

FRANZ KAFKA: LOVE OF EXISTENCE

Viktor Ivanovich Polishchuk*, Zoya Yanovna Selitskaya*,
Grigory Viktorovich Silchenko* and Evgenia Alexandrovna Yurina*

Introduction: Life can be regarded as an illusion or a semblance of true existence. The writer Franz Kafka was close to such an understanding.

Purpose: The subject matter is presented in connection with the milestones of Kafka's biography and writings. It is demonstrated that Kafka, in spite of paucity of his biography, had a good knowledge of life, society, man and the general bleakness of his environment. For that reason, he preferred being in himself.

Research methodology: The author makes use of the biographical method, i.e. a narrative portrayal of the writer's life. The other methods employed are analytical, historical, cultural, comparative and hermeneutical.

Outcomes: Tragically, the discovery of the Absurd as the norm of existence cost Kafka his life. He did not want to tolerate a life that was nothing but appearances and obvious follies. He wanted to break free from the absurd world and to liberate it without "tearing it apart". To be consistent, however, one would have to break free from life itself in the process.

Field of application: The study can be used as a means of interpreting past and current events, as well as understanding the essence of man's mission on earth.

Conclusions: Kafka wanted to attain true existence, while others lived as if in a dream. He maintained that man should be "the guard" and as such, he should stay awake and watchful.

Key words: existence; life; writing; mass man; constructions; understanding; method; loneliness.

As it is known, life is not all bliss; sometimes it feels like a burden. The very fact that people are eager to change it suggests that they are not happy with it. It is generally believed possible to get rid of the dissatisfaction and to achieve another state that is referred to as "living like a normal person".

The idea of how a "normal person" actually lives is formed in two ways. One way is to eliminate the hardships and deprivations that prevent one from living decently. Such speculations give rise to social reforms and determine the popular ideas of liberation. The other way to a "decent life" consists in rejecting not only some aspects of life, but life itself, as an illusion of true existence, which is only possible through one's personal self-directed efforts. The writer Franz Kafka was close to such a concept of life because the world he depicted could not be changed.

His life journey was uneventful, as if nothing ever happened to him. He avoided social situations and, in his own words, was reserved, taciturn, and unsociable. But all this, he thought, was only a reflection of his goals. He was not a typical man of masses, but he anticipated that kind of man, he could feel him coming. He grasped his essence and expressed it in his works.

* Tyumen State University, 10 Semakova Str., Tyumen, 625003, Russia

In essence, the mass man is burdened by life with its never-ending concerns that seem to be superimposed on him by someone. It is tempting to conclude that if only one can get rid of the problems life will become easy and free. However, the mass man is often not ready to become free of concerns because new questions, which have so far been shielded by other ones, will arise: what to do with this life, how and why to go on living?

This is the point of confluence of the two concepts of “living like a normal person”. The idea that life is hard and full of problems and the attitude to it as a punishment can be understood by means of pure cognition, when one feels alienated from life since the beginning. The understanding can also come gradually, when the circumstances hiding the problematic nature of life suddenly vanish. One way or another, the essential difficulty of life eventually dawns upon man, and he becomes fully aware of what is heralded by the first cry of a new-born baby – his alienation from the true existence.

At this point the two concepts of a “decent life” also diverge. For Kafka, for instance, the burden of life was lifted in his writings that revived him even as he wrote them. Although the writer fully acknowledged the pointlessness of his life, he found its justification in his soul, which never ceased to generate new images. Thus, his soul was emptied of its contents, the writer let the haunting images go and became himself again.

What does the mass man do when he suddenly feels that his life is burdensome and full of problems? Scared by the truth, he tries to pretend that nothing has happened, that there is no truth, and life is just that – the problems he was so eager to get rid of. Alternatively, having achieved the long-desired freedom, he continues doing what he argued with and rebelled against, but now “freely”, without any pressure from outside. Either way, life remains full of troubles and concerns for him.

That is why Kafka, who authored all this, was not a dreamer as he was sometimes referred to, but a prophet. He portrayed his fantastic inner life, but it turned out to be a reflection of the mass man’s life. The external world was quite irrelevant to him; therefore, his writings equal the writer himself. “What a tremendous world is enclosed in my head!” he exclaimed in his diary (21. VI. 1913) [Kafka, 1968]. That world was subsequently spilled onto paper in the form of stories and parables, and it was hard to believe that they were but fiction, that they were not sketched from real life. The introspective person sees the world from the inside. He also sees the future of the world because it does not come from afar, but emerges from the deep. Commendably, Kafka refrained from explaining or interpreting his visions in an attempt to make them more accessible. It is the truth that man needs, not its interpretation. He felt it was pointless to look for ideas or comprehensive reasoning in his writings because there were none.

Whatever the writer’s opinion, it did not prevent his works from being searched for hints, allusions, implications, etc. Kafka’s numerous critics interpreted his art

as “total capitalism”, “a horrifying caricature of man”, “a flavor of absurdity”, “a sick talent”, and even as “an evidence of the terrible tragedy of man, ruined by bourgeois society”. However, the critics’ bias is understandable. After all, it was only in 1959 that some research on Kafka was first published in the USSR. Literary criticism of the day was expected to be loyal and valiant, rather than analytical and insightful about life *per se*. In the subsequent years, such Soviet scholars and critics as V. Dneprov, B. Suchkov, L. Kopelev, E. Knipovich, A. Gulyga, E. Meletinsky wrote on Franz Kafka. Their opinions varied, but generally made it clear that Kafka’s views were not aligned with the communist ideology.

And yet, in the early 80s, sympathy and understanding found their way into analytical papers, and the writer came to be reproached for pessimism and an apology of loneliness rather than for reactionism. Interestingly, he was reproached for what his critics suffered from and disliked in themselves. By that time, it was hard to ignore the similarities and some inner affinity of Kafka’s world with the familiar world of the “socialist camp”. The injustice and the oppression of the individual, the absolute priority given to the state machinery, the lives of millions of loners incomprehensible in their fatality – everything B. Brecht saw in Kafka’s writings back in the 30s – became reality. If only Kafka, in line with Brecht’s interpretation, had simply foreseen all this, if only he had merely described the possible hazards... However, his revelations are, in fact, a doom, and they will inevitably come true.

How was he able to make such an accurate guess? Not just the concentration camps or the heartless bureaucracy, but the fact that they would all become reality in spite of the countless warnings of the danger, in spite of a naive faith in the justice and rationality of existence. Most importantly, while portraying violence and coercion, he did not reveal their mechanism or source. Anonymous coercion is just what creates the feeling of despair that invariably permeates the works of Kafka.

The method he used to make his “guesses” is as old as the world. It could be called “self-observation”, but it is not an entirely suitable term since it is not separate thoughts or feelings that constitute the object of observation, but the observer as an integral whole. “A look at ourselves through the eyes of another person” – that, perhaps, would be a more accurate definition. But, more precisely, it is one’s own self-view as a person, as a man. More than a view: it is also an attempt to behave or express oneself as a man – not as a specific individual, but man in general. He is multifaceted; according to the well-known philosopher and researcher of culture P.S. Gurevich, “he does not fit one image” [Gurevich, 2004, p. 170].

While performing the role of a man one inevitably adopts some characteristics of an actor, and it must be done on a grand scale. It is not the writer that one plays, nor a historical figure, nor the paterfamilias, but man. The facial expression, the gestures, the words – everything must be brought in accordance with the role. It

does not really matter whether the acting is convincing or not. It is much more important to find the image of man within and, keeping it in mind, being aware of it at all times, to try to follow it, to make it accessible to external observation [Polishchuk, 2013, p. 43].

Did Kafka act like that? No explicit evidence has been found. Admittedly, such evidence is not often obtainable, because a serious person is expected to be what he is, i.e. to comply with the role he was born to perform. However, the very requirement to be someone, even oneself, presupposes the possibility not to be, therefore, implies the need for some effort, for a targeted and at least partially conscious action. In essence, it is nothing but acting. It turns out that one cannot help acting provided that one is even slightly aware of one's actions, one's mood, and of the impression produced [Gurevich, 2013, p. 26].

It can be said about Kafka that he did just that: he was continually aware. He was mindful of everything that happened to him, of everything he saw, wrote, experienced or said. He was predisposed to it by his education, which he claimed to have been detrimental. The damage was inflicted by Kafka's father who broke the son's will and made him bitterly aware of the fact. Because of this he had an acute sense of responsibility, which was actually his inability to resist the will of his father. Kafka did act, but his acting was innocent because he did not seek to make a false impression on others. He wanted to exist, but not as someone else. He only wished to be understood by others. Anyway, G. Janouch, Kafka's acquaintance since March 1920, felt it to be the case. The desire to exist also arises from self-doubt. The person questions the necessity, even the possibility of being someone – whether at work, in the society, or in the family. Such doubts are resolved, if ever, through an effort to retain the actual objective image of man as such.

Therefore, Kafka played the role of man. What did he do it for? This question suggests a certain perspective, which creates the illusion of understanding. What kind of perspective can man *per se* possibly have? He is deprived of it by default. One can imagine perspective, of course, but only provided that one stops being man. Unless it is imagined, perspective does not exist. Here is what Kafka wrote about it in his diary, "All is imaginary – family, office, friends, the street, all imaginary, far away or close at hand, the woman; the truth that lies closest, however, is only this, that you are beating your head against the wall of a windowless and doorless cell" (21.X.1921).

At this point, it is more important to understand why he played the role without asking the "what for" question. An analogy borrowed from his diary can be helpful here. One day Kafka wondered why the Chukchi did not leave their severe and terrible land. And he answered the question himself as follows: they cannot leave because only that which is possible can happen. Here his thought took a truly philosophical turn, for he did not substitute the goal for the reason, but saw the reason in the fact of existence. The existence of the Chukchi was such that it

conditioned them to stay. They simply could not do otherwise. No doubt, a theory could be devised to explain their strange life in an unnatural environment, but it would be nothing but idle speculations.

It was the same with Kafka: he could not lead another life, could not play any other role but that of man. It was natural for him to lead the life of a stranger and to be doomed to loneliness because he knew no alternative and could not do otherwise. He did try to change it, but failed. Impediments loomed forebodingly everywhere, and it was even more daunting to try and overcome them.

From a detached point of view, such a position is nothing but folly. To be busy working, to do something useful is what the society traditionally approves of as sensible behavior. However, Kafka shunned it and called it a product of imagination. Is it normal? Kafka had a job, of course, but he did not attach much importance to it. He was not in the least interested in what a person is habitually valued for or called upon to do in the society [Katsapova, 2010, p. 70].

It is certainly strange, but no more so than the actual coming of man into this world, where everything seems to run smoothly without his interference. Man is not of this world, but being born into it, he does not give much thought to the randomness of his existence. Man is a redundancy in this world, and if he tries to be his true self without any contrivance, he will encounter few events and plenty of estrangement and loneliness wherever he goes.

To sum up, the method of Kafka is not a way of guessing some truths about man, but an inimitable way of life that cannot be observed, adopted, or mirrored. Any imitation or likening in the visible world is not worthy of man. What he is entitled to lies beyond the mundane. It implies a rejection of both life and the world, which does not, however, dim its understanding, but elucidates it.

Kafka described a world of people who are a result of their circumstances; they are what their life is reduced to. His characters are always confronted by the unexpected. They struggle to comprehend the events, taking some things into account and avoiding others, but they remain victims all the same. Can it be otherwise with people who have acknowledged themselves to be a product of their circumstances? Kafka's world is a symbol of domination of circumstances over man, while his characters are symbols of voluntary yielding to such domination [Spirova, 2013, p. 59]. At the same time, Kafka knew that man is something more than just circumstances and relationships, that by yielding to them he betrays himself. There is no force in the world that can make man betray himself, but he always tricks himself into believing that the betrayal is forced upon him.

Kafka's tragedy was that he resisted the coercion too much. He felt he was a stranger everywhere: he was a Jew among Christians, a non-believer among the faithful, a speaker of German among the Czechs, a German-speaking Jew among the Germans, a Bohemian among the Austrians, a clerk among workers, etc. Even in his family circle he was a stranger. Isn't it a special talent to be estranged from

almost everyone? A true talent has a peculiar attitude to what is false, superficial and contrived. He feels that should he be an insider in such a company he would have to either lie or make too much effort to retain his identity. Unlike Goethe or Balzac, Kafka did not feel strong enough to be himself in any social environment. He knew and felt himself only tête-à-tête with himself. He welcomed solitude seeing it as his goal and his great temptation, but at the same time fearing it because, when left alone, he saw the world in a completely different light. A portrayal of this world, i.e. of his fantastic inner life, was his struggle for survival; it also made inconsequential anything that did not pertain to literature. He sacrificed everything to literature: family, health, marriage, communication and simple pleasures that he needed so badly.

At the same time, he confessed that he did not care for his writings, only cherishing the moments when the words left the tip of his pen. At such moments he did not feel the need to leave his house, he longed to stay at his desk, alone and transfixed – listening, waiting. In Kafka's strong conviction, those were the moments when the world actually revealed itself.

Even his own writings, which remained unfinished more often as years went by, were no more than dry, distorted imitations of the epiphany he experienced in the state of trance. He felt that he was compelled to constantly put forth the truth from inside himself, otherwise he would die. Life is impossible without the truth, and the truth is probably life itself. The burden of the truth, like that of life, is such that it can crush man, and the fear of this heavy load manifests itself in the form of lies.

Lies, superficiality and perversity of life – all this is not just intellectual aberration, nor theoretical or calculation errors, but man's fear of the truth and life, and of himself. It is possible that all theories are put forward only to allay this fear, to push into the future both life and the truth about man. According to K. Marx, a theory or an idea becomes a force only when it takes hold of the masses. For Kafka, when a theory becomes mainstream and starts to "take hold" of people's minds, it also becomes an absurdity because, as he said, people do not even notice that they lose their heads without losing their lives.

The XX century demonstrated that people do not just lose their heads. The tragedy of the millions of deaths becomes absurd because it in no way impresses the madmen. It is justified by a historical imperative or by current circumstances. The absurdity lies not in the existence as such but in the fact that no one feels it: people cannot do otherwise. They are lunatics, not villains, as Kafka once remarked. All vices are social, he claimed, and all virtues are personal. Most people live unaware of the supreme responsibility, and that is the root of all evil.

However, all people have dozens of duties to see to. Why call them irresponsible? In Kafka's opinion, it is because people do not foresee the outcomes of their actions. There are duties that originate from one's attachments, and there

is the unconditioned, predetermined mission. Kafka supposed that no one knows one's mission exactly. This uncertainty gives rise to the feeling of guilt that everyone wants to escape or to fall asleep.

There are plenty of ways to escape, to fall asleep and to forget oneself. One can pretend to be a subhuman (*der Untermensch*) and blame the hardships of life; alternatively, one can picture oneself as a superhuman and dominate this life. But what can one do if there is no way to run, if one does not see oneself otherwise but as a human being? According to the rules of the game of being human there is but one option: to remain true to oneself and wait (Note 1). The world should reveal itself because "it can't do otherwise". The discovery of the world is the discovery of one's mission.

Kafka was naturally a fragile, delicate, painfully sensitive person. It could have been used as an excuse for any weakness of character. He would not do that, though. Once, surrounded by a mob of fierce nationalists, he stubbornly refused to stand up when the orchestra struck up *Die Wacht am Rhein* (*The Watch on the Rhine*). He pictured himself as skinny, weak and wretched, and to onlookers he appeared vulnerable. Milena Jesenská, the woman Kafka loved, wrote about him that trivial things seemed absolutely mystical to him, like the most wonderful riddles; that he was "like a naked man amidst a dressed crowd" [Kafka, 1952, p. 87]. She gave a surprisingly precise description of the writer and his environment, although typical of the culture in general, "We all seem to be well adapted to life, but it is only because one day we managed to find refuge in lies, blindness, enthusiasm, optimism, firm convictions, pessimism – whatever. He never looked for refuge in anything. He was absolutely incapable of a lie..." [Rudenko, 1993, p. 56].

Kafka's vulnerability and "nakedness" were his ways to open up to the world and, what is more, to resist madness. This is the point at which the roads of human existence diverge [Shilovskaya, 2012, p. 184]. The first one is taken by the "dressed" masses protected by one another, by the culture, the civilization. The other road is trodden by the lonely few playing the game of being human after the Creator's original design. It is also at this point that one becomes aware of one's supreme responsibility and mission because an insight comes: the world has been abandoned by God; there is no one to rely upon anymore. Salvation and protection can be sought on the path of creating a world of one's own and shifting the responsibility on history, the society, and the state, but they can also be achieved by remaining abandoned and by testifying of God through one's presence in the world. The supreme responsibility is the responsibility to God for the abandoned world in which his tools, i.e. human feelings, have nevertheless been preserved. The testimony of such loners is both their mission and their salvation.

The mission: to be true to oneself, to reconstruct the "image and likeness" and the original design of the world imparted to man as a symbol of the Creator's powers, to portray the world just as it is immediately perceived, and to prevent the

thinking process from becoming too abstract and independent as it tends to be at the moment of awakening. Kafka wrote in his diary, “Special methods of thinking. Permeated with emotion. Everything feels itself to be a thought, even the vaguest feelings” (21.VII.1913).

The salvation: Kafka told G. Janouch that his literary endeavors were similar to “casting spells” [Kopelev, 1960, p. 173]. Why should we look for some special work if the Creator entrusted man with but one task, which is to name every living being? To portray, to give a name – that is how the lost feelings and knowledge can be regained by people, in Kafka’s opinion. To achieve salvation is to focus on creation, to respond to the call of the pristine existence, which has long faded into oblivion, to regain the initial abundance of feelings [Polishchuk, 2014, p. 40].

Kafka sought salvation for the sake of creation – giving birth to new images with which his mind always overflowed. A close acquaintance of his, Max Brod, was slightly annoyed by Kafka’s all too visual thoughts and speech. It was almost impossible to discuss abstract matters with him [Kopelev, 1960, p. 178]. Meanwhile, Kafka’s life was becoming more and more abstract, he did not bother his nearest and dearest with his presence, trying to be almost invisible; he never tried to gain the understanding of the “beefy, boisterous, sound and rough” people who surrounded him since childhood. The writer assumed the secluded life of a hermit after 1917.

He died at about the same age as Søren Kierkegaard, who influenced his thinking in the final years of his life and of whom he wrote, “He bears me out like a friend” (21.VIII.1913). Before his death, Kafka asked for his writings to be burned. D. Zatonsky explained it by the writer’s wish to alleviate the atmosphere of groundlessness that was loathful to him [Zatonsky, 1972, p. 84]. That may be true. But it implies that Kafka tried to spare his potential readers, like an old and much persecuted teacher spares his disciples by warning them not to follow his steps. The teacher knows that they will escape neither suffering nor atrocity and that they will disregard his admonition anyway. Their ignorance might prove to be their innocence. By not telling them the truth he would be taking the spear, albeit partially, in his own chest.

A quarter of a century later, Kafka was “discovered” in the West, and he gained the fame of a visionary because true existence revealed itself in his symbolism. As for the self-proclaimed socialist countries, they continued to ban his writings for a long time after that. As time went by, it became all the more clear that Kafka was not a weaver of symbols – his art was sketched from life. The following words he addressed to Milena Jesenská can be applied to him as well, “And actually it’s not at all you I love, but rather the existence you have bestowed on me” [Kafka, 1952, p. 40].

The well-known theorist of literature Lev Kopelov, in his discussion of Kafka’s work, once remarked, “An inner world can be experienced, but it cannot be

described” [Kopelov, 1960, p. 180]. What he meant was that an unbridgeable gulf exists not only between the outer and the inner worlds, but also between the experience and its description. He further defined Kafka’s artistic expression as the last boundary of the modern Subjectivism, beyond which there is no Art, there is nothing at all.

But where there is “nothing at all”, existence itself abides, and utmost subjectivism is followed by utmost objectivism [Yakovlev, 2013, p. 38]. Needless to recall how objective the inner world can be, since history knows instances of its negligence causing catastrophes in the external world. According to some authors, the conviction that the subjective is not real is “probably the most preposterous scientific misconception of the XX century” [Vilyunas, 1990, p. 257]. Such a distrust of the inner world is the result of over-reliance on a massive delusion that it is supposedly located “inside” the individual. It is not so: all that is usually attributed to the external world, i.e. things, people, and day-to-day bustle, being the actual inner world, only made accessible to the eye. The outside world is the inner world made visible. Its portrayal is similar to that of the external world, but the resulting picture lacks the diversity of movements, the physicality and correlation of objects in space. Kafka was convinced that he was depicting, not simply experiencing his inner world. Herein lies the difference between the writer and the mere recipient of an experience. Kafka wrote in his diary, “My talent for portraying my dreamlike inner life has thrust all other matters into the background; my life has dwindled dreadfully, nor will it cease to dwindle” (6.VIII. 1914.).

It stands to reason that description and experience are not the same. They always differ, not only in form, but also in content: “A thought once uttered becomes a lie”. In Kafka’s words, “When I say something it immediately and finally loses its importance, when I write it down it loses it too, but sometimes gains a new one” (3. VII. 1913). It was not the experience of the description as such that disturbed and troubled him, but the difficult task to merge them into a single whole, the need for integrity and completeness of expression. He noticed a “tremendous world” in his head and wrote further, “But how do I free myself and free it without being torn to pieces? And yet I would rather be torn to pieces a thousand times than retain it in me or bury it. That, indeed, is why I am here, that is quite clear to me” (21.VI.1913).

Is it such an extraordinary desire to express oneself to the full, to rid oneself of the alien “demons” that prevent a person from being himself? Such a deliverance also works as self-knowledge because it reveals man’s ignorance of himself. An awareness of one’s ignorance is knowledge in its own right, and the unshackled knowledge liberates man too. That is the way Sancho Panza releases his Don Quixote demon in Kafka’s parable *Die Wahrheit über Sancho Pansa* (*The Truth about Sancho Panza*). Unless demons get released, how can it be ascertained that they are no more than dreams of the sleeping mind and not man himself? Getting

rid of the demons and externalizing them in writings leads man to the awakening of the mind and shows him the way back to himself.

The deliverance of man from the demonic element is only attainable if the element is clearly and adequately visible, which was actually Kafka's goal. *Das Stadtwappen (The City Coat of Arms)* is a short story by Kafka detailing the building of the Tower of Babel that was meant to touch the sky. Such a responsible task being much too ambitious for the natural scale and the span of human life, the building gradually comes to a standstill because the builders' interests become increasingly focused on their own wellbeing and privacy. The upcoming generations are fully aware of the ridiculousness of the task, yet everyone is so accustomed to it that the idea of giving it up never crosses their minds. The building, the purpose, and even life become nothing but appearances; new myths are created, and from those man cannot get free.

The writer often made use of the character's morning awakening as a factor of his becoming aware of reality. Gregor Samsa, the protagonist of the novel *Die Verwandlung (The Metamorphosis)*, wakes up to find himself transformed into a giant insect. In the novel *Der Prozess (The Trial)*, Josef K. awakens to a discovery that he is under arrest. The awakening, the beginning of wakefulness, is not deliverance, it is only a confirmation of bondage, when the protagonist suddenly realizes that the reality is not what he assumed it to be. He is a scurrying insect, he is restricted, and moreover, he is guilty of something. 'Guilt is always undeniable' says the Officer in Kafka's short story *In der Strafkolonie (In the Penal Colony)* [Kafka, 1965, p. 42]. Man is guilty of losing the ability to see himself in reality although no one ever deprived him of either the ability or the right to do it. Man loses it not just because he is busy building a sky-high tower, but also because he is reluctant to see himself in reality. Man is an appearance of himself, and in the course of time it becomes habitual and natural for him.

Kafka's writings, as well as his main work, i.e. his life, are a result of his constant, never ending fight with the demons who are trying to usurp the name "Kafka" and whom he was "spellbinding" in order to obtain authenticity. He wanted to see the original images, including the one of himself, or, as his influence Goethe put it, proto-phenomena. In one of his short stories *Beschreibung eines Kampfes (The Description of a Struggle)* a young man said, "At all times, dear sir, I desired to see things as they are before they appear before my eyes". In *The Trial* there is an interesting speculation of a priest on the same subject, "The correct perception of a phenomenon and its wrong interpretation are not mutually exclusive" [Kafka, 1965, p. 298]. In agreement with Goethe, Kafka held it sufficient to simply contemplate the proto-phenomena, as any attempt at their interpretation can lead to distortion and misunderstanding. To see and to interpret is the same as to imagine and misunderstand. That is how Kafka treated his images, and he insisted that others should treat them in the same way. It justifies a peculiarity of Kafka's writings

noted by the critics: his heroes lack character and inner world. Their actions are performed outside time and space, and these actions are what constitutes the plots of the novels and short stories, because nothing else ever happens.

This method of narration, which came naturally to Kafka, proved to be very effective. He portrayed history or the society in which people, sapient beings, decide to live quite independently on the assumption that they are aware of all the circumstances of their lives and that they know everything about themselves. As for history, life or man, they allegedly contain no hidden qualities or properties. Such people see nothing arcane; everything is explicit and mundane. Everything is clear to them, discovered by them; the illusions and intricacies of ancient legends do not weigh upon them. These people themselves are no more than particles.

No sooner do they start to move, however, than it turns out that their sterile elementary existence is but an illusion, which generates some new meanings and guilt feelings out of the blue. It becomes apparent that violence, anarchy and absurdity swarm all around, and their end is imminent. They do not know themselves, hold any knowledge of themselves to be a demonic product of imagination, and at the same time they become prisoners of the demonic that they so unconcernedly dismissed. They are ensnared by their own ignorance of life, history and themselves. It appears that man is enslaved not so much by lack of knowledge, as by being unaware of his lack of knowledge. That is why man becomes something fictitious, a phantom, and a sheer illusion. It produces the stunning effect of estrangement and desperation in Kafka's writings, in which man is not so much a victim, as a vehicle and an initiator of alienation: without knowing himself, he voluntarily acknowledges the power of unknown laws and strange, nonsensical duties. Kafka's characters are indifferent to good and evil: they have nothing to resist, they have no preferences, or goals, or personal qualities. They cannot believe in anything, but at the same time they are credulous like little children, they trust every word and immediately retract their trust. They are empty, and in this sense they are pure existence, and the message they transmit is blood-curdling truth. The same effect is sometimes produced by the words and conduct of a God's fool, an oracle or a sage.

Kafka's method is genuinely scientific (Note 2). He did not describe others' minds or characters, which are incognizable, other than through those very minds and characters. To describe another mind is to make it up. The only way to write honestly, without speculations and gimmicks, is to write like Kafka did. What is more, he portrayed the world of people who are determined to do without any gimmicks in real life, to live according to exact rules. And yet none of them understands anything in this world, however obvious it might seem. People surrender to obvious incongruities and eventually become slaves to the immediate façade. This absurd world is strikingly realistic.

Kafka succeeded in accomplishing this task because he did not mentor anyone, nor did he try to either terrify, surprise, or astonish anybody. All he did was looking inside himself and seeing a world that became obvious to millions of other people considerably later. He lived his life the only way possible, by following the path of self-knowledge. Nothing else would satisfy him, like the protagonist of the short story *Ein Hungerkünstler* (*A Hunger Artist*), who explained his exotic obsession with fasting by the simple reason that he could never find food to his taste. Fasting is an Art, but like taste, it is so subtle that it cannot be learned. The hunger artist says, "Try to explain the art of fasting to anyone! If someone doesn't feel it, then he cannot be made to understand it" [Kafka, 1965, p. 59]. This confession is key to understanding Kafka. It reveals the way of Kafka the hunger artist, increasingly abandoning ties with the outside world, plunging deeper and deeper into the world of his mind. He did not claim a discovery of truth or penetrating into the essence of things and relationships. As mentioned above, his task was different: to restore his true self, to attain the primal vision as self-consciousness, cleared of any alien images and imposed influences of the outside world. Kafka found salvation therein, but the salvation of a kind akin to the art of fasting. If nothing can satisfy a person's taste, all he can do is consume himself, since he does not want to exchange his right of the firstborn for lentil stew. It is the same with the mind: if you neither substitute nor identify it with images of things or with words, you can disenchant the magic of external influence and see the world from the inside. This will make consciousness exactly what the word "consciousness" implies. The world will be stripped naked of all names, but to live in such a world is to devour oneself. When looked at through human eyes, this world would be very similar to that of Kafka. This, of course, is a bitter and dangerous vision, but is it not bitter and dangerous to be a human in the society?

Everything seemed "constructed" to Kafka. In an attempt to understand phenomena "before they appeared before his eyes", to experience them without interpretations, he portrayed the world's confusing, absurd facets. Confusion is the result of a false self-understanding, but it can only be perceived and expressed in words on condition that one's ignorance has been sincerely acknowledged. Man must either outlive or eradicate his delusions to become what he was meant to be. Kafka felt compelled to write about his inner turmoil, yet he could not do that to his satisfaction: language is not intended to express such profound states of consciousness. The more the writer focused, the more thinned he became, pushing himself to the point of exhaustion. His diary abounds in corresponding images, such as a pork butcher's knife that "cuts off very thin slices" from his body, or a horse that has to be whipped properly and spurred with strength. This thinning found its way into his writings, into the name of his protagonist in particular, which became somehow lighter as his humaneness and common sense eroded: Karl Rossman – Josef K. – K.

The significance of Kafka's literary endeavors consists in exposing not so much the absurdity of existence as the ordinariness of absurdity. Kafka demonstrated that the mass man does not wish any other, more rational existence, that any attempt at recognizing and eliminating the absurdity would inevitably lead to destruction. The average individual in his everyday life ranks rather lower than the ideal. What is more, he does not want to aim any higher, intuitively perceiving it as overwhelming and dangerous. There is nothing to do for man as a human being in this world, apart from witnessing the world's perfection. For the purposes of living, breeding and transforming this world, however, it is enough to maintain some semblance of being human.

Absurdity is also destructive, of course, but it creates an appearance of life. As the mass man is satisfied with the appearance, he simply ignores the absurdity, accepting it as a normal and natural way of existence. It is probably only humane to recognize man's right to absurdity.

Tragically, the discovery of the absurdity as the norm of existence cost Kafka his life. He did not want to tolerate a life that was nothing but appearances and obvious follies. He wanted to break free from the absurd world and to set it free without "tearing it to pieces". To be consistent, however, one would have to break free from life itself in the process. It is life that complements this absurd world and makes it whole. Eventually, life also hampers its rationalization. Although it was his own life, Kafka consistently sacrificed it for the mutual freedom of the "tremendous world" and of his own. He was a devoted servant of his art and always committed himself to it completely. That is why his art is inherently tragic. Not only art, but creativity in general.

It is even more tragic because the sacrifice man has to make is required by no one but himself. By offering himself as a sacrifice, man becomes a means of his own self-realization. He thinks he knows and rules the world he lives in, but in fact, like the sea god in Kafka's parable *Poseidon*, he hardly ever sees his world because he spends his life making endless calculations [Kafka, 1965, p. 559]. Such a life, however, fully meets man's views of himself. Admittedly, he is sometimes overcome by a feeling of sadness and fear, but, as Kafka pointed out, "when asked what he really wants he cannot answer, because – and that is his strongest argument – he does not have the slightest idea about freedom".

Apparently, that makes sense: you cannot want freedom unless you know what it is and have the choice. But is man really that unaware of freedom and his own confinement? Is life really the result of his ignorance? Let us take Josef K., the protagonist of the novel *The Trial*, as an instance: he is under arrest, but he is not outwardly deprived of freedom because he is neither in fetters, nor in prison, nor out of work. He does not feel guilty, he protests at first, he denounces, appeals to reason and demands justice. Gradually, however, the evidence of Josef K.'s guilt becomes overwhelming, because his behavior is in no way different from

that of any accused person. He seeks defense from people who could influence the proceedings of the trial, he considers the possibility of a hideout. Nobody forced him to do it. He had a built-in pattern of enforced behavior, and he followed it voluntarily, never displaying his innocence and even acting contrary to it. In the end, he made a full confession and did not even put up a struggle when two strangers slaughtered him like a pig.

So what is Josef K. guilty of? The novel never mentions it, but it is hardly relevant. What is important, however, is that he acts like a perpetrator. Naïvely assuming that the trial would reveal the truth and that justice would prevail all by itself, he surrenders himself to the trial, i.e. he forces himself to comply. At the same time, he distrusts the trial; therefore, he tries to influence its outcomes in roundabout ways. The rule of law turns out to be an impersonal mechanism that works in full accordance with Josef's behavior. That is why, as the priest put it, "the trial gradually becomes the verdict" [Kafka, 1965, p. 292]. The only factor that could have prevented the verdict is the defendant's personality, his morale and his confidence in his innocence. The protagonist had none of those qualities, and, in fact, betrayed himself and his true feelings. At this point Josef K.'s lack of faith is revealed. He does not believe in any law, either internal or external. Consequently, he does not believe in freedom, seeing it as no more than deviousness. He behaves with the cunning of a faithless being, who is only allegedly free, which is his fault.

Therefore, Josef K. had some idea of freedom, after all. He, who knew no fault at first, eventually forced himself to act in a certain way. Self-restraint is a feature of a free being. He was free to choose his behavioral patterns, but he acted in accordance with the fact of his arrest and with his desire to avoid the verdict, i.e. he used his freedom surreptitiously. He knew about his freedom inwardly, though nobody forbade him to exercise it and be truly free. The verdict was imposed on him in agreement with his behavior, condemning the purportedly free person, who refused to become truly free.

This is where the trial, or the case of Life against Man, comes to an end. One day man wakes up to realize that he is, in fact, a convict, that the trial is well under way, and that the verdict is inevitable. People can take this news differently, of course, but the behavior of the protagonist of *The Trial* is typical. In his attempt to influence the proceedings, to put off the execution somehow, or to pretend that he is oblivious of its existence, man behaves like a doomed creature and signs his verdict himself. But does it have to be like that? If man tries to influence the verdict or to postpone its enforcement, if he sometimes pretends that he does not know about it, although he cannot but know, that means he has already accepted the victim role. That is why he eventually behaves like a convict although he does not feel guilty at first. His guilt grows as he proceeds with the chosen course of action, whereby he is afraid of being himself and shifts the responsibility on the society or the circumstances. He fears freedom, just pretending that he is concerned

about his freedom, creating all kinds of deliverance theories; he also pretends that he is afraid of death, whereas he, in fact, fears his immortality. He simply does not know what to do with all this: his existence, himself, the freedom, the immortality. He does not know, but he pretends that those are just the things he wants. That is why he is oblivious of the fact that a human being is not limited to life, but to realize it, one must truly be.

G. Janouch once told Kafka that Oswald Spengler had based his entire doctrine of the decline of the West on Goethe's *Faust*, to which Kafka replied that many so-called scientists transpose their artistic world into the realm of science. Kafka did that, too, only he transposed his own life into the cognitive sphere. In fact, his "demons", "awakening", "absurdity", "the art of fasting", "constructs", "the trial" and "the verdict" are at once symbols of existence and the moments of the writer's life. His life was short and uneventful. Measured on the scale of existence, however, Kafka is as significant today, and will be tomorrow, and forever, as are Socrates, Spinoza, Rousseau, Solovyov. That is because he wanted to be when others lived as if in a dream. He expressed this in his fragmentary story *Nachts (At Night)*. "All around people are asleep. It's just play acting, an innocent self-deception, that they sleep in houses, in safe beds, under a safe roof." Kafka goes on to reveal that people are, in fact, "under a cold sky on cold earth. And you are watching, are one of the watchmen, you find the next one by brandishing a burning stick from the brushwood pile beside you. Why are you watching? Someone must watch, it is said. Someone must be there." [Kafka, 1965, p. 560]

Notes

Note 1. In connection with this, it is interesting to recall a Bedouin belief, according to which a human soul can travel no faster than a camel runs; a person travelling faster than that should stop and wait for his soul to catch up with him. Solitude, or the game of being human, consists in waiting.

Note 2. It would be insightful to compare the method of Kafka the writer with that of Edmund Husserl the philosopher. But that is a subject of a separate study.

References

- Vilyunas V.K. Psychological Mechanisms of Human Motivation. M., 1990.
 Gurevich P.S. The Problem of Human Integrity. M., 2004.
 The Diaries of Franz Kafka. Voprosy literatury. 1968. No 2.
 Zatonsky D.V. Franz Kafka and the Problems of Modernism. M., 1972.
 Katsapova I.A. The Meaning of Life: a Moral Refinement or a Sermon. *Filosofiya i kul'tura*. 2010. No 5.
 Kopelev L.Z. The Heart is Always on the Left. M., 1960.
 Larin Yu.V. The Epistemology of Culture: the History and the Philosophy of Culture Studies. Tyumen, 2013.

- Polishchuk V.I. The Problem of Creativity in the Philosophy of Culture. Materialy X miedzynarodowej naukowo-praktycznej konferencji «Kluczowe aspekty naukowej działalności-2014».
- Rudenko I. The Naked among the Dressed. *Novoe vremya*. 1993. No 21.
- Franz Kafka. The novel. Short stories. Parables. M., 1965. Shilovskaya N.S. Man as the Subject, the Existence, and the Existence of the Subject in History and the Present.. NB: *Filosofskie issledovaniya*. 2012. No 1. S. 171-203. (URL: http://www.e-notabene.ru/fr/article_88.html).
- Yakovlev V.A. The Informational Integrity of Being: Conscience, Life, and Matter. NB: *Filosofskie issledovaniya*. 2013. No 10. (DOI: 10.7256/2306-0174.2013.10.8920. URL: http://www.e-notabene.ru/fr/article_8920.html).
- Franz Kafka. Briefe an Milena. Heiausgegeben von Willy Haas. 1952. Schokken Books Inc., New York City, USA.
- Elvira M. Spirova. *Russian Studies in Philosophy* "The Symbol as an Anthropological Concept, New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2013. Number 2. DOI: 10.2753/RSP1061-1967520202.
- Pavel S. Gurevich. *Russian Studies in Philosophy* "New Versions of the Interpretation of Human Nature, New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2013. Number 2. DOI: 10.2753/RSP1061-1967520202.
- Viktor I. Polishchuk. *Russian Studies in Philosophy* – Three Answers to the Question of the Human, New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2013. Number 2. DOI: 10.2753/RSP1061-1967520202.

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.win2pdf.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.
This page will not be added after purchasing Win2PDF.