

Before The Law.

It is the center piece of Kafka's unfinished novel **The Trial**. We'll watch some of Orson Welles' film adaptation featuring Anthony Perkins as Joseph K. Welles recites a condensed version of the parable **Before The Law** which alone makes the film worth seeing.

Consult my revised essay "**Kafka's Parable *Before The Law***" originally published in **The Germanic Review**, May, 1964 copied below.

Please consult also the chapter "The Missing First Page" from Alberto Manguel's **A History of Reading**, Viking.

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KAFKA'S PARABLE BEFORE THE LAW

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The parable "Before the Law" and its context, the chapter "In the Cathedral," have long been recognized as the center piece of Kafka's unfinished novel *The Trial* [1]. It may, with some qualifications, be considered a key to Kafka's work. Various critics have treated it at length, the interpretations of Wilhelm Emrich and Heinz Politzer and, most recently, Ingeborg Henel's brilliant and comprehensive study being among the most profound [2]. Although these critics differ on many issues, their opinions are not mutually exclusive on all points and it would, therefore, be naive to state that the following pages will propose something so different as to have nothing in common with interpretations already suggested. Yet I believe that, by eliminating two errors which have plagued previous critics, this article can point to additional--and different--aspects. One error, I feel, is the assumption of guilt on K.'s part, which I fail to recognize; the other consists in singling out individual statements made by the priest and pronouncing them correct readings of the parable, whereas the priest insists that he is only listing various opinions (p. 200).

At first glance, the story is both simple and mysterious. The plot is so self-evident that it apparently defies further explanation. It involves a man trying in vain to gain the desired entrance; he spends the rest of his life waiting for permission which is never granted. But although the action is logical, its setting is not at all identical with our reality. Nor do we recognize the characters. The man from the country has been narrowed to the personification of a persistent desire, the doorkeeper is limited to the function of an obstacle, the identity of the Law remains hidden. However, once we accept the kind of reality defined by these limitations, the narrative poses no problem. Yet it is obviously intended to be a parable. This is suggested by its very position in the context of the *Trial*. Some technical devices characteristic of a parable are easily recognized (e.g., the absence of proper names, the concentration of the plot, the point at the end). Although the details of the plot are self-explanatory the story as a whole certainly calls for interpretation. If it is a parable it must "mean" something. What, then, does it mean?

A popular approach to Kafka is to treat his works as allegories, that is, to search for the second and concurrent meaning beneath the surface story [3], a meaning limited in scope, applicable to only one problem, one class, one historical age, etc. Trying to reveal the identity of the doorkeeper, of the man from the country and the Law we would proceed to search for something that fits the pattern of

the plot, say, man in pursuit of happiness--he never achieves it, man in search of God--he never comprehends him, the artist waiting for inspiration or public recognition which never comes. A given number of imaginative readers would be able to arrive at as many different so-called keys to the story. How do we know which key is the correct one? Obviously the one which sounds most probable. It need hardly be stated that this is no interpretation at all but a more or less undisciplined guessing game, however interesting. It would not be based on the narrative but merely on its pattern, on the radius of our knowledge and the whim of our imagination. In any case, we would be looking behind the story rather than into it.

The alternative is a careful analysis of an apparently simple plot. This approach appears all the more in order since it is the very thing that Kafka--on the surface--has his own listener do. One morning K., the principal figure of *The Trial*, is pronounced arrested by men he had never met, but he remains free to go and carry on as before. He is told that legal proceedings are under way against him, but neither his alleged crime nor the identity of his accusers are revealed. The suit is based upon a law K. has never heard of. Eventually, it becomes his sole ambition to meet the mysterious Court face to face in order to vindicate himself. One day, in the course of his fruitless efforts, after spending a long time waiting in the dark and empty cathedral, he suddenly notices a dimly lit pulpit, a priest begins to address him and what follows is the text of our parable. In keeping with the traditional sequence of scripture reading and exegesis K. and the priest engage in a discussion as to the significance of the narrative. Like all of K.'s efforts it leads nowhere and we need not go into a detailed description.

It is important to note, however, that K. is so convinced of his innocence and so preoccupied with freeing himself from what must be a false charge that he can see the parable only under the aspect of right and wrong. He has already forgotten or, rather, never understood the priest's angry remark before the recital: "Can't you see two feet ahead?" (p. 254). His immediate reaction is that the man from the country has been deceived by the doorkeeper. The priest counters that he has told the parable in the official version--it belongs, by implication, to the "Holy Scriptures" of the mysterious Court where K.'s secret trial is being conducted. It is the official text, then, and to speak of deceit is wrong simply because the word deceit does not occur. Again and again, by reference to the narrative and by the sheer weight of logic, K.'s arguments are overruled. But at the very moment when both K. and the reader are almost convinced of the doorkeeper's benevolence it turns out that the priest has been pursuing a strictly academic dispute, he has not committed himself but only reported one of many contradictory opinions [4]. Moreover, he states categorically that these opinions are irrelevant because the text is unchangeable no matter what its interpretations and that the opinions themselves are "often nothing but an expression of despair over this fact" (p. 260). As if to prove how non-committal and objective he is he advances a view according to which it is the doorkeeper who was deceived. Again, the argument is so logical and well substantiated that even K. cannot escape its conclusions. Yet he also remains unwilling to give up his earlier conviction that the man from the country is a victim of deceit. If already the doorkeeper is deceived (e.g., under a grave delusion about his position) his deception must necessarily have a disastrous effect on the man from the country. Deceived or not, he is at best a fool who should be stripped of his office. The priest's final argument, in immediate reply to K.'s last point, is that nowhere does the text give us a right to judge, let alone condemn, the doorkeeper. As a servant of the Law he is far above the reach of human judgment; doubting his worthiness would imply doubting the Law itself. Thus the priest has come full circle in his argument. Naturally, K. cannot agree because it would mean that everything the doorkeeper says is true, which cannot be the case for the very reasons the priest had previously outlined. "One need not consider everything true," the priest re-plies, "one must only consider it necessary" (p. 264).

By now we are thoroughly confused. The exegesis is nearly four times as long as the text. The simple story is no longer simple. As before, our confusion comes from understanding what is said but

not knowing what to make of it. The individual steps of the argument seem flawless, but the discussion as a whole has reached no conclusion whatever. The narrative, for all its simplicity, is not clear enough to understand it to the extent necessary for passing judgment. Although the plot is elementary, the implications escape our comprehension. It involves two antagonists; the obvious question as to who is right and who is wrong remains unanswered.

In literary tradition a parable is told to illustrate a certain point, to teach a golden rule. It is a didactic narrative. K., in his hopeless predicament, expects some illumination, a hint as to what steps to take--the reader certainly does. But his attempt to analyze what appears to be a parable intended for him is frustrated: the narrative contains no golden rule, it does not suggest a mode of behavior under certain conditions. It would seem, then, that it is no parable at all, that the very function of the narrative is cruelly to defeat the hope it had aroused.

Yet this cannot be the sole purpose of a story so elaborately introduced. It is not until the end of the novel, however--too late for K.--that the true significance of the narrative is revealed. In retrospect, it proves to be both an allegory and a parable. For it is nothing but a veiled and concentrated account of K.'s own life. The man from the country is K. himself. There is one difference: K. meets a violent death while the other dies of old age. Yet it matters little. The fruitlessness of such a life is more important an aspect than the manner in which it is finally terminated. And is not the man from the country "dead" for all practical purposes from the moment he abandons all just to sit beside the entrance to the Law? And cannot the same be said about K. who leaves his customary course of life to devote himself increasingly to his own justification?

Does K. at least recognize the pertinence of the priest's narrative? The answer is a qualified "yes." Since he himself is trying to gain admission to the mysterious and elusive Court he instinctively comes to the defense of a man in a parallel situation [5]. He attempts to establish what or who is right or wrong. His interpretation of the narrative is based on the assumption that there are such criteria as guilt and innocence. In fact, he is so preoccupied with them that he fails to see the real significance of the narrative. His perception ends at the crucial point where the story becomes a parable. It is not concerned with the question of right or wrong, it makes no suggestion as to what effort to undergo in order to reach a given goal, but it pictures the futility of all efforts. Whatever man undertakes is doomed to failure. Whatever he desires escapes him. Whatever he does to further his cause will be frustrated. Whatever, he has done was the wrong thing to do. He is free, for he can do what he wants. Yet he is a helpless prisoner for whatever he does will be frustrated. His ambition to free himself is based on the delusion that this is possible. He is endowed with the freedom of choice but lacks the power to enforce his decisions. The meaning of our narrative is not to be found in the characters but in the general action, in what goes on regardless almost of the characters. The entire plot is one of Kafka's many variations on his central theme, and the theme is frustration. What is depicted is futility itself, universal and of unlimited applicability, and we should not read into it the futile efforts of one particular group or the clandestine presentation of one particular problem [6].

It is not enough that the underlying theme of the story is frustration; K.'s attempt to analyze it is also frustrated. Its very effect in the novel is to increase K.'s frustration. K. is blinded by the indignation of a legal mind over an obvious act of injustice and, in the final analysis, by the instinct of self-preservation. He is so convinced of the possibility that matters can be changed that he overlooks the only message the story has for him, namely, that they cannot. He fails to understand the parable precisely because he interprets it--very understandably--in terms of justice and injustice. But in doing so he super-imposes his own concepts on the narrative rather than concentrating on the text itself. The priest, at the very outset, had tried to hint at his fallacy by mentioning that the word deceit did not occur. The basic truth, all there is to know, is contained in the narrative itself or, as the priest

stated it, the text is unchangeable. The introduction of a foreign element is based on the futile hope that this cannot be the case; it is, again in the priest's words, an expression of despair over this fact. The parable remains inconclusive only because K. lacks the proper perspective.

But even if K. recognized the significance of the story, would it help him? The answer is, of course, "no" [7]. Whoever his accusers are, they reside somewhere in sublime unconcern. From their point of view, there is little difference between no effort at all and the limited action K. is capable of. His fate is irreconcilable and will be the same, just as the man from the country would have died of old age had he stayed at home. And here we, too, have come full circle. K.'s inability to interpret the parable was no tragic oversight at all. Whether the narrative is identified as a parable or not is of no importance. It does not suggest a course of action, consequently K. can learn nothing from it. In fact, it suggests that no course of action will help and it makes no difference to his eventual fate whether this is recognized or not. The narrative is an abstract of the entire novel, presented near the end; it is both a parable and a prophecy. The image of hopelessness and frustration is complete. The complexity of K's struggle is of insurmountable proportions; but the reason for it is the very simplicity of a fact unknown to him: there is nothing he can do. I wonder whether Kafka could have pictured the total misery of human existence in his *Trial* more effectively than by inserting a parable which need not be understood by the protagonist.

K.'s cause is lost from the beginning. When he insists that he is innocent the priest replies: "But that is how the guilty speak" (p. 253). His case is indeed hopeless if stating his innocence is proof of his guilt. What would an admission of guilt prove? His is a predetermined fate from which there is no escape. Cruelty is added to injustice by the ever renewed and tantalizing hope (expressed in the parable's "but not now") which will never be fulfilled, thus turning the old cardinal virtue into a means of torture. K. never learns what he is accused of, he never meets his accusers, despite the title he is never ordered to stand trial. He is free to go wherever he chooses. But eventually it becomes his sole ambition to influence a court he does not know--although he considers himself innocent, and the reader certainly knows of no crime K. has committed [8]. Every step he takes proves to be a mistake. Even this is too definite a statement; the darkness is so impenetrable that he is unable to measure the effect of his actions. He is finally murdered knowing as little as ever [9].

This state of complication and utter frustration is at the core of all of Kafka's works. The apparent simplicity of plot is quite misleading. Kafka's devotion to detail (as shown, for example, in the ensuing dispute over the parable) has a confusing rather than clarifying effect. He displays an even greater mastery of his analytical method in short stories like *A Hunger Artist*, *Josephine*, *The Burrow*, to name only a few. We are forced to reach the paradoxical conclusion that thoroughness does not enlighten but that it obscures. Again and again in Kafka's works we encounter the careful weighing of all possibilities, the painstaking attention to every possible viewpoint, which make for a clear conception of each detail, but the picture as a whole is hopelessly blurred; thus even the reader is left frustrated.

The question remains whether a novel like *The Trial* is a great work of art. Kafka's genius is most admirably evident in his depiction of ever new situations, in the detailed analyses of problems, not in the characterization of persons confronted by them. However, the lack of effective characterization need not be a shortcoming at all. Kafka might even abandon it on purpose to direct the reader's attention almost exclusively to the situation confronting his characters. His heroes are engaged in a struggle against a faceless fate, they themselves are mere puppets. Since it is a condition that potentially applies to everyone and at all times there can be no distinct personalities who encounter what might be called their own fate. It is the condition par excellence, a universal state. From this point of view all men are alike, indistinguishable, that is: faceless. Another aspect is important. Since

Kafka's heroes are no characters of flesh and blood in the traditional sense (let alone his lesser figures who are merely defined by their functions) they do not command our sympathy. We are not moved by their fate, do not pity them but, instead, are awed by the cruelty of fate in general, by the insurmountable complications of existence and the frustration of all efforts. Pity and fear are supplanted by a paralyzing sense of inevitable doom. Everyone can be this kind of tragic hero, through no fault or character defect of his own, through no combination of circumstances, but simply because he exists [10]. Thus Kafka's method turns out to be the most effective manner, after all, of conveying an all-embracing and total futility.

Yet a novel is too demanding in scope for so limited a method, too spacious a vehicle for so exclusive a theme. Kafka's lack of epic abundance is undeniable, and we should not attempt to disregard it. His approach is that of a brilliant, logical, and controlled legal mind who views a subject from every possible angle and who is inexhaustible in creating novel situations showing the hero's struggle from different vantage points. But his inventiveness is limited to an endless variety of episodes; there is only one theme, and it is hopelessness and frustration. One might summarize *The Trial* thus: between the time of his arrest and the day of his execution K. tries in vain to meet his accusers face to face. And the entire novel centers on "in vain," each chapter dealing with another aspect of it. Neither *The Trial* nor *The Castle* are novels in the traditional sense; each is composed of a string of nearly independent installments. To be sure, K.'s preoccupation with the trial grows, he increasingly neglects his customary life. One might expect a gradual and total disintegration of his intellectual capacity, but his deviation from normal conduct is not nearly as drastic as is the case of two other victims, the merchant Block and the worldly gentleman in the third chapter who completely loses his composure when asked a simple question. Even the end of the novel which shows an amazing degree of submission on K.'s part (very much in contrast to the preceding cathedral scene, a suddenness which is perhaps due to the fragmentary character of *The Trial*) pictures him fully capable of rational and critical thinking although, as in the case of Kafka's *Country Doctor*, it is a useless kind of superiority. Thus even here there is little change. From this point of view--and from this point of view alone--the whole recent quarrel over the proper order of individual chapters within the novels is a bit pointless; most of them are interchangeable, for they do not advance the plot. The novels move along a very narrow path defined by the one and only theme and the different chapters are illustrations of it. *

Where Kafka chose the opposite way: condensing a potential novel to a short story rather than pursuing the same problem through endless variations of equal fruitlessness the results are masterpieces. *The Hunger Artist* (1922), for instance, is such a "condensed novel." The topic again is total frustration, viewed from every angle, presented in every possible light. Told in chronological order and expanded to 300 pages it would have been a novel like *The Trial*. Instead, it is a brilliant short story. This literary genre alone appears to be the adequate medium for both Kafka's single-mindedness and his analytical skill. The former loses its fascination in the course of a longer piece of prose, the latter tends to degenerate into mere intellectual play.*

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* Postscript. I was very young then. In subsequent lectures based on the essay I have linked Kafka's novels to the picaresque tradition, hoping to redeem myself.

[1] The text used is Franz Kafka, *Der Prozess* (New York, 1946). The translations are my own.

[2] Wilhelm Emrich, *Franz Kafka* (Frankfurt, 1961), p. 266ff.; Heinz Politzer, *Franz Kafka* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y., 1962), p. 173ff.; Ingeborg Henel, "Die Türhüterlegende und ihre Bedeutung für Kafkas 'Prozess'," *DVLG*, XXXVII (1963), 50ff.

[3] This definition is taken from the *Dictionary of World Literature*, ed. Joseph T. Shipley (New York, 1953), p. 13.

[4] Wilhelm Emrich's main fallacy, it seems to me, is expressed in his sentence: "Dabei sind die Äusserungen des Geistlichen sehr genau abzuwägen" (p. 268). On the contrary, the points of view presented cancel one another. The priest only recites various opinions. Emrich, however, takes individual statements literally without revealing his principle of selection.

[5] Heinz Politzer writes that K., "by concentrating on the man from the country instead of the doorkeeper, could have denied the relevance of the parable for his particular situation" (p. 180). I feel that he reveals his intuitive grasp of the parable's relevance precisely by coming to the aid of the man from the country. The man, for all we know, may no more come of his own volition (as Politzer believes) than does K. who is nevertheless told by the priest: "Es [das Gericht] nimmt dich auf, wenn du kommst, und es entlässt dich, wenn du gehst" (p. 265).

[6] It is, of course, true that the man's actions are aimed exclusively at changing the doorkeeper's mind. Since he makes no attempt to enter without the doorkeeper's permission, Mrs. Henel considers him guilty of neglect (52) and of using the doorkeeper's "No" as an excuse for not reaching his aim (60). But neither did he know from the beginning that the door existed only for him nor does he tire in his efforts to gain admission. Moreover, if the heavens, in another of Kafka's parables, mean "impossibility of crows" (otherwise a single crow could, as the saying goes, destroy the heavens), then being a man from the country means "impossibility of ignoring the doorkeeper." (Cf. also Politzer, pp. 167 and 174ff.). Mrs. Henel believes that the man alone bears the guilt for his neglect (57). Could not the Law be blamed for enlisting the help of a doorkeeper only to have him disregarded? Wilhelm Emrich writes: "In dem Augenblick, in dem er dieses Verbot [des Türhüters] missachtete, . . . lebte er im Gesetz" (p. 268). But is this not similar to adding the proverbial sixth act? We have no way of knowing what might have happened if the man had ignored the doorkeeper. There is no reason why Kafka's Trial should be an exception to the rule that the literary critic cannot ask what would have happened if ... ? It is but another of Kafka's many symbols for his view of human existence as futility and hopelessness that the door is destined for the very man who is barred from using it. Neither the parable nor the novel deal with the question of what should have been done. Both are concerned with the failure of all depicted efforts. The reader may be able to list a variety of potential decisions, Kafka presents no alternatives. K.'s only possibility of avoiding the frustrations of liberating himself is to ignore the arrest altogether as he could well have. The simplest manner of escaping the Court would be to disregard it. This, too, however, is a fallacious argument, for being K. simply means "impossibility of ignoring the Court."

[7] At this point Ingeborg Henel's interpretation and mine reach identical conclusions: K.'s eventual fate is unalterable. Mrs. Henel writes: "Aber selbst wenn Josef K. diese Möglichkeit [die Anklage anzuerkennen und sich dem Gericht zu unterwerfen] ergriffen hätte, wäre er dennoch zugrunde gegangen; denn der Mensch besitzt nicht die notwendige Kraft, die Erkenntnis seiner Schuld zu ertragen, wie das angeführte Zitat über den Sündenfall [57] deutlich sagt" (66). But what is the nature of the accusation and where is the Court? In spite of her statement that "Schuld ist das Thema des Romans" (57), Mrs. Henel seems to imply here that it is futility rather than K.'s alleged guilt which is the dominant theme of *The Trial*.

[8] Most critics are united in considering K. guilty. Heinz Politzer goes as far as stating: "Kafka's failure to implant this guilt intelligibly in K.'s personality and life history forces us to break the story open and to extend it into Kafka's biography, in other words, to commit an intentional fallacy" (p. 177). Both Ingeborg Henel and Wilhelm Emrich would support him to the extent of insisting on K.'s guilt. But even if Kafka viewed his work as a kind of "Selbstgericht" (Henel, 69), would it limit the reader to the very same approach? Does not "failure to implant this guilt intelligibly" simply mean that there is none and that K. (who is not identical with Kafka, as most critics will admit) is laboring under frustrations not of his own making? If Kafka satirized his own existence in the figure of the Hunger Artist (to use one of Mrs. Henel's examples, 62), it reveals, among other things, the important difference between the two: the critical self-consciousness of the author which his projection does not possess. Kafka might have been plagued by guilt-consciousness; K. is not, that is the decisive difference. Kafka might have considered this kind of punishment just. K. is a hapless victim like Georg Bendemann and Gregor Samsa. And, to extend the line of thought a little further, if *The Trial* is really a reflection of Kafka's situation, could it not be that it is precisely Kafka's own incomprehensible and paralyzing guilt-consciousness which appears as the incomprehensible and destructive "accusation" in *The Trial*? In other words, *The Trial* might express Kafka's secret belief that his own guilt feelings were just as unwarranted as K.'s arrest. Thus the *Trial* would be a subtle kind of self-liberation.

[9] Since K. does not execute himself, he is murdered like a dog. Would voluntary suicide make his end more noble? Mrs. Henel writes: "Hätte Josef K. seine Schuld bekannt, so wäre er nicht gestorben wie ein Hund, sondern hätte am Ende die Kraft besessen, sein Urteil selbst zu vollziehen wie Georg Bendemann im 'Urteil'" (66). Which is the guilt, to pose the question again, that warrants so senseless a death? I cannot help believing I that we are not faced with a problem of guilt but with the compulsive and futile attempt on K.'s part to free himself of a capricious accusation the nature of which remains unknown to him as well as the reader.

[10] It is in this context that I would quote Kafka's "He has the feeling that he is blocking his own way [simply] because he exists" which Mrs. Henel uses to point out that K. is an obstacle on the way to his own salvation (67). Certainly K. would have no problem if there were no K. What, then, is K. to do? Could a better formula for absolute futility be found than this piece of primitive logic?

ADDENDUM

Most of Kafka's protagonists experience frustration and futility because of the nature of their problems and their attempts to cope with them:

The Hunger Artist yearning for admiration for something he cannot help doing to begin with; namely fasting and hoping to gain credibility by performing feats of increasing incredibility. No one believes him because no one can observe him without interruption for forty days. Only he could be a satisfied observer of his own accomplishment. Yet he remains dissatisfied because he knows the full truth of his assertion that, to him, fasting is the easiest thing in the world; a truth he does not reveal until the very end of his life.

Gregor Samsa, changed into a huge bug, continues to think like a human. But the family is aware only of his animal shape, appetite, and general life style. And the new means available to the changed Gregor to communicate his human sentiments only convince his family that this is no longer Gregor but "dieses Tier."

Josephine, mouse and singer, insisting on exclusive acclaim for an ability she shares with everybody else.

The officer in the Penal Colony attempting to gain the explorer's support by explaining both the exquisite technology of execution and the utter primitivity of the legal system.

The animal in *The Burrow* striving for ultimate security by constructing an ever more complicated web of tunnels vaguely realizing all the while that, as long as the exit remains a necessity, he will remain vulnerable no matter how clever the construction underground. The high degree of relative security the animal achieves equals, in the end, insecurity and ceaseless activity, watchfulness and rationalization cannot calm his fears.

Or the imperial messenger who is on his way to you with an important message: but the distance and the obstacles are such that he cannot hope ever to reach you with it. Du sitzt am Fenster und erträumst sie dir. You sit by the window and envision it.

K. in *The Castle* appeals to a gigantic and elusive bureaucracy to compensate him within his lifetime for an erroneous decision. The bureaucracy is designed to correct itself eventually, but without regard for a human life span. The Castle, in charge of people, is determined to operate faultlessly, but is guided by institutional considerations, not by human concern. According to Max Brod, K. was to be granted permanent residence on his deathbed. Justice & generosity, but of a useless sort. We are reminded a bit of the country doctor who had also answered an erroneous call. and who remarks wistfully in a moment of danger that he is "superior to everyone here, but it doesn't help me any." A useless superiority, as useless as the golden opportunity provided to K. by Buergel. K. is too tired to seize it.

The list could go on. The happy ending provided in the novel *Amerika* is rather misleading. Karl Rossmann does finally find his place in the Great Theater of Oklahoma, but only because that society is defined by the very fact that it has a place for everyone; it is a utopian society.

Why do Kafka's protagonists persist in their struggle? Why for instance do the two Ks undertake attempt after attempt, like picaresque heroes going through adventure after adventure without ever changing until death or retirement changes everything? Why, since their hopes are dashed again and again and their actions rendered futile? I do not want to argue with those who suggest alternate behavior for Kafka's victims, or even find them guilty of not proceeding differently and therefore deserving what they get. A person can't be blamed for not thinking of what he can't think of. The man from the country, as we saw, continues to use every means he can think of. The important fact is that whatever he can think of fails.

The answer to why they renew their efforts after every failure lies, I believe, in the word and concept hope. There is common denominator to all the paradoxes we have listed or, rather, there is a basic paradox underlying all of them. Man is endowed with the instinct of self-preservation while at the same time facing the certainty of death. These two irreconcilable aspects of life are Kafka's creative obsession. Man is programmed to extend himself endlessly into the future, yet he is designed to be finite. It is hope of survival, faith in the future, that makes Joseph K blind to the parable whose very message is hopelessness. The initiated can understand, but death is the only initiator. The parables are true, but incomprehensible. Therefore they are useless. If they were comprehensible they would still be useless. They do not show a way out, they merely state that fate is unalterable. That we knew, but hoped we were wrong.

Life unto death. All other conflicts and paradoxes are merely analogies of this basic one. Like the

ability to envision utopia while lacking the tools to build it. Feeling a hunger no common food can still. Knowing what questions to ask but finding the answers elusive.

The two Ks persistence in their struggle is not based on a conscious decision as is the case with traditional rebels like Lucifer and Faust who chose to ignore the limitations placed upon them. The two Ks react instinctively. Their struggle is a manifestation of the instinct of self-preservation, of hope and of course a manifestation of their ignorance regarding their chance of success.

What we are witnessing are days in the life of Sisyphus until the final day which ends all without having to resolve anything. These novels and stories are Kafka's *apologia pro vita sua*, a defense of a life style based on instinct. And if there is any accusation at all it is against whatever power initiated the momentum without informing the victim that there was nothing he could do to stop it. What if the victim were informed? Useless information. *Catch 22*. *Wie du dich auch drehst, der Arsch bleibt immer hinten*. No matter how you turn, your butt will always be in back.