THE SHORT STORIES OF FRANZ KAFKA: LITERATURE-PHILOSOPHY

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THE SHORT STORIES OF FRANZ KAFKA: LITERATURE-PHILOSOPHY

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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>Literature-Philosophy</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>On Tradition, Law, Authority</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>On Messages</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>On Hope</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI.</td>
<td>On Searching</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII.</td>
<td>On Communication and Fellowship</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Stepping into Franz Kafka's fictional world, one feels that all rules for beginning and ending have been left behind. Through the use of excessive logic Kafka relates illogical tales filled with the fantastic of the ordinary. Kafka blurs the factual world into a dreamlike appearance, but only to make it come to light again in sharper focus. Through his narrative, humans may acquire beastly characteristics while beasts appear divine. Time and space take on new dimensions, and familiar surroundings are seen in new perspectives. In short, the entire everyday world is turned upside down. Yet out of this bizarre and bewildering atmosphere comes a stark revelation of reality. Confusion is, in fact, essential to Kafka's art, for its very essence lies in the strange formula of the paradox.

Kafka describes modern man's condition as accurately as he can, offering no positive solution to it through religious concepts, man's reasoning process, or humanitarian morals. Yet, not suicide, nor the loss of self, nor nihilism provides victory either. Kafka offers no absolute solutions for man's problems. His only "conclusions" are paradoxes and unanswered questions. Kafka cannot solve the paradoxes or answer the questions. He is, nevertheless, an artist who is
also a modern philosopher. Philosophy in its most recent form has become a manifestation of existence, of what is. Rather than abstract the truth in an absolute form, philosophy simply attempts to see what is evident in man's existence. An accurate description of human living is, therefore, a way of making the truth manifest. Because Kafka, through his art, describes existence without prejudice, his writing is not only literature, but also philosophy, that is literature-philosophy.

However, Kafka's method of describing the questions and paradoxes evident in man's existence is such that his authority as a philosopher is not always obvious. The paradoxes of Kafka's themes have various levels of significance and thus may be interpreted in terms of religion, psychology, history or politics. Philip Rahv observes that Kafka's "language is simple and his construction elementary, yet most readers have found his fiction inexplicable. ... The mystification is entirely one of meaning" (5, p. 61). The problem of meaning in Kafka's parables and tales is compounded when his fiction is interpreted in terms of his personal life. Born in Prague on July 3, 1883, of Jewish parents, Kafka was brought up as a German, though he also acquired an understanding of his Jewish heritage and of Czechoslovakian literature. "... from the Czech point of view he was considered a German, but as a German he did not belong among the Germans" (2, p. 46). "... his Jewishness
offended the German nationalists; on the other hand, orthodoxy and the past rebuked him for not being Jewish enough . . . " (2, p. 135).

Kafka received his degree in law from the German University in Prague. He worked in an insurance office each day, so most of his writing had to be done in the evenings. Kafka was engaged twice to the same girl and once to another, but he never married. His relationship with his father was never satisfactory and caused him great pain. On June 3, 1924, in a sanitarium near Vienna, Kafka died of tuberculosis at the age of forty-one. Thus Kafka's nationality, religious background, his relationship with his father and his attitude toward women and marriage invite an autobiographical interpretation of his work in some cases. Heinz Politzer points out the danger of this approach while discussing Kafka's diaries, conversations, letters and aphorisms. "The information they contain is tenuous and, more often than not, misleading. We cannot identify a reflected image by reflecting it in a second mirror" (4, p. 18). Regardless of how informative Kafka's biography may be in explaining the origin of his creative symbols, it can never fully explain how the symbols function in the work of art itself.

Even when an interpretation of Kafka's work is carefully restricted to the composition itself, the problem of meaning is a complex one. In fact, there is no way to restrict the various levels of significance in Kafka's prose to a single
meaning without robbing the work of its intended and necessary ambiguity. According to Gunter Anders, "Kafka is a sceptic, but he is sceptical about the legitimacy of his own scepticism. . . . He is a moralist, but cannot distinguish between good and evil. . . . Kafka is a critic of the dehumanized world, but he is also its exalter. He is an atheist, but makes a theology of atheism" (1, p. 96). Thus meanings which are antithetical are not necessarily mutually exclusive in Kafka's work. One critic may see "The Hunger Artist" as a religious allegory, and another may feel that the story symbolizes man's inability to live a satisfying life. Perhaps both interpretations are correct in different respects.

Folitzer, through an analysis of the fragment "Give It Up!" demonstrates various possible approaches to the interpretation of this one short paragraph. The narrator of "Give It Up!" explains that he was on his way to a railroad station when he realized by comparing his watch to a tower clock that it was much later than he had thought. Rushed and unsure of the way, he asked a policeman to direct him. The officer, however, tells him to "Give it up," and turns away "like someone who wants to be alone with his laughter" (3, p. 120). In a social or historical framework, the policeman may be interpreted as a representative of an administration which cannot help its citizens. It supplies neither information, protection nor guidance (4, p. 9).
Within a psychological frame of reference, the fragment may seem a "case study in neurasthenia" with the narrator's fear of being late interpreted as his fear of death (4, p. 10). The fear becomes more acute when the policeman reveals that he cannot or will not help. If one assumes the paragraph to be an autobiographical anecdote, the official might become an image of Kafka's father who keeps his son from finding the way to a satisfying adult life (4, p. 11). If the reader shifts to a religious perspective, the composition can be seen as a type of allegory with the policeman representing a spiritual official who has nothing to offer humankind but the advice, "Give it up," which now seems a divine judgment. Perhaps the narrator is too superficial to understand the spiritual or perhaps the official is simply indifferent to mankind. In either case, communication is impossible (4, p. 12). Finally, it is possible to see the narrator as an existential hero and the policeman as "the spokesman of a universe totally unconcerned with the information seeker's personal destiny" (4, p. 13).

It is not possible to say that one interpretation is more correct than another. In fact, the paragraph invites each interpretation. Kafka seems deliberately to resist distinguishing between authorities—physical, metaphysical, social or otherwise—perhaps because they are all united in alienation from man, denying him even the smallest victory. The authority's duty is to provide man with security and
some order in an otherwise disorderly world, but Kafka's policeman denies his duty and yet retains his position. Kafka leaves the question of responsibility open. It remains difficult to say whether the narrator has forfeited his right to be protected or if he is being unjustly denied. Is the policeman to be questioned or does his profession place him above suspicion? Is the lack of communication the policeman's fault or does the problem lie with the traveler?

Instead of choosing among these conflicting points of view, Kafka forces the reader to change constantly from one to the other. The policeman seems both petty and awe-inspiring. The traveler seems ridiculous and yet deserving of pity (4, p. 3). "Shifts of perspective occur so quickly that the contrasts are blurred, the opposites merge, and the contradictions are shrouded by an all-encompassing ambiguity" (4, p. 8).

Kafka's prose is so multileveled that, though an interpretation from almost any approach will have a certain validity, there is no one and only meaning in terms of the exact symbols of any dogmatic doctrine. It is possible, however, that Kafka's ambiguity is nothing more than the natural consequence of his unrelenting honesty. Kafka realistically and thoroughly portrays existence as he sees it from varied and often contrasting viewpoints. "The policeman's 'Give it up!' is spoken to all those interpreters of Kafka who seem to assume that he believed in the existence
of only one way leading in one direction to one aim" (4, p. 8). Indeed, it is impossible objectively to restrict Kafka to one aim. At the same time, however, it is just because Kafka does blend various levels of meaning and conflicting forces into one confusing, paradoxical whole that he gives a faithful description of what does appear--of reality. That there is no one unequivocal meaning in Kafka's prose does not mean that he is not unequivocally rendering reality.

This examination of Kafka as philosopher will not, therefore, concentrate on the selection of the "correct" approach to his work, but on his description of reality from all levels of approach. Socially, spiritually, psychologically, Kafka speaks not only as an artist, but also as a philosopher, who sees all levels of man's existence as a part of reality. The definition of Kafka's prose as literature-philosophy will be based chiefly on an examination of his shorter fiction. However, his novels The Trial and The Castle epitomize certain aspects of Kafka's concept of the cosmos and will be referred to accordingly.

Before his death, Kafka requested his friend Max Brod to burn all of his unpublished manuscripts. Brod, however, edited Kafka's works and had them published instead. Of the compositions published while Kafka was alive, the first was in a literary periodical in 1908. Kafka continued writing until his death forty-four years ago. In the examination to
follow, Kafka's compositions will not be taken up chronologically, but according to the topics with which each deals, or more accurately, according to certain common questions which each poses. In asserting that Kafka is a philosopher, it will not be necessary to find answers to the questions Kafka himself has left open. Though Kafka's questions remain unanswered and his paradoxes insoluble, further examination should show why this artist is also a philosopher.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER II

LITERATURE-PHILOSOPHY

In order to understand Kafka as author, as philosopher, his conception of existence must be understood on his terms, through the symbols he uses to describe it. He is a philosopher in the modern tradition, expressing reality only as he sees it. He does not borrow a philosophical system and hang his concept of the universe on it. The recent condemnation of philosophy as the construction of systems is, in fact, exactly what makes it possible to view Kafka's literature as modern philosophy. When existentialism is understood as a movement and not as an idea or a system, it is tenable to say that Kafka demonstrates the existential position.

Everett W. Knight explains that existentialism is "an effort to tear philosophy away from its contemplation of an order that does not exist, so that it may participate in the confusion that does" (12, p. 285).

If modern philosophy had continued the quest for a total explanation, Kafka's lack of positive solutions, his ambiguity and his fragmentary explanations would place him outside the realm of philosophy. However, since existentialism "is the substitution of a living ambiguity for a dead absolute." (12, p. 285) philosophy and Kafka's literature describe the nature of the world and of man from the
same position. Kafka portrays the dilemma of man's existence without translating it into doctrinal terms. He proposes no answers to modern man's condition, but merely describes it as accurately as he can and with all the strength of his being. "He does not depend on the definitive logic of a generally known system of theology: . . . he is not allegorical in any accepted sense but rather an innovator so deeply individualistic as to fit none of the familiar categories" (14, p. 61).

Kafka cannot be made to fit a mold because honesty prevents him from describing life as man would like it to be and forces him to describe it as it is. "His passion is the truth, not which one can lightly repeat, but which one can only try to unravel for oneself. . . . He avoids the all too easy bridging of gulfs" (17, p. 188). It is this quest to reveal existence as man actually experiences it that unites philosophy and literature. Knight says:

Existentialism reduces life from what we would like it to be, to what it is, and the instrument employed is not this or that method, but lucidity. The writer who refuses to allow a faith, a hope or a theory to interfere with his work, who has the courage to confront existence itself, is also a metaphysician, because existence is Reality and not merely its outward form (12, p. 16).

The validity of referring to Kafka as a philosopher is based on the thesis that philosophy and literature have lost their identities in one another. "There is, of course, no question of an influence of any decisive nature; on the contrary, the
point is that literature and philosophy should have arrived
at the same conclusions almost independently of one another--
that literature should be philosophy" (12, p. 16). Both
literature and philosophy have come to be a manifestation of
existence, of what is or of what appears, and this appearance
is Reality, not its shadow or reflection. Reality is no
longer viewed as some abstract absolute which can be attained
by following the right prescription.

Perhaps the most drastic philosophical changes which
lead eventually to the merger of literature and philosophy
begin with Descartes (1596-1650). It is with this seventeenth-
century philosopher's analysis of knowledge that ideas get a
new orientation. The one certainty for Descartes is a sub-
jective one, "I think, therefore I am." All information
which man gains through sense perception is open to doubt.
The innate, self-evident truths, recognized universally, are
in the understanding and remain constant, independent of
sense data. Thus mind (holder of innate truths) and matter
(perceived by the senses) become two distinct, separate
entities (4). For Descartes, God guaranteed a liaison between
these two worlds, but for men of a less religious view, the
problem proved to be difficult, one with which man has con-
tinually struggled.

John Locke (1632-1704), with his concept of the mind
being a tabula rasa at birth, does away with Descartes' 
innate ideas and further separates mind and matter. The
idealism of Berkeley and the skepticism of Hume demonstrate two ways of dealing with the problem of this division. George Berkeley (1685-1753), maintaining the only thing man can be sure of is sensation itself, transfers the world of the empiricists from outside to inside the mind. Still, man has no way of knowing that his sensation of what is "out there" corresponds to what actually is "out there." As does Descartes, Berkeley calls on God to supply the missing link (2).

David Hume (1721-1776), however, proposes the unhappy possibility that all knowledge is, at best, only probable. Man subjectively imposes laws on the objective world that are discoverable only by experience; they elude all rational demonstration. There is no firm basis for causal relations since it is impossible to infer the effect of any cause without the assistance of observation and experience. Man's laws of necessity, subjectively imposed on the world, have no objective validity (7).

It is the perplexing observation of Hume that leads Kant (1724-1804) to propose the theory that the objective world appears to man only because of his subjective concepts. Reason's function is to synthesize and thus actually order sense experience by means of principles which are in the mind prior to the materials which they bring into appearance. The mind, then, through its concepts is actually the author of experience rather than the mere recorder of it. Since
the categories of the understanding are necessary conditions of any experience whatsoever, a thing-in-itself cannot appear because it is not conditioned. Man knows objects as phenomena only. As noumena, objects are completely unknown to man. Finally, therefore, Kant's method of explaining experience and knowledge makes impossible the rational demonstration of an objective existence. The natural laws and causalities of the external world exist in the way the mind is structured, in the synthesis man makes of sense data through the understanding. The world is man's own construction, so it would seem that man, at last, is free. Yet man can never get on the other side of his perceptions (11).

In Knight's explanation of Kant's position, he observes that the freedom Kant gives with one hand, he takes back with the other. The limitations once imposed by the objective world are now imposed by the subjective one. Man is still bound, but by self-imposed laws (12, p. 29). Knight explains the consequences of this situation as follows:

This peculiar contradiction between total freedom (since it is human subjectivity which determines the shape of the world) and total enslavement (since that subjectivity is imposed and inalterable) runs through the entire nineteenth century.... It is a period at the same time classical and romantic, rational and mystic, democratic and fascist (12, p. 29).

The empiricism and idealism of the last century, so apparently opposite, now appear fundamentally the same. The exterior world is relative in either case--to the structure of the
mind for the idealist and to sense perception for the empiricist. "Both empiricism and idealism bequeath this singularly disappointing conception of a universe in appearance so inexhaustible, in reality, partly or entirely, shut up within the mind" (12, p. 31).

Kant was free to theorize that the mind contained inalterable principles through which knowledge came into being, but by the end of the century the mind could no longer be regarded as this secure safety deposit box. If man evolves, it is logical to assume that his mind evolves with him, and its nature changes accordingly. Its principles are no more stable than the sense data which Kant says it orders. Both consciousness and ideas, therefore, are subjected to the natural, evolitional process. Thinking becomes nothing more than a natural phenomenon.

At the beginning of this century, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), in an effort to show that such a conclusion can be avoided, analyzed the subjective process. The interaction between subjectivity and the exterior world is explained, according to Husserl, by the existence of essences in the object, rather than by the existence of unchanging concepts in the mind used to order experience (8). His position is exactly the opposite of Kant's. The phenomenological concept of consciousness transcends all inner-outer, mind-matter dualisms, because both mind and matter are necessary for any cognition whatsoever.
Intentionality is an essential concept in understanding why the very distinction between mind and matter is, in fact, unwarranted. The object appears because it is intended—one turns toward it, which means he becomes conscious of it. The essence of an object is in the very "giveness" of the phenomenon itself. The real is found in appearance since consciousness and the object are variables in experiencing one phenomenon (8, 5). Cognition necessarily involves constituting the object in consciousness. The world exists because man intentionally constitutes it. By turning toward objects without prejudice, he sees them exactly as they give themselves (8, 9). Consciousness is, then, simply a turning toward the object. It is intentionality. Since consciousness is always consciousness of something, intentionality is a liberation from subjectivity. Consciousness is in immediate contact with things in themselves so the slogan of phenomenology becomes "back to things themselves." All thought should be concentrated exclusively on the object, eliminating everything subjective, because phenomenology's goal is simply to make immanent that which is (3, pp. 16-18). Phenomenology, as a method, outlines the steps which must be taken in order to arrive at the pure phenomenon, wherein essences are revealed. As a philosophy, it gives essential knowledge of that which is (8).

Husserl's method for arriving at the pure phenomenon is neither deductive nor inductive, but reductive. When one
reduces or "brackets away" all from the object except what is absolutely necessary for its meaning, the essence of the object will appear (9). Husserl, attempting to account for there being consciousness without the least trait of subjectivity, introduces the transcendental ego. All subjectivity can be suspended from it. Being pure structure, devoid of content, the transcendental ego can perceive the essential structure of the object just as it is (9). At this point it is possible to see how the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905- ) was developed from Husserl's phenomenology. Husserl maintains man's subjective, emotional states should be bracketed away, whereas Sartre feels they reveal what is.

As Knight explains, Sartre argues that if consciousness is always in contact with things themselves, each emotion is significant since it is provoked by the thing itself and must, therefore, reveal something about reality (12, p. 52). Existentialism concentrates on the fact that everything encountered by consciousness exists, rather than upon the question of the structure which makes these things comprehensible to man (12, p. 97). For the existentialist, both the source and the elements of knowledge are sensations as they exist in man's consciousness. "Phenomenology becomes existentialism when emphasis rather than being placed upon the material objects 'intended' by consciousness is placed upon the existence of consciousness itself" (12, p. 52). There is no knowledge other than the entire presence of the object to consciousness.
Sartre explains knowledge as the total truth of appearance (15, p. 216). His the "in-itself" and the "for-itself" are two terms essential to understanding this view. The in-itself is everything that exists—everything of which there is consciousness. The entire material universe signifies nothing. Knight observes that, according to Sartre, "All that can be said of the in-itself is that it is; it conceals nothing. Knowledge, consequently, is simply the presence of the object" (12, p. 293). Facts are not deduced or proved, but let themselves be seen. There is no order or necessity to the in-itself. It is always changing, thus it is absurd or contingent.

Value is the for-itself, according to Sartre. The in-itself is contingent upon the for-itself, which may be understood as man's consciousness—the attitude that he takes toward the in-itself, or his emotional state (15, pp. 93-94). The for-itself both does and does not exist; it is a tangible absence (15, pp. 103-104). It is a nothingness which exists, because it is never conscious of itself apart from the in-itself. It is a nothingness insofar as it cannot exist except as it is conscious of something, yet it exists insofar as it allows the object to appear (15, pp. 617-618).

The world is nothing more than the totality of objects which the for-itself gives appearance and meaning. Things are kept apart only by the attitudes man takes toward them (15, p. 175). Existence is only that which man consciously
gives it, so existence is not necessary, but contingent (15, pp. 82-83). Existence and its quality depend upon the individual. There is, therefore, not one truth, but as many truths as there are perspectives. Yet as Knight points out, Sartre's conception of the world as man's creation, at the same time involves a suppression of the self since there is nothing apart from things. Man has no essential self. The self is nothing more than Sartre's the for-itself (12, p. 266). Subjectivity is no more than a response to sensations aroused by things. Sartre maintains that since consciousness cannot turn itself toward what does not exist, the meaning of human life is inherent in existence itself. Man is his existence. Other than existence, he is nothingness. There is no universal essence of man, no basic human nature (15, pp. 172-180). There is no intrinsic value to life; it cannot be justified by reference to some Reality outside its own existence. Existence is Reality. Life is. Period.

The fusion of modern philosophy and literature should now be evident. Tracing the consequences of philosophy from Descartes to Sartre leads to the conclusion that no metaphysical concepts account for what really is lived or experienced. Reality, as man knows it through daily existence, is at odds with all abstractions. When the goal of both artist and philosopher is to bring the real and the abstract together, literature becomes philosophy. If no abstractions account for reality, then there are no concepts about it
except that there are none, or what is the same thing, there is only the absurd. There is life as it appears, and not as it is intellectually interpreted in absolute abstractions. Existentialism maintains that there is no special status of being, apart from being through daily action. Existence is the only reality. Consequently, as Knight observes, the truth of any present situation is perfectly evident as it is, and all that philosophy does is to make it manifest. "It is the business of the writer to prevent it [truth] from being obscured by fear or selfish interests" (12, p. 288).

Kafka's constant and diligent attempt to render reality as man experiences it places the author within the sphere of literature-philosophy. Through his art, Kafka manifests the truth of human existence and courageously fights to prevent its obscurity. The doubts expressed in his prose "reveal a demand for the objective, for the world, that outweighs being sunk in one's own subjectivity" (17, p. 242). In "The Building of the Temple" Kafka compares "the dark, enigmatic real significances of being . . . with the possible ones ascribed it by the spirit" (17, p. 242). Kafka's meditation relates the ease of building a temple, except that on every stone children or barbarians have made clumsy scratches "for an eternity outlasting the temple" (10, p. 47).

The author does not shield a theological or philosophical system from the childish and barbaric inconsistencies of
human existence.

"I represent," we read in Kafka's diary, "the negative elements of my age... Unlike Kierkegaard, I was not guided in life by the now heavily sinking hand of Christianity, nor have I caught hold, like the Zionists, of one of the ends of the flying prayer-shawl of the Jews" (14, p. 64).

As one who has the courage to face existence without the aid of any doctrine, Kafka joins modern philosophers. He writes, "'What have I in common with Jews? I have hardly anything in common with myself and should stand very quietly in a corner, content that I can breathe'" (6, p. 137).

If Kafka supports no particular theory, but seeks only the truth, his conception of existence must be taken as it is and for what it is, as expressed within his prose. Though Kafka uses symbols from various doctrines, he does so to make his perception of man and the world concrete and particular, not to create a value system for mankind. "The ways of this world are too hard and fast to be changed, and Kafka too much of a realist to compromise by an escape into the world of myth" (17, p. xi). Kafka is not a creator of private mythology with his own specific framework like those of Yeats, Eliot or Joyce. He does not invent images, but uses for his own purposes those which already exist. He takes the meaning of an existing image and scrutinizes it under a microscope (1, p. 45). This detailed examination of existing concepts results in a new meaning expressed by the old concepts. In this way even Kafka's religious motifs of
guilt, salvation, power and grace can be understood in terms of this world and modern man's psychological reactions to it. Kafka's symbolic framework is, in final analysis, nothing more than the concepts of language, which he tears apart and puts back together again. Kafka accounts for the world with words as his images. "His mode presupposes no body of knowledge external to itself . . . " (14, p. 61). Therefore, just as a philosopher's meaning must be found in the context of the symbols (words) he uses without reference to some pre-established framework, so must Kafka's meaning be found in the symbols he uses within his work.

This is not to say that Kafka, the artist, intentionally wrote literature which is also philosophy. The point is that writers who reveal essential knowledge of that which is, quite apart from their methods of expression, demonstrate today's existential position. In fact, Knight argues that the ideas of literature have been formed into an existential context, and not that an existential "doctrine" has been emulated in themes of literature. It seems unlikely that literature borrows from an existential dogma, since existentialism is a movement which arises precisely from the refusal to believe in the possibility of a system which accounts for reality (12). Phenomenology explains how it is possible for what is real in appearance to also be true in reality. Existentialism then deals with this reality, closing the gap between appearance and reality, between the life one really
leads and abstractions about it. Philosophy is no more than a manifestation of life; thus Kafka speaks with the authority of a philosopher.

Sartre has explained that the for-itself (consciousness or the nothingness that lets objects appear) is always a reflection of the in-itself (the absurd or the material universe) so the for-itself also is contingent. There is no necessity to its existence. Searching for greater knowledge of one's self or of the world, therefore, is quite simply irrelevant to what existence means to man, because there is no way man can know himself as an in-itself or that he can know reality as other than what appears (15, pp. 122-123, 172-180). Politzer observes that Kafka's writing is "not the fruit of wisdom," so much as it is a "profession of ignorance" (13, p. 86). The endless searches and open questions revealed in Kafka's compositions lead not to increasing knowledge so much as they do to the conclusion that the search for any absolute answer is in vain.

Philip Rahv observes that what Kafka wished most "was to recreate life in such a way that 'while still retaining its natural full-bodied rise and fall, it would simultaneously be recognized no less clearly as a nothing, a dream, a dim hovering' . . ." (14, p. 69). Kafka's "dim hovering," life, is none the less human for being a nothing. Kafka's deepest concern is, in fact, for human existence. Franz Kafka's importance, according to Politzer, lies in the fact that
"he was probably the first and certainly the most radical
writer to pronounce the insoluble paradox of human existence
by using this paradox as the message of his parables" (13,
p. 22). Kafka's basic concern, then, is that of modern
philosophy—human existence. The paths of both the scholas-
tics and the experimentalists are regarded as somewhat
irrelevant detours "because the certitude of which each
boasts is arrived at only at the cost of not taking into
account the essential—human existence" (12, p. 286).

It is possible to assert that Kafka is a philosopher
without ignoring the disquieting qualities of his art
because, after all, his "vision of the world is an aesthetic
construction, a model of significant reality, not a madman's
fancy" (16, p. 63). The grotesqueness of Kafka's world "is
neither distortion nor realism, but an apprehension of
reality, a way of getting at the truth . . ." (16, p. 137).
Despite Kafka's adherence to truth, the author's work is so
ambiguous the reader cannot always be certain of its inten-
tions. This is not, however, "because the best art expresses
emotion rather than idea, but because it expresses the truth,
the nature of which is to be ambiguous" (12, p. 286). Thus,
the definition of modern literature-philosophy does not
involve fitting Kafka into some Sartrean existential mold.
Indeed, there are basic differences between the ways these
two writers manifest that which is. The point is that since
Kafka simply describes reality without prejudice, he is a
philosopher who speaks with the same authority as Sartre or any modern philosopher. The examination of Kafka's fictional pieces will not, therefore, reveal a particular metaphysical system, but simply what the artist says as a philosopher in his own right.
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Kafka examines, questions, doubts, and contradicts. Even his conclusions embody contradictory concepts; they are paradoxes. Kafka's account of the world is descriptive—not prescriptive. Consequently Kafka's compositions cannot be examined in terms of particular propositions, but merely according to the various topics with which each deals. Furthermore, Kafka's ambiguity demands that the topics be broad enough to allow interpretation on various levels. Kafka speaks on tradition, law, and authority, on messages, on hope, on meaning, and on communication and fellowship, distinguishing between them at least enough to make these topics serviceable as guidelines in the examination of his fiction. He speaks not only as an artist, but as a philosopher because, though his descriptions apply to various levels of man's existence, they manifest that which is evident on each level.

Among the most important symbols in Kafka's description of the world are those which have to do with tradition, law, and authority. Included in most of Kafka's fictional pieces is a representation of authority, often presented as some type of father figure. In fact, Kafka's description of the world is in some ways nothing more than a description of the
relationship between father and son. The relationship is expanded, contracted, melted down, and poured up again and again and applied to authority and its subject on psychological, religious, and political levels. By taking the relationship apart and putting it back together again, Kafka transforms it into a new relationship altogether. For example, in one tale the affiliation emerges as reality and one's self-conscious state, in another as God and man, or law and man, or ruler and the people, or order and the universe, or society and the citizen. In every case, the conflict between the two is always evident, as is the lack of a sound basis for the relationship in the first place. Charles Neider says Kafka's tales are first and foremost, autobiographical (12). Thus, the father-son motif arises from Kafka's own never-ending struggle with his father, who made Kafka feel guilty without cause, ruled over without reason, always ineffectual and incompetent, and above all, hopeless. The author attempts to define his relationship with the older Kafka in a long letter to his father. The central theme of the letter may be summed up, according to Max Brod, in the formula: son's weakness as compared to the father's arrogant strength (2, p. 18).

To view the relationship in Kafka's fiction itself, one may turn to "The Judgment," in which a strong father condemns his son to death. The son, Georg, writes to his bachelor friend of his coming marriage and upon telling his
father of the letter, receives the verdict of death. Of just what the son is guilty remains a mystery. Tauber suggests that Georg's friend symbolizes the weakened spiritual existence of Georg himself, who is portrayed as a vital businessman. His father, associated with God, condemns him for his complete concern with this world and his neglect of the spiritual (16, pp. 14-16). A respect for the elements of tradition does seem to be inherent in the story, since life on the bridge goes on quite as well after Georg's death in the waters below. The continuance of life may indicate that in some way the father's judgment was sound and his sentence just. Authority or tradition knows best. Man dies, but society goes on; innocent men perish, but law survives—and this is all as it should be, Kafka seems to say. The father, physical or divine, has the power to condemn without explaining why.

Yet Georg is finally brushed aside, not by some spiritual force, but by the "soulless life of a modern city" (13, p. 63). Kafka tells the reader "an unending stream of traffic was just going over the bridge" (10, p. 18). Furthermore, Georg's death, in final analysis, "is caused only by the whim of a middle-class father intent on settling his account with an obstinate son" (13, p. 63). Georg's life as revealed in the story doesn't seem vile enough to justify the sentence. Neither Georg nor the world gains any insight from the verdict. Even the father gains no glory, but crashes down
on his bed. As Politzer observes, both the judged and the judge perish (13, p. 62). Perhaps, then, there is something amiss in the father's judgment after all. It is possible that the father's authority is as defective as the son's life.

Georg asserts his love for his parents even as he is jumping to his death, so perhaps the entire episode results from lack of communication and understanding. Steinberg sees Georg as a good and dutiful son, who like Gregor in "The Metamorphosis," is undermined by the father (15, p. 93). Neither son was given the strength necessary for attaining his father's approval, so both Gregor and Georg accept their rejection, and perish (15, p. 96). The father's authority may be merely physical or it may be metaphysical or political, but in any case it causes Georg's death and brings enlightenment to no one. Georg is never given a chance to repent or make amends or even to find out why he is guilty, if indeed, he is. Kafka, himself, doesn't seem to know where to place the blame or where to look for a different solution.

Kate Floros argues that "The Judgment" allows Kafka to attain "his ultimate self-justification before his father by executing his sentence" (6, p. 23). Georg represents Kafka's daily existence as an office clerk, and the friend represents Kafka's inner self, his writing self. Thus the story deals with the "triangular conflict man vs. writer vs. marriage" (6, p. 16) within Kafka, in addition to his quest for understanding and approval from his father, who had a distaste
for Kafka's writing (6, p. 22). Yet the comfort of self-justification which this interpretation allows is not Kafka's final answer. Man's quest for self-fulfillment is not so simple as that. It is difficult to determine if the death of Georg, the everyday Kafka, allows the friend, the writing Kafka, to flourish. After all, it is the soulless life of the city which triumphs. Surely there must be ways of attaining self-justification other than complying with the wish of an authority whose wisdom Kafka allows the reader to question. Miss Flores is well aware that Kafka has not spoken his final word in "The Judgment." She concludes that the comfort which comes from carrying out the father's sentence "is not to be compared to the ecstasy of the hopeless, the preposterous, but unendable quest" (6, p. 23).

Kafka's hopeless quest for an authority, a law or a tradition by which man can govern his life is not restricted to family existence, but reaches out to the various levels on which man lives. According to Mark Spilka, Kafka catches "deeply and accurately the connection between home and office, the thwarting of independence in both realms, the depletion of the spirit, and, in consequence, the reduction of urban man to bestial immaturity." Georg is guilty, therefore, of this bestial existence, yet since he did not choose it, he is also innocent (14, p. 139). Kafka merely describes what is, thus he can suggest both that the sentence is unjust and yet Georg is guilty and/or that Georg is
innocent and yet the sentence is just. Kafka manifests the truth of both paradoxes, without giving a solution to either.

The paradoxical nature of authority is again described in "In The Penal Colony," but its symbols less restricted than the father-son relationship of "The Judgment." The narrative describes a horrible machine which slowly and meticulously executes the detailed instructions given it by an officer of the colony. The machine is equipped with sets of needles and thereby communicates the guilt of the accused to him by engraving it into his flesh. The needles puncture the victim's flesh over and over again, forming the letters that spell out the charge against him. The accused is not previously informed of the charge against him. The executing officer explains, "Guilt is never to be doubted" (10, p. 97). He also gives a logical account of why the victim is not formally charged and given a chance to prove his innocence: 

"... things would have got into a confused tangle. He would have told lies, and had I exposed these lies he would have backed them up with more lies, and so on and so forth. As it is, I've got him and I won't let him go" (10, p. 98).

Politzer suggests that the machine suggests the mystery and paradoxical nature of law. Though the punishment is lawful, the procedure seems unjust and the execution inhuman (13, p. 102). The execution officer is the colony's only remaining advocate of the torture machine. Therefore, when an objective stranger who observes the execution
ceremony also objects to the procedure, the officer decides he must sacrifice himself to the machine. He gives it directions to puncture "Be Just" into his skin. However, the machine goes berserk and quite simply murders him outright.

Tauber suggests that the machine makes man's redemption possible through suffering (16, p. 62). The officer is cruelly murdered because he oversteps human bounds in proclaiming his own judgment and thus forfeits the divine grace necessary for salvation. Yet the officer acts in good faith when he sacrifices himself. His life offering is not an act of defiance or rebellion from the old order, but merely an attempt to serve it faithfully in the only recourse left to him. That God would deny His saving grace to a time-tested servant with pure motives seems unlikely. Furthermore, during the process of the officer's execution, the machine breaks down and destroys itself. It seems more natural, therefore, to view the sacrifice as Politzer does: a slaughter in honor of the monstrous idol, which itself disintegrates (13, p. 107).

Man sacrifices himself for this mechanized symbol of a political or metaphysical ultimate, or merely of authority in general. But as Charles Neider observes, the machine handles the sacrificer with no refinement; it murders him outright (12, p. 79). Even if man tries to give his life to an idol, to God, to any mythical figure, or to any system,
he is simply murdered without significance since his idol eliminates itself anyway. To give his life meaning, man can rely on no authoritative system—legal, metaphysical or otherwise—because such systems, in the comprehensive symbol of the torture machine, are doomed to self-destruction.

It is not to be assumed, however, that man is innocent merely because systems are guilty. Kafka's conception of authority is not as simple as that. Man's "guilt is never to be doubted." Furthermore, given a chance to prove himself innocent, man lies and creates a "confused tangle." The full circle has once again been made, ending in the complete impasse from which no straight line can be drawn. All motion within a paradox is circular and can have no other direction.

If the authority for which the machine stands is not that of a particular system, but of life itself, the hopelessness of the final outcome remains the same. Even if man gives up his inner needs and desires, diminishing his self to nothing but a mere existence, in an attempt to meet the demands of life outside himself, life (the torture machine) then disintegrates and becomes meaningless. Attaining the loss of self in order to escape the tortures of life results merely in a living death. If in order to exist, man must be slaughtered, he does not gain much.

Even the explorer, who is an opposing force to the authority of the machine, holds little hope for man. Burns
observes that the explorer never says "yes" to the inhumanity of the penal colony (4, p. 50), but he does not do much to alter it either. Politzer points out that the explorer has no assurance that the new order will be any better than the old one. In addition, the explorer's departure from the island indicates that his interest in man fails (13, p. 108). The explorer is of major significance, according to Burns, who sees him as the one holder of humanitarian values in the story. "The explorer's dilemma is now the dilemma of every man who shares the explorer's values. For our everyday world has taken on all the characteristics of the penal colony, and if we accept its values we are the executioners and the executed" (4, p. 51).

Kafka, as a mere recorder of man's existence, does not point the way out of the dilemma. He merely describes the difficulties of submitting and of not submitting to absolute authority. There is no easy answer to the question of what (if anything) can give meaning and direction to man's life. Kafka cannot honestly give an answer in terms of humanism, as Sartre does. Even though Kafka shows the inadequacy of an absolute authority, he does not assert that man is capable of being his own authority. However, perhaps Kafka's descriptions are necessary for Sartre logically to make such an assertion.

Regardless of the imagery which Kafka uses to describe it, law and authority always present a dilemma for man.
Perhaps none of Kafka's heroes feel the dilemma more acutely than poor Joseph K. when he is baffled by the parable "Before The Law" in The Trial. The parable deals with a man from the country who begs admittance to the Law, but before the Law stands a doorkeeper who tells the man he cannot allow him to enter at that moment though it may be possible for him to do so later. The man continues to ask for admittance the rest of his life, but always without success. Just before the man dies, the doorkeeper tells him the door to the Law was intended for him alone. The doorkeeper adds that he is now going to shut the door, though he had said at an earlier time that the door always stands open.

K. concludes, therefore, that the man was deluded. The priest who relates the parable explains, however, that it is just as logical to conclude that the doorkeeper is deluded, since he fears the interior of the Law even more than the man does. The doorkeeper's fear suggests that "he knows nothing about the aspect and significance of the interior . . ." (11, p. 273). Furthermore, the doorkeeper must wait before the Law, whereas the country man does so of his own free will. K. answers that he is inclined to agree that the doorkeeper is deceived. "But that has not made me abandon my former opinion, since both conclusions are to some extent compatible" (11, p. 275). Both the doorkeeper and the man are deluded. To this reflection, the priest replies that since the Law has placed the doorkeeper at his post, "to
doubt his dignity is to doubt the Law itself" (11, p. 276). K. cannot accept this view because it means accepting "as true everything the doorkeeper says" (11, p. 276). The doorkeeper tells the man that the door leading to the Law always stands open but then says he is going to shut it, so it is impossible for everything the doorkeeper says to be true. The priest says that one does not have to accept all that the doorkeeper says as true, but only as necessary. "'A melancholy conclusion,' said K. 'It turns lying into a universal principle!'" (11, p. 276).

Lies are necessary to protect the Law. Therefore, it seems man would do better to forget the Law altogether rather than to waste his entire life in a futile effort to be admitted to it. However, just as the parable itself allows no easy conclusion, neither does Kafka's use of it. Perhaps it is quite possible to enter the gates of the Law, but the man's own shortcomings make him see the gatekeeper as an obstacle. The man from the country simply lacked sufficient faith and courage to enter (15, p. 97). However, the doorkeeper certainly makes no effort to help the man. In fact, he acts as a deterrent to man in his effort to reach the law. Furthermore, since he turns his back on the Law while talking to the man and never even sees the light behind the door of the Law, it is possible that he "is speaking and acting quite independently of the Law" (13, p. 179). If this is the case, man has a double problem.
Not only must he find the obscure and inaccessible Law, but he must first get around a deceitful authority of the Law who blocks his way. Of course, it may be the terrible inadequacy of human understanding that is the chief problem, but communication between Law and man seems impossible in any case.

If the parable is examined in relation to K.'s predicament in The Trial, the country man seems to represent K.'s position and the doorkeeper reflects the Court of Justice which is handling K.'s "trial." The difference in the two relationships is that the country man comes on his own to the Law, whereas K. was summoned (13, p. 174). Thus, K.'s plight is even more pathetic than that of the country man because the Court summons K. and then abandons him to misery (13, p. 184). Perhaps it is impossible, therefore, for man to forget the Law and live his life outside it. In such an attempt, he is summoned by some deceitful authority of the Law, but then he is not allowed to live within the Law either, but abandoned to a life without any comprehensible guiding principle. K. listens to the various interpretations of the parable, but gains no insight into his own problem. "If the argument with the priest proves anything to him, it is the complete hopelessness of his predicament" (13, p. 342).

The futility of man's efforts to communicate with Law and authority runs throughout the narrative of The Trial. K. is willing to take into account endless hierarchies of
courts and their baffling systems of rituals in his effort to find justice. "Yet Kafka's point is that even then he cannot make any headway, . . . his case never comes up and he dies without a trial. The two laws, human and divine, are mutually incongruous" (5, p. 68). K. makes a continual quest for meaning, and the Court is forever pursuing K. Yet the two forces never communicate. They forever run past one another to a meaningless destination. K. and the functionaries of the Law seem to talk on different levels, base their arguments on different premises; despite K.'s good intentions, there seems no way to bring the two realms together. According to Politzer, the metaphysical world of the Courts and the everyday one of K. have lost all common ground (13, p. 166). Indeed, whatever the two realms represent—metaphysical and daily, political and individual, divine and human—the lack of common understanding is painfully evident.

Not only is K. himself unable to communicate with that realm represented by the trial proceedings, but he is unable to find anyone to serve as a go-between. Likewise, the narrator of "Advocates," cannot find an advocate who might serve as a link between the world of authority and the world of man. "... I was searching for an advocate everywhere; he is needed everywhere . . ." (8, p. 141). The story, which reads as if it were a first-person narration by K., continues that an advocate should be needed less in a law court than
elsewhere since the court passes judgment according to a law which should be fair and just. "It is different, however, in the case of the verdict itself; ... here it is most necessary to have advocates, advocates galore ...." (8, p. 142). So the search for someone to communicate the narrator's innocence continues, but he says, "I'm not in the right place--alas, I cannot rid myself of the feeling that I'm not in the right place" (8, p. 142). The thought that he is traveling in the wrong direction occurs to him, but he must not turn back. "In the end you may fall over a precipice perhaps, but had you turned back after the first steps and run downstairs you would have fallen at once--and not perhaps, but for certain" (8, p. 143). Man must continue his search upward, though the officials of authority will forever elude him. The search is unending, futile.

Kafka's conception of authority is no more promising for man as he presents it in The Castle. Erich Heller comments:

I do not know of any conceivable idea of divinity which could justify those interpreters who see in the Castle the residence of "divine law and divine grace." Its officers are totally indifferent to good if they are not positively wicked. Neither in their decrees nor in their activities is there any trace of love, mercy, charity, or majesty. In their icy detachment they inspire certainly no awe, but fear and revulsion. ... From the very beginning there is an air of indecency, indeed of obscenity about the inscrutable rule of the Castle (7, pp. 116-117).

Indeed, the reader's sympathy does lie with K. in his struggle to obtain permission from the Castle to proceed
with his work as a land-surveyor rather than with the officials of the Castle. Since the Castle summoned K. in the first place, his plight is not unlike that of Joseph K., who was first summoned by the Court and then abandoned to his own misery.

The representatives of the Castle are not unlike those of the Court, and in each case the mediators of authority prevent man's progress rather than aid it. Man is left without guides to the Law or to the Castle, yet he cannot find the way alone, nor can he live peacefully outside these powers unless he can somehow become like the Castle villagers, who also seem beyond human comprehension. At least, K. seeks to understand the power he feels must control life. He wants to do what is right, but seems always to misjudge. His very struggle, nevertheless, seems more admirable than the almost animal-like acceptance of the villagers. "Indeed, the obliviousness of an insensible world to the private world of his man of sensibility is one of Kafka's fundamental issues . . ." (6, p. 19). In any case, the very right to become one of the villagers seems to have been denied K.

Kafka can no longer either believe or disbelieve in divine authority, according to Burgum. He cannot reject it because it is tied up with his own personality, but the evidence is against it (3, p. 166). Kafka's dilemma arises out of "the fear of authority and the need for it; the need to be independent, free from emotional commitment and at the
same time a need to belong and to serve" (15, p. 91). Kafka
seems to know both that there is no God or guiding principle
and also that there must be one. That he can assert both
with equal assurance is not surprising, for Kafka "never
thinks in disputable or refutable generalities. His thinking
is a reflex movement of his being and shares the irrefutability
of all that is" (7, p. 101). As an artist-philosopher,
absolute propositions are not Kafka's concern; truth is.

Since Kafka seeks truth rather than some absolute pro-
posal, he does not ignore either the confusion which results
from man's inability to accept some authority or the ineffec-
tiveness which results when man takes refuge in some authority
which is no longer operative. "The New Advocate" deals with
each of these consequences. When an old battle charger, who
was once the horse of Alexander the Great, finds himself
without a leader, he withdraws from battle and buries himself
in law books. The old charger once accomplished great feats,
but today no one at all can blaze a trail to India. "Even
in his day, the gates of India were beyond reach, yet the
King's sword pointed the way to them. Today the gates have
receded to remoter and loftier places; no one points the
way; . . ." (10, p. 160). Though many carry swords, to try
to follow them results in confusion. So the old battle
charger, turned advocate, "reads and turns the pages of our
ancient tomes" (10, p. 160) far away from the fields of
battle. Once again, man in the Kafkaesque world is left
with no one to point the way to India, to a cause, to reason, to God, to anywhere. So perhaps it is best for man to withdraw from battle (life or any endeavor to make it meaningful) and absorb himself in law books. Whether Kafka's law books represent society's law, a myth, the Bible, or some metaphysical tradition, they are removed from the fields of battle. They are ancient and do not apply to life, yet without them life is confusing and chaotic. So Kafka says "perhaps it is really best" (10, p. 160) to do as the battle charger has done. If man can find no peace outside authority, law, or tradition, then perhaps the old battle charger's non-human retreat into outdated law books is as good a recourse as is left to modern man. Yet Kafka's "perhaps it is best" qualifies the author's own faith in such a "solution."

In fact, the narrator of "An Old Manuscript" points out the very real danger of relying on an authority which outdates its purpose. He observes that much has been neglected in his country's system of defense. Nomads from the North have invaded, and the soldiers stand guard around the square, which they have converted into a stable. As invaders, they take whatever is needed. To make matters worse, the natives cannot talk to them because the nomads communicate with each other as jackdaws do. They demand meat from the butcher, and a horseman and his horse often gnaw at the same joint, one at either end. The butcher once gave them a live ox to lessen his burden of having to butcher it. However, he will
never do it again for reasons the narrator explains. He says he had his head muffled in all the rugs and pillows he had, "simply to keep from hearing the bellowing of that ox, which the nomads were leaping on from all sides, tearing morsels out of its living flesh with their teeth" (10, p. 163). The Emperor does nothing more than watch these events with bowed head. His palace has somehow drawn the nomads, but does not know how to drive them away again. Therefore, it is left to the artisans and tradesmen to save their country. But the narrator concludes, "... we are not equal to such a task; nor have we ever claimed to be capable of it. This is a misunderstanding of some kind; and it will be the ruin of us" (10, p. 164).

It seems man never claimed to be able to live his life with meaning. He is not equal to such a task, yet he finds himself here and alive, without laws or an authority. The palace has metaphysically conditioned man to look for order and meaning in life, yet it no longer has the power to provide such meaning. The cosmic Emperor no longer fulfills his purpose, so it is left to the common man (the artisans and tradesmen) to save his life from disintegration, though he never claimed to be capable of doing so himself. A misunderstanding of some kind will be the ruin of him.

This same problem of being left without law, authority, or tradition is discussed in "The Problems of Our Laws." The laws of the people are kept secret by a small group of
ruling nobles. The existence of these laws "is at most a matter of presumption" (9, p. 155). The people could repudiate all belief in the laws and the nobility as well, but no one wants to repudiate the nobility. "The sole visible and indubitable law that is imposed upon us is the nobility, and must we ourselves deprive ourselves of that one law?" (9, p. 159). These people must live a conscious lie to redeem themselves from the horrible truth of the nonexistence of the laws. Otherwise, they would be left alone without a governing power for their life. They cling to a false tradition so they will not have to give up their laws.

Man's reverence for tradition, even a dangerous one, is again displayed in "The Building of a City." The narrator is asked to build a city on a site where the drop to the river is too steep, no drinking water is available, and protection from attacks will be impossible. The future city dwellers admit that the narrator's arguments against the site are irrefutable, and add that they have no good reasons for their choice—except "ancient traditions that recommended the place" (9, p. 105). Therefore, they stand firm by their choice, though it is a very poor one.

Man, following Kafka's paths of tradition, law and authority, is thwarted at every turn. He is sentenced to drowning by his father. He is torturously murdered by the very object of his worship. He can never get beyond the doorkeeper of the Law. He can never secure a trial for
himself and does not even know of what he is charged, even though in the end he must "die like a dog." He can find no advocate to defend him, though he is innocent in the first place. He can never reach the Castle or ever communicate directly with it. He is not assured even of his right to live in the village below the Castle. He has no one to point the way. He didn't ask for this life which will be the ruin of him. He cannot divorce himself from nobles who rule him without a law. He builds his city in the worst possible place merely because tradition demands it.

Yet, despite the futility of all attempts to find peace with whatever authority controls his life, the Kafkaesque man desperately continues his struggle. According to Warren, Kafka's heroes are men for whom the "ought" has survived positive and particular codes of religion and moral systems (17, p. 131). Anders suggests that Kafka represents man as having a religious sensibility and no clear religious beliefs. Kafka shows the inconsistency of a morality divorced from a sanctioning power. His heroes, therefore, are trying to discover the strength merely to be, without the need of religious meaning (1, p. 74). They are in a state of helpless spiritual imprisonment with a desperate desire to escape, but they cannot. They cannot, even though they know God is dead (1, p. 82). In this way Kafka's heroes are not unlike adults who feel bound to act in a way that would not displease their parents even though both the mother and father have been...
dead for years and even though there is no validity in the moral code the parents taught in the first place. The head remains despite the fact that there is no logical basis for it.

Kafka's description of authority ends in no significant proposal to man. The author does not prescribe a course of action but only hints at possible ones. Kafka does not recommend revolt from authority, nor does he show a way for man's reconciliation with it. Kafka does not say what to do about what is. He is not striving to create a metaphysical system that has value for civilization and that can direct man's life. He is an artist, creating symbols to record the truth he finds evident, and thus he is also a modern philosopher.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER IV

ON MESSAGES

Just as it is impossible to tell if Kafka's heroes struggle with authority within a religious, social, or individual context, so it is impossible to determine from what realm they await messages. The messages delivered (or more accurately, which cannot be delivered) to man in Kafka's compositions may come from God, a political ruler, one's physical father, an artist, a prophet, or merely from one's fellow man.

"The Great Wall of China" tells of the insurmountable difficulties the people of a small Chinese village face in trying to obtain word from their Emperor. In fact, the Emperor himself is a mystery to the people, despite their continual effort to gather information about him. "One hears a great many things, true, but can gather nothing definite" (6, p. 140). The Emperor is thousands of miles away from their remote village so that "any tidings, even if they did reach us would arrive far too late, would have become obsolete long before they reached us" (6, p. 141). The parable of an "Imperial Message" describes the possibility, or rather, the impossibility, of receiving a message from the Emperor. Indeed, the Emperor does give word to a messenger who attempts to deliver it, but he can never reach his
destination because the route is fraught with insurmountable obstacles.

Throughout the tale, there is a terrible confusion of time and space. The Emperor's people are so remote from his court that they have no real connection with him. If he rules their lives, they are not aware of it. The people live by laws that have long been obsolete, and they honor the dynasty which no longer rules, an Emperor who has been "long-dead." The narrator, a member of the village, says, "If from such appearances any one should draw the conclusion that in reality we have no Emperor, he would not be far from the truth" (6, p. 145).

The first part of the story deals less with the Chinese people than with the actual construction of the Great Wall. Here again, the governing principle of the entire building process is called into question. The wall was proclaimed to be a protection against the peoples of the north, but the leaders directed it to be built in a piecemeal fashion which resulted in gaps being left in the wall. Needless to say, such construction hardly affords the best protection. It is possible then that the real reason for the building of the wall is to be found in a theory put forth by a scholar during the early stages of the wall's construction. The Great Wall was to provide a secure foundation for a new Tower of Babel, since the first tower failed because of its weak foundation. But the narrator has objections to this theory as well: "How
could the wall, which did not form even a circle, but only a sort of quarter or half-circle, provide the foundation for a tower? That could obviously be meant only in a spiritual sense. But in that case why build the actual wall ...?" (6, p. 135). The narrator concludes that any specific cause for building the wall is only an apparent one. "Far rather do I believe that the high command has existed from all eternity, and the decision to build the wall likewise" (6, p. 139). No particular decree is the cause of the piecemeal construction. Rather, it is all that man can do—construct his life as best he can without the aid of any directive force. Even if there is meaning to life in a spiritual sense, how then is it connected to man's daily existence? How is man to direct his day to day activities toward some far-off goal in another realm? The general confusion in building the Great Wall points to the disorder of life generally and to the impossibility of having the physical directed by something beyond it.

Tauber sees the wall as "the expression of a will to create the Kingdom of God, a will to earthly perfection" (10, p. 126). Yet the religious interpretation does little to brighten man's prospect in the tale, for the imperfection of the wall remains. The lack of the peoples' connection with the Emperor is explained in part by "a certain feebleness of faith" which prevents them from reaching him, but "the essential responsibility for it lies with the government"
(6, p. 146). Therefore, within a religious context, it seems man may be justified for his lack of faith since the essential responsibility lies with the religious system and not with man. However, Tauber maintains that this weakness of faith within orthodox Jewry is "something that preserves" (10, p. 129), whereas attempts to actualize God end in discord. For him, the fundamental mood of the tale is bright, the Chinese people, a symbol of comfort. The limits of the race "are then expressed not as stupidity but as a childlike trust in God" (9, p. 124).

The narrator indicates that those among the people who "had achieved the highest degree of culture" could not use their knowledge to help build the wall, but "sank by thousands into hopelessness" (6, p. 131). Perhaps, then, a certain lack of intellectual curiosity is necessary even for the weakest faith in a guiding force. Land-Surveyor K., as a symbol of human sensibility, would undoubtedly find himself no more at home with these Chinese people than he does with the insensitive Castle villagers. The way the people believe in a ruler after he is dead seems incredible, and the definite impossibility of an Emperor's message ever being received points to the incommensurability between evidence and knowledge.

Martin Buber does not attribute the Kafkaesque man's apparent weakness of faith to lack of evidence, but to "the Jew's security in the dark" (2, p. 161). The Jew knows that God exists even though He is darkened by the world, thus the
Jew can "persevere steadfast to God, without disowning reality" (2, p. 162). Kafka writes, says Buber, of a time in which God hides himself. Therefore, the "foreground course of the world" for all of its cruelty, absurdity, and confusion is not inconsistent with the idea of God, since God is merely hiding (2, p. 161). Buber's view provides insight into the relation between the confusion in building the Great Wall and the impossibility of ever receiving a message from the Emperor. If God is hiding, He is as remote as the Emperor of the Chinese people and thus He cannot lend order to the building process (life) nor can He successfully deliver a message to redeem man. The God of Kafka's prose has indeed hidden Himself from man, and there is no Christ to serve as mediator to the unredeemed Jew. "That He hides Himself does not diminish the immediacy" (2, p. 142), says Buber.

Buber's interpretation does seem more consistent with the details of Kafka's story than a superficial Christian interpretation which might explain the distance between the Emperor (God) and his people (man) in terms of the unredeemed Jew who simply does not reach after salvation. Yet, in final analysis, the evidence of God's immediacy must be found in the Jewish doctrine since it is lacking in a purely intrinsic study of Kafka's work. The Emperor in "The Great Wall of China" is anything but immediate, even if his existence is real. It is impossible to receive a direct
message from the Emperor, nor can he guide man's life even in the most general way. In fact, that there is in reality no Emperor at all is not far from the truth. Kafka's God remains well hidden. There is no evidence of His immediacy within the content of the tale. Clement Greenberg interprets the Great Wall on one level of meaning as Jewish law (4, p. 77). However, he adds the following reservation:

But the Great Wall should not be interpreted too consistently or closely in terms of its Jewish meaning. It alludes to the entire human condition, in the sense Kafka has of it as being walled around by ignorance reinforced by irony. . . . the allegorical meaning is kept shuttling between two or more contexts (4, p. 80).

Friedrich Beissner condemns all extrinsic approaches to Kafka's work, but argues that despite the actual content of the parable, an "Imperial Message" in "The Great Wall of China" there is in the very method of the artist an expression of faith in the divine. Beissner proposes that the messenger on his way is cause for hope since the imperial message is, at least, on its way to man (1, p. 30). He maintains that behind the frustration and futility of man's existence evident in Kafka's work, there is a faith in the divine which, if not explicitly stated is, nevertheless, profoundly felt (1, p. 27). There are "soft, involuntary accentuations" within the parable which lend hope to the "Imperial Message."
It is true, Kafka's parable says the Emperor has sent a message "to you alone," but it also says it was sent from the Emperor while he was on his death bed. Furthermore, even if the messenger made his way through the chambers of the innermost palace, nothing would be gained. There would always be another obstacle to surmount before the message would arrive. "... once more stairs and courts; and once more another palace; and so on for thousands of years; ... Nobody could fight his way through here even with a message from a dead man" (6, p. 142). To conclude that there is hope in the fact that the messenger is on his way to man, when he will never reach him and even if he did, would deliver nothing but the message of a dead man, seems to stretch the meaning "within the course and the spirit of Kafka's sentences" (1, p. 30).

Beissner's argument that Kafka is, above all, an artist and should be attended to as such is quite valid. Certainly there is no one body of doctrine to which all of Kafka's work can be referred. It is true also, as Beissner says, that art can through its method assert more (or less) than is evident in its content; Kafka's first concern is that of a creative artist, not a systematic thinker. However, as an artist, he is true to his perception of the world; thus, the content of his work surely must be as important as his method of putting it down. This examination of Kafka as a philosopher involves concentration on the content of his
prose rather than on his artistic method, but it does not involve going outside the artist's own perceptions as he relates them within his compositions. To see Kafka as a modern philosopher, it is not necessary to subordinate his meaning to certain preoccupations with some system of belief. His very refusal to rely on a particular system accounts for his reality; his insistence on being true to his perception of the world links him to contemporary metaphysics and renders him a philosopher in his own right. The problem, then, is not to see how Kafka fits into a philosophical school, but merely to see his perceptions for what they are within the context of his work.

It is probably wiser, therefore, to leave the "Imperial Message" which cannot be delivered just as it is within Kafka's text without specifying the exact realm from which it was sent—divine, social, or otherwise. The confusion and disorder of the Chinese people, the inadequacy of their building process and the impossibility of communication between the Emperor and his people are evident in Kafka's description. Whether the situation can be amended by faith in the divine, by recognition of God's immediacy, or through Christian salvation is left open to debate. Kafka gives no definite answer. He merely records the unquestionable alienation of the people. A message from any directive force has no possibility of reaching man.

This same theme of being ineffectually governed by some distant ruler situated in uncertainty is expressed in "The
Refusal." Once again the narrator's little town is completely isolated from the capital which rules over it. Communication is impossible here, too, according to the narrator: "... of the capital we learn next to nothing..." (5, p. 161). None of the events in the capital has an influence on the little town; the colonel who does command the town somehow seems less than authentic. "I don't think he has ever produced a document entitling him to this position; very likely he does not possess such a thing" (5, p. 165). Yet when a town's member makes a request, the colonel holds in his outstretched hands, two poles of bamboo symbolizing his authority. "This is an ancient custom implying more or less that he supports the law, and the law supports him" (5, p. 169). When the colonel lets the poles fall, he turns "once more into a human being like the rest of us" (5, p. 171). The colonel rarely grants a request. "In all important matters, ... the citizens can always count on a refusal" (5, p. 173). The townspeople nevertheless accept the colonel's decrees except for "a certain age group that is not content--these are the young people roughly between seventeen and twenty" (5, p. 173).

The people of this town receive scarcely more benefit from their colonel than the Chinese people do from their Emperor in "The Great Wall of China." Both rulers are unable to help man fulfill the goals of his life. Man is refused. The law which supports the colonel comes from the capital, of which the people know nothing. He becomes one of the
people when he is not holding the poles of this uncertain law, yet the people willingly submit to a law of which they know nothing and accept the colonel's continual refusal. Only the very young are actually discontent. Perhaps the very young, unhampered by the illusions of tradition, see the absurdity of submitting to an arbitrary law which results in a life devoid of anything but a negative message. On the other hand, perhaps the older generation is wiser and knows the value of law, even one which refuses the people's rights. In either case, however, man is left with a great deal to wish for in the way of a satisfactory governing body, regardless of the level on which it functions—political, metaphysical, or otherwise. Kafka's man receives no message at all, as in "The Great Wall of China," or if he does, it is negative as in "The Refusal."

Still another type of message in Kafka's work is the meaningless one. The one paragraph, "Couriers," explains that there are no longer kings, but only couriers of kings, who hurry about the world shouting "messages that have become meaningless" (5, p. 175). There is no authority or absolute truth, so there is no message that can give meaning to life. The couriers "would like to put an end to this miserable life of theirs but they dare not because of their oaths of service" (5, p. 175). Despite a kingless (Godless, nihilistic, absurd) world, man continues to serve because of his oath of allegiance. Whether this oath is man's salvation or his
damnation, Kafka does not say. The struggle may be worth the effort, enough to make life worthwhile; yet it seems that suicide or indifference are man's only alternatives. Kafka demands suicide, but renders it impossible. Man's oath binds him to a life in which he is refused love and guidance, law and certainty. Is such a life worth living; is it hopeless and absurd, or is it both? Kafka does not give only one answer for as Kaufmann explains:

It is for the sake of truthfulness that Kafka eschews reduction to a single explanation. The world that confronts us and our life in it defy every attempt at a compelling exegesis: that life lends itself to many different interpretations is of its essence [7, p. 123].

The meaningless message of "Couriers" is examined more fully in "Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk," where the message appears as the nothingness of Josephine's song. Josephine unites the mice kingdom with her singing. Actually, it is nothing more than a piping, yet the people listen to her and look to her for guidance, at the same time regarding her as a child. Josephine apparently exerts herself to no purpose, but the mice group around her to hear. The narrator explains that Josephine's singing is a mere nothing. "Yet she gets across her piping like a message from the whole people to each mind" [6, p. 315]. He hastens to add that Josephine is no real singer, or the people could not take her. They listen precisely because she is not real—because she does not tell the truth, which they are unable to accept.
The narrator brings his story to a close by explaining that Josephine wanted to stop working because it hindered her singing. The mice nation denied her this privilege, so Josephine, in revolt, disappeared from the nation. The narrator concludes that Josephine will rise to the heights of redemption and be forgotten like all her brothers.

Politzer interprets the message of this tale as follows: "You do not unite a nation around a symbol which is emptied of its meaning and is therefore both unwilling and unable to serve in such a function" (9, p. 316). If this is the case, Kafka is saying that there is no specific message in which man can believe to provide him with the answer to his existence. No specific mythical, religious, or philosophical framework can provide an answer, and Kafka is not sure that living a conscious lie will redeem man from this truth. Josephine rises to the heights of redemption only to be forgotten like all her brothers. Man cannot support a false singer forever. The same message cannot sustain a nation indefinitely.

Tauber sees Josephine's song as the word that Israel still hears from its teachers, which no longer has "the worth of the original prophetic word" (10, p. 196). The people no longer have any real faith in Josephine as an Imperial messenger from God to man. "There remains only a vague piety" (10, p. 196). Thus the final disappearance of Josephine signifies the people's lack of concern with the
Jewish tradition which maintains that prophets from heaven reveal themselves to man in an empirical fashion. Tauber's implication is that the Jewish nation's rejection of the old heritage is a step toward Christianity where the reality of God's word requires no empirical manifestation. However, Tauber views both the problem and the solution of the mouse folk as less complicated than does Kafka.

Josephine and her message, even if it is senseless, are not without value to the mice nation. "Josephine's claim to strengthen the people in time of stress does not lack merit, but her attraction of audiences when danger is almost imminent . . . has hindered timely precautions" (ll, p. 74). The narrator of the tale communicates sympathy and even affection for Josephine. "He does not doubt Josephine's value, he just does not know what her value is" (ll, p. 74). Perhaps the story indicates that the desire to believe in a message from some directive source is an indissoluble part of man's makeup. The question then quite simply becomes which message man will choose for his guidance and by what method he will decide, since he will always believe in a messenger of some type.

The fact that the message is completely false and absurd may make no difference. The thing that matters is that the people believe or pretend to believe it. Thus, the mice nation is united around a Josephine after all. If these considerations are true, Kafka's timid hint that man can
find the strength merely to be without the aid of any directive force probably is the least likely message of all. Man must satisfy his urge to believe in something. He has a deep need to receive a message—even a meaningless one. Maybe this need explains why Kafka's mice nation can unite itself around the nothingness of Josephine's singing. Men, no stronger than poor scurrying mice, must depend on something beyond themselves to give meaning to life. The puzzle is that in the end Josephine is forgotten and thus a new question arises. After Josephine is forgotten, who or what comes next? Will new songs and new Josephines arise forever and forever and forever, or will man one day find the strength merely to be?

Kafka gives no evidence within the story as to what path the mice nation will follow after Josephine's descent into oblivion. In the first place, it is difficult to determine from what level Josephine sings. Is the mere nothingness which she pipes that of the artist to society, of the ruler to his subjects, of the prophet to God's people, of the sensitive man to his insensitive brothers? "Josephine is Josephine, skillfully blurred" (11, p. 75). There is the further problem of why the message is senseless, a nothingness. Is it because of the singer's inability or the people's lack of receptiveness? Or maybe neither the people nor Josephine can be blamed for any shortcoming. It is possible
that the message itself is senseless. Then, too, perhaps a nation of men is different from a nation of mice.

"Reading 'Josephine' alertly is . . . like putting back together the leaves of a disassembled cabbage through which a supernaturally hungry worm . . . has bored separate holes" (11, p. 71). The "proper alignment of holes through the various leaves" (11, p. 71) is no easy task. It may be that Josephine, the mouse nation and the message function as they should, for Josephine will rise to the heights of redemption. However, through her redemption, Josephine will only be forgotten so, as Politzer observes, even the redemption is devoid of any sign pointing to a positive solution (9, p. 318). "The question of what Kafka understood by oblivion as well as by the redemption to which it leads will remain forever open" (9, p. 318).

Kafka's comments on messages lend themselves to a neat conclusion no easier than do his comments on tradition, law, and authority. The lack of any meaningful message leads to a life full of gaps and devoid of any particular form. Life is a great wall for which there are no rules of construction. The Imperial message comes from a dead leader, and even then it does not reach man. Or if a message does reach man, it is a negative one—a refusal—or a meaningless one shouted by a courier who has no king or is piped by a mouse songstress whose music is mere nothingness. Kafka's descriptions emerge distinct and horrifying in their detail, but where are the
morals? Kafka seems deliberately to refrain from setting any. He delivers the message that there is no message to be delivered. His thesis is the absence of any thesis. Politzer concludes that Kafka's work "contains evidence collected by modern man to present at the trial of a world deprived of meaning. It goes without saying that in this trial man cannot hope for any verdict other than the pronouncement of the paradox on which his existence is based" (9, p. 345). It is this insoluble paradox of human existence that Kafka uses as the message of his parables.

Therefore, it is Kafka's most essential message throughout his works that places him within the realm of contemporary philosophy. Angel Flores says Kafka's critics have too often been grinding their own axes. They have, depending upon their own points of view, described a schizophrenic Kafka or a God-intoxicated Kafka, an Expressionist Kafka or a Talmudic Kafka, a family-loving Kafka or an Existentialist Kafka—forever endeavoring to fit his work into some preconceived pattern or other (3, p. 2).

To say, however, that Kafka is an existential philosopher does not involve fitting him into a particular pattern. Existentialism no more seeks to give definitive answers to human questions than Kafka does. To philosophize is no longer "to deduce or to analyse" according to fixed principles, "but simply to describe what exists . . ." (8, p. 16). Furthermore, no particular method for achieving this aim can be outlined. The lucidity of the description is the only
"proof" of its truth. Thus it is possible to view Kafka as a philosopher and at the same time "let the work of art speak forcibly for itself" (3, p. 2). Artists who are also philosophers necessarily raise questions to which the answers are various and sometimes conflicting, because they refuse to describe reality in oversimplified terms but simply manifest what is evident. To produce successful and moving fiction which lucidly describes existence as it confronts man is to be both artist and modern philosopher. Franz Kafka is both.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER V

ON HOPE

With the same relentless effort that Kafka investigates authority's function on all levels of man's existence and explores the possibility of receiving a meaningful message from any realm, he seeks for some object in which it is possible for man to hope. Kafka's heroes search everywhere, anywhere, for the least gesture, for the slightest something to save them from complete despair. They are careful to examine painstakingly even the most incredible possibility of redemption. Yet in the end, even the faintest glimmer of hope is extinguished, forever crushed out by an all-encompassing darkness.

One of Kafka's most terrifying descriptions of modern man's condition is found in "The Metamorphosis," where everything hopeful is reduced to nothing, lost in a void representing all that is negative. The story begins when Gregor Samsa awakes one morning to find "himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect" (8, p. 19). Kafka then traces Gregor's insect stages to their end in inanimate matter, which the charwoman pushes to one side with her broomstick. The actual events of the story indicate that man's existence is devoid of any hope whatsoever.
Even a religious interpretation of Gregor's hopeless situation fails to produce a substantially more hopeful one for man. Johannes Pfeiffer attempts to show that in "The Metamorphosis" there must be a light behind the absurd this-worldliness to give a positive way out of the hero's alienation from God and society (13, p. 57). Pfeiffer says man (Gregor Samsa) has stumbled into an impasse and is searching for the light which he can never grasp alone (13, p. 59). "The distantly sensed door into the open remains blocked" for Gregor, but it "nevertheless indirectly gives us a feeling of the hidden background which gives meaning to the whole" (13, p. 58). Gregor's yearning to hear his sister's violin implies the possibility "of escaping the imprisonment in existence which is our lot" and returning to "essential, true, absolute Being" (13, p. 57). Pfeiffer's assertion is that man must find God in order to keep himself from being alienated and falling into despair, the condition of man symbolized by Gregor Samsa's transformation into an insect. The way out is blocked except through grace. Pfeiffer happily points out that this interpretation does away with the otherwise entirely negative and pessimistic conclusion of the story (13, p. 58).

Norman Holland also finds the hope of Christianity in Gregor's transformation. He says, "In every case, [Kafka] has charged a specific realistic element of the story with a specific non-realistic or spiritual value" (6, p. 147).
In this way, Holland argues that Gregor is a symbol of Christ, killed by the apple of mortality and unable to rise again because love is nonexistent in the present society (13, p. 148). Tauber, too, argues that Gregor suffers from lack of love. The family members could with "their love break through and enable the being lost in itself to discover a new relationship" (19, p. 22). They fail, however, and Gregor perishes. Still Gregor possesses a "secret ironic superiority over this world," according to Tauber (19, p. 21). "The remoteness from his family opens up the possibility of the greatest closeness, disgust with the usual ways of satisfying life renders him free to expect a higher happiness" (19, p. 26).

Certainly Christianity holds out the development of man's spirit and soul as the solution to Gregor's impasse, but it is less certain that Kafka does the same. Pfeiffer finds hope through grace, while Holland and Tauber seek hope for man through love. Kafka, however, denies Gregor both grace and love without even explaining why the protagonist must suffer his fate. Kafka never reveals the reasons for Gregor's punishment. Gregor, himself, remains in the dark about the reasons for his metamorphosis. The reader is forced to accept it unconditionally. Furthermore, since the members of Gregor's family do not turn to a spiritual life filled with love as a result of Gregor's death, it seems Kafka sees little hope in resurrecting Christ through the
love of which Holland speaks. Finally, there is little in Kafka's story on which to base the hope that Gregor will find Tauber's "higher happiness" or Pfeiffer's "essential, absolute Being" since Gregor's final destination is nowhere more ethereal than the garbage heap.

An explanation of "The Metamorphosis" on an emotional level throws Gregor's fall into the debris of the dustbin into no brighter perspective than does a spiritual interpretation. Philip Rahv suggests that Gregor's metamorphosis represents objectively "the emotion of exclusion from the family and, beyond that, the estrangement of man from his human environment" (15, p. 67). Because Gregor is not able to communicate with other human beings, he is terribly persecuted and terribly persecutes others. Neither Gregor nor any member of his family can break through the shell of his isolated existence to form a meaningful human relationship. "In Kafka's catastrophic world there is no escape for the protagonist. Once Samsa is changed into an insect, he never returns to his human state" writes Rahv (15, p. 68).

Since Gregor cannot escape, his ultimate fate is of course death—a death which is not and cannot be meaningful because it lacks significance to those who triumph in the end. The victorious Samsas, despite their human form, are really no less insect-like than Gregor. Even in a life-sacrifice, man's situation remains hopeless because those who live on learn nothing. The members of Gregor's family
do not develop a deeper understanding of human problems or vow to face life with more tolerance and love for their fellow man. They make no resolution to reform. They are merely relieved that their burden of having to house an insect has been lifted. Their "new dreams and excellent intentions" are concerned with nothing more than their petty jobs and a husband for Gregor's sister. The three survivors remain self-centered. Superficial life triumphs.

Even if Gregor's condition is viewed as a symbol of a willful withdrawal from life, a deliberate self-enclosure, superficial life remains the victor. Neider points out that Gregor's transformation into an insect is a kind of existence in death without the release of death (12, p. 77). The transformed Gregor is no less miserable as a slimy insect than he was in his mundane and superficial human existence. Politzer observes, "The un, the dark, the void are the only designations Kafka could find for the mystery at the center of the tale" (14, p. 81). Kafka cannot give Gregor's new being more description than this. Gregor does not overpower dehumanized humanity by withdrawing from it. He is near nothing in existence and finally does become non-existent, but where is his victory in either case? There seems to be no success and yet no victory in defeat.

Gregor cannot become human, but neither can he enjoy his seclusion. He sneaks from his room to watch enviously the rest of the household go about its routine. As long as
he is not actually dead, Gregor cannot diminish his self so completely that the needs of his own ego do not demand attention. Gregor cannot flourish without the bonds of human relationships, but he finds it impossible to establish them. Whether Gregor or the outside world is to blame for the depletion of human emotion is an open question. In any case, however, "The Metamorphosis" renders any hope placed in humanity or the ability to withdraw from it as null and void.

The futility of hope within a spiritual and emotional interpretation is no less evident from a social level of meaning. Spilka observes that Gregor "has been aggravated by social and familial pressures which reduce him to bestial immaturity . . . his regression follows punishment . . ." (18, p. 253). Thus, according to Spilka, "Gregor's guilt is less heinous than many critics suppose" (18, p. 253). Politzer agrees. He says that it is moralizing unduly to assume Gregor's preoccupation with the material aspects of life causes his malady because "Gregor is never offered an alternative to his fate. He is given neither a choice between good and evil nor a genuine opportunity to repent or atone for his absorption in the superficial realities of his existence" (14, p. 81).

In fact, Gregor's all-consuming concern with his job can hardly be avoided since his family is, to a great extent, dependent upon his financial success. Should Gregor have
devoted his time to music as his sister does rather than to his petty salesman's job? Could he have found fulfillment in an artistic profession? Is Gregor to blame for his choice or has he been forced into his decision by the debts of his parents and the ambition of his sister? Whether Gregor is to blame for not being able to effectively function under pressure from his family and the social system or whether his family and the social system have unjustly forced Gregor into his insect's shell is open to debate.

On one hand, Gregor seems to blame since he is the one who is punished. On the other, however, the Samsas' success is so trivial as to almost obliterate their victory. The final superficial uplifting of the Samsas does not really counterbalance the abjection of man's situation as revealed through Gregor's excruciating deterioration. As Politzer says, "Neither the warm sunshine of an early spring day nor the social rehabilitation of a middle-class family nor the successful passing of a young girl's puberty can make us forget the unknown which reached through Gregor into life as it is known to us" (14, p. 82).

Just how Gregor could have prevented his grotesque fate spiritually, emotionally, or socially is no clearer than why it was forced upon him in the first place. Gregor could not find the proper nourishment for life. "I'm hungry enough;" said Gregor sadly to himself, 'but not for that kind of food. How these lodgers are stuffing themselves,
and here am I dying of starvation" (8, p. 74). If the spiritual world holds Gregor's proper nourishment, then why is he denied the grace and love necessary for salvation? Does Gregor starve because he fails to love and understand the family members as he should, or do they refuse Gregor a chance? Should he have survived within his self-enclosure by diminishing the needs of his ego to no more than those of a bug? Had he tried the food of an artistic profession, how would he have met the financial obligation to his parents?

Nothing which Gregor has done or left undone seems to cause his damnation, yet redemption is irrefutably denied. Thus Gregor can do nothing but accept what happens to him. He cannot rebel or name his fate cruel. He can make no value judgments whatever, because he understands nothing. The discrepancy and incongruity of Gregor's total environment leave him nothing but despair. F. D. Luke observes that "Kafka's technique . . . consists largely of skillful exposures, cumulative revelations of a basic incongruity between situations and responses" (11, p. 36). Certainly in Gregor's case, there is no cause-effect relationship, no appropriate response to his preposterous situation. There is absurdity only and it forces itself upon Gregor. The confusion and alienation inherent in the reality of his daily world crush him.

Kafka's description of the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical disintegration of man is vivid, but its cause,
any method of prevention or way of redemption is obscure. On a spiritual level, Gregor finds no answer through the grace and love of religion. On an emotional level, human relations fail him; yet he is unable to survive without them. On a physical level, he cannot meaningfully sacrifice himself for his family; neither can he assert himself over them. On a social level, he is pressured into a job in which he can find no fulfillment. Yet he finds no peace in complete withdrawal from society. Totally immobilized, he cannot continue to exist as nothingness, so he must perish. Gregor is swept away with the garbage and with him any hope which Kafka has for man.

Just as "The Metamorphosis" is a depiction of the impossibility of hope on various levels, "The Married Couple" explores the theme of hope in many ways without revealing a significantly brighter conclusion. The narrator of the story pays a business call to N. at N.'s home, where he also meets Frau N., the couple's son, and an agent who is a "trade rival" of the narrator. The protagonist must talk to N. in the bedroom of the son, who is ill, while the agent sits by the son's bed. The narrator feels uncomfortable and finds it difficult to state his business. He says, "Now at last, it seemed to me, my moment had come, or rather it had not come and probably would never come; yet if I was to attempt anything it must be done at once, for I felt that
here the conditions for a business interview could only become increasingly unfavorable (7, pp. 130-131).

The businessman finds N. less than receptive to his proposals and is finally cut short in his speech by the son. He then looks at N., who seems to be having some type of seizure. The old man stops breathing, and the narrator grasps N.'s hand to find the pulse beat has stopped. "So it was all over" (7, p. 133). Yet Frau N. comes in and wakes her husband, who says he has fallen asleep from boredom. He makes some unpleasant observations on the business offers and waves the agent and the narrator away. Frau N. reminds the Narrator of his mother. "Things that we destroyed she could make whole again," (7, p. 134) he says and then leaves. "Oh, how many business calls come to nothing, and yet one must keep going" (7, p. 135).

Jarvis Thurston suggests that the religious theme of the story is "disillusioned modern man in search of his soul" (20, p. 85) but adds that there are philosophical, psychological, and cultural-historical levels of meaning as well. On the religious level, N. symbolizes God; his son is Jesus Christ; his wife, the Virgin Mary; the agent, a member of some religious sect, and the narrator is secularized modern man in search of faith and certainty (20, p. 85). The search is doomed to failure, however. God (N.) has "grown very thin because of some creeping malady" (7, p. 130) and He is "bent and infirm." He does not reach out to man.
"I noticed quite well, for instance, that N. was by no means in a receptive state; . . . and his face was so impassive that one might have thought no syllable of what I was saying, indeed no awareness of my presence, had penetrated to him" (7, p. 132).

The protagonist is no more clearly the culprit here than Gregor is in "The Metamorphosis." The reasons for the narrator's lapse of business with N. are completely unknown to him. Furthermore, to gain admittance to N. "is a somewhat ticklish business" (7, p. 129). N. is never in his office; thus, the narrator must make a special effort just to see him. When he finally feels he may speak to N., he does his best to communicate effectively. In fact, he says he is willing to make "concessions that had not even been asked for" (7, p. 132). Yet, in the end, N. merely makes "unpleasant observations" about the narrator's offers. The call comes to nothing, though what the businessman should have done for better results is not explained.

N. makes no effort to explain his client's mistakes. Neither the son, Frau N., nor the agent makes any helpful suggestions about the manner in which the protagonist should have tried to establish a relationship with N. The son, at one point during the interview, "wanted to say something, to point out something, but he had not strength enough" (7, p. 132). Frau N., who can make things whole again, is quite deaf to the businessman. The security and faith of childhood
which he seeks through her are denied him. The agent does not seem very successful in his dealings with N. either; in any case, he is a rival, so the narrator cannot expect any help from him. In sum, from every approach, the narrator's call comes to nothing.

Thurston feels that these insoluble riddles and incongruities within a religious context "are necessary for maintaining a reasonable consistency at other levels of meaning—and are ramps leading to these other related levels" (20, p. 87). Thus the hopelessness of the narrator's quest encompasses the meaninglessness of man's existence in various realms. From a psychological viewpoint, the tale "centers around the human need for 'relations' with other human beings, the attempt to find the 'home' lost in one's childhood, the attempt to overcome one's essential aloneness" (20, p. 90). The need for human relations is left unfulfilled despite the narrator's offers and personal concessions. The home remains lost since he cannot relate to Frau N. The narrator cannot communicate with N., his wife, their son, or the agent. One's essential aloneness cannot be overcome.

On a cultural-historical level, Thurston sees the story as a commentary on a world whose history parallels the narrator's movement from a childhood filled with love to an adulthood devoid of it (20, p. 91). Kafka describes a "secular and commercial civilization—competitive, crass, arrogant and essentially absurd . . ." (20, p. 91). Such a
civilization has no link with a guiding metaphysical force, and its human relations have irretrievably raveled away.

From a philosophic approach, the story can be taken as a parable of any search for an absolute truth or total system. "Kafka's protagonist, like all of us, is faced with the problem of understanding himself and the world about him— and there is much that seems to defy explanation, much that is irrational . . ." (20, p. 90). There is little hope for a total comprehension of the universe by man. "Something is wrong, for the mission is not accomplished, and the protagonist can only keep going. . . . He is confused in a world he never made" (20, p. 90). Kafka cannot explain away the confusion of man's existence because he has no faith in any absolute. If there is hope for man at all in "The Married Couple," it seems to be merely that of "going on." Life cannot be explained. It is what it is and yet one must keep going.

Kafka fully realizes that the only happiness man can have is completely rooted in the knowledge that men live and men die, observes Phillip H. Rhein (16, p. 88). Rhein goes on to say that this happiness is the "affirmation of the dignity and unique value of human life" (16, p. 96). Kafka wishes, he says, man to better his life on this earth. While it is true that Kafka says acceptance of one's plight in this world is man's way out, it is his only way out and only a way out. Man is not unlike the ape in "A Report To An Academy." The ape has turned into a human being in order
to escape his cage, but he still does not have freedom or any kind of victorious dignity. He has simply managed to fight his way through "the thick of things... There was nothing else for me to do, provided always that freedom was not to be my choice" (8, p. 180). This meager accomplishment is the only dignity available to man.

If Kafka appeals to humanitarianism as a way out, he seems ultimately to say that he has little faith in it himself. He merely satirizes the type of humanity to which the ape must turn in order to exist. The humanized ape seems no less bestial after his transformation than he did before. Neider says the tale's "function is to satirize the spiritual in man. Kafka, like Swift, implies that man is a beast" (12, p. 81). Tauber says the ape "is really a picture of the everyday man who expands in the superficial, who cannot fulfill his being and realize it in freedom, but whose first commandment is to adapt himself" (19, p. 71). The traits of human culture are thrown into a rather unattractive and inhuman light by the ape turned human.

William C. Rubinstein suggests that the ape symbolizes something more specific than this dehumanization of humanity. "He is quite possibly a Jew who has allowed himself to be converted to Christianity in order to escape persecution" (17, p. 58). The ape must find a way out of the cage or die. "Two courses are open to him: To attempt an escape to freedom (Zionism), or to become a human being (assimilation
and conversion)" (17, p. 59). The two choices of the ape could as easily represent an escape to freedom (suicide, nihilism, insanity, or self-withdrawal), or to become a human being (indifference to the absurdity of the world, adaptation of some kind of humanitarian morals, or acceptance of a mundane existence).

Actually, the ape has no choice at all because freedom—whatever it represents—is forever denied him. The attempt to discover it would be so dangerous that the ape doesn't even consider it as a possibility. Predatory pythons or death by drowning would greet him. He is left, therefore, with his only way out being the way of humanity. There is no real triumph to this accomplishment in itself, but it is something, insofar as it helps the ape out of his cage. As he explains, "There was no attraction for me in imitating human beings; I imitated them because I needed a way out, and for no other reason" (8, p. 178). Even this way out seems somewhat contrived and incomplete when the ape reveals "there sits waiting for me a half-trained little chimpanzee and I take comfort from her as apes do" (8, p. 180). Something is askew even in the human way out.

Mark Spilka feels that the figures of Kafka's fiction attempt less to escape their traps than they do to flourish within their limitations (18, p. 243). Thus Kafka reveals life where life can scarcely exist (18, p. 244). This is the life the poor ape seems left with when he turns human—
a life in which he can scarcely exist. Anders feels Kafka first describes the world as an alien one and then shows "the desperate efforts which [an] insubstantial and homeless creature makes in order to gain acceptance into the world" (1, p. 21). Wayne Burns sees the conflict within Kafka's protagonists as one which "is nearly always between some form of 'I' and what seems to be actuality" as fashioned by the superego (2, p. 50). The superego's forces have right and might and therefore sanity, "so that the 'I' has no choice but to conform—either that, or be destroyed" (2, p. 50). Thus the ape must become human to gain acceptance in the world, according to Anders, and in order to conform to actuality fashioned by the superego, according to Burns. If he is to survive, he has no choice, but to try to exist where, as Spilka says, life is scarcely possible. This frail human existence to which the ape turns is the only hope left to man.

Man is stripped of even this frail hope in the conclusion of "A Country Doctor," which tells of the physician's trip to see a young boy who has been reported dying. He manages the trip only by having pigs changed into horses because he finds that his own team has been stolen. This feat is accomplished at the expense of his beloved servant girl, Rose, who is sacrificed to the performer of the magic deed. Full of anguish after all of his misfortune in making the trip to his patient's home, the doctor arrives to find the
patient in perfect health. However, on a second examination, he finds:

an open wound as big as the palm of my hand. Rose-red, in many variations of shade, dark in the hollows, lighter at the edges, softly granulated, with irregular clots of blood... [and] worms, as thick and as long as my little finger, themselves rose-red and blood spotted as well, were wriggling from their fastness in the interior of the wound towards the light with small white heads and many little legs (8, p. 154).

However, the doctor concludes that the boy's wound isn't so bad after all and he starts for home, but wanders astray. It is cold and he can't even reach his coat which is hanging on the back of his gig. Still not a patient lifts a finger to help him. "Betrayed! Betrayed! A false alarm on the night bell once answered— it cannot be made good, not ever" (8, p. 156).

The doctor cannot help the patient, and the patient cannot help the doctor. Whether the doctor and patient represent man and man, man and life, law and man, God and man or any other two forces, the fact remains that the wound is beyond healing. Basil Busacca points out that the vital matters for analogy are the patterns of relation, and not specific termini of relations (3, p. 46). Any number of valid explications may be given for "A Country Doctor" when the pattern of the relations among the characters of the story are applied to specific termini. "When the fable is sound, . . . analogues are not far to seek" (3, p. 54).
The protagonist of the story is "doctor, parson, lover, every guise of the god-surrogate that fails and knows itself false, in some sense, because foredoomed, caught in metaphysical demands beyond its power or any power . . . ." (3, p. 51). Politzer sees the doctor as an image of humanity's dehumanization and the paradoxical helplessness of one whose profession is to help (14, p. 89). Tauber, too, sees the hopelessness of the relationship between the doctor and his patient. "In the boy the doctor finds his own ruined state—that is why he cannot cure him, but can only flee" (19, p. 76). Thus, whatever the doctor, the patient and the wound symbolize, the fatal misunderstanding is evident and the wound remains incurable. One can only pretend that it is not so bad after all. Man is left with a bleeding, festering gap in his side and the desire to die, insofar as man's condition is like that of the patient. On the other hand, if man's situation is identical to that of the doctor, he finds himself alone and helpless in the icy cold chaos of the world. Whether man sounds the alarm for help or attempts to answer it, he is betrayed. In either case, the alarm, once answered, cannot be made good—not ever.

The relationship between the country doctor and his patient is similar to that between a businessman and an old village schoolmaster in "The Giant Mole." The object around which the relationship centers in this case is not a wound, but a huge mole which the schoolmaster has discovered. The
teacher has built up tremendous hopes of fame and fortune on the basis of his discovery, but only to find bitter disappointment. Scientists, scholars, and the public in general refuse to take the matter seriously. The businessman, who narrates the story, attempts to help the schoolmaster by his own investigation into the discovery. He publishes a pamphlet on his research, but he has no more success in drawing attention to the matter than does the schoolmaster. Both investigators place senseless hopes on the mole's discovery. Tauber writes, "The monster is the object of exaggerated hopes. In this it corresponds to the historic object of the religions" (19, p. 199). "The fragment presents a refusal of the inadequate piously-objective attitude of historical religion. The clinging to something no longer quite realized is disdained" (19, p. 200). Tauber suggests that the willing and benevolent businessman is "the symbolic representative of an age that has grown uncertain in its spiritual gestures" (19, p. 201).

Tauber's explanation in terms of Busacca's specific "termini," is perfectly valid, but the hopelessness of the "relationship" remains. The businessman says, "I wanted to help you, but that was a failure, and the worst failure I have ever had" (7, p. 238). He apologizes for his intrusion and withdraws from the entire affair. He realizes the futility of his "spiritual gestures." The mole can no more fulfill the hopes of the businessman and the teacher than
the boy's wound in "A Country Doctor" could be cured by the physician. Furthermore, the relationship among the teacher, the public and the businessman is as useless and full of misunderstanding as that among the doctor, his patients, and the wounded boy. Whether Kafka is describing the impotence of an outdated religion or the erroneous attitudes of man toward religion, the mole's discovery is irrevocably condemned to obscurity. Whatever guiding principle the mole represents, it cannot be recognized. Any hope based on the mole is necessarily exaggerated.

This mockery of yearning and hope Kafka gives particularly bitter expression in the gloomy short composition, "Jackals and Arabs." A European traveling in the desert among Arabs is confronted by a disgusting pack of jackals who implore him to save them from the Arabs. They assure him that he is the one person who can redeem them from their enemies. However, as Politzer points out, there is throughout the story an ironic contrast between the jackals' pretended demand for purity and their actual desire to have the throats of the Arabs slit (14, p. 90). In the end, the jackals feast upon the carcass of a camel thrown to them by the very Arabs for whom the beasts have such contempt. They cannot restrain themselves and even seem to take a hideous pleasure in the feast even though an Arab whips them while they eat.

The Arab explains to the traveler that the animals believe every European can save them. His scornful words
indicate the absurdity of such hope even if it is sincere. "They have the most lunatic hopes, these beasts; they're just fools, utter fools" (9, p. 154). Even if the jackals truly desire to rise above their wretched condition and are not merely being hypocritical in their quest for purity, the calmness and assurance with which the Arab speaks ridicules their very attempt. The Arab scornfully laughs at man's vain dreams of redemption.

Despite the depressing conclusions inherent in Kafka's description of modern man's predicament, Albert Camus interprets Kafka in such a way as to enlarge the possibility of hope in his work. Camus illustrates with an example of a crazy man fishing in a bathtub. A psychologist, trying to humor the mentally disturbed fisherman, asks if the fish are biting. The psychologist receives the reply: "Of course not, you fool, since this is a bathtub" (4, p. 150). Camus explains, "Kafka's world is in truth an indescribable universe in which man allows himself the tormenting luxury of fishing in a bathtub, knowing nothing will come of it" (4, p. 150). Camus goes beyond Kafka in his definition of the hopeful element in such a world. As he sees it, the more tragic the condition described by Kafka, the firmer and more aggressive hope becomes (4, p. 152). He finds Kafka in agreement with Kierkegaard's statement that earthly hope must be killed so one can be saved by true hope (4, p. 153). He defines Kafka's work not as a desperate cry with no recourse left to man, but as writing completely oriented
towards the absurd and its consequences, leading to a tremendous cry of hope. "It is through humility that hope enters in . . . Kafka refuses his god moral nobility, evidence, virtue, coherence, but only the better to fall into his arms" (4, p. 153).

Kafka's "Investigations of a Dog" shows the indifference of all that is above and below man and of all that is on the same level with man. There is no falling into the arms of something which promises meaning to man's existence. Further, even if there is in Kafka's work hope for finding this something, it is hope that will produce nothing—the hope of catching a fish in a bathtub. The dog in Kafka's short story tries fasting to find how he is to secure food, to understand the basis of his existence. He wonders if the food comes through chants and rituals to some source above or from the ground through a dog's cultivation of the soil.

Through his fasting, the dog discovers no hope for learning the answer to his existence because no one cares. The dog, recalling his fast, says "... it was clear that nobody troubled about me, nobody beneath the earth, on it, or above it; I was dying of their indifference; they said indifferently: 'He is dying,' and it would actually come to pass" (8, p. 248). The hero is bound by his own existence and can find no way out of it. Kafka's protagonists are in a world without grace. They either do not know their goal or else can find no way to reach it. In either case, their
hopes are obliterated. Kafkaesque heroes have nothing but the paradox of their own existence. They did not ask to exist, but they do. They want to die, but they cannot, and even cling to life. They have nothing more than the struggle of this life. Kafka cannot see that this struggle makes them happy, as Camus feels it does.

Camus asserts that Sisyphus, whom the gods have condemned to the ceaseless rolling of a rock to the top of a mountain only to have the stone fall back of its own weight, is happy. Sisyphus finds his happiness in the absurd struggle itself. It is enough to make men happy, Camus says. "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (5, p. 315). In Camus, one sees human relations reestablished. Man communicating with man can scorn the gods or his fate and cross the paradoxes of his existence. He negates his fate by accepting it of his own free will and then endures it together with his fellow men. Hope is realized in the work of Camus, but he had to push beyond Kafka to find it.

Rhein explains the difference between Kafka and Camus by suggesting that the two writers are standing side by side looking through a plate glass window into a shop filled with exquisite art objects (16, p. 10). Both writers are oblivious to the busy street behind them. Jolted out of their reveries, they both look up and see the grotesquely distorted mass of men and machines as they are reflected in the curved glass.
Momentarily, the objects of the street appear to be monstrous phantoms closing in on the two men. "Both pause, stare, shudder. Kafka quickly lowers his glance. Camus turns and steps into the street" (16, p. 10). Camus can step into the absurd and contrive a positive solution for living there. Kafka cannot step into the street. He presents life as a complete impasse. Therefore, motion is impossible.

In the Kafkaesque world men die as bugs. They receive no more recognition from an important business associate than they would from a dead man. They have no one to make things whole again. They have no freedom and can find a way out only by living where life can scarcely exist. They have answered a false alarm that can never be made good. They never realize the object on which they place exaggerated hopes. They are ridiculed and subjected to scornful laughter because of their absurd hopefulness. They almost die because of the indifference of all that surrounds them. They cannot truly exist, but they are denied the release of death. They are left without hope of finding the answer to their existence.

Regardless of what each character may represent within each story, the pattern of the relationship clearly indicates the annulment of hope placed in anything at all. In his concluding remarks on hope, Kafka directs man nowhere. He cannot tell man where to turn because he sees stultification in any direction. All Kafka can do is describe the situation just as it presents itself to him. He confronts man with
the truth of his actual existence. It is this manifestation of truth that marks Kafka as a modern philosopher. That Camus, Sartre, and other philosophers after him are able to push beyond to more hopeful conclusions does not render Kafka's description less philosophical. It simply means that an existential philosopher describes the human condition as accurately as possible—from his individual perspective and the artist who does likewise is also a philosopher. As Knight says, "What is new in the current situation is not that literature has become philosophical—it has always been so—but that philosophy is seeking through literature to regain access to existence" (10, p. 117).

If philosophy and literature accepted only a scientific criterion of truth in the description of reality, both fields would be left without anything to write about. Scientific investigations would be the only valid ones. "If literature, like philosophy, is not to die of inanition, it must renew its bonds with existence" (10, p. 119). The pursuit of truth about human relations is a field outside the realm of science. The truth of existence as man actually lives it can be revealed only through individual perspectives of what is evident. The reality of current human existence, at least, cannot be totally explained and packed away into neat stacks of boxes. Unless science makes man a total robot, he must continue to bungle along as a befuddled human, living as best he can. Making the truth of man's bungling manifest,
which is precisely what Kafka does, is not yet the business of science but properly that of philosophy and literature—or of literature-philosophy.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER VI

ON SEARCHING

The pattern of man's existence in Kafka's prose is one of incoherently stumbling through the confusing muddle of life without guidance from law or authority, without a tradition to follow, without a message from any directive source, and without hope in any object whatsoever. All the while, however, man continues to search for something that will redeem him from this impasse. Kafka's heroes conduct an unending search for peace and security, for the meaning of their existence, for some obscure goal to which the way is unknown if indeed there is a way.

In any case, Kafka's search can never end because it can never realize its goal—any goal. Yet the negative quest itself is not stated in the positive terms of Sisyphus' incessant struggle. Even the absurd victory is denied Kafka's heroes. Furthermore, Kafka not only resists expressing the negative in positive terms as does Camus, but he also resists asserting that the extreme negative is positive. That is, he does not project the loss of self or the reduction of one's ego to nothing as a positive way out. Kafka's protagonists cannot completely submit their own timid desires and needs to the forces of the outside world which overpower
them. They are not convinced of their right to exist, but neither are they convinced that they have no right to exist. They cannot give up the will to live; self destruction is not such an easy thing to accomplish. Kafka's heroes are unable to end their search either by fulfilling or destroying the self.

The canine hero of "Investigations of a Dog" finds an old dog does not die as easily as one would think. He searches for the meaning of his existence without result even though he is determined to fast until he is given an answer or dies. When he is weak from hunger and still has received no insight, he wishes to die, but "one does not die so easily as a nervous dog imagines" (7, p. 249). Finally he is driven away by a musical dog whose strange silence sends him running. The sole ambition of dogs is to become old dogs, "truly a thing which they could not fail to achieve" (7, p. 233). As they grow older, they are coming nearer and nearer to death with increasing speed, so why praise the old dogs? They are accomplishing nothing more than a "natural and ugly process" (7, p. 231). Thus the paradoxical formula emerges: man wants to live, but that only brings him nearer to death. Yet when he tries to commit suicide, he is driven away by the silent, musical dog, death.

The real question of the canine's existence is how long he can endure silence because the world of dogs is pledged
to silence. Tauber explains:

The silence is the inadequacy of the world, of all explanations and definitions of ends in a life that doubts every realization. . . . It is the sullen feeling of doom of a generation that sees itself cut off from its origins and entrapped in a culture made up of incalculable and in the end senseless forms of life (14, p. 208).

Yet the dog concludes that he shall probably hold out against this silence until his natural end. He cannot hear the music of the musical dog, death, but only its silence. His existence in this life goes on. He can neither destroy nor transcend this life through his fasting. His investigations prove fruitless. As Tauber observes, the dog's inquiry cannot "provide tenable bonds with the foundation of existence" (14, p. 205). His fast for more meaningful food results in little enlightenment. Even after his encounter with the musical dog, the hero "does not feel redeemed at all from his problematic position" (14, p. 211). He cannot conclude the search for the basis of his existence in spiritual salvation because he is driven away from the death necessary for his spiritual rebirth.

On the other hand, if the death which the dog seeks is merely a biological one, he finds it impossible to commit suicide. There is no solace in this "solution" either. He must hold out to his natural end. Or perhaps the musical death for which the dog longs is the death of reducing the ego to nothing. Paul Goodman suggests that the dog who drives the hero from his place of fasting is not inevitable
death, but life in death, the giving in of the self (4, p. 249).
In this case the problem presents itself in a different form.
Is the dog's ego biologically distinct from his doggishness?
No, the hero finds his hunger and self cannot be separated.
They are "very painfully one" (7, p. 244). The dog's report
of his attempt to will his self away follows: "My beautiful
fancies fled one by one before the increasing urgency of my
hunger; . . ." (7, p. 244). All of the dog's sublime feel-
ings about giving up the self flee as he is left "totally
alone with the hunger burning in [his] entrails" (7, p. 244).
At the end of his story, the dog concludes that his instinct
invalidates his scientific capacities.

Of course, there is the possibility that man can do
what the dog cannot do. Goodman asks if men are necessarily
dogs. Is man's ego avoidable or at least destructible,
whereas that of the dog is not? Should the ego be avoided
or destroyed? Can it be done away with (4, p. 150)? In the
case of the canine, the self remains. Kafka realizes that
complete submission to all outside demands is just as
arbitrary as asserting oneself over and beyond them. Kafka
cannot deal with what life would be like at the absolute
zero mark, because he cannot get there. Man is too torn by
his own need to exist to commit his self to oblivion. Thus
Kafka describes the conflict just as it is, manifesting what
is evident without resorting to fantasy in order to build
up or to tear down. There is nothing on which man can base
the assumption that he is something, so he must be nothing. Yet he continues to exist so he is not absolute zero. He is an existing nothing. "Two incompatible constructions coexist in one appearance," says Goodman (4, p. 265).

Kafka explores several paths of asceticism during his endless pursuit of meaning. The poor hero of "A Hunger Artist" abstains from willing at all, but his self-denial is ultimately no more significant than that of the canine investigator. At the end of the story he faces death without victory. He is replaced by a vigorous animal, full of life, while the hunger artist is forgotten. The starvation artist reveals that he would have saved himself too if only he could have found the right food. He destroyed his self "because I couldn't find the food I like. If I had found it, believe me, I should have made no fuss and stuffed myself like you or anyone else" (7, p. 201). These are the last words of the hunger artist.

For man to eat something he does not like (or to believe in a metaphysical order or a supernatural entity that does not exist) is absurd, yet to refrain from believing results in meaningless and stymied searches which can never realize a goal or the sacrifice of the self which ultimately ends in a death that is also without significance. Ronald Gray sums up the crisis by pointing out that losing one's life in order to save it is a familiar parable, but in Kafka's work even the loss of life does not save it (6, pp. 3-4). The hunger
artist says he would have stuffed himself like anyone else if he could have found the right food, but where does Kafka place the blame for his not being provided with it? Is the order of the universe to blame? Is society? Is man himself at fault for not being able to conduct his search for meaning to the proper goal? Or is the insensible search a goal in itself? Is this modern man's lot?

M. M. Waidson says "the starvation artist dies with firm conviction still in his eyes; he has lost his pride, but not his sense of purpose" (15, p. 269). Waidson feels the artist "does not despair of the world order or of the value of his place in it" (15, p. 266). According to this interpretation, the artist would seem to have merely misapprehended the way leading to a meaningful existence. The unhappy conclusion would be due to the artist's shortcomings rather than to the fact that there is no meaning. The artist's purpose is correct; it is his method which leads him astray. Meno Spann, however, feels that the artist's act is a farce and that his life is built on illusion and error (12, p. 90). The sham artist's life is an example of unauthentic existence while the animal's authentic existence is evident even in captivity (12, p. 98). The artist's "lack of appetite had led him into a meaningless existence, deprived of dignity, joy and freedom; but about the leopard the author says, . . . 'He lacked nothing!'" (12, p. 92). However even though the leopard is triumphant, Spann admits
that the reader is left wondering "about the complexity of man which made the selection of food problematic for him" (12, p. 92).

R. W. Stallman finds the failure of the artist in his attempt to divorce himself completely from the physical, the body, and the life of society. "Complete detachment from physical reality is spiritual death" (13, p. 66). The artist's statement, "'I always wanted you to admire my fasting'" (7, p. 200) is, according to Stallman, "his confession that spirit has no absolute sovereignty over matter, soul has no absolute sovereignty over body and art has no absolute sovereignty over life" (13, p. 67). The starvation artist asks for forgiveness "for his blasphemy against nature" (13, p. 67). The artist has no right to isolate himself totally from the society in which he lives nor should man strive for a condition of pure spirituality or pure soul. The physical body also demands attention. As Stallman points out, the story may be translated into metaphysical, religious, or sociological terms because Kafka's "meanings emerge at several planes at once, and the planes are interconnected. No complete paraphrase is possible" (13, p. 64). However the conflict between spirit and matter, body and soul, and artist and society coincide in the resolution, says Stallman. "Christ is truly dead. Our post-Renaissance world has discarded the act of faith from its reality. For the mystic,
as for the artist, there is no resurrection because today not spirit but matter alone is recognized" (13, p. 69).

The canine investigator and the hunger artist fast without result. The dog's experiment does not reveal the basis of his being, and the starvation artist realizes that his very existence is based on illusion. They both lose the way to their goal and can find no peace even in death.

Another poor searcher who has lost his way is "The Hunter Gracchus." Also in this story is the explicit statement that death is by no means the release it is commonly thought to be. The hunter is no less miserable in death than he was in life. His death ship has gone astray, so he can find no peace. Tauber says the hunter who continues "to wander on the edge of life, without a destiny" is "the picture of Life itself which has become empty" (14, p. 73). "The secret of Life--Death--remains inaccessible to him" (14, p. 72).

Caroline Gordon interprets the tale as a story of Christ, who has been crucified but has never been able to ascend into heaven (5, p. 81). Literally, the story deals with a dead hunter, who is also alive. "A moment's absence of mind on the pilot's part" caused his death ship to lose its way and since that time his ship has sailed earthly waters. The hunter is not to blame for his fate. The guilt is the boatman's. The hunter concludes, "I am here, more than that I do not know, further than that I cannot go. My
The ship has no rudder, and it is driven by the wind that blows in the undermost regions of death" (7, p. 187).

According to Miss Gordon, Gracchus is Christ and the boatman is the church. The town official who talks with Gracchus on his ship's arrival at the harbor, Miss Gordon says, represents the soul while the harbor is a symbol for any community (5, p. 81). Thus, she concludes, Christ cannot become Christ. The church has not made it possible for the community to accept Christ as its savior. Kafka's allegorical symbolism is as exact, if not as full, as Dante's, Miss Gordon says. The difference is that his faith is not as complete (5, p. 82).

It seems equally valid to interpret the hunter as man and the boatman as God. The town official would then become simply a member of society, from which the hunter is estranged. Man has no contact with God or society. Since God is dead, He can mean nothing to man. There is no logic in believing in something which does not exist. On the other hand, there is no logic to tie one to society, because as the hunter says, "'Nobody will read what I say here'" (7, p. 187). Every door and every window remains shut. "'I am here, more than that I do not know, further than that I cannot go'" (7, p. 187). Does not this condition sound as identical to man's situation as it does to that of Christ? The hunter tells the official that he (the hunter) has been turned into a butterfly, which Miss Gordon interprets as a
symbol of the soul. It seems the butterfly could as easily represent the instability and lack of unity in man. With no foundation for his life, man absurdly flits hither and thither without direction. On the other hand, if Gracchus is Christ, it seems possible to assume from the context of the story that Christ cannot become Christ because God is dead. He cannot be man's savior because there is nothing otherworldly in which salvation lies. Whether Kafka asserts that God is dead or merely that man has alienated himself from God, the result for man is a sense of meaninglessness in the world.

This meaninglessness of the outer world to the Kafkaesque man may result less from an inoperative god than from the fact that he feels permanently banished from living in the world, according to Anders. He argues that what Kafka's heroes hunger for "is not redemption from the world, but redemption from not living in the world" (1, p. 39). Yet they do not know for sure what they have lost or wish to recover (1, p. 91). In fact, it seems they are not always sure they want to recover it at all. The beast of "The Burrow" suggests a mentality which does not want to gain entrance to the world, but wants only to keep the world out and find peace in withdrawal. The search for guidance withers, yet withdrawing into one's mind does not promise gratification either. The burrow provides some security "but by no means enough, for is one ever free from anxieties inside it?" (7, p. 276). Furthermore, in their destructive
effects these anxieties "are much the same as those that exist in the outer world" (7, p. 276). Inside or outside one's mind, the search for security never reaches its goal.

The beast feels the labor needed to make his burrow safe would not be worth the actual security he would have. He can't manage to keep all danger out. He is never sure of the silence within the burrow, but always hears a faint murmur of a threatening sound. Lienhard Bergel, who feels the central theme of the story is concerned with the interplay between mind and reality, says:

The relationship with reality remains ambivalent; no definite choice has been made between introversion and extroversion nor have the two been reconciled. Reality has not been conquered by being lived nor has it been fully replaced by a completely solipsistic construction ... (3, p. 202).

At most, withdrawal can bring nothing more than a timid inner security and even that is under a constant threat. Regardless of how nearly the underground beast diminishes his self, there is still a threat from without. The vacuum created by man's withdrawal or self-sacrifice will inevitably be filled by a power which he will find hard to ignore. The buzzing sound, though perhaps faint, perhaps even imaginative, will never be completely non-existent.

On the other hand, despite the animal's elaborately planned attempts to locate the source of the noise, he knows he will never be able to do so. He begins to break up every clod in his burrow to see if the noise comes from a tiny
beast inside the clods. He breaks into these lumps "not really hoping to find anything, but simply so as to do some-
thing to give expression to one's inward agitation" (7, p. 289). In fact, he says he believes so little in his plan to find
the noise that he does not even fear the terrors that success might well bring. Finally even the thought of the horrible
beast above his burrow is not enough to make him continue his efforts to dig for his safety. No consideration can make
him dig. In the end, the burrow-creature gets a piece of flayed red flesh and starts to gnaw on it. He concludes,
"I should enjoy my store of food as fully as possible while I still have the chance. This last is probably the sole plan
I have left that I can carry out" (7, p. 302). Though man wants to live, he is in constant danger of death. Yet, even
if he wants to die, he cannot give up his existence. Accord-
ing to Tauber, "fear of [both] life and death are depicted at very close quarters, while memory and hope seem to be
forgotten forces" (14, p. 213). The search for meaning cannot be realized in life or in death. The sole plan man
can carry out is to enjoy his store of food as fully as possible while he still has the chance. Even this plan is
carried out within the dismal confines of the burrow, which is hollow, without light, and devoid of significance.

The burrow, according to Poiitzer, both attracts the creature and is unable to keep him within its labyrinth.
"The animal cannot live within the cave and likewise is
not able to bear the thought of leaving it" (11, p. 324). Therefore, as Anders points out, the need of Kafka's heroes to enter the world cannot be fulfilled. They cannot leave their own subjective burrow, though they cannot live peacefully within it either. What remains "is a general hunger for salvation" (1, p. 91) which can never be appeased. Even the burrow beast himself says, "No, if one takes it by and large I have no right to complain that I am alone and have nobody that I can trust" (7, p. 275). As always, Kafka's symbols may be applied in various ways. Lienhard Bergel observes, "The story is in itself a 'burrow' of the most complicated construction, with an ingenious system of coordinated and intertwining tunnels" (3, p. 205). Therefore, it is possible to turn this story inside out and conclude that neither will one's commitment to something outside the burrow ever be secure from threats from within. Dedication to any metaphysical, religious, or social system will likely suffer attacks from man's actual experience on a personal level. Man will probably be unable to believe in any absolute which renders the world sensible, even though he wants to do so.

Finally, whatever the animal is searching for and whatever the burrow is a fortress against, the goal is never attained, nor is the burrow ever completed. "Moreover, it [the animal] will not attain what it desires most: it will never find the complete peace for which it is longing, the
perfect stillness in which it could hear 'the murmur of the silence of the Castle Keep'" (11, p. 326). The burrow, as a place for an encounter—between life and man, art and society, God and man, myth and reality, or any other two forces—can provide, at best, only a timid security.

Any definite resolution always eludes Kafka's seekers and investigators for truth and meaning, for peace and security, for a sense of belonging. Kafka's searchers can never find their way. The Castle, which gives an account of the classical Kafkaesque search, neither dooms its hero to hell nor lifts him to heaven. The novel has no happy or tragic end. As Politzer observes, poor Land Surveyor K., one of Kafka's most ardent searchers for a certainty of one kind or the other, "wanders in circles through the twilight between salvation and damnation, which is the most infernal fate of all" (11, p. 280). Likewise, Joseph K.'s life struggle to secure a comprehensible trial leads only to the meaningless and untried verdict of dying like a dog. Mont Belgion regards man in Kafka's novels as unable to escape making some choice or other and as doomed to find that whatever his choice may be it will ultimately always seem to have been wrong (2, p. 16). Belgion concludes as follows:

Kafka, then, takes man's concern for reassurance regarding the consequences of his acts and man's aspiration after an understanding and stability of life; and treats these from the standpoint that both concern and aspiration are encouraged and at the same time perpetually circumvented (2, p. 17).
A concise statement which sums up the perpetual circum-
vention of man's continual aspiration to discover a meaning-
ful existence is "A Common Confusion." The story tells of
how it is impossible for A and B to get together. A makes
the journey to meet B in ten minutes on one occasion. When
he goes for a second, and the most important interview, it
takes him ten hours. A finally arrives to find that B has
gone to meet him in his home village. A retraces his steps,
in exactly one second this time, to find that B met him as
he was first leaving, but A had been too rushed to notice.
Now B is impatiently waiting for A upstairs. A runs up to
explain the error, but falls on the stairs and "hears B--
impossible to tell whether at a great distance or quite near
him--stamping down the stairs in a violent rage and vanishing
for good" (7, p. 158). Whether A and B represent man and
society, man and man, man and woman, self-consciousness and
reality, truth and man, law and man, or God and man, makes
little difference. The impossibility of the two ever getting
together is the same. As the title indicates, the confusion
is common, so perhaps the confusion exists in all the above
instances. Time and distance have no stability. Man and
the universe are equally deranged.

The condition of man's existence as revealed in "A
Common Confusion" is enlightened by a comment from Anders:

If a man does not know what position he is in
nor where he is going, what he owes nor to
whom, what he may be suspected of, or why he
is accused, or whether or not he is tolerated
(if so, for how long, if not on what authority),
then all his energies will be consumed by an
unremitting search for meaning, a kind of mania
for interpretation. No event will be so insig-
nificant, no gesture so fleeting, that it does
not at once provoke the question, "What does
this mean?" (1, p. 51).

Anders feels this mania for interpretation is the stigma of
one who is without power, one who "must forever interpret
the world because others rule and change it" (1, p. 52).
Therefore, Kafka's interpretations of life necessarily give
rise to endless possibilities and complexities, dooming his
heroes to incessant searches and his readers to incessant
interpretations.

Both A and B, when transformed into particulars, may
become the subjects of any number of complex portrayals of
life and the problems it presents to man. The theme may be
about any two conflicting forces and yet the end result, the
basic pattern, will not change. A will never reach B, his
goal. Since the confusion inherent in A's position is sig-
nificantly common, this brief composition seems a fitting
summary to all of Kafka's searches. It reveals the basic
pattern on which even the lengthy searches of the two K.'s
are constructed. Man's searches can lead only to nowhere.
There is no absolute stopping place where meaning is revealed.
Man can only wander through the labyrinth of this life,
conducting investigations that can never end.

Max Lerner observes, Kafka "offers no cheap and easy
endings, no safe harbor for the human voyage." His only
religion is a religion of "unending exploration" (9, p. 44). Yesterday's religions and ancient customs appear ridiculous as one views them in "the album of beliefs" (18, p. 366) says T. Weiss. "Ours is a time in which most answers are made of such inferior stuff they prove either flimsy or unfashionable even as we try them on" (18, p. 366). For this reason man must move nakedly through his world, and "the writer perhaps most agonizingly aware of his nakedness is Franz Kafka" (18, p. 366). That Kafka's searches can never be completed points to his awareness of this nakedness forced upon him by the lack of any tenable conclusion. "The world, moving, has changed shape; the ready made answers can hardly fit" (18, p. 366). Therefore, Kafka's futile quest must continue. Austin Warren says Kafka makes apparent "how elusive is the truth. What happens is tolerably easy to ascertain, but what it means is precarious as well as important" (16, p. 129).

The creatures of Kafka's disquisitions are aware of the outward events through which they move, but the significance of these happenings is questionable. A canine investigator can find no basis for his existence, nor can he find peace in non-existence. A starvation artist fasts his life away in a search of proper nourishment only to die confessing that his entire existence was a sham. A dead, but living, hunter wandering astray can find no meaning either in life or in death. A beast who spends his life burrowing into chambers of nothingness finds no more than a timid inner
security. The man A forever fails to make contact with meaning because of the confusion in time and space. None of Kafka's searchers can find his way.

The hope of discovery is in vain, yet perhaps something has been salvaged along the way. At least the examination is honest and therefore illuminating. "Ignorance mapped, the unknown delimited, is a kind of knowledge, perhaps the only kind we can expect" (13, p. 370). Furthermore, as Claude-Edmonde Magny points out, Kafka does not ridicule "all human ambitions because he cannot comprehend their nobility; he feels on the contrary very strongly the nobility of any aspiration or effort, whatever its object" (10, p. 92). Man is not necessarily to blame for the failure of his seeking, nor is any other single factor. Life, itself, is ambiguous and lacks certainty so that man's existence in it must be likewise. Magny asserts that what constitutes the ground of Kafka's work is, as in Sartre, "the impression that life is essentially without rules, without laws, that a day might bring forth anything at all; that life lacks necessity, . . ." (10, p. 95).

This same idea of Kafka's work being grounded in the knowledge that life lacks necessity is echoed in an observation by Wladimir Weidlé. Kafka can never bring his searches to an end, or reach a conclusion of any type because his purpose is to explain nothing. One reads Kafka's prose feeling he is just about to guess its hidden meaning. "We
need the meaning, we expect it to come; . . . but the end of the story explains nothing. We are condemned to the absurd, we must wander indefinitely in the exitless labyrinth of existence; and suddenly it dawns upon us that this and this alone was what Kafka meant" (17, p. 360). Kafka's meaning is not hidden and separated from his description of man's condition. Whatever meaning there is to life is inherent in the actual description of life itself, not obscured behind it.

Life is what it is. That is its only meaning. Kafka refrains from providing his aspirants with superficial successes. Through his continual survey, which he conducts with honesty and without prejudice, Kafka is perpetually describing life as it is. Because Kafka's searches continue, it is valid to refer to him not only as an artist, but also as a philosopher. Knight observes that modern thinkers have come to view the contemplative attitude and the systems of classical philosophy as less important than man's actual existence. Existentialism is concerned with man's existence, not some hidden essence; "with the particular, not the general; and with life itself, not with what lies behind it" (8, p. 119). Rather than create remedial contrivances for modern man's existence, Kafka merely portrays life as it is. Through his fervent examination of daily, bemuddled life, he manifests modern philosophic truth.


CHAPTER VII

ON COMMUNICATION AND FELLOWSHIP

The lack of communication and fellowship emerges time and again throughout Kafka's description of the universe. Indeed so basic to Kafka's work is this deficiency that all of his writing is in some way concerned with it. Man's problematic relation to law and authority, his failure to receive meaningful messages, his confusion about the possibility of hope and what might provide it, and the futility of his searches are all related to the impossibility of effective communication and the need of common understanding and fellowship per se, especially within the sphere of human relations.

Philip Rahv writes that "the lack of communication between man and the powers that rule him" is one of Kafka's chief postulates (12, p. 71). Likewise, communication between man and man is cut asunder so that mankind cannot unite against the forces that rule and threaten. Each individual must wrestle with reality on his own. "Kafka's hero is always alone. . . . His pathos is the pathos of loneliness and exclusion" (12, p. 73). To make matters worse, there is disintegration even within the single individual's framework. "The Kafkian man," says Rahv, "is deprived of the most
elementary requisites of adjustment." The inner and outer selves of Kafka's heroes are confounded (12, p. 71).

The very idea of a neighbor usually indicates one with whom friendship and understanding is possible, yet Kafka's "My Neighbor" describes an entirely different sort of person. Harras, the narrator's neighbor, worms his way into the narrator's business secrets by eavesdropping on telephone conversations through the thin walls. Despite the flimsy physical barrier between them, the two neighbors are completely emotionally estranged from one another. Harras literally shoots past the narrator, slipping through the door "like the tail of a rat" (4, p. 137). The narrator never even gets a good look at his neighbor, much less a chance to know or communicate with him. He fears Harras "and yet can't help divulging . . . valuable information through the wall" (4, p. 137). The protagonist says, "Because of all this my business decisions have naturally become unsure, my voice nervous" (4, p. 137). As soon as Harras learns what he needs to know, he rushes away and before his neighbor has even "hung up the receiver, is already at his goal working against him" (4, p. 138).

The neighbors cannot work together or understand and help each other. In fact, Harras' goal consists precisely in working against his neighbor. Kafka describes the modern man who has no time to spend understanding another man's problems or aspirations. Men do not really get to know one
another, yet they are suspicious and frightened of each other. Whether the narrator or his neighbor is to blame for the situation in the story is an open question. The very impossibility of the two ever getting together seems to be taken for granted. The fact that each neighbor is isolated can hardly be traced solely to a business environment since they are called neighbors and not merely associates. Furthermore, the same rupture in communication is evident in Kafka's family situations, in the relation between an authority and his subjects, between man and the world about him, and between any guiding Being and man's actual experience. Such stories as "The Metamorphosis," "The Great Wall of China," "The Judgment," "Investigations of a Dog," and "The Burrow" reveal these themes. Therefore, it seems logical to conclude that the difficulty of communication and the breach of fellowship are problems inherent in life itself.

D. S. Savage comments on the way in which Kafka deals with these inherent problems of life: "Kafka leaves us with no solution at all to the problems which he has been exploring. The issues are certainly raised, but no conclusion is come to . . . bafflement and frustration reign" (13, p. 321). Savage argues that Kafka is primarily "an explorer of the human condition" (13, p. 335), but that his exploration is limited "by his determining obsessions" (13, p. 322). Kafka, according to Savage, has lost his faith in the rightness of things and yet is incapable of making a leap toward faith.
and reintegrating his life on a higher level (13). Such a predicament, however, seems to result less from Kafka's "obsessions" than from his honest and assiduous examination of the human condition. T. Weiss suggests that it is not because Kafka does not wish a higher level for man's existence that he shuns lofty panaceas, but because he wishes it too much to give any remedy save a description of actual daily life "with as much humility and honesty as the human spirit can endure. . . . [He] did not conquer by cutting off the snake-writhing head of reality, but came to realize it and, never taming, to live with it" (16, p. 370). The insufficiency of fellowship is perfectly evident in Kafka's perception of reality, but what to do about it is another matter. According to Weiss, Kafka "does not try to persuade the world to accept his terms. More than that he does not try to wring meanings (still terms or preconceptions) from the world he sees. That world is enough, almost too much" (16, p. 368).

Since Kafka's honesty leaves him without recourse to any world other than the one in which men live daily, his descriptions cannot be other than what they are. Kafka sees the modern world without comradeship, thus his neighbors are anything but neighborly. Man is totally alienated even from one who lives next to him. Kafka is sympathetic about man's plight, but unable to lessen it. As Anders observes, Kafka's voice is that of the ineffectual conformist; it is
a mere world of consolation from the prisoner in the next cell (1, p. 98). Rahv maintains that Kafka's hero "is the anonymous, standard man of our rationalistic civilization, . . . produced by the urban life-machine" (12, p. 72). Communication or mutual helpfulness is impossible, according to Rahv, because of the society in which man lives. No one is to blame and yet all are at fault. No one can help anybody; each is secluded from the other, encircled by an impenetrable aloofness.

Kafka's hero cannot refute the systems of society because the absurd order of a senseless life is somehow irrefutably imposed upon him. Kafka displays the rules of life as chaotic and also necessary. As Anders points out, punishment which precedes guilt is taken as evidence of guilt (1, p. 40). This systematic inversion of guilt and punishment arises with a crazy kind of logical necessity according to Anders (1, p. 39). Thus, the absurdity of Kafka's world comes to light under an excess of logic. Kafka shows that even horror may have a certain order, Anders says (1, p. 69). It is this unnatural horror that is also somehow natural and ordered that reaches out and grips Kafka's reader. "It is not we who look at [Kafka's world], but it which fixes us with its baleful stare" (1, p. 62). The reader cannot escape the reality of Kafka's nightmares. He speaks and the reader listens.
Egon Vietta writes that what most readers fear is "a radical scepticism toward its standard of uniformly accepted ideas. Kafka puts fundamental question marks behind this well-proven reality" (15, p. 344). Vietta further asserts that Kafka's work represents "a new attitude of the spirit" (15, p. 346), "a basic shift within consciousness itself" (15, p. 344), "a new manner of seizing reality" (15, p. 346). "Though philosophically not yet clarified, a more profound conception of existence here presses forward . . ." (15, p. 345). While Vietta's optimism seems hard-pressed, his point that Kafka's prose questions conventionally accepted reality is definitely well founded. The "unreal reality" (15, p. 345) of Kafka's prose calls all traditional values into question. Therefore, while Kafka's voice is that of the conformist, his method of speaking is such that one finds himself asking the very question that Kafka has just shown the futility of asking.

Anders says Kafka is a conformist, and Vietta asserts that he questions tradition. Both are quite correct even though they contradict one another. Kafka's hero is left without companions, cut off from any type of intelligible communication, unable to obtain help or give it to others. He is left without an effective method of revolt because of an absurd order imposed on him, so he conforms. Yet by conforming he points out how preposterous it is to do so. For example, in "A Fratricide" Kafka sounds a note of complete
resignation to a situation which calls for vehement protests by humanity. The observations of both Politzer and Neider point to what seems the obvious conclusion of this short piece in which one man coldly murders another. Neider says Kafka points out that man murders man both spiritually and literally (10, p. 81). There is no indication in the story that the two men are brothers, so Politzer says reasonably enough that "they represent humanity, one part of which is murderously set against the other for no apparent reason except that humans are, after all, inhuman" (11, p. 93).

Schmar, the murderer, after his deed says, "the bliss of murder! The relief, the soaring ecstasy from the shedding of another's blood" (5, p. 167). In this world without brotherhood, men are not only unable to help one another, but they actually take delight in persecuting each other. The victim had just scrutinized the heavens to interpret the future, but nothing drew together into a pattern for him. The heavens leave him to stumble upon his death. His murderer asks coldly, "What's the good of the dumb question you are asking?" (5, p. 167). The killer is in turn betrayed by a fellow man who saw the crime from his house. A policeman then leads away the criminal, who fights down the last of his nausea as he follows.

The witness, the policeman, the murderer, and the victim are all at cross purposes, making a bad situation worse. The story contains no trace of victory in justice,
but ends on a note of complete desperation. There is no basis for coming to a more inspiriting conclusion in the short composition, because motives are not explained, ideas are not discussed. The world is devoid of human emotion and feeling. The characters move about like mere puppets of a power stronger than they. This ruling power is senseless, inhuman, cold, and murderously condemning. Yet humanity is easily frozen by this inscrutable power and left without the warmth of any emotion whatsoever. Nausea is its only response to the world.

Hardly less disabling than this nauseous response to the world is Kafka's disheartening description of the irremediable rent in human relations in "The Little Woman." The composition is a plotless sketch of a woman who cannot tolerate the narrator. Her dislike for him is so intense that at the very sight of him she verges on hysteria. The relationship is really never comprehended by the narrator. He would like to communicate with the woman and feels that even if they never understand and appreciate one another, perhaps he can at least make her dislike him less intensely. However, he has to conclude that "Her objection to me, as I am now aware, is a fundamental one; nothing can remove it, not even the removal of myself . . ." (6, p. 239).

Politzer supplies an effective statement of the story's theme. He says it "reaffirms the alienation which existed between the writer and the most accidental among his fellow
Indeed, the total depletion of any meaningful social or human bond is painfully evident in Kafka's prose. One of the author's disarmingly intense descriptions of this dehumanized universe is in "The Bucket Rider." Man is left completely alone, cold and without coal, "the sky a silver shield against anyone who looks for help from it" (4, p. 125). Denied heavenly assistance, the hero rides off on his empty bucket to seek help from the human realm. He is without means, but asks the coal dealer for just a shovelful of his worst coal to keep from freezing to death. However, the coal dealer's wife merely wafts the bucket rider away, and he ascends "into the regions of the ice mountains" and is "lost forever" (4, p. 128).

The story creates an image of cosmic cold gripping the world, Politzer observes. The sky is a void, the earth is emptiness. All human energy and vitality are wasted (11, p. 88). The fire of human relations is out and there is no fuel left. The wife offers no more encouragement to the beggar than does the indifferent sky to which she sends him. "As a statement of man's forlornness in a wintry world," the beginning of this tale is lyrically perfect says Politzer (11, p. 88).

Several of Kafka's short fragments do little more than reveal acute images of man's forlornness and the futility of his every attempt to overcome his fate by appealing to fellow beings. Men, because they misunderstand each other,
increase rather than decrease their problems. The narrator of "The Knock at the Manor Gate" (4, pp. 111-112) tells of how his sister chanced to knock on a farm gate as the two strolled past it. All sorts of confusion between the country people and the brother and sister ensues, and the girl's innocent little gesture leads finally to the narrator's imprisonment, without any prospect of release. Even the slightest movement may lead to terrible results in a world where communication is impossible.

The appeal for help is at least communicated in "The Vulture" (4, p. 118), but to no avail. A passerby offers to get a gun to shoot a vulture who is hacking away at the narrator's feet. Before he can return, however, the vulture kills his victim and then drowns in the dying man's blood. Even the vulture, which should thrive on the very spoils of humanity even as it decomposes, cannot survive on the decaying and rotting remains of mankind.

All that is left of human kindness in Kafka's prose is its putrefying corpse. The human world is inhuman. Kafka's descriptive enumerations of eleven sons and ten engineers in two separate plotless compositions reveal men, stripped of truly distinguishing human traits. "The Eleven Sons" (6, pp. 161-166) and the engineers of "A Visit to a Mine" (6, pp. 155-157) cannot be kept clearly apart despite the individual description of each. All men merge together into an incoherent and inhuman mass. Politzer says the parallel
theme of these two stories shows "the namelessness and facelessness of dehumanized humanity" (11, p. 95). The death of humanity, and thus the isolation of man, is equally evident within his family and profession. Already abandoned by God or any other metaphysical father, Kafka's hero looks to the human realm for companionship, only to find communication and fellowship equally impossible in the areas of family and professional relations. Regardless of where Kafka's hero turns for acceptance, ultimately he stands alone, uncertain and trembling.

The total lack of acceptance faced by Kafka's heroes is sadly manifest in the melancholy "Home-coming," which is hardly a homecoming at all. The narrator says, "I have returned." He assures himself, "I have arrived." But then he asks, "Who is going to receive me? Do you feel you belong, do you feel at home?" He is sure he is at his father's house, but adds, "I don't know, I feel most uncertain" (4, p. 144). He can hear the sounds within, but he dares not knock on the door. He cannot establish a link with those inside. Friedrich Beissner writes, "He remains alone and lonely . . . nor does he . . . release himself by an upward glance, a movement of the soul into some other dimension. There is no longer any other dimension for Kafka" (2, pp. 21-22). Beissner observes that the theme directly embodied here is that of the unsuccessful arrival (2, p. 21), and it is one which runs through the mainstream of all Kafka's prose. Never do his heroes successfully arrive.
This entire frustrating problem of communication, fellowship, and lack of acceptance receives condensed treatment in "Fellowship." The short piece tells of five friends who are unwilling to accept a sixth one. "We don't know him and don't want him to join us" (4, p. 145). There were times when the five did not know each other, of course, and there is no point in their continual togetherness anyway, but still they are unwilling to admit another. "We are five and don't want to be six. . . . Long explanations would almost amount to accepting him in our circle, so we prefer not to explain and not to accept him" (4, p. 145).

It is possible then that a large part of Kafka's incongruous communication results from the fact that men are not willing to take time to explain things to one another. They do not want to reach out to another being but prefer to isolate themselves in the mystique of some group or in their own subjectivity. The realm of human relations fails so miserably because mankind is, after all, anything but kind. The poor outsider takes no refuge in his exclusion, but constantly seeks admittance into the group of five whose relationship has no point in the first place. "No matter how he pouts his lips we push him away with our elbows, but however much we push him away, back he comes" (4, p. 145). Typical of its author, this piece merely describes the situation without assessing guilt or providing a way out of the discord. Whether the outcast would be wiser to satisfy
himself with staying outside or to continue his perpetual attempt to gain acceptance is an open question, as is that of whether the relationship of the five is valuable or destructive.

According to some interpretations of Kafka, his answer lies in pulling both sides together into a harmonious and meaningful human relationship. M. W. Steinberg sees Kafka's hope in the perfection of the earth. He feels Joseph K. is found guilty of his own meaningless, arid life, and that Land-Surveyor K.'s likewise sterile existence is what sets him apart from the castle villagers (14, pp. 97, 100). Thus Kafka is urging man to accept the community and find one's place in it as the only true way to find God (14, pp. 101, 103). However, Edwin Berry Burgum argues that it is impossible to view the community of average men from which the two K.'s are expelled as any type of perfection on earth. He, in fact, sees these prodding creatures of The Trial and The Castle as less hopeful examples of humanity than Land-Surveyor and Joseph K. Burgum asserts that the average man had no need to pursue the Castle because "he was reconciled to the contradictions that life had thrust upon him. He had become resigned to a chaos he did not understand, whether he found it within himself or in the outside world" (3, p. 163).

K. is therefore not to blame because he cannot reach the Castle or attain the faith of his neighbors who may
believe in something that does not even exist. Walter Kaufmann suggests "that in The Castle, God is dead, and we are faced with a universe devoid of sense" (7, p. 122). Therefore, K.'s desperate wandering is hopelessly confused because the entire world is devoid of sense and not because K. is merely out of step. Burgum also notes such a possibility. He says of the Castle, "we remain ignorant whether its material appearance justifies our assumption of spiritual power within" (3, p. 167). Burgum maintains that Kafka has lost his struggle to attain religious faith, cannot place it in humanity, and is thus left without any faith at all. Kaufmann says Kafka "pictures the world into which Heidegger's man is 'thrown,' the godless world of Sartre, the 'absurd' world of Camus" (7, p. 122). Weiss says Kafka describes "the logic of human chaos, of the very Philadelphia we build around us to hide in, a world that deliberately mirrors only what we externally are" (16, p. 368).

In final analysis, Kafka's heroes find the outside world threatening and confusing, devoid of fellowship and understanding, yet they cannot find solace in their own no less chaotic subjectivity. Weiss says Kafka shows that "little as we experience the outside, we know that we know ourselves less" (16, p. 369). He observes that Kafka depicts the tragedy of being by demonstrating that "whatever we are at a particular moment, that is all we can be" (16, p. 369). Therefore, in the very act of being, man is doomed to
solitude and loneliness. He clutches to himself in an effort to be and thus inevitably has a feeling of apartness, of being locked out. The five cannot become six because they are necessarily locked in their own being, just as the sixth is locked in his. The son who returns home cannot enter, cannot arrive, any more than those inside can open up and reach out to him. The son feels that what goes on inside is the secret of those within. Yet he admits that if someone were to open the door and ask him a question, "Would not I myself then behave like the one who wants to keep his secret?" (4, p. 144). Each man is snared in the trap of seclusion by his own short-ranged vision.

Kafka's hero enters the battlefield of human relations only to meet his usual defeat. Even his neighbor works against him. The routine of his life dominates him, rendering him immobile. He walks into the blood-letting knife of his brother. He is hated by the most casual of acquaintances. Assistance is refused him and he is wafted away to the icy unknown. He is imprisoned because of his sister's timid knock on the gate of humanity. Even the vulture cannot survive on his remains. He is excluded even from the bonds of family and profession. He cannot come home. He is doomed to be the sixth from whom a close-knit five forever conceal themselves.

This summary of defeat cannot include any unequivocal reason for humanity's failure. Nor is there an exclusive
solution to its abjection. As usual, Kafka merely describes what is real. He does not explain its "meaning," but simply shows its manifold aspects. According to Claude-Edmond Magny, Kafka confines himself "to establishing the duality of the points of view of his characters, . . . without declaring either superior to the other, nor in any way more truthful" (9, p. 84). In Kafka's prose is "a paramount manifestation of the fundamental irreducibility of all points of view" (9, p. 84).

Kafka's heroes must face the absurdity of a life which ultimately offers nothing more than death or accept an order for which there is no basis. Kafka does not limit his descriptions of what is evident in life for the purpose of forcing reality into a harmonious construction. He does not omit aspects of life which might destroy a system, for he has no system to destroy. As Knight points out, existential philosophers have abandoned the search for the true scheme through analysis in favor of merely describing evident structures (8, p. 233). A logical metaphysical system still will not erase the perplexity of man's actual existence; thus, Kafka does not surrender his method to the demands of constructing a system. According to Magny, Kafka "hurls the unacceptable before our eyes and obliges us to look on it. He stands at the antipodes of all soothing, . . . remote from [all] escape mechanisms . . . " (9, p. 79). Kafka sees the inconsistencies inherent in human living, and he must
deal with them since his goal is not to solve the insoluble, but to manifest the truth which is evident. Knight writes:

The only way to understand the world is to renounce trying to persuade ourselves that there exists somewhere an absolute principle of order with an absolute "human nature" to take cognizance of it, and to recognize that there is not one truth, but as many as there are individual perspectives (8, p. 113).

It is the truth of Kafka's individual perspective as an artist that classifies his literature as philosophy also.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Kafka not only painstakingly transcribed what he saw in the world, but he also tested his vision against most of history's religious, sociological, psychological, and philosophical explanations of what it means to be a man. Because Kafka's unexplainable world is both aligned with and juxtaposed against the various explained worlds, his artistic recreation of manifold reality emerges on various levels at once. Therefore, there is no single "correct" approach to explaining his work. Each interpretation has its own, but surely limited, validity.

As Busacca points out, Kafka's symbols may be interpreted in terms of any number of specific termini as long as the pattern of relations is the same in the analogy as in Kafka's prose. Thus it is possible to find a religious theme running throughout Kafka's work, as Tauber, Brod and Muir do. Other critics concentrate on the religious meaning of a particular composition. Beissner finds symbols of Christianity in "The Imperial Message," as does Gordon in "The Hunter Gracchus." Pfeiffer and Holland explain "The Metamorphosis" in terms of the Christian dogma; Buber and Rubinstein stress the Jewish roots of Kafka's prose.
Various critics concentrate on the cultural-historical or sociological aspect of Kafka's work. For instance, Burgum, Lerner, and Vietta stress Kafka's social themes; Spilka and Rahv trace the plights of Kafka's heroes not only to the pressures of society, but to emotional factors as well. Anders, who sees Kafka as nihilistic, verges on a sociological interpretation, though he deals with various other themes in Kafka's art.

Seeking to establish a relation between Kafka's biography and his art, Neider and Goodman explain the artist's view of man and the world in terms of psychology. Savage and Luke share this tendency to stress the psychological elements in Kafka's fiction.

Spann points out the philosophical content of Kafka's work, and Heller explains Kafka, the thinker, in terms of the history of ideas. Weiss, Magny, and Weidlic also view the chaos and absurdity of Kafka's fictional universe as the transcription of what Kafka, the thinker, finds in the reality of the daily world. Rhein pays close attention to the artistic qualities of Kafka's writing, but deals also with Kafka's philosophical position as it arises out of the artist's description of the sociological, emotional, and religious environment of modern man.

Burns, Steinberg, and Camus feel the questions which Kafka poses have ultimately to do with humanity and its ability to face a life such as Kafka describes. Rhein, in
his explanation of Kafka's philosophy, also adheres to the thesis that it is up to humanity to save itself. While some weakness may be found in any of these particular approaches to Kafka's work, a greater weakness would be to suppose that any one of them is completely without validity. Kafka's ambiguity invites each interpretation; the artist's meaning cannot be restricted to one level. Bergel, in his explanation of "The Burrow," Greenberg, in his analysis of "The Great Wall of China," and Woodring in his interpretation of "Josephine, or The Mice Nation," each shows the way in which Kafka's meaning shuttles back and forth from one context to another. The exegeses of "A Country Doctor" by Busacca, of "The Married Couple" by Thurston, and of "A Hunger Artist" by Stallman reveal religious, psychological-emotional, cultural-historical, and philosophical levels of meaning in each story. Ronald Gray and Angel Flores are also careful to point out the validity of various interpretations of Kafka, as are Warren and Politzer.

Since Kafka gives essential knowledge of that which occurs on all levels of man's existence, he makes use of any doctrine that will make lucid his description of reality. Thus Kafka conducts his examination of tradition, law, and authority not only on a religious level, but on sociological, psychological, and philosophical levels as well. The relationship between any authority and its subjects can be
seen as that between God and man, a political ruler and his subjects, father and son, or a metaphysical system and its followers. In every case, however, the Kafkaesque man's attempt to find peace with whatever authority controls his life meets with failure.

Man is condemned to death by his father. The very object which he seeks to obey murders him and then itself disintegrates. The law is never revealed to man. He can find no advocate to defend him, though he is not guilty to begin with. He can never reach the world of the courts and its officials or that of the castle and its authorities. He is left without a leader to point the way. His emperor draws invaders who cannot be driven away. He builds his city in the worst possible place merely because tradition recommends it.

Kafka's man remains tied by the bonds of tradition and authority despite the absence of any logical basis. Kafka does not advocate revolt from authority, nor does he show a way for man's reconciliation with it. He holds out no significant proposal to man, but merely describes what he sees as he sees it.

Likewise, Kafka cannot deliver a message for man to follow. Regardless of the realm from which they come, meaningful messages never reach Kafka's heroes. If they receive a message at all, it is either senseless or negative. Kafka's messages are sent from either a dying ruler or one
with no right to his position in the first place. The Chinese emperor who sends a message has been long dead. The imperial messenger cannot fight his way through to man. The colonel of "A Refusal" delivers only negative decrees. Couriers shout messages which mean nothing because there are no kings from whom the messages come. A mouse songstress, who is no real singer, pipes a mere nothingness to her people.

Whether Kafka's messages come from God, a political leader, a physical father, or a philosophical scholar, they are never comprehended by man. Whether the sender, the receiver, or the message itself is to blame is difficult to determine. Kafka simply describes situations as they exist. Warren suggests that "Kafka's multiple interpretations are all possible options within one world" (6, p. 128). According to Folitzer, Kafka "asked questions in ever new cadences, and what at first seemed an answer turned out to be a fresh question" (5, p. 375).

Continually questioning, Kafka surveys many religious, sociological, and psychological objects in which man can hope. In addition, Kafka's philosophical level of meaning regarding hope is expanded so that man's entire reasoning process is questioned. Kafka describes scientific empiricism and ways of transcending it in order to investigate the possibility of hope in either of these methods. He also
explores humanity in his attempt to find a hopeful solution to man's existence.

Yet the conclusions of Kafka's stories on hope are anything but hopeful. All levels of meaning coincide in Kafka's resolution, or rather in his lack of resolution. Gregor's decomposition is not counterbalanced by the superficial hopes of his survivors. N. does not fulfill the hopes of his business client on any level. The ape can find no hope of freedom through any means, nor can he enjoy being human. The country doctor is caught in demands which he cannot fulfill. Any hope based on the giant mole, whatever it may represent, comes to nothing. The canine investigator researches every method he can think of and is still left without hope of finding the answers he seeks. The mocking laughter of the Arab greets each hopeful proposition regardless of the realm in which it is made.

Clearly, Kafka does not point the way to hope within his compositions, nor does he reveal what must be rectified in order for man to gain hope. Describing man's condition, Kafka continues to probe existence without concluding anything. Gray comments on Kafka's method as follows: "Exploring our condition, dangerous though it can be, is as necessary now as it ever was, and Kafka is the least prejudiced of any explorers. ... his discoveries have a trustworthiness not easily achieved by less candid writers" (1, p. 10).
While Kafka's discoveries indicate that man incoherently stumbles through life without guidance from law or authority, without a tradition to follow, without a message from any directive source and without hope in any object whatsoever, the Kafkain man continues to search for something that will rescue him from this impasse. Kafka's searches are conducted with his usual diligence within religious and philosophical realms and even more exhaustively within psychological and sociological bounds. Kafka's heroes search for a meaningful existence through God, a metaphysical or a political authority, or through a fulfilling emotional involvement with other humans. In every case, however, Kafka's hero finds no way to function effectively in the outside world. The canine inspector cannot find the basis of his existence, the hunger artist cannot find the food he likes, Gracchus can no more fully live than he can come to terms with death, and the animal of the burrow cannot adjust to life outside his cavern. Thus the searches go beyond these possibilities and seek to find, if not meaning, at least peace and security through less conventional means such as nihilism, suicide, withdrawal, or destruction of the ego.

Yet Kafka's own uncertainty obliterates any timid assertion that man can find a way out of his dilemma through a negative "solution." Kafka cannot happily abandon his quest to the chaos of nihilism. While his heroes can never find a basis for knowledge, they do not deny the possibility
of such a basis. Certainly they do not feel free to set up arbitrary standards by which to live. Man's dilemma of needing a criterion by which to judge existence and being left without one (metaphysical or otherwise) is solved only at point zero where all things are united in nothingness. Kafka cringes from this destination.

The burrow beast, who can find security in no system of belief, concludes that there is nothing left for him to do except to enjoy his store of food while he still has the chance. He must arbitrarily make his own judgments, since he must fill his life with some activity. All the while, however, he is tormented by some vague threat. Another of Kafka's beasts, the ape, realizes from the beginning that the dangers of complete freedom are too great even to attempt to find it. Nor do the two K.'s ever break into freedom by defying the powers that control their lives. Kafka's heroes cannot abandon themselves to anarchy, yet neither can they contrive an ethical or political system which allows them to avoid nihilism.

The openness of Kafka's perspective in his search for hope allows his hero the tormenting opportunity of testing every solution. He seeks to find an authority on a religious, social, or philosophical level or nihilistically live without one. Yet he is unable to secure either alternative. On a psychological level, Kafka's protagonist strives both to withdraw from the world and find peace in his own subjectivity,
and to surrender to the world's every demand so that his self, his ego, is diminished to a mere hull which can accept anything forced into it. The canine investigator, the hunger artist, Gracchus and the burrow beast struggle with the possibility of living a life in the death of self-withdrawal or self-destruction. Yet the dog is driven from death, the hunger artist realizes his self-abstention was hypocritical, Gracchus cannot die, and the burrow creature never finds peace.

If each of these stories is considered on a purely physical plane, then suicide, even as an out, is rendered as impossible as a psychological-emotional death of any type. Kafka does not conclude that resignation is man's answer to facing existence. Kafka's searchers can find no positive solution to life, yet any negative way out is denied them. Their quests end in nothing more than paradoxes which are left unsolved and questions which are left unanswered.

Since Kafka offers no absolute authority or message to obey, no object in which to hope, and no end to the human search for meaning within religious, social, philosophical or psychological realms, it seems the human realm is all that is left. However, the human world in Kafka's fiction emerges as inhuman, so a humanistic answer to man's existence becomes a question instead. How can man be human in a dehumanized world? Bonds of communication and fellowship do not exist. Neighbors work against one another. Fellow men
murder one another. Man is detested by the most casual of acquaintances. One human refuses another even a shovelful of the worst coal and waves him on to his icy death. Man cannot even come home, so weak are the emotional bonds between family members. Kafka's man is forever the sixth in a group of five. The inhumanity of humanity leaves Kafka's heroes entangled in the perplexity of their own existence.

Through humanism, Sartre and Camus can contrive solutions for living in nothingness, but Kafka cannot. Kafka does not place hope in all things human, as Camus does, nor does he find the basis for Sartrean humanism. According to Sartre, man is responsible for his every act since each act is a part of what it means to be a human. But who is to judge which acts create an inferior or superior human? Sartre says man exists in relation to other men, so he has a responsibility to create himself as a man. He should make every act a human act because his actions are all that he is. Thus man's actions should respond to an immediate human need. However, Kafka is not sure of who or what determines this need.

Sartre attempts to justify action by a self with no essence in a world that is constantly changing and does not exist of necessity. Kafka describes the same self and the same world, but he can find no certain justification for either entity. If the world is only that which man allows
appearance, what should man allow appearance? Sartre says that man is nothing but that which he makes of himself, but Kafka asks what man should make of himself.

Kafka cannot break through his description to make positive assertions about man's condition, as Sartre does after him. While Sartre maintains knowledge need not be the basis for action, Kafka describes man stultified by the impossibility of finding a basis for knowledge. Sartre says that apart from action, life has no content. What it means to be is to act, to live, so man is free to live; Kafka asks how does one live. Sartre says a life is worth what it does, but Kafka asks who determines the worth of doing. Since there is no intrinsic value to life, Sartre allows man the right to create his own values, but Kafka searches everywhere for some authority to designate value.

Kafka's hero realizes that the life he leads is the only life there is, so he is left to live it as it appears. He lives day by day, and that is all there is. Yet he yearns for some abstraction which will support his being. He knows, as Sartre asserts, that life is responding to the immediate, but he does not know how to respond. Sartre asserts that an act sustains being, but Kafka's heroes are not so sure. In their effort to sustain being by their own power, they feel tormented and guilty. They are alone and uncertain. Kafka does not urge man to rely solely upon himself and establish a new human destiny on his own authority.
He offers no positive way out of an existence without necessity in a world which refuses to make sense.

The heroes of Kafka's prose run up and down the various levels of man's existence only to meet with a new paradox on each plane. Through his description of authority and the messages which man receives, Kafka explores mythical and religious frameworks and the social, political, and philosophical systems constructed by man's reason. Through his description of man's hopes and searches, Kafka extends his exploration to consider nihilism, psychological withdrawal and even complete destruction of one's ego, as well as the possibility of learning merely to be. Through his description of humanity, Kafka extends his investigation to consider a way cut through humanism. Everywhere does Kafka look for the solution to modern man's existence, but his anxious glance can rest nowhere. Thus each interpretation of Kafka from any realm of reality as it confronts man has a certain validity, but each way out of Kafka's impasse necessarily appeals to some extrinsic assertion.

Once one steps outside Kafka's fictional reality, he may find answers through endless religions, philosophies, scientific methods, social orders, and other dogmas (as various critics do) but Kafka's prose itself supports no absolute proposition. What is more important than the answers which preconceived systems of reality give, is the awareness of the questions Kafka himself presents about
these very systems. It seems wiser, then, to interpret Kafka's work just as he has left it—as an investigation which never ends, as a mass of questions which he cannot answer.

Of course, modern man is free to answer the questions which Kafka leaves open. He may even return to answers which Kafka would not give. Yet the acutely disquieting questions of such an unrelenting seeker of truth deserve consideration—and every ready answer, reconsideration. Surely Kafka's painfully relevant questions deserve to be met with more than age-worn platitudes and superficial solutions.

In "On Parables" Kafka himself effectively deals with the inadequacy of any definitive explanation of life. The composition points out that the words of the wise are "of no use in daily life, which is the only life we have" (2, p. 101). All parables "really set out to say merely that the incomprehensible is incomprehensible, and we know that already. But the cares we have to struggle with every day: that is a different matter" (2, p. 101). Reality as it confronts man is inherent with these daily cares; therefore, Kafka continues his questions about what does appear rather than to assert what is parabolically—or scientifically or systematically—certain. Since it is human existence which Kafka describes, he cannot ask the questions of science or offer the answers of preconceived systems. The way in which
this position links Kafka to modern philosophy is evident in Kaufmann's words:

The refusal to belong to any school of thought, the repudiation of the adequacy of any body of beliefs whatever, and especially of systems, and a marked dissatisfaction with traditional philosophy as superficial, academic and remote from life—that is the heart of existentialism (3, p. 12).

Kafka finds rational accounts of life incompatible with the life man actually leads. This incompatibility is precisely what gives rise to man's dilemma in the first place. Thus if Kafka's fictional reality is inherently unstable and refuses to conform to an intelligible order, it is because Kafka's prose conforms to the reality which confronts man. As Knight points out, "Classical philosophy tries to make life conform to thought, existentialism seeks to make thought conform to life" (4, p. 11). Kafka does not attempt to explain away what does not make sense in order to "prove" anything for "the absurd is less proved than it is experienced—existed" (4, p. 11).

"The Test" tells of a servant who is unable to answer the questions he is called on to answer. When the perplexed man apologizes for his ignorance, his interrogator says, "'That was only a test. He who does not answer the questions has passed the test!'" (2, p. 140). Kafka also passes the test by leaving unanswered the questions he poses. If man sees a world devoid of meaning, all he can do is live life as it appears, asking questions he really never expects to have answered.
Like the befuddled servant who could not even understand the questions much less give the answers, modern philosophers in the existential tradition do not understand the questions of orthodox philosophy. Searching for an absolute knowledge is irrelevant to what existence means to man, because there is no way he can know reality other than as it confronts him in all its ambiguity and complexity. According to Knight, "Existentialism does not offer to modify classical thought, it denies the validity of its premises... Existentialism, being a revolution, does not propose new answers, it asks new questions..." (4, p. 12).

It is therefore unnecessary to force all modern philosophers into a rigid mold. Each manifestation of existence must be considered in its own right. The widely different revolts against traditional philosophy by Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Jaspers, Heidegger, Sartre, Camus, and Kafka are all lucid descriptions of what is, as viewed from different individual perspectives. Each philosopher describes and questions existence as it confronts man through daily living. Thus each may express himself in perfect freedom, manifesting what he sees. Kafka's lucid description of existence as it confronts man with all its questions and paradoxes makes him a modern philosopher in his own right. His aesthetically effective and moving fiction makes him an artist. Franz Kafka is both an artist and a philosopher. His prose is literature and philosophy, that is, literature-philosophy.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


**Articles**


