

“If free play is essential for kids to become free agents with autonomy, who know they deserve a voice in public decision making, then we may be in serious trouble,” he said, pointing to “a new kind of tyranny where people are more and more willing to let authorities make decisions for them.” The public reaction—or lack thereof—to government wire-tapping and surveillance are, he believes, early warning signs of this increasing apathy and compliance. “People are willing to let the government spy on them and monitor their calls and emails because they can’t think of any other way to stay safe. Fundamental issues of privacy and individual rights are really changing. Maybe that’s inevitable. But I hope not.”

Human nature seems almost to require that every generation bemoan the attitudes and prospects of younger generations. Even so, to think that the relentless pace of change in the last century will not have serious effects is naïve.

From, "The Death and Life of the American Imagination" by Jeannine Ouellette

Consider the implications of the above statement. Then, in a thoroughly developed post, argue for or against the position offered by the quotation; support your argument with appropriate evidence from *The Second Hearing of Darkness at Noon*.

HER POSITION:

**Society becoming more compliant, fundamental issues of privacy and individual rights are really changing.**

**To think that the relentless pace of change in the last century will not have serious effects is naïve**

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In Arthur Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon*, there exists a strong contrast between the older, political generation and the younger, more carefree generation that describes the concern expressed in Jeannine Ouellette’s essay, “The Death and Life of the American Imagination.” Rubashov, his colleagues, and his opponents, comprise a group of aging revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries from an era of Civil War; the common, peasant class whose simplistic motives are revealed by Gletkin make up the majority of the population. Ouellette’s claim that as society ages and moves away from the conflicts of its inception the people tend to become less politically involved and more compliant proves very true in the dictatorial world of Rubashov.

Gletkin’s interrogations reflect a more cynical view of the people. He says that “human beings able to resist any amount of physical pressure do not exist. [He has] never seen one” (102)—this means that, given enough pressure from the government, people will comply, leading to the “increasing apathy and compliance” that Ouellette is concerned about. However, Ivanov points out to Rubashov that “[Gletkin] is used to dealing with peasants” (150), which limits this claim to the common people. This claim is further emphasized by Rubashov’s observation of the dilapidated state of their society:

“Our engineers work with the constant knowledge that an error in calculation may take them to prison or the scaffold; the higher officials in our administration ruin and destroy their subordinates, because they know that they will be held responsible for the slightest slip and be destroyed themselves; our poets settle discussions on questions of style by denunciations to the Secret Police, because the expressionists consider the naturalistic style counter-revolutionary, and vice versa” (162).

In this thought, it is clearly shown that ordinary people (“our engineers,” “the higher officials,” “our poets”) succumb to the power of the government for fear of personal harm if they dissent. Although this does not directly relate to wire-tapping or government surveillance, as Ouellette mentions, it does have to do with the restriction of individual rights that result from a rule by fear. In other words, the ordinary, less political people simply desire a lifestyle unaffected by political oppression; the path of least resistance materializes as this increased compliance. The people choose to have their individual rights diminished in order to live more peacefully.

On the other hand, Ivanov, who knows Rubashov personally as a previous colleague, sees Rubashov as a man of higher moral virtue than the ordinary people. He says that, “when Rubashov capitulates, ... it won't be out of cowardice, but by logic” (102). Logic is what propels Rubashov to question and not sit well with the current way of being. Logic is what propels Ivanov to reason with Rubashov rather than resorting to the demeaning methods that Gletkin proposes. Logic is the only reason that Rubashov is different from the masses and the reason that this story can be told. Rubashov is unlike Richard or Little Loewy or Arlova, more ordinary-minded citizens who hold a bias towards looser, more practical ideals, such as Richard's cries for immorality of the Party's lies to Little Loewy's suspicion of the secret fleet. These people are seen as weaknesses, as deviations, in the strict-minded reasoning of Rubashov; they are the ordinary people that comply to the government's power. Rubashov, however, considers himself as high-minded, unchangeable figure that would not give in to the governmental suppression that Ouellette mentions. Rather, that “government wire-tapping and surveillance” that Ouellette worries that the younger generation inspires Rubashov to be as revolutionary as he is. As for the “increasing apathy and compliance” that Ouellette sees, this too is absent in Ivanov's and Rubashov's conversation. Ivanov says that “One may not regard the world as a sort of metaphysical brothel for emotions” (155), citing the useless endeavors of revolutionaries weeping over the the cons of society, supporting the use of reason as an ultimate doctrine. Thus, not everybody reacts passively to the tyranny of the government; there are still some resistant stumps that look to change society, not surrendering to the pull of society.

These two intellectuals deign to stoop to the level of the ordinary people, and therefore refuse to lower themselves to the conveniences and consequences that the commoners subject themselves to in exchange for an easier living. Specifically, he mentions that “to turn up one's eyes and humbly offer the back of one's neck to Gletkin's revolver—that is an easy solution. The

greatest temptation for the like of us is: to renounce violence, to repent, and to make peace with oneself” (156). Even the act of death for a virtuous cause (i.e., martyrdom) is seen as a weakness, an act of the common people. As Ivanov puts it, “If you deny [agreeing to my proposition], it’s just moral cowardice. Moral cowardice has driven many to martyrdom” (166). To him, martyrs are not heroes—they’re cowards. It is more of a matter of choice to defy the government, albeit with great effort, than a simple matter of absolute compliance.

By dissociating themselves from the commoners is not to say that they do not care. Rather, to support Ouellette’s other claim that “to think that the relentless pace of change in the last century will not have serious effects is naïve,” Rubashov toils for years on end for the survival of the Party for the good of the people. He just needs to be on a moral pedestal to lead them, from which stems his looking-down on others.

For the most part, Ouellette’s beliefs stands true with Koestler’s words in *Darkness at Noon*. The citizens live under a tyrannical rule, cowering and submitting to pressures imposed by government, exactly as Ouellette predicted. But hidden in the folds of society are a few intellectuals who hold themselves to standards higher than that of the ordinary people, refusing to let themselves become disillusioned or suppressed. People of the like of Ivanov and Rubashov and even the mysterious No. 1 are actually empowered by this suppression, revolutionaries in a mob of complacency. An aging and weak member of the Party, Rubashov demonstrates that even in the most trying times, and even as society advances as Ouellette says towards oppression and despotism, there is always some hope left. Rubashov is that last hope.