

Nowhere to Go Humanity, an Economic Rejoinder to Timo Airaksinen ¹

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Abstract

This paper responds to Timo Airaksinen's assessment of the meaning of Kafka's two main novels from a linguistic point of view. The main argument of this paper is that Kafka's highly illusive symbolic style (form) of writing is not an art as an end in itself but serves purposefully to depict the circumstances of unhappiness in modern societies. In contrast to the opaque characters in his writing (as an analogy to the abstract form of symbolic modern painting), the contents of his novels have the ambition to pass a meaning to reality that is left open to readers in search for a consensual interpretation. A general conclusion is drawn that Kafka's art bears a comparative parallel with modern social sciences and with the criteria for objectification of its content.

Keywords: Form, content, symbols, ambiguity, behavior, objectives

The truth is rarely pure and never simple.
Oscar Wilde

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1. Kafka's Opaque Style and the Outlook of Economics

Tolstoy opened his *Anna Karenina* with "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." This is the genial synopsis of that novel. **The novels of Franz Kafka² are predominantly about human unhappiness and frustration**, which are an inextricable part of the human existence. The first task of a social investigator of such phenomena would concern their origin. Is the cause of "unhappiness" exogenous or endogenous to human life? To which extent are the roots of unhappiness objective, and where is it simply a subjective perception, difficult to communicate or amend? Can we derive from unhappiness an implication of guilt and sentencing? In other words, who (or, more correctly, what) should be blamed for an individual's unhappiness? Of course, both types of causes of unhappiness, exogenous or endogenous, can occur together in a puzzling circular interaction. They can be approached by science, e.g. by positive psychology (Seligman 2009) or by economics of happiness (Frey 2008) or, alternatively, by art. For example, authors of *belles lettres* can illustrate unhappiness and its causes through fictional "case studies" and "stylized facts". The artistic analysis of such abstract human experiences calls for specific literary techniques (forms), which make the rhetorical linguistic, or tropological descriptions of (un)happiness different from the scientific analyses where the latter are methodologically much more restrictive in the usage of language. Nevertheless, one might hypothesize that Kafka's art could be treated as a parallel to social sciences, using a different explanatory technique. Testing this approach is the primary objective of this article.

To analyze the writings of Kafka, Airaksinen (2017) utilized linguistics and tropological instruments to methodologically explain Kafka's philosophy and art. Airaksinen's key trope is "ambiguity", as it refers to Kafka's epistemology that is biased towards relativism, thus to paradoxes, irony and objectification failures. Such a highly stylistic description of life's

² Following T. Airaksinen, we shall concentrate in this paper on Kafka's two main works: *The Castle* (Kafka 2009a) and *The Process* (Kafka 2009b). A minor consideration will be given to his shorter novel *In the Penal Colony* (Kafka 1988).

ambiguities reveals Kafka's lack of trust in human rationality. Nevertheless, these ambiguities could be compared with reality and tested whether the literary world is an authentic reflection of real lives or, at least, if it offers a credible perception of both human woes and triumphs in their latent subjective substance. The status of social interactions, dealing for example with commitment, love, empathy, trust, loyalty, recognition or appreciation, could be tested to question whether such social interactions always converge to a mutually positive consensus between interacting parties. A failure of positive consensus for either party in these interactions could be labeled "social estrangement".

A "metaphor" is then just an artistic literary instrument for describing such frail subjectively perceived and abstract events and processes. In addition, the perception of social interaction is fertile for wishful thinking and normative expectations that give a particular, personalized bias to empirical observations. Once there is no equivalence in describing empirical objects by pre-defined theoretical entities, the usage of "proxies" becomes a practical resort out of emergency even in such a hard science like physics. Explaining social perceptions of abstract phenomena, where rationality, feelings, instincts and institutions of social order are co-acting, is even much more open to such weak equivalences. Therefore, Kafka's literary world is choked with "proxies", which extend metaphors by other tropes, such as through metonymies, antinomies, allegories or hyperboles, in order to add „dynamism“ of life to otherwise static verbal descriptions of such abstract objects as feeling, impression, contemplation, intent or uncertainty, that are difficult to control, frustrating so their actors. Rhetorical linguistic tools like metaphors are therefore efficient instruments for the techniques of writing in modern literary art. However, it is important to remember that they describe just a fraction of formal aspects of art.

To expand the literary analysis, Airaksinen further detaches his argument from traditional linguistics. It is not only the Kafka's language that is ambiguous, but so is the environment

populated by the heroes of his novels. Consequentially, Kafka's writings acquire a more general connotation when describing our social world. They become as relevant to the depiction of certain particular individual perception of one's own life, as to our generalized explanation of reality as lived by millions of people. Here, in the formation of a generalized knowledge, the art and the science overlap. In order to test the general properties of Kafka's descriptions of social interactions of individuals, Airaksinen subjects them to three closely related tropes: **Meeting, Visiting and Travelling. Their meaning is dichotomous: associated with mutual human "encounter" and "recognition" on the one hand, or with their failure, on the other hand.** We can say these are the main avenues of social interactions, representing the core of human social existence, explained otherwise also by religion, psychology, sociology, anthropology, law, political science and economics. In this study, we will concentrate on the interaction between art and science by testing the hypothesis that Airaksinen's methodology can be refined and enriched through adopting the methodologies of various social sciences.

As a special case, we will test whether Kafka's novels can be subjected to an economic interpretation. In order to avoid confusion, since economics has many branches and even more interpretations in the public, the role of "economics" in this particular case needs clarification. Here, "economics" is understood in the microeconomic meaning: as a study of human behavior connected with the production, exchange and consumption of human values (products) for the attainment of wellbeing by sacrificing costs (e.g. scarce resources). This is a slightly modified definition, originally attributed to Marshall (1920 [1890]: 1-2).

According to Airaksinen, the basic social interaction is "meeting" where people recognize each other, share their values and form an *ad hoc* belonging to a social unit. We can presuppose that this is the base of a happy, authentic human life aimed for by individuals. Strangely, Airaksinen applies here the condition of a vertical social mobility that is always bound to fail. But is this a credible reason for a failure? We can have doubts about that.

The success of a “meeting” cannot be *a priori* ascribed to horizontal class relationships only. Instead, we should ask about the aims of a meeting. Is the meeting meant for gaining creative enrichment from mutual interaction? If so, then it can be subjected to a Pareto condition where the enrichment is multilateral, i.e. where no party loses. Thus all meetings aim for certain optimality that can, but need not, always be reached, similarly as tradesmen intend to gain from exchanges but not all bargains succeed. So, any social meeting can be interpreted as a potential for a “micro-entrepreneurial” venture aiming at a gain. The dominant normal objective of people in social interactions is constructive: they neither meet (voluntarily) in order to be unilaterally open to a loss due to evident predatory redistribution (e.g., to let themselves be robbed or humiliated), nor will they meet in order to cause bilateral harm (where the objective is mutual destruction). The natural risk aversion protects humans from such straight negative exposures. Generally speaking, the majority of free social interactions should end up in Pareto-optimal outcomes. However, how is it in cases of institutionally forced interactions where the freedom of action is blocked?

Here we arrive at a three-pronged classification of human entrepreneurial activities described by Baumol (1990) where the objectives of innovative individuals are directed to productive, redistributive and destructive aims. For the latter two cases Airaksinen assigns the trope “visit”, as an antinomy to mutually enriching “meetings”. He infers that Kafka’s literary “life is all about ... anxiety-ridden encounters where people fail to meet each other” (Airaksinen 2017: 3). This is about intended meetings becoming corrupt non-meetings, i.e. mere “visits” – physical contacts full of costs that bring hardly anything positive in return. In order to delve deeper into the problem, we can subject the phenomena of “meetings” and “visits” to the following two hypotheses akin to gravity models of spatial interactions (Head and Mayer 2013: 23):

- a) The larger the remoteness between classes among the people in various communities and the larger their “mutual otherness”, the greater the probability

of their communication failure reducing “meetings” to frustrating “visits” or even to “no contacts”. Since the Castle community is remote from the Village their interaction is burdened with additional costs and thus bound to be less efficient.

- b) The intensity of contacts between two communities is proportionally related to their size. Considering that the community of upper classes belonging to the Castle is much smaller than the communities of middle and lower classes down in the countryside, the “meetings” between the former and the latter two have a natural tendency to be scarce.

Thus, economics would agree with Airaksinen that vertical social interaction is more difficult than the horizontal one. But this does not imply that vertical communication must always fail. In Kafka’s novels the fragility of vertical meetings serves as a source of thrill – as metaphors for prowling social misunderstandings, whose sources of potential conflicts often remain hidden in mystery. The trapped individuals experience a failure that is not predictable and becomes exogenous to their actions. If any of the novels’ protagonists reached his aim on the first or second attempt or if the failure could be known in advance, there would not be anything left that could represent the Kafkaesque world, either literary or real.

Airaksinen’s sequence of metaphors reaches its explanatory climax in the “master metaphor” that is represented by the “travel”. Its essence rests on purposeful social dynamics: through communication efforts (implying intended costs) trying to overcome the impediments to life such as isolation, loneliness or the provision of existential needs. Here we touched Maslow’s ranking of human needs (Maslow 1987, [1954]) whose upper rungs in the hierarchy of needs lead to happiness associated with love, esteem and self-actualization. Achieving these benefits requires effort and incurring costs – often substantial, lifelong costs. It is a sort of entrepreneurial venture aiming toward gains by undertaking investment and risk. Hence, activities of that type are studied and explained also by microeconomics. “Travel” becomes thus a universal human occupation and a

literary metaphor for exchanges of values that are hard-earned, a sort of *per aspera ad astra* that mark an intensive human endeavor full of risks that could end in a success or a failure.

Airaksinen ascribes only negative characteristics to “travel” in Kafka’s novels: anxiety, aimless wandering and endless, cursed penitence that brings it closer to his definition of an empty “visit” - akin to a perennially *a priori* lost business plan. Are the human efforts as dismal as that? Or was Kafka such a melancholic weirdo? I consider this too strict since it strips Kafka of another thrill. His novels are not as desperate as that. Our personal “travels” in general could be endowed with more gratifying characteristics since practically all people travel and they do it voluntarily, repeatedly and often with a great joy. Kafka himself travelled frequently. Therefore, socio-economic investigators have large niches in “travel” to explain not only how cost-intensive they were or how enriching to travelers their outcome was, but they can also study cases of failure, and especially when they fail systematically. Kafka was particularly attracted by such unfruitful stories, as seen in his *A Country Doctor*, *The Man Who Disappeared*, *In the Penal Colony*, *The Castle* and *The Trial*.

We can argue that an objective investigator of “travel” should be able to derive conclusions from more general circumstances of their success or failure. If some travels keep failing there must be causal reasons, which are distinct from reasons where travels are successful. Though Kafka was obsessed by the former, he must have been well aware of the existence of the lucky later cases. Without a contrast and potential alternative (that means without a volitional choice), the meaning of a failure in travels would lose its meaning. Literature describing anything absolutely firm and unchallengeable is lackluster. It would become akin to a novel built on repeating the futility in attempts to break the absolute laws of physics, such as “in any isolated real system we can neither create new energy, nor construe perpetual motion”. This implies that whenever “travelling” (as a necessary condition for a “meeting”) would have no positive meaning, i.e. it would always end up in a mere “visit”, then also “meeting” is stripped of meaning and becomes

redundant. In such circumstances, the description of success in vertical travel would become false fiction, a schmaltzy kitsch, and therefore a phenomenon not worth analyzing or writing about in serious art. Symmetrically, an endless description of failures in vertical travel would also become a trivial, bad work of art. The niche for a good art rests in the space between these two extreme positions, which contain more tension, suspense and uncertainty. A statistician would say that they have higher degrees of freedom implying the potential for more varied unexpected plots.

Introducing verticality versus horizontality in class interactions as dichotomy (Airaksinen 2017: 6) seems to me an arbitrary premature constraint that would degrade Kafka's art. We should understand the fundamental causes behind why either of these two interactions is bound to malfunction. That cannot be unveiled while we keep them shrouded in bizarre literary allegories. Here, the audience must read actively with intuition and internalize the allegory. One may even deduce that the claim that Kafka's "social world is then ambiguous to the core" (ibid, p. 6) needs further discussion because in many cases its characters (either main or auxiliary) do not seem to have a persistent problem with social meetings or behavioral opacity, what Airaksinen accepts for some horizontal class interactions only.

2. From Literary Forms to Literary Contents

The reader of any of Kafka's novels is exposed to an observation that their societies are "blind", i.e. the empirical analytical capacities of their members are constrained, which extends even to behavioral irrationality, which may resemble to feeble-mindedness or hallucination. As a result, they cannot foresee and arrange for an improvement in wellbeing through shared values and participation. Viewed from the perspective of Olson's (1965) theory of collective action, protagonists in Kafka's societies are not able to collude and collectively organize to attain the benefits of cooperation. However, this lacks both realism and an artistic counterpoint in designing the plots. We cannot claim that

Kafka assigned all aspects of society the status of blindness, irrationality and resulting ignorance. At least the village in *The Castle* and the city in *The Trial* have been built, all people maintained their livelihood, there was an awareness of collective identity and even a bureaucratic infrastructure had been organized. These all required substantial collective action both in the past and present, and rationality in coordination, though that rationality might largely differ from the rationality of ideal democracies functioning under perfect information on all markets (economic, political and inter-human).

Van Zomeren et al. (2008) analyzed over 180 studies of collective action in the world and tried to find common pre-conditions (“causes”) of their success or failure. The main factors triggering a quest for particular collective responses were perceptions of three parameters: injustice (i.e., potentials for improvement), efficacy (i.e., costs proportional to gains) and social identity (i.e. the feelings of collective unity), plus an ability to assign these three factors a shared value propounding the rationality of an action for change and the need of leadership. The study does not go deeper into the matter; it does not explain how the perceptions were formed, whether they were authentic or politically manipulated via ideology, ethics, media or culture. Kafka went further and undertook that quite fundamental search for the causes of a collective action failure. He combined the lack of perception of cooperation with epistemological barriers: the ambiguity (uncertainty) of recognizing the state of the world both in biased primary empirical observations and in constrained secondary communication with others. We can call it a transaction cost failure. His novels are full of confusion in the perception of facts and in their encoding into words and symbols for communication, preventing the sharing of minds and thus barring their transformation into an organization conducive to collective action.

People tend to respond collectively to perceived states of disadvantage, which may or may not spring so much from objective states of social reality. Thus, collective action is fostered as a defense, rectifying the perceived barriers leading to lost opportunities (injustice), providing for the availability of techniques to reallocate resources (efficacy)

and coping for the ability to organize by shared social identity. It is an opportunity cost approach typical for economic thinking where democracy, freedom and individualism are spawning collective action while totalitarian regimes, bureaucracy and forced collectivism are its impediments. Kafka, as an excellent observer of reality, was aware of such causes and effects and built them into his novels. His novels are not about free societies but societies locked in transaction costs, communication failures and resultant hardships. Both K's persist in fighting for their causes and try to organize collective actions.

The Kafkaesque enigma arises here: why were the main single characters side-lined even though they evidently were not successful in organizing a collective action, or even they often refrained from doing so? Indeed, they could be considered harmless to their society. Or, why were they not willing to adjust to practices ruling the rest of the population but remained in an assertive competitive mode of action and subject to a zero-sum game, instead of yielding and becoming cooperative? **The problem of social inefficiency where some persons, especially creative ones, are sidelined from the society is a perennial paradoxical mystery of life.** History has shown that there were periods where this problem had its ebbs and flows. The Nazi and Communist legacies were just two ostentatious outliers. Practically all creative citizens of a Communist country could experience an instant rebirth when the totalitarian regime suddenly demised. In parallel, there were locations with differences coexisting in the same time. The present world is not out of the exclusion game. We can cross an imaginary geographic or social border and enter into a different culture where creativity and freedom are not recognized. Yes, Josef K failed in the society of *The Trial*, but would he also fail, had he emigrated to London, or had he lived some 30 years before or 30 years later? To which extent is his experience general to all of our lives and what kind of lessons for one's own improvement can be drawn from Kafka's novels?

The core of Airaksinen's analysis deals with the philosophical conception of Kafka's world where the "unknowability of ultimate reality" (*de re*) is combined with "linguistic

ambiguity” (*de dicto*). These ambiguities are therefore present in both the ontological and the epistemological aspects. In consequence, individual perceptions of the Kafkaesque world do not “meet”, lacking the consensus subject to logic of shared aims. Therefore, also their actions cannot meet. The main actors are wobbling around, trying hard to rearrange the world and participate but their efficacy is unable to develop. They could be characterized as precursors of a “liquid modernity”, outlined much later by Bauman (2000), where feelings of instability and social estrangement pair with ambivalent perceptions of reality or even hazy (liquid) reality itself. We could agree, at least, that the world of Kafka abounds with descriptions of many impediments to happiness, which are shared in the feelings of life by people living in modern societies, passing so a non-conformist original message of a literary abstraction into the concrete. That is why Kafka’s novels keep living in the minds of readers because the experience from the novel and the experience from their lives overlap.

Now is the right moment to assess Airaksinen’s (2017) main conclusions concerning the meaning of Kafka’s novels. He envisaged them primarily in the form of writing technique while the contents of writing were subsidiary, lost in the form. That is characterized by statements such as, “What Kafka wants to say is never clear” (ibid. p. 2); “Kafka’s ... narrative totality fails under the weight of its relentless ambiguation”; “... the parable is deliberately meaningless” (p. 17); “Kafka’s special allegories ... allow for no interpretation” (p. 18); Kafka’s concluding narratives of the Priest in *The Trial* “... crystallize all the ambiguities of the text that is *ambiguous to the core*” (p. 18, emphasis is mine V.B.); or, as is epitomized in the Abstract, “... Kafka’s text does not allow for consensual interpretation. Any reader may read the text as he or she likes.”

Airaksinen’s “Nowhere to Go Kafka” is then prone to guide the reader to believe that Kafka’s value as an artist rests in a formalistic toying with words and, because of the ambiguity in form (presented *in dicto*), also the contents of Kafka’s world must be full of unknowable mysteries of meaninglessness. Consequently, such abstract key notions as

“estrangement”, “guilt”, “nothingness”, “understanding”, “friendship”, “happiness” or “human value” can be ascribed just subjectivist interpretations that are relative to the observer’s personal whims. This might suggest that Kafka also joined the club of formalist artists like Jackson Pollock in painting, Arnold Schönberg in music, Tristan Tzara in poetry or Marcel Duchamp in conceptual arts; becoming thus a spiritual father. Indeed, he would be akin to the case of Dada symbolized by Duchamp’s urinal presented provocatively as the *Fountain*. Claimed as the most influential artwork of the 20th century, the urinal as an artefact does not embody a message about the spiritual (artistic) abstraction of the world created by the artist, but relies on the fancy and frivolity of observers who are expected to assign their personal meaning to it, and subject that artwork to their own unrestrained subjectivity. Such independent and endogenous playful creativity, whose value depends as much on the wit and projections of the observing consumers of art, as on their dreams, deceit or ineptness, is an escape from the pretenses of rational claims on the world and from responsibility for costs of shared human achievement. I argue that this was definitely not the objective Kafka was aspiring to. He cared and wrote about reality and transformed his own perception of some specific, dim aspects of the world into figurative literary models whose interpretation can withstand the test for a generalized objective meaning. That is the root of his geniality.

Kafka touches notable philosophical aspects of the essence of the modern world wherein “truth” becomes detached from Nature, i.e. from the material empirical world, and where human “freedom” is confused with unrestrained *ad hoc* voluntarism. The misunderstanding originates in the “extended” social world, i.e. in that part of the world, which was created by human dominion over Nature. That world is largely immaterial, represented by ways of thinking and communication flows encoded into symbols or by the social infrastructure that is embodied in numerous institutions. In the last 400 years, following the reflections of Descartes, Kant or Rousseau, we can observe a tendency towards human autonomy (relative to Nature) that has regained popularity in recent three decades. The present social world can be characterized as “liquid” and “virtual,” embodied

in or mediated by infinite data, which subsequently became autonomous and lost the property of information. Kafka characterized that phenomenon in the following dialogue between Josef K and the Priest (*The Trial*, end of ch. 9):

"No", said the priest, "it is not necessary to accept everything as true, one must only accept it as necessary". "What a melancholy idea", said K, "it turns lying into a universal principle". K said that with finality, but it was not his final judgment.

The inability of people to rely on well-anchored, mutually shared “truths” and their confusion with meaningless gibberish, is the tenor of the Kafkaesque world. Communication has a meaning upon the condition where a rising quantity of configurations of data decreases the entropy of social actors. The “truth” symbolized by Kafka through K’s commitment to reaching the Castle or getting exoneration in *The Trial*, gets stuck in the inefficiency to process information. Here we reconnect with economics, particularly the economics of bounded rationality (Simon 1972) and economics of asymmetric information (Stiglitz and Greenwald 1986). In the Kafkaesque world, mutual listening and encompassing rational thinking based on shared objectives and criteria get distorted and consequently replaced by confusion stemming from irrationality, subjectivity and relativity of knowledge where the facts of the nature and facts of a fiction are interchanged. Such an environment opens freeway to the rule of implanted ideologies, authorities of celebrities and to “proofs” by mere (trumped-up) silence (see Macek, 2006). The latter two circumstances let to form the characteristic gloomy scenes in Kafka’s novels. Is this observation about potential maladies of societies not a heated topic for high art? Has Kafka not captured it sufficiently well? Is the present culture of “alternative facts”, “fake news” or “political correctness” not a part of his world?

Unhappiness can be defined in terms of investment economics where “investment” is conceived as forfeiting some human value in order to receive greater utility returns from it later. Thus, unhappiness can be explained as a failure to allocate human resources (e.g., the capacities for love, favor, creativity or happy living) optimally, as intended by human

normative expectations. Investments can clearly miss objectives and keep missing them further if the society loses the control mechanisms, as it happened e.g. in 33 Communist countries. Such a failure is also subject to subjectivity defaults where a personal projection (plan) gets thwarted by various external processes that were not correctly previewed. The existence of a poorly predictable nature of aspirations in the highly dynamic and spontaneous social world – where an individual loses identity in the mire of “data” generated by “others”, or where the authenticity of that individual is deliberately not recognized by society – is the essence of Kafka’s literary inquiries. Therefore, I challenge Airaksinen’s conclusion reprehending Kafka for the lack of clarity due to his allegoric style of writing.

3. The Nature of Kafka’s Characters and Their Environment

Kafka’s heroes are ordinary honest people who act quite realistically. In the Communist past the Marxian literary scholars (e.g., Goldstücker 1965) tried to argue ideologically, in order to keep Kafka off the black list of ideologically “hostile formalists”, that both K’s from *The Trial* and *The Castle* were actually guilty: as intellectuals they were estranged from the world of working class and were mistaken in searching for their vindication in the ranks of bureaucracy and high classes. Their guilt and failure were just. Those arguments are wrong. In reality, Kafka built his argument on the hypothesis that even the working classes (as all others) were tainted with communication failures and exposed to bureaucratic blind alleys, whose fate they accepted and internalized. Consequently, each of the main characters is “an other”: they are inadaptable outliers whose guilt is not endogenous, i.e. they did not consciously trespass any rule. Undoubtedly, anything they “committed” could be punishable neither in Kafka’s times, nor now under the present EU law. Indeed, both K’s could experience similar misfortunes even in our present world full of ambivalence. For example, where weapons of mass destruction are present and not

present; where NATO can be both obsolete and not obsolete any longer; where Brexit is both correct and incorrect; where migrants are wanted and not wanted; etc.

Laws in Kafka's novels are not merely formal: they are natural laws of inter-human conduct where everyone is both an object and subject of the law, and therefore, the "court" is paradoxically everywhere and nowhere. The "liquid post-fact modernity" complemented with its cult of formal "freedom" (that was also present in Kafka's novels), produces a fuzzy world where both the punishment for misdemeanor and the punishment for being borne (i.e. by the natural death) run in parallel quite irrationally and chaotically. Exercising human uniqueness (i.e. the creativity and the happiness) remains a painful mystery still. Definitely, this is a topic worth investigating through social sciences and arts, a topic that Kafka understood deeply.

It would be useful to confront Kafka's main characters, i.e. Josef K and Surveyor K, with their hypothetical antipodes. Both K's are certainly not supermen of the James Bond type, able to impose their ideals and will onto the reality that operates at a morally inferior level, thus bringing the world closer to perfection. "James Bonds" are kitsch because they are pre-arranged, fake winners. Though Kafka's heroes also undertake extreme challenges that the mysterious, surrounding world is imposing on them, they can neither cheat nor call hexes for a rescue. They must rely solely upon their own vulnerable body and mind as a shield that, in the long-run, will end in demise, at least due to attrition by toil and age. But, contrary to that, they do fight, despite the fact that they hardly move forward, notwithstanding their position as borne losers. In that they deserve esteem. There are many other exhausted figures among their partners and adversaries: bailiffs, lawyer Huld, merchant Block, Leni, doorkeeper, executioners; Olga, Amalia, Frieda, aids Arthur and Jeremiah, Klamm or Sortini. Many of these are tainted by some mental deficiency symbolizing weakness. Contrasting the formal side of Kafka's writing, full of ambiguities, allegories and abstractions, the authenticity of his characters is compatible with behavioral patterns that we may come across in our daily life.

Both main characters belong to higher social ranks. Josef K became a chief attorney of a bank before his age of 30. A bank is an institution managing money and capital – both crucial assets for creating wealth and power in modern societies. Land surveyor K was a professional skilled in geometry and logical thinking. Measuring land, as an asset, makes sense only in relationship to wealth and property, whose owners must be interested in capital yields. Both characters can be labeled upper middle class, whose positions also stem from the endowment of human capital and rationality. This is greatly contradictory to their mental opponents. The paradox is even deeper: the obsequious servants humiliate and indict their morally supreme adversaries through misdemeanor and finally score a sloppy victory. Rationality is defeated and the victorious, tedious bureaucracy makes all participating parties lose, which is a Pareto inefficient outcome signaling the presence of adverse selection – an economic concept explaining a failure (Akerlof 1970). Adverse selection is a clear social loss and a reason for deep thinking both in science and art.

In what kind of environment do the characters of Kafka jostle? Some thinkers are of the opinion that Kafka foresaw the rise of Nazism and Communism (see Arendt 1994; or Greif 2015: 134-141). Although we can agree that many aspects of his novels, particularly *In the Penal Colony* (Kafka 1988) could elicit this idea, the explicit totalitarian clout in his novels is much softer. It is not coming unilaterally from above as a command, as in Orwell's *1984*. Rather, Kafka's totality is based on the grass roots – as if it were genetic coding due to some Darwinian natural selection. His novels can be taken as a literary vanguard warning humanity about dangers that are endogenous to society (Greif 2015). Palpable, real danger – not just a subjective irrational fear – is omnipresent in modern societies, though it is insidious in its hazy evolution. Certainly, it is difficult to eliminate by hearty, prudent judgment of common sense or by organized political opposition amongst various social groups. Human rationality does not seem to be so powerful. The estrangement comes from all tiers of society where rationality appeals to a blind eye. From the view of Kafka's main characters the system is rotten, though, as the protagonists still hope, not rotten to the core. These main characters are not abject. The plot depicts the instances of their

individual resistance to challenges within bizarre social systems. Here, Kafka's aggrieved heroes largely share the environment and thinking from the novels of Dostoyevsky (see e.g. *Notes from Underground*). Sometimes, the overlap is stunning.

Neither could we claim that the world of Kafka's novels would lack freedom, which characterizes life under hard totalitarian regimes. We cannot propound with certainty that the ways of the two K's were completely tragic. Both practiced free personal life, contested with the environment and frequently created predicaments for their adversaries. They had fruitful, friendly encounters with such persons as Leni, Mrs. Grubach; Olga, Frieda, Barnabas or Hans. They even experienced free intellectual encounters with Block, Titorelli or the Priest. Kafka often exaggerates, uses tropes, hyperboles and metaphors as methodological instruments, but his presentation of the world retains contact with human casual experiences. The novels introduce scenarios that resemble our present life: dealing with guilt and debt (as a constant liability of humanity), as much as with freedom (as its asset), while revealing the fragility of the boundary between them. In the metaphor of "reaching the Castle" lost in the haze, surveyor K ponders the travesty of a resolution to achieve freedom, identity and recognition as ideal objectives of existence. A similar stance is taken with the endurance of human pains caused by social misunderstandings. It can be understood as a parallel to biblical salvation, which is portrayed as an unattainable treat, at least in this world. Though anyone would wish to attain a remission instantly, the surrounding world refuses to grant it.

In plain words, Kafka's characters attempt to answer "who is the Man of our age?" The plot itself is a test ground for his properties vis-à-vis the modern Man's social environment. That means the environment, whose decisive part is again the Man's own creation that often malfunctions. Characteristically, the Kafkaesque Man is a frail, hesitant and erratic hero, actually an anti-hero of our semi-virtual world of smug co-travelers and arrogant institutions. It is a Man that aims towards perfection but finds that the world

escapes him, unfulfilling of his expectations. A world that was supposed to be devised for the Man's advantage in reality becomes a cage of enigmatic traps.

4. Conclusion: Parallels between Art and Science

Methodologically, Kafka's novels are descriptive narratives, not normative ones preaching for or condemning morals. Ultimately, Kafka's fiction and its seemingly phantasmagorical plots aim to be potentially aligned with human lives, though everyone is free to his or her own interpretation of that relationship. The subjectivity of the reader's interpretation distinguishes art (literature in this particular case) from the science. Science is also characterized by descriptive analyses connected methodologically to abstract working terms. Science works with simplified model variables meant as proxies to reality, paralleling literature as it works with tropes, allegories and metaphors. Social sciences seek to explain the behavioral properties of studied phenomena, which can be also attributed to such arts as literature, painting, ballet or opera. But, science is fundamentally different in the methodology because through interpreting its findings science tries maximally to limit subjectivity by aiming to achieve universal understanding within the scientific community. That means its exactness is achievable exclusively within theoretical systems based on axioms where the empirics can only prove that the abstracted knowledge is not in categorical conflict with reality. Empirics, as much as science, cannot serve as a proof of absolute truth. Thus even science, similarly to art, leaves certain degree of expediency, i.e. doubt and subjectivity, in claiming that our understanding of the world is final and correct. Science and art meet here: they represent two different methods of the search for truth and the interpretation of the world.

In the sense of Karl Popper (1959), the knowledge embodied in the given theory either cannot be (just for the time being) proved false, or at least there are no better substitutes for a theory inconsistent with empirics. This implies an incremental and nonstop, relativist progress of understanding. According to Milton Friedman (1953), even incomplete science

can (as an analogy) prove useful in prediction, by decreasing the entropy of its users. Hence, we can say that science contributes to progress in human behavior. In these two aspects Kafka's novels again share similarities with science, notwithstanding that in art the progress in the search for understanding is achieved subjectively, and in fact intuitively, by the reader. Nevertheless, art adds value for the reader, provided it is a good art: it offers new, authentic content for the reader's life or, at least, a new understanding of life. This legacy is shared both by art and science despite their incompatible methods.

Indeed, Kafka's plots can be subjected to "proof" of their meanings by submitting them to empirical falsification vis-à-vis the reader's perception of the world. Their interpretation must be credible, otherwise they are misunderstood and rejected. If accepted, the plots also facilitate projections, i.e. provide for personal predictions of events and actions resulting from a better understanding of the world. Thus the situations and plots in novels are confronted with the reader's experience that gets re-adjusted, which is an approach to authentication of art proposed by John Dewey (1934). By authentic art the reader's past experience is enriched and upgraded into a new experience that has a pragmatic value. The fantastic images of Kafka's literary legacy thus can enrich the life of their readers, notwithstanding that his texts were not created for all-embracing consensual interpretation, which (by the definition of art) cannot avoid being symbolic, subjective, hyperbolic and, to some extent even metaphysical.

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