

## From the Editors

### How Many Kafka's Are There?

Almost 100 years have passed since Kafka's death and yet there is so much we do not know about one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century. Everyone has their own Kafka, be it the sad and dark author of *The Trial*, or the frenzied author of *Amerika*—also known as *The Man who Disappeared*; be it the shy boy afraid of his father or the womanizer with an exceptional sense of humor. There is something about his writings that makes him susceptible to so many varying interpretations, and thus he remains both thoroughly well-known, and enigmatic. Even Kafka's own identity was an enigma for himself. In his *Diaries*, he wrote: "I am nothing but literature and can and want to be nothing else" (Kafka 1910–1923).

The aim of this volume is to present Kafka not as a writer, or not only as a writer, but as a philosopher. However, even after narrowing the scope of our interest down, there will still be several Kafka's on the table left. Some philosophical themes will immediately come to mind: the so-called Brentano School in Prague, his affiliation to the Louvre Circle, Kafka and existentialist philosophy, Kafka and vegetarianism, Kafka's prediction of totalitarian regimes, his Jewish heritage and therefore Jewish philosophical thought, his love of Nietzsche and Meister Eckhart and—last but not least, since he was such an exceptional writer—his aesthetics.

Kafka was as protean as was his city: "Franz Kafka was born inside a vortex called Prague. A city where three human groups had acted side by side for centuries, yet divided by difference in language, customs, and culture. The situation in the kingdom of Bohemia was Kafkaesque long before Kafka drew upon it to create a new form of a fantasy tale, thereby giving rise to one of the adjectives that was to describe the twentieth century" (Insua 2002, 17).

The six papers that have made their way into this volume perfectly illustrate the multiple —yet somehow coherent—faces of Kafka. However, before we move on to these papers, we would like to present what we see as Kafka's *Brentanian* philosophical background.<sup>1</sup>

### **Kafka's Philosophical Background**

Max Brod—Kafka's best friend and posthumous (and self-appointed) editor—was of the opinion that Kafka was not interested in philosophy at all. How then should we explain their philosophical discussions about beauty<sup>2</sup> (among other things)? Brod claimed that Kafka “was thinking in pictures” and this viewpoint was the basis for his opinion that his friend was not inspired by any philosophical movement, and especially not by the Prague Brentanists, who gathered regularly in the Café Louvre, Brod and Kafka being part of this circle. In our opinion—the fact that Kafka was a “picture-thinker” may serve as proof that he was indeed inspired by philosophy and chiefly by Brentano's theory of perception and consciousness. Pictures (images) formed the core of this theory (a theory which stems from Aristotle), and are a necessary condition of perceiving and thinking. Brod claims that Kafka could not have been a Brentanist, since he was inspired by Arthur Schopenhauer, the latter supposedly being a figure despised by the Prague circle of Brentanists. Brod himself was indeed very much indebted to Schopenhauer, and so perhaps wanted to see this same inspiration in his friend as well. But we do not think that Kafka would have been worried by contradicting inspirations. Brentano's thought was one of the most influential philosophical currents of that time, after all, and not only in Prague.<sup>3</sup>

In the year 1902 Kafka went to Anton Marty's lecture *Grundfragen der deskriptiven Psychologie* and in the winter semester of 1904/1905 to *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie*. At that time his interests and tastes were very different from the later purism of his prose, as Reiner Stach points out in his biography: *Kafka: Die Jahre der Entscheidungen*. This, we believe, explains why he had a leaning towards a type of philosophy which he later found repulsive and devoid of anything truly moving. Brentano's descriptive psychology was so influential not least thanks to Christian von Ehrenfels

<sup>1</sup> Below, we will be using fragments from: Kamińska 2017, 98–117; 2015, 35–50.

<sup>2</sup> Brod's two-part from the weekly *Die Gegenwart (The Present)* from February 1906 and Kafka's unpublished critical reply edited by Brod years later: *Ungedrucktes von Franz Kafka (Zeit Online, Kultur)*.

<sup>3</sup> For more see: Kamińska 2015, 35–50; Smith 1994; 1997, 83–104.

and Anton Marty, who established and sustained Brentanism in Prague, and although both Brod and Kafka had mixed feelings about it, they went to the meetings organized by Berta Fanta and Ida Freund, first at Fanta's home (from 1902), then in the Café Louvre (from 1904). Brod left the circle after he had published (in 1905) two caricatures of Brentanists in the very same *Die Gegenwart* in which he published his above-mentioned discussion of beauty. And in leaving, Kafka followed his friend. The essays in question were called *Warum singt der Vogel?* (Why does the bird sing?) and *Zwillingspaar von Seelen* (Twin Souls). The first was supposed to depict the sterile discussions at Marty's home, which Brod attended (and Kafka did not) where everybody seemed to want only to flatter Marty and no one aimed at finding the truth. The *Twin Souls* novella presents an adherent of Brentanism named *Flachkopf* (Flat Head). This was enough for Emil Utitz and Hugo Bergmann to ask Brod to leave the circle. We are telling this story in such detail, because we find it possible that Brod was in fact driven by *ressentiment* towards the Brentanists when he claimed that Kafka had nothing in common with them. Many say that Brod was very partial and possessive when it came to Kafka. He is often criticized as an editor of Kafka for being "distanzlos" (W. Benjamin), or in other words for "not leaving the reader alone with Kafka" (L. Hardt).<sup>4</sup>

In his book *K*, Roberto Calasso (2006) argues that Ockham's razor was Kafka's favorite tool. He writes that Kafka always picked only the necessary objects from the surrounding world and referred to them precisely and literally. This is how, according to Calasso, Kafka should be read: literally. All we get from Kafka are images of objects meticulously selected. (We would not, however, call him a nominalist or a reist; the pictures suggest rather a type of conceptualism.)

All this "picture-thinking" may have its origin in the moving pictures Kafka adored. "Moving pictures" is of course another name for "cinema" where Kafka loved to spend his time as a child (see Wagenbach 2002). Moving pictures are also the pictures we perceive in real life or imagine, all of them being played out before our mind's eye and—according to Kafka—all of them being equally important and credible (a truly Brentanian intuition of inner perception). Kafka's prose, then, whether it was conscious or not—contains multiple philosophical themes, and many of them are illustrated by the authors of this volume.

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<sup>4</sup> For more see: Kamińska 2017, 98–117.

## Authors and Papers

**Charlene Elsby**, in her paper *Gregor Samsa's Spots of Indeterminacy: Kafka as Phenomenologist*, presents a view of Kafka against this Brentanian backdrop through the spectacles of Roman Ingarden, an indirect student of Brentano via Edmund Husserl. Elsby uses Ingarden's ontology of the literary work of art to read and explain Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and thereby offers an Ingardenian analysis of Gregor Samsa.

**Katarzyna Szafranowska**, in her paper *The Machinic Metaphor in Kafkaian Animal Stories*, takes us from *Metamorphosis* to the *Metaphormosis*, which challenges the famous reading of Kafka by Deleuze and Guattari and claims that there *are* metaphors in Kafka, only they are broken and dysfunctional.

Brentanism is not of course the only philosophical current associated with Kafka. As was mentioned before, there are strong links between Kafka and the so-called philosophy of existence. Our volume contains two papers covering these issues. **Aoileann Ní Éigeartaigh** reads Kafka through the lens of Erich Fromm in his *"How Can One Take Delight in the World Unless One Flees to it for Refuge?": The Fear of Freedom in Erich Fromm and Franz Kafka*. Her paper argues that "the loosening of traditional social structures leads some individuals to seek out restrictions, for example in order to counteract the feelings of being alone". This is reminiscent of Franz Kafka's words "A cage went in search of a bird" (*Blue Octavo Notebooks*). **Markus Kohl**, in *Kafka on the Loss of Purpose and the Illusion of Freedom*, claims that freedom is deceptive. How can one make meaningful choices if the teleological dimension is gone? Kohl thus presents a radicalized reading of Søren Kierkegaard.

Both of these papers are—broadly speaking—in the current of existentialist/personalist thought. However, **Aoileann Ní Éigeartaigh** addresses a further issue, namely the human condition in modern democracies. This is also tackled by **Matthew Wester** who—in *Before Adolf Eichmann: A Kafkaian Analysis of the 'Banality of Evil'*—proposes an application of Kafka's *The Trial* to Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Wester supplements "our understanding of the 'banality of evil' by demonstrating that Arendt also meant it to describe a factual social arrangement characterized by a form of false consciousness."

And—last but not least—**Ido Lewit's** essay *"He Couldn't Tell the Difference between The Merry Widow and Tristan and Isolde": Kafka's Anti-Wagnerian Philosophy of Music*, which asserts that sounds cannot be

divorced from their corporeal and visual aspects. With this Lewit brings our collection full circle, echoing once again Brod's "picture thesis" and Wagenbach's "cinema thesis" as channels through which to read Kafka's thoughts.

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