

Great Books Discussion Group
Questions for *Darkness at Noon*

On a literal level, Koestler's novel deals with the Communist trials in the USSR which occurred in the 1930s, where the original leaders of the revolution (the Bolsheviks) were accused of crimes against the revolution. In effect, these trials were one of the many purges that occurred in the USSR as old leadership was replaced by new leadership. On a metaphorical level, Koestler is comparing the sacrifice of Rubashov for the greater good; as being akin to Jesus' sacrifice for humanity. The title of the novel, *Darkness at Noon*, may refer to the gospel of St. Matthew, which mentions an eclipse of the sun at 12:00 on Good Friday when Christ died "Now from the sixth hour there was a darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour" (Matthew, 27:45).

1. Why does Rubashov agree to confess to crimes he did not commit? Was his agreement made to avoid torture, or was there another reason for his agreement?
2. Why does Rubashov maintain that the first person, "I" is a grammatical fiction? Is he denouncing the idea of a personal identity, or just the notion that an individual should take precedence over the needs of the many?
3. Is number 1 good, bad, or amoral? Is number 1 a metaphor for God the father? Why doesn't number 1 have a name? Is it a coincidence that God doesn't have a name?
4. If number 1 is a metaphor for God and Rubashov a metaphor for Jesus, what is the relationship between the two? Is Rubashov acting out the will of number 1 in the same manner that Jesus acted out the will of God?
5. Why is Rubashov's country not identified? Does this omission help or hinder the story? Why or why not?
6. Is it a coincidence that the Jesus' message, if carried to a logical extreme, calls for complete sharing of worldly goods – i.e. communism? Do you think that Koestler was consciously using this message when he wrote the novel?
7. What are the implications of erasing history, as the novel mentions in several areas? Is it necessary to erase history in order to make people more compliant? What effect does the erasure of history have on the common people, according to Rubashov? According to Gletkin?
8. In one of his reveries, Rubashov contemplates the science of understanding human motivations and psychology, and applying those observations to the day-to-day business of government. Was this study helpful to Rubashov? Was it helpful to

- Gletkin? Can life become so depersonalized (can you become a “grammatical fiction”) that human motivations can be controlled through group psychology?
9. Does Rubashov ever completely detach himself from his emotions? He seems to feel remorse over his treatment of Richard, Lowey and Arlova. Is this remorse real, or is it feigned?