur Koestler published his understanding of instability and posited a construction of how healthy, integrated systems function at the theoretical level. While Koestler had written *Insight and Outlook* between 1946 and 1947, he had already created the outline of his system based in post-Newtonian science in *The Yogi and the Commissar*. The latter work was serialized in several periodicals between 1941 and 1944. At least from 1941 Koestler had retained little faith in the traditional belief that science formulated laws that completely described how nature governed itself across all levels of complexity. It was, therefore, the early 1940s, not the latter part of the decade, when Koestler began to build his system based on twentieth-century science's hypothesis that the behavior of matter operated in a fashion that was determined by hierarchical organization.¹

On the foundation of science's hypothesis of a hierarchically functioning universe, Koestler would construct his detailed system that David Cesarani holds never was divorced from politics. According to Cesarani, "For Koestler, science was politics by other means." In his search for a scientifically-grounded moral ballast to bring social and political harmony to twentieth-century Europeans, and through them, to mankind, Koestler had to convince himself and others that his system was independent and in no way a rationalized or "predetermined search for answers in the service of politics."² Cesarani's argument is that Koestler's science writing was simply a means to discover

ethics in politics. “The Yogi and the Commissar (II),” the final essay in the collection of philosophical ruminations by the same name, points out how twentieth-century science had acknowledged its limitations and had seen the necessity to find new ways of knowing. Especially implicated in science’s need for new approaches was a non-materialistic morality because, according to Koestler, materialism had reached a dead end in Darwinistic sociology. Such sociology had led ethicists singularly to nihilism, a conclusion that had been anticipated by the Marquis de Sade’s “natural law” ethics, according to Koestler.³ Koestler began his philosophical system by building on familiar territory. *Insight and Outlook* started with a discussion of words, their associations, and the act of storytelling that was motivated to create the specific effect of humor. In his preface Koestler was clear that not until a second volume would he attempt through empirical support to put the theory established in the 1949 investigation “on a more scholarly basis.” He further claimed that “the terminology” of *Insight and Outlook* would be “rather loose, and [would fall] considerably short of the requirements of semantic purism.”⁴ Cesarani offers a partial elucidation of *Insight and Outlook*’s “rather loose” argument, its semantic untidiness. He explains that Koestler sweated over his proofs of the book in July 1948 in the midst of a stay in Israel during which he worked on several projects. One of these was the writing of *Promise and Fulfillment: Palestine, 1917-1949*, a work which, after it traced the history of the region with an eye on Zionist goals, concluded that the new state of Israel embodied a dysfunctional hierarchical social order. It was during this same stay in Israel that Koestler was also engaged in journalistic projects including interviews with militant Zionist Menachem Begin and Israel’s first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion. Thus it was “in the most unfavorable circumstances,” without recourse to libraries or his own copies of the reference works on which he based

his theory, that Koestler worked the final proof of his first full-scale attempt at philosophy and system building.⁵

It is clear that the social and political instability through which Koestler lived, beginning three-and-a-half decades earlier in 1914, provided a sense of imperative motivation for a project designed to rediscover a means to connect ethics with science. It is also clear that Koestler's perception of continuing instability in the world of international politics after 1945 profoundly affected this project. In continental Europe he feared the relative strength of the monolithic Soviet state which, when compared to the liberal democracies with their disillusioned and disheartened intellectuals, appeared as infinitely confident as it appeared invincible.⁶ The Cold War between the Soviet Union and an equally powerful and confident opponent did little but inspire further angst in Koestler. So how was humankind to understand its present state of instability and achieve some level of accommodation with itself?

It might appear that everything in his experience with and response to the world would channel Koestler's system-building in a direction pointing away from hierarchy. Paradoxically, however, his hatred of the pretence to total power possessed by Communist and fascist states as well as his grudging acceptance of the necessity of capitalist society to defeat fascism during the Second World War accompanied by his distrust of empire, led him straight toward hierarchy. It was in hierarchy that Koestler saw the potential for stability. The philosophical description of an ordered world, the system he proposed in *Insight and Outlook*, was one that was built on the notion that order could be maintained only through hierarchy – not just any hierarchy, however, but a ranked order kept functional by a homeostatic mechanism. Koestler's conception of healthy and proportional hierarchy was a system kept in equilibrium by a subtle degree of

autonomy among its individual parts that differentiated it from commonly understood “blind” or non-assertive feedback loops. Parts would be simultaneously subject to the authority of the whole system while each part was just as subject to its own responsibility to respond independently to local or immediate circumstance that might contradict the established rules of its system. This limited autonomy existed in order to guarantee the survival of the whole.

By the fourth chapter of *Insight and Outlook*, Koestler, in a manner suggestive of nineteenth-century idealism, set himself against established theories of human psychology. If the imperative behind Hegel’s grand philosophy was an absent German nation, Koestler’s imperative was an absent connection between science and ethics, a missing integrity of spirit. In Chapter Four of *Insight and Outlook*, entitled “Bisociation and the Operative Field,” Koestler denigrates and avoids multiple theories in favor of the over-arching integrity of some unitary theory or philosophy. In his abstract explanation of the psychological reasons that cause and allow us to laugh, Koestler sought to discover a general explanation of human cognition, consciousness, and behavior. He initiates his movement toward the general by drawing his readers’ attention to the inadequacy of other theories of comedy. He believed that an audience’s response to a writer’s and a comedian’s complete comedic performance could not be satisfactorily explained by any extant psychological theory. Koestler explained this eventuality as being due to “the inadequacy of present-day theories concerning the higher mental functions, and,” he claims, “it will lead us straight to the core of psychology of reasoning.”⁷ Here the foundations of Koestler’s theory reach back to the end of the nineteenth century as they couch his conception of human consciousness in terms that connect him with the tradition of William James. He tells his readers that since James discredited the notion that

consciousness exists as a sole linear chain, no single, consistent theory of human awareness had developed which could account for how the human mind progresses from idea to idea. In what can be read as his manifesto against the fractured nature of mid-twentieth-century behavioral sciences, Koestler wrote the following:

Psychoanalysis, Behaviourism, and the Gestalt school have treated the problem of thinking each from its specific scientific angle, but with little common ground between [sic] them, each encrusted in its particular universe of discourse, that no comprehensive view has emerged; psychology today seems on the point of not only being divided into different schools, but of splitting up into separate sciences with fields almost as mutually independent as zoology and philology. Under these circumstances a historical approach to our problem would merely obscure the issue and get us bogged in polemics and cross-reference. Instead, we shall choose the method of frontal attack, of a fresh approach, deferring our critical discussion of the existing schools, and the points of agreement and disagreement between the present theory and theirs, to Volume Two.⁸

This basic idea, that of a need for theoretical unity, would, by the end of his philosophical treatise, metamorphose into a general complaint against disunity in science.

Shifting Awareness

Koestler's discussion of the "operative field" as the ground in which consciousness operates, that is, his definition of mentality as adaptability, and not as reflex, was a fairly transparent attack on Behaviorism.⁹ He posited the complexity of coincident multiple operative fields as "schemata of mental operations [that exist as] selective matrices [sic] of acquired habits...not linear chains of conditioned reflexes, but integrated habit patterns of extreme plasticity and adaptability." Calling behavioral science to closer examination, he continued, "The implicit rules of these habit manipulations can usually only be made explicit under the analytical microscope of the logician or semanticist."¹⁰ Although Koestler would forgo polemics as he indicated in the beginning of *Insight and Outlook* with his reference to William James, it would prove

impossible for him to refrain from critiquing established schools of psychology in the course of his own theory-building enterprise.

Koestler defined the operative field, the “self-consistent and ‘homogeneous’ systems” of human consciousness, as an arena in which our minds associate or connect ideas through a process of habituation within specific and discrete contexts.¹¹ He conceived these fields as different planes or levels of awareness that may be crossed by independent strands of thought during the linear passage of time. *Insight and Outlook* explains that on occasion ideas “bisociate” or jump from one contextual plane to another, completely unrelated, contextual plane. The book defines “bisociation” as the simultaneous association of an idea or character “with two independent and mutually exclusive mental fields. [or] *Any mental occurrence simultaneously associated with two habitually incompatible contexts.*”¹² When bisociation occurs, the result is a new insight or “flash,” as he put it. We are all capable of experiencing these leaps from one context to another through the links established by ideas that normally are associated only with one of a multiplicity of contexts. When listening to a joke, Koestler maintains, “flash” is the point at which the narrative breaks the rising tension, when unexpected details of the story make leaps from one context to another and cause listeners to burst into laughter as they marvel at the unexpected connections.¹³

It is apparent that as he built his philosophical system Koestler equated levels of human awareness with distinct tiers in hierarchical social structures. He is somewhat vague about the precise transference of his concepts of hierarchically structured awareness of the individual human being to hierarchically ordered social institutions. Koestler is equally vague about the precise functioning of the bisociative process at the social level. It is nevertheless quite conceivable that Koestler thought of political

accommodation and compromise as an instance of bisociation within the body politic. This seems to be the only way to build bridges between his many comments on psychology and those concerning modern society. In this way we can understand Koestler's construction of the political world after 1940 as a form of twentieth-century Burkean political theory in which bisociation, through accretive compromise and accommodation, facilitates orderly, integrative social change.

In the course of his investigation, Koestler posited two fundamental emotional states in humankind: an ego drive to assert oneself and a counter-drive to sublimate the ego and transcend the self. The latter, he believed, connects each of us with humanity and ultimately with the universe. Koestler equates it with Romain Rolland's notion of the "oceanic feeling" that speaks to intuitions of religious or transcendental integrity with nature as well as with society. The tendencies of self-assertion and self-transcendence necessitate balance in order for the maintenance of structure and peace.¹⁴ To construct a complete system, Koestler found it necessary to propose not only a "geometry of laughter," but also one of crying. He defined crying as "a discharge reflex of redundant or frustrated self-transcending emotions." Laughing, on the other hand, he described as a discharge reflex for the self-asserting emotions. These differing emotional repositories necessitated and reflected different sets of geometrical "shapes." Crying possessed an "associative geometry" which allowed one to recall sad experiences or to empathize with his fellow creatures, and laughing possessed a "bisociative geometry" which acted as a safety valve for accumulated self-assertive emotions.¹⁵

It was necessary for Koestler to postulate a psychological mechanism that could account for flashes of insight into the ironies and contradictions that constitute humor and, more generally, creativity. In the same manner that he coined the concept

bisociation for the connection of dissimilar contexts, Koestler created a term for the constituent parts that functioned to integrate elements into operating wholes. These were his “holons.” These independent, but integrated, component parts of wholes maintained two-way hierarchical relationships, he claimed. They were self-sufficient wholes when looking downward and dependent parts when looking upward in a hierarchy.¹⁶ In philosophical terms the concept of the holon-integrated hierarchy functioned in the following manner:

In the evolutionary hierarchy, each level has its own set of integrative laws, or “organizing relations”; on each level these are more complex than on the previous one. They imply the laws of the next lower level (as, for example, biology implies the laws of chemistry, which in turn implies the laws of physics), but they cannot be reduced to, or predicted from the lower level. Hence a thing or part will enter into different relations and behave in a different way according to the integrative laws to which it is submitted: an atom of carbon will behave differently in a heap of coal dust, in an inorganic compound, or in a protein molecule. In short, the organism in its totality is as essential to an explanation of its elements, as its elements are to an explanation of the organism”.¹⁷

The Holon, thus defined, constituted the basic component of Koestler’s hierarchical scheme of the cosmos, his Janus-faced key to understanding wholes in general – not just wholes of human cognition – as integrated, functioning systems.

Later in his discursively philosophic volume, Koestler would offer a rubric for analyzing patterns of thought in comedy or literature. He formulates the connection between intellectuation and emotion as they exist in art in the following manner: “*In this simultaneous occurrence of intellectual illumination and emotional expansion, which are but two aspects of the same bisociative process, lies the essence of the aesthetic experience.*”¹⁸ Koestler does this after he operationally defines the emotive value in art as the “*capacity to facilitate the generation and consummation of self-transcending impulses*” and after he associates the intellectual and emotive aspects of aesthetic

experience.¹⁹ These, one rational, the other irrational, exist as the bisociative elaboration of abstract thought. In order to follow the flow of thought as it makes its way from the deeper to the more apparent psychological levels in stories, he says, we should, first, describe the operative field in which thought originates and then exists in narrative. Second, we should analyze the emotive content of thought in fiction and assign some value to it. Third, we should scrutinize the technical criteria of narrative in regard to a narrative's a) originality of thought, b) its relevance to a time-bound audience, and c) its economy of language, situations, and setting.²⁰

One of many consequences of this schema was the claim made by Koestler that the self-assertive tendency is incapable of accommodating bisociative functioning. The fourth and final part of *Insight and Outlook*, entitled "The Emotive Arts," begins by positing an organizational structure reminiscent of the Freudian model of Ego and Id. There Koestler argues that self-assertive impulses cannot jump from one operative field to another; they are emotions incapable of bisociation. On the other hand, he claims that self-transcendent thought is ideally suited to bisociation. He expresses his postulate this way,

The Self-transcending emotions, when bisociation occurs, do not become detached from thought, but follow it loyally to the new field.

We are led to expect that the integrative impulses are more supple and malleable, less 'massive' and inert, easier directed by thought than aggressive-defensive ones.²¹

In the chapter that follows the above expression of the supple and integrative qualities of the self-transcendent emotions with the bisociative thinking process, *Insight and Outlook* returns to its author's familiar ground, the world of letters. Chapter Twenty-one, "Patterns of Illusion," contains a fine description of literature in terms of the

Koestlerian Gestalt of bisociative, holistic analysis. It follows that literature engenders an integrative tendency simply by virtue of its social nature. Koestler shows fiction to be a sharing of thought between an author and audience that reaches the level of the transcendent, a communicative enterprise that yearns for transference of experience from the writer to the reader or listener.²²

It is through the direct speech of characters, Koestler claims, that the artist creates the primary means of establishing the “here and now” settings in the individual minds of audience members. It is through the artist’s representation of his own experiences that imagination gives rise to a portrayal of a perceived “nature of things” for the audience which communicates a sense of the “then and there.”²³ Bisociation, Koestler maintains, is the intersection of the “here and now” with the “then and there” in a reader’s, viewers, or listener’s mind. *Insight and Outlook* summarizes the transcendent communicative powers of fiction in the following manner:

The locus of self-assertive, aggressive behaviour is always in the Here and Now; and the transfer of interest and emotion to remote persons and locations is in itself an act of self-transcendence in the literal sense...²⁴

Fiction is, therefore, a vehicle of self-transcendence or

a means for the actualization of man’s integrative tendencies, whose unfolding is frustrated in the struggles of everyday life by self-assertive impulses. In the absence of stimuli for his egotism [cut off from his routine], man is an altruist. Whenever he changes from his business clothes into a dark suit and goes to the theatre, he at once shows himself capable of taking a strong and entirely unselfish interest in the destinies of persons on the stage.²⁵

It appears that by 1949 Arthur Koestler believed that exposure to the creative mind of the artist, the vicarious experience achieved through intersecting imaginations, acted as a social leavening agent which functioned as a necessary cause of social balance and peace.

While Koestler's insights into humor and, more generally, into creativity owe a debt to Sigmund Freud, Koestler reaches some conclusions that oppose those held by the Freudian branch of psychoanalysis. In particular, Koestler questioned the validity of the notion of the death wish. At the simplest observational level, he notes that nowhere else in biology can we witness plant or animal behavior that follows a path of "destruction for destruction's sake."²⁶ Taking the long view, *Insight and Outlook* understands the unstable social equilibrium during the twentieth century in the West as symptomatic of hyper-excitation caused by "unheard of concentration of stimuli for the competitive and acquisitive drives" facilitated by unbalanced power of industrial and finance capital.²⁷ The result of such skewed and concentrated power was disastrous, Koestler argued. The influence of modern communication and technology, rendered as radio and print communication (advertisement and propaganda) and efficient weaponry (ultimately, atomic fission), "amplify our aggressive and dominative impulses" to an unhealthy extent.²⁸ This vein of Koestler's argument concluded with a critique of one of Freud's later, but nevertheless fundamental, conceptualizations about the human psyche. He said,

If our conclusions are correct, then the symptoms which characterize the Western crisis, such as ruthless competition, war, and political fanaticism, are the natural responses of the self-assertive tendency in man to hyperstimulation [sic] and abnormal stresses in his environment – and not, as Freud suggested, the release of an inherent destructive tendency or death-wish.²⁹

And neither religion nor mysticism was equal to the challenge of correcting the imbalance in Western civilization, he concluded. Politics was no better fit to renew balance. The misfit among productive capacity, social institutions, and social values, especially that of war, was, by the twentieth century, simply too severe to enable social theorists to graft a new system of morality onto Western society via political schemes.³⁰

As can be seen, Koestler, unlike Freud, would privilege the social over the individual. It is quite understandable that as a result of his experiences in a dehumanizing social order, Koestler would focus on the rate of social change in the modern world and conclude that communication media helped put self-transcendence to counter-productive purposes in twentieth-century Europe. If mass media had an equal potentiality to put communication to positive, integrative purposes, Koestler fails to recognize or comment upon such possibilities. He unequivocally paints twentieth-century communication media and capital concentration as singularly dysfunctional:

...Western man during the past three centuries has lived in an unstable environment which was changing through his own activities at a biologically unprecedented rate. This is true both of his relations with nature, constantly modified by applied science, and with other men, constantly modified by social changes. This unstable equilibrium of the social whole produced excitations and stresses in the individual part such as no other species and no other civilization has experienced before. Books, magazines, films serve as accumulators of constant sexual overstimulation [sic]; industrial and finance capital represent an unheard-of concentration of stimuli for the competitive and acquisitive drives; modern weapons, radio and press amplify our aggressive and dominative impulses. If a Frankenstein wanted to transform a sixteenth century [sic] artisan into a twentieth century [sic] business executive by purely biochemical means, then, taking only the three factors mentioned into account, he would have to feed him on aphrodisiacs, pump him with adrenalin [sic], and amplify his voice and muscular strength at a ratio of about a thousand to one.³¹

Insight and Outlook explained that social evolution should not be considered to exist as a linear process “with discontent through instinct renunciation increasing in direct ratio to [society’s] progress.”³² In periods of crisis, here read as over-emotional and under-rational responses or behaviors, longer integrative social development like the kind represented by Judeo-Christian ethics and humanistic ideologies could be contradicted by “spectacular regressions” such as “primitive herd” or “rigid monoaxiate tyrannies” that had been given expression during the twentieth century.³³ These anti-social or disintegrative developments resulted from the unnatural, quickened pace of change in the

twentieth century, Koestler concluded, and not from any death-wish put to inevitable nihilistic purposes. As already witnessed, the pace of changes created by mankind's intellectual potential was a theme in Koestler's analysis of twentieth-century man. Here, in *Insight and Outlook*, he transparently expresses this theme as Western culture being unequal to the task of assimilating changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution:

Before the Western world had time to adapt its social structure to the invention of the mechanical loom, the steam engine was invented; when it had only begun to digest the consequences of this, other profound environmental upheavals, culminating in the release of nuclear energy, made all previous adjustments illusory.³⁴

In the course of his analysis of Western social progress, Koestler would, at least temporarily, renounce nineteenth-century liberal thought. "Social integration cannot be achieved by a merely rational appeal to enlightened self-interest," he would warn.³⁵ Socialism, he would continue, was just as rooted in the unrealistic optimism and idealized power of reason given such confident expression by the Enlightenment as was nineteenth-century liberalism. Socialism, and by logical regression, liberalism, could not fill the emotional void left by the declining influence of Christianity. The Enlightenment, liberalism, and socialism were all flawed by an "optimistic fallacy" that posited mankind's evolution as one destined for intellectual perfection, improving quality of life, political equality, and unmitigated social peace.³⁶ Utilitarianism was just as fallacious as the Pollyanna schemes proffered by the Enlightenment, by liberalism, or by socialism. There was no guarantee that the accumulation of knowledge would arithmetically achieve social progress. Koestler's experience during the first half of the twentieth century made this conclusion axiomatic, and his angst over the continuance of the existence of the species *Homo-sapiens* transformed it, for him, into a dangerous delusion.

By the end of the third part of *Insight and Outlook* Koestler would regain a sense of optimism, however. His search for integrity in Western civilization, which he began with an analysis of humor at the levels of individual person and social psychology, arrived at a prognostication of spiritual renewal that he claimed he could already see outlined in extant science. He reminded his readers that beginning in the late nineteenth century all of Western science “from physics to psychology” had begun to abandon its mechanistic philosophy in favor of various holistic appreciations of nature. He predicted that as science came to understand the world more from a holistic perspective, it would abandon its pretense to ethical neutrality in favor of a union between knowledge and faith. Such a shift, Koestler maintained, would take the form of

the growing realization that the explanations of ultimate reality which science has to offer are mere anthropomorphic projections, just as the explanations of religion were. The primitive created gods and idols in his own image; the scientist made models of atoms, germ cells, brain processes by projecting his narrow spacio-temporal experiences of the phenomenal world, of substance, energy, and causation, into spheres where they do not apply. But gradually, since the last century, the models have collapsed as the idols once did.”³⁷

Science, thus conceived, was, no less than humor or literature, a transcendent and humanistic enterprise based on creative thought which related various operative fields of consciousness and which still, ultimately, held the potential of progressive prospects for humankind. By viewing Western science as a cultural construct, Arthur Koestler returned it to the sense of optimism in which it had developed since the eighteenth century. He achieved a spirit of optimism, however, by divorcing Western science from its deterministic traditions established during the Enlightenment. While the science projected by Koestler was as yet something merely implied and largely unseen, his liberal hopefulness had again remained evident, unfolded, and exposed to the light.

Dreaming Associations

Arthur Koestler held fast to the structure and components of his system for the remainder of his writing career. A decade after the publication of *Insight and Outlook*, he applied his notion of bisociation to a general explanation of the creative process that is typically behind discoveries made by the pioneers and geniuses of science. In *The Sleepwalkers: a history of man's changing vision of the Universe* (1959), an investigation into the interrelationship of the ideas as well as the personalities of Copernicus, Tycho de Brahe, Kepler, Galileo, and ultimately Newton, bisociation plays a central role. After a discussion of the intuitive nature of Kepler's commitment to a heliocentric view of the solar system based on elliptical orbits of the planets, Koestler explains that ingenious insights are often based not in reason at all. Ingenuity, he argues, commonly rests on the intuition that often results from the condensation of habituated experience saturated with a sense of knowing that bears little or no relation to logic. He characterizes Kepler's creative solution to the problem presented by Copernicus's circular orbits of the planets in the following manner. Here Koestler typically puts metaphor to good use.

What enabled him [Kepler] to recognize instantly his chance when the number 0.00429 turned up in an unexpected context was the fact that not only his waking mind, but his sleepwalking unconscious self was saturated with every conceivable aspect of his problem, not only with the numerical data and ratios, but also with an intuitive 'feel' of the physical forces, and of the Gestalt configurations which it involved. A locksmith who opens a complicated lock with a crude piece of bent wire is not guided by logic, but by the unconscious residue of countless past experiences with locks, which lend his touch a wisdom that his reason does not pose. It is perhaps that intermittent flicker of an overall vision which accounts for the mutually compensatory nature of Kepler's mistakes, as if some balancing reflex or 'backfeed' mechanism had been at work in his unconscious mind.³⁸

Koestler shows that there had to be more to Kepler's genius than the condensation of experience, however. In *The Sleepwalkers* he employed recorded accounts of the lives and work of the men he investigated as well as discussions of the power of psychological processes like dreams. He eavesdrops on Kepler's notebooks, for instance, and makes statements concerning the possibilities of the subconscious mind. Koestler's purpose was to explain how the ideas of these men could develop and then intersect as they created the modern heliocentric theory of the solar system and again, ultimately, modern theoretical physics. Of key interest in this volume is Kepler's discovery that elliptical orbits of the planets explained the apparent dissonance between observed periods of planetary movement and Copernicus's heliocentric system based on the postulation of circular orbits. Koestler shows that Kepler's notebooks hold faulty equations which Kepler subconsciously refused to recognize as such because of the strength of his intuition that ellipses made the heliocentric system work. Koestler argues that not until the process of bisociation was allowed to work could Kepler make his unorthodox and obstinate discovery concerning elliptical orbits. Kepler's mind had to allow ideas to jump from one context to another. In this case his unconscious mind had to allow his mathematical knowledge of ellipses to jump to the separate context or field of his knowledge of the observations of planetary periods in the night sky. Only such a bisociative leap, a powerful hunch, Koestler argues, could enable Kepler to intuitively arrive at his elliptical solution to the dissonance between the circular theory of orbits and the observed planetary movement in his science.

Koestler imagines how Kepler could possibly have discovered the ellipticity of the solar system's orbiting bodies as he accounts for Kepler's genius thusly:

This operation of removing a problem from its traditional context, looking at it through glasses of a different colour as it were, has always seemed to me of the very essence of the creative process. It leads not only to a reevaluation of the problem itself, but often to a synthesis of much wider consequences, brought about by a fusion of two previously unrelated frames of reference. In our case, the orbit of Mars became the unifying link between the two formerly separate realms of physics and cosmology.³⁹

The Sleepwalkers' description of the operative bisociation in Kepler's mind, a Medieval mind that was void of any knowledge of momentum as a force or even of the existence of gravity, is convincing. Koestler's psychological explanation of the progress in physics and cosmology made during the early stages of the Scientific Revolution would find resonance in later explanations, such as Thomas Kuhn's, of how scientific discoveries and progress in knowledge come about.

By the middle of his book Koestler could offer an explanation of Isaac Newton's genius in the continuing construction of mankind's understanding of the cosmos and, through that explanation, offer a comment on the dangers of orthodoxy as well as the need for non-conventional ideas to assure progress in science. *The Sleepwalkers* reveals how Newton's theory resulted from a combination of Kepler's departure in the realm of heliocentric systems, elliptically orbiting planets, and Galileo's departure in dynamics of orthodox physics, that the earth rotates on its axis. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, orthodoxy represented a roadblock that had to be obliterated, Koestler's argument goes. Someone had to reject both the notions of planets orbiting the sun in perfect circles and of the earth standing static on its axis. Koestler generalized that, "A new evolutionary departure is only possible after a certain amount of de-differentiation, a cracking and thawing of the frozen structures resulting from isolated, over-specialized developments."⁴⁰

It must be reiterated that Koestler's vision of science was a humanistic one. His experience with orthodoxy in Comintern politics registered sympathetically with his investigation of the role of orthodoxy in the creation of modern physics; his knowledge, born of experience, jumped from one context the other in his own mind. Koestler's narrative of how Western science progressed was in a fundamental way an application of his own social experience in the twentieth century. *The Sleepwalkers* relates that experience to what he learned had been the experiences of scientists during the Scientific Revolution. He could pronounce with the certitude of his own way of knowing that genius generally possesses the ability to be simultaneously suspect of orthodoxy and credulous in regard to new, novel ideas. It was Koestler's point that such psychological capabilities, whether comfortable for those who hold them or not, enable individuals to make associative leaps from one idea to another and from one context to another while they enable people to act simultaneously in objective and subjective manners. Put another way, the tension between these two capabilities enables us to be human in regard to the utilization of our powers of imagination. Koestler's own experience both in the political realities of twentieth-century Europe and in his role as writer of psychological novels taught him the central importance of the "crucial capacity of perceiving a familiar object, situation, problem, or collection of data, in a sudden new light or context."⁴¹ He could transfer his own experiences and feelings of being the social outsider into conclusions about how scientists construct their understanding of the universe creatively and continuously. This aspect of reality, the force of convention or the existence of social pressure among scientists to maintain orthodoxy, and the inevitability that some practitioners of this human enterprise will act as renegades, became the subject of one of his later works of fiction, *The Call Girls: A Tragi-Comedy* (1972). Koestler's humanistic

approach to what is taken as the rational practice of science shows that flights of fancy and leaps of the imagination have always been just as important to the scientist as they have been to the comedian.

Science, because it is so human, necessitates a mixing of what are taken in orthodox circles to be mutually exclusive planes of thought. In *Insight and Outlook* Koestler refers to a need within creative people to contaminate one field of thought with another field that remains distinct and unconnected to it in any rational manner. This desire can be experienced as a stress commonly felt in the awareness that two planes of separate existence occasionally cry to be blended. Only by relenting in this stress do creative people, be they concerned with religion, science, or art, achieve a cathartic release from what they experience as a dangerous and negative impulse to pollute one realm of thought with another, Koestler says. Creative people experience this catharsis in the piecemeal, bisociative sparks that generate solutions to problems. They experience these sparks as the seminal insights that are achieved by the imaginative mixing of heterogeneous realms of inquiry.⁴² Koestler continues his characterization of creativity by noting that genius itself refuses to reside in the perfected execution of standardized technique, convention, or practice. When any human endeavor becomes standardized, when it becomes orthodox, genius dies on its vine. In art this phenomenon takes shape in the form of staid, predictable conventions that come to bore people, and Koestler claims that when any technique becomes the norm, humanity yearns for genius to improve upon it. “The principal mark of genius,” Koestler tells us, “is not perfection, but originality.”⁴³

Arthur Koestler renounced the equation of science with reason and of art with intuition. He refers to these ideas as “the oldest popular fallacies” and is adamant that

“no discovery was ever made by logical deduction.”⁴⁴ In spite of this formula’s improbable uniform application, he is clear in his conviction that all advancements in science derive to some extent and at some level from the operation of the non-reasoning capabilities. Scientific progress is the fruit of the unconscious mind. It results from the self-same mental process that is responsible for the existence of objects of art and cerebral wit.⁴⁵ The latter aspect of human cognition, humor, can be the outcome of the bisociative disruption of relatively banal fields of thought, Koestler claims. Bisociated thoughts may take the form of playful daydreaming as our minds follow paths of least resistance and jump from one operative field to another. This tendency, so characteristic of human cognition, Koestler believes, serves a positive affective function, allowing our minds to play with divergent ideas or to place ideas in strange contexts. Occasionally, however, bisociated thoughts leave the playful, affective realm of human consciousness and enliven the revolutionary junctures where creative synthesis embodies discovery or invention.⁴⁶

Once again revealing his familiarity with Freudian psychoanalysis, Koestler views sleep and dreaming as serving a creative, regenerative function. In sleep and in dreams, he explains, our minds revisit old experiences or employ preconscious mechanisms to integrate and repair the stresses and damage our psyches suffer during our waking, diurnal states.⁴⁷ Koestler recognizes that the capacity mankind has for dreaming during waking hours is no less functional than nocturnal dreaming. Chapter Twenty-four of *Insight and Outlook*, “Sources of Poetic Inspiration,” presents sleep dreaming and daydreaming as functional equivalents when it comes to the flashes of insight they are both capable of producing. Daydreamers can experience trance-like states of mind that close the mind to extraneous stimuli not associated with fixated thoughts.⁴⁸ This is the

sense in which Koestler used the notion of sleepwalking in his investigation of Kepler's scientific genius. According to Koestler, dreaming, whether it be in waking or sleeping states, possesses a subconscious process in which "an extraneous selective operator" chooses associative connections that the conscious mind would reject and view as unnatural or nonsensical, and, one could add, dangerous.⁴⁹

As we have seen, it is not necessary for an unconscious mind to think with unmitigated reason or utility. It is also possible for a conscious mind to focus excessively on something and lose its grasp on it. In his analysis of habituation and the tendency of consciousness to atrophy under the influence of the regularization of patterns, Koestler takes a Gestalt approach to describing the fluid operation of the waking, conscious mind. On one hand he points to the ability of our minds to attend selectively to the ideas that transmit themselves from the printed page to our awareness. While reading we lose track of the precise shapes of the single letters that form the words which hold the abstractions that enter our brains and allow us to weave meaning, Koestler reminds us.⁵⁰ On the other hand, he recalls for his own readers that experiments in human psychology had shown that we need several parts of the cognitive field for our vision to function properly. If we focus too intently on a single object, our brains can distort reality and see things that are not there.⁵¹ In each instance balance and context are necessary for proper functioning of human cognition and perception.

So habituation does have its place; it is necessary for normal functioning in human interaction with the environment. "Mastery of the code and stability of the environment are obvious factors which lead to the formation of habit" which are a requisite in normal human functioning.⁵² Too much stability, Koestler argues, is not a good thing, because habit-formation, he continues, "is accompanied by a gradual

dimming and darkening of the lights of awareness.”⁵³ This assertion insinuates that what is true for the individual holds true for the collective enterprise of science. Too much routine and convention lead to the diminution of a science’s active understanding of nature. There is an implicit dialectic in this analysis. As convention and stability come to dominate the practice of a given science, the science’s vitality begins to suffer. At a certain point adherence to orthodox beliefs about the material world make theoretical science experience a death. Its vitality wanes and a longing for fresh insights of human imagination makes itself felt.

Just as an individual can literally lose sight if he focuses his eyes too intently on an object, a vital science can lose touch with deeper and developing understandings of its subject if its practitioners become too specialized. Specialization can threaten vitality. *Drinkers of Infinity* (1968), a collection of essays on spirituality, politics, philosophy, literary criticism, and science written by Koestler between 1955 and 1967, shows how overspecialization works to block scientific creativity. One essay in this volume, “Biological and Mental Evolution: an Exercise in Analogy,” a summary of Koestler’s address during the bicentennial celebration of the birth of James Smithson, delivered at the Smithsonian Institute in September 1965, links the pedant’s mind-set with an overspecialized animal.⁵⁴ Accordingly, the specialized scientist, or humanist for that matter, is like the Koala bear that evolved to feed on a single species of plant, the eucalyptus, and consequently continuously lives on the brink of extinction.⁵⁵ There is little glaring insight in the above realization. However, for Arthur Koestler, it represents another instance of a vestigial remain from the nineteenth century in his consciousness. In the period in which he lived, an age increasingly characterized by specialization, Koestler obstinately followed the path of a generalist. Some would view this fact

alternately as simply happenstance or as Koestler's tendency toward rebelliousness. We should not take the fact that Koestler was, in Harold Harris's conception "astride two cultures," with one foot in the humanities and another in the sciences, for granted.⁵⁶ It strikes at the heart of his being. Much of Koestler's writing served the purpose of attempting to tie an increasingly fractured culture back together. This effort constitutes a large share of the motivation behind his longing for spiritual integrity in European culture and is deeply implicated in the liberal imperatives as well as in the valuation of the individual, so alienated and abused by mass society, that defined so much of Koestler's writing. We should try not to lose sight of the fact that his formative years were spent in the Victorian setting of the long nineteenth century. It is significant that Koestler's initiation into the world, his acculturation, served to create a personality that eschewed the narrowness of specialization and came to perceive grave danger in the compartmentalization of the bureaucratic mind. It is precisely this insistence on breadth and the refusal of the blinkered perspective engendered by specialization that distinguishes Arthur Koestler from his contemporaries, many of whom followed a different path from the nineteenth into the twentieth century.

Willing Existence

Arthur Koestler modulated his distrust of specialization into a critique of Darwin's theory of natural selection which was really, in Koestler's case, a variation on the theme of anti-determinism.⁵⁷ He refused to believe that random and blind mutation was the sole mechanism behind evolution, and he preferred a conception of life acting on, rather than reacting to, its environment. He needed to believe that life asserted itself and could not accept the premise that life responded passively to what it encountered. Koestler was not comfortable with the idea that life resulted from cosmic accidents.

Neither was he at ease with the idea that life resulted from some completely predetermined design.

On one level, Koestler's argument in favor of a theory of evolution opposed to simple, mechanistic selection by nature was associated with a need to believe in the notion of agency in the cosmos. The idea of agency could, however, still make Koestler ill at ease. He seems to have experienced an approach-avoidance response to both theodicy and determinacy. Thus it appears that he was unsure about his own need to believe in a god. It is quite clear that Arthur Koestler was not sure about the necessity for mankind to believe in an uncaused cause that possessed some teleological design which drove the cosmos. This push and pull was where his longing for spiritual integrity in the age of science met his desire to know that individual men had value and dignity. Koestler's experiences had taught him to esteem the ability of individual men to affect their own destinies; he had to privilege their power to influence the immediate social environments in which they lived their lives.

Being thus unsure about his relation to religion and teleology, Koestler, nevertheless, claimed in his 1965 address to the Smithsonian Institution that it was possible to reject the notion of the predominance of random mutation in evolution "without invoking a *deus ex machina*, or a Socratic *daimon* [alternately a devil or a minor Greek deity]." ⁵⁸ He was indeed optimistic that a means to reconcile materialistic science and spirituality existed. He was hopeful that such a means would preserve human dignity through an assertive conception of life. Koestler appeared to skirt an attraction for the Lamarckian theory of evolution throughout the latter stage of his writing career, but what he really desired was the discovery that life was, if not purposeful, at least willful. This attitude put him in the company of the existentialists with whom he had other, largely

political disagreements. At a minimum Koestler longed for science to substantiate an active, rather than a passive, trial-and-error accumulation of knowledge that aided the higher forms of life in their struggle to survive through confronting the opportunities offered by their environments. Ideally, he hoped science could locate an intuitive ability in intelligent life below the level of Homo-sapiens to employ bisociative powers in problem solving without resorting to trials. Koestler did not think that human thought was singularly capable of discovery. He insisted that “while random events no doubt play an important part in the picture, that is not all there is to it.”⁵⁹

By 1964, fifteen years after the publication of *Insight and Outlook*, Koestler’s *The Act of Creation* exclaimed, “A variable environment calls for flexible strategies, for behavioural matrices [sic] with sufficient degrees of freedom to cope with the changing conditions. Paranormal [significantly out-of-the-ordinary] challenges call for a kind of super-flexibility, for *adaptations of a second order which enable the animal to carry out major reorganizations on several levels of its structural or functional hierarchies.*”⁶⁰

These italicized words are an example of how Koestler would occasionally come quite close to endorsing Lamarckism.⁶¹ Again, the words emphasized above by the present writer indicate a capability within animate life to simultaneously effect “several levels” of strategies that have evolved to assure survival. The quoted words indicate something Arthur Koestler longed for, something he hoped empirical science could validate: an extended capability possessed by living creatures to willfully initiate strategy changes when something in them determines that the environment demands a new response or survival tactic.

Such risky, if not completely unsupportable, statements represent two forces within Koestler. First, he felt a fundamental need, born of the political experience he

shared with so many of his fellow twentieth-century Europeans, to assert the belief that individual members of his own species should be guaranteed the right and the power to influence their own destinies. These people should not be left to the vagaries of mass politics, the “historic necessities” of ideologies, or the brutality of dictators. Secondly, Koestler felt a strong sense of revulsion for the implications of the research that was being carried out by behaviorist psychologists which, in his mind, reduced mankind to a species of slavish automatons in a manner that was so reminiscent of how Communism and fascism treated his contemporaries. In Enlightenment and liberal traditions, Koestler had hoped for much more and expected much better for his fellow creatures.

Koestler’s argument against random mutation as the sole mechanism of natural selection, his argument for life as assertiveness, could rise to the level of the convincing. In one part of *The Act of Creation*’s third chapter, “Dynamic Equilibrium and Regenerative Potential,” a section that bore the subtitle “Acting and Reacting,” Koestler employed the conception of life used by G. E. Coghill in *Anatomy and the Problem of Behaviour* (1929). This book on psychology conceptualized the relationship of living creatures to their environments with the following formula: “The Organism acts on the environment before it reacts to the environment.”⁶² From this notion of assertive life, Koestler generated his own definition of life that belied its connection to post-modern physics and which came quite close to an articulation of chaos theory. He defined life as “the emergence of spontaneous, organized exertion to maintain and reproduce originally unstable forms of equilibrium in a statistically improbable system in the teeth of an environment governed by the laws of probability.”⁶³ He extended this definition to include the creation of an internal environment designed to confront the external environment. This newly conceived definition of life is one in which vital, living force

possesses the temporary ability to defy entropy as “biological clocks replace astronomical clocks, and hierarchic order reigns supreme.”⁶⁴

As the passage quoted above continues, Koestler eventually paints life as confronting its environment with what we might characterize as a defiant, existential agency. In the course of describing his version of the assertive nature of life, Koestler calls on nuance to redefine the traditional understanding of adaptation:

If all these processes [morphogenesis, maturation, reproduction, all regulated by bio-clocks] are to be lumped together under the portmanteau word ‘adaptation’, then we must call it an adaptation of a special kind, *on the organism’s own terms*; after all, the perfect adaptation of our organism to the temperature and chemistry of the environment is to die. In fact, the animal does not merely adapt to the environment, but constantly adapts the environment to itself. It eats environment, drinks environment, fights and mates environment, burrows and builds in the environment; it modifies, dismantles, analyses, and reassembles it after its own fashion, converting ‘noise’ into ‘information’.⁶⁵

Then after bringing his readers’ attention to R. S. Woodworth’s notion that perception is basically directed by the desire or will to perceive, Koestler calls on his gift for metaphor as he summarizes his argument for life as assertion. Life, he claims, is like litigants in court who address not each other, but the presiding judge. To live is thereby no longer to be viewed as the struggle among individual organisms for scarce food. Survival is not conceived in terms of competitive struggle to determine what is the fittest life form for a particular environment; life is defined as the organism addressing its environment.⁶⁶

As we have already seen numerous times, it was quite characteristic of Koestler to reach back into European history in order to afford his readers the deepest possible understanding of the issues he presents to them. In an essay entitled “Mysterium Tremendum,” a review of Sir Alistar Hardy’s Gifford Lectures on Natural Theology reprinted in *Drinkers of Infinity*, Koestler reveals how Hardy took exception to the idea that evolution’s prime, if not singular, motive was the selection pressure presented to

species by the environment.⁶⁷ In keeping with the Gifford Lecture's *raison d'être*, theodicy was implicit in Hardy's questioning of New Darwinism's insistence on blind chance as evolution's only means of advancement, but, like Koestler and the founders of the symposium, Professor Hardy required that empirical science validate agency in nature's unfolding. While he questioned random mutation as evolution's sole path, Hardy emphasized animal behavior that evinced restless exploration of the environment. He pointed to what could be considered an example of *élan vital* within the assertive behavior in which a "perceiving animal...discovers new ways of living, new sources of food...giving us the lines of runners, climbers, burrowers, swimmers, and conquerors of the air."⁶⁸

Koestler endorsed Hardy's view, but not without caveat. He admitted that inheritance of acquired traits would provide, what was from his perspective, "a reassuring and sensible view of evolution as the result of learning-from-experience," but he admitted that firm evidence for a connection between learned behavior and an animal's genes did not yet exist. Koestler reveals the lengths to which Hardy's claim extended. Hardy held out the possibility that evolution acted through the agency of animate behavior to include the mechanism of telepathic communication. Hardy claimed that such communication must be general in animal populations. Koestler neither chides nor directly supports this suggestion. He simply underscores the idea that telepathic communication is akin to Jung's notion of the collective unconscious, a "psychic blueprint" "widespread in the animal kingdom." Koestler does not ridicule the conclusion that animals communicate, as it were, through the ether.⁶⁹

Koestler explains that long after Darwin's theory of natural selection had become orthodox, British scientists had continued to debate the possibilities of evolution

advancing through the assertive behavior among life forms that was somehow transmitted genetically from one generation to the next. The notion of “pioneer work” among animals achieved through insight and then sanctioned by an animal’s genes which transmit the print for the new behavior had long been considered a worthy topic of inquiry. Evolution through animate agency had been a subject pondered by James M. Baldwin and Lloyd Morgan at the turn of the century as well as by a Professor Waddington as late as the mid-twentieth century. Baldwin and Morgan referred to their theory as “organic selection” and Waddington to his as “genetic assimilation.” Koestler responds to their and to Hardy’s ideas with the hope that a revolution in biological science might be in the making because, as he underscored for his readers, such revolutions in the past had been “due not to the discovery of new facts but to a shift in emphasis.”⁷⁰

In 1971, continuing a defense of the maverick and an attack on orthodoxy, Koestler’s *The Case of the Mid-wife Toad* again stressed the humanistic side of science. *The Case of the Mid-wife Toad* tells in detail the story of Austrian biologist Paul Kammerer, whose persecution at the hands of narrow-minded orthodox scientists in England, Koestler contends, led to his suicide. Kammerer’s experiments, which Kammerer claimed (and Koestler accepted) established animate agency in the mid-wife toad, were determined to have been faked by British establishment scientists. The latter men refused to believe that the male mid-wife toad developed environmentally determined structures on its forelimbs to aid in its reproduction. Kammerer contended that he had proven that in certain conditions of high humidity the male mid-wife toad grew bony structures that enabled it to hold on to a slippery female during copulation. British scientists discounted Kammerer’s degenerated samples of thorny-limbed

specimens as substantiation of the latter's claim that the environment triggered the development of ancillary reproductive structures. Koestler paints this incredulity among British biologists as a simple refusal to accept the idea of the animal's capability to respond to new environmental conditions in an ersatz fashion.

At the end of his book on Kammerer, Koestler's science-as-culture position identifies a "central dogma" in genetic science that held that the flow of information was a one-way stream in which codes went from DNA to proteins, but not in any fashion in the opposite direction. Koestler maintained the possibility that DNA could be copied from RNA and cites evidence accumulated in 1970 that certain cancer-causing viruses could produce their own DNA.⁷¹ He quotes biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy that Neo-Darwinian science was based as much in sociology as in empirical evidence. According to Bertalanffy, "Society and science have been too steeped in the ideas of mechanism, utilitarianism and the economic process of free competition, that instead of God, Selection was enthroned as ultimate reality."⁷² Koestler uses Bertalanffy's statement to introduce his own hope in, as yet unseen, proof that at some level animate agency is one of the forces behind evolution. According to Koestler,

Biologists are faced with the choice of either asserting that ostriches develop callosities to sit on, just where they need them, by pure chance – or at least to admit the theoretical possibility that some well-defined structural modifications – such as the aforementioned callosities or the thick skin on our soles – which are acquired by generation after generation, did gradually seep through the protective filter and lead to changes in the genetic code which made them inheritable.⁷³

Koestler was capable of better, more exacting expressions of his hope for the verification of agency as an evolutionary force than the one quoted above. Four years prior to the publication of *The Case of the Mid-wife Toad*, Koestler had hit upon the idea of "internal selection" in *The Ghost in the Machine*. This book was partially funded by

and begun during Koestler's tenure at the Center for Advanced Study, a psychological institute at Stanford University. Resorting again to the notion that science was a cultural pursuit, Koestler complained that scientists generally exhibited a reluctance to ask themselves questions "until they can see the rudiments of an answer in their minds."⁷⁴ The right question for biologists and geneticists to ask, Koestler insisted, was the nature of what he described as the missing link between genes, "the 'atoms' of heredity," and the vital and continuous flow of the evolutionary process. It was this missing link that held the hope for a meaningful construction of both the science of genetics and an understanding of evolution as a process, Koestler intoned. "There can be no doubt that Darwinian selection is a powerful force," he admitted, but the key to understanding evolution in its complete complexity must lie in some intervening process between genetic encoding and birth. The question he wanted geneticists to investigate was how such encoding took place. He said,

...in between these two events, between the chemical changes in a gene and the appearance of the finished product as a newcomer on the evolutionary stage, there is a whole hierarchy of internal processes at work which impose strict limitation on the range of possible mutations and thus considerably reduce the importance of the chance factor.⁷⁵

It was inconceivable to Koestler that inheritance could be a completely random phenomenon, for, if it were, he believed that genetic mistakes would proliferate in an uncontrollable fashion. He employed a monkey at a typewriter as his metaphor for chance evolution. Because it was statistically improbable that the monkey would ever type a recognizable word, much less a sentence that made any sense, Koestler concludes that the key intervening mechanism in evolution involves self-correction, not environmental selection per se. He continued,

If a nonsense syllable occurs, the [evolutionary] machine will erase it...we would have to populate the higher levels of the hierarchy with proof-readers and then editors, whose task is no longer elimination, but correction, self-repair and coordination – as in the example of the mutated eye [that determines the size of its lens after the retina establishes its own size].⁷⁶

The theme that Koestler was pursuing here was the judgement that, if mutations are to show any effect, they must occur in multiples. This was true, he reasoned, because organs and systems are so complex. The only other possibility he offers is that mutations must be governed by some internal strategy, at the level of the holon, which regulates itself, albeit in the interests of the hierarchically organized organism.

Earlier in *The Ghost in the Machine* Koestler had summoned the process of embryonic development to aid his argument against the “flat-earth science” of Neo-Darwinism and, by extension, the same of behaviorist psychology. Due to environmental cues delivered through feedback loops, “no two embryos, not even identical twins, are formed in exactly the same way.” Self-regulating mechanisms respond to localized environmental conditions and correct deviations from norms allowing self-assertive powers to guarantee stable results.⁷⁷ The coordinated development of the eye was not the only organ or system in which components held within themselves some ability to interpret the codes of inheritance to fit local developments. Koestler showed that the developing embryo could be viewed as an assemblage of Janus-faced organic holons. When these structures looked backward to an earlier time in their development, they saw their development as “irrevocably determined.” When they looked forward chronologically, they saw their futures as less rigidly determined. In regard to the future, Koestler maintained, organ buds were allowed the fluidity of accommodating themselves, within limits, to the immediate circumstances. “‘Determination’ and ‘docility,’ self-

assertive and integrative potential, are two sides of one medal,” he concluded, as were the camps of “‘regulative’ and ‘mosaic’ development” in the polemics among biologists.⁷⁸

Koestler continued his argument by drawing attention to the parsimony employed by nature. The design of homologous organs is not infinite. Rather, it is quite limited. Like Darwin, he stressed that nature recapitulates the same basic forms. The arm of Homo-sapiens, for instance, is not unlike the wing of a bird or the forelimb of the whale.⁷⁹ The key to the new understanding of the evolutionary process that Koestler offered rested on the stability of nature’s basic plans. Claiming to have identified the flaw in Neo-Darwinism as the nexus between orthodox scientific theory and restricted imagination, Koestler formulated a prescription for a way forward in genetic research and theories of evolution:

[Nature possesses] stable holons in the evolutionary flux. *The phenomena of homology implied in fact the hierarchic principle in phylogeny as well as in ontogeny.* But the point was never made explicit, and the principles of hierarchic order hardly received a cursory glance. This may be the reason why the inherent contradictions of the orthodox theory [of evolution] could pass so long unnoticed.⁸⁰

A few pages later, Koestler summed the information he had presented into a simple conclusion that he philosophically tethered to a refined interpretation of the Enlightenment’s notion of scientific laws as well as to a cosmology that left room for some overarching plan. The latter plan minimized chance as an evolutionary means. Just how much this version of evolutionary agency eliminates indeterminacy in favor of determinism is left to the reader to judge.

The conclusion that emerges from all this is that there must be unitary laws underlying evolutionary variety, permitting unlimited variations on a limited number of themes. Translated into our terminology, this means that the evolutionary process, like the hierarchic operations, is governed by fixed canons, and guided by adaptable strategies.⁸¹

Bringing the environment back into focus, Koestler admitted that environment played a key role in evolution by establishing the limits within which life could develop. The chemistry and temperature of a planet predetermine a finite number of directions in which life can evolve, he conceded. The development of life forms, that is, the trajectory of evolution, was a “game played according to fixed rules which limit its possibilities but leave sufficient scope for a limitless number of possibilities.”⁸² He insisted, however, that flexibility within the fixed rules was the key to understanding evolution. It was the factor that should be emphasized. Such rules were “inherent in the basic structure” of living things, but “variations derive from adaptive structures,” evolution being “neither a free-for-all nor the execution of a rigidly pre-determined computer programme.”⁸³

The Ghost in the Machine was fundamentally a polemic against behaviorist psychology, but Koestler had been reacting against what he believed were behaviorism’s anti-liberal flaws as early as 1949 when he wrote *Insight and Outlook*. It was a perceived simplistic determinism in behaviorism that peeved Koestler with a vengeance. In his attempt to support his own hunch that life actively blazes its own trails through the environment, Koestler relates the story of a chimpanzee, Nueva, cited in Wolfgang Köhler’s *The Mentality of Apes* (1925).⁸⁴ According to Köhler’s observations, Nueva first expressed frustration as she realized that a banana lay outside her cage beyond her reach. According to Köhler, Nueva eventually recognized, without resorting to trial and error or to conditioned reflex training, that she could use a stick to extend her reach and drag bananas near enough to her cage that she could grab them and consume them. At that point, Köhler describes her affect as one that expressed relief from feelings of frustration. Then, he reports, “...she did not stumble on the solution by poling about

aimlessly with the stick, but seized the stick, carried it to the bars, stretched it out of the cage, and placed it behind the banana.”⁸⁵

Koestler characterizes Nueva’s genius as a bisociative moment of creativity. Even in the case of apes, he insists, “we notice the eureka process does not consist in inventing something new out of nothing, but in a bringing together of the hitherto unconnected.” He continues, “Nothing is created that was not already there, in the outside world and its mental reflection...in synthesis.”⁸⁶

* * *

At the level of philosophy, Koestler insisted that behaviorism was innately reductive. It was, in his estimation, simply one instance of reductive materialism. In *The Sleepwalkers* he projects the linear relationship among Aristotle, Plato, Galileo, and Descartes. Through them he postulates a line between materialism and determinism. In Chapter Fourteen, “The Failure of Nerve,” Koestler reveals how Medieval and Enlightenment Europe, no matter what their individual attitude toward materialism, shared a habitual separation of reason from belief. This separation at its base was, of course, Platonic. In the case of the medieval mind, this separation facilitated a rejection of materialism in favor of a more or less exclusive concentration on the spiritual aspects of life. From the seventeenth century onward, through the medium of materialism, Europe privileged knowledge and technology above spirituality. The result, Koestler sadly reported, was a void in European life left by the rendering of spirituality as essentially worthless.⁸⁷

The intellectual drama that Europe played between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries was responsible for what Koestler recognized as a philosophical crisis by the twentieth century. This drama’s prologue was written in Greek as determined by

Aristotle and Plato, Koestler maintained. *The Sleepwalkers* explains that Aristotle held a purely materialistic conception of the cosmos, trivializing any attribution of physical phenomena to divine causes. All answers and explanations lay, he held, in matter alone. In contrast to Aristotle's reliance on matter, Plato's conception of the cosmos relied exclusively on idealism. For him, the physical world perceived by mankind was nothing more than a shadow, a flawed phenomenological copy of the true and real world of ideas. In the latter construction of reality, what we see is only a reflection of what is already in our minds. Plato's approach to the world privileged abstract problems over practical ones. And if Plato did not intend to trivialize matter, Koestler explains, Europeans, beginning with the Neapolitan School, nevertheless took Plato's approach literally, facilitating the medieval concentration on spiritualism. It would not be until the seventeenth century that Aristotle would be rediscovered by Europeans and put in the service of the new science to the detriment of traditional spirituality.⁸⁸

In a section of *The Sleepwalkers'* epilogue, entitled "The Fatal Estrangement," Koestler asserts that Galileo was the first modern European materialist who possessed no spiritual side. This approach to the world that is void of spiritualism, Koestler defines as a dangerously eccentric development.⁸⁹ He believes that the danger in Galileo's philosophy lay in his over reliance on mathematics and quantification. *The Sleepwalkers* proclaims that "Galileo takes the hyperstatization of mathematics a decisive step further [than Aristotle] by reducing all nature to 'size, figure, numbers and slow or rapid motion' and by relegating into the limbo of 'subjective' qualities everything that cannot be reduced to these elements – including, by implication, ethical values and the phenomena of the mind."⁹⁰ Descartes would bring this development to its reductive conclusion, according to Koestler. Descartes' materialist approach to the world contained only two

primary qualities, ‘extension’ and ‘motion.’ All else, Descartes held, were simply categories created by our minds.⁹¹

Koestler’s inescapable conclusion that “theology and physics parted ways not in anger, but in sorrow, not because of Signor Galileo, but because they became bored with and had nothing to say to each other,” encapsulates his appreciation of the twentieth century’s philosophical and spiritual crises in the West.⁹² He puts this dual crisis largely at the feet of Galileo whom he holds responsible, through his arrogant and churlish personality, for the Roman Catholic Church’s intransigent refusal to accept the heliocentric theory of the universe for over two hundred years. Koestler maintained that this response by Europe’s preeminent spiritual institution guaranteed that the European mind would continue to divorce science and reason from religion and spirit.

It was somehow easier for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rationalists to harbor an intense ire for the Catholic Church than it was for Arthur Koestler. One of his biographers indicates that he even once briefly considered converting to Catholicism. Koestler’s benign verdict for Catholicism’s dogma in regard to the shape of the universe between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries can be explained by the knowledge that Koestler possessed as a man of the twentieth century. Compared to twentieth-century dogmas and their associated atrocities in Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia, the Catholic Church’s insistence that the sun orbited the earth could appear quite benign indeed.⁹³ In his plaintive recognition of the reasons why spirit and logic parted ways in modern Europe, Koestler quoted the eminent British scientist and philosopher Lord Whitehead. Koestler maintained that Whitehead’s 1926 description of the decline of religion in the West had acquired a prescient quality by 1959. Whitehead saw the role of spirituality and religion in the following manner:

Religion is the vision of something that stands beyond, behind, and within the passing flux of immediate things; something which is real, and yet waiting to be realized; something which is a remote possibility, and yet eludes apprehension; something whose possession is the final good, and yet is beyond all reach; something which is the ultimate ideal, and the hopeless quest.⁹⁴

It is somewhat unexpected, if not patently ironic, that Koestler would find such a fine expression of his own spiritual longing in the writing of a man most would consider a nineteenth-century scientist. We must recall, however, that Western science's overconfidence, hubris, and idealized optimism were all beginning to wane by the end of the nineteenth century.

What we in the early twenty-first century might identify as impatience in Arthur Koestler was an anxiety that informed him that human development was in crisis. His experience taught him that the West had a spiritual void to fill and little time within which to fill it. He held tightly to a confidence in European culture, believing that the West could still save mankind. The terrible inhumanity suffered by Europeans between the late 1930s and the middle 1940s, not to speak of privations that continued into the middle 1960s, were exacerbated by the prospect of nuclear war. His fear of the atomic bomb in the brinkmanship context of the Cold War was justifiable; it was not paranoia. From Koestler's vantage point, history had truncated the time span granted to humanity to find a spirituality that would fill the void left by the Enlightenment's overvaluation of knowledge and its naïve assumption that knowledge and human progress existed in direct proportion. Koestler's generation was confronted by the question of free will. Was mankind doomed in deterministic fashion by historic circumstances or was mankind capable of extricating itself from a dilemma of its own making?

Periodically Arthur Koestler could construct the immediate problem of the twentieth century as one of misaligned human cerebral evolution in which "primitive"

emotion seemed to get the better of “advanced” reason. At some point, however, humanity’s problems had to be defined in terms of free will, and Koestler would occasionally think and write in these terms. During his crusade against capital punishment in the United Kingdom during 1957 Koestler did indeed focus on free will. Chapter Six of *Reflections on Hanging* (1957), a chapter entitled “Free Will and Determinism, or to the Philosophy of Hanging,” pointed toward contradictions between the tenets of modern behavioral science and the law. The question of where the boundary between free will and determinism lay formed “the oldest and most awe-inspiring problem of philosophy” Koestler wrote.⁹⁵ Science, he claimed, remained largely deterministic, allowing mankind only scant possibilities that its actions and responses were not predetermined either by culture or by psychological conditioning. Paraphrasing William James on the need we all feel to believe that we are responsible for our actions, that we exert some agency in our own lives, Koestler pronounces his social-psychological take on free will. For his campaign against capital punishment, free will is defined simply as “a useful and necessary illusion for the functioning of both the individual and society.”⁹⁶

It is instructive in any attempt to understand Arthur Koestler to recall how necessary it was for him to believe that humankind could affect its own destiny. Ironically, this necessity connects Koestler intellectually with the Enlightenment that he believed held an “optimistic fallacy” through its overemphasis of reason. For Koestler, mankind’s hope resided not in any blind forces of history but in a conscious effort, a free will, to steer humanity away from anomie, political oppression, and Armageddon. Koestler could not see himself as hoping against hope. He had to believe that mankind was capable of making rational decisions even though his experience had taught him that

it may have been statistically probable, but highly unlikely, that mankind could resist calls to emotion that took little notice of reason. As he worked through this imperative to believe in free will and a hopeful future for mankind, Koestler found himself drawn to wishing for the possibility that life could exert some control over its existence in the short term as well as the longer term of evolution. It is positive testimony to his energy and intellectual prowess as well as, one might say, to his optimistic and liberal spirit that Arthur Koestler could build a philosophical system that remained internally consistent as it struggled for integrity in Western culture. His system brought nuance to materialistic science without devaluing empiricism. It opened new vistas for science and pointed in directions yet unseen. His imagination was less successful, however, in finding a means to fill the void in Western culture left by its abiding faith in logic and the accumulation of knowledge. Koestler's system also did little to cure the antagonistic relationship that he recognized between the camp of scientific orthodoxy with all its vested interests and the camps of scientific imagination. Neither did his system discover a solution to the complex and nuanced relationship between means and ends in politics.

End Notes

¹ Arthur Koestler, *The Yogi and the Commissar and Other Essays* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1945), pp. 226, 232, 239. David Cesarani points to this volume's last essay, "The Yogi and the Commissar (II)," as the best digest of Arthur Koestler's ethical system, "the most concise and accessible expression of Koestler's unified theory." See David Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind* (London: Heineman, 1998), p. 233.

² Cesarani, *The Homeless Mind*, pp. 230-233.

³ Koestler, *The Yogi and the Commissar*, pp. 227 and 240.

⁴ Arthur Koestler, *Insight and Outlook: An Inquiry into the Common Foundations of Science, Art and Social Ethics* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1949), p. x.

⁵ Cesarani goes on to show that Koestler's response to the negative reception given to *Insight and Outlook* in the year of its publication was one of surprise. He points to a *Time* review in the U. S. A. of the work as typical. It characterized the book's theory as being somewhat inspired, but cautioned that it demanded too much of any reader willing to wade through it. See *The Homeless Mind*, pages 320, 321, and 323.

⁶ In 1951 Koestler would publish a novel, *The Age of Longing*, concerned exclusively with a description of the state of mind of continental intellectuals, who had given up on Europe's old liberal confidence and optimism. According to the novel, these intellectuals were all too ready to prostrate themselves before Soviet hegemony. The novel portrays the naiveté of Americans as a misfortune that only aggravated a bad situation.

⁷ Koestler, *Insight and Outlook*, p. 38.

⁸ Ibid. P. 39. The second and final part of "Volume Two," *The Act of Creation* (1964), does focus on psychology, but hardly offers a systematic critique of the development of the science of psychology and its various schools of thought.

Louis Menand's analysis of William James in *The Metaphysical Club* (2001) draws some conclusions that could be mentioned here as they touch our discussion of Arthur Koestler. First, like Koestler, William James was on the cusp of a new period in Western thought. Menand explains that a gulf existed between William James' mind-set and that of his father, Henry, who had been born in the early nineteenth century. Despite his Calvinist religiosity, the latter was much more a man of the Enlightenment than was his son. Menand sees Henry James, the elder, as essentially a Platonist who held a conception of the universe as unchanging and hidden from human sight. According to Menand,

The main pillars of Henry Senior's thought – monistic belief in the unchanging reality of an unseen world, indifference to temporal moral distinctions, and anti-individualism – are entirely alien to the views of his oldest son. They belong to the conception of a closed and predetermined universe – the 'block universe' – that William James designed pragmatism specifically to subvert. William hated the idea of undifferentiated oneness... He thought the universe should be renamed the 'pluriverse.' And his belief in the power of individual agency was so pronounced that even his philosophical allies Charles Peirce and John Dewey criticized him for it. (*The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001), p. 88)

Thus we can see as early as the late nineteenth century a conceptualization of free will philosophically connected to a cosmology of infinite possibilities through spiritual liberalism.

Secondly, the itinerant quality of William James' education holds a certain affinity with Koestler's habit of residential rootlessness. Menand's rendering of William James reveals that such itinerancy resulted in the cultivation of a "self-conscious impulsivity" reminiscent of David Cesarani's appreciation of Koestler as a "homeless mind." (See *The Metaphysical Club* 75-77.) On William James' impulsivity, Menand explains,

He worked most of his life to defend simultaneously held worldviews – modern science and religious faith – that most people regarded as mutually exclusive, and he ended up inventing a philosophy...that is supposed to enable people to make good choices among philosophical options. James believed that a risk-assuming decisiveness – betting on an alternative even before all the evidence is in – was the supreme mark of character. He thought that the universe would meet such a person halfway. But he also thought that certainty was moral death, and he hated to foreclose anything. (Ibid. 75)

Thirdly, notice the affinity that William James' necessity to help people make good philosophical choices has to Koestler's yogi versus commissar perspective on Western politics.

⁹ Koestler, *Insight and Outlook*, pp. 39-46.

¹⁰ Ibid. P. 46.

¹¹ Ibid. P. 39.

¹² Ibid. 36 and 37. Original emphasis.

¹³ Ibid. P. 18.

¹⁴ Ibid. Pp. 217 and 221-224.

¹⁵ Ibid. Pp. 124-129.

¹⁶ Ibid. P. 135.

¹⁷ Ibid. P. 136. The quoted words at end of the above passage are cited as W. E. Ritter, *The Unity of the Organization* as quoted in J. F. Dunbar, *Emotions and Bodily Changes* (NY, 1936).

¹⁸ Ibid. P. 88. Original emphasis.

¹⁹ Ibid. P. 287. Original emphasis.

²⁰ Ibid. P. 291.

²¹ Ibid. P. 277.

²² In what one familiar with Koestler's fiction recognizes as an oblique reference to his own novels, Koestler explains that the artist who writes from strong experience will possess an imperative to make the communication with his audience both deep and broad. Such an artist's experience forces him or her to leave the commonplace trivial plane and reach the tragic plane of existence where the individual finds himself connected to humanity in a transcendent manner. Koestler deduces that "The more developed his integrative tendency and the more intense his experience, the stronger will be the teller's urge to share them, the more painful his loneliness and frustration if he does not succeed in sharing them." Ibid. P. 292.

²³ Ibid. P. 294-296.

²⁴ Ibid. P. 296.

²⁵ Ibid. P. 298.

²⁶ Ibid. P. 223.

²⁷ Ibid. P. 221.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid. Pp. 228-229.

³¹ Ibid. P. 221.

³² Ibid. P. 224.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid. Pp. 224-225.

³⁵ Ibid. P. 229.

³⁶ Ibid. P. 230. Recognition that socialism represented an unrealistic, an idealistic, and hence, an unattainable goal of reason did not cause Koestler to fall back on a recognition of Freud's notion of Eros as the essential force behind socialism's goals. He clearly ridicules the idea that Eros is the only means by which Freudians could explain social integration when he states the following. "As Freud recognizes no general integrative tendency in man, and as the only concrete expression of his Eros is the sexual drive, all cultural achievements appear as ersatz formations for goal-inhibited sexuality, and the correct term for the Freudian meaning of 'sublimation' would be 'substitution.' In the last resort, all arts, crafts, discoveries, and constructive achievements appear then as coitus substitutes. It is curious that in the long and stormy controversy about the Freudian metapsychology, no serious attempt has yet been made to produce historical evidence for the coincidence or otherwise of peak periods in the history of art with sex-inhibiting social conditions." (*Insight and Outlook*, 214.)

³⁷ Ibid. Pp. 232-233.

³⁸ Arthur Koestler, *The Sleepwalkers: a history of man's changing vision of the Universe* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1959), p. 335.

³⁹ Ibid. P. 336.

⁴⁰ Ibid. P. 518.

⁴¹ Ibid. P. 519.

⁴² Koestler, *Insight and Outlook*, 378.

⁴³ Ibid. P. 410.

⁴⁴ Ibid. P. 270.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid. P. 52.

⁴⁷ Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1964), pp. 461-465.

⁴⁸ Koestler, *Insight and Outlook*, pp. 333-334.

⁴⁹ Ibid. P. 334.

⁵⁰ Koestler, *The Act of Creation*, p. 155.

⁵¹ Ibid. Pp. 158-159.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ This essay was originally published in *Knowledge Among Men, Eleven Essays on Science, Culture and Society* [sic] (New York, 1966).

⁵⁵ Arthur Koestler, *Drinkers of Infinity: Essays, 1955-1967* (London: Hutchinson, 1968), p. 261.

⁵⁶ It is no coincidence that Koestler quoted Professor Bateson's letter to his wife which derisively characterized biologist Paul Kammerer as "something inclining to the artistic" and which dismissively intoned that "he [Kammerer] once thought of being a musician." This was Koestler's way of revealing what was in his estimation an unwarranted split between art and science as well as a tenable place for the generalist. See Arthur Koestler, *The Case of the Mid-wife Toad* (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 63.

⁵⁷ It is characteristic of the integrity and breadth of Koestler's philosophy that he would extend his system to include an interpretation of Darwin's theory building. In *Insight and Outlook* Koestler traces the development of Darwin's ideas about the process that achieved biological evolution by using his own concept of bisociation as the facilitating means behind Darwin's thought. Koestler presents Darwin's theory as being the result of the bisociation of his knowledge of selective breeding, derived from his experience as a member of the English gentry, with his understanding of Malthus's conclusion about population growth and available food sources in changing environments. Koestler then tied Darwin's theory of natural selection to a second bisociation of ideas in two distinct contexts: his recognition of what he believed was the descent of man from apes and his knowledge of genetic selection. See *Insight and Outlook*, pages 260-262.

⁵⁸ Koestler, *Drinkers of Infinity*, "Biological and Mental Evolution: an Exercise in Analogy," p. 262.

⁵⁹ Ibid. Cf, *Drinkers of Infinity*, “Mysterium Tremendum,” 168 and *The Case of the Mid-wife Toad*, 129.

⁶⁰ Koestler, *The Act of Creation*, p. 450. My emphasis.

⁶¹ Koestler did feel obligated to distance himself from Lamarckism. For example in *The Ghost in the Machine* he wrote, “To this day, in spite of great efforts, Lamarckism has failed to produce conclusive evidence that acquired characters are transmitted to the offspring; and it seems fairly certain that, while experience does affect heredity, it does not do so in this simple and direct way.” (*The Ghost in the Machine*, pp. 116-117.)

⁶² Ibid. Quoted on page 447 without page citation.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid. P. 448.

⁶⁶ Ibid. P. 449.

⁶⁷ This lecture was printed in *The Living Stream* (1965) and *The Divine Flame* (1966). Koestler’s review originally appeared in the *Sunday Times* (London) (11/14/65) and in *New Scientist* (12/29/66).

⁶⁸ Quoted by Koestler on pages 166-167 of *Drinkers of Infinity*.

⁶⁹ Ibid. P. 169.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Arthur Koestler, *The Case of the Mid-wife Toad* (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 127.

⁷² Ibid. Quoted on page 129. Cited simply as Bertalanffy, 1969.

⁷³ Ibid. P. 132.

⁷⁴ Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine*, pp. 129-130.

⁷⁵ Ibid. Pp. 132-133.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid. P. 121.

⁷⁸ Ibid. P. 125.

⁷⁹ Ibid. Pp. 135-136. Nature’s basic plans are so recognizable that scientists and philosophers, be they evolutionists or anti-evolutionists, could not help but take note of this reality throughout human history. Koestler reminded his readers that Geoffrey St. Hilaire commented on the similarity of design in all vertebrates. Goethe had recognized homology in plants, Koestler continued, and based on the similarity of their leaf structures had guessed that all plants had evolved from one basic design. See pages 137-139.

⁸⁰ Ibid. P. 139. Original emphasis.

⁸¹ Ibid. P. 147.

⁸² Ibid. P. 148.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Wolfgang Köhler. *The Mentality of Apes* (London: K. Paul, 1925). There are no page citations for Koestler's sources in *Insight and Outlook*.

⁸⁵ *Insight and Outlook*. Köhler is quoted by Koestler on page 256 again without a page citation from Köhler's book.

⁸⁶ Ibid. P. 258.

⁸⁷ Koestler, *The Sleepwalkers*, p. 51.

⁸⁸ Ibid. P. 52.

⁸⁹ Ibid. P. 525.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid. P. 527.

⁹³ For Koestler's judgement that the Catholic Church did not necessarily constitute an irretrievable block to an integrated European philosophy after the Scientific Revolution, see *The Sleepwalkers* pages 520-523.

⁹⁴ Cited by Koestler as quoted in Butterfield, *The Origins of Modern Science*, pages 233-238. See *The Sleepwalkers*, page 528.

⁹⁵ Arthur Koestler, *Reflections on Hanging* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1957), p. 88.

⁹⁶ Ibid. P. 90.

Chapter Six

Arthur Koestler's Humanism: Twentieth-Century Angst and Nineteenth-Century Optimism as Hope in the Unseen

The 1960s saw Koestler gain acceptance as a writer on scientific subjects. His attraction to science and his investigations of the subject betrayed a fundamental loathing for Behaviorist psychology. In other words, his engagement with science was largely politically motivated and spoke to issues of free will in mankind transmuted into assertiveness in nature or veiled determinism in the cosmos. Koestler's fear of nuclear annihilation still haunted him. While in the USA in 1959, he saw a chance to test his theory that drugs could just as easily keep mankind from exterminating itself as they could treat disease or prevent pregnancy. He met Timothy Leary in Boston specifically in order to test LSD's effect on what Koestler believed he was an authority, creativity. He concluded that LSD induced only a false sense of creativity, and his experience with another hallucinogenic drug, psilocybin, in 1960 led Koestler to pronounce that drug's effect as temporary insanity. Koestler did not refrain from talking and writing about a pharmaceutical panacea to the threat of nuclear war, but it seems that he was comfortable with losing control of his faculties only through the use of alcohol.

During the 1960s Koestler focused his life around summers writing, entertaining, and holding symposia at his residence in the Austrian Tyrol, near the town of Alpbach. He called this house *Schreiberhäusl*. His attraction to the paranormal surfaced again in 1961. In that year he purchased a specialized scale at Alpbach that he intended to use to test the probability of levitation during hypnosis. But still, politics, in one form or another, continued to call Koestler's pen to action. In 1963 he wrote "Suicide of a

Nation” for the London *Observer*. In this article he adduced a presumed anathema toward work and efficiency in British culture. He identified a class-based resentment within the British working class that the Labour party proved incapable of translating into a programmatic accommodation with capitalism. This critique of British society continued in *Encounter*, the organ of the CCF, in early 1964 and presaged Koestler’s extinguishing of his Labour party connections, his participation in Tory politics, and Parliament’s making him a Commander of the British Empire in the early 1970s.

In 1965 Koestler married his long-time secretary and paramour Cynthia Jefferies in New York on his way to participate in an institute at Stanford’s Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences. It was perhaps typical that the group of Fellows in which Koestler participated devoted itself to what it referred to as “Partly Baked Ideas,” a pun on Psi (extrasensory perception), reflecting Koestler’s interest in paranormal phenomena. Regardless of the group’s unscientific sounding appellation, Koestler was able to engage in scientific discourse with professional scientists. This eventuality underlined his nerve and put his inferiority complex in question. While in Palo Alto, Koestler began to veer away from writing about science, strictly speaking, and found himself sliding more in the direction of thinking about paranormal phenomena. It was at Stanford that Koestler began writing *The Ghost in the Machine*, a volume that brought his fascination with the paranormal nearer to mysticism. By 1976 Koestler was comfortable enough with mysticism to co-edit with Arnold Toynbee a work entitled *Life after Death*.

By the time Parkinson’s Disease triggered Koestler’s suicide in March 1983, the man had received honorary degrees from three universities, had written a paper for UCLA’s Brain Research Institute, had lectured at Cambridge and the Smithsonian Institution, and he had been inaugurated as a Companion of the Royal Society. His

bequest of one million Pounds Sterling to the cause of paranormal research typified both Koestler's generosity and his quirkiness as a commentator on society, science, and philosophy. This rather large legacy put the final touches to Koestler's progressively tarnishing reputation as a devotee, popularizer, and critic of Western science. One might say that it typified his self-destructiveness. Koestler's slide into the antinomies between science and mysticism did not, however, diminish his earlier achievements as an interpreter of science in its cultural context. This drift toward the mystical may simply indicate an attraction for the unseen engendered by the simultaneous possession of angst and optimism, regardless of whether these feelings were of terrestrial or cosmic origin.

* * *

The developments of human institutions and human thought are, of course, nothing more than instances of continuity and discontinuity intertwining. In the history of thought we can recognize Galileo Galilei and Arthur Koestler to have both been at the ends of different segments of mankind's developing efforts in the West to define its relationship to the universe. It is quite possible that Koestler was correct in seeing Galileo as the first European to completely abandon the late medieval amalgam of materialistic alchemy and astrology and spiritualistic magic and Christianity. As such Galileo could be considered at the end of an age, his insistence on the primacy of mathematical measurement presaging the mechanistic certitude of the Age of Science. It is just as possible to view Arthur Koestler as being at the end an age of optimism begun by men who thought in the manner of Galileo. Formal education and casual acculturation had taught Koestler to expect human progress, but his experience had taught him to be suspicious of statements that human society was progressing in a direct teleologically determined direction toward approximations of perfection. His knowledge of the latest

developments in scientific thought, starting with physics and extending into human psychology, biology, and evolution, led him to appreciate how complex and intricate the universe could be and how open were its possibilities. The chronology of Arthur Koestler's existence put him at a nodal point connecting two eras. He lived at the end of a segment in which Western man defined the universe too simplistically as mechanism, that is, at the end of the simple and naive optimism enjoyed by the heirs of Enlightenment thought. Arthur Koestler's reality was situated at the beginning of a period in which Europeans had lost their innocent optimism about human prospects. By the time he was ten years old circumstances had forced Europeans to search for new philosophical ballast and new spiritual moorings. Where these longings for order and security would be found were as yet unknown. They were, except in human imagination, unseen. By his early middle age, Koestler's imagination envisioned such putative cultural ballast and moorings only in outline. He could recognize the dangers of determinism and the vexing choices between commissar agency and yogi contemplativeness, but he could not perceive the precise spiritual vectors that could allow society to move in, if not an unmitigated, at least a halting and tentative, positive direction in his own time. He placed his hopes in traditional liberal values which he believed could carry humankind in the direction of general progress.

One reason that Koestler could not see the details of renewed human spirituality in Europe lay in his need to believe that such spirituality was securely connected to human progress rather than regress. This need expressed his impatient, short-term liberal faith, a hope that progress would be evident during his own lifetime. "*Reculer pour mieux sauter*" (retreat in order to better advance, or strategic retreat) was a theme in much of his writing. Koestler could implicitly acknowledge the temporary regress of

social and political development without accepting the notion that humans were destined for devolution. This shock, delivered to him by the political turmoil that surrounded him, found its expression in humbled expectations that nevertheless maintained liberalism's faith in humankind's long-term ascent. His fear of nuclear holocaust coexisted with his inability to accept its eventuality. His fear of Soviet domination of Europe coexisted with his inability to view it as an acceptable prospect. This attitude distinguished him from other post-war European intellectuals. In spite of Koestler's warnings about the fallacious optimism of the Enlightenment, he remained a hopeful person when it came to the social and political prospects of Europe and the continued existence of Homo-sapiens.

Arthur Koestler's biographer Mark Levene claims that Koestler refused to see himself as being at the end of an era, an age so defined by its optimism.¹ However, there are indications that Koestler's search for integrity in Western culture and philosophy represent one man's recognition that the certitudes of the Enlightenment exploded by both science and politics needed to be replenished as quickly as possible with other species of guarantees. By the twentieth century the West's mechanistic conception of the universe had given way to a nuanced, but not quite an organic, conception of the cosmos. Late nineteenth-century science and technology had witnessed developments that forced humanity to recognize the separation between reality within nature and human perception of it. The invention of the machines that enabled motion pictures, to take one example from the turn of the nineteenth century, had to have reminded some Europeans of the conclusions about the limitations of human perception reached by Immanuel Kant. Kant had acknowledged the limitations of human knowledge in the midst of the Enlightenment's enthusiasm for science and the optimistic prospects for humanity that the movement assumed were associated with scientific progress. Long before the Great

War, and the Second International's, Stalin's, or Hitler's versions of nationalistic socialism had become empirical realities, some European thinkers could ascertain that scientific progress did not necessarily lead to social progress. Kant's recognition that the human mind plays an active role in constituting the features of experience and that the mind possessed limitations in regard to the empirical realms of time and space were acknowledgements that science was first a human enterprise. Kant's eighteenth-century philosophy implicitly allowed for the possibility that science could be put to dehumanizing purposes as easily as it could be put to humanistic ones.

As early as the late nineteenth century, coincident with the development of social science in the West, European men of science and philosophy began to recognize the flaw in viewing the universe as a continuous phenomenon. William Everdell in *The First Moderns* (1997) paints the fracturing of science with its associated rejection of materialism and scientific determinism, of positivism, and of the idea that human progress was both inevitable and linked through science to positive moral certitudes as the essential definition of modernism.² Everdell is not alone in his interpretation of the changes wrought in Western science and the consequences these changes have had on Western culture. He explains how certain nineteenth-century Europeans like the German mathematician Richard Dedekind could employ the concept of irrationality to create, in his case, a number system that separated the digital from the continuous.³ The nineteenth-century mind-set which had defined the universe as whole had begun to itself disintegrate before the beginning of the twentieth century. The belief in a smooth, whole universe, so typical of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, did not enter the new century as a completely valid manner in which human imagination could construct the cosmos. The notion that the universe could be seen steadily and whole from a privileged

position lost its credibility. Objectivity crumbled to be replaced by phenomenology and solipsism in physics, philosophy, politics, and literature. As Everdell shows, the ability to look at oneself or one's society produced sensations of subjective consciousness that obliterated formal logic. This new awareness took the certainties of the nineteenth century away and produced an ontological fog, banishing the traditional rules of epistemology. No longer could the observed be separated from the observer.⁴ Separation and context came to replace mechanism in almost every human endeavor.

By the twentieth century, scientists were able to acknowledge that the increasingly sophisticated instruments that enabled what were apparently increasingly minute and accurate measurements of the material world were not completely dependable. These measuring devices could act as clumsy, blunt instruments introducing anomaly and interference at the microscopic end of scientific inquiry. Also in the early twentieth century Sigmund Freud and others had discovered the importance that the irrational had for human consciousness. Almost simultaneously with Freud's discoveries, Albert Einstein showed that the human categories of time, matter, and energy were not for the universe the constants that they were for human perception. Finally, Werner Heisenberg recognized probability as a viable aspect of the nature of atoms and in the process exploded the eighteenth century's clockwork universe forever.

Arthur Koestler was part of these developments in Western thought. He witnessed the transformation of science and philosophy. In spite of his initial attraction to the reasonableness of Historical Materialism, he could come to declare it an anachronism. In spite of his recognition that the universe was discontinuous and open, he could not, however, easily abandon European thought's modern belief in a continuous universe. He longed for integrity in politics, in philosophy, in the universe. He did

manage to merge a conception of reality both as discontinuous and as unified and whole. That very construction of reality is what he insisted upon in his philosophy. Koestler's utilization of hierarchy within the context of integrated systems blended the new, twentieth-century conception of the separateness within the universe with the older conception of the universe as whole. His philosophical creation brought nuance to the older mechanistic construction of nature.

Arthur Koestler acknowledged that science, like philosophy, was a human construct. *The Sleepwalkers* stressed the intuitive way in which men and women come to know the world. This book shows that Kepler's belief in the heliocentric universe was certainly more than a hunch. It was based in years of accurately taken observations and accurately recorded measurements of heavenly bodies in their orbits within the solar system. However, Koestler shows that in spite of mistakes in Kepler's mathematical descriptions of planetary orbits he stubbornly held to what he knew in his bones. Because Kepler trusted his instincts he achieved a conceptualization of the cosmos that eventually was taken by other scientists to be validation of a sun-centered universe based in both human perception and reason. Koestler's *The Case of the Mid-wife Toad* and *The Call Girls* stressed the institutional nature of science. Both books, the first a nonfiction case study, the second a novel, paint the practice of science as involving pressures to conform to extant mind-sets. Such pressure is, of course in the broadest sense, political in nature. In *The Case of the Mid-wife Toad* Koestler maintained that the failure of his peers to accept the conclusions of his experiments was strong enough social isolation to lead Paul Kamerer to suicide. In *The Call Girls* Koestler depicts competing schools of late twentieth-century psychology as all being inadequate in some way while each is defended both as an article of faith and as a jealously guarded spot of professional turf.

It is precisely the recognition of the social pressure to conform to orthodoxy and of human knowledge as a-rational belief or faith that unite Koestler's thoughts about science and politics. His focus on these two aspects of humanity, conformity and faith, constitute his contribution through the world of letters and imagination to insights into the ideas through which modern Europeans constructed their reality. By the middle 1950s his political experience brought him back to a focus on science. His angst over Europe's political and social prospects in the early phases of the Cold War could be endured only for so long. Koestler's Cassandra role, warning his contemporaries about Soviet threats and nuclear annihilation, could not be sustained indefinitely. His decision to abandon political writing during the 1950s could not, however, hold within it a renunciation of his political experience and thought. He transferred his political lessons to an analysis of the social practice of physical and behavioral sciences.

Arthur Koestler was quick to see dangers in Stalinism that were not so readily acknowledged by fellow members of the pink generation. Because he could relate this perception to the science of psychology and then modulate it to a general critique of the practice of science, it is tempting to focus solely on the precocious nature of his personality. It might, however, be more instructive to contrast what he recognized during his lifetime with what he failed to see.

It is both ironic and understandable that Arthur Koestler recognized danger in self-transcendence. He, after all, seemed to long for a level of social and cultural integrity that he felt was sorely missing from his experiences during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. He described the self-assertive impulses in the human psyche as being tied to emotions, incapable of bisociative combination in different operative fields. Surprisingly, however, he did not see self-assertion as the primary danger threatening

twentieth-century man. He saw its opposite that way.⁵ Koestler feared misdirected self-transcendence more than self-assertive behavior among his fellow creatures. It was mankind's self-transcending thoughts that he believed were capable of jumping from one operative field or idea to another. This was their promise and their danger. They could lead one to empathy as well as to the ecstatic crowd mentality typical of fascism or to the blind and twisted loyalty of the Stalinist bureaucrat or the orthodox scientist. He feared self-transcendence when instantiated as conformity, whether it be in politics or in schools of science. This fear was the seat of his angst over the simultaneity of emotionally immature and technically competent mankind, Koestler's putatively misaligned evolution of different aspects of the mind of Homo-sapiens. He believed that self-transcendence can as easily be diverted to inhumane projects by commercial advertising or political propaganda as it can be channeled into humanizing projects by art. Koestler believed that "In the absence of stimuli for his egotism, man is an altruist [who in the theater] shows himself capable of taking a strong and entirely unselfish interest in the destinies of persons on the stage."⁶ His experience, however, taught him that one could not depend on self-transcendence to be guided by art with the aim of building oceanic connections among people or feelings of unity with the universe. The intellect illuminated nature and emotion expanded humanity, he would say.⁷ He feared what he had seen happen all too often: emotion getting the better of intellect. His *bête noire*, irrational men acting inhumanely in concert with one another, resulted from what he believed was a dysfunctional relationship between reason and emotion. Like others, he recognized the danger of nuclear warfare, and like other better known intellectuals including Albert Einstein, Leó Szilard, Carl Jung, Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell, Arthur Koestler recognized that this danger constituted a supreme irony. By 1945 mankind's intellectual

competency enabled Homo-sapiens to achieve its ultimate connection with the cosmos through nuclear species immolation.

In light of the above potentiality, it was easy for class struggle to lose its attraction for Koestler. Contrarily, nuclear war served to push men like Jean-Paul Sartre more in the direction of viewing class struggle as the only reasonable means to forestall Apocalypse in a world of flawed and limited possibilities. Unlike that of his contemporary George Orwell, Koestler's work does not ring with optimistic belief in the potential of the working class. None of Koestler's novels share Orwell's refrain in *1984* that if there is hope, it lay in the proles. Koestler's turn away from class struggle may be explained by his devotion to the individualistic values of nineteenth-century liberalism. But it could also be explained by taking into account Koestler's expressed feelings of isolation and discomfort in social situations. He claims to have felt threatened by group dynamics at school and in the KPD. He attributes these feelings to his being raised as an only child by an over-protective mother.⁸ *The Gladiators* expresses a distrust of the actions and motivations of men assembled in groups. Remember that in the novel the lawyer Fulvius concludes that following class or individual interests is simply a matter of social pressure. Fulvius' thoughts recognize a tendency in mankind to "act contrary to his interests when great issues [are] concerned" while "guarding his advantage with so much cunning and obstinacy when small matters [are] at stake."⁹ Fulvius entitles one part of his treatise on human psychology and the Spartacus Rebellion "On the Causes which Induce Man to Act Contrary to the Interests of Others When Isolated and to Act Contrary to His Own Interests When Associated in Groups or Crowds."¹⁰

Koestler clearly expresses little faith in the underclass in his first novel. Also, in Koestler's estimation, group dynamics presented certain stresses and threats to the

practice of science. For Arthur Koestler, the only child of middle-class parents and the product of a middle-class education and manly, nineteenth-century values, it was not difficult to acquire an understanding of class struggle as something less than a motive force in history. For men like Koestler, Stalinism had tarnished the attractiveness of class politics, ultimately transforming the class struggle into a mere reified construct attached to understandings of the past and the present by determined men devoted to deterministic philosophy. Koestler may have been episodically attracted to the ideal of a just, classless society from the mere logic of it in the manner of Nicholas Salmanovitch Rubashov or out of empathy and guilt in the manner of Peter Slavek. His social origin alone is incapable of explaining the shift in Koestler's politics, however. Given the possibility of nuclear holocaust and all the impracticalities of social revolution he identified in his novels, it was not difficult for Koestler to begin shedding all semblance of leftist politics during the 1950s. By the 1980s he became critical even of British trade unionism. Recall that Arthur Koestler believed that gargantuan productive capacity, antiquated social institutions, and war as a primary social value combined in the twentieth century to make it impossible for political schemes alone to graft new systems of morality onto Western society.¹¹

As hopeless as post-1945 global politics appeared to many, Arthur Koestler's fundamental liberal optimism impelled him to search for some form of human agency to replace Marxism's faith in the working class as the creative force behind historical progress in the industrialized world. This search would lead him to a refutation of behaviorist psychology and to a questioning of neo-Darwinistic evolution in favor of an assertive construction of nature that flirted with Lamarckism. The same optimism that gave rise to Koestler's assertive construction of nature would periodically tempt him to

hope for the empirical validation of the epitome of the unseen, extrasensory perception. His hopeful attitude that science might one day substantiate the existence of a telekinetic power within thought is not that fantastic when one thinks about the fundamental element in the Newtonian universe, gravity, another invisible force that acts at a distance. Koestler's impatience, his sense of the critical juncture at which he saw mankind, did not allow him to wait for science to prove the telepathic powers of human thought and then discover how these powers might help reason conquer emotion. In desperation he would go as far as looking temporarily to LSD as a possible pharmaceutical route to social peace that might facilitate mankind's escape from self-destruction. In this approach Koestler was in a tradition established by Aldous Huxley during the 1920s who, while living in California, wrote *Brave New World*. The fact that after experiencing LSD with Timothy Leary in the middle 1960s Koestler largely abandoned hope in pharmaceutical protection against nuclear annihilation merely validates his impatience and sense of crisis.¹² If Koestler could not find agency in social classes, in the self-respecting, confident, and dignified individuals who affected their own destinies, or in drugs, he would search for it in nature itself. Thus, the role played by Koestler's search for evidence of assertive nature in evolution and in psychology was, again, one of modulating politics into science. This transference, resulting from a feeling of crisis, expressed Koestler's typical twin attitude of short-term pessimism and long-term optimism.

After he defined mankind's malaise in terms of misaligned cerebral evolution, Arthur Koestler witnessed only three decades of development in Western science. He was alive at the beginning of the invention of chaos theory that would put Darwin's natural selection in a slightly different and more complex context. Projects like mapping

the human brain or describing the entire human genome were barely being dreamt during the 1970s. Had Koestler lived into the 1990s, we might expect theories of multiple universes in astrophysics or string theory in nuclear physics to have frustrated his nineteenth-century inspired desire for something resembling new certitudes in science. These constructions lack elegance and obfuscate the goal of unified field theory. These developments in theoretical physics were at best nascent during Koestler's lifetime. But we should not forget Koestler's wide-eyed acceptance of de Broglie's and Einstein's counterintuitive and contradictory conceptualizations of light earlier in the century. It is more than plausible that Arthur Koestler would have been excited by developments like string theory and the lack of unity, that is, of the open possibilities for mankind's imagination in theoretical physics.

Likewise, Koestler could have been aware of the post-Cold War political development of Communism only in outline. He did witness the beginnings of weakening power of the Comintern and the decentralization of so-called Euro-Communism. Although he did not comment on it, he had to have been cognizant of the metamorphosis, for instance, of the Italian and French Communist Parties, both of which by the late 1970s rejected one component of orthodox Marxist theory, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. When Euro-Communists willingly gave up the idea that the state should be revolutionary, that is, directed exclusively by the working class, Koestler witnessed the recasting of continental Communism into social democratic pressure groups within French and Italian electoral politics. He was alive when Communism in Europe began to lose its defensive attitude toward the Soviet Union along with its ostensibly revolutionary rhetoric. He was able to see the beginning of a weakening Soviet system, which would ultimately cease to throw a Promethean military shadow across Europe.

One eventuality unseen and, more importantly unforeseen, by Arthur Koestler was the final collapse of the Soviet Union. His suicide in 1983 determined that he would miss this event by only six years. The implosion of Soviet society spoke to the idea of determinism and human agency, but not in ways that had made Koestler so uneasy during the 1940s and 1950s. By the middle 1980s, the ruling Soviet bureaucracy seemed to have lacked the will attributed to it by men like Koestler. At a fundamental level Kremlin leaders allowed Soviet society to expire by the seventh decade of its existence. They let their established order disintegrate. By the mid-1980s the ruling bureaucracy by no means constituted a monolithic political power within the Soviet state which held uncompromisingly to a deterministic theory of history. If it possessed the characteristics of a social class under a system of “state capitalism,” as Koestler had argued in *The Yogi and the Commissar*, the ruling Soviet bureaucracy constituted a class only in a limited sense. A group within the ruling party clique did indeed opportunistically pursue its narrow self-interests as the Soviet Union divested itself of collectivized property and baptized post-Soviet era Russia into a period of economic, social, and political chaos. In many ways this chaos was that of an open social and political universe, a hopeful sort of disorder which looked forward to some of liberal political ideals for which Koestler had argued during the 1930s and 1940s. Secondly, again because he died too early, Koestler had never commented upon the development of two prospects that by the turn of the twentieth century had seemed to replace the Soviet Union in the minds of many Europeans as the greatest threats to world peace. The first of these was the United States of America, with its continued super power status and devotion to nuclear monopoly pursued through the Strategic Defense Initiative, the dream of a “Star Wars” defensive umbrella . The second was the antagonism within the Muslim world created by Israel’s

behavior toward Palestinian Arabs in combination with the failure of Islamic states to create economic stability and of Muslim society to successfully accommodate modernity. In the absence of the Soviet Union, it is quite possible that Koestler's attachment to American military power may have waned. Koestler had commented in *Thieves in the Night* on the comparatively rudimentary development of traditional Arab culture. He was neither condescending nor belligerent in a racist manner toward the Arabs, but clearly viewed them as a pre-modern people at a distinct comparative disadvantage to the cultural level of the Zionists. As regards Israel and the Palestinians, Koestler did indicate in *Promise and Fulfillment: Palestine 1917-1949* (1949) that at certain junctures during the British mandate over Palestine partitioning Arab and Jewish states would have been the best political option.

Developments in the Soviet Union after 1989 could be interpreted as a special case of the Koestlerian Law of Detours. The loss of ideological resolve among the Soviet ruling clique and Mikail Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* could quite easily be interpreted as the bureaucracy's bending to the will of the masses. It could be argued that something forced Soviet leadership to abandon dogma and follow the masses down a path toward the immediate gratification of consumer goods production. Orthodox Communists undoubtedly believed that the Revolution was compromised by an abandoning of what they defined as the necessity of military security against capitalism which alone could assure the ideal of Communist ideology's golden and glorious egalitarian future. Many Communists probably viewed Gorbachev's reforms as a shortsighted sacrifice of the utopian period of abundance created by "liberated," "rationalized," and "humanized" productive capabilities. It could just as well be argued, however, that the Soviet masses led their rulers toward wider participation in the modern

world rather than down a retrograde spiral or “antinomy of the slopes” toward isolation and irrelevancy. In Koestlerian terms, the fall of the Soviet Union could be viewed as a version of the Law of Detours in which the masses pushed leadership onto the path of the “antinomy of the serpentine” where a switchback road led upward and away from queues and empty shops.

Perhaps the central and principal entity that Koestler could not see in a literal or direct way was that of a single or a multiplicity of gods. Koestler longed to discover some focus or unity that could integrate European culture. He recognized that religion had served this function during the Middle Ages, and he believed that the source of the West’s troubles during the early twentieth century was philosophical or, in a narrower sense, religious. Stephen Toulmin has convincingly analyzed Koestler’s work in terms of a theodicy that it betrays.¹³ Regardless of Arthur Koestler’s basic secular bent, he was concerned with spiritual matters. His autobiography begins with an astrological casting of the day of his birth, and he describes the impetuous action of his burning of his matriculation book as both an act of will and an act that was fated. The second volume of his autobiography, *The Invisible Writing*, continues the theme of the determinism in his personal experiences as it stresses the role of fate.¹⁴ Koestler’s various descriptions of the attraction of revolution to individual personalities are achieved through the notion that some people are simply fated to be rebels or revolutionaries. He described his prison experience in Malaga in spiritual and mystical terms. He claimed during his brush with death in Spain he had escaped the “trivial plane” for the “tragic plane” which he defined as the more essential level of existence where everything is clarified and simple.¹⁵ Koestler could be uncomfortable with the idea that life was determined by cosmic accidents while he was simultaneously uneasy with the idea that phenomena were

completely predetermined. Intellectual life may have been easier for Arthur Koestler had he lived during the thirteenth century.

Mark Levene and Jenni Calder have drawn Koestler as a messianic writer urgently bringing news to his readers about impending crisis, and reading just a few pages of his early work justifies such a portrait of the man.¹⁶ Arthur Koestler recognized the author's need to communicate meaningful episodes of his or her own experiences as an essential aspect of art, a key quality that universalizes art by enabling the private to become transcendent and bind men and women to each other and, occasionally, to the cosmos. The human personality's ability to transcend self, while potentially dangerous, was, according to Koestler, also potentially humanizing and liberating. Expressions of self-assertive and self-transcendent behavior were both givens in Koestler's view of the human psyche. Their results, whether positive or negative, depended upon the Gestalt or context in which each behavior existed. Individualism was not the simple question for Koestler that it may have typically been for European liberals of the nineteenth century.

Arthur Koestler felt that he lived in an interregnum between a Newtonian age and some undetermined future. He believed the interregnum would continue the twentieth century's social and political chaos. This transition would last only a few decades, he thought. Koestler hopefully predicted that humankind would eventually discover a new "irresistible global mood, a spiritual spring-tide like early Christianity or the Renaissance."¹⁷ Political movements possessed their own "organic laws" which become irrelevant, Koestler claimed, if the undetermined events of history kept them from attaining power. He believed it was in this sense that all of Europe's horizontal movements had been frustrated by the social and political events of his lifetime. Revealing a conception of an open universe in social and historical development Koestler

could say, “The only survivors of the age of the ascending power were the Trade Unions,” and they were, he continued, “an economic safeguard, not a creative political force.”¹⁸ Safeguards do not constitute vanguards and they do not fit into a philosophy of history that projects predetermined ends reached through closed channels of human possibilities and their consequent events. Koestler believed that the struggles of economic man would come to an end by the beginning of the new age that he predicted out of his longing for spiritual integrity and ideological peace in European society.¹⁹ He could not, however, say precisely how economic struggles would be scripted, because, for Koestler, history ceased to be a metaphysical force and because Koestler’s conception of human will was one that was too open-ended and unpredictable.

Trade unionism could, by the above definition, never achieve the power of an integrating vertical movement. Trade unionism suffered the fate of all other horizontal structures, an inability to solve its own dilemmas. In a manner suggestive of Koestler’s portrayal of the spiritual transformation he experienced in the Spanish prison when one of his guards looked at him suggesting a meaninglessness of their present circumstances and the existence of a cosmic transcendence of it, Koestler interpreted European history in the short term. He posited a hierarchical solution to what he understood to be a missing verticality of integrity. He said,

The great disputes are never settled on their own level, but on the next higher one. The Second and Third Internationals got into the blind alley because they fought capitalism in its own terms of reference, and were unable to ascend to that spiritual climate the longing for which we feel in our bones.²⁰

Koestler did not see the problem of the twentieth century as one of a crisis of political leadership, at least not directly so. He believed that the twentieth century was missing

the vertical structures of thought and institution from which leadership could, presumably, organize humanizing efforts.

Oddly or not, Koestler seems to have stuck by his pledge made in 1956 to avoid engaging himself in political tracts or political literature. He had claimed that Cassandra had gone hoarse, and it appears that he, not she in this case, really had lost the ability or, more likely, the will to engage in screaming on the printed page or the orator's podium. His chief biographer, David Cesarani, offers no reference to Koestler's reaction to the New Left or the intersection of workers and students in Paris during 1968, to China's Great Cultural Revolution, or to the Civil rights Movement in the U. S. A. After Koestler's 1956 swearing off politics as subject matter in favor of science and philosophy, Cesarani offers only one reference to any of Koestler's anti-Soviet political action or general political attitudes toward a developing leftist critique of the victors' of the Second World War. It is not a reference to anything Koestler had written. In response to Nikita Khrushchev's 1956 repression of the Hungarian government's halting acquiescence in popular anti-Russian feelings and the public's will to quit the Warsaw Pact, Koestler did erupt in the manner of the commissar's *vita activa*. He organized protests in front of the Hungarian legation in London, even throwing bricks through its windows. With others at Denison Hall, Victoria, Koestler organized a mass protest against Soviet action in the nation of his birth. Cesarani characterizes the meeting as well attended and as an event that witnessed many rousing speeches. Koestler himself delivered no speech and wrote no piece about the mass meeting or the event which precipitated it. After helping to organize the demonstration in Victoria, Koestler put his active will to use in a yogi-like project, that of helping deliver financial aid to the Hungarian refugees pouring into Austria.²¹

Arthur Koestler believed that by the 1930s Europe was traveling toward the ultraviolet or yogi end of his spiritual diode. He construed this movement as voluntary and volitional. He did, however, see the Kantian antinomy acting in this movement. “The less consciously we drift with the wind [toward yogi spirituality], the more willingly we do it; the more consciously the less willing,” he would write.²² In 1945, after he had already investigated the problems of free will and determinism in three novels about mankind’s longing for social justice during both the first century B. C. and the twentieth century A. D., Arthur Koestler would acknowledge a connection between science and politics and an end to antiquated certitudes in both. He could proclaim what he had already worked out in his novels, something apparently more obvious to himself than to many of his contemporaries. He perceived the end of an age, but could only suggest outlines for the approaching age for which he so longed. In 1945 Koestler wrote facetiously that he “wished one could still write an honest infra-red novel without an ultra-violet ending.” He believed that “no honest scientist [could any longer] publish a book on physics without a metaphysical epilogue,” and that “no Socialist [could] write a survey of the Left’s defeats without accounting for the irrational factor in mass-psychology.”²³ All of the above constituted the realities which, for Koestler, indicated that nineteenth-century approaches to science, culture, and politics had become passé. Active philosophers could not completely abandon nineteenth-century mentalities; they had to be ready to approach the world within tradition, but without dogma. They had to look upward and see their part in integrated history while looking downward to observe their independence within an extant social and political system. In Koestler’s words, “He who clings to the past will be left behind; but he who abandons himself too readily will be carried away like a dry leaf; *all we can do is to travel even more consciously and even*

less willingly."²⁴ This was an approach to the world Koestler had already developed through his fictional characters as he attempted to account for the failure of the Russian Revolution and the power of Stalinism to exact such dishonest and irrational sacrifice from the best of the Bolsheviks as well as from what was, in his view, Europe's most politically conscious and socially optimistic people.

Arthur Koestler acknowledged that he lived in an interregnum between a Newtonian world and some indeterminate future.²⁵ Because he could not see that future, he held tightly to part of the past. Koestler's tenacious grip on liberalism's optimism may be the element responsible for his refusal to see himself as being at the end of an era. Believing that he was somewhere in the middle of a final episode of modern European history or at the beginning of a transition period out of that history may be what made it so difficult for Koestler to come to grips with the twentieth century. He could not see the future for which he pined. On one hand he could not completely abandon determinism, and on the other hand he was unwilling to give himself completely to a belief in the power held by assertions of will, be they in the individual person, collectively in mankind, or in the totality of nature. If we accept the notion that Koestler was part of the long nineteenth century, we can just as easily accept the idea that he could not see that the world into which he had been born had come completely to an end in 1914, in 1933, in 1937, in 1941, or even in 1945. Mark Levene's interpretation of Koestler's writing is that it sprang from a concern about the future, particularly about an unwinding of nineteenth-century liberalism which he witnessed from the inside at Ullstein beginning in 1933.²⁶ To this we can add that Arthur Koestler witnessed liberalism unravel from the outside as well. He saw a primary liberal value, that of the dignity of the individual, stillborn in the Comintern and strangled in its infancy in Spain. Finally, he saw liberalism collapse

utterly in France as the Third Republic expired only to see it threatened later in France and all of continental Europe by the incubus of Soviet expansionism and a resigned hopelessness of many European intellectuals after 1945. The sense of urgent hopefulness recognized in Koestler by David Astor, British editor of *The Observer*, in the late 1930s was undoubtedly simply an expression of Koestler's firm and tenacious clutching to the liberal values he had absorbed during his youth.²⁷ Holding fast to nineteenth-century conceptions of the individual's relationship to society, he defied social changes that had begun with the Great Deflation and had continued beyond the Peace of Versailles. The world confronted by the individual in the twentieth century was slightly different than that confronted by the individual in the nineteenth century. This was precisely what William Phillips in his collective obituary to Koestler, Manes Sperber, Raymond Aron, and Ignazio Silone recognized as the inability of these men to accept social progress without the sanctity of the individual. Phillips maintained that they all defined respect for the individual as non-idealistic, as a practical and necessary condition of social progress.²⁸ It was easier for Koestler to respond to events around him from the point of view of continuity than from that of change. He had to be a short-term pessimist but he maintained his long-term optimism. His liberalism may have been old-fashioned, but like Zpardokos' description of how the individual chooses political perspectives like ready-made garments, nineteenth-century liberalism fit Koestler well; it fit him well into the twentieth century.

The search for new cultural values to integrate Western culture intersected with Koestler's knowledge of scientific theories that visualized the world as complex systems of hierarchies. So in the longing for as yet unseen vertical intellectual and social structures, Koestler's nineteenth-century liberal values required that the philosophy he

built would focus on the individual part's functioning within the whole of its given system. His holons, therefore, required autonomy in order to realize the smooth functioning of the whole. In human terms they demanded the dignity due them in order to function for the benefit of the system. It is not coincident that what Koestler's philosophy identified in nature was the reciprocity he experienced as conspicuously absent on the continent of Europe during the 1930s.

Roy Webberley has noted that Koestler's prose, be it on political or scientific subjects, represents the tension between the straightjacket of determinism and the freedom of creativity. It is fear of determinism that Webberley sees as the persistent theme in all of Koestler's writing.²⁹ Life had taught Koestler that if materialistic science succeeded in manipulating nature, it was a short step for science to the treatment of the individual human as a conditioned automaton that was denied all free and creative action. From there it was an even shorter step to political purges or genocide. In his autobiography Koestler claims that he came to realize that by the time he had discovered Historical Materialism, Marxism had become a philosophical anachronism.³⁰ Science had already advanced beyond mechanistic determinism. Long before the 1920s Western science had begun to create an open conception of the universe in which the finite expanded and probability replaced certitude. What is clearly remarkable – and Webberley stresses this fact – is that Koestler saw human liberation in hierarchical structures contained within an open universe.³¹

It is, therefore, a distrust of authority that threads its way through all of Arthur Koestler's writing. Freedom must confront determinism in order that the individual remain human in his ability to confront political ideology or scientific orthodoxy. Politics and science were always connected in Koestler's mind because they each

represent intellectual inquiry and human imagination. The breadth of his work confronts the specialization that Koestler knew strengthened the inhuman potential of authority. His path as a generalist may have stemmed from his rebellious, adolescent personality, but it was a path that he actively and purposely carved through the world of ideas.

Koestler witnessed inhumanity perpetrated by both the Left and the Right. His political novels analyze sins against the individual in corporatist Spain, the Comintern, and Nazi Germany. His direct and vicarious experiences called him to discover ethics in science as well as in politics. For many after 1914 efforts that linked science and ethics related only to the systematic efficiency of mechanized killing revealed by the Great War. For Arthur Koestler linking science and ethics was a deeper enterprise because it struck at the root of Europe's intellectual and spiritual dilemma in the modern world. In *The Yogi and the Commissar* Koestler equated materialism with nihilism.³² In *Arrival and Departure* he recognized that the age of simple and unrelenting quantification was over.³³ He also held to Western traditions, be they Classical Greek, eighteenth-century Enlightenment, or nineteenth-century German Idealism, which privileged a unified theory of the universe over cosmological disunity. Koestler, nevertheless, shared with William James a longing to understand human cognition in a consistent, scientific manner, and in his first awkward attempt at philosophical writing and system building, he relied, like James, on a "pluriverse." His system was a world in which potentials, both natural and human, were simultaneously open and determined depending on which level they were operating at a given time. This unbounded quality is how Koestler addressed the hubris of Western science, showing that it was first a human and, therefore, an imaginative enterprise. He recognized the necessity for an organized and orderly retreat of science from the oppressive hegemony of strict determinism. His prescription for a re-balancing

of Western culture's approach to human existence and mankind's power within the universe began with the acknowledgement of the Enlightenment's arrogance. As Mark Graubard has stressed, *The Sleepwalkers'* genius lay in its treatment of science as a creative project which thrives when imagination is free to construct new understandings of nature's mysteries.³⁴ Koestler recognized the importance that free association and playful daydreaming possessed for the development of science. He saw the necessity for bisociated thoughts to be free to find their new revolutionary junctures that lead to discovery and invention. It is clear that Arthur Koestler's spirit of long-term optimism reposed in his abiding faith in the capacity of man's mental powers. Even if he could occasionally mope and complain about what he saw as a misaligned evolution of the organ in which mankind's mental powers reside, he never abandoned the core of modern Europe's faith in science. He was, after all, captive to the Enlightenment's "optimistic fallacy" which his writings struggled to expose while they sweated to discover new, more nuanced applications of science in a new integrated world-view. Arthur Koestler's optimism rested in the belief in humanistic social progress, which he believed was possible in the long run. His integrated philosophy, consisting of a belief in the possibilities and limitations of materialistic science and logic accompanied by a respect for the humanity of the individual and the powers of human imagination, is as good as any definition of European liberalism in its firm humanist tradition.

End Notes

¹ Mark Levene, *Arthur Koestler* (New York: Frederic Unger Publishers, 1984), P. 149.

² William Everdell, *The First Moderns: Profiles in the Origins of Twentieth-Century Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 10-12.

³ Ibid. P. 30.

⁴ Ibid. Pp. 10 and 298.

⁵ Arthur Koestler, *Insight and Outlook: An Inquiry into the Common Foundations of Science, Art, and Social Ethics* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1949), 277. It should be noted that Jean-Paul Sartre conceived of self-transcendence differently, that is in an opposite manner. Sartre saw the consequences of man's tendency to go outside and beyond himself as the seat of human existence, an existence that he argues is essentially social and, by implication, positive. He posited the human universe as being defined by the ability and necessity for the subject to go beyond itself. Self-transcendence is, therefore constituent to human reality. In "Existentialism is a Humanism" Sartre says, "...it is not by turning back upon himself, but always by seeking, beyond himself, an aim which is one of liberation or of some particular realization, that man can realize himself as truly human." This universe may hold both positive and negative possibilities, but Sartre's existential humanism accentuates the positive, humanizing possibilities, not the disintegrative horde mentality which Koestler fearfully associated with self-transcendence. See Sartre's essay translated by Philip Mairet and collected in Watler Kaufmann, ed., *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (New York: Meridian Books, 1975). Particularly, see pp. 368-369.

⁶ Ibid. P. 298.

⁷ Ibid. P. 287.

⁸ Arthur Koestler, *Arrow in the Blue: An Autobiography* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1952). See Chapter Four, "The Tree of Guilt – Ahor and Babo."

⁹ Arthur Koestler, *The Gladiators* (New York: MacMillan, 1939), pp. 149-150.

¹⁰ Ibid. P. 149.

¹¹ Koestler, *Insight & Outlook*, Pp. 228-229.

¹² See Arthur Koestler, "Return Trip to Nirvana" (1961), reprinted in *Drinkers of Infinity*. Cf. John Beloff, "Koestler's Philosophy of Mind" in Harold Harris, ed., *Astride Two Cultures* (New York: Random House, 1976), p. 70.

¹³ Steven Toulmin, "Arthur Koestler's Theodicy: On Sin, Science, and Politics," *Encounter* (vol. 52, number 2, 1979).

¹⁴ For a description of fated or determined existence, see *Invisible Writing* p. 15.

¹⁵ Arthur Koestler, *Dialog with Death* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1942), p. 204.

¹⁶ Levene, *Arthur Koestler*, p. 149. Cf. Jenni Calder, *Chronicles of Conscience: A Study of Arthur Koestler and George Orwell* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1968), pp. 20, 25, and 11.

¹⁷ Arthur Koestler, *The Yogi and the Commissar and Other Essays* (New York: MacMillan, 1945), p. 104.

¹⁸ Ibid. Pp. 102-103.

¹⁹ Ibid. P. 104.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ See David Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind* (London: William Heineman, 1998), pp. 445-446. Cf. George Mikes, *Arthur Koestler: The Story of a Friendship* (London: André Deutsch, 1983), pp. 17-20.

²² Koestler, *The Yogi and the Commissar*, p. 7.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. My emphasis.

²⁵ Ibid. P. 104.

²⁶ Levene, *Arthur Koestler*, p. 7.

²⁷ *Encounter* (vol. 61, # 1, 1983), pp. 31-23. Quoted by Levene in *Arthur Koestler*, p. 19.

²⁸ William Phillips, "The Last Generation," *Partisan Review* (vol. 15 (1984), #2), pp. 167-169.

²⁹ Roy Webberley, "An Attempt at an Overview," in Harold Harris, ed., *Astride Two Cultures: Arthur Koestler at Seventy* (New York: Random House, 1975), p. 4.

³⁰ Arthur Koestler, *The Invisible Writing: Being the Second Volume of Arrow in the Blue* (London: Collins with Hamish Hamilton, Ltd., 1954), Chapter 32, "The Exploding Universe." See p. 295.

³¹ Harris, ed., *Astride Two Cultures*, p. 4.

³² Koestler, *The Yogi and the Commissar*, pp. 227, 240.

³³ Arthur Koestler, *Arrival and Departure* (New York: MacMillan, 1943), 178.

³⁴ Mark Graubard, "The Sleepwalkers: Its Contribution and Impact," in Harris, ed., *Astride Two Cultures*, pp. 35-36.

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Notes on Sources

Unless otherwise noted, the source of general information about Arthur Koestler in this investigation is taken from David Cesarani's excellent digest of the diaries, letters, and other papers in the Koestler Archive, Edinburgh University. This information is presented in full with insightful analysis in Cesarani's exhaustive biography of Koestler, *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind* (1998). The second chapter of this paper, which concentrates on 1905 to 1937, relies heavily on the first four chapters of Cesarani's book. The summary of Koestler's life between 1938 and 1944 that beings the third chapter of the present inquiry summarizes the information Cesarani presents in the fourth through the sixth chapters of his work. The narrative that begins Chapter Five of this study focuses on the events in Koestler's life between 1945 and 1959. It is heavily dependent on Chapters Seven through Eleven of *The Homeless Mind*. Finally, this paper's last chapter's preliminary discussion of the final phase of Koestler's life, that is, the span between 1960 and 1983, is dependent on Chapters Twelve through Fourteen of Cesarani's portrayal of Arthur Koestler.

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