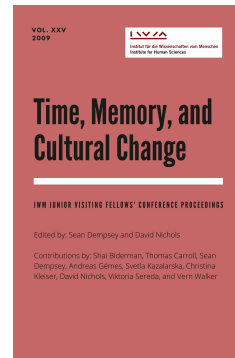


# The Big Leap: Heidegger, Nietzsche, Kafka

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*Deeply lost in the night. Just as one sometimes lowers one's head to reflect, thus to be utterly lost in the night. All around people are asleep. It's just play acting, and innocent self-deception, that they sleep in houses, in safe beds, under a safe roof, stretched out or curled up on mattresses, in sheets, under blankets; in reality they have flocked together as they had once upon a time and again later in a deserted region, a camp in the open, a countless number of men, an army, a people, under a cold sky on cold earth, collapsed where once they had stood, forehead pressed on the arm, face to the ground, breathing quietly. And you are watching, are one of the watchmen, you find the next one by brandishing a burning stick from the brushwood pile beside you. Why are you watching? Someone must watch, it is said. Someone must be there. [1].*

## Introduction

One of the defining characteristics of the later Heidegger is the concern for art and its place in humanity's relation to Being.[2] In his Nietzsche lectures, as in his lecture on the origin of the work of art, Heidegger constructs a hermeneutical picture of the world in which art, the artistic lifestyle and the image of the artist play an important role. The world itself, Heidegger presupposes, is merely a dynamic set of relations, properties and attributes which construes the entirety of human possibilities, thus, of human meanings and significances. As such, Heidegger claims, it is hidden and forgotten, undisclosed and unapproachable in its entirety, buried six feet under several layers of metaphysical misconstructions and religious anxieties. The world of art, on the other hand, offers resolution and disclosure. It reveals the basic fields of significance, which are otherwise repressed and ignored. Art and the way of the artist reveal not only the totality of meanings but also and mainly the mere possibility of meaning at all. A work of art, Heidegger argues, reveals the very event of disclosure – the disclosure-as-such – and not only the radical tension that specifically articulates the world of references and relations. Thus, Heidegger seeks to comprehend the meticulous way in which art itself as such discloses disclosure by revealing disclosure in the work of art.

In this paper I intend to apply Heidegger's conception of art as the ultimate and utter disclosure of "being as a whole" to the work of two extraordinary thinkers: Nietzsche and Kafka. It seems at first glance that these two thinkers share no common ground. The former is a philosopher-artist, the teacher and creator of the Eternal Recurrence and the Will to Power, the mad[3] watchman at the gateway of the artistic becoming[4] and the

barbaric destructor of nihilism. The latter, on the other hand, is an artist-philosopher, the creator of the Kafkaesque picture of the world that negates any possibility of becoming. Nietzsche gives birth to a new man at the moment's gateway<sup>[5]</sup> who rises out of the ashes of the nihilistic God-free world to create new laws and new ethics. Kafka, on the other hand, hopelessly tortures his protagonists, ridicules their naivety, mocks their beliefs, and aimlessly puts to them the Sisyphean task of charging their own gateways.<sup>[6]</sup> Nietzsche's protagonists can deify themselves and become supermen; Kafka's protagonists will never enter the gate of law and will never reach the promised castle.<sup>[7]</sup> Zarathustra, the most predominant Nietzschean artist, recreates himself and is finally consoled while disclosing life in its entirety; K., the wretched advocate of the Kafkaesque picture of the world, is doomed never to succeed, despite continuing and excruciating efforts, in any of his missions, and inevitably dies.

Despite the apparent abyss gaping between Nietzsche's and Kafka's worlds, the two seem to share one crucial idea. Both Kafka and Nietzsche believe the way to unfold the true meaning of life (and to that extent – of art) begins with a total and essential metamorphosis. Nietzsche opens his book “for none and all” with the depiction of “the three metamorphoses,”<sup>[8]</sup> posing the image of the child as the final goal of this self-redeeming process. Kafka devotes one of K's most famous enterprises to the utter transformation of his being and his reincarnation as “a monstrous verminous bug.”<sup>[9]</sup> Whereas Nietzsche's metamorphosis leads to the disclosure of “the moment” in its entirety (what Heidegger calls “being as a whole”), Kafka's metamorphosis begins in the arbitrariness of “one morning” and ends with total despair and annihilation. However, these two approaches coexist while sharing the same basic framework, which articulates the immanent need for a metamorphosis in order to explore life in its entirety.

Thus, whereas the two worlds – that of Nietzsche and that of Kafka – differ in motivation and direction, they both hold the metamorphic process to be a constructive and necessary essence in the human experience of life. Since Heidegger's contention about art and life is clearly an intellectual reflection on Nietzsche's world, it is only fair to assume that Heidegger will approve of Nietzsche's “three metamorphoses” and will hold them to be the truest essence of the will to power. Whether he will disapprove of Kafka's “metamorphosis” is a question yet to be answered. Within the limited scope of this paper, I aim to pursue this question. First, I will present in broad strokes Heidegger's position on the nature of art and on the contemplative relations between art and life. Then, I will illuminate the differences (and, more importantly, the similarities) between Nietzsche's world and Kafka's world, using two of their famous epigrams: Nietzsche's story of “The Tightrope Walker”<sup>[10]</sup> and Kafka's tale of “The First Sorrow.”<sup>[11]</sup> I will argue for the centrality of the artistic leap in the works of both Nietzsche and Kafka, and will reversely trace this idea in Heidegger's metaphysics. Finally, I will conclude what, if at all, the comparison of Nietzsche and Kafka might teach us regarding Heidegger's outlook on the artistic life.

## **The Heideggerian Leap: Five Statements on Art, Life and What Sets Them Apart**

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Heidegger constructs his view about the nature of art in five constitutive statements: first, he claims that “Art is the most perspicuous and familiar configuration of will to power” and that “Art must be grasped in terms of the artist”;<sup>[12]</sup> he follows that by claiming that “art is the basic occurrence of all beings”<sup>[13]</sup> and that it is “the distinctive countermovement to nihilism”; last, he argues that “art is worth more than the truth.”<sup>[14]</sup> With these five statements Heidegger negates the common view, which perceives art primarily as a way of representing things in the world. According to this common view, there is an immanent distance between the artistic representation and the objects it depicts. This distance keeps art and its objects in a representative relationship of estrangement and “unfamiliarity.” Heidegger opposes this view. He does not perceive this relationship as merely “representative” but instead articulates it as the best configuration of life, i.e., as something which exceeds the mere representational relationship and reveals truth of its own. Moreover, following Nietzsche, who claims that “the phenomenon ‘artist’” is “the most perspicuous [form of life],”<sup>[15]</sup> Heidegger describes art as “perspicuous,” i.e., as familiar and accessible. Since to define art in terms of familiarity is to articulate art as a domain which experiences ‘Being’ in the fullest and richest way possible, it is fair to assert that the being of an artist is the most perspicuous mode of life. Thus, says Heidegger, “life is for us the most familiar form of Being” and since “the innermost essence of Being is will to power” art reinvents itself as the ultimate vessel of the will to power.

As such, art does not stand merely as a generic name of its entire performances and occurrences but as the essence and origin of all of them, and, foremost, as a unique kind of disclosure. This uniqueness creates a most structurally clear framework, and as such it holds two apparent advantages. First, it allows us to bring forth and express distinct processes of becoming. When we create a jar out of clay, or any meaningful composition out of a structure, we embrace the artistic framework as the distinctive and ultimate mode of expression and creative power. Second, and most important, it includes the artist both as a cause and as an effect of the creative process, thus making him non-distinct from the entire creation. As such, it removes all restraints and abolishes all boundaries, thus reviving forgotten possibilities and enhancing the affirmation of life.

According to Heidegger, this new framework portrays the artist as the main axis of the creative process, per which “the other configurations of will to power...are to be observed.”<sup>[16]</sup> This creative affirmation thus unifies the ‘bringing-forth’ and ‘brought-forth’ into the ultimate manifestation of life and the will to power. Art as ‘bringing-forth’ is incapable of being distinct from the artist, the one who ‘brings-forth.’ The inseparability of these two components puts forward the image of the new creator, which Heidegger names “the artistic-philosopher.”<sup>[17]</sup> This creator is the self-creating fully-aware awakened man who “remove(s) himself far enough from other men, in order to give them form,”<sup>[18]</sup> and thus becomes the philosopher who “is an artist in that he gives form to beings as a whole.”<sup>[19]</sup> He does not accustom himself to an oblivious concept of reality and to forgetfulness of his own existence. He is fully committed to the totality of a creative process and fully asserts the will to power as life. Thus, he is not occupied with mortality as his defining moment and is not thrown into a limited world of senses shaped by his being-towards-death. He gains “access to creation in general and thereby to will to

power”[20] whereby disclosing and unfolding the merits of life. He reveals “what propels and advances, what lifts a thing beyond itself,” which is the will to power.[21] He does not unfold the truth – he creates it by “yes-saying to the sensuous, to the semblance, to what is not ‘the true world.’”[22] Echoing Nietzsche’s famous question: “Have you ever said ‘Yes’ to a single joy?”[23]—Heidegger concludes his description of the artist-philosopher-creator as he who says “yes” to a single joy and by that affirms life in its entirety.

To be an artist is thus to be engaged in a metaphysical activity since “the artistic creates and gives form” and as such it “constitutes metaphysical activity,” which effects “the highest deed and thus the thinking of philosophy too.”[24] Heidegger stresses this assertion in his final statement in which he concludes that “art is worth more than the truth.”[25] Art is more important than truth in the sense that it exemplifies the kind of evaluative vision that determines how we judge the values embodied in the world, and it is this vision that decides what, for us, is to count as truth in human affairs.[26] Art, as opposed to the metaphysical narrative of ‘truth,’ is a semblance stimulation, a generator of a world in which truth-as-such has no meaning.

The artist-philosopher creates art as truth. The art he creates does not exist merely as a bearer of properties, as an external reflection of his intentionality, or as a mere distinction between matter and form. The art which he creates, inseparable from the artistic lifestyle he leads, falls outside the hermeneutical circle Heidegger portrayed in his early work.[27] The principle of the hermeneutical circle assumes that the process of interpretation materializes in the unfolding of the already-known, and as such “it appropriates understandingly that which is understood by it.” Therefore, “in interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself.”[28] Art, as previously argued, falls outside this barren self-serving circle. It opens itself and becomes “the origin” even of the hermeneutical circle. Consequently, art is able to create a new semantic field of references, which exceeds and is not dependent on representational relationships. In other words, art has the ability to disengage itself from the restraining particularities of an historical context, and thus is able to depict “the most familiar,” the “Being as a whole” and the “will to power” without the enforcing pressure of the already-known. It does so while constructing a new relational turf, in which the representational relationship is replaced with the comprehension and affirmation of life as a whole.

The work and life of the artist-philosopher is thus that of a creator who is not bound to the restrictions of hermeneutics, since his creative affirmation of the will to power lies beyond interpretation. In order to become a creator one has to proceed by means of a leap—a leap into what is most familiar, most daily but nevertheless requires a bold and risky leap—a metamorphosis—in order to be exposed. This leap becomes the only artistic possibility when we encounter a phenomenon which unfolds a conceptual value which can not be merely seen in the actual occurrence. To understand the nature of such a leap, Pattison gives the example of a blossomed tree: when one opens his window and sees a tree in blossom, one actually experiences a particular construction of physical elements, none of which (apart or together) really holds the blossom of the tree. Neither the flowery bloom nor the greenest of leaves holds something else rather than its own phenomenological appearance. The conceptual and mental being of “the blossom” are thus comprehended

not through their mere appearance but rather through an “artistic leap” which boldly reveals the non-physical “blossom” and thus experiences its total Being. Thus, Heidegger concludes, it is “the leap alone [which] takes us into the neighborhood where thinking resides.”[29]

In order to draw a better picture of this epistemological and metaphysical leap, one should recall Nietzsche to the stand. In his work on the birth of tragedy Nietzsche writes: “Here, when the danger to his will is greatest, art approaches as a saving sorceress, expert at healing. She alone knows how to turn these nauseating thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence, into notions with which one can live: these are the sublime as the artistic taming of the horrible, and the comic as the artistic discharge of the nausea of absurdity [...] these Dionysian companions, the feelings described here exhausted themselves.”[30] This depiction of art as “a saving sorceress” goes deep into the phenomenological sense in which Heidegger perceives it.[31] Art is indeed the true domain that exposes and affirms “being as a whole,” while properly rearranging the mechanism of the hermeneutical circle. The leap it relies upon is the conception of art as the will to power. The will to power, as the striving force which aims to uphold life in its entirety, is the artistic metamorphosis of Heidegger’s philosophy

## **Nietzsche’s Leap: the Metamorphosis of the Tightrope Walker**

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The quotation from Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy* shows the similarities and the interdependence between the way Heidegger constructs the artistic metamorphosis in his five statements and the way Nietzsche depicts the nature of this metamorphosis throughout his theories of Eternal Recurrence and The Will to Power. Nietzsche’s depiction of the three metamorphoses opens his masterwork, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which tells the story of Zarathustra, “the teacher of Eternal Recurrence.”[32] Zarathustra’s story is that of overcoming; it is the description of his transformation—his metamorphosis. Zarathustra changes throughout the course of the book. He begins his journey as a hermit in solitude, a shepherd without a flock choking on a snake which has crawled into his mouth,[33] warily pondering his “abysmal thought”[34] which lies upon him as his “greatest weight.”[35] He ends this journey consoled and healed, “no longer shepherd, no longer human” but “changed, radiant [and] laughing”[36]. The nature of his transformation, his metamorphosis from a lion to a child, lies within his subjection of the will.

Nietzsche most famously discusses this transformative will when he describes Zarathustra’s healing and convalescence in his speech “on the convalescent.” [37] He uses the metaphor of a gateway to support his claim regarding the illusive yet profound nature of the submissive will. Zarathustra begins his speech when he declares: “Behold ... this moment! From this gateway, Moment, a long, eternal lane leads backward: behind us lies an eternity. Must not whatever can walk have walked on this lane before?”[38] A moment placed on a linear timeline imposes absolute limits on the will’s capacity to will backward and command time. The past cannot be undone. However, if the moment is at “a gateway,” inasmuch as it is a spaceless transformative instrument which symbolizes the non-linearity of time, it still cannot be changed – but it can be unwilled. “The image of

time running forward and backward into eternity,” says Heidegger, causes time itself to be “viewed from the ‘moment,’ from the ‘now.’”[39] To view the “moment” from the “now” – “to stand [in the moment]” as Heidegger puts it[40]—is to apply and affirm the most genuine assertion of the will.

To view time “from the moment”[41] is to become the artist-philosopher, i.e., to become the deified creator who killed God and shattered the old metaphysical “tablets”[42] in order to destroy the certitude of all moral values, philosophical doctrines, religious beliefs and social conventions. And while the old metaphysical world is going up in the flames of nihilism—art, the “saving sorceress,” arises as the consoling force which reaffirms the will, as the Dionysian assertion of Being and as “a countermovement to nihilism” which as such is “worth more than the truth.”[43]

It is obvious that the most predominant artist in Nietzsche’s masterwork is Zarathustra himself. In his overcoming he becomes the teacher of eternal recurrence, and since the godless world he creates eliminates the old distinction between truth and appearance, his teachings can only be explained in terms of artistic creativity. However, and even before he sketches the way and begins his journey (with his speech “on the three metamorphoses”), Zarathustra has a most important encounter with another artist. This counter-artist – the nemesis who is nevertheless deeply admired – is the tightrope walker.

The metaphorical encounter with the tightrope walker begins when Zarathustra wanders to the edge of the forest and comes upon a town. He has only just ended a prior encounter with an old saint, a misguided representative of the old metaphysics who evidently “has not yet heard the news, that God is dead.”[44] That encounter ends when Zarathustra and the old man separate while “laughing as two boys laugh.” This boyish laughter, a preliminary reminder of the last of “the three metamorphoses,” is a highly significant prelude to the encounter with the tightrope walker since it unfolds both the nature of the metamorphosis (becoming a child) and the joyful Dionysian attributes of the creative assertion.[45]

However, Zarathustra has first to face laughter of a different sort. It is not yet the liberating laughter of the already transformed philosopher who has solved the riddle and become an artist;[46] for now, it is a ridiculing laughter, the one of the mocking crowd that gathers around to listen to Zarathustra’s speeches, mistaking him for the ringmaster who has come to introduce the tightrope walker. Oddly enough, this liberating artistic laughter that becomes the crowd’s mocking laughter is believed by the tightrope walker to be the cue to begin his artistic performance.

No sooner does the tightrope walker commence his performance than a jester dances out upon the rope, mocking and reproaching him “in an awe-inspiring voice”[47] for venturing where he does not belong and for blocking the way of his superior. Then, contemptuous of the tightrope walker’s safety, the jester leaps over his head, causing the acrobat to lose his balance, or his will, and to plummet to the ground.[48] As Zarathustra kneels beside him, the tightrope walker, maimed and mortally wounded, regains consciousness and states that the jester who tripped him is the devil and that the devil will now drag him to hell. Zarathustra, however, denies the reality of the devil and hell, God

and heaven. The dying tightrope walker responds by saying that if Zarathustra is right about the nonexistence of the devil and the mortality of the soul, then death is not fearful and life is not valuable. According to the tightrope walker's reasoning, if heaven and hell do not exist, then human beings do not differ from beasts and therefore are not accountable for their actions; thus, the nihilistic conclusion that everything is permitted, nothing is punishable and human life is meaningless. Zarathustra hastily rejects the tightrope walker's inference. He calms the dying man and says that since the tightrope walker dared to leave his tower and to risk his life, it cannot be claimed that his life was meaningless. The tightrope walker expresses his gratitude to Zarathustra, and Zarathustra, admiring the man for having made danger his vocation, promises to bury him with his own hands.

The tightrope walker story should be read as a metaphor which illustrates Zarathustra's speeches to the townspeople. This metaphor contains all of the necessary elements which will later serve Heidegger in his interpretation of the artistic "leap" needed to disclose "being as a whole." The tightrope walker fails to become the artist and to surmount his historical site by authentically taking up his own being-towards-death. Enslaved by the Christian-Platonic metaphysics (depicted through his belief in the afterlife and the construction of meaning), the tightrope walker plunges to his death and fails to authentically take up his own being-towards-death. Zarathustra tries to convince the tightrope walker that he is not reducible to the Christian-Platonic interpretation of his existence and that he must risk the abandonment of the Christian-Platonic identity if he is to overcome himself.[49] The imagery of the "leap" —the jester's leap over the tightrope walker in this case—articulates the nature of this overcoming.

The tightrope walker's response to the jester's leap is critical. Prompted by the sight of the victorious jester, the tightrope walker renounces his will to reach the end of his rope and plunges to his death.[50] He cannot bear to see his rival win, since the jester symbolizes the possibility of overcoming man, the same possibility the tightrope walker cannot bear to think of. With his leaps above the tightrope walker, the jester mocks the Christian-Platonic metaphysical constraints, which are the founding roots of the tightrope walker's world. The tightrope walker no longer can aim to artistically represent this metaphysics, since he surrenders to the jester. After experiencing the jester's leap and realizing his win, the tightrope walker has no alternative but to fall to his unavoidable death.

In order to prevail, the Nietzschean artist must not submit himself to the jester's leap. Instead, he must perform his own leap, facing the meaninglessness of existence and joyfully affirming life in its entirety. The Nietzschean artist must not reduce himself to the town's laughingstock; instead, he should embrace his own laughter, the all-freeing laughter which eases the burden of "the greatest weight." The tightrope walker, the undeveloped and not-yet-enlightened artist, fails to accomplish the task and is crushed to the ground by the jester's leap. His fall and his death are nothing but the bitter unavoidable end of the life he led; both are offspring of the same metaphysical framework which has replaced the forgotten "Being-as-such" with the fearful "being-towards-death." In his dying moments, the tightrope walker realizes the unauthentic nature of his life.

With Zarathustra at his bedside he then contests the jester's leap with one of his own, changing the tragic plunge to an overcoming victorious leap of his own. He acknowledges the wisdom of Zarathustra, and earns a dignified burial.

## Kafka's Leap: the Metamorphosis of the Trapeze Artist

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When we focus our attention on the philosophical branch of Kafka criticism, it seems that we find ourselves in the midst of an endless exegesis and interpretation to which Kafka's works are mercilessly subject. Despite this multitude, it seems that Kafka's text easily defeats any of its specific readings, as if "every sentence says 'interpret me,' but none will allow it." [51] Thus, we might want to proceed with great caution when we aim to portray Kafka's imagery of art and of the artist. Some of Kafka's well known works – "The Metamorphosis," "Before the Law," "The Hunger Artist" and "In the Penal Colony" to name a few – compose a deep and complex picture of these topics. I will not elaborate on these works here. For now, I will begin by contrasting Nietzsche's tightrope walker with the most vividly similar imagery Kafka has to offer, which is the image of the trapeze artist in "First Sorrow."

Kafka's "First Sorrow" tells a story of a trapeze artist who cannot distinguish between life and art and thus spends all his time at the top of the circus tent, in perpetual performance of his art:

*A trapeze artist—this art, practiced high in the vaulted domes of the great variety theaters, is admittedly one of the most difficult humanity can achieve—had so arranged his life that, as long as he kept working in the same building, he never came down from his trapeze by night or day, at first only from a desire to perfect his skill, but later because custom was too strong for him.*

His artistic existence – whereas perspicuous and essential to his being – is nonetheless a troublesome and distracting occurrence in the overall realm of circus life:

*...when other turns were on the stage, his being still up aloft, which could not be dissembled, proved somewhat distracting, as also the fact that, although at such times he mostly kept very still, he drew a stray glance here and there from the public.*

However,

*The management overlooked this, because he was an extraordinary and unique artist. And... this mode of life was... his art... at... its perfection.*

The trapeze artist "could have gone on living peacefully" in his seclusion "had it not been for the inevitable journeys from place to place, which he found extremely trying." After one too many journeys, the artist asks his manager for a second trapeze to be always available to him:



*The trapeze artist, biting his lips, said that he must always in the future have two trapezes for his performance instead of only one, two trapezes opposite each other. The manager at once agreed. But the trapeze artist, as if to show that the manager's consent counted for as little as his refusal, said that never again would he perform on only one trapeze, in no circumstances whatever. The very idea that it might happen at all seemed to make him shudder.*

The manager once more agrees with his protégé, justifying and rationalizing his whim. “At that the trapeze artist suddenly burst into tears” crying: “Only the one bar in my hands—how can I go on living?” The worried manager calms him down and promises him that his wish will be acted upon. Little by little the manager succeeded in reassuring the trapeze artist, who had fallen back to his sleep.

*But he [the manager] himself was far from reassured. With deep uneasiness he kept glancing secretly at the trapeze artist over the top of his book. Once such ideas began to torment him, would they ever quite leave him alone? Would they not rather increase in urgency? Would they not threaten his very existence? And indeed the manager believed he could see, during the apparently peaceful sleep which had succeeded the fit of tears, the first furrows of care engraving themselves upon the trapeze artist's smooth, childlike forehead.*  
[52].

The structural similarities between Nietzsche's depiction of the tightrope walker and Kafka's portrayal of the trapeze artist are stunning. Both stories present an image of an artist who confuses his life for his art. Both artists can only stand to be up in the heights, between earth and sky, detached and not really belonging to each. In both cases the cosmological yet delusive peacefulness of the artistic existence is challenged by a menace distraction: a jester in the former case and a second trapeze in the latter. And in both cases it is the art which kills the artists, bringing a metaphysical (and actual) end to the tightrope walker and an existential end to the trapeze artist.

While noticing these structural similarities, it is easy to be fooled into the conclusion that both stories bear the same moral, which, to put in Heideggerian terms, aims to reveal the true art of life, the creative art which experiences “being as a whole” and is, as Heidegger puts it, “worth more than the truth.”[53] To put it in other words, it is tempting to infer that both Nietzsche and Kafka have the same metamorphosis in mind when they are asked to portray their respective image of the artistic “leap.” But that would be a mistake, or at least an oversimplification of Kafka's parable, since the nature of the Kafkaesque metamorphosis – symbolized in the bizarre yet fatal request for a second trapeze – is essentially different from the role of the jester in Nietzsche's story.

Nietzsche's jester symbolizes the joyful artistic leap (or metamorphosis) that one should make in order to become. Zarathustra himself will make the leap throughout his journey, and will be consoled. Nietzsche's leap is thus the leap *outside metaphysics*, beyond good and evil, and into the new domain of artistic life. The tightrope walker fails, of course, to make that leap. He is still captured by a world which is dominated by a Godly and devilish morality, and only on his deathbed does he acknowledge his captivity.

Kafka's leap, on the other hand, keeps the reader locked within the same metaphysical constraints Nietzsche is so eager to overcome. Moreover, the Kafkaesque leap strongly suggests that this metaphysics is actually inescapable. For Kafka, this metaphysical framework is the precondition of all our representations. It is the reality on the sole trapeze – the trapeze for itself – which is believed to be a coherent and conceptual construction. However, the sole trapeze turns to be insufficient; the reality it presents is empty. A second trapeze is necessarily required in order to complete the metaphysical picture and restore its alleged stability.

A second trapeze, needless to say, will not restore any stability but will rather encourage its opposite. The artist, while agonized and tormented in his cabin, is well aware of that result. A second trapeze will do nothing but reveal the possibility of an epistemological reflection and, in the same breath, the impossibility of a coherent interpretation. To put it in other words, a metaphysical reality which consists of two trapezes is a paradoxical reality which fails itself. It cannot stand for itself (in the Kantian sense) and it cannot vouch for any consistency, since consistency is interdependent with the stability which no longer exists. Kafka thus cannot commit himself to any picture of reality, however precarious and unstable it may be. If descriptions of reality are confounded by paradoxes, the same holds true of the paradoxical descriptions themselves – they are no less paradoxical than their alleged subject matter.

Kafka's trapeze artist thus 'performs' the metaphysical failure. Some might think that this is sheer nonsense; anyone acquainted with and abiding to Aristotle's laws of thought knows that two contradictory statements cannot reside within one logical framework. And yet, Kafka is not interested in paradoxes as such, but rather with the pragmatic inefficiency of metaphysics. Whereas paradoxes stem from the conjunction of two contradictory propositions, the Kafkaesque situation is such that even contradictions fail to materialize – every proposition, by being performed, somehow 'entails' its contradiction. In saying one thing – its exact opposite is concurrently 'performed.'

To perform one thing is thus to perform its opposite. To have two trapezes (as a matter of necessity) is to open the possibility for three. The metaphysical picture Kafka portrays here resembles an attempt to sew together two pieces of cloth with a needle in whose eye there is a minute blade that unstitches whatever this needle sews together. Yet, even this analogy is somewhat off the mark, since, in effect, the unstitching blade is not a part of the needle, but is attached to the fingers of the hand clutching it. And so, we end up in a sorry state of affairs – "the first sorrow" – where stitching is unstitching, and unstitching is stitching, affirmation is negation, progress is retreat and vice versa. It is this circular movement that gives rise to the Kafkaesque nightmare in which every possibility contains within itself the very obstacle that prevents its actualization.

The essential difference between Nietzsche's tightrope walker and Kafka's trapeze artist lies within the metaphysical nature of their respective worlds. For Nietzsche, God is dead and the tightrope walker is required to leap beyond metaphysics. For Kafka, God can never die – but he can never live either. God is conspicuously absent in Kafka's writings, but, yet again, every claim confirming his absence simultaneously proclaims his presence.

While Nietzsche calls for the abolition of transcendence from our conceptual groundwork, declaring the Kantian thing-in-itself to be empty, Kafka could not abide this optimistic wish.

In a diary entry dated January 16, 1922, Kafka refers to waking up (the perceiving of the outside world) and sleep (the inward self) as two clocks that are not in unison. The lack of synchronization between these two clocks is brought about by the fact that ‘the inner one runs crazily on’ while ‘the outer one limps along at its usual speed.’ Inevitably, this lack of synchronization brings about tragic results: ‘What else can happen but that the two worlds split apart, and they do split apart, or at least clash in a fearful manner.’

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## *Notes:*

1. Kafka, “At Night.”

2. Pattison, p. 75.

3. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 125.

4. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, III, 13, “The Convalescent.”

5. Ibid.

6. Kafka, “Before the law”: “Before the Law stands a doorkeeper. To this doorkeeper there comes a man from the country and prays for admittance to the Law. But the doorkeeper says that he cannot grant admittance at the moment.”

7. Kafka, "The Castle."
8. Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, I, 1, "On the three metamorphoses."
9. Kafka, "The metamorphosis"; I chose to unify K with the actual protagonist of this story, Gregor Samsa, since the philosophical idea of the metamorphosis can be shared by both.
10. Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, prologue.
11. Kafka, "The First Sorrow."
12. Heidegger, N, I, p. 71.
13. Heidegger, N, I, p. 72.
14. Heidegger, N, I, p. 75.
15. Nietzsche, Will to Power, 797; see: Pattison, p. 69.
16. Heidegger, N, I, p. 71.
17. Nietzsche, The Will to Power, 795; Heidegger, N, I, pp. 73-74.
18. Heidegger, N, I, pp. 73-74.
19. Ibid.
20. Heidegger, N, I, p. 139.
21. Heidegger, N, I, p. 76.
22. Heidegger, N, I, p. 74.
23. Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, IV, 19, "The Drunken Song."
24. Heidegger, N, I, p. 73.
25. Heidegger, N, I, p. 75.
26. Pattison, p. 80.
27. Heidegger, BT, 188/148.
28. Ibid.
29. Heidegger, WCT, 12.
30. Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 7.
31. See: Gooding-Williams, p. 53-54.
32. Nietzsche, The Twilight of the Idols, X, 5.
33. Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, III, 2, "On the Vision and the Riddle."
34. Ibid.
35. Nietzsche, The Gay Science, IV, 341.
36. Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, III, 2, "On the Vision and the Riddle."

37. Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, III, 13, “The Convalescent.”

38. Ibid.

39. Heidegger, N, II, p. 41.

40. Heidegger, N, II, p. 57.

41. Ibid.

42. Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, III, 12, “On the Old and New tablets.”

43. Heidegger, N, I, p. 75.

44. The old man, prologue, 2: “Could it be possible? This old saint in the forest has not yet heard the news, that God is dead!”

45. Berkowitz, p. 135; Gooding-Williams, p. 64.

46. Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, III, 2, “On the Vision and the Riddle.”

47. Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Prologue, 6.

48. Berkowitz, pp. 143-144.

49. Gooding-Williams, p. 48-49, 65-66.

50. Gooding-Williams, p 91.

51. Theodor W. Adorno, “Notes on Kafka,” in Harold Bloom, Ed., Franz Kafka (New York and Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986), p. 95. Thus Erich Heller wisely comments: “There is only one way to save oneself the trouble of interpreting The Trial: not to read it...” See: Erich Heller, Kafka (London: Fontana/Collins, 1974), p. 80.

52. Italics mine.

53. Heidegger, N, I, p. 75.

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