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Class Conflict in *Das Schloß*: The Struggle for a *Dienstpragmatik*

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Franz Kafka was employed at the Assicurazioni Generali, a private insurance firm, from October 1907 until July 1908, and at the state-administered Arbeiter-Unfall-Versicherungs-Anstalt (henceforth, "the Institute") from July 1908 until July 1922. This extensive experience in a world of *Angestellte* and *Beamte* lent a distinctive class coloration to his literary subject-matter.[1] His diaries are strewn with observations concerning various sorts of officials and private white-collar employees.[2] Indeed, no other objective motif recurs more frequently in Kafka's journals, notebooks, and novels than his depiction of the contractual relationships of employees, their terms of service, the acts of hiring, promoting, and firing, and the subtle connections which link the employee to his superior.[3] Several of his most memorable characters, including Gregor Samsa, Blumfeld, and Josef K., are white-collar workers, and in *Das Schloß* the plot itself coincides with the protagonist's struggle to establish the terms of his employment.

Literary works of even the most singularly imaginative sort may draw their essential motives from the realm of social fact. Thus Don Quixote's mad exploits are set in motion by the real status of the petty gentry in Renaissance Spain. Similarly, it is possible to view Kafka's fictional employees as refractions of a social stratum which achieved a kind of ascendancy during his career as writer and bureaucrat. For during his first years of service the salaried employees in government, commerce, and industry, known collectively as the "Festbesoldete," consolidated their ranks in order to agitate aggressively for improvements in their social, legal, occupational, and political status.[4] Although their movement is now virtually forgotten—having been eclipsed by the far more dramatic events which immediately followed upon its defeat—at the time of Kafka's beginning service at the Institute the so-called "Beamtenbewegung" led by the minor Hapsburg officials succeeded in unsettling the royal and imperial bureaucracy so thoroughly that the shock was felt even at the summit of government,[5] and its echoes registered even after the war at Kafka's Institute, during the period before the writing of *Das Schloß*. And since the origin of Kafka's fictional repertoire of employees coincides historically with the discordant entry of the "Festbe-

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soldete" into public awareness, it seems reasonable to inquire after the influence of social history upon fiction. The inquiry is especially relevant to his last and least explicable novel which is centered upon an employee's contractual relations with his superiors.

The main trends of Kafka scholarship have run counter to an interpretation of *Das Schloß* in terms of social representationalism. The traces of Kafka's career experience found in the novel were characterized by Max Brod as mere "realistische Deckblätter" concealing a core meaning of transcendental reference;[6] and recently this minimization of the social content has been reconfirmed by Hartmut Binder who argues that the novel's social elements, however abundant, remain subordinate to the expression of Kafka's "komplexes System des eigenen Innenlebens."[7] To a remarkable degree, this view has received support even from Marxist interpreters.[8]

The question of the social elements in *Das Schloß*, their coherence and centrality in the novel's thematic structure, can be handled most effectively by means of a comparative methodology, that is, by juxtaposing literary content with the social and occupational context of the author's experience. Although this method can convey little, if anything, about the author's conscious intentions for his work, it should, at the very least, throw a clearer light upon a coherent thematic infrastructure which any interpretation of *Das Schloß* must take into account.

The central peculiarity of K.'s "Kampf"—the basis for the most varied interpretations directed toward it—is its ambivalence: K. is irresistibly drawn to an authority against which he rebels, initially with violent intensity. The push and pull of his ambivalent struggle and of the mysteriously equivocal responses he elicits from the castle appear as fantastic forces which motivate and sustain the novel's central conflict and plot. But these forces also possess specific historical counterparts which parallel the novel's thematic developments both as a whole and with respect to important individual episodes.

During the period of Kafka's initial employment at the Institute, the Hapsburg bureaucracy was racked by a peculiar conflict whose background, build-up and ultimate emergence have been summarized by Josef Redlich in the Introduction to his *Austrian War Government*:

> The new so-called "social" police legislation, together with the new system of workmen's insurance introduced on the German model, cast a fresh burden on the civil service, and led to the creation of endless offices and bureaus. . . . As a result of the nationalization of the railways, the extension of the postal service on modern lines and addition of many other new and technical branches, a kind of great subsidiary civil service had grown up, an annex, too, that inevitably was without the traditions of the older official body. Finally, the beginning of the new century witnessed a gradual revolt of the service itself against its conditions of pay and the rigid, hierarchical grading of the lower ranks un-

> der the official bureaucracy. This was aggravated, in its turn, by the rise within the lower civil service ranks of a trade-union spirit, more or less tinged with Socialism.[9]

This historic revolt of the minor civil servants is K.'s ambivalent struggle writ large. Both struggles stem from the disruptive arrival of the new technical employee who confronts an established officialdom, rebels vociferously against his lack of rights and his hierarchical subordination, but falls prey to the inherent ambiguities of his revolt against an establishment in which he wishes to serve.

Like K.'s own "Kampf," the "Beamtenbewegung" can be characterized as a radical effort to secure a fixed place within the established order. During the climactic phase of the movement, between 1909 and 1913, the subaltern officials convened public assemblies to press their demands for improved pay, for the right of civil servants to engage in political activities, for the extension of greater job security and advancement opportunities to the untenured "Praktikanten," for the establishment of a favorable service code ("Dienstpragmatik"), and for the abolition of secret ratings ("geheime Qualifikationen") in determining acceptance or promotion.[10] The movement was weakened almost from the beginning by official particularism and special interests, but its rhetoric of struggle was by no means less radical in tone than K.'s own grim pledges of combat. There were denunciations of higher bureaucratism and talk of an impending struggle for power. The officials, like K., presented themselves as opponents of a bureaucratic regime which endangered the individual (S 78). They even threatened to employ passive resistance in the event that their demands were not met.[11]

All of this ultimately proved hardly more effective against higher intransigence than K.'s own efforts. At best, the movement succeeded in revealing a new alignment of interests. In 1912, the German and Czech officials in Bohemia overcame their national hostilities in order to hold common rallies. The rebellious Hapsburg officials were joined by comparably placed employees in private industry. The radicalized employees and officials attempted to muster all "Festbesoldete" into common organizations which would serve the interests of everyone on a fixed income.[12] Partially and implicitly, the government extended a certain recognition to the new social grouping by passing legislation on January 16, 1910, which regulated under a single heading the status of lower employees in both the public and private sectors of society—including the status of the still untenured "Anstaltspraktikant" Kafka.

Despite the fact that Kafka did not mention these matters in his extant writing, an enormous amount of circumstantial evidence suggests that he could not have been unfamiliar with the "Beamtenbewegung," its history and attendant circumstances. He was an active member of a professional organization of Jewish officals ("Verein der jüdischen Kanzleibeamten") and

he had taken courses in the history and administration of workers' insurance in preparation for his service at the Institute. Thus he was both an affected party and an expert witness to the main developments. They had a direct bearing upon his personal status and activities in several regards: as a "Praktikant" during his initial service at the Institute, as an expert in the area of industrial safety and workers' insurance, as a long-standing dependent of the Institute, and as a retired official on a fixed income.[13] In each of these cases there are coherent parallels between the conflict and development of *Das Schloß* and the social context of its author's experience.

Kafka's probationary period as a "Hilfsbeamter" or "Praktikant" at the Institute lasted from July 1908 until May 1910 and therefore fell within the period in which the status of the "Praktikanten" was most controversial. During this period, Kafka's employment was legally tentative. He was therefore dependent, like K., on the good graces of his employers.[14] Like K., he had left behind what was, if not secure, at least familiar, in order to obtain a post in the service of officialdom. Both the author and his character arrive with real or purported technical credentials.[15] In both cases their intended activities involve a kind of measurement—K.'s surveying or Kafka's statistical analyses and adjustments of the hazard levels ("Gefahrenklassen") of insured industrial sites. Likewise, these activities have implications which are, if not revolutionary, at least somewhat upsetting to the *status quo*.[16] And finally, both men will face, sooner or later and for various reasons, the resistance of intangible hindrances and unexpected obstacles which will frustrate their hopes and drain them of their vital energies. Both will encounter what K. calls "die Gewalt der entmutigenden Umgebung, der Gewöhnung an Enttäuschungen, die Gewalt der unmerklichen Einflüsse jedes Augenblicks" (S 24).

In each case, the effort at self-assertion elicits from the authorities an overt positive response that ultimately proves ambiguous, empty, or even paradoxically negative. Though Kafka received warm support and recognition from his superiors at the Institute he did not cease, even after his promotion to a tenured rank, to feel—not altogether unjustifiably—insecure and ill at ease in his official position. Though K. receives communications from his superior Klamm, expressing approval and encouragement, they are couched in vague and general terms which ultimately prove empty and meaningless. Similarly, the clamorous Hapsburg officials and employees were at first granted recognition and dispensation in the form of special legislation, including a law which applied to the employees of the Institute, and may have touched upon Kafka's professional offices in that it contained guidelines for safety and security at the site of employment: *Das Gesetz vom 16. Jänner 1910, über den Dienstvertrag der Handlungsgehilfen und anderer Dienstnehmer in ähnlicher Stellung* (*Handlungsgehilfengesetz*).[17] This law—surely well known to any expert on labor law at the time—was directed mainly at the non-official employees of state and industry, but its contents

suggest an oblique response to the movement's never-fulfilled demand for a *Dienstpragmatik*.

In several respects, the situation presumed by the law of 1910 corresponds to that of the surveyor K., whose dilemma stems from his lack of binding and open contractual relationships with his employers. The main thrust of this law was toward requiring and regulating the employees' service contracts. In *Das Schloß*, K. goes to the house of his supervisor, the mayor, and attempts, in a grotesque scene amid huge bales of documents, to obtain a paper bearing upon his supposed summons into service. Likewise, several passages of the law of 1910 were addressed to the problem of providing the employees with access to documentation concerning their hiring and tenure of service.[18] When the surveyor K. is engaged as a school janitor he is furnished with room and board in lieu of a salary. That this invidious arrangement was also an issue historically is evidenced by § 6 of the new law, which mandated that such practices might be forbidden:

> Die Überlassung von Wohnräumen an Dienstnehmer sowie deren Verköstigung auf Rechnung des Entgeltes kann von den beteiligten Ministerien . . . durch Verordnung für Unternehmungen bestimmter Art oder für den Bereich bestimmter Orte verboten werden.

K. receives his position as janitor as a concession from his superiors. As a result, the motif of his indeterminate contract relationship is inverted in that the terms of his employment become exaggeratedly and unbearably exact. His new immediate superior, the schoolmaster, spells them out:

> Sie haben, Herr Landvermesser, täglich beide Schulzimmer zu reinigen und zu heizen, kleinere Reparaturen im Haus, ferner an den Turngeräten selbst vorzunehmen, den Weg durch den Garten schneefrei zu halten, Botengänge für mich und das Fräulein Lehrerin zu machen und in der wärmeren Jahreszeit alle Gartenarbeit zu besorgen. Dafür haben Sie das Recht, nach Ihrer Wahl in einem der Schulzimmer zu wohnen; doch müssen Sie, wenn nicht gleichzeitig in beiden Zimmern unterrichtet wird und Sie gerade in dem Zimmer, in welchem unterrichtet wird, wohnen, natürlich in das andere Zimmer übersiedeln. (S 82)

The law of 1910 likewise responded to the employees' demands with some very exacting stipulations, including a requirement that the employee's household be made mobile under certain circumstances:

> Stirbt ein Dienstnehmer, dem vom Dienstgeber auf Grund des Dienstvertrages Wohnräume überlassen werden, so ist die Wohnung, wenn der Dienstnehmer einen eigenen Haushalt führte, binnen einem Monate, sonst binnen vierzehn Tagen nach dessen Tode zu räumen. Der Dienstgeber kann jedoch die sofortige Räumung eines Teiles der Wohnung verlangen, soweit dies zur Unterbringung des Nachfolgers und seiner Einrichtung erforderlich ist.[19]

Further, the law responded to the employees' demands by requiring and regulating their "Dienstverträge." According to the schoolmaster, K. will be required to sign a "Dienstvertrag" upon entering his service as a janitor. The question of a salary will be decided only after a probationary period ("erst nach einmonatigem Probedienst"). The criteria upon which the decision is to be based are not stipulated. Barnabas, too, toils as an employee without recognition, reward, or even a minimal assurance that he has been accepted into the official service. Both he and K. are fixed to a kind of indefinite "Praktikum" or "Probedienst" in which the terms for acceptance or advancement are unknown. The rebellious Hapsburg officials of 1910 had demanded improvements in the status of the "Praktikanten" and denounced the use of arbitrary, secret ratings as a remnant of reactionary absolutism.[20] But despite the misery of their positions as unsalaried employees, both K. and Barnabas persevere in their self-defeating quest for the assurance of an official post. K. refuses Frieda's suggestion that they emigrate to France or Spain (S 118). Max Weber once observed that in the countries without prospects for colonial expansion the prestige and security of official service made official posts much sought after—and assured the lowest possible salaries to those who occupied them.[21]

By the close of the novel's uncompleted plot (or in the planned ending reported by Brod) it is clear that K.'s initial struggle for autonomy *vis-à-vis* his official employers has been moderated, compromised, and, finally, totally defeated. Similarly, the "Beamtenbewegung" moderated its goals and compromised its stand, only to meet with failure in the end. Emil Lederer described its achievements as of 1913:

> Die gegenwärtige Situation für die österreichische Beamtenschaft kann vielleicht am besten dahin gekennzeichnet werden: die Versuche der Organisationen, für die Beamten eine größere Autonomie zu erlangen und ihre Rechtslage, namentlich ihre staatsbürgerlichen Rechte zu verbessern, sind nahezu ganz erfolglos gewesen.[22]

K., who rejects "Gnadengeschenke vom Schloß" in order to demand his "Recht" (64), fares like his counterparts in pursuing a *Dienstpragmatik*. According to Lederer, their movement was unable to overcome the restricting influences of its petit-bourgeois social origins.[23] Although the officials shared the fate of the proletariat, since conditions within the lower bureaucratic ranks were becoming equally poor and oppressive, they would not present an effective challenge to authority. It seems likely that there was also a compromising element of bad faith in the denunciations of bureaucratism with which they accompanied their demands for greater security within the social apparatus.[24]

The movement rose and fell, then passed into oblivion. But the attitude of futile anti-authoritarianism it had engendered continued to affect Kafka by confronting him with the spectacle of an ambiguous conflict over

service conditions. One of Janouch's recollections documents the post-war recurrence of such conflicts. The scene takes place around the year 1920. Kafka is in conversation with a colleague who complains bitterly about the latest reorganization planned for the Institute. Kafka replies that in the end everything will remain just the same. The colleague angrily retorts that in this case his merits will again go unacknowledged. But according to Kafka this can only be so: "Der Vorstand wird doch nicht seine eigene Bedeutung herabsetzen!" Enraged, the colleague then talks about blowing up the Institute. Kafka simply replies: "Sie wollen doch nicht die Quelle Ihres Einkommens zuschütten! Oder doch?" The colleague, embarrassed, backs down, explaining that the constant insecurity caused by the reorganization has gotten to his nerves, and that his threat was only words. Yet Kafka presses the case, cautioning his colleague that words may become deeds. He points to the street outside: a powder keg which could blow up the Institute and others around it (it must be remembered that the Prague streets had seen demonstrations against injustice turn into anti-Semitic rioting, and that such riots darkened the immediate post-war years of the republic).[25] To this, the colleague, frightened by the prospect of institutional destruction, replies: "Sie übertreiben, Herr Doktor. Die Straße ist keine Gefahr. Der Staat ist stark." But Kafka continues to press the point relentlessly, and the colleague leaves the office quite chastened. On no less than two subsequent occasions, Janouch witnessed scenes of a similar sort. In one case a colleague accused Kafka of uncomradely support for the directorate of the Institute. Kafka considered the official's words unjust but at the same time acknowledged the real suffering which had caused them : "Er ist nur verängstigt. Dadurch wird er ungerecht. Die Angst um's Brot zerfrißt den Charakter."[26]

It seems then that the lower officials' insecure and contradictory relation to institutional authority remained the same throughout Kafka's career. And he may well have suffered from the consequences—in more ways than one. But Kafka apparently differed from his colleagues in that he was more conscious of his own ambivalent situation. On the one hand, he liked and respected his superiors. On the other hand, he also suffered from the bad conditions which affected his colleagues. Throughout his career he was compelled to petition for adjustments in his rank or salary, and at the end of it, even for his pension.[27] By then, his benefits were greatly diminished by the post-war inflation, devastating to everyone on a fixed income.

The "Festbesoldete" had agitated for governmental recognition and support of their special status. In Austria-Hungary and Germany their demands had been met with special pension insurance legislation.[28] The politicians and ideologues who supported their demands had made use of the concept of the "new middle class" (*der neue Mittelstand*). This concept implied that the "Festbesoldete" occupied a middle ground between the diminishing ranks of the independent bourgeoisie and the growing ranks of the proletariat. Their status had to be shored up as a buffer against class conflict.[29]

The perilous alternative between proletarianization and the assertion of an intermediate status—dependent yet somehow autonomous—is essential to the plot of *Das Schloß*. K.'s struggle is launched on the basis of this alternative, as expressed in the first letter which he receives from his official superior Klamm (S 23-24). Its literal contents may at first glance appear simple. Klamm ("Vorstand der X. Kanzlei") addresses K. with the respectful greeting ("Sehr geehrter Herr!") and officially informs him that he has been accepted into the manorial service ("in die herrschaftlichen Dienste aufgenommen"). From his immediate superior, the village mayor, K. will learn the exact details of his employment. However, Klamm will personally keep an eye on the new employee and permit the bearer of the message, Barnabas, to inquire after and communicate K.'s wishes from time to time.

When K. undertakes to interpret this letter in order to deduce from it his actual situation as an employee, he expresses certain assumptions. On the one hand, he accepts for certain the authority of the official apparatus in whose name it has been sent: "Den einer solchen Behörde gegenüber wahnwitzigen Gedanken, daß hier Unentschlossenheit mitgewirkt habe, streifte K. kaum." On the other hand, he perceives a certain ambiguity in its wording, suggesting that a choice regarding his status has been left to him. There is a contradiction between "Stellen, wo mit ihm wie mit einem Freien gesprochen wurde, dessen eigenen Willen man anerkennt," and "Stellen, wo er offen oder versteckt als ein kleiner, vom Sitz jenes Vorstandes kaum bemerkbarer Arbeiter behandelt wurde."

Above all, K. perceives one grave peril in his ambiguous position. It is the danger of proletarianization:

> Freilich, eine Gefahr bestand, und sie war in dem Brief genug betont, mit einer gewißen Freude war sie dargestellt, als sei sie unentrinnbar. Es war das Arbeitersein. Dienst, Vorgesetzter, Arbeit, Lohnbestimmungen, Rechenschaft, Arbeiter, davon wimmelte der Brief . . . (S 24)

In order to avoid this threatened proletarianization within the official hierarchy, whose ultimate authority he does not venture to challenge, K. intends to assume a militant and collectivist stance. He will free himself from his precarious dependence upon his employers ("ihre Gnade") by seeming to act in solidarity with the villagers, that is, as a "scheinbarer Dorfarbeiter, der in Wirklichkeit sein ganzes Arbeitsverhältnis von den Nachrichten des Barnabas bestimmen ließ." The motivation for his stratagem is clearly stated:

> Nur als Dorfarbeiter, möglichst weit den Herren vom Schloß entrückt, war er imstande, etwas im Schloß zu erreichen, diese Leute im Dorfe, die noch so mißtrauisch gegen ihn waren, würden zu sprechen anfangen, wenn er, wo nicht ihr Freund, so doch ihr Mitbürger geworden war . . . (S 24)

The result of this path is, of course, defeat. K. is not even accepted by the villagers. He remains in an isolated position, bound to the hierarchy of official instances and reduced in the end to complete destitution and insecurity.

The Hapsburg officials likewise adopted a stance of militancy and collectivism which included support for the Social Democrats and opposition to war preparations. However, they were more radical in word than in deed. Their main efforts were channeled into lobbying for a program of legislation which included the new service code. Lacking sufficiently broad support, their legislation passed the *Abgeordnetenhaus* only to be rescinded almost *in toto* by the *Herrenhaus*. When the government thus reconfirmed its old position that the officials' status was an employment *sui generis*, and that their requests could only be taken up via the path of the state hierarchy, the movement's spokesmen could do no more than talk of an audience with the Kaiser.[30]

K. also finds himself reduced to a status which is *sui generis*. Despite his pledge to struggle for his rights, he is thwarted by his own unexpected awe of the authority which he has accepted in accordance with Klamm's letter. Shortly after receiving it, he finds himself petitioning the innkeeper of the *Herrenhof* for permission to spend the night on the premises. When the latter accedes, appearing to leave the choice up to K., and adding only that Klamm is at the moment quartered on the premises, K. is beset by a sudden hesitation:

> K. konnte aber nichts sagen, besonders der Umstand, daß gerade sein Vorgesetzter hier war, verblüffte ihn. Ohne daß er es sich selbst ganz erklären konnte, fühlte er sich Klamm gegenüber nicht so frei wie sonst gegenüber dem Schloß . . . (S 32)

K.'s free choice, between options dictated from above, seals his bondage. Propelled by his own assertive impulses, he falls into a tacit submission to authority—an attitude which, universalized, structures almost every facet of the life of the village. His ambivalent rebellion in pursuit of a secure position only locks him into an ever more hopeless state of subordination and insecurity. In his diary, Kafka reflected on a similar kind of class conflict which seals contractual subordination through mutual hostility. Apropos the signing of a contract demanded by his father's employees, he noted in 1911: "Die leichte theoretische Feindseligkeit, die bei Vertragsabschlüssen zwischen den Kontrahenten entstehen muß." And in 1914 he remarked that the difference between an imagined director and his subordinates is so great that it could not be harmonized by a simple giving and obeying of orders: "Erst der beiderseitige Haß bewirkt den Ausgleich und rundet das ganze Unternehmen ab."[31]

On a fantastic level, the world of the castle bureaucracy is also structured by certain contradictory class conflicts and relationships. By means of

its hierarchic structure, the bureaucracy raises the seat of authority beyond reach and out of sight, and thereby alienates the atomized lower employees from itself and from one another. One episode illustrates these relations particularly well. K. observes the workings of the great hierarchy's division of labor at close hand during the scene, near the end, in the "Sekretärengang" where the secretaries wage a fierce and infantile struggle for the morning documents to be processed. K. watches an especially steadfast servant who is laboriously attempting to distribute the documents. His unwonted initiative fascinates K. and elicits a reflection which momentarily illuminates the protagonist's own ambiguous relation to the hierarchy of authority:

> Von allen abseitigen Beobachtungen kehrte dann K. immer bald wieder zu dem Diener zurück; für diesen traf das wahrlich nicht zu, was man K. sonst von den Dienern im allgemeinen, von ihrer Untätigkeit, ihrem bequemen Leben, ihrem Hochmut erzählt hatte, es gab wohl auch Ausnahmen unter den Dienern oder, was wahrscheinlicher war, verschiedene Gruppen unter ihnen, denn hier waren, wie K. merkte, viele Abgrenzungen, von denen er bisher kaum eine Andeutung zu sehen bekommen hatte. (S 231)

Within this single pregnant glimpse of the servant fulfilling the onerous tasks of his employment, the entirety of K.'s struggle is recapitulated, his progress in it demarked and, finally, the very possibility of any progress cast into doubt. The forthright servant's struggle parallels K.'s own ordeal against unseen opponents; it therefore offers a parable of hope. But K.'s immediate, almost instinctive, reduction of the individual as "Ausnahme" to "verschiedene Gruppen" belies his own compromised consciousness, and the further reduction to "viele Abgrenzungen" portends an infinity of instances which render impossible all progress toward a determination of K.'s own position. The ambivalent relation to authority orders not only the world which he experiences but also his way of experiencing it.

Of course, K. endures his struggle not as an individual member of an Austro-Hungarian class of "Festbesoldete" but as a depersonalized lone contestant in a nameless castle village; yet the polarities and contradictions which circumscribe his problematic employment are real ones. As employees—"Angestellte," in a root sense of the term—both K. and Barnabas attempt to identify themselves, not with the performance of undifferentiated labor, but rather with their position ("Stellung") within the bureaucratic system of administration. The complete negativity and insecurity of their condition is only the extreme variant of a class status defined negatively, in terms of what it is not, and subjected to great insecurity during the period in which *Das Schloß* was written. Both abjure labor in favor of a higher calling involving contact with the castle. (Barnabas, we learn, could spare himself his ordeal as a messenger, and save his family from destitution, by accepting the profitable "Schusterarbeit" which is available in plenty [S 153].) But

both are reduced to an endless pilgrimage from official pillar to post, more miserable than even the lot of the village's manual craftsmen.

Their quest, which proceeds from the specific alternatives of "Freier" and "Arbeiter" but moves toward an elusive higher realm, suggests mutely but distinctly the immanent presence of a stratum of mythic significance. To adumbrate these mythic implications even schematically would, however, require excursions far beyond the limited framework of our discussion. Here it must suffice to suggest that a superstructure of meaning involving myth is implicit in the social subject-matter itself. Klaus-Peter Phillipi's concept of "empty transcendence" *(entleerte Transzendenz)*[32] applies also to the emerging world of bureaucratized occupational life which furnished Kafka with his subject. It was Kafka's contemporary, Max Weber, who described this bureaucratization of professional life and productive activity as a transformation which not only created the diverse strata of the "Festbesoldete" and the system of legalistic domination for controlling them but also, in so doing, deprived their activities of any former associations inherited from the Reformation, with divine "calling," and ultimately of even the barest significance beyond a functional consignment within the technical division of labor.[33] Kafka's theoretical and practical knowledge of this transition was enormous, and it seems certain that his admiration for the pre-industrial vocations of agriculture and craft labor was reinforced by his experience of the fragmented, bureaucratized operations of the modern office or factory.[34] To some extent, each of his earlier novels, *Amerika* as well as *Der Prozeß*, contains a thematic contrast of, on the one hand, the practical contingencies of modern bureaucratized work (Karl Roßmann's observations of his uncle's employees and his own experience as an elevator boy, or Josef K.'s taxing professional life as a bank official) and, on the other, the ethical claims of an individual, higher calling (Karl's desire to become an engineer, half fulfilled in the Great Nature Theater of Oklahoma, or the futile quest of The Man from the Country for the law, by a door which is meant for him alone). In *Das Schloß*, however, the juxtaposed thematic aspects of employment and calling are integrated into a single linear development. K.'s initial claim to a "Berufung" is reduced first to a "Beruf," then to a position or "Stellung," and finally to a mere "Stelle," a job which is presented to him by his superiors as a mockery of his chosen vocation.[35]

It should be added that the historical context of Kafka's employment as reflected in his works integrates several other thematic areas involving the author's existence as a writer, as a Jew, and as a son. Writing was, of course, Kafka's personal higher calling in life, a calling frustrated by his career at the office. But his observations concerning the working time and free time of factory laborers make it appear unlikely that he viewed his own conflict as an isolated, purely personal dilemma.[36] As a Jew, his marginal employee's position between classes was accentuated by the fact that in Bohemia the primar-

ily German upper classes and primarily Czech laboring classes both looked with increasing hostility and contempt upon the Jews, who were in turn attracted by the relative security of official positions in government and industry.[37] Finally, as a son unable to emancipate himself from his father's influence, Kafka again only reinforces through the data of his personal life, the social significance of his employment. For, beginning with the small store ("Gassengeschäft") fondly remembered in his "Brief an den Vater," continuing to the larger wholesale establishment with its bullied employees, advancing to the oppressive offices of the international insurance firm, and culminating at the half-governmental Institute with its wide overview of the interconnected workings of bureaucratic government, bureaucratic business, and a bureaucratized labor movement, Kafka, the son of the self-made merchant, progressed into a system of authority which was more complex and subtle than the older simple dichotomy of worker and owner, but equally overpowering and at least as difficult to oppose. The disparate spheres of Kafka's life—as a writer, a Jew, and a son—intersect to shape and concentrate the intense thematic sphere of employment which plays a central role in *Das Schloß* and grounds his work in historical reality.

For various reasons, this aspect of the subject-matter of *Das Schloß* has been largely neglected by the interpreters, including both those who maximize and those who minimize the realistic aspects of his writing. There has often been a tendency to interpret K.'s quest in terms of an unambiguous moral absolute, that is, either as something justified or unjustified, as a pilgrimage undertaken to receive grace (Brod), or the hubris of an impostor and pathological manipulator (Sokel), as the wanderings of a messiah (Sebald), or an underdog's struggle against injustice (Arendt).[38] For all their disparity, these morally definitive interpretations share a common disregard for the possibility that K.'s quest might be inherently ambivalent, implying both a brave struggle against oppression and a deluded pursuit of a mythic higher reality—an anguished dream sustained by bad faith. The tendency to view K.'s fight as the embodiment of an ethical absolute has no doubt been conditioned in turn by the apparent absence of those social elements which such a view ignores. For if it is assumed that *Das Schloß* not only exaggerates or "alienates" certain features of reality but also rescinds the concrete and logical world of historical time and social place, then it would seem that only the force of an absolute—a Divine Will, the Absurd,[39] or the damnation of an evil "curse"[40]—could produce such extreme distortions. Brod bequeathed to subsequent critics the notion of a dichotomy between outer "realistische Deckblätter" and an inner essence of transcendental reference, and this dichotomy has influenced even critics like Pierre Angel or Georg Lukács whose orientation is virtually the opposite of Brod's.[41] However, if the basic terms of K.'s struggle can be understood historically, then, by implication, the transcendental references of *Das Schloß* may be no more absolute than

those of *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*, whose author also required an alien fantastic setting, China and her gods, in order to treat the moral ambiguities engendered by modern capitalism.

A number of Marxist and social critics have also been tripped up by the unnoticed ambiguities of Kafka's material. In particular, they have tended to overlook the existence of the "new middle-class" of white-collar employees as a stratum situated distinctly between bourgeoisie and proletariat. The concept of the "petit-bourgeois" has been generously applied to Kafka and to his envisioned world.[42] But since this concept pertains to a social theory which defines class primarily by the criterion of ownership or non-ownership of the means of production, it is, strictly speaking, not entirely applicable to the author himself, much less to his characters who, like Josef K. or the surveyor K., are neither proletarians in the usual sense nor the owners of any means of production, petit or grand. Klaus Hermsdorf at least acknowledges Kafka's membership in an "unproduktiv bürokratisch-intellektuell" subsphere of the petit-bourgeoisie; but his documentary discussion of the latter concentrates almost entirely upon the self-renewing forces of small commerce in Austria-Hungary, as if these and not the world of employees and officials had dominated Kafka's experience.[43] Even when Kafka's white-collar figures are acknowledged as such, this may be done with an air of reproach. Thus Adorno argues that Kafka revealed a personal weakness of character, a tendency to present the oppressed rather than their oppressors as superfluous, by portraying a world in which no one "leistet gesellschaftlich nützliche Arbeit." It is as if the "Agenten der Zirkulation," as Adorno calls them, were somehow unworthy of thematic representation.[44] The moral valence of the social interpretation is reversed by Hannah Arendt when she argues that K. demands "nothing more than the inalienable rights of man."[45] But this interpretation likewise ignores everything dubious and equivocal in K.'s struggle.

In any event, the argument for the inherent moral and social ambivalence of K.'s struggle does not rest on speculation about the author's class consciousness or artistic intentions, but rather upon the evidence of the text itself. K. does not stand for or symbolize a subaltern public employee: he *is* such an employee, and his circumstances and actions largely parallel those of his historical counterparts in the rising stratum of "Festbesoldete" with which Kafka's experience and class interests coincided.

[1]The details of Kafka's office career are recounted and documented in Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: Eine Biographie* (Frankfurt, 1954), and in Klaus Wagenbach, *Franz Kafka: Eine Biographie seiner Jugend 1883-1912* (Bern, 1956).

[2]See *Tagebücher 1910-1923* (New York, 1948), pp. 62, 76, 100, 108, 125, 143, 144, 149, 150, 385f., 415, and 447—among others.

[3]*Ibid.*, pp. 41, 100ff., 106, 108, 109f., 174f., 385f., 414f., 416, 417f., 422, 447, 447, 489. See also *Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande und andere Prosa aus dem Nachlaß* (Frankfurt, 1953), pp. 131, 134f., 151, 286f., 319, 341f., 344f., 356f., 367-73.

[4]Emil Lederer reported on and analyzed the movement of Hapsburg officials and employees, comparing it with the similar though less radical, contemporaneous movements in Germany, in his "Zeitchronik" series in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, 31 (1910) pp. 681 ff.; 33 (1911) pp. 975 ff.; 35 (1912) pp. 895 ff.; 37 (1913) pp. 660 ff.; 41 (1915-16) pp. 920 ff.

[5]See Josef Redlich, *Das politische Tagebuch Josef Redlichs (1908-1914)*, I (Graz-Köln, 1953), pp. 29, 113. The author, a pre-war Viennese law professor and finance minister who was in charge of a parliamentary commission for reforming the civil service, reports on his conversations with government leaders. On Nov. 5, 1909: "Koerber gibt mir zu, daß die laute und stille Widersetzlichkeit der Beamten den Staat schwer gefährde." On Nov. 25, 1911: "Über die Beamtenfrage wird viel gesprochen—Aehrenthal sieht die Sache sehr ernst an."

[6]Max Brod, *Franz Kafka*, pp. 104f. See also "Nachwort zur ersten Ausgabe," *Das Schloß* (Frankfurt, 1968), pp. 302f. (Subsequent page references in parentheses will refer to this edition.)

[7]Hartmut Binder, *Kafka in neuer Sicht: Mimik, Gestik und Personengefüge als Darstellungsformen des Autobiographischen* (Stuttgart, 1976). p. 396.

[8]To mention only one characteristic example: Klaus Hermsdorf maintained that, on the whole, Kafka universalized his personal sense of failure, elevating it to the status of a false abstraction, ignoring the existence of other individuals and classes whose experiences were quite different; *Kafka: Weltbild und Roman* (Berlin, 1929), pp. 206ff. Also, see below.

[9]Josef Redlich, *Austrian War Government* (New Haven, 1929), pp. 28, 53f.

[10]Lederer, esp. 31 (1910) pp. 661f., 689, 692, 701; 33 (1911) pp. 979-84; 35 (1912), p. 902.

[11]Lederer 33 (1911), pp. 979, 980, 981; 35 (1912) pp. 896, 901; 37 (1913) pp. 660ff.

[12]Lederer 33 (1911), pp. 981ff.; 35 (1912), pp. 907ff.; 37 (1913), p. 661.

[13]The demands of the "Festbesoldete" were met above all with labor, insurance, and pension legislation. See Ernst Lakenbacher, "White-Collar Unions in Austria," in *White-Collar Trade Unions*, ed. Adolf Sturmthal (Urbana, 1967), pp. 38f. The contractual conditions and insurance obligations involving the employees of Kafka père were a concern of the author. See *Tagebücher*, pp. 100ff., 174f. The law of 1910, passed as a concession to employee demands, directly affected Kafka's position as an employee by guaranteeing him a longer vacation than he had enjoyed at the Assicurazioni Generali, and it affected his sphere of professional competency by including provisions on employee safety at the work site. See below, fn. 17.

[14]Despite the outward appearance of security and success at the Institute, Kafka could still voice his characteristic anxiety regarding his position—even after his promotion to the rank of "Concipist"; see *Tagebücher*, p. 41. No doubt his generalized anxieties were to some degree justified, since, as a rule, Jews were excluded from such positions in Hapsburg Bohemia; see Christoph Stölzl, *Kafkas böses Böhmen: Zur Sozialgeschichte eines Prager Juden* (München, 1975), pp. 76-79.

[15]Kafka took a number of technical courses in preparation for his work at the Institute. See Wagenbach, p. 249.

[16]The slightly upsetting effect exercised by Kafka's activities upon existing relations of entrepreneurial ownership is evinced by his newspaper article "Die Arbeiterunfallversicherung und die Unternehmer"; See Wagenbach, pp. 326-37. The possibly upsetting implications of K.'s surveying upon existing property relations in the village are evidenced by the peasants' first reaction upon learning that he is a surveyor (S 8).

[17]In *Reichsgesetzblatt für die im Reichsrate vertretenen Königreiche und Länder (1910)* pp. 41-47. The law is specifically applicable to the employees of "Versicherungsanstalten jeder Art," whether public or private (§ 2.2). Guidelines for employee security are included in §§ 18 and 26.4.

[18]*Ibid.* §§ 6, 10, and 14.

[19]*Reichsgesetzblatt*, p. 44 (§ 24).

[20]Lederer 31 (1910), pp. 691, 701(fn. 82).

[21]Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriß der verstehenden Soziologie* (Tübingen, 1956), p. 563.

[22]Lederer 37 (1913), p. 668.

[23]Lederer 31 (1910), p. 707; 35 (1912), pp. 912f.

[24]There was perhaps a certain unintended irony in the fact that the radical officials coupled their demands for, among other things, a system of automatic promotion by seniority with denunciations of "die Herrschaft der Bureaukratie"; see Lederer 37 (1913), p. 660.

[25]See Stölzl, pp. 96-100.

[26]Gustav Janouch, *Gespräche mit Kafka: Aufzeichnungen und Erinnerungen* (Frankfurt, 1968), pp. 87-91. Although it is perhaps doubtful that Janouch could have recalled such precise details after an interval of several decades, and doubly questionable to the extent that these conversations are found only in the second, revised edition of his *Gespräche*, nonetheless Janouch's insistence upon the multiple recurrence of the quarrels, together with the fact that his other source of information about the Institute, his father, was a colleague of Kafka and therefore presumably well informed about the latter's professional affairs, suggests that, barring a willful fabrication, the unpleasant incidents in question must have at least occurred, if not absolutely *verbatim* as reported.

[27]See Klaus Hermsdorf, "Briefe des Versicherungsangestellten Franz Kafka," and "Zu den Briefen Franz Kafkas," *Sinn und Form*, 9 (1957), pp. 639 ff. and 653 ff.

[28]See Lakenbacher, pp. 38f.; also, see below, fn. 29.

[29]See Jürgen Kocka, *Unternehmensverwaltung und Angestelltenschaft am Beispiel Siemens 1847-1914: Zum Verhältnis von Kapitalismus und Bürokratie in der deutschen Industrialisierung* (Stuttgart, 1969), pp. 538ff. When the German *Angestelltenversicherungsgesetz* was passed in 1911, its supporters in the Reichstag argued that its passage would secure the "new middle-class" as an ally of the *status quo*—against proletarian pressures. Similarly, the Austrian officials justified their demands with the argument that their fulfillment would be "staatserhaltend"; see Lederer 37 (1913), p. 660; 35 (1912), p. 899, fn. 45.

[30]Lederer 37 (1913), pp. 663, 666f.

[31]*Tagebücher*, pp. 106, 146.

[32]Klaus-Peter Phillipi, *Reflexion und Wirklichkeit: Untersuchungen zu Kafkas Roman 'Das Schloß'* (Tübingen, 1966), pp. 207, 220 ff.

[33]Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York, 1958), pp. 179-83.

[34]See *Tagebücher*, p. 536 (Kafka describes peasants in glowing terms, in a passage which Brod considered an original source for *Das Schloß*). Also, see Janouch, 34f. (Kafka praises craft labor which, in contrast to intellectual-clerical work, unites the laborer with his fellows).

[35]K.'s initial reaction upon hearing that the castle has recognized "seine Landvermesserschaft," a reaction which has been taken as proof of his evil motives, seems rather to suggest a personal, free mission—a "calling" in the original higher sense—than a mere intention to deceive and swindle (S 9f.). Soon, however, K. becomes identified with his profession—"Der ewige Landvermesser," as an official puts it (S 21). In conversation with Gardena, the innkeeper's wife, he speaks of his "Stellung" (S 47). At the village mayor's, he says, "mein Ehrgeiz geht dahin . . . als kleiner Landvermesser bei einem kleinen Zeichentisch ruhig zu arbeiten" (S 58)—an ironic contrast to the presumed duties of a surveyor. But instead of a "Stellung," he is offered a "Stelle" (S 79, 81), a lesser position as janitor, in which the original nature of his higher "calling," its principle of geometrical perfection, is cruelly parodied. The position is offered to K. by the school teacher who quotes the mayor's words: "Sie seien doch Landvermesser und würden daher die Beete im Schulgarten besonders schön gerade ziehen können" (S 79).

[36]See Janouch, p. 159 (Kafka talks about the bad effects of Taylor's "scientific managment," which deprives the individual of his possession of time). Also, see *Tagebücher*, pp. 247f. (Kafka observes the machine-like nature of factory girls at work but notices, perhaps with envy, the way in which they become human again when the moment of freedom arrives).

[37]See Stölzl, pp. 76-90.

[38]Walter H. Sokel, *Franz Kafka—Tragik und Ironie: Zur Struktur seiner Kunst* (Wien-

München, 1964), pp. 404, 419. Sokel's perceptive analysis of *Die Verwandlung* is superior because in it the critic refuses to accept categories of pure innocence or pure guilt; his reference to Gregor Samsa's "Ersatz für offene Rebellion" could be inverted to apply to K.'s stance.—W.G. Sebald, "The Law of Ignominy: Authority, Messianism and Exile in *The Castle*," in *On Kafka: Semi-Centenary Perspectives*, ed. Franz Kuna (London, 1976), pp. 42-58. Hannah Arendt, "Franz Kafka: A Revaluation," *Partisan Review*, XI (1944), p. 415.

[39]Albert Camus, "Hope and the Absurd in the Work of Franz Kafka," in *Kafka: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Ronald Gray (Englewood Cliffs, 1962), pp. 147-55.

[40]Erich Heller, *Franz Kafka* (New York, 1974), pp. 105, 107.

[41]Pierre Angel, "L'obsession bureaucratique chez Kafka," *Etudes Germaniques*, XVII 1962), pp. 1-13. Georg Lukács, *Realism in Our Time: Literature and the Class Struggle* (New York, 1971), p. 78.

[42]See, for example, Paul Reimann, *Von Herder bis Kisch: Studien zur Geschichte der deutsch-österreichisch-tschechischen Literaturbeziehungen* (Berlin, 1961), p. 157. Helmut Richter, *Franz Kafka: Werk und Entwurf* (Berlin, 1962), p. 299. Hermsdorf, pp. 146-55.

[43]Hermsdorf, pp. 149, 277ff.

[44]Theodor W. Adorno, *Prismen: Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt, 1955), pp. 319, 324.

[45]Arendt, p. 415.