



Modelling the Pataphysics Exemplified in Franz Kafka's Novels

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Abstract: This article responds to the advances in adopting pataphysics in social studies presented in this journal by Timo Airaksinen. This contribution aims to present an alternative interpretation of pataphysics by using the methodology of general economics and to illustrate its implications in the novels of Franz Kafka. The idea is that pataphysics can become a complement instead of an antagonist of the social sciences, which helps to attenuate the methodological gap between science and art. Our analysis is based on the dichotomy between autoregressive and random walk conceptual models and on applying the principles of the autoimmunity models of medicine. The bizarre plots in Kafka's novels are interpreted as a pata-paradigm standing as an antithesis of the paradigm of neoclassical economics where all is logical, and all agents are better off.

*Ein Buch muß die Axt sein für das gefrorene Meer in uns.
Franz Kafka*

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1. Introduction

Since this contribution appears in a scientific journal, it makes sense to introduce pataphysics, the unconventional methodological instrument used in this paper, so that some of its readers do not consider it counterintuitive or disruptive. Axiomatically minded scientists should be ready to internalise its “pata-shock.” I will show that pataphysics is a valuable complement to science guided primarily by the metaphysics of abstract rational reasoning.

This fundamental working axiom needs clarification: Metaphysics is the study of what is outside objective experience, which is the world of ideas and the methodology of knowledge. As such, metaphysics is related to thinking, conscience, spirituality, persuasion, or intuition, all concerned with methods for understanding reality and developing theories about what exists and how it exists. In its systematised form, it is associated with ontology, epistemology and science. In its more casual alternative definition, metaphysics describes something opposite: thoughts with no basis in reality, for example, in the deliberations about wishful, serendipitous, religious or paranormal phenomena. Pataphysics can be then twinned with this second definition, which assigns pataphysics the role of a paradoxical complement to science. This paper explains this perplexing concept in more detail.

Our definition of pataphysics, a literary trope invented by French absurdist Alfred Jarry in 1911, is a paraphrase and extension of his descriptions in Chapter 8: Definition of Pataphysics (Jarry 1996). Thus, in our interpretation, pataphysics is a methodical study of imaginary solutions transgressing rationality, applied to social abnormalities, mysteries, or paradoxes. In a way, it is a sort of surrealism in art transposed into the pursuit of knowledge and understanding of the complexities of real life. Bök (2002: 20) discusses how “pataphysics, the science of imaginary solutions, thrives in environments where the dominance of truth and scientific reasoning has heightened our appreciation for imagination, intuition, unpredictability, and shock.” Thus, pataphysics examines the circumstances governing exceptions, the unexpected and absurdities, not the repeating universal causes. So, pataphysics can reflect our present disoriented world of post-modernism, post-truth, and their information chaos. (For more insights, see Clarke 2018; Hugill 2015; and Airaksinen 2023.)

Next, the author of this paper must acknowledge his dues to Timo Airaksinen for his two inspiring intellectual exercises (Airaksinen 2017; 2024), which got him to respond about the complements of his methodology. In the first rejoinder (Benáček 2018), I aimed for a fusion between classical “high art” (my hobby) and economics (my profession). I tried to illustrate how Kafka’s novels (like any real art) share similarities with science despite their incompatible methods. Art, jointly with social sciences, should add new knowledge and a new understanding of our world. Art relies on the subjectivity and intuition projected to the reader. At the same time, science argues by axioms, hypotheses, models and quantitative search for regularities in the behaviour of studied agents and objects.

In his second paper, Airaksinen (2024) analysed the behavioural patterns of actors in Kafka’s novels using pataphysics – a methodology appropriated by many artists. In contrast to science, pataphysics concentrates on the “residuals” unexplained by science, such as random hazards, irrationality, and mysteries of “black swans” in social development (Taleb 2007). The argument is that the mentioned “residuals” could be so prominent in the social sciences that there is a vast space left for literature and art to illustrate and explain them. Thus, there is also a space for alternatives to ruling social theories, as Popper (1959) defines science as a set of theoretical statements entailing predictions which have not been so far revealed to be false. Leibniz’s (1997) speculative claim about the existence of alternative “possible worlds” hypothesis is another methodological approach. Pataphysics also claims that there is no single evolution or interpretation of reality.

Thus, I was inspired by Airaksinen’s use of pataphysics to show *how art and economics can share their methodology and find a conjunction in their search for explaining human behaviour*. Novels by Franz Kafka are particularly suitable for such an exercise because pataphysics abounds generously in his works. I will stress what is often omitted in the assessments of his work: that he also dealt with the ontology, searching for the meaning of a Hegelian ‘being’ and that his novels are related to human reality.

Let us start by broadly defining economics: it is a method for analysing how society organises the production and *interhuman exchanges of artefacts* with economic value. There, the “economic value” can be both positive (beneficial and demanded) or negative (harmful and primarily unwanted); “artefacts” can include material products such as butter or

guns or intangible products such as safety, democracy, institutions, friendship or hatred. They all have their costs of production and benefits of consumption, which can be expressed by some measure, such as money prices, shadow prices, or opportunity costs that can be estimated irrespective of whether their “exchange” happened in a market, barter, or donation transactions, or even as an externality (positive or negative). Neoclassical economics is congenial in interpreting when and how the exchanges of artefacts with economic value converge to a general equilibrium and, thus, Pareto optimum in all exchanges. These transactions are constrained by current endowments with factors of production and a provision that the “invisible hand of the markets” satisfies certain (narrowly defined) conditions. Then, all demands of consumers are satisfied at their first best according to their purchasing budgets that are equal to their contribution to the common production set of benefits (e.g., the GDP). The interaction of all economic agents is thus both most effective and fair – fair according to their marginal contributions, which are affected exogenously by autonomous market forces.

The problem is that in axiomatic economics, there are too many conditions to guarantee the existence of the general equilibrium, and, in addition, there are too many artefacts suitable for exchanges but left without functioning markets. At the same time, in parallel, their extra-market bargaining fails, too. Thus, even in a highly competitive market economy, the reality is left with misallocated resources even in the long run. Kafka is possessed by that. An example is the failure to recover the value of Joseph K.'s intangible assets in *The Trial*: his lost credibility as a banker and citizen due to inefficient courts, information failure, failing public governance, etc. Or the general inability of the land surveyor K. in *The Castle* to find a suitable position in the labour market, find a female partner or become an effective citizen.

Kafka, characterised by his friends as a hilarious person with biting humour of the absurd, was particularly interested in describing human failures in exchanging positive artefacts, which economics explains by transaction costs. Another of his obsessions was the “production” and enforced consumption of goods with disutilities and externalities, such as hostility, bureaucratic harassment, or brutality. Therefore, we can consider the methodology used by Kafka in illustrating human failing exchanges as a paradigm opposite to the methodology of the neoclassical economic mainstream, where all exchanges reach optimum allocation of resources,

bringing benefits to all interacting parties in a win-win outcome, which is also the just outcome. Kafka's economics are about disequilibria, inefficiency, inconsistency, injustice, and constraints on human exchanges. Why do such weird things happen in our enlightened world where some or all actors in a transaction are worse off, failing so to exploit the benefits of their potential? Kafka and our daily news provide examples. Why are some people unhappy, why do we not understand each other, and why do deep constraints impede even simple transactions (e.g., getting friends)?

2. Normal State and Dynamics in Kafka

We can treat Kafka's main novels as models of the microeconomic behaviour of societies in the form of vegetative units (e.g., individuals sharing a community) under the following two contrasting situations.

2.1 Situation A: The Normal Static State

There exists initially (or potentially) some "Normal Static State" of units where all inter-human actions follow a specific path given by the "history of errands" that keep the system in equilibrium. The errands of all participating individuals are assigned to "social performance slots" (i.e., positions set by professions or duties) with well-defined tasks. The system performs like an autoregressive model replicating its past order

$$R_t = a + b R_{t-1} + \varepsilon_t$$

where R is the control variable characterising performance, such as total output, utility, felicity, etc. Its replication in time can be perfect if $a = 0$, $b = 1$ and $\varepsilon_t = 0$. Or, there can be a periodic built-in tendency for a change if $a \neq 0$ and/or $b \neq 1$. The marginal uncertainty is set if $\varepsilon_t > 0$, where in Situation A we assume very small values in ε_t/R_t .

It is like observing a small tract of land without a gardener (autocrat) where there are vegetations, which contest for living in a vegetative evolutionary way. A qualitative change in the flow of its history can occur only by a random walk principle with insignificantly small steps, modifying thus the error term in the trend. If the error term is small and can be fully internalised by the system, the development can be stable and, therefore, explained by a model.

Random walk is the explanatory model of pataphysics in this paper since the magnitude of its step can suddenly increase to a shock in development – which will be discussed next in Situation B. Hence, it is a

conceptual model, not a quantitative model of the econometric type. Its task is to set an unexpected qualitative change, its varied perceptions, disparate interpretations, and the need for readjustment into the theoretical analysis of social events. This is a way to introduce an exception to the lawlike hypotheses of the sciences (Airaksinen 2023: 7-8). The perceptions are subjective and specific for each individual, contrasting thus with the assumed objectivity of real changes. All real changes need interpretation, i.e., some prosaic narrative characterising the perception of a change, representing the “imaginary solution” pertinent to pataphysics.

For illustration, in *The Castle*, the village is the largest vegetative unit (i.e., community). Its middle units of the social discourse are formed by two pubs, a castle, a school, a family of Olga, etc. The smallest units are the acting individual characters: Fride, Klamm, Momus, Erlanger, mayor, Barnabas, etc., which all have pre-assigned social slots of incumbents. Their positions are hierarchical. K. is the only one without a slot. He is an Alien. The plot of the novel hinges on the narratives of how all units react to a change in their environment. We will discuss this later in Situation B since the Alien is not a part of Situation A.

Thus, there are very few conflicts in societies in the Normal State, as there are also no dominant *exogenous social objective functions* (competing aims) shared by the community, or at least by their governance bodies. Such aims could be: gaining wealth and profits; wielding power over the subordinates ranked in hierarchies;² or showing the status of moral superiority by sticking to social responsibility ethics. Therefore, the Normal State system is “flat”, without the volatility and big external shocks. Such a social unit is then in a slowly evolving equilibrium, performing in homeostasis (e.g., as the healthy human body does while aging), accepting the present autocracies and hierarchies. In Situation A, Kafka abstracts from the societies where their individuals must re-adjust to the objective needs of optimisation according to the socially shared aims, such as the maximisation of benefits, or resist the subjective whims of power-thirsty autocrats. His static Normal State forms the base for his pataphysics, launched by a sudden blast, shifting the situation from A to B. To understand this shift, it would be most helpful to the readers if they presumed that the plot in each of Kafka’s novels is launched *tacitly* from

² An exception is the substory of combative Sortini and fragile Amalia. It is methodologically different from the rest of the plots in the novel.

Situation A, where the protagonists lived in social harmony. The land surveyor K. in *The Castle*, lawyer Josef K. in *The Trial*, young Karl in *Amerika*, or Samsa in *The Metamorphosis* should be presumed to have lived a happy life before entering into the gloomy plot of the book. Similarly, Kafka lived a double life: one full of happiness and friendships and another full of anxieties.

In the stationery Kafkaesque world in Situation A, individuals accept things as they are, trying to act according to the assigned social performance slots. Such a society can be interpreted as the “golden times” that are easy to live in. But such ambrosial times never lasted for long.³ Should not a dramatic change be expected if such a utopia is not sustainable?

2.2 Situation B: The Dynamics in Kafka

The stationary flow of time in the Normal State A is disturbed by an external shock: the entry of an “alien” – a man without a portfolio, a free-rider and an immigrant. He is a person without an assigned slot; thus, he is a character outside of the incumbents' position in hierarchies. If we use the vocabulary of economics, the alien's search for his assignment into the socio-economic slot is the role of the labour market. In the community of *The Castle*, its performance is highly imperfect. In *The Trial*, Joseph K. was suddenly brought into conflict with his elite banking position, and there was no instrument to set his position right. Karl is bound to disembark and enter a confusing New World, Samsa wakes up as a large insect, etc.

We can model such an “alien” as a person whose past (autoregressive part) was minimised, or even discarded, and who would be subject to an increase in the step of random walk that starts to dominate. Its steps become massive and chaotic. Potentially they can induce a change in the parameters a and/or b , forming a transition to an “alternative world.”

According to Airaksinen (2024), this transition marks the social system's entry into pataphysics. We will call it “pata-situation”. Even though the pata-situation in the new alternative world can be full of bizarre circumstances, it may be as real as the previous quietistic one. For

³ An excellent illustration of the transition from the “belle époque” to a social nightmare is offered by Stefan Zweig in his *The World of Yesterday*, 1942.

example, K. in *The Castle* is suddenly not treated like a land surveyor and the search for his contract proceeds throughout the novel. Everyone treats him differently since he is illegible and incomprehensible to the incumbents. His invitation by the Castle was a part of the Castle's small error term. Similarly, it was an erroneous exception, which led to the indictment of K. in *The Trial*. An unexpected misstep in the random walk strikes a conflict into the homeostasis and transforms static Situation A into a dynamic pata-Situation B. For example, a gardener arrives at the pastoral tract of land and disturbs its equilibrium by intensive cultivation, or a vandal destroys its nature. Though exceptional, the upside-down changeover of societies and individuals has always been a salient feature of life that the social sciences cannot always convincingly explain, in contrast to the arts. The reader can find numerous fiction and non-fiction literature describing, e.g., an order-abiding citizen being suddenly locked in jail with criminals, a racial minority being turned into underdogs due to a political coup, or a depressed nation living under communism to become intoxicated by freedom once the walls of oppression break down.

In such a dramatic pata-change, not only do individuals enter into an alternative world, but they also undergo individual transitions into their alternative personality. Kafka concentrated particularly on such pata-situations and his method can be called pata-paradigm. For example, in both of his main novels, all their protagonists try to retain their former equilibria without solving their problem, thus getting into a situation of aliens that requires their adjustment. But no one around has the power (or will) to accept that. Also, the autonomous reallocation of one's position, typically performed by markets (e.g., bidding in negotiations), is failing. It is an institutional failure generating public bads and negative externalities where all agents are losing and cannot help it.

Transitions from stationary A to dynamic B are part of the human perception of frustration and a source of problems in general. We model that by a socio-economic system whose inter-human exchanges transition from the idealistic pure general equilibrium in Situation A to a down-to-earth position of reality describing their permanent multiple disequilibria arising from inconsistencies and inefficiencies in Situation B.

We can even relate the model of transition from A to B to a real situation by raising a speculative hypothesis that Situation A is also a model fitting the capitalist West after 1989, when the Cold War seemed to be bygone and when the capitalist system was expected to enter the world-wide stationary "end of history" (Fukuyama 1992). However, Fukuyama's

fantasy of perfection evolved into a pata-reality in Situation B once the societies in the West resigned to follow the system based on toilsome duties and individual responsibilities of capitalist competition, seemingly universal for all, and replaced them with more facile antitheses based on the beliefs in the right for equity, reliefs to the underperforming individuals and groups, dominance of redistributive politics over productive economics or general preference of the public provision of welfare for all. The transitions of post-communist countries to Fukuyama's brave new world were also falsified: some transited to highly imperfect markets, nepotism and backsliding (Cianetti and Hanley 2021), and some transited directly to autocracy and oligarchic economy (Aslund 2019).

In *The Castle* and *The Trial*, the conflicts are not with or between incumbent people but between the K.s and systems too fuzzy to be captured, rationalised, and brought to performance according to the general equilibrium. Since there are also no autocratic dictators or social coordinators to enforce equilibrium, there arises a potential for a myriad of conflicts between the transitioning K.s and the unchanged incumbents who still keep acting according to the errands assigned by their slots. This is also a realistic description of the social intercourse in modern societies biased against changes and their costs.

A unique feature is that Kafka's pataphysics fails in the solution of discords by rationality since there are no such objectives in the behaviour of incumbent units: There is no Prince in the Castle who would care about the improvement of the wellbeing of subjects or care about their maximal output contributing to his fortune, or care about justice. In *The Trial*, there is no effective authority and no alternative that would induce justice mechanism (e.g., see its chapters on the search for Law or God). One must muddle through to find a way out by a random walk. Thus, Kafka's novels are full of micro-encounters that lack a general drive for their solutions.⁴ Surveyor K. and Joseph K. failed to form a local coalition to push their causes. In the end, they lose their fight by being alone and abating in force as if they would be converging to pata-eternity, akin to the destiny of

⁴ This could remind us the narratives of E.A. Poe (e.g., *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*) or F. Dostoyevsky (*Notes from Underground*). In a sense, J. Hasek's *Good Soldier Svejk*, entangled in constant absurd strife, is also written in Kafka's paradigm of pataphysics, as are many other picaresque novels with Don Quixote at

Sisyphus or the endless circle of suffering in Buddhism. That is not without parallels in the present social reality, where many individuals lack the direction given by a credible social aim and order. Market economy and democracy capture some parts of them, but not all of them. Kafka did not shoot into the dark but tried to project the human entanglements, whose presence would last in the form of no solution. Pata-situations are unexpected disruptions, which the science relying on regularities in behavioural patterns can hardly predict.

3. Modelling Kafkaesque Failing Social Encounters

A micro-encounter model between Incumbents and Aliens can be approached by studying the human immunity defence. The system (a vegetative unit) is assumed to start in equilibrium of Situation A. Suddenly, exogenously, a radical change comes: an alien antigen (invader) enters the unit (i.e., the human body). Its homeostasis is broken, and local antibodies in social slots launch a defensive assault. The assault on antigens is spontaneous. It is built into social slots of white cells (antibodies) without a central control. However, the antigens need not always be neutralised without recourse to complications. In medicine, there is the syndrome of *autoimmunity disorder*. This happens when, due to the communication (information) failure, the antibodies turn their fighting against their own healthy organs that are considered antigens by mistake.

Although the immunity model belongs to medicine, it could be compared with economics and its search for equilibrium. If the goal of an equilibrium theory is one of stepwise elimination of disproportions between supply and demand, local antibodies have a similar objective vis-à-vis the parameters of health. Then, the autoimmunity disorder is akin to the situation when the Walrasian *tâtonnement* process must find equilibrium in commodities whose social costs and benefits are distorted (e.g., in public goods), and the social outcome may cause more bad than good.

How can this serve as an analogy for the conflicts in Kafka's paradigm? There are two triggers: the lack of information about the social systems that are too complicated and the lack of strict rationality in the

behaviour of characters. This is the opposite of how neoclassical economics treats the situations of cooperative exchanges via perfect markets with perfect information and the perfect rationality of the *homo oeconomicus*. The pataphysical paradigm of Kafka can be treated as the complement of the economics of general equilibrium (GE) of the Arrow-Debreu-McKenzie type, where the human exchanges reach the Pareto optimum even automatically with decisions based on economic rationality and complete contracts, and with no transaction costs. All agents are satisfied, living in the Pareto-optimal omnipresent win-win market world for all their needs.

However, if used to explain real human exchanges, the GE model fails in many concrete cases, e.g., due to externalities, public goods, market power, etc. On the one hand, these failures do not falsify the equilibrium models, which are correct by their logical structure. On the other hand, in explaining some parts of the real human exchanges, the empirics disprove the GEs' general validity related to the world's ontology. We could model such a situation by complementing a GE model (akin to our Situation A) with a random walk model with a random size of the step that will model the extent of "social abnormalities, mysteries or paradoxes", i.e., the extent of pataphysics in our real life. Some of these mysterious abnormalities were explained in economics, e.g., by public choice, X-inefficiency, rent-seeking, information asymmetries, etc. (Stiglitz 2017). But by far, not all of them! There are whole fields in economics where the explanation of failures is weak: for semi-public goods, missing markets for relational and collective goods, or the provision of immaterial goods, such as institutions, trust, or justice (Orrell 2017). Why are we failing in the overproduction of evil? (Sedlacek 2011). This implies that we are back to Kafka, who concentrates particularly on situations where the interhuman exchanges and their contracts suddenly either fail entirely (as in *The Trial*) or underperform (as in *The Castle* or *Amerika* or *In the Penal Colony*). Though art applies a different methodology than abstract explanatory economics, it can be descriptive and normative in enriching our knowledge about the mysteries in the "production" of happiness and evil. Communism was a Kafkaesque socio-economic pata-model brought to reality for more than 70 years.⁵

⁵ See the novels of Kundera or Solzhenitsyn, among many others, explaining the micro-mechanisms of totalitarian states often much better than the social scientists.

In Kafka's pataphysics, there are two failures in keeping the system in equilibrium, including the objective of social happiness. Both are due to the communication or institutional failures built into his model. Firstly, the alleged antigens (i.e., the alien protagonists) are no real threat, which is the case of futile autoimmunity reaction where the fight is counter-productive. This happens when alleged aliens could be incorporated into healthy parts of the unit. In other words, such false "antigens" could be easily adjusted to the present system's homeostasis. Thus, the incoming "aliens", in search of their new social slots, can be peacefully included in the productive coexistence with all incumbents of the hosting society. Yet, their social system is closed in the novels, and the new slots are not open for their inclusion. This is the situation of the land surveyor K. or Karl in *Amerika*. The attacks of antibodies (incumbents) on peaceful incoming agents (mistaken for antigens and aliens) are absurd. Kafka was highly interested in the absurd human situations that abound so much in our reality. He considered them more relevant than the behaviour where all conflicts have a rational solution and human life is fulfilling and happy.⁶ The latter is the paradigm of life narratives developed by romanticism and today spread by the commercials in social media. Kafka challenged this fabric and offered a partially novel, more realistic paradigm. In his case, it is the conflict between social autarchy (Situation A) and open society (B) which could work but failed (Situation B).

Secondly, the antibodies assault their healthy slots directly without an exogenous shock. This is due to information and coordination failure – the classic autoimmunity disorder. For example, that happened to Joseph K. in *The Trial* when, at the very start of the novel, he was rounded up in his flat by two arrogant strangers authorised by some mysterious court edict. K. was unaware of committing anything wrong, and in his previous life, he had been perfectly embedded in the social system as an elite, the status he suddenly lost. His apprehension was a system failure against which there was no appeal, as was found later. This also happened to Samsa in *Metamorphosis* or the condemned in *The Penal Colony*. Reversals in the functioning of the social protective institutions could be traced, for

⁶ Ayn Rand in *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* opted for a modified strategy: first showed how a well-organised life is possible (via entrepreneurial capitalism in Situation A) and then contrasted it with social engineers in Situation B who tried to destroy it by redistributive strategies that start to dominate.

example, in the French Revolution of 1789, where Liberté turned to violence and wars, or Communism of 1917-90, where the lure for building Paradise turned to creating a paranoid police state – in all of which the “protective antibodies” turned to devour their own loyal citizens (see, e.g., Doctor Zhivago).

Both cases of immunity failure are quite realistic, even though their economic effects are absurdly inefficient: producing just frustration. In economics, this is well described by *negative externalities*, which humans produce in huge quantities with or without markets. Kafka was a visionary, and his visions fit not only into communism (which was a failed romantic idea of a non-religious chiasm), but now they fit again into the lives of the IT&AI emerging generations where rules are opaque, information is flawed, truth is relative, merits are disregarded, and political decision-making is often socially irrational. That is the situation where the pataphysics of the populists dominate over the rule by authentic elites, rationality and science.

Kahneman (2011) supports the logic of pata-inefficiency through biological studies. According to them, animals and people fight harder to prevent losses than to achieve gains. Therefore, the losers have a stronger voice and political power than the innovative, effective winners who feel comfortable. The laws and institutions are then biased towards minimal changes from the status quo and the support of the inefficient majority. This counter-Darwinian paradox, opposing the economic law of comparative advantage, looks irrational. However, viewed from the pataphysical side, it makes sense. Indeed, animal spirits are a fundamental concept of economics and business, which Keynes (1936) exposed in his discussion of the role of expectations in Chapter 12, which transcends the rationality of calculations since the future in economics is uncertain. Similarly, Akerlof and Shiller (2009) discussed the role of bipolar irrational states of vitality and depression, which often drive social decision-making more intensively than pure rationality.

We can conclude this section with a more practical observation. We can recognise two approaches in the applications of the pata-principles in the literature and arts:

(a) The initiative comes from the producer (author) of the artistic artefact, where the pata-situations are built explicitly into the logic of the artefact (e.g., novel, painting, or sculpture). The reader can identify the absurdity in the situation directly and without opaque distortions. For example, in *The Castle*, the land surveyor K. expects to be in Situation A:

that his employment by the Castle will be solved perfectly by market bargaining within functioning institutions, such as public administrators or ethics. But, contrary to his expectations, K. is exposed to bizarre pata-solutions in Situation B: harassment, disregard, and irrationality. There is not much left for the reader to add.

(b) The initiative to figure out the pata-solution is shifted to the consumer of the artistic artefact, e.g., the reader or the viewer of visual art. Thus, the pata-situation occurs twice: in the produced pata-product (a – often not very sophisticated) and in its pata-consumption (b – often revolting). Airaksinen (2024) used this interpretation by subjecting the last three chapters in *The Trial* to the pata-solution. This is the modern pata-art methodology, manifested in 1917 by M. Duchamp's urinal presented provocatively as *The Fountain*. It is then on observers' fancy and frivolity to guess what the given artefact means – often with no consensus and many embarrassments.

This second approach may even be applied to the scientific axiomatic models, which are treated as intentionally simplified abstractions of certain hidden, more general narratives (Sedláček 2011). It is on the reader how the model conclusions and their narratives are interpreted. For example, the pata-interpretation of neoclassical models, partially in conflict with empirics, is that no extra-market forces are needed to intervene in the economy's performance. The opposite pata-interpretation of the same model is by orthodox Marxists: all market models are a humbug, and economies must be governed by bureaucrats – modern despots of the quasi-scientist pata-truths.

4. What is the authentic nature of the alien “antigens” in Kafka?

We can identify a common feature in all characters of Kafka's novels, which is essential for understanding his concept of estrangement and, thus, communication failures: It is the individual specificity implying the *differences* in the existential features between people. The “difference” means dissimilarity caused by everyone's irreplicable uniqueness. Though this dissimilarity is easily recognised, it is difficult to figure out one's character, internalise it and assign the “stranger” to an appropriate social slot. For example, surveyor K. in *The Castle* and Karl in *Amerika* are foreigners, immigrants, outsiders and potential troublemakers. Samsa in *The Metamorphosis* is suddenly physically different, thus repugnant. The Condemned in *The Penal Colony* has dared to disobey an absurd rule, and

Joseph K. in *The Trial* was an elite banker whose alleged guilt was a mere slander: a trumped-up charge – maybe due to envy or due to the *schlendrian* in the safeguarding institutions, which reacted as confused “antibodies”. *The Trial* opens with this famous sentence: “*Somebody must have made a false accusation against Joseph K., for he was arrested one morning without having done anything wrong.*” K. is suddenly not a normal person – he has been transferred into a group of aliens by being smeared and thus marked as “different.”

We presume that a person transiting between camps, classes and hierarchies of people while receiving an earmark of being “different” would be a suitable candidate for a protagonist in a new Kafkaesque novel, afflicted by some of the autoimmunity failures and signs of pata-situations. Let us illustrate the importance of “difference” with a list of serious macro-conflicts in societies since the start of capitalism, costing millions of victims:

a) French Revolution of 1789: aristocracy versus commoners, plus (later under Jacobines) commoners with redistributive versus commoners with productive objectives.

b) Socialist/communist movement: Capitalist owners versus hired labourers. The conflict was particularly antagonistic between the redistribution radicals backing the proletariat and those whose property was bound to be abducted. In the end, Stalin made radicals fight with one another by inventing the charges of a difference.

c) WW I and WW II: the difference is marked by belonging to a German versus a French/British/US geopolitical (or even racial) camp. The internal strife between Nazis and the external one with Nazis would deserve another study.

d) Cold War: belonging to the Soviet autocratic camp versus the democratic US-led camp. As in the previous, the internal strife within the communist societies would deserve a Kafkaesque gold medal.

e) The present most dangerous external conflict involves strife between the democratic US-led and autocratic Chinese-Russian camps. In contrast to the Cold War, the present conflict with China is qualitatively different: China is much better organised than the Soviet heterogeneous block used to be. The US-CN differences are also toxic and unconciliatory.

f) The post-modern post-truth society: this is a conflict between the idealism of “liberal progressivists” who are enforcing policies of equity backed by human rights versus the “conservatives” who use the

differences to build social hierarchies backed by human duties and their efficiency. One camp accuses the other and quarrels about whether the hierarchy is or is not a “natural” inequality or if enforced equity can or cannot benefit all. Their antagonism is undermining social stability.

Solving this crucial *internal* conflict f) of our time is subject to fulfilling two Sisyphean tasks: to turn differences into equity and to cancel the motive for building hierarchies. Both camps develop their policies on the grounds of differences. Conservatives stress differences in endowments of individuals carried over in time: in the ownership of human capital (or any other capital), income, system of values, ideological viewpoints, geographic location, ethnicity, culture, IQ, nationality, race, age, religion, experience, socioeconomic background, class, caste, temperament, sexual identity, gender, one’s upbringing, skin, language, type of hairdo, weight, taste of the books by Ayn Rand ... and many more.⁷ Any of these differences can be part of narratives in a Kafkaesque pata-paradigm, which can be pretty realistic. Their plot could develop a sequence of dismal social misalignments, institutional failures, inefficiency and personal frustrations, allowing for transitions into the pata-situations of infinity. So far, their plots need not end in crimes like that at the end of *The Trial*. On the other hand, liberals stress that all the previous toxic differences can be smoothed out and the sources of conflicts thus quenched. *Insha'Allah!* If not, the entry into a pata-solution is very probable.

Literature with the paradigm of DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion), where the differences can be easily internalised by turning them into equity so that all live together in harmony, can be called neo-utopian, which, as an objective, is more than blessed. Their narratives can explore the themes of acceptance, tolerance, inclusion and conflict resolution through trust and happy collaboration. Indeed, many such negotiations may end in a mutually advantageous, effective contract. But this is what both the neoclassical economics and the Marxian politics claim. Needless to say, both ideologies had many partisan supporters. With a pinch of good luck, their optimistic narratives may also happen in reality – but not everywhere and all the time. Therefore, the complementary pataphysical

⁷ To bring relief to our list, let us mention Swift’s satire in *Gulliver’s Travels*, where the wars in Lilliput were waged over the differences in egg-cracking etiquette or heel height.

paradigm, full of abnormalities, mysteries or paradoxes due to ill-perceived behavioural differences, offers then vast grounds for artistic representation. Thus, art can complement social sciences by adding their point of view to problems where science does not cover the full spectrum of affairs (Benáček 2018).

5. Conclusion

The key to Kafka's novels is not the quest for a dreamlike transcendental irrationality, akin to solving mysteries of an abstract painting, but the pursuit of rationality, which fails in its non-standard pata-situations. Thus, this study builds on the contrast between rationalism in the role of *normative frame of reference* (e.g., by an economic model of general equilibrium where no one is worse off) and the imperfections of real situations where neither reason nor morals can solve some situations settled otherwise by ordinary bargaining. Hence, the boundless width of art, on the one hand, and social sciences constrained by assumptions, represented here by pure economics, on the other hand, can act as complements for explaining human behaviour.

I cannot but conclude this text with a paradox: if pataphysics is a "science of imaginary solutions," then Kafka's paradigm does not belong to this box of easy imaginary solutions since it offers no solutions. Kafka's ends were always dark because he considered human existence stripped of a positive objective meaning dominated by rationality. His lifelong search for solutions in his practice as a first-rate lawyer (Corngold et al. 2008) could not have been squeezed into easy tasks since too many of his attempts for win-win solutions failed. One can wonder why Kafka ordered Max Brod to destroy all his intellectual heritage. Maybe he reckoned that even his own message to the world was imperfect and thus futile. Such was the explanation by Auden (1948).

Thus, Kafka's "no solution", transiting to pata-eternality, is offered as a conclusion based on his experience. Even some of our personal experiences could be so devastating that we usually prefer to cast them aside and ignore them, notwithstanding our previous audacity. Similarly, economic mainstream cast aside many socio-economic issues (e.g., the over-production of negative "goods", which no consumer demands), which Kafka tried to pinpoint more successfully. Arrow (1962) cast such behavioural patterns, unexplained by microeconomics, into nano-

economics, the term he coined for interhuman exchanges off markets, which has not progressed much since.

In contrast, the happy ends of utopian romanticism deserve to belong to pataphysics, primarily for their normative surrealism. Given their optimism, they can join the *scientistic* and religious attempts to explain the meaning of the human mission of individuals, as much as of societies, in heavenly peace in Situation A. There is a word describing such rosy imaginary pata-solutions: the kitsch. Kafka essentially avoided condescending to find a solution in kitsch and thus preferred its inverse: human inscrutability. Here, we can close the circle and return to the motto of this paper: “A book must be the axe for the frozen sea within us.” Kafka succeeded in uncovering the blockages (i.e., the “frozen sea”) imposed by people and social constructs on free human efforts. He even raised doubts that there are ultimate truths and ends, which theoretical economics offers unabatedly.

However, his skepticism, bordering with agnosticism, regarding the elimination of negative goods and negative externalities gets into a seeming conflict with the first part of the motto. What kind of axe is offered in Kafka’s books, then? Indeed, they do not offer any solutions, no collective action tricks, or moral preaching. The only explanation is that the readers themselves must find all these and act. This is what we discussed in section 3 ad (b). Kafka depicts the problem and expects that its solution will be the exclusive duty of the reader. His books are “axes” only if the readers seize them and decide for an action. Kafka behaved accordingly by providing something useful for the world’s wellbeing – as a citizen, lawyer, and writer. Progress in science, including economics, can be one of the other responses.

Therefore, our general conclusion in assessing the role of art would be to steer cautiously between the excess of the schmaltz and its dismal deficiency. Kafka solved this dichotomy by sprinkling satire on the murky situations. We can extend our moderation even further by making the pataphysics of arts complement the never-perfect rationality in social sciences, raising their social contribution. This may be a surprising pragmatic pata-solution, akin to the *deus ex machina*, but such seems to be the reality of our social existence and its indiscriminate mix of interpretations.

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