

FINDING AND FOLLOWING THE TRUE WAY:

FRANZ KAFKA'S ZÜRAU APHORISMS

by

Ben McFry

(Under the Direction of Ronald Bogue)

ABSTRACT

After a discussion of the historical and critical context of Kafka's Zürau aphorisms, this thesis explores one aphorism that describes mankind's ongoing state of deception, using it as a guide for interpreting the entire collection and thereby ultimately finding and following what Kafka suggests as a solution to this deception, "the Way." Finding and following the Way requires synthesizing conflicting interpretations of single aphorisms, reconciling contradictory interpretations of multiple aphorisms, and discovering the commentary provided by aphorisms that were added to the collection at a later time. Each of these methods is exemplified before concluding with the final aphorism of the collection and its suggestions for continuing on the Way.

INDEX WORDS: Kafka, Aphorism, Zürau, Austrian Literature, Czech Literature

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Defining the Aphorism's Way of Doing: Creative Undoing

Attempting a definition of anything is often a task doomed from the start. There will always be exceptions, critiques, and undecidables that prevent the formation of a true and stable definition. However, the aphorism has a unique relationship to the definition in that the aphorism is constantly seeking to undo definitions. The aphorism even often mocks the definition by taking on its form. Thus, to decide what an aphorism is, we must look at its way of doing, its *art de faire*.

As will be shown later, many have struggled with defining the aphorism, and the cause of their struggles has most often been the problem of their approach. Michel de Certeau's theory of "strategies and tactics" from his book *Arts de faire* [literally "ways of doing"; English title translated as *The Practice of Everyday Life*] provides the potential for discussing the definition of an aphorism without the problems inherent in many earlier discussions. De Certeau defines strategy as "the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an 'environment.' A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, 'clientèles,' 'targets,' or 'objects' of research)" (De Certeau xix). De Certeau claims that "[p]olitical, economic, and scientific rationality has been constructed on this strategic model" (*Practice* xix). Strategy is employed by institutions and systems of power to organize and delineate space and time. De Certeau uses the example of a city's layout, which is a grid of streets, sidewalks, fences, etc., as an example of a system based on strategy. The city's grid

defines what is proper to it and in essence defines the city. When de Certeau's theory is applied to language use, strategy can be used to define proper semantics (dictionary meanings), correct grammar (grammar text), civil speech (obscenity laws), etc.

De Certeau defines tactic as "a calculus which cannot count on a 'proper' (a spatial or institutional localization) nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality...It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into 'opportunities'" (de Certeau xix). Tactics are employed by the individual when navigating the systems created by the networks of strategies. In the example of the city's layout, tactics are used by the individual pedestrian to move within the city. Tactics can at times follow the course of the city's strategy or can be employed when the pedestrian cuts a corner on the sidewalk or gets away with walking on the lawn with the "Keep Off Grass" sign. When pedestrians employ tactics, they momentarily create a space for themselves in the city's grid but do not commit such a subversive act as to claim the spot as their own from then on. Concerning language, de Certeau claims that "the act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to statements uttered" (de Certeau 97). We as individuals employ tactics when speaking by appropriating language in our communications. We extract words and sentences from a linguistic system and make them our own for the time that we use them.

The aphoristic mode of expression is a tactic employed by the aphorist when working within a system of language determined by strategy. The aphorism creatively undoes rigid distinctions and connections within the strategic system of language to form new ones. The focus of this chapter will be an exposition of the aphorism's relationships to the strategy of definition in general and to the strategy of the aphorism's definition, as well as an illustration of how the aphorism creatively undoes these relationships. But before exploring these relationships

using de Certeau's theory, a look at some recent attempts to define the aphorism will provide a salient context for this discussion.

One of the most popular and often cited anthologies of aphorisms is *The Faber Book of Aphorisms* (1962), edited by W. H. Auden and Louis Kronenberger. Auden was a well-known English poet and translator, and a well-established editor at the time of *Faber's* publication. Kronenberger, though less well-known, was a drama critic for *Time* magazine for more than twenty years before co-editing *Faber* and a professor of drama at Brandeis University. The anthology is almost four hundred pages long and contains aphorisms by more than four hundred authors ranging from antiquity to the contemporary age and from all across the Western canon. In their foreword to the text, Auden and Kronenberger discuss what constitutes an aphorism, citing one of Pascal's as an example:

An aphorism...must convince every reader that it is either universally true or true of every member of the class to which it refers, irrespective of the reader's convictions. To a Christian, for example, *The knowledge of God is very far from the love of Him* is a true statement about a defect in the relation between himself and God; to the unbeliever, it is a true statement about the psychology of religious belief. (Auden and Kronenberger vii)

In the first part of their definition of an aphorism, Auden and Kronenberger state that it is the job of the aphorism to convince its reader that it is true. This criterion makes the definition of an aphorism a subjective matter, as if every aphorism were to have to be believed before it could be an aphorism. What Auden and Kronenberger mean by universal truth must be immediately qualified as being "true of every member of the class to which it refers," which contradicts the very notion of universal truth. The proposed interpretations of Pascal's aphorism by the Christian and the unbeliever are problematic as well, for the knowledge and love of God would be totally foreign to the unbeliever, and thus dubious as to whether the unbeliever would think that the aphorism applied to the "class" of Christians. Furthermore, Auden and Kroneberger

devote a section of their anthology to truth, “Truth and Error,” in which several of the aphorisms they choose for the collection contradict their claims in the foreword, for example, Samuel Butler’s aphorism: “There is no such source of error as the pursuit of absolute truth” (Auden and Kronenberger 322). This aphorism, when interpreted with Auden and Kronenberger’s claims in mind, appears to make the entire pursuit of reading aphorisms a great source of error. In their opinion the job of the aphorism is to convince the reader of truth, and if the reader is convinced by Butler’s aphorism, he or she would immediately arrive at an irreconcilable contradiction.

Auden and Kronenberger go on to say that “[A]n aphorism can be polemic in form but not in meaning. *Do not do unto others as you would they should do unto you—their tastes may not be the same*—is not a denial of the Gospel injunction but an explanation of what it really means” (Auden and Kronenberger vii). Here the editors appear to say in essence that aphorisms cannot disagree, but a fundamental component of so many aphorisms is polemic. One could also easily argue, in spite of what Auden and Kronenberger claim, that this aphorism is an outright denial of the Gospel injunction.

Auden and Kronenberger, perhaps sensing the problems with their definition, cite a “borderline case” in the next sentence: “*The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom....It is a valid aphorism if one can safely assume that every reader knows the importance of self-control; one cannot help feeling that, were Blake our contemporary, he would have written sometimes leads*” (Auden and Kronenberger vii). Here the editors expose another problem with their definition of the aphorism as being “universally true or true of every member of the class to which it refers” by introducing temporality into their argument. Following the logic of their argument, Blake’s aphorism may not be an aphorism in contemporary culture because it is no longer true of the class to which it refers.

The editors make only a few remarks concerning the form of an aphorism: “an aphorism, though it should not be boring and must be succinct in style, need not make the reader laugh and can extend itself to several sentences” (Auden and Kronenberger vii). The selections in the anthology do not contradict the editors’ definition of form here, though the subjective nature of the criterion “boring” is obviously problematic. But Auden and Kronenberger do touch on one of the most common of criteria used to define aphorisms—that it be succinct. While this quality is important for recognizing groups of words that have the potential to be aphorisms, it is a quality that excludes but does not necessarily constitute an aphorism. This will be discussed in further detail later.

Auden and Kronenberger move on to make the most often quoted statement from their foreword and perhaps the most controversial:

Aphorisms are essentially an aristocratic genre of writing. The aphorist does not argue or explain, he asserts, and implicit in his assertion is a conviction that he is wiser or more intelligent than his readers. For this reason the aphorist who adopts a folksy style with ‘democratic’ diction and grammar is a cowardly and insufferable hypocrite. (Auden and Kronenberger vii-viii)

The word *class* used earlier by the editors receives its full meaning and context here. One need only consider the eighty-seven proverbs that share pages throughout the anthology with all of Auden and Kronenberger’s other selections to understand the hypocrisy of the editor’s own statement. The very nature of the proverb is that it has been passed down and around for so long that it is a common saying. The proverb belongs to its people, and thus it is as “democratic” as a saying might be. Though Auden was a prolific translator, it is doubtful that he had the linguistic abilities to classify the diction of the proverbs used in the anthology, which come from more than twenty languages. Furthermore, Auden and Kronenberger’s inclusion of two “Negro” proverbs directly contradicts their statement about an aphorism’s diction: “When a man say him do not

mind, then him mind” (Auden and Kronenberger 31), and “You want to know how story go, wait till quarrel come” (Auden and Kronenberger 240). Though the editors may have been hoping to attain racial equality by including these “Negro” proverbs, the derogatory nature of the diction of these aphorisms would likely fit the editor’s criteria for “folksy,” and it is indicative of the attitude of minstrel show performers when composing lyrics in the “style” of Black Americans more than one hundred years before the publication of this anthology. The editor’s “editing” of these two proverbs brings the true meaning of Auden and Kronenberger’s use of the word *aristocratic* into question.

A more contemporary study of the aphorism may be found in James Geary’s *The World in a Phrase: A Brief History of the Aphorism* (2005). Geary is an editor of the European edition of *Time* magazine and details his lifelong obsession with the aphorism in his book. Rather than use Auden and Kronenberger’s approach of collecting a plethora of aphorisms by Western authors, Geary selects a few aphorisms from approximately forty authors and provides commentary for each. He divides his selections into categories of roughly six authors per category and generally uses chronological and regional criteria to classify the authors ranging from antiquity (Lao-tzu, Buddha, Confucius) to modernity (Cioran, Kraus, Lec) and from all over the world, though with a heavy Western bias. While perhaps “aristocratic” in some of his selections, the aphorisms of Dr. Seuss can be found in the same chapter as those of Pope and Blake.

In the first chapter of his book, Geary lays down “The Five Laws of Aphorisms”: 1. It Must Be Brief, 2. It Must Be Definitive, 3. It Must Be Personal, 4. It Must Have a Twist, and 5. It Must Be Philosophical. Though the laws appear rather formalistic or paradigmatic, Geary’s explanations of each of his laws show that they are based on usage and not necessarily a

systematic classification. Like Auden and Kroneberger, Geary touches on one of the most common criteria for characterizing the aphorism with his first law: It Must Be Brief. Geary writes of this law: “concision is the aphorism’s heart. Aphorisms must work quickly because they are meant for emergencies. We’re most in need of aphorisms at times of distress or joy, ecstasy or anguish. And in cases of spiritual or emotional urgency, brevity is the best policy” (Geary 10). One can see here that Geary’s concern is for the usage of the aphorism and what needs it might fulfill. Geary goes on to support his explanation by making reference to *The Cloud of Unknowing*, a fourteenth-century instruction manual written by an anonymous English monk, in which the need for brevity in prayer is argued. Geary does devote one sentence to explicitly describing the form of the aphorism: “An aphorism can be anywhere from a few words to a few sentences long” (Geary 11), but his remarks are no more specific than Auden and Kronenberger’s criterion of “succinct” nor than many other remarks made by students of the aphorism.

Geary’s next law of the aphorism, It Must Be Definitive, is of particular interest to this investigation and continues Geary’s usage-based approach to characterizing the aphorism. Geary first invokes the etymological roots of the word *aphorism* “from the Greek words *apo* (from) and *horos* (boundary or horizon)” and concludes from it that “an aphorism is something that marks off or sets apart—that is, a definition” (Geary 12). However, Geary states that an aphorism is more active than a mere marker. Aphorisms “assert rather than argue, proclaim rather than persuade, state rather than suggest” (Geary 12). Geary’s opinion here is contrary to the one stated by Auden and Kronenberger in *Faber* (though Geary cites that work and is an avid fan of Auden’s writings): “An aphorism...must convince every reader that it is either universally true or true of every member of the class to which it refers” (Auden and Kronenberger vii).

According to Auden and Kronenberger, the aphorism has the burden placed upon it of proving itself true, whereas Geary claims “aphorisms aren’t necessarily 100 percent true...yet they demand assent through the declarative style in which they are expressed” (Geary 12). The power of the aphorism to function on its own—outside of any authorial, historical, ideological, or veridical context—is not a claim to be taken lightly. Even Auden and Kronenberger’s anthology testifies to this in two ways. First, every aphorism is followed only by the last name of its author except for those whose author is unknown and for proverbs. Neither the work from which each aphorism is taken nor the year of its composition is given anywhere in the text. There is no biographical information about the authors contained in the text, so unless the reader is familiar with each of the more than four hundred authors cited in the text, many of the aphorisms will have to attain their effects on their merits alone. Second, Auden and Kronenberger’s inclusion of numerous proverbs in their anthology of aphorisms illustrates the true power of the proverb. Each proverb has been passed down and across generations surviving only because of its own merit ultimately to wind up sharing pages with arguably some of the greatest authors in the Western canon. The usual distinction made between the aphorism and the proverb is that the proverb lacks an attributable author, and Geary concurs with this distinction; however, the methods used in this paper to define the aphorism will likely exclude many proverbs from the category of aphorisms while including others. The frequency and accuracy of recording sources has only increased over time, thus the creation of a modern proverb in its true form is unlikely; however, if this were not the case, one could easily argue that all great aphorisms are destined to become proverbs. Thus, the author-based distinction between aphorism and proverb is not necessarily a reliable or well-founded one.

Geary's third law of the aphorism, It Must Be Personal, is obviously the most subjective of his criteria and would be a difficult one to maintain were Geary working with a rigid paradigm rather than a usage-based approach. What Geary means by personal is that aphorisms "are deeply personal and idiosyncratic statements, as unique to an individual as a strand of his or her DNA" (Geary 15). While this may be true of many aphorisms, it is not a defining criterion. As previously discussed, the author has little if anything to do with the aphorism's function, or "way of doing." However, Geary's discussion of the aphorism's personal relationship to the reader speaks closer to the truth of the aphorism, particularly Geary's quotation of Francis Bacon: "Aphorisms, representing a knowledge broken, do invite men to enquire farther" (Geary 15). But aphorisms do not "represent" a knowledge broken but *are* a knowledge broken and thus force men to enquire farther. The aphorism's creative undoing causes disturbance. It does not represent problems in thought. It is a problem in thought.

Geary's fourth law of the aphorism, It Must Have a Twist, touches on another of the most common criteria used to define the aphorism, that it must be profound, though having a twist is not necessarily exactly the same as being profound. Geary uses several aphorisms by French author François-Auguste-René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848) to illustrate his point, including "[a]n original writer is not one who imitates nobody, but one whom nobody can imitate" (Geary 17). The other examples of Chateaubriand in Geary's text do have a similar "twist" of logical reversals via repeated phrases with changes in syntax or juxtaposition of opposites: "Love decreases when it ceases to increase" (Geary 17). Geary's criterion of profundity seems to depend more on the literal wording of the aphorism, on its turn of phrase. Though many aphorisms rely on such cleverness to achieve their goal, again this is not a defining characteristic of the aphorism. Geary even includes aphorisms that arguably have no such "twist" in his own

text, including Cioran's "[o]nly one thing matters: learning to be the loser" or Kraus's "[a]rt serves to rinse out our eyes" (Geary 125, 179). The aphorism need not have a set up and delivery, as Geary claims: "[l]ike a good joke, a good aphorism has a punch line, a quick verbal psychological flip, a sudden sting in the tail that gives you a jolt" (Geary 17). The profundity of the aphorism is caused by its creative undoing. Its depth comes from its ability to upset.

Geary's fifth and final law, *It Must Be Philosophical*, strikes closer to the heart of what an aphorism is. By philosophical, Geary means constantly pursuing wisdom. He cites Friedrich von Schlegel to illustrate his point: "One can only become a philosopher, not be one. As soon as one thinks one is a philosopher, one stops becoming one" (Geary 18). But Geary takes the emphasis off the power of the aphorism itself, and characterizes it in this section of the text as more of an aid: "Aphorisms are signposts along the route to becoming a philosopher" (Geary 18). Aphorisms do not need philosophers anymore than philosophers need aphorisms. The aphorism creatively undoes on its own and thus is "philosophical" itself. Another quote from Schlegel that Geary uses returns the emphasis to the power of the aphorism proper (here framed in terms of the "fragment"): "A fragment, like a miniature work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a porcupine" (Geary 19). For the aphorism to be complete in itself the author must necessarily be excluded from it.

As has been shown, the relationship between the aphorism and the concept of a definition is a complicated and often confusing one. Almost every criterion is questionable. However, the one criterion that will hold fast is the aphorism's mode of operating, its way of doing, which is always creative undoing. To understand exactly what is meant by this, let us return to de Certeau's theory of strategy and tactics.

Auden, Kronenberger, and Geary are in essence strategists. Though their systems for defining the aphorism are not as deterministic or rigid as a city's grid, they are a form of mapping. Every time borders are delineated to contain the aphorism, the aphorism tactically makes its own space by using its power of creative undoing. The aphorism does not have a proper space of its own. Like the tactics of the individuals moving in the city who are not a collective with proper borders, the many aphorisms function independently from each other but with a common goal, creative undoing.

Auden and Kronenberger attempt not only to impose a strategic grid on the aphorism, but also to impose a social strategy. De Certeau discusses this in the chapter "Reading As Poaching," in which he criticizes the dominance of elitist's interpretations of text that are forced upon others:

The use made of the book by privileged readers constitutes it as a secret of which they are the 'true' interpreters. It interposes a frontier between the text and its readers that can be crossed only if one has a passport delivered by these official interpreters, who transform their own reading (which is *also* a legitimate one) into an orthodox 'literality' that makes other (equally legitimate) readings either heretical (not in 'conformity' with the meaning of the text) or insignificant. From this point of view, 'literal' meaning is the index and the result of a social power, that of an elite. (*Practice* 171)

Auden and Kronenberger exemplify de Certeau's point in a perhaps more severe and troubling fashion than a standard critic. Their phrasing of the two "Negro" proverbs, "When a man say him do not mind, then him mind" (Auden and Kronenberger 31), and "You want to know how story go, wait till quarrel come" (Auden and Kronenberger 240), clearly indicates how they wish them to be read. No other proverbs in their anthology are given this treatment. While the editors may have been hoping to give these two proverbs a more "authentic" flavor, the implications of the non-standard grammar clearly characterize the "Negro" proverb as being spoken by an uneducated class. Auden and Kronenberger's treatment of these two proverbs "interposes a

frontier” perhaps worse than the one interposed by the “official interpreters” in that an interpretation is already implicitly given in the presentation of the proverbs.

As previously mentioned, the problem with defining the aphorism is one of approach. The critics discussed thus far with some exception have focused by and large on the form of the aphorism and the experience of its readers and authors. One critic has taken a dramatically different approach to defining the aphorism. Richard T. Gray in the first chapter of his book *Constructive Destruction: Kafka's Aphorism: Literary Tradition and Literary Transformation* (1987) proposes a definition that focuses on the action of the aphorism itself. He bases his definition on Roman Jakobson's opposition of the “metaphoric” and the “metonymic,” which he briefly characterizes in these terms: “Metonymy, or contiguity function, adequately defines both syntactical and logical structures which function on the basis of serial combination; metaphor, or similarity function, refers both to the linguistic figure of speech and to the process of association which allows substitution based on perceived similarity” (Gray 50). Gray then gives his definition of the aphorism:

Using Jakobson's phrases the aphorism can be defined as a prose genre in which, in a strictly compressed textual space, the metaphorical and metonymical drives of language and thought enter into an exaggerated dialectical interplay, at times waging a heated and concerted struggle against each other, while at other times mutually reinforcing one another. The aphorism, then, expresses in consciously exaggerated fashion the dialectical relationship between similarity and contiguity, metaphor and metonymy, creative association and logical order. In this context one is still able to conceive of the aphorism...as an expressive form that portrays and problematizes the “Erkenntnissituation” [situation of knowledge] of human beings as spanned between art and science, depiction and abstract thought, empirical and theoretical knowledge. (Gray 50-51)

One should note that even in Gray's complex definition a concession to the form of the aphorism must be made: “in a strictly compressed textual space.” One can see something of de Certeau in Gray's definition. The aphorism tactically navigates strategically organized language, and as

it does so, makes its own space by undoing preexisting relations. Gray's definition is clearly based on what the aphorism does, but rather than discuss the implications of his definition or provide specific examples, Gray immediately develops a system of classification of aphorisms and a method for analyzing the forms of the aphorism (which is the primary concern of his book) based on his definition, but he never returns to a discussion of the definition itself. One can, however, easily identify the prevalence of the metaphoric over the metonymic and vice versa in examples from Auden and Kronenberger's *Faber* anthology, though both the metaphoric and metonymic are present in every aphorism.

An aphorism by Georg Lichtenberg emphasizes the metaphoric aspect of language: "Everyone is perfectly willing to learn from unpleasant experience — if only the damage of the first lesson could be repaired" (Auden and Kronenberger 23). In this aphorism, the notion of "experience" is replaced via metaphor with "lesson," and "unpleasant" is replaced with "damage." The aphorism implicitly makes these connections, and by doing so remaps the meanings of "experience" and "lesson," undoing their former distinction.

An aphorism of Novalis emphasizes the metonymic aspect of language: "Man is a sun; and the senses are his planets" (Auden and Kronenberger 8). This aphorism makes a comparison between two analogous bodies, "sun" and "planet" in order to compare "man" and "the senses." Unlike Lichtenberg's aphorism in which the comparison is drawn between two things that are similar by association, Novalis's aphorism draws a comparison between two analogous things.

The above two aphorisms respectively illustrate the predominance of the metaphoric over the metonymic and vice versa, but they do not exemplify the interplay between the metaphoric and metonymic well. An aphorism from Nietzsche's *Human, All Too Human* portrays the interplay much better: "The danger of language for spiritual/intellectual freedom — every word

is a prejudice.” “Language” is analogously replaced by “every word,” whereas “danger” metaphorically becomes being prejudiced. Here the metaphoric and metonymic aspects of the aphorism can be seen “waging a heated and concerted struggle against each other.” “Language” or the concept of language as a unified whole is analogously exchanged for the multiplicity of “every word,” which is in turn placed in the “danger” of segregating itself to the point of separation by its “prejudice.”

Though Gray’s definition proves useful for analyzing finite details of an aphorism and for classifying aphorisms, it is not necessarily an effective means for identifying aphorisms but rather a description of one of the ways in which aphorisms creatively undo distinctions. Furthermore, his criteria would almost certainly identify many poems, jokes, riddles, and puns as aphorisms. The proper definition of the aphorism thus remains elusive, but the aphorism’s way of creatively undoing has hopefully been exemplified in this chapter by its constant undoing of every attempt at definition, only to create a definition of its way of doing. With this in mind, we will move further along the way to the Kafka aphorism and explore some of the ways it has been approached specifically.

Ways to the Kafkan Aphorism

There are currently only three published book-length studies devoted specifically to Kafka's aphorisms: Werner Hoffmann's *Kafkas Aphorismen* (1975) [*Kafka's Aphorisms*] and '*Ansturm gegen die letzte irdische Grenze*': *Aphorismen und Spätwerk Kafkas* (1984) [*Onslaught against the last earthly Border*': *Aphorisms and late Works of Kafka*], and Richard T. Gray's *Constructive Destruction: Kafka's Aphorism: Literary Tradition and Literary Transformation* (1987). The reason for such relative lack of scholarship on the specific subject is identified by both authors as the marginalization of the aphorisms by scholars and critics. Kafka's aphorisms are often viewed as secondary to his proper "literary" works, as attempts by Kafka to express a coherent personal philosophy or theology, or as some sort of commentary on all of his other works. This is the case even in the few of what are considered the major critical and theoretical works on Kafka that mention his aphorisms. Both Hoffmann and Gray protest this marginalization and either attempt to integrate the aphorisms with Kafka's other works (Hoffmann) or to discover a connection between the aphorisms and Kafka's parables (Gray). A complete discussion of the relationship among Kafka's aphorisms and his other works is beyond the scope of this paper; indeed, Gray spends over two hundred and sixty pages preparing for such a discussion before he begins it in his final chapter, which itself only lays the groundwork for a true analysis. But both authors, of course, have much to say about the aphorisms themselves.

Much of what Hoffmann writes in his first text is reiterated in his longer second text; thus, this discussion will focus primarily on the second. Hoffmann's main concern is the motivation for Kafka's writing of his late works. He theorizes that Kafka, after being diagnosed with

tuberculosis, rejected his stance against religion, which supposedly dominated the period of his life before the diagnosis, and began embracing religion. Hoffmann bases much of his theory on Kafka's reading of Kierkegaard and Hassidic literature during the latter part of his life and on scattered references in Kafka's personal writings that can be interpreted to support Hoffmann's claim. Hoffmann believes that Kafka's late works are all unified by the common motivation of a search for God. Hoffmann presents many allegorical readings of Kafka's late works that support his thesis, which is a hermeneutical technique made (in-)famous by Max Brod to whose memory Hoffmann's book is dedicated. Hoffmann's book has been highly criticized (mainly by Gray) for its rather tired approach of allegorizing Kafka's works, interpreting those allegories as being representative of Kafka's own life, and basing that interpretation on scattered biographical and contextual evidence.¹ The final two paragraphs below are indicative of Hoffmann's method:

Kafka hat sich nicht gesträubt gegen ihn [sein Tod], in der Hoffnung, daß er dem Leben in einer anderen Welt eben darum gewachsen sein werde, weil er sich hier nicht zurechtfinden konnte.

Er hatte nach dem Aphorismus 96 den Freuden des Lebens mißtraut, weil die Menschen sich ihnen aus Furcht vor ihrer Vergänglichkeit hingaben — 'aus Angst vor dem Aufsteigen in ein höheres Leben' — und er hatte die Leiden, die die anderen fürchteren, hingenommen, weil sie ihm zu dem Aufsteig verhelfen konnten und weil, 'das, was in dieser Welt Leiden heißt, in einer anderen Welt, unverändert und nur befreit von seinem Gegensatz, Seligkeit ist.' (Hoffmann 277)

Kafka had not resisted it [his death] in the hope that a new life would be created just for him in another world because he could not cope with his life here.

After aphorism 96, he doubted that there was any joy in life because humanity had sacrificed it out of fear of their transience — 'out of fear of the ascent to a higher life' — and he had accepted the suffering that they feared because the suffering could help him in his ascent and because 'that which we call suffering in this world is in another world, unchanged and merely freed of its opposite, bliss.'

¹ This hermeneutical approach is perpetuated to this day, albeit with modification, in publications as recent as 2006, such as Roberto Calasso's afterword (which is also chapter in his book *K.*) to the most recent translation of Kafka's Zürau aphorisms in which, after agreeing with Brod on several points and drawing conclusions repeatedly from the sparse evidence of Kafka's personal life, Calasso writes: "these slips of paper [the Zürau aphorisms] constitute the only text in which Kafka directly confronts theological themes" (Calasso 119).

In order to support his theory of Kafka's view of death, of Kafka's expressing such personal views in his aphorisms, and of a reader's ability to divine such conclusions from two of Kafka's aphorisms, Hoffmann quotes only part of aphorisms 96 and 97 here, and thus removes the words of the aphorisms from perhaps the only context they can have—the rest of the aphorisms, one of which, 97, explicitly denies earthly suffering's ability to assist one in ascending to an afterlife:

96. Die Freuden dieses Lebens sind nicht die sein, sondern unsere Angst vor dem Aufsteigen in ein höheres Leben; die Qualen dieses Lebens sind nicht die seinen, sondern unsere Selbstqual wegen jener Angst.

97. Nur hier ist Leiden Leiden. Nicht so, als ob die, welche hier leiden, anderswo wegen dieses Leidens erhöht werden sollen, sondern so, daß das was in dieser Welt Leiden heißt, in einer andern Welt, unverändert und nur befreit von seinem Gegensatz, Seligkeit ist.

96. The joys of this life are not life's, but instead our fear of the ascent to a higher life; the torments of this life are not life's, but instead our self-torment because of that fear.

97. Only here is suffering suffering. Not so as if those who suffer here should be lifted up elsewhere because of this suffering but instead that that which is called suffering in this world is in another world, unchanged and merely freed of its opposite, bliss.²

That Kafka believed that “that a new life would be created just for him in another world because he could not cope with his life here” is not specifically explained by Hoffmann, nor does he explain exactly how Kafka's accepting of the suffering that others fear would help him in ascending to a higher life. Hoffmann's interpretation contradicts what is explicitly stated in aphorism 97: that it is “not so as if those who suffer here should be lifted up elsewhere because of this suffering.” Furthermore, neither aphorism makes mention of accepting suffering, and in fact, they imply that one cannot accept suffering while one is here. Hoffmann makes no attempt

² This and all subsequent block quotations of Kafka's Zürau aphorisms are taken from Kafka's *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente II*. The translations are my own.

to deal with the aphorisms in their entirety or in comparison to one another but rather merely lifts lines from each to support his argument.

There is something to be salvaged from Hoffmann's book: that Kafka's aphorisms are something more than mere words or "reflections"³ and that they are active, in this case in a search for God. Gray's definition of the aphorism certainly emphasizes the action of the aphorism in which "the metaphorical and metonymical drives of language and thought enter into an exaggerated dialectical interplay, at times waging a heated and concerted struggle against each other, while at other times mutually reinforcing one another," though he is concerned more with how the aphorisms do what they do rather than what they do or why they do it, as he concludes: "My investigation of Kafka's aphoristic texts...tends to provide analyses rather than interpretations; in this sense its purpose has been to suggest possible approaches to, and manners of understanding, Kafka's aphoristic and parabolic texts" (Gray 291). Indeed, Gray resists interpretation at almost every turn: "Kafka's aphorisms represent his experiments in the application of a specific discursive *method*, and not the simple formulation of a narrowly definable set of 'beliefs'" (Gray 236); "Kafka was more concerned with stylistic density and discursive technique than with the formulation of particular conceptual/philosophical statements or ideas" (Gray 216). Gray tries to leave the meaning of Kafka's aphorisms as vague as possible, but he still intimates something, à la Walter H. Sokel (Gray's mentor), that approaches the hermeneutical, though he states that it is not necessarily particular to Kafka's aphorisms: "The aphorisms are...fictions of the self projected through the formal and rhetorical objectivity of aphoristic discourse; but in this sense they are scarcely different, except in textual form, from Kafka's other fictionalizations of the self in novel, short story, letter, and diary" (Gray 265).

³ Ironically, Max Brod originally titled Kafka's Zürau aphorisms "Betrachtungen über Sünde, Leid, Hoffnung und den wahren Weg" [Reflections on Sin, Pain, Hope, and the true Way].

Curiously, traces of both Hoffmann's and Gray's techniques can be found in the writings of Siegfried Kracauer, which specifically discuss Kafka's aphorisms, more than forty years prior to Hoffmann and Gray. In a series of separate essays that were ultimately collected in *Das Ornament der Masse: Essays* (1963) [Trans. *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*], Siegfried Kracauer analyses the modes of thought of three of the most important minds of the twentieth century: Simmel, Benjamin, and Kafka. Kracauer's analyses rely heavily upon the rhetorical strategies of the writers to exemplify their mode of thought, and the terms he uses to describe such thought would remind today's reader of the study of cognitive linguistics, though Kracauer was writing decades before that discipline was truly realized. Kracauer describes Simmel's thought as analogy, Benjamin's as metaphor, and Kafka's as signified without sign (fittingly there is no true single term for Kracauer's description of Kafka's thought). Interestingly, an analysis of Kracauer's own mode of thought when thinking of these three authors reveals Kracauer's appropriation of each author's mode of thought to describe the respective author's mode. Such appropriations invite the question of whether an objective perspective for discussing the modes of thought of others is possible. What follows here is an explication of Kracauer's analyses of each of the three authors, then an analysis of Kracauer's own mode of thought, a discussion of the possibility of objectivity when thinking about the thought of others, and finally how Kracauer's work is similar to and problematizes Hoffmann's and Gray's.

Kracauer characterizes Simmel's mode of thought as a holistic one that envisions every object of study as both a single phenomenon and an inseparable part of the universe. Simmel does not begin with a fundamental idea and then seek its exemplification in the world, but rather he begins with a single object of study or idea and explores its relations to other ideas and objects in order to expose an underlying commonality among them: "Simmel is a born mediator

between phenomena and ideas; using a net of relations of analogy and of essential homogeneity, he advances from the surface of things to their spiritual/intellectual substrata everywhere he looks. In the process, he demonstrates that this surface is symbolic in character and that it is the manifestation and result of these spiritual/intellectual powers and essentialities” (Kracauer 253). Simmel’s thought functions analogically in that it moves from one phenomenon or idea to another following clearly defined logical relationships between such phenomena and ideas. An example of Simmel’s mode of thought can be found in his essay “The Stranger” in which Simmel moves from a general notion of the stranger, to a specific one via elimination of unfit characteristics, to the stranger as traveling trader, to the traveling trader as fixed trader, to the objectivity of the fixed trader, to the freedom of objectivity, and so on. A continuous line of reasoning can be followed through this essay as it traces “a net of relations of analogy” that ultimately leads to the “spiritual/intellectual substrata” of proximity relations within groups.

Like Simmel, Benjamin does not move from a fundamental idea to the world, but unlike Simmel, Benjamin does not follow a continuous, meandering line of thought. Benjamin works with unrelated fragments that “point to essentialities” (Kracauer 263), and Kracauer characterizes this mode of thought as one of metaphor. Benjamin’s mode of thought leaps from one topic to a seemingly unrelated topic that finds its link with the first topic only via metaphor. Akin to Leibnitz’s monads that exist as worlds within themselves that are nonetheless related to all other monads, Benjamin’s “procedure [of thought is] monadological” (Kracauer 259). One of the examples offered by Kracauer is Benjamin’s collection of aphorisms *One Way Street*. The text moves through a plethora of disparate and diverse topics, such as filling stations, breakfast rooms, the number 113, clocks, gloves, and even German inflation. Almost every aphorism is titled, and often the relationship between the title and the aphorism itself is obscure. However, after

reading and digesting the entire collection, a clearer picture of Benjamin's Weltanschauung emerges that is the product of Benjamin and the reader's finding (and perhaps creating) the link between the objects and ideas discussed in Benjamin's *One Way Street*.

According to Kracauer, there are no such links in the thought of Kafka. Every relation among objects and ideas refers one to an origin that cannot be reached: "All of Kafka's work circles around this one insight: that we are cut off from the true word, which even Kafka himself is unable to perceive" (Kracauer 270). Kracauer's invocation of the unreachable "true word" [das wahre Wort]⁴ is best described in relation to his analyses of Simmel and Benjamin as signified without sign, for Kafka's mode of thought is forever seeking expression of an unnamed and inexpressible object. Every attempt to name the object is misspoken, which breeds only confusion and forever defers the calling of the "true word." Kracauer uses numerous examples from the latter part of Kafka's oeuvre to illustrate his point of which perhaps the best is Kafka's short story "The City Coat of Arms" in which the construction of the Tower of Babel is described as one of perpetual delays and digressions that lead to confusion and fighting among the people and ultimate distraction from the construction project. Every attempt to continue construction, however well-intended, only serves to hinder its completion.

Since Kracauer's analyses of the thinking of Simmel, Benjamin, and Kafka are so insightful, one cannot help but wonder what such an analysis of Kracauer's own mode of thought would yield. Though Kracauer's voice can be heard in each of these three essays, the voice of authors who are the topics of the essays can be heard as well. Kracauer appropriates the modes of thought of each of his objects of study as he studies them.

⁴ Kracauer's term echoes Kafka's "der wahre Weg" from the Zürau aphorisms.

In his essay on Simmel, Kracauer's use of Simmel's method is apparent from the start. Kracauer begins by excluding everything from his description of Simmel that Simmel did not do, including interpreting "the world through the prism of the sublime metaphysical idea," discovering "the magic word for the macrocosm," and expressing "a far-reaching, all-encompassing notion of the world" (Kracauer 225). In the following paragraphs, Kracauer examines the thought of Simmel by following a line of reasoning, moving from the "raw material" to "different material realms" to the "second realm of material" to the "third realm of conceptual material" (Kracauer 226-228). The rest of the essay continues as if it were written by Simmel, following analogous and logical connections between phenomena and ideas.

In his essay on Benjamin, Kracauer once again mimics the metaphorical thought of his object of study. Kracauer uses two disparate works (connected only in that they share the same author) to characterize the thought of Benjamin: *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, a topic-oriented examination of Baroque German tragic dramas, and *One Way Street*, a collection of aphorisms dealing with numerous topics. Kracauer discusses both these works without privileging one, and he never truly discusses the works' relation to one another, leaving the reader to discover or create this connection via metaphor. Kracauer even borrows one of Benjamin's metaphors to describe his conception of Benjamin's mode of thought: "Opinions are to the vast apparatus of social existence what oil is to machines. One does not go up to a turbine and pour machine oil over it; one applies a little to hidden spindles and joints that one has to know" (Kracauer 263).

In his essay on Kafka, Kracauer adopts Kafka's mode of thought as well. With Simmel, Kracauer discusses his entire oeuvre in general; with Benjamin, he discusses specifics of two of his works; with Kafka, Kracauer makes numerous scattered references to all sorts of works from

the latter part of Kafka's life. Some of these references, mainly aphorisms, go completely unexplained and are left to the reader for interpretation; some references, such as "The Village Schoolmaster" and "The City Coat of Arms," serve as short digressions and are discussed in a few sentences; others, such as "Investigations of a Dog" are discussed at length but never in their entirety rather only in fragments of the work. This rhetoric mimics Kafka's by Kracauer's constant diversions to the original texts of Kafka to exemplify points, which often only invite more questions than answers, just as in "The City Coat of Arms," every attempt to complete the tower only serves to hinder its completion. This is not to say that one learns nothing from Kracauer's essay, but rather that it brings the reader closer to understanding Kafka but never completely, which aligns perfectly with Kafka's thought. The final paragraph of the essay is littered with such phrases as "perhaps," "or could it be," and "it is not certain," and Kracauer discusses multiple conflicting interpretations of Kafka's works without necessarily privileging any particular one. The final sentence of the essay exemplifies Kracauer's appropriation of Kafka's mode of thought best: "It is here that we remain, with the unconfirmed longing for the place of freedom" (Kracauer 278).

Kracauer's appropriation of Simmel's, Benjamin's, and Kafka's thought to discuss each author respectively poses the question of whether true objective thought is possible when analyzing the thought of others. Though Kracauer's appropriation of such modes of thought was likely intentional or at the least subconsciously motivated, the fact that he chose to do so three times implies that other methods might prove ineffective. If one were to adopt these methods for him or herself and use them to answer the above question, then Simmel's mode would describe a mind consisting of almost infinite congruent and connected faculties that functioned both independently and as a whole; Benjamin's mode would describe a fragmented mind, perhaps a

more complicated version of Freud's iceberg model, in which unrelated faculties would function unaware of each other but nonetheless in relation to one another via metaphorical orchestrations; Kafka's mode would describe a mind that perpetually wanders from thought to thought with the goal of discovering the one continuous thought that is forever in the back of the thinker's mind; Kracauer's mode would describe a malleable brain that constantly adapts to the task at hand and learns from experience. The last mode is paradoxically the answer, for the mode of thought of Kracauer creates objectivity through its malleability, albeit an ever-changing objectivity. Kracauer's appropriation of the mode of thought of others imposes the least amount of subjectivity onto his object of study and is thereby the most objective; however, this form of objectivity is subjective in that it must adapt to each new object of study.

One can recognize an affinity between Kracauer's and Hoffmann's work in that both view Kafka's later works as a form of searching. Hoffmann believed this search was for God, whereas Kracauer describes it as a search for the ever-elusive "true word." An affinity with Gray's work can be recognized as well, for both use the notions and terminology of metaphoric and analogical modes of thought and expression in their analysis of others' works. Kracauer, Hoffmann, and Gray all exemplify ways to the Kafkan aphorism, but as Kracauer clearly understood, there are many ways but each must be constantly tested and revised. There are tactical ways around every strategic system, and one must follow the aphorism as it creatively undoes strategic systems in order to find the ways. The next chapter will outline a method for doing just that with Kafka's Zürau aphorisms. It will provide a method that reacts to its object of study and follows the way wherever it leads. Unlike Hoffmann's, this method relies solely on textual evidence for its analysis, and unlike Gray's, it requires one to make interpretations, but

these interpretations are made in the manner of Kracauer, constantly reacting to the matter at hand with the tactics developed for a strategic system.

The Way of Kafka's Zürau Aphorisms

Composition and Complications

On September 4th, 1917 at the age of 34, Franz Kafka was diagnosed with catarrh in the lungs and serious danger of developing tuberculosis, the disease that took his life almost seven years later. Following the advice of his doctor to move to the country, on September 12th Kafka took an extended leave of absence from his job at a semi-governmental workers' accident insurance firm in Prague and moved in with his sister Ottla in her home in a small village then called Zürau (now Siřem) in the northwest of the present Czech Republic. Over the next five months, from October 1917 to February 1918, Kafka composed the majority of what are now commonly called the Zürau aphorisms.

The aphorisms were first written in two octavo notebooks. Though the notebooks consist primarily of aphorisms, short and sporadic diaristic entries can be found in them as well, but these entries, unlike the deep introspective reflections of Kafka's other diaries, are instead only terse remarks about places he visited, current events, and his daily emotional status. In late February of 1918, prior to or just after coming back to Prague, Kafka returned to these two notebooks and selected and edited one hundred and six aphorisms into a fair copy.⁵ He wrote each aphorism in the fair copy on a separate numbered sheet of paper, except for one aphorism (39a) that was written on the verso side of the page of another aphorism. Kafka began

⁵ The history of the composition of the aphoristic collection given here is based largely on evidence presented by the editors of the *Apparatband* (pp. 48-53) to Kafka's *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente II*, which was published as the critical edition of Kafka's works, and by Max Brod in his biography of Kafka. Other scholarly sources, many of which were published prior to the critical edition, contradict the history given here; however, the critical edition is the most recent detailed account of the Zürau aphorisms and is based on years of study of the oeuvre of Kafka's original manuscripts.

assembling this fair copy before he composed the final aphorisms of the collection, and he finished assembling it before the end of that February in 1918. In the fall of 1920, Kafka returned to the fair copy and added eight new aphorisms to his collection. He wrote each new aphorism on the recto side of the same page of another aphorism from the original one hundred and six, dividing the two on each page with a horizontal line. The additional aphorisms were added to original aphorisms throughout the collection. The significance and relation of the original aphorisms to the additional ones will be discussed in the next chapter. The addition of the new aphorisms brought the total number of aphorisms to one hundred and fourteen, though there are only one hundred and five sheets of paper in the collection and the numbering ends at one hundred and nine. This is so for several reasons: three pages have a single aphorism under two numbers (8/9, 11/12, 70/71), there are no pages numbered 65 or 89, and there is one page numbered 39 on its recto side and 39a on its verso side. After copying the aphorisms from the notebooks onto separate sheets of paper, Kafka also struck through twenty-three of the aphorisms in the collection; however, he struck them through using a pencil whereas the aphorisms were written in pen, which would allow him easily to erase the strikethrough without ruining the aphorisms. The entire collection, including those that were struck through, was copied into a typescript in the late fall of 1920 by someone other than Kafka. Those aphorisms that were struck through were marked with “xx” in the margins of the typescript. The aphorisms were left in this state by the author.

One cannot ascertain with full certainty the intentions informing Kafka’s composing, editing, numbering, and deleting of these aphorisms. Thus, like the aphoristic form itself, this collection of aphorisms resists contextualization to a certain degree. But as is the case with many of Kafka’s works that were left unfinished, there is enough evidence for one to reach

reasonable conclusions about the intentions that inform this work, though this collection of aphorisms may present more complications for reaching such conclusions than some of Kafka's other works.

One can easily argue that Kafka planned to publish this collection of aphorisms at some point, though to ascertain why he did not do so is probably impossible. The facts that a fair copy was made and that the aphorisms were copied into type show that the collection was in at least a preliminary stage of preparation for publication. One must also consider the mental labor involved in the process of selecting the aphorisms in the collection from the more than three hundred entries in the one hundred and forty pages (seventy leaves) of the two notebooks, the physical labor of copying them by hand, the expense of the paper and ink at that time, and the fact that the modest and self-critical Kafka allowed someone else to read his work in its presumably unfinished state while he or she typed it. Furthermore, the fact that the aphorisms were numbered indicates that Kafka was generally keeping track of how many aphorisms were in the collection and may have intended for the collection ultimately to consist of an even one hundred aphorisms; however, the methodology of numbering the aphorisms is one of the most troublesome aspects of reaching conclusions of the final reasoning behind the assemblage of the collection.

The one hundred and six aphorisms written from October 9th, 1917 to February 26th, 1918 were extracted and placed sometime in February of 1918 on the numbered sheets of paper in the order in which they appear in the notebooks, which is chronological. Three of the aphorisms are on single pages numbered with two consecutive numbers, pages 65 and 89 are not in the collection, and there is a recto 39 and verso 39a. One can conclude, however, that those aphorisms with two numbers are so numbered in order to indicate that for each aphorism an

additional aphorism is needed that is similar in theme, style, or some other characteristic to the one with two numbers, and that once the new aphorism was written, it would take as its number one of the numbers from the aphorism that has two numbers. This is supported by the fact that in each case Kafka wrote the first number of the two numbers before he copied the aphorism and added the second number after he finished writing the aphorism. Thus, one can deduce that Kafka first considered the aphorism while copying it or some time thereafter; decided another like it was needed; and then added the second number as a placeholder for a later composition. The missing numbers 65 and 89 could indicate places where aphorisms that are dissimilar in theme, style, etc. to the ones surrounding them are needed. It follows then that Kafka may have originally composed aphorisms 65 and 89 in the notebooks, copied them into the fair copy, but upon reconsideration disliked them so much that he removed them completely from the collection, and left their spaces to be filled in at a later time.⁶ One can postulate that Aphorisms 39 and 39a were meant to be two alternatives for a single aphorism, and that one of them would be deleted, which is arguably the case with aphorism 39a, for it was indeed struck through. Further evidence to support the claim that 39 and 39a are alternatives for a single aphorism is the fact that they share a similar theme in abstraction though they appear unrelated when read literally.

39. Dem Bösen kann man nicht in Raten zahlen – und versucht es unaufhörlich.

39. One cannot pay Evil in installments – and it is tried incessantly.

⁶ Kafka generally struck through those aphorisms in the notebooks that were not used in the fair copy and did not strike through those that were to be used in the fair copy; however, there are exceptions to this case. It is possible that aphorisms 65 and 89 may be present in the notebooks and may be found by their position between the original versions of those aphorisms that would surround them in the collection and by their lacking strikethrough. The critical edition of Kafka's works does not indicate which entries were struck through in the notebooks, and I have not had access to the manuscripts themselves.

39a. Der Weg ist unendlich, da ist nichts abzuziehen, nichts zuzugeben und doch hält doch [sic] jeder noch seine eigene kindliche Elle daran. „Gewiß auch diese Elle Wegs mußt Du noch gehn, es wird Dir nicht vergessen werden.“

39a. The Way is unending, since there is nothing to subtract from it, nothing to add to it, and still though each holds his own childish yardstick to it. “Certainly you must still go this yard of the Way also; it will not be forgotten of you.”⁷

Both aphorisms share the theme of the indivisibility of a whole, the disregard of that indivisibility by man, and the ultimate proof of the whole’s indivisibility via that very disregard. In aphorisms 39, a person cannot divide his payment to Evil into installments, but he tries to do so incessantly, without a stop. Thus his attempt to divide payment into installments leads to one continuous installment and thus proves that one cannot pay Evil in divided installments. In aphorism 39a the Way is said to have no end because portions cannot be subtracted or added to it; nonetheless, each person tries to divide the Way into yards by “holding his childish yardstick to it,” but this division only leads to the conclusion that there is still always more of the Way to go, for ““certainly you must still go this yard of the Way; it will not be forgotten of you,”” and thus the Way is unending. The fact that 39a was struck through with pencil may indicate that Kafka was planning on deleting it and using 39 in the final collection and that he did not entirely delete 39a in case he changed his mind or found another place for it. It seems likely that Kafka had the same attitude toward the other twenty-two aphorisms that he struck through in pencil as well.

Though one cannot definitely know what Kafka’s final intention was for writing, editing, and collecting these aphorisms, it is reasonable to believe that the final intent was publication, as has already been shown. But the uncertainty of the intent and the stage in which the manuscripts were left do present problems in approaching and interpreting this collection. If not for

⁷ The superfluous second *doch* of 39a is believed to be a proofing error on Kafka’s part.

publication, then what was the intent of the collection? Are those aphorisms that were struck through to be included in the reading of the collection? How much attention should one pay to the aphorisms as they appear in the notebooks versus their appearance after editing in the manuscripts? Was Kafka trying to form a cohesive collection of aphorisms, or was he recording mixed remarks and thoughts from a five-month period in his own idiom? These questions and problems have no definite answers, but rather than despair over the unknown and view these questions and problems as obstacles, one should see the nature of the aphorism in them, for such questions and problems are inherent to the aphoristic form that is itself a dubious classification riddled with undecidability. Even the question of what qualifies an aphorism as an aphorism cannot be laid to rest. To glean a list of criteria even from Kafka's collection is nearly impossible, much less from examples throughout the history of what have been called aphorisms. The most common criteria are that the aphorism be short and profound, but even those two simple criteria are so subjective and contextually determined as to render them nearly useless. But again one should not despair over the unknowns of classification, for as will be seen in the explication of Kafka's aphorism 86 in the following chapter, the very act of classification and the competition among men to classify are what have gotten mankind into trouble in the first place and created the need for such a literary and philosophical undertaking as Kafka's *Zürcher Aphorismen*. However, before we look closely at the meaning of aphorism 86 itself, we must briefly look at its function in the collection, for aphorism 86 is the answer to the one question that cannot be left unanswered when considering the collection: Since the order of the majority of the aphorisms in the collection is determined only by the chronology of their original composition in Kafka's notebooks; since one cannot be certain that the current order of the aphorisms is the intended final order; and since Kafka gives no definite prominence to any

particular aphorism in the collection, where should one begin an interpretation of Kafka's Zürau aphorisms?

Knowledge since the Fall

86. Seit dem Sündenfall sind wir in der Fähigkeit zur Erkenntnis des Guten und Bösen in Wesentlichen gleich; trotzdem suchen wir gerade hier unsere besonderen Vorzüge. Aber erst jenseits dieser Erkenntnis beginnen die wahren Verschiedenheiten. Der gegenteilige Schein wird durch Folgendes hervorgerufen: Niemand kann sich mit der Erkenntnis allein begnügen, sondern muß sich bestreben, ihr gemäß zu handeln. Dazu aber ist ihm die Kraft nicht mitgegeben, er muß daher sich zerstören, selbst auf die Gefahr hin, sogar dadurch die notwendige Kraft nicht zu erhalten, aber es bleibt ihm nichts anderes übrig als dieser letzte Versuch. (Das ist auch der Sinn der Todesdrohung beim Verbot des Essens vom Baume der Erkenntnis; vielleicht ist das auch der ursprüngliche Sinn des natürlichen Todes.) Vor diesem Versuch nun fürchtet er sich; lieber will er die Erkenntnis des Guten und Bösen rückgängig machen; (die Bezeichnung: „Sündenfall“ geht auf diese Angst zurück) aber das Geschehene kann nicht rückgängig gemacht, sondern nur getrübt werden. Zu diesem Zweck entstehen die Motivationen. Die ganze Welt ist ihrer voll, ja die ganze sichtbare Welt ist vielleicht nichts anderes, als eine Motivation des einen Augenblick lang ruhenwollenden Menschen. Ein Versuch, die Tatsache der Erkenntnis zu fälschen, die Erkenntnis erst zum Ziel zu machen.

86. Since the fall we have been essentially the same in our ability to know Good and Evil; in spite of this it is precisely here that we seek our special merits. But just beyond this knowledge the true differences begin. The opposite appearance is elicited by the following: knowledge alone is not enough for anyone, instead he must strive to act in accordance with it. However, the strength to do so is not given to him, thus he must destroy himself, even at the risk that by doing so he will not receive the necessary strength, but nothing else remains for him except this last attempt. (This is also the sense of the threat of death for eating from the Tree of Knowledge; perhaps it is also the original sense of natural death.) He is now afraid of this attempt; he would prefer to return the knowledge of Good and Evil; (the term “The Fall” goes back to this fear) but the past cannot be reversed, only made cloudy and obscure. For this purpose motivations originated. The whole world is full of them, indeed the whole visible world is perhaps nothing other than a motivation of humanity wanting a moment of rest—an attempt to counterfeit the fact of knowledge, to make knowledge just a goal.

Aphorism 86 is a history of mankind since the Fall. It is by far the longest of Kafka's Zürau aphorisms, and the only aphorism of the collection to offer a history of mankind's current

epistemological and ethical situation. Of all the aphorisms, aphorism 86 provides the clearest indication of the collection's purpose and the principles that should guide the interpretation of all the aphorisms. It is in keeping with the fragmentary nature of the aphoristic mode of expression that only an aphorism can provide the true context for interpreting a collection of aphorisms. Let us now turn to a close reading of aphorism 86 to explain the aphorism itself and how it functions as a starting point for interpreting the collection.

Aphorism 86 opens with a reference to the story of the Fall from chapter three of the book of Genesis, in which the serpent convinces Eve, who in turn convinces Adam, to eat of the Tree of Knowledge. Eating from the Tree of Knowledge causes Adam and Eve to know Good and Evil. Kafka's aphorism elaborates on this story by claiming that we, as descendants of Adam and Eve, have an equal ability to know Good and Evil. This ability is described by Kafka as the ability of *Erkenntnis*, which may be translated as knowledge, insight, discovery, or recognition. *Erkenntnis* is the abstract noun related to the verb *erkennen*, "to recognize or identify." *Kennen* is the root of both words and means "to be familiar with." Thus *Erkenntnis* is best defined here as something like awareness or recognition, and it implies an act of discovery or realization.

Though we are equal in our ability to know Good and Evil, Kafka claims that we seek merits via this ability: "it is precisely here that we seek our special merits." In this sentence, Kafka employs the German rhetorical "*hier*" [here] as a pronoun, indicating that "the ability" is the antecedent of "here." "Merits" is the translation I have given for *Vorzüge*, the plural form of *Vorzug*, though it could just as well have been translated as preference, priority, or distinction. *Vorzug* means literally "a pull to the fore." Thus Kafka's statement that "it is precisely here that we seek our special merits" indicates that we as humans vie in our ability to know Good and Evil. This implies not only a competition among humans in their ability to discern Good and Evil but

also struggle within each individual to make the best determination of Good and Evil for oneself. However, this search for special merit is in vain, for we are essentially equal in our ability to know Good and Evil — at least as those moral qualities are generally understood. The true differences among us are just beyond this knowledge: “But just beyond this knowledge the true differences begin.” Though we seek to distinguish ourselves via our ability to know Good and Evil, the true distinctions among us should be made via other means.

Though the true differences among us should not be made via our ability to know Good and Evil, “the opposite appearance is elicited” by our actions. “Elicited” is the translation offered for the past participle of the verb “*hervorrufen*,” literally “to call forth” and which could also be translated as “to cause,” in the sense of provoking or evoking something. Kafka uses *hervorgerufen* to indicate our active role in the production of “the opposite appearance,” rather than suggesting that the cause of the “opposite appearance” is something not under our influence. To explain this “opposite appearance,” we must first examine more closely how our relations to our knowledge of Good and Evil are described in the aphorism.

“[K]nowledge alone is not enough for anyone, instead he must strive to act in accordance with it.” We are not satisfied merely with the knowledge of Good and Evil that we have, but we must also act in ways that we believe to be good in order that we may consider ourselves good. “However, the strength to do so is not given to him, thus he must destroy himself.” Because we do not have the strength to act in accordance with our knowledge of Good and Evil, we come to see ourselves as Evil and decide that we must destroy ourselves in order to end our current evil existence. Though this self-destruction may not bring us the necessary strength to act in accordance with our notion of Good, nothing else is left for us to do: “[T]hus he must destroy himself, even at the risk that by doing so he will not receive the necessary strength, but nothing

else remains for him except this last attempt.” At this juncture, Kafka inserts a parenthetical remark indicating that this self-destructive impulse, which arises from our failure to act in accordance with the Good, helps us understand “the sense of the threat of death for eating from the Tree of Knowledge; perhaps it is also the original sense of natural death.” God threatened Adam and Eve with death for eating of the Tree of Knowledge, but when they did eat of it, they did not die physically. Rather by eating of the Tree of Knowledge, they came to know Good and Evil and thereby destroyed their former innocent selves. Kafka also sees a possible connection between his concept of death via self-destruction and the notion of “natural death,” with natural death providing a metaphor for the death of a self wishing to correct its evil by its own self-destruction but only worsening the situation by doing so. Such a psychic death is “natural” because the natural self, the self doomed by God to know Good and Evil and cope with it, dies, leaving yet another self that is more aware of its own evil and helpless to change it. But after this parenthetical remark, Kafka claims that the option of self-destruction will not be realized anyway, for we are too afraid to destroy ourselves and we would rather rid ourselves of our knowledge of Good and Evil by “returning it,” that is, by giving it back to God: “He is now afraid of this attempt; he would prefer to return the knowledge of Good and Evil.” Kafka parenthetically remarks at this point that “the term ‘The Fall’ goes back to this fear.” The Fall is literally a temporal falling away that would require a return or reversal to rid ourselves of the knowledge of Good and Evil. Yet Kafka goes on to say that we find this return impossible too, for time cannot be reversed, the past cannot be undone. Our only option is to distort the past, as well as the knowledge of Good and Evil and the fact that we possess the knowledge of Good and Evil: “but the past cannot be reversed, only made cloudy and obscure.” (“Cloudy and obscure”

is the translation given here for *getrübt*, which literally means murky and is often used to describe translucent liquid clouded by suspended sediment or even water that has been polluted.)

In order to make our knowledge of Good and Evil cloudy and obscure, we must have motivation to do so. Indeed, it is “[f]or this purpose [that] motivations originated.” Kafka argues here that the world is full of motivations to distort our knowledge of Good and Evil and that we as humans may in fact have even constructed our entire phenomenal world as a collective motivation allowing us to cloud and obscure the knowledge of Good and Evil and with it the fact that we possess that knowledge: “The whole world is full of them, indeed the whole visible world is perhaps nothing other than a motivation of humanity wanting a moment of rest.” We are wearied by our process of distorting this knowledge and are in need of rest, but we are continuously driven by the motivation to sustain and increase the distortions of our knowledge of Good and Evil. Kafka elaborates on this notion by saying that we try to disguise the fact of our knowledge, i.e. that it exists and we possess it: ours is a constant “attempt to counterfeit the fact of knowledge, to make knowledge just a goal.” We counterfeit the fact of our knowledge in order to make it seem dubious and untrustworthy. We make it seem as though the knowledge of Good and Evil is a goal to be reached because we do not genuinely possess it. (In an earlier draft of aphorisms 86, Kafka described our self-deluding impulse as “[a] means to bring the knowledge into suspicion [Ein Mittel um die Tatsache der Erkenntnis in Verdacht zu bringen]” before changing it to “an attempt to counterfeit the fact of knowledge.”)

Let us now review the contents of aphorism 86. Since the Fall we have had essentially the same ability to know Good and Evil, but we vie in our ability to know Good and Evil best. This vying is both an external struggle with others and an internal struggle to better ourselves. But we vie and struggle to know Good and Evil best in vain, for we are essentially the same in

our ability to know Good and Evil and the true differences between us begin just beyond this ability. Though we are essentially the same in our ability and the true differences among us are beyond this ability, we bring about the opposite appearance through our relationship to the knowledge of Good and Evil. Our relationship to the knowledge of Good and Evil is complex. We cannot be satisfied merely with possessing the knowledge of Good and Evil, but we must also strive to act in accordance with that knowledge. However, we do not have the strength to act in accordance with it. We thus decide it is better to destroy ourselves so that we may see ourselves as no longer evil, but we are afraid to destroy ourselves. Since we cannot destroy ourselves, we would prefer to surrender our knowledge of Good and Evil, but the past cannot be reversed. Since we cannot reverse the past and rid ourselves of our knowledge of Good and Evil, we decide to distort the knowledge of Good and Evil and the fact that we possess it by making our knowledge cloudy and obscure. Motivations arise to facilitate this process of distortion. Our world becomes full of these motivations, and in fact the entire phenomenal world may be nothing other than a collective motivation constructed by man to distort the knowledge of Good and Evil. The effect of these motivations is that the knowledge of Good and Evil appears counterfeit, and hence suspicious and untrustworthy. By making this knowledge suspicious and untrustworthy, we persuade ourselves that we do not genuinely possess it, and as a result, we turn the knowledge of Good and Evil into a goal to be reached.

Now that the meaning of aphorism 86 has been explained, we may return to a discussion of how aphorism 86 provides a clear indication of the collection's purpose and the principles that should guide the interpretations of all the aphorisms. Aphorism 86 is a history of mankind since the fall, and as such it is a description of the problem facing humanity: That we are epistemologically, ethically, and phenomenologically in a state of deception of our own creation.

Because of our difficulty in coming to terms with the consequences of our knowledge of Good and Evil and our possession of that knowledge, we have fashioned a world that conceals our past and sustains our illusions. Aphorism 86 is an exposé of mankind's greatest cover-up. Aphorism 86 is a detailed and clear diagnosis of the problem that is the object of study for the rest of Kafka's Zürau aphorisms. Aphorism 86 is the negative beginning of what becomes the positive path of Kafka's Zürau aphorisms. Aphorism 86 is the start of what Kafka calls "the Way." But before we look at what Kafka's Way is, we must see how Kafka explores the consequences of the problem diagnosed in aphorism 86, creating and sustaining a world of deception.

The distortion of our knowledge of Good and Evil inherently calls all knowledge into question. The distinction that could be made between moral knowledge, i.e. the knowledge of Good and Evil, and amoral knowledge, i.e. factual knowledge, reason, logic, etc., is subject to distortion as well, and thus we must approach all knowledge as possibly distorted knowledge or the possible product of distorted knowledge. In essence, the categories of what are now called Good and Evil must be treated as arbitrary and open ones because of their suspect nature. Kafka alludes to our misconceptions of Good and Evil in several aphorisms, and indeed what is meant by Good and Evil is not necessarily consistent throughout the collection of aphorisms, which only strengthens Kafka's stand on our misconceptions of Good and Evil through the meta-commentary provided by his contradictory usages. Let us turn to some of these aphorisms.

54. Es gibts nichts anderes als eine geistige Welt; was wir sinnliche Welt nennen ist das Böse in der geistigen und was wir böse nennen ist nur eine Notwendigkeit eines Augenblicks unserer ewigen Entwicklung.

54. There is nothing other than a spiritual world; what we call the phenomenal world is the Evil in the spiritual world, and what we call Evil is only the necessity of a moment in our eternal development.

In aphorism 54, Kafka claims that the world that we experience through our senses is the Evil present in the spiritual world. What we think is Evil is actually “the necessity of a moment in our eternal development,” the need of particular events integral to our growth as a species. Thus, even in this single aphorism, there are two different kinds of Evil: the actual Evil that is the phenomenal world and that which we call Evil, “the necessity of a moment in our eternal development.” Kafka complicates the matter with his use of “*geistige*,” which can mean either “spiritual” or “mental.” The aphorism plays on the traditional opposition of mental world opposed to phenomenal world by suggesting that it is the same as the opposition of spiritual world opposed to Evil world. Thus, it is unclear whether the “*geistige*” world is meant to be a mental world, a world all in our heads, or a spiritual world, an unseen mystical world beyond our knowing. The particulars of the aphorism are indeed confusing, but the purpose is clear: what we take for spiritual, mental, phenomenal, and Evil are not necessarily so.

Kafka has a similar perspective in aphorism 85 though not without contradicting 54.

85. Das Böse ist eine Ausstrahlung des menschlichen Bewußtseins in bestimmten Übergangstellungen. Nicht eigentlich die sinnliche Welt ist Schein, sondern ihr Böses, das allerdings für unsere Augen die sinnliche Welt bildet.

85. Evil is a radiation of human consciousness in certain positions of transition. The phenomenal world is not actually appearance, instead appearance is the Evil of the phenomenal world, and Evil forms the phenomenal world for our eyes.

In aphorism 85, Evil is emitted by our consciousness when we undergo certain transitions. This emitted Evil in aphorism 85 seems similar to the Evil that is “a necessity of a moment in our eternal development” in aphorism 54 because both aphorisms describe this Evil as being related to our development. Because of this similarity, the emitted Evil of aphorism 85 may not be actual Evil but only what we call Evil. In aphorism 54, the phenomenal world is actual Evil, while in aphorism 85 the appearance of the phenomenal world is actual Evil, and this appearance

is formed by actual Evil. Whether these slight contradictions are intended by Kafka or not is inconsequential at this stage of our exploration of Kafka's aphorisms. The important point is here again to rethink the traditional categories of Good and Evil and to question the distinction between moral and amoral knowledge.

The problems with the knowledge of Good and Evil exposed in aphorism 86 are applied to all knowledge in aphorisms 54, 85, and others. Thus, we are in a world of complete and total deception both morally and amorally. Thankfully, there is a way out, "the Way." Kafka explicitly mentions this Way in many of his aphorisms, and the Way implicitly runs through all of them. The Way is a way of unclouding knowledge. The Way unclouds knowledge by rethinking thought. The Way unclouds knowledge by erasing distinctions and marking new ones. The Way is the way to solve the problem described in aphorism 86. But the Way is not easy to find and follow. The Way is constantly covering its tracks, as Kafka points out in aphorism 15:

15. Wie ein Weg im Herbst: kaum ist er rein gekehrt, bedeckt er sich wieder mit den trockenen Blättern.

15. Like a path in autumn: hardly is it swept clean before it covers itself again with wet leaves.

"Path" is the translation I give for "*Weg*," which literally means and is a cognate of "way." The Way indeed "covers itself" [*bedeckt er sich*] and is not covered by something else. The Way covers itself linguistically and logically in Kafka's Zürau aphorisms by constantly undermining what it asserts, by being simultaneously earnest and ironic. Kafka cannot explicitly show us the Way because of its concealment, but he can implicitly guide us toward it, and the readings given in this paper can help us to follow his guide. We can only find and follow the Way in this implicit way because of the problems described in aphorism 86 and the extended applications of those problems described in aphorisms 54, 85, and others: In short, all knowledge is suspect and

possible deception. But the Way is not easy to find and follow. The Way can be where we least expect it, and the Way can appear to lead us into error, as it is described in the first aphorism of Kafka's collection:

1. Der wahre Weg geht über ein Seil, das nicht in der Höhe gespannt ist, sondern knapp über dem Boden. Es scheint mehr bestimmt stolpern zu machen, als begangen zu werden.

1. The true Way goes over a rope that is not stretched on high but instead just above the ground. It appears more certain to make one stumble than to be walked upon.

Kafka describes the Way in aphorism 1 as the "true Way" [*wahre Weg*] to emphasize that the Way is the true Way though "it appears more certain to make one stumble." Kafka's description of the Way as "going over a rope" that may be "walked upon" implies that the rope is a tightrope, and in fact Kafka used the word *Dratseil* [tightrope] in an earlier version of this aphorism. Thus, traveling the way is as difficult as walking a tightrope that appears to be a tripwire. Yet it can still be done.

Because the way is constantly covering itself, Kafka can only implicitly guide us to the Way. Because Kafka can only implicitly guide us to the way, our reading of the aphorisms must take advantage of all available implicit meanings. Finding and following the Way is achieved by reading Kafka's aphorisms simultaneously from many perspectives and by synthesizing multiple conflicting interpretations of the aphorisms. This way of reading requires reading single aphorisms earnestly, ironically, in pieces, and holistically, and fusing these multiple readings into a single meta-reading. This way of reading requires comparing multiple aphorisms that have apparent conflicting meanings and reconciling these conflicts. This way of reading requires examining aphorisms that Kafka "revisited" by adding another aphorism to the page that originally only had one and discovering what commentary the latter aphorism provides on the

former. This way of reading also requires a little faith, as will be shown in the first aphorism that we turn to in the next chapter, the last of the collection, aphorism 109.

Aphorisms Alone

Finding and following the Way as it runs through single aphorisms requires synthesizing multiple readings of each aphorism into a meta-reading. Because Kafka cannot explicitly show us the way, he can only imply it, and hence we must take advantage of all available implicit meanings, even meanings implied by implicit meanings, meta-readings. Doing so allows us to find and follow the Way, which in turn allows us to uncloud our knowledge and thereby undo the deception of our own creation so that we can ultimately come to terms with our knowledge of Good and Evil.

109. „Daß es uns an Glauben fehle, kann man nicht sagen. Allein die einfache Tatsache unseres Lebens ist in ihrem Glaubenswert gar nicht auszuschöpfen.“

„Hier wäre ein Glaubenswert? Man kann doch nicht nicht-leben.“

„Eben in diesem ‚kann doch nicht‘ steckt die wahnsinnige Kraft des Glaubens; in dieser Verneinung bekommt sie Gestalt.“

109. “That we are lacking in faith cannot be said. The simple fact alone that we are alive is not to be exhausted of its worthiness of faith.”

“You say that has worthiness of faith? But one cannot not-live though.”

“Even in this ‘cannot’ there is the insane power of faith; in this denial it receives its form.”

Taken earnestly, this aphorism appears to be a commentary on the impassable limitations of language and the stranglehold that language has on logic. The first speaker of the dialogue (the quotation marks are Kafka’s) states what he believes to be a universal truth: “that we are lacking in faith cannot be said” and that “the simple fact that we are alive is not to be exhausted of its worthiness of faith.” The second speaker rebukes the first speaker by attempting to undermine the first speaker’s logic that being alive proves the existence of faith, but to do this he must use a

stilted construction to form a neologism, “kann doch nicht nicht-leben,” [cannot not-live] in order to convey his meaning. The second speaker’s neologism appears rather clever, but the first speaker then turns the second speaker’s neologism against him to make his point that the second speaker’s attempt to undermine the first speaker’s logic by manipulating language with this neologism is ultimately countered by language itself, for this emphatic “kann doch nicht” [cannot] of the second speaker’s statement is predicated on the faith in the ability of language to express prohibition and possibility: “Even in this ‘cannot’ there is the insane power of faith; in this denial it receives its form.” The final statement of the first speaker claims that attempting to deny the existence of faith with language is impossible, even when using neologisms, for the person who denies faith with language must have faith in the language that he or she uses to deny faith.

Taken with irony, the contradictions of this aphorism undermine the notions set forth in the previous *prima facie* interpretation. The aphorism begins to collapse from the first sentence onward. Since the aphorism is clearly a dialogue, the first speaker says exactly what one cannot say — “that we are lacking in faith” — and then he says one cannot say it. This initial contradiction immediately questions the findings of the first speaker discussed in the earnest reading. The first speaker may be using the phrase “one cannot say” idiomatically, but as one who criticizes another’s use of “cannot,” surely the first speaker is aware of the explicit meaning of his own statement, which brings into question the interpretability of the remainder of his statement. The dual meanings of the negated *sein* and *zu*, which are analogous to the English *is not to be* and require context to divine their specific meaning, problematize the first speaker’s second sentence: “The simple fact alone that we are alive is not to be exhausted of its worthiness of faith.” On the one hand with *sein* and *zu* taken to express probability, the worthiness of belief

in our living cannot be exhausted. On the other hand with *sein* and *zu* taken to express obligation, the worthiness must not be exhausted, and thus man must not question the worthiness of belief too deeply. Kafka could have easily cleared up this ambiguity by using a modal verb instead of *sein* and *zu*, but nonetheless the ambiguity remains.

Further ambiguity arises in the second speaker's statement, when he facetiously invokes the subjunctive with *wäre* [were] (translated here as "[y]ou say that") and leaves the object of the worthiness of faith [*Glaubenswert*] of which he speaks vague: "You say that has worthiness of faith." The reader cannot tell whether the second speaker's *Glaubenswert* refers to the *Glaubenswert* in the first speaker's sentence or to the entire utterance of the first speaker because the second speaker simply says "*Hier*" [Here] (translated here as "that"). The double negative of the second speaker's next sentence (*nicht nicht-*) [not not-] has the one meaning that one cannot be nonliving and still verify the first speaker's point. It also has the other meaning that one cannot live at all, for it is unclear whether a double negative should reverse the negation or intensify the negation. The first speaker's response (Even in this 'cannot' there is the insane power of faith; in this denial it receives its form.) to this doubly-negated neologism can be taken to mean that "the insane power of faith" is literally in the words or in language because mankind is bound to language. The same response can also have the meaning that the second speaker's intent of the assertion itself, to deny faith, cannot defeat the first speaker's point because of faith's "insane power." Either of these interpretations contradicts the first speaker's initial point by relying on something other than "the simple fact that we are alive by itself" to prove that there is no lack in faith.

Taken as a whole to form a meta-reading, the contradictions of the aphorism undermine the notion of expressing oneself at all, for both speakers' arguments are predicated on and use

language and its logic heavily, but the contradictory and ironic meanings of their arguments deny the ability of their own language to make an argument, yet they still speak their arguments and retain faith in language to speak truth. Thus, the meta-reading of aphorism 109 exposes the need for such meta-readings, for relying on language and its logic is shown in 109 to be susceptible to all kinds of deception, but as our only means of communication, we must work through the deception and retain faith in language to speak truth.

Kafka turns from the logic of language to the logic of truth in aphorism 80, and the Way finds similar faults with truth as well:

80. Wahrheit ist unteilbar, kann sich also selbst nicht erkennen; wer sie erkennen will, muß Lüge sein.

80. Truth is indivisible, it cannot thus recognize itself; he who wants to recognize it, must be lie.⁸

Taken earnestly, this aphorism classifies truth as a category of one. For truth to be recognized, the recognition itself would become a truth, which would violate the principle of the indivisibility of truth. Thus truth itself must remain an abstraction without form, content, or specification. Truth can only be when it is not recognized as such; thus, those who want or claim to know it destroy the possibility of its being simply by desiring it in a definable manner.

Taken ironically, a conundrum is revealed, for Kafka's aphorism denies rather than proclaims its ability to assert truth even while making this assertion by violating its own principle of the indivisibility of truth. As with the quotation marks of aphorism 109, we should notice the punctuation of this aphorism almost symmetrically dividing what cannot be divided and remain true, the further division of truth from itself by the emphatic placement of "also"

⁸ Though the noun is singular, there is no indefinite article modifying *Lüge* [lie] in the original German, which in essence coins an abstract term that could be translated "falsity." The difference in meaning between *eine Lüge* [a lie] and *Lüge* [lie] is analogous to the difference between *die Wahrheit* [the truth] and *Wahrheit* [truth] both in English and German (hence my literal translation). This coinage creates a semantically analogous term for comparing truth and lie and renders lie as linguistically "indivisible" as truth.

[thus] between “sich” [it] and “selbst” [itself], and that the collection to which this aphorism belongs is so divisible that almost every aphorism was written on a separate sheet of paper.

Taken as a whole to form a meta-reading, this interpretation creates yet another conundrum, for by the logic of the aphorism the aphorism cannot be truth because of its principle of recognition of truth: “he who wants to recognize it, must be lie.” This line of thinking leads us to the larger question at stake here: How can one make a true statement about what truth is without the nature of truth already being given to qualify the statement as true? Once again, the Way exposes fundamental problems with our thought that can only be solved by continuing to find and follow the Way.

Aphorisms Together

Finding and Following the Way as it runs through multiple aphorisms requires discovering apparent contradictions among aphorisms and reconciling those contradictions into a paradox. This paradox forms the meta-reading. No definite guidelines can be provided for choosing which aphorisms to compare. The examples given in this chapter represent two possible extremes for comparison. The first example compares two aphorisms that have no apparent explicit relation, while the second example compares four aphorisms that share common themes.

21. So fest wie die Hand den Stein hält. Sie hält ihn aber fest nur um ihn desto weiter zu verwerfen. Aber auch in jene Weite führt der Weg.

21. As firmly as the hand grips the stone. It grips it firmly however only in order to throw it all the further. But the Way leads in that distance too.

48. An Fortschritt glauben heißt nicht glauben daß ein Fortschritt schon geschehen ist. Das wäre kein Glauben.

48. To believe in progress does not mean believing that a progression has already occurred. That would not be a belief.

In aphorism 21, a person is trying to remove a stone from the way. The person grips the stone tightly in order to throw it far away, assuming that the stone can be thrown far enough to be off the way, “but the Way leads in that distance too.” Based on the comparative “*desto weiter*” [all the further], one can infer that the person has encountered the stone before and attempted to throw it away; thus, the person now grips the stone more tightly in order to hurl it further than before, only to ultimately encounter it again and throw it again because “the Way leads in that distance too.” Relative to the stone, the person has made no progress; relative to the Way, the person has progressed. Progress has and has not been made.

In aphorism 48, belief in progress is self-defeating. It is and isn’t made. Similar to the problem of making true statements about truth in aphorism 80, to believe in progress means believing that no progress has yet occurred; thus, every current progression which one believes to be occurring must be denied once it can be qualified as a progression. As with the person and the stone in aphorism 21, no real progress is made within each individual progression, for each is denied and forgotten once it occurs, but in respect to an overall progression, the cycle of denial and forgetting has progressed. Progression cannot be seen in individual parts but only as a whole, which itself can only be seen when progress ceases, which would mean that it is no longer true progress. Progress has and has not been made.

The paradox created by combining these two aphorisms is that the human notion of progress denies the ability of progress to be progress (48), yet humans still seek to make some kind of progress (21), which would be a progression in itself if progress were possible, but which ultimately does form a part of a larger progression. The notion of progress is both deceiving and enlightening. It cannot exist in relationship to anything but itself. This is the measure of progress on the way, and as so one progresses on the way.

Progression is complicated here by the paradoxes of only two aphorisms, but the combination of four aphorisms yields even more complex paradoxes concerning the concepts of being and having.

35. Es gibt kein Haben, nur ein Sein, nur ein nach letztem Atem, nach Ersticken verlangendes Sein.

35. There is not a having, only a being, only a being that desires the last breath, desires suffocation.

37. Sein Antwort auf die Behauptung, er besitze vielleicht, sei aber nicht, war nur Zittern und Herzklopfen.

37. His reply to the claim, that he perhaps possesses but does not be, was only trembling and pounding of his heart.

46. Das Wort „sein“ bedeutet im Deutschen beides: Da-sein und Ihm-gehören.

46. The word *sein* in German means both things: existence and belonging to it.

57. Die Sprache kann für alles außerhalb der sinnlichen Welt nur andeutungsweise, aber niemals auch nur annähernd vergleichsweise gebraucht werden, da sie entsprechend der sinnlichen Welt nur vom Besitz und seinen Beziehungen handelt.

57. For everything outside the phenomenal world, language can be used only in a way that suggests but never in a way that even approaches comparison, since by its corresponding to the phenomenal world, it is concerned only with possession and the relations of possession.

It is best to progress in the reverse numerical order when considering the four above aphorisms. As aphorism 109 similarly does, aphorism 57 deals with the topic of the limitations of language to provide anything other than an inkling of what lies beyond the world of experience: “For everything outside the phenomenal world, language can be used only in a way that suggests but never in a way that even approaches comparison.” Language is limited because “it is concerned only with possession and the relations of possession.” Language does so because of the necessity of its correspondence to something other than itself, the phenomenal

world, for even empty words correspond to emptiness. Thus, whether it possesses or is possessed, language has no being other than possession. This is addressed in aphorism 46, for Kafka's literary language of German has a single word, *sein* [to be], that can mean both being and possession: "*Da-sein und Ihm-gehören*" [existence and belonging to it]. The meaning of "*Ihm-gehören*" [belonging to it] is problematic. What possesses what is ambiguous in this aphorism, for the object that is possessed is unnamed and left understood, and the possessor, *Ihm* [to it/to him], which is the masculine and neuter dative pronoun required by *gehören* [to belong], can refer to many other words within the aphorism: *das Wort* [the word], *Deutschen* [German], *Da-sein* [existence], or the understood object of *beides* [both]. Regardless of this ambiguity, the emphasis here is on *sein*'s meaning simultaneously both being and ownership. Ever aware of punctuation, Kafka even divided *Dasein* [existence] with the nonstandard hyphen while revising later drafts of the aphorism, which further emphasizes the relationship between being and owning in the context of language by giving the written words used to express them in the language of the aphorism similar appearances via the hyphens: "*Da-sein und Ihm-gehören.*" Taken together, aphorisms 57 and 46 erase the linguistic line between being and owning, between being and our being.

However, aphorisms 35 and 37 apparently contradict 46 and 57 by directly asserting distinctions between being and possessing in the context of language. Aphorism 37 narrates the reply of a nameless character who is told that he perhaps owns but does not exist: "His reply to the claim, that he perhaps possesses but does not be, was only trembling and pounding of his heart." This would be impossible for a user of language according to aphorisms 46 and 57, for by using language (which is done here by declaration and reply), the character invokes both existence and possession. However, the nameless character does not reply with language once

he is informed that he only possesses; he replies only with trembling and pounding of his heart. The declaration has stricken him dumb. Thus, to assert a distinction between possessing and being and thereby to possess without being, one can only abandon language for other mediums of communication.

According to aphorism 35, to achieve the opposite of 37, to be without possessing or being possessed, one must seek to cease to be: “There is not a having, only a being, only a being that desires the last breath, desires suffocation.” Like 37, Aphorism 35 asserts a distinction between being and having, but like 46 and 57, it also denies that distinction. By denying the existence of having verbally (“Es gibt kein Haben...”), aphorism 35 acknowledges having in language by mentioning its word but disavows having outside of language by saying it doesn’t exist. By doing so, it begins to uncover being without owning; however this being desires its own end. This is the truth of being beyond the phenomenal world and outside of language. For being to be without having, one must assert the singleness of the two and deny it, having must receive its form only in denial through language, which recognizes having and also negates it; we may be without having only when being has rid itself of having, which requires a being that desires the last breath of suffocation in order to rid being of its final possessor and possession, *the being*.

The paradoxical meta-reading of aphorism 35, 37, 46, and 57 is that there are and simultaneously are not distinctions between being and having, depending on how and when we are using our language. There is a possibility of having without being, but we cannot speak it, we cannot use language in that state. There is a possibility to be without having, but that existence must desire its own end in order to rid itself of the being that possesses its being.

Aphorisms Revisited

Beyond the many thematic cycles of these aphorisms is an actual physical cycle, for in the case of eight aphorisms, Kafka returned two years after their initial composition to add aphorisms to each under the same numbered heading, dividing them with a horizontal line drawn across the page. The additional aphorisms were composed in the fall of 1920 during another long period of aphoristic production and can be found among hundreds of other entries in a bundle of papers in Kafka's *Nachlaß* from the second half of 1920. While the original one hundred and six aphorisms were extracted from the octavo notebooks in the order they appeared, these additional aphorisms were extracted in seemingly random order from the bundle of papers, though their placement in the final collection appears to have method. It is important to note that Kafka most likely did not compose these additional aphorisms with each original aphorism to which each additional aphorism would be added specifically in mind, for the additional aphorisms were composed in the same fashion as the original ones, in a log recording daily reflections, and are among hundreds of other entries in the bundle of papers written two years after the original aphorisms. Thus, the relation of each additional aphorism to the one with which it shares a page finds its origin in Kafka's editing but not his initial composition. Furthermore, in most cases the additional aphorisms were not changed from the form in which they appear in the bundle of papers, and in the cases where the additional aphorisms were changed, the changes were minor. Thus none of the additional aphorisms were edited in such a way as to make their relation to the aphorisms with which they share pages any stronger or weaker. One cannot ascertain whether Kafka meant these additions to replace the aphorisms with which they share a page or complement them; however, one can by comparison glean something further of the Way from them: That a return to parts of the Way is part of the way. However, a return is not for

reminiscence but to assert a denial of what is asserted in the previous aphorism. Such a process helps to guard against any distortion of knowledge that the previous aphorism itself may be asserting. This way of reading requires examining aphorisms that Kafka “revisited” by adding another aphorism to the page that originally only had one and discovering what commentary and critique the latter aphorism provides on the former. Aphorism 94 illustrates well this need for return on the way as radical testing:

94. Zwei Aufgaben des Lebensanfangs: Deinen Kreis immer mehr einschränken und immer wieder nachprüfen, ob Du Dich nicht irgendwo außerhalb Deines Kreises versteckt hältst.

94. Two tasks from the outset of life: To shrink your circle ever more inward and to test ever again whether you are not hiding somewhere outside your circle.

Having seen the contradictions and paradoxes within single aphorisms and in comparisons among multiple separate aphorisms, let us move on to these aphorisms combined under the same numbers and the notion of return. Some of the aphorisms selected for previous comparisons in this paper were chosen because they shared similar themes; however, the aphorisms discussed here are somewhat artificially chosen based solely on the fact that they share pages and were returned to by the author.⁹

29. Die Hintergedanken, mit denen Du das Böse in Dir aufnimmst, sind nicht die Dienen, sondern die des Bösen.

Das Tier entwindet dem Herrn die Peitsche und peitscht sich selbst um Herr zu werden und weiß nicht daß das nur eine Phantasie ist, erzeugt durch einen neuen Knoten im Peitschenriemen des Herrn.

29. The ulterior motives with which you admit and establish evil in yourself are not your own, but those of evil.

⁹ The additional and original aphorisms 26 and 39, which are among those aphorisms with later additions, are excluded from this discussion in order to shorten it and because of the complications presented by strikethrough and derivation. 26/1 one is struck through, which makes it a likely candidate for replacement. 39/1 was not struck through but has the added complication of being the only aphorism with a derivative aphorism (39a).

The animal wrests the whip from the master and whips itself in order to become master and does not know that it is only a fantasy created by a new knot in the lash of the master's whip.

Both aphorisms of 29 deal with the problem of the deception of the appropriation of power. The first aphorism depicts the fact that Evil is ever alluring, and it will deceive one into thinking that it can be used via "ulterior motives" for Good, only so Evil may be admitted and established within a person and then convince its new host that the "ulterior motives" were indeed Good. The second aphorism undermines that notion by showing that it is not just the moral appropriation of Evil for Good that deceives one, but the amoral appropriation of power in general, even power over the self. The master tricks the animal by letting it have the whip so that it can whip itself and believe itself master when the original master is still in charge. The original master is still in charge via the mental deception of the animal's belief that it is now in charge. The master is now even more powerful because his control over the animal is unknown to the animal. The deception is similar in both aphorisms of 29, but the moral deception of 29/1 is abstracted to an amoral deception in 29/2. The amorality is emphasized by the transition from a direct address to the human reader in a familiar but respectful form in 29/1 (the capitalization of *Du* and *Dich*) to a third person narrative about an animal and its master in 29/2.

54. Es gibt nicht anderes als eine geistige Welt; was wir sinnliche Welt nennen ist das Böse in der geistigen und was wir böse nennen ist nur eine Notwendigkeit eines Augenblicks unserer ewigen Entwicklung.

Mit stärkstem Licht kann man die Welt auflösen. Vor schwachen Augen wird sie fest, vor noch schwächeren bekommt sie Fäuste, vor noch schwächeren wird sie schamhaft und zerschmettert den, der sie anzuschauen wagt.

54. There is nothing other than a spiritual world; what we call the phenomenal world is the evil in the spiritual world, and what we call evil is only a necessity of a moment of our eternal development.

With the strongest light one can (dis-)solve the world. Before weak eyes it becomes solid, before still weaker eyes it develops fists, before still weaker eyes it becomes shameful and smashes to bits him who dares to look at it.

Aphorisms 54/1 and 54/2 consider the problems of phenomenism as Evil. 54/1 is examined earlier in chapter one but should take on a new meaning in this present light. 54/1 explains that the whole of existence is unknowingly within the spiritual world and that all that is perceived to be the world is actually the Evil of the spiritual world. In our ignorance, we call what is necessary to our development Evil. 54/2 undermines the knowledge given in 54/1 by removing any possibility of proving 54/1. 54/2 does this by showing that any attempt to go beyond the phenomenal world and experience the spiritual world is self-defeating because the experience sought is still a phenomenal one. The phenomenism of Evil will not allow one to go beyond itself. He who comes with the strongest light will blind himself by that light and risk the wrath of Evil smashing him to bits. This prohibition by Evil is further emphasized by the transition from a first-person-plural “*wir*” [we] in the 54/1 to a generic “*man*” [one] in 54/2. 54/1 is all-inclusive in its description of man’s situation via the first-person plural, whereas 54/2 adopts a conditional and individualistic tone of prohibition via a third-person singular by describing the scenario of an individual seeking to dissolve the phenomenal world rather than simply prohibiting everyone.

76. Diese Gefühl: „hier ankere ich nicht“ und gleich die wogende tragende Flut um sich fühlen.

Ein Umschwung. Lauernd, ängstlich, hoffend umschleicht die Antwort die Frage, sucht verzweifelt in ihrem unzugänglichen Gesicht, folgt ihr auf den sinnlosesten d. h. von der Antwort möglichst wegstrebenden Wegen.

76. This feeling: “Here I will not anchor” and simultaneously feeling the surging flood around himself bearing him.

An about-face: Lurking, fearful, hoping the answer creeps around the question, seeking doubt in its inaccessible face, follows it along the most senseless paths, i.e., the farthest possible distance away from the answer.

76/1 and 76/2 concern the connotations of freedom in movement and being unfixed from a particular location. In 76/1 a person gets the feeling of not being anchored to a given place and immediately feels himself lifted by a “surging flood,” as if he were carried by the tide out to sea. The nuances of 76/1 connote a pleasurable experience of movement and of unfixing oneself from a spot, whereas 76/2 portrays a dubious and deceitful experience of free movement. In 76/2 the answer stalks the question, which is described as reversal from the norm by the opening words “*Ein Umschwung*” [An about-face]. Normally, the question seeks the answer, and it seeks its anchor in the answer. But the answer has now concealed itself and secretly follows the question as it seeks the answer “on the most senseless paths,” which are the farthest possible distance away from the answer because the answer is in motion and is concealed. In 76/1 the freedom in movement is extolled, whereas in 76/2, this notion is undermined by the negative connotations of freedom in movement as a blind person wandering in deception.

99. Wieviel bedrückender als die unerbittlichste Überzeugung von unserem gegenwärtigen sündhaften Stand ist selbst die schwächste Überzeugung von der einstigen ewigen Rechtfertigung unserer Zeitlichkeit. Nur die Kraft im Ertragen dieser zweiten Übergzeugung, welche in ihrer Reinheit die erste voll umfaßt, ist das Maß des Glaubens.

Manche nehmen an, daß neben dem großen Urbetrug noch in jedem Fall eigens für sie ein kleiner besonderer Betrug veranstaltet wird, daß also wenn ein Liebesspiel auf der Bühne aufgeführt wird, die Schauspielerin außer dem verlogenen Lächeln für ihren Geliebten auch noch ein besonders hinterhältiges Lächeln für den ganz bestimmten Zuschauer auf der letzten Gallerie hat. Das heißt zu weit gehn.

99. So much more depressing than the most inexorable conviction of our present state being sinful is the weakest conviction of our former and eternal justification of our temporality itself. Only the strength in bearing this second conviction, which in its purity the first completely contains, is the measure of faith.

Many assume that besides the great original deception a special little deception is provided specifically for them in every case, that thus when a romantic play is acted on the stage, the actress has apart from the deceitful smile for her lover still also an especially treacherous smile for the quite certain spectator in the last gallery. This is going too far.

Aphorisms 99/1 and 99/2 discuss the issue of prerequisite beliefs. In 99/1 the necessity of a prerequisite belief in temporality in order to judge our present state as sinful is shown. For one to believe that we are presently in sin, one must believe in the present itself as differing from a past and future. Thus, the measure of faith is independent of our judgment of our present state, but rather the measure of faith is the strength of our belief in time's passing and lasting eternally when we are present for only an infinitesimal part of eternity. The judgment of our present state depends on the strength of our belief in temporality. In 99/2 the prerequisite belief is in "the great original deception." Belief in the great original deception is required for one to believe in "a special little deception." As the conviction of temporality wholly contains and is prerequisite for the conviction of a present sinful state in 99/1, the great original deception wholly contains and is prerequisite for any special little deceptions. However, whereas the conviction of a present sinful state is hailed as "inexorable" in 99/1, the belief in a special deception is ridiculed in 99/2 by the final sentence: "This is going too far." Unlike the separate convictions of temporality and sin in 99/1, the convictions of 99/2 are inseparable. Any special little deception is inseparable from the great original deception in that, because of its "going too far" and thus being false, the special little deception is a deception in that it is not a special little deception but a manifestation of the great original deception. Whereas 99/1 depicts beliefs in prerequisites as the measure of faith, 99/2 depicts the belief in prerequisites as immeasurable deception.

106. Die Demut gibt jedem, auch dem einsam Verzweifelnden das stärkste Verhältnis zum Mitmenschen und zwar sofort, allerdings nur bei völliger und dauernder Demut. Sie kann das deshalb, weil sie die wahre Gebetsprache ist, gleichzeitig Anbetung und festeste Verbindung. Das Verhältnis zum

Mitmenschen ist das Verhältnis des Gebetes, das Verhältnis zu sich das Verhältnis des Strebens; aus dem Gebet wird die Kraft für das Streben geholt.

Kannst Du denn etwas anderes kennen als Betrug? Wird einmal der Betrug vernichtet darfst Du ja nicht hinsehn oder Du wirst zur Salzsäule.

106. Devotion gives to each, even to him alone in despair, the strongest relationship to fellow men and surely is it given immediately, though obviously only with complete and continuous devotion. It can do this because it is the true language of prayer, simultaneously worship and the most solid unity. The relationship to fellow men is the relationship of prayer, the relationship to oneself is the relationship of striving; out of prayer the strength for the striving is gotten.

Can you know anything other than deception? If deception is ever annihilated, you must not look towards it, or you will be turned into a pillar of salt.

Aphorisms 106/1 and 106/2 present two different perspectives on religious devotion. In 106/1, “devotion gives to each, even him alone in despair” over his faith, the strongest relation to his fellow men. Devotion is “the true language of prayer,” for it is a prayer that worships rather than asks. The truly devoted ask for nothing. Selfless devotion to God expressed in prayer brings one closer to his fellow men, but devotion requires striving and effort to maintain it completely and continuously. To be completely devoted to an other is to deny the self; the strength to strive to deny the self comes from prayer; prayer expresses devotion to God; devotion to God relates one to his fellow men; the relationship to fellow men denies the self. Thus faith in its strongest form, devotion, ultimately denies the self and brings all men into unity.

In 106/2, the notion of religious devotion leading to human unity is undermined by the notion of religious devotion leading to deception. 106/2 alludes to the story of Lot in chapter nineteen of the book Genesis. Lot is the nephew of Abraham. He lives with his immediate family in the city of Sodom, which is notorious for its wickedness. Many pray to God to do something about Sodom. God decides to destroy Sodom, but Abraham argues with God that destroying Sodom will kill righteous people as well. After much arguing, God agrees that if he

can find ten righteous people living in Sodom, he will not destroy the city. God then sends two angels to Sodom. When they arrive in the city, Lot bows down to them and takes them into his home. When the citizens of Sodom hear of the two strangers that have come to their city, all of the men gather around Lot's house and demand that the angels, who the citizens believe to be merely strangers, be brought out so that they can have sex with them. Lot, showing his devotion to God, goes outside his house and refuses to turn the angels over to the citizens and instead offers his two virgin daughters to the citizens so that they may rape them. When the angels hear this, they pull Lot inside the house and strike all the citizens outside with blindness. They then warn Lot to flee from Sodom to the mountains because God is going to destroy Sodom. Lot asks that instead he be allowed to flee to Zoar, a small village nearby. The angels allow him to do so, which saves Zoar from destruction by God. The angels warn Lot not to look back towards Sodom. After Lot and his family reach Zoar, God begins destroying Sodom, but Lot's wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. After the destruction of Sodom, Lot and his two daughters go to live in the mountains. Because there are no men there, each of Lot's daughters gets him drunk on wine and has sex with him while Lot is unconscious. Both daughters become pregnant by the father.

106/2 depicts the downside of complete devotion. Being devoted requires one not to violate the prohibitions of God, though doing as God wishes may not be rewarded. Lot's wife violated God's prohibition of looking back on Sodom, and she became a pillar of salt. 106/2 opens with the question, "Can you know anything other than deception," the second sentence answers the question with a prohibition, "[i]f deception is ever annihilated, you must not look towards it, or you will be turned into a pillar of salt," which ultimately says that one cannot know anything other than deception. This prohibition mimics the voice of God by its analogous

relationship to the prohibition of God not to look on Sodom. Devotion to God requires obedience to prohibitions and thereby confinement to deception. Thus devotion brings unity to mankind in 106/1 but also mass delusion in 106/2.

The Way Goes On

109. „Daß es uns an Glauben fehle, kann man nicht sagen. Allein die einfache Tatsache unseres Lebens ist in ihrem Glaubenswert gar nicht auszuschöpfen.“

„Hier wäre ein Glaubenswert? Man kann doch nicht nicht-leben.“

„Eben in diesem ‚kann doch nicht‘ steckt die wahnsinnige Kraft des Glaubens; in dieser Verneinung bekommt sie Gestalt.“

Es ist nicht notwendig, daß Du aus dem Haus gehst. Bleib bei Deinem Tisch und horche. Horche nicht einmal, warte nur. Warte nicht einmal, sei völlig still und allein. Anbieten wird sich Dir die Welt zur Entlarvung, sie kann nicht anders, verzückt wird sie sich vor Dir winden.

109. “That we are lacking in faith cannot be said. The simple fact alone that we are alive is not to be exhausted of its worthiness of faith.”

“You say that has worthiness of faith? But one cannot not-live though.”

“Even in this ‘cannot’ there is the insane power of faith; in this denial it receives its form.”

It is not necessary that you go out of your house. Remain by your table and listen. Do not even listen, only wait. Do not even wait, be completely still and alone. The world will offer itself to you to be unmasked; it cannot do otherwise, in ecstasy it will writhe before you.

Aphorism 109 is the last revisited aphorism and the last of Kafka’s Zürau aphorisms. One cannot ascertain whether 109 was intended to close the finished collection. Kafka chose the position of 109/1 in the collection based on its chronological position in the original notebooks, but the position of 109/2 was not chosen for the same reason. Though the question of its intended position is unanswerable, 109 functions well as an ending for the collection, for the

commentary that 109/2 provides for 109/1, in turn provides a commentary for the entire collection.

Aphorism 109/1 is previously analyzed in detail chapter two. 109/1 illustrates the limitations of language and logic based on language yet also illustrates man's inextinguishable faith in language to speak truth and the necessity of that faith. If 109/1 questions language's ability to speak truth, then one would presume to look elsewhere for truth. Aphorism 109/2 explores this option and illustrates that man's faith in language and in language's ability to communicate truth to and from others is perhaps futile. 109/2 opens with the simple declaration that it is not necessary to leave one's home. It follows with the commands to remain by one's table and listen. To remain by one's table is easy, but to listen out for something, to hearken (cognate of "*hörchen*"), is to expect it, to desire a sign of its coming or not coming. One cannot listen out for "the unmasking of the world," for it is not such a form of communication. "The unmasking of the world" is an uncovering. The aphorism follows this chain of logic and demands that the reader only wait; however, waiting implies an expectation for an event that will end the waiting. One cannot wait for a sign communicating the world's unmasking of itself. One can only "be completely still and alone," then one can do what so many of Kafka's other aphorisms say is impossible — to see the world unmasked. When one is completely still and alone, "[t]he world will offer itself to you to be unmasked." However, the experience of unmasking the world is not something that can be communicated via language and perhaps not at all, for one must be "completely quiet and alone," and thus, befitting as the pervasive irony of this entire collection of aphorisms, language here proves its own impotence. The words of the aphorism and indeed the words of all the aphorisms of the collection, deprive the aphorism of its

power, the ability of language to communicate truth, while simultaneously communicating that fact.

This is where the Way leads us, but this is not an end of the Way. The Way goes on. The unmasking of the world is the uncovering of the Way. Kafka's "unfinished" project of the Zürau aphorisms "ends" here the only way it can—by denying what it asserts—that we as humans live in a world of deception created by us because of our inability to come to terms with our knowledge of Good and Evil; that this deception is omnipresent; that the only way out of this deception is finding and following the Way, which involves reading pieces of language, aphorisms, which constantly undermine the language they use as they use it and which ultimately lead us to abandon language only to return to language to find and follow the Way. The Way goes on.

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