

ARTHUR KOESTLER AND MYSTICISM

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ARTHUR Koestler was an influential writer during the first years after the war. His attacks on communism got a world-wide echo, in particular among intellectuals. To the reading public he was in the first place a political writer. But according to himself the political content is only one aspect of his literary production from his first years as an author. As important were some mystical experiences he had while sitting in one of Franco's prisons awaiting execution during the Spanish Civil War.

These experiences had for him certain ethical implications, and an important theme in his first books was the contrast between the ethics derived from his mystical experiences on the one hand and Marxist-Leninist ethics as well as the ethical implications of Freudian psychoanalysis on the other. In his autobiography Koestler writes about how his first books were influenced by his mystical experiences, or the 'hours by the window' as he called them: 'In the years that followed I wrote a number of books in which I attempted to assimilate the (mystical) experiences of cell no. 40. Ethical problems had hitherto played no part in my writing, now they became its central concern. In 'The Gladiators', (...), and 'Darkness at Noon', (...), I tried to come to intellectual terms with the intuitive glimpses gained during the 'hours by the window'. Both novels were variations on the same theme: the problem of Ends and Means, the conflict between transcendental morality and social expediency. The next novel, 'Arrival and Departure', was a rejection of the ethical neutrality of science as expressed in the psychiatrist's claim to be able to 'reduce' courage, dedication, and self-sacrifice to neurotic motives. Finally, in 'The Yogi and the Commissar', I tried once more to digest, in the form of essays this time, the meaning of the solitary dialogue of cell no. 40. This book, (...), closed the cycle, it had taken five years to digest the hours by the window.'¹

In this article I will first discuss Koestler's mystical experiences as he tells about them in the second volume of his autobio-

¹ Arthur Koestler, *The Invisible Writing*, London 1954, p. 358

graphy, 'The Invisible Writing'. I will show what kind of experiences Koestler had, and point out peculiarities of his experiences compared to those of other mystics. I will also discuss his interpretations of his experiences.

Then I will discuss the influence of mysticism in his first three novels and point out those passages that are relevant in this connection. These novels are 'The Gladiators' (1939), 'Darkness at Noon' (1940) and 'Arrival and Departure' (1943). These books make out three of the four ones in which Koestler tried to digest and understand his experiences. The fourth, 'The Yogi and the Commissar' (1945), is non-fictional, and I think a discussion of it would lead too far into sciences like physics and biology. I will therefore not discuss it here.

First it must be stated that it can be no doubt that Koestler's 'hours by the window' were genuine mystical experiences. In the first place he calls them so himself, as when he refers to them by saying 'Yet, "mystical" experiences, as we dubiously call them'.² The description of his experiences are also enclosed in several anthologies on mysticism as an example of mystical experiences in our time.³

As mentioned Koestler was in one of Franco's prisons when he had his mystical experiences. He expected to be shot there. But nevertheless he felt happy and at peace.

He sometimes had a split consciousness at this time, a phenomenon often mentioned by mystics. Koestler tells about it in this way: 'I had benefited from the well known phenomenon of a split consciousness, a dream-like, dazed self-estrangement which separated the conscious self from the acting self - the former becoming a detached observer, the latter an automaton'.⁴

Koestler mentions that this phenomenon happened in three subsequent dangerous situations and had a soothing effect. But he does not relate this phenomenon to his mystical experiences. It is known, however, that this split consciousness is often reported by mystics. H.D. Thoreau wrote for instance: 'With thinking we may be beside ourselves in a sane sense. By a conscious effort of the mind we can stand aloof from actions and their consequences(...).

² Ibid., p. 352

³ See for instance W.T. Stace, *The Teachings of the Mystics*, New York 1960, p. 230-235, and Aage Marcus, *Mystikk og mystikere*, Oslo 1966, p. 152-154

⁴ Koestler, *op.cit.*, p. 350

I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but spectator, sharing no experience'.⁵

A yogi sufficiently advanced on his path of enlightenment experiences such a split permanently. This phenomenon, however, might also be a symptom of scizofrenia.⁶

But the point here is that Koestler already before he had his first mystical experience, experienced a mental phenomenon common among mystics. And in spite of the fact that no generally accepted theory exists about how mystical experiences originate, one might suggest the hypothesis that before his mystical experiences had taken place, certain psychological processes had occurred that prepared him for the 'hours by the window'. This split consciousness was perhaps an effect of these processes.

Koestler himself suggests that one reason why his experiences happened was the various shocking events that occurred to him which 'had apparently caused a loosening up and displacement of psychic strata close to rock bottom — a softening of resistances and rearrangement of structures which laid them temporarily open to that new type of experience that I am leading up to'.⁷

This might be so. Frequently, however, the mystic is in a melancholy state of mind during the time preceding his experience. This was for instance the case regarding George Fox, the founder of Quakerism. But Koestler's state of mind was peaceful, as mentioned, in spite of the shocking events.

Scholars of mysticism often distinguish between spontaneous and acquired mystical experiences. A spontaneous experience is not willed by the mystic. The processes leading up to it take place in the subconscious, and the experience might then be started by some insignificant event. Koestler's experience is clearly of this type.

The acquired experiences are those brought about by some conscious effort in order to produce a mystical experience. Examples of such efforts are Hindu and Buddhist types of meditation, and the spiritual exercises of Ignatius Loyola.

The events that started Koestler's first experience was his attempt to recall Euclid's proof that the numbers of primes are in-

⁵H.D. Thoreau, *Walden — or Life in the Woods*, London, New York, Toronto 1906 (First published 1854), p. 120

⁶R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self*, Chicago 1960, p. 76

⁷Koestler, *op.cit.*, p. 350

finite. At first glance this might seem to have little to do with mysticism. Of course it is just the final link in a chain of causes leading up to the experience. But this problem is not altogether without relation to mysticism. As Koestler says: 'The scribbled symbols on the wall represented one of the rare cases where a meaningful and comprehensive statement about the infinite is arrived at by finite means'.⁸

When mystics describe their experiences, they use words like infinite, cosmical, boundless etc. And for Koestler Euclid's proof had a relation to the infinite. So it was perhaps no coincidence that just this event brought about his experience.

Koestler describes the experience like this: 'And then, for the first time, I suddenly understood the reason for this enchantment (of the proof): the scribbled symbols on the wall represented one of the rare cases where a meaningful and comprehensive statement about the infinite is arrived at by precise and finite means. The infinite is a mystical mass shrouded in a haze, and yet it was possible to gain some knowledge of it without losing oneself in treacherous ambiguities. The significance of this swept over me like a wave. The wave had originated in an articulate verbal insight, but this evaporated at once, leaving in its wake only a wordless essence, a fragrance of eternity (...). I must have stood there for some minutes, entranced, with a wordless awareness that 'this is perfect-perfect' until I noticed some slight mental discomfort (...): I was of course in prison and might be shot. But this was immediately answered by a feeling whose verbal translation would be: 'So what? is that all? have you got nothing more serious to worry about? (...). Then I was floating on my back in a river of peace, under bridges of silence. It came from nowhere and flowed nowhere. Then there was no river and no I. The I had ceased to exist.

It is extremely embarrassing to write down a phrase like that when one has read 'The Meaning of Meaning' and nibbled at logical positivism and aims at verbal precision and dislikes nebulous gushings. Yet, 'mystical' experiences, as we dubiously call them, are not nebulous, vague or maudling – they only become so when we debase them by verbalization. However, to communicate what is incommunicable by its nature, one must somehow put it into words, and so one moves in a vicious circle. When I say 'the I had

⁸ Ibid., p. 351

ceased to exist', I refer to a concrete experience that is verbally as incommunicable as the feeling aroused by a piano concerto, yet just as real – only much more real. In fact, its primary mark is the sensation that this state is more real than any other one has experienced before – that for the first time the veil has fallen and one is in touch with 'real reality', the hidden order of things, the X-ray texture of the world, normally obscured by layers of irrelevancy.

What distinguishes this type of experience from the emotional entrancements of music, landscapes, or love is that the former has a definitely intellectual, or rather noumenal, content. It is meaningful, though not in verbal terms. Verbal transcriptions that come nearest to it are: the unity and interlocking of everything that exists, an inter-dependence like that of gravitational fields or communicating vessels. The 'I' ceases to exist because it has, by a kind of mental osmosis, established communication with, and been dissolved in, the universal pool. It is this process of dissolution and limitless expansion which is sensed as the 'oceanic feeling', as the draining of all tension, the absolute catharsis, the peace that passeth all understanding'.⁹

Many definitions of mystical experiences exist. I will here use the definition of Professor W.T. Stace, who also has written a little about Koestler's experience. Stace distinguishes between extrovertive and introvertive mystical experiences. The main difference between them is that during the extrovertive experience the mystic perceives 'real reality' as Koestler says, or the One, or God, as other mystics say, in the surroundings. But during an introvertive experience the mystic experiences this reality in his own mind, having lost contact with the outer world.

Stace defines the two types of mystical experiences in this way:

'Common Characteristics of Extrovertive Mystical Experiences.

1. The Unifying Vision—all things are One.
2. The more concrete apprehension of the One as an inner subjectivity, or life, in all things.

Common Characteristics of Introvertive Mystical Experiences.

1. The Unitary Consciousness, the One, the Void, pure consciousness.
2. Nonspatial, nontemporal.

⁹ Ibid., p. 351-352

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| 3. Sense of objectivity or reality | 3. Sense of objectivity or reality. |
| 4. Blessedness, peace etc. | 4. Blessedness, peace etc. |
| 5. Feeling of the holy, sacred, or divine. | 5. Feeling of the holy, sacred, or divine. |
| 6. Paradoxicality. | 6. Paradoxicality. |
| 7. Alleged by mystics to be ineffable. | 7. Alleged by mystics to be ineffable'. ¹⁰ |

Although Stace does not mention it here, one also ought to stress the difference between mystical experiences of a personal kind and those being impersonal. This distinction will be important when discussing certain passages of 'Darkness at Noon'. In a personal experience the mystic realizes an entity with certain personal aspects, whom he might call God, the World-Soul, or the like. During the impersonal experience he is in an impersonal state of mind. An example is Nirvana in Buddhism. Christian mysticism is generally personal, Eastern mysticism usually impersonal.

Stace classifies Koestler's experience as a partial and incomplete introvertive mystical experience,¹¹ since the attention is directed inward and not outward, although Koestler still had some awareness of the outer world. To clarify this Stace wrote some questions to Koestler, to which Koestler replied: 'Q: Am I right in supposing that during the experiences your physical senses were still in operation, so that you continued to perceive the various physical objects around you (. . .)?

A: Yes.

Q: Did they become dim or fuzzy at the edges?

A: No. But they were just there in the margin of attention, but unattended to.

Q: One of the Upanishads says: 'It is pure unitary experience wherein awareness of the world and of multiplicity is completely obliterated.' Have you had any experience like this? Do you think that when the Upanishad speaks of the awareness of multiplicity being 'completely obliterated' it is perhaps exaggerating?

A: No, I did not experience that. That must be a higher degree. But somehow I believe that the experience exists and that its description is not exaggerated.¹²

¹⁰ W.T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, London 1961, p. 131-132

¹¹ W.T. Stace, *The Teachings of the Mystics*, New York 1960, p. 230

¹² W.T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, London 1961, p. 122

But although Koestler did not attain the highest stage, his experience is still an example of the unitary consciousness because he writes about the 'unity and interlocking of everything that exists', as the closest characterization of the experience he could give. And this peculiar feeling of unity with everything is the chief characteristic of the unitary consciousness. Koestler describes this consciousness further by saying: 'The "I" ceases to exist because it has, by a kind of mental osmosis, established communication with, and been dissolved in, the universal pool'.

Such ego-loss is frequently reported by mystics. But in some cases the ego, often in a more vague form, continues to exist, and there is a distinction between the ego of the mystic and 'true reality', the Absolute, God, or what he calls that he experiences.

Regarding the objectivity and reality of the experiences (characteristic 3) Koestler says: 'These (mystical experiences) one may regard as 'real' in the sense of subjective pointers to an objective reality *ipso facto* eluding comprehension.'¹³

He thus maintains that his experiences are not in themselves an objective reality. But they give a proof that such a reality exists. By 'objective' he seems to mean 'extramental'. He says that the experiences 'had filled me with a direct certainty that a higher order of reality existed. I came to call it later on 'the reality of the third order'!¹⁴

The requirements of characteristic 4 is fulfilled since he says that he was 'floating on my back in a river of peace'. That the experience was holy (characteristic 5) seems, however, not to have been mentioned.

The paradoxicality of the experience (characteristic 6) is probably also mentioned. He refers to reflections on his experiences by saying that: 'they will become more embarrassing and more difficult to put into words. They will also contradict each other – for we are moving here through strata that are held together by the cement of contradiction'.¹⁵

He also talks about his experiences as ineffable (characteristic 7) as when he says that to write about them is like trying 'to communicate what is incommunicable by its nature'.

When Koestler describes his mystical experiences, he does not say that they were nonspatial and nontemporal (characteristic 2).

¹³ Koestler, *op.cit.*, p. 349

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 353

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 349

In his comments on them, however, he says: 'so the "third order" disclosed that time, space, and causality, that the isolation, separateness, and spatio-temporal limitations of the self were merely optical illusions on the next higher level'.¹⁶

As mentioned above, the 'third order' was Koestler's name for this objective, 'real' reality his experiences allegedly disclosed. From the viewpoint of the 'third order', time and space are illusions. But this does not necessarily imply that this 'third order' and the mystical experiences revealing its existence are nonspatial and nontemporal, as characteristic 2 requires. Something might be spatial and temporal although it reveals that these qualities are unreal. Koestler is a bit unclear at this point.

I can thus conclude that characteristics 1, 3, 4, 6, and 7 belong to Koestler's experience. But whether characteristic 2 belongs to it is uncertain. Characteristic 5, however, does not seem to be mentioned in connection with his experience. Stace defines a fully developed mystical experience as having all the characteristics on his list. Experiences having only some he calls borderline cases. Koestler's experience is therefore a borderline case of an introvertive mystical experience, although close to a fully developed one.

Peculiar to Koestler's experience is also that it is impersonal. He experienced a state, not a personal being. He also experienced ego-loss during the experience. But as said above other mystics retain their ego or some aspects of it during their experiences.

Mystical experiences are also roughly divided in two groups according to their emotional tone. One group of experiences are of an intellectual and serene kind. The experiences of Meister Eckhart and Shankara belonged to this group. The experiences of the other group are characterized by ecstasy and violent emotions. St. Theresa's and Mechthild of Magdeburg's experiences belonged for instance to this group.

Koestler's experiences seem, however, to belong to the first of these groups.

Koestler's experience apparently lasted between a few minutes and an hour. It was for this reason not like a flash, which often is reported. But it is also far from that state which in Christian mysticism is called 'The Unitive Life' or 'Spiritual Marriage', i.e. that state when the mystic constantly lives in the mystical consciousness. St. Teresia and John of the Cross lived in this state.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 354

What Koestler writes about the end of the experience and its aftereffects is well-known in the mystical tradition. He felt that the experience left a 'serene and fear-dispelling aftereffect that lasted for hours and days. It was as if a massive dosis of vitamins had been injected into the veins. Or, to change the metaphor, I resumed my travels through the cell like an old car with its batteries freshly recharged'.¹⁷

Such effects are often mentioned by mystics. Peace, joy, and energy follow an experience.

The experiences had also long-range effects. In fact they changed his whole personality. This is the usual effect of mystical experiences. The mystic's character is reshaped. This process has in the West been called the *via mystica*, the mystical path.

This development is often characterized by great emotional changes, by ups and downs. Sometimes mystics might go through real depressions, that in Christian tradition often is called 'the dark night of the soul'. Koestler writes about this: 'I feel that this present account gives a far too tidy and logical description of a spiritual crisis with its constant ups and downs, advances and relapses, its oscillation between new certainties and old doubts, its sudden illuminations, followed by long periods of inner darkness, petty resentments and fear. My stay in cell no. 40 was a protracted, compulsory sojourn on the 'tragic plane', where every day is judgment day. When I got out, the process continued. It had started at the unconscious foundations, but it took many years till it gradually altered the intellectual structure'.¹⁸

Koestler thinks that this development lasts for a long time. He opposes the views of some Christian converts by saying: 'I do not believe that anybody, except a very primitive person, can be reborn in one night, as so many tales of sudden conversions will have it. I do believe that one can suddenly "see the light" and undergo a change that will completely alter the course of one's life. But a change of this kind takes place at the spiritual core of the subject, and it will take a long time to seep through to the periphery, until in the end the entire personality, his conscious thoughts and actions, become impregnated with it. A conversion which, after the first genuine crisis, saves further labour by buying a whole packet of ready-made beliefs, and replaces one set of dogmas by another, can hardly be an inspiring example (...) Nor do I believe that a

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 352

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 357

true spiritual transformation can be the result of a process of conscious reasoning working its way downward, as it were. It begins on the level where the unconscious axioms of faith, the implicit premisses of thinking, the innate standards of value, are located.¹⁹

Koestler's experiences became the base for an independent philosophy. His views are not those of any particular religious creed or philosophy, although they show similarities with some mystical philosophical systems. He writes: 'The hours by the window, (...), had filled me with a direct certainty that a higher order of reality existed and that it alone invested existence with meaning. I came to call it later on 'the reality of the third order'. The narrow world of sensory perception constituted the first order: this perceptual world was enveloped by the conceptual world which contained phenomena not directly perceivable, such as gravitation, electromagnetic fields, and curved space. The second order of reality filled in the gaps and gave meaning to the absurd patchiness of the sensory world.

In the same manner, the third order of reality enveloped, interpenetrated, and gave meaning to the second. It contained 'occult' phenomena which could not be apprehended or explained either on the sensory or on the conceptual level, and yet occasionally invaded them like spiritual meteors piercing the primitive's vaulted sky.'²⁰

This interpretation could clearly not have been written by any mystic before the beginning of modern science. Koestler regards this 'reality of the third order' as more fundamental than the ordinary physical world. But although Koestler uses the language of modern physics, his views are close to those mystical, metaphysical systems maintaining that the 'true reality' of the mystical experience is more real and basic than the sensory world, and that the latter is somehow derived from and owes its existence to the former.

From other passages it is clear that he regards this third order as basically incommunicable and irrational. His views thus contradict the well-known marxist thesis that everything in the universe is rational, and that natural phenomena never can be explained by something irrational. But Koestler felt that it was the ethical implications of his experiences that mostly contradicted communist views.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 357

²⁰ Ibid., p. 353-354

He has also the following comments to his experience: 'one could not hope to grasp in cognate terms the nature of ultimate reality. It was a text written in invisible ink, and though one could not read it, the knowledge that it existed was sufficient to alter the texture of one's existence, and make one's actions conform to the text.'

I liked to spin out this metaphor. The captain of a ship sets out with a sealed order in his pocket which he is only permitted to open on the high seas (...), but when the moment arrives and he tears the envelope open, he only finds an invisible text which defies all attempts at chemical treatment. Now and then a word becomes visible, or a figure denoting a meridian, then it fades again. He will never know the exact wording of the order, nor whether he has complied with it or failed in his mission. But his awareness of the order in his pocket, even though it cannot be deciphered, makes him think and act differently from the captain of a pleasure-cruiser or of a pirate ship.²¹

The title of the second volume of his autobiography, 'The Invisible Writing', is alluding to this passage and to this reality of the third order.

Koestler says that for him this reality was mainly unknown. But he does not discuss whether it can be known in its entirety, although not in rational terms, e.g. later in his development as a mystic.

The influences of Koestler's mystical experiences on his books were mainly ethical. And these ethical influences were in the main caused by this feeling of identity with everything existing which is a part of the mystical experience. He writes: 'For it struck me as self-evident that we were all responsible for each other - not only in the superficial sense of social responsibility, but because, in some inexplicable manner, we partook of the same substance or identity, like Siamese twins or communicating vessels. If everybody were an island, how could the world be a concern of his?'²²

Similar views also exist in Buddhism that teaches that the root of evil is that the individual egos of persons overshadow their fundamental identity with each other and the universe.

This feeling of identity with everything is the cornerstone of most ethical systems based on mystical experiences. Stace writes for instance: 'The basis of the mystical theory of ethics is that

²¹ Ibid., p. 354

²² Ibid., p. 355-356

the separateness of individual selves produces that egoism which is the source of conflict, grasping, aggressiveness, selfishness, hatred, cruelty, malice, and other forms of evil, and that this separateness is abolished in the mystical consciousness (...) there is, in that reality which the mystic believes himself to perceive, no separateness of I from you, or of you from he, and (...) we are all one in the Universal Self – the emotional counterpart of this is love.’²³

Most mystics claim that their experiences filled them with love, and they felt it to be a duty to pour out this love to their fellowmen. Koestler does not explicitly mention that a feeling of love accompanied his experience. Neither does he say that this reality he experienced was the source of all ethical values, as many mystics claim.

The problem of ends and means that was so central in Koestler’s first books, is not common in mystical literature. That Koestler was so preoccupied with it, must be a result of his background as a communist. The problem illustrates the conflict between Marxist-Leninist utilitarian ethics and that ethics Koestler derived from his mystical experiences. According to the former almost any sacrifice and means was justified to promote the cause and bring about a utopia with happiness for all. Koestler has given many examples of what it implied. He once wrote: ‘My Party comrades, for instance, would say that the question whether A should sacrifice his life for B, depended entirely on the relative social value of A and B.’²⁴ Koestler felt, however, that when human beings were involved, this problem could not be solved merely by some kind of calculation.

In Koestler’s first novel, ‘The Gladiators’, this problem of ends and means, which Koestler felt was closely related to mysticism, is central. The book does not contain, however, any *direct* allusions to mysticism.

The great moral problem of the slave leader Spartacus is that in order to establish and preserve his supreme goal, the new society, the Sun State, he could not shrink from any measure. He thus once had to crucify 24 of his leading men to avoid a break-down of army discipline.

Spartacus’s problem was formulated by the lawyer Fulvius from Capua, who wrote the chronicle of the slaves’ rebellion: ‘he who

²³ Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, London 1961, p. 324

²⁴ Koestler, *op.cit.*, p. 356

guides the blind may not shirk a reputation of haughtiness. He must harden himself against their sufferings, be deaf to their cries. For he must defend their own interests against their own want of reason, which attitude will often force him to inflict measures which may appear as arbitrary as they are difficult to understand. He will have to make detours whose point is lost on others, for he alone can see, while they are blind.'²⁵

This could as well have been a formulation of Lenin's view of the relation between the Communist Party and the Masses. It is therefore no coincidence that many communist organizations have called themselves 'Spartacus'.

But Spartacus is more like Raskolnikow than like Stalin. He learns that logic is one thing, ethics another.

The same problem is also central in Koestler's next novel, 'Darkness at Noon'. Apart from giving a theory why many leading communists confessed at the Moscow Trials, it is also a confrontation with Marxist-Leninist, and in particular with Stalinist ethics, personified in the examining magistrates Ivanov and Gletkin. Ivanov says for instance: 'The principle that the end justifies the means is and remains the only rule of political ethics.'²⁶

Many of Koestler's thoughts on this principle and what he believed it to imply are found in the mottos preceding each chapter. He thus quoted one Dietrich of Nieheim, bishop of Verden, who wrote in the fifteenth century: 'When the existence of the Church is threatened, she is released from the commandments of morality. With unity as the end, the use of every means is sanctified, even cunning, treachery, violence, simony, prison, death. For all order is for the sake of the community, and the individual must be sacrificed to the common good.'²⁷

What here is said about the Church, could as well have been applied to the Communist Party as Koestler saw it.

Thus 'Darkness at Noon' in many ways resembles 'Crime and Punishment' by Dostojevski. In Dostojevski's novel the central problem is also about ends and means. But Raskolnikow had to draw the conclusion that the end did not justify the means in his case. And Rabashow formulates the conclusion of Raskolnikow by saying that human beings cannot be treated according to the rules of arithmetic. He says that Raskolnikow discovers that 'twice two are not four when the mathematical units are human beings.'²⁸

²⁵ Koestler, *The Gladiators*, London 1949, p. 182

²⁶ Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*, London 1954, p. 152

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 97

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 152

It is therefore no surprise when Ivanov says that every copy of Dostojevski's book ought to be burnt.

Koestler's own solution to the problem can probably be found in the quote from Lasalle that he puts as a motto before the last chapter:

'Show us not the aim without the way.
For ends and means on earth are so entangled
That changing one, you change the other too
Each different path brings other ends in view.'²⁹

It is probably not correct that every new set of means will change the end as well, as stated here. That will depend on the nature of the means as well as on the whole situation. But it is clear that the means used will often also influence the end, although not always. But it is hard to give any general rule about how much the goals will be affected. That can only be decided by analyzing each particular situation.

In the book Koestler does not mention the philosopher who is best known for his thinking about ends and means, i.e. Kant. But some of Kant's thoughts are nevertheless discussed and Rubashov seems to give them a vague support.

Kant believed that every person, including oneself, should be treated as an end and never as a mere means. But Ivanov opposes the idea that the 'individual is sacrosanct', which might be a way of saying that it is an end in itself, by pointing out that then a battalion commander might not sacrifice a patrolling party to save the regiment. To that Rubashov answers that war is an abnormal circumstance.³⁰ But Rubashov does not mention the various objections that can be raised to the principle also in normal times, e.g., the way society imprison criminals as a means to deter others from crimes, or the fact that when a population is vaccinated against some diseases, a few persons will die due to the injection etc.

'Darkness at Noon' has many references to and descriptions of mystical experiences. It also contains descriptions of a phenomenon that resembles the 'split-consciousness' that Koestler tells about in his autobiography. Rubashov felt that his ego contained a component that he had not been aware of. He writes: '... by his observations Rubashov gradually became convinced that there was a thoroughly tangible component in this first person singular,

²⁹ Ibid., p. 231

³⁰ Ibid., p. 152

which had remained silent through all these years and now had started to speak.³¹

This component seems to be what psychologists call an autonomous complex, i.e. some split-off part of the psyche which is felt to have an independent existence in the mind. Such complexes have different contents. Some are so comprehensive that they make up a whole personality of their own beside the person's ordinary one. Others have a rather limited content. In the minds of some schizophrenics there might be a multitude of such autonomous complexes which alternate of having control.

An autonomous complex is either conscious or unconscious. For Rubashov it seems to have been unconscious during his previous life but became conscious during his time in the cell.

The way Koestler describes this autonomous complex shows that it is related to mysticism. He gives it different names. Sometimes he calls it 'the silent partner', and sometimes 'the grammatical fiction'. It speaks to Rubashov with an 'inner voice'. Koestler writes about it: 'Rubashov tried to study this newly discovered entity very thoroughly (...) he felt a compelling urge to clear up this matter, to 'think it to a logical conclusion'. But the realm of the 'grammatical fiction' seemed to begin just where the 'thinking to a conclusion' ended. It was obviously an essential part of its being, to remain out of the reach of logical thought, and then to take one unaware s.'³²

Once it is characterized in this way: 'but the silent partner just remains silent, shuns observation and even refuses to be localized in time and space.'³³

This silent partner seems thus to be irrational and apparently also in a way nonspatial and nontemporal. It can probably be regarded as the content of a borderline introvertive experience of the personal type. Like Koestler's own mystical experience it has ethical significance, as when Rubashov reflects: 'His consciousness of guilt, which Ivanov called "moral exaltation", could not be expressed in logical formulae - it lay in the realm of the "grammatical fiction".'³⁴

Koestler also describes how to communicate with this silent partner. He explains thereby how an experience of this partner leads to an impersonal, mystical experience: 'He (the silent part-

³¹ Ibid., p. 109

³² Ibid., p. 111

³³ Ibid., p. 109

³⁴ Ibid., p. 146

ner) was deaf to direct questions (. . .). And yet there were ways of approach to him. Sometimes he would respond unexpectedly to a tune (. . .), or of the folded hands of the Pietà, or of certain scenes of his childhood. As if a tuning-fork had been struck, there would be answering vibrations, and once this had started a state would be produced which the mystics called 'ecstasy' and saints 'contemplation', the greatest and soberest of modern psychologists had recognized this state as a fact and called it the 'oceanic sense'. And, indeed, one's personality dissolved as a grain of salt in the sea, but at the same time the infinite sea seemed to be contained in the grain of salt. The grain could no longer be localized in time and space. It was a state in which thought lost its direction and started to circle, like the compass needle at the magnetic pole, until finally it cut loose from its axis and travelled freely in space, like a bunch of light in the night, and until it seemed that all thoughts and all sensations, even pain and joy itself, were only the spectrum lines of the same ray of light, disintegrating in the prisma of consciousness.³⁵

This is clearly a description of an introvertive, impersonal experience, partly more detailed than Koestler's account of his own experience in 'The Invisible Writing'. It seems also that Koestler reserves the term 'mystical' for the impersonal experience and not for the experience of this silent parmer. This, however, is a matter of definition. Many mystics have both had such personal experiences as well as impersonal ones. The latter has generally been regarded as the higher ones. Meister Eckhart called the content of his personal experiences for God and the content of the impersonal ones for the Godhead.

The mystical state described here is probably of the introvertive kind, because Rubashov's attention seems to be directed inwards. But like Koestler's first experience it is not fully developed since some reminiscences of sensations and thoughts still remain, although somehow transformed into 'the spectrum lines of the same ray of light, disintegrating in the prisma of consciousness.'

Rubashov's impersonal experience seems to have the following of Stace's characteristics. The dissolution of the ego into something greater, which is a way of describing the Unitary Consciousness (characteristic 1). It is (probably) nonspatial and nontemporal (characteristic 2). The formulation that thought 'lost its direction and started to circle', may be a way of expressing the irrationality

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 244

and paradoxicality of the experience (characteristic 6). Other characteristics do not seem to be present. Rubashov's experience can therefore be termed a borderline, introvertive mystical experience that developed from a personal into an impersonal state.

In the quote Koestler mentions a phenomenon that is not included in the description of his own experience. That is the well-known mystical 'all-in-all'-experience which is here expressed like this: 'but at the same time the infinite sea seemed to be contained in a grain of salt'. This is a variation of the somewhat strange idea in mysticism that everything existing might be contained in a single object, an idea Blake expressed when he said he 'saw the world in a grain of sand'.

It seems, however, that Rubashov also had impersonal mystical experiences that were not brought about by this silent partner. In one passage it is said that: 'Apparently even a patch of blue sky was enough to cause the "oceanic state".'³⁶ On the same page Koestler writes: 'When he had read that newspaper notice (...), he had fallen into a queer state of exaltation – the 'oceanic state' had swept him away'. This also seems to be a typical example of spontaneous experiences.

A phenomenon that usually accompanies a mystical experience is a deep feeling of inner silence. Rubashov felt it like this: 'When he stood still (...), the silence between the whitewashed walls came to meet him, as from the depth of a well. He still did not understand why it had become so quiet, within and without. But he knew that now nothing could disturb that peace any more.'³⁷

This silence had sunk over him just before he held his last speech at the trial. It is not connected with a mystical experience. Nevertheless the mystical consciousness he had had before, might have contributed to this quietness, since mystical awareness generally is followed by such a state of silence.

Rubashov also reflects on the value of these experiences: The communist view he sums up like this: 'The Party disapproved of such states. It called them petit-bourgeois mysticism, refuge in the ivory tower. It called them 'escape from the task', 'Desertion of the class struggle'. The 'oceanic sense' was counter-revolutionary.'³⁸

This is the communist variety of the old claim that the mystic is an escapee from the world. He seeks isolation to enjoy his own

³⁶ Ibid., p. 245

³⁷ Ibid., p. 241

³⁸ Ibid., p. 245-246

transcendent pleasures. But this view is generally opposed in the mystical tradition. Meister Eckhart wrote for instance: 'Those who are out for "feelings" or for "great experiences" and only wish to have this pleasant side: that is self-will and nothing else.'³⁹ The mystic ought also to be active in the world.

Rubashov reasons further: 'But had these irrational processes become more admissible merely because he had a personal acquaintance with them now? Was it any the less necessary to fight the 'mystical intoxication' merely because one had oneself become intoxicated by it.'⁴⁰

Rubashov's final conclusion regarding his experiences is, however, positive. He puts them into a larger social context and thinks: 'Perhaps later (...) the new movement would arise - with new flags, a new spirit knowing of both: of economic fatality and the 'oceanic sense'. Perhaps the members of the new party will wear monks' cowls, and preach that only purity of means can justify the ends. Perhaps they will teach that the tenet is wrong which says that a man is the product of one million divided by one million, and will introduce a new kind of arithmetic based on multiplication: on the joining of a million individuals to form a new entity which (...) will develop a consciousness and an individuality of its own, with an "oceanic feeling" increased a millionfold.'⁴¹

The vision of a new society is contrasted with his former ideals, and Rubashov sums up the message of the book in this way: 'For forty years he had lived strictly in accordance with the vows of his order, the Party. He had held to the rules of logical calculation. He had burnt the remains of the old, illogical morality from his consciousness with the acid of reason. He had turned away from the temptations of the silent partner, and had fought against the 'oceanic sense' with all his might. And where had it landed him? Premises of unimpeachable truth had led to a result which was completely absurd, Ivanov's and Gletkin's irrefutable deductions had taken him straight into the weird and ghostly game of the public trial.'⁴²

In 'Arrival and Departure' there is probably no direct description of a mystical experience. But the hero seems sometimes to be on the verge of a borderline experience. In those cases he uses many mystical-sounding phrases. He describes for instance a dream in

³⁹ Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism East and West*, New York 1957, p. 73

⁴⁰ Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*, London 1954, p. 150

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 249

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 246-247

this way: 'He stood engulfed from all sides in a very bright, transparent fluid which permeated his body, and he knew that the fluid was Time and that where he stood was its centre, the present. Then he realized that this fluid was cool and dry, and he said aloud: I am a fossil in the crystal of frozen time. He experienced an exquisite coolness and cleanness, and said in a serene voice: I am a captive immured in the present, which is the crystalized void.

He dearly regretted that he had woken up in the middle of the dream, when he seemed just on the verge of some blissful and important discovery. (...) All he remembered now of his dream was the sensation of a vibrating, penetrating void, and the phrase: 'A prisoner empty time'.⁴³

Often mystical experiences occur during sleep.⁴⁴ Sometimes a mystical experience is also foreboded in a dream.

What above is said about time, is similar to many mystics' philosophizing about it, a philosophizing that often appear somewhat obscure. Mystics frequently report that the feeling of time is changed in many peculiar ways. Time might be identified with a tangible object or looked upon as unreal and superficial. Some also hold that it imprisons man so that he does not get the full experience of reality.

A mystical-sounding expression used in the passage is 'This bright, transparent fluid' which somehow also is time. The notion seems similar to that 'life-force', 'transcendent essence' etc. that the extrovertive mystics see in nature and which often makes everything shining with a 'celestial' light.

The concepts 'crystalized void' and 'vibrating, penetrating void' has perhaps a similar meaning as the mystical concepts 'the void', 'nothingness', 'emptiness', 'pure consciousness' etc. which so often are used to describe the introvertive mystical experience.

The hero also felt he was on the verge of some blissful and important discovery. This might be an indication that this vague, borderline-like experience might develop into a real mystical experience. But it must be stressed that one cannot be sure that this dream renders a borderline mystical experience. The dream only contains a few elements that might be interpreted in that way.

Later the hero becomes acquainted with some new aspect of his being, with his inner core that seems to have some mystical char-

⁴³ Koestler, *Arrival and Departure*, London 1966, p. 58-59

⁴⁴ Aelfrida Tillyard, *Spiritual Exercises and their Result*, London 1927, p. 50.

acteristics. He says about it: 'Yes, Sonia was right, but all her logic could not interfere with this experience of supreme peace which seemed to emanate from a source beyond her reach, from the very core of his self.'⁴⁵

As his personality develops, a new faith is formed with a certain religious and mystical tinge. The hero writes: 'I think a new god is about to be born (...). Don't try to divine his message or the form of his cult - this will be after our time. The mystics of to-day are as trite as the political reformers.'⁴⁶

Those passages in 'Arrival and Departure' which might have something to do with mystical experiences are, however, rather peripheral. Koestler has formulated the central theme in this way: "'Arrival and Departure" was a rejection of the ethical neutrality of science. The hero, who has been made to see on the psychiatrist's coach that his beliefs "in big words and little flags" have been illusions, his courage vanity, his self-sacrifice the effect of repressed guilt, is apparently cured of all these unreasonable attitudes. Yet after the cure, he once more volunteers for a dangerous and self-sacrificing mission, driven by an urge that emanates from his untouchable core, beyond psychological causation and beyond the grasp of reason.'⁴⁷

As Koestler says in his autobiography, this theme is also derived from his mystical experiences. He felt that his mystical experiences implied that ethical conduct was something irreducible. They could not be explained by factors from any science. The hero formulated his credo like this: 'If one accepted a faith, one should not ask because of what - the "because of" should be taken for granted, beyond questioning.'⁴⁸

Perhaps Koestler's ethical views can be formulated in the way that ethical conduct and imperatives ought to be regarded as indefinable and irreducible. They cannot be explained by something else. Koestler thus rejects so called naturalism in ethics, i.e. those theories that maintain that ethical concepts can be analysed without remainder into non-ethical characteristics, e.g. taken from psychoanalysis.

When Koestler rejects the reduction of ethical norms and conduct to something else, he also rejects fundamental parts of Freud's theories.

⁴⁵ Koestler, *op.cit.*, p.175

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.186-187

⁴⁷ Koestler, *The Invisible Writing*, London 1954, p.358

⁴⁸ Koestler, *Arrival and Departure*, London 1954, p.176.

Communism and psychoanalysis were the two theories that most influenced Koestler in his youth. In 'The Gladiators' and in particular in 'Darkness at Noon' he broke with communism. But in 'Arrival and Departure' he mainly rejected Freud.

Many great authors have been mystics, like Dostojevski, Proust, Valery, Thoreau, Whitman, and Tennyson. But the mysticism in their works have always got a personal form. And this is especially so regarding Koestler. His mystical experiences might be of the same kind as those known thousands of years ago. But characteristic for him is that his experiences have been interpreted and brought to bear upon important currents of thought in this century, so that his work is something that only could have appeared in our time.