CHAPTER - 2

Kafka’s Notion of Crisis as Suspension of Being
Frantz Kafka presents a situated notion of being that encounters an unbearable reality in relation to the self. Such a reality is mapped in a separation between self-identity and the being of that identity. The separation is a simultaneous partitioning of being as well as an existential confrontation with a reality that was never deemed to be a part of existence. This phenomenon is presented by Kafka in three of his famous tales of punishment—*The Judgment, The Metamorphosis*, and *The Trial*. In all these the unbearable reality of life remains the point of contact between the world and the consciousness with a magical and extraordinary transformation of the self from within that destroys the very self in the face of an unbearable reality. In all three works, the effect of the fantastic, which has come to be known as kafkaesque, derives from that strange discrepancy between the explicit perspective of the narrative, which is the protagonist's consciousness, and a reality that erupts from within him and overwhems and destroys him. Such a reality is primarily marked by a suspension of being. Suspension happens in the
following ways:
1. that the being needs to suspend itself in order to defend itself against imminent odds.
2. being is always in a process of transformation and any psycho-physical or metaphysical transformation is conditioned by a suspension.

The travelling salesman Gregor Samsa’s metamorphosis is the most famous example of this structure of suspension that we intend to discuss in this chapter. The essential question before us, to describe in a Heideggarian vein, how is the being of the human is riveted and delivered over to beings that refuse it?

Gregor Samsa, the protagonist in Kafka’s Metamorphosis is delivered up to its proper being by a refusal to be magnificently expressed in the insecthood of Gregor in contrast to members of the family who never live upto their ‘proper’ being. Gregor becoming insect is simultaneously constitutive of human relations as well as it exposes the impossibility of realizing the potential of the being in its fullest form. It is rather a narrativization of Gregor’s lived experience from the supposed transformation of Gregor into an insect who faces the double crisis of a temporal disjunction between the past and the present and an exclusion from the sphere of human relations. Gregor’s exclusion from his family and his own world expresses the exclusionary character of
human relations that displaces itself to an inner crisis. As Gilberte Royer points out, Infantile stories, fables, fairy tales, and such characters as Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck reveal how easily an animal becomes a hero. In the metamorphosis the switch between animal-man produces a sinister element, an undefinable, severely unpleasant feeling. The sinister elements related to the repression of the castration complex, the familiar which has been handled (animism), the perception of the 'double', the need to repeat in a compulsive way, and the infantile fears about loneliness and darkness are all condensed in Kafka's stories. It is postulated that as a defense the ego which feels impotent in the presence of a magic, primitive, chaotic, and terrifying world has the need to repeat the infantile situation. The defense, mind and body, is a specific dissociation, defending against a total dissolution by creating the shell of a body and also protecting the body against all these terrifying unconscious fantasies. In the story, by the return of the repressed, the author managed to gratify the fantasy and at the same time had no need to abandon the defense mechanism.² At the time, when Kafka wrote The Trial, he noted a similar relationship between surface consciousness and submerged Jewish past, between their official self that
they show to the world, and their hidden ghetto past, their truth, which they do not acknowledge, but which still rules them. In *Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa's transformation into an insect body is a defense mechanism that ironically militates against its own possibility of being.

**Partition of Gregor's Being**

In Metamorphosis, Gregor's consciousness is that of a dutiful son and family member, an ordinary hardworking salesman. But his reality, into which he wakes after a night of restless dreams, is that of a giant species of vermin, an unspecified combination of bed bug and cockroach perhaps. The cool, objective narration provides no explanation. But in reading the text carefully, we note that Gregor's verminous condition functions as the alienated and disgusted perspective with which Gregor's dutiful consciousness views his rebellious desire for liberation from his salesman's existence of routinized drudgery. Gregor has had to repress this rebellious urge in order to remain the conscientious breadwinner of his family who depends on him. But his urge can be seen erupting in a form that absolves him of responsibility. He changes literally into the parasite, turning tables on his family. His transformation frees him from his hateful bondage in
fact, without, however, involving his conscious mind in his actual refusal to work.

Being an insect, "Gregor" overcomes the being of the insect—this is a facet of becoming and a sort of double suspension of being as well. The suspension happens in two stages: (1) suspension of Gregor’s being in the insect and (2) the being of insect is suspended in Gregor’s emerging identity/non-identity in course of his remembrances and present experiences.

Kafka builds up an existence for Gregor to which he becomes and in this sense, existence 'is' not, but it becomes. Gregor’s mode of being as an insect facilitates the real overcoming of nihilism embedded in an other identity, here in the identity of being a creature other than what one is. This overcoming must consist in the effective dispensing with the abstractive requirements of the inquiring of Being in favor of the actual varying modes of the determination of Being in the lived world of the everyday, in social, political, and cultural reverberations of the destining of Being understood as the nihilistic presencing of Being.

**Sources for an insect identity**

Kafka’s letter to Max Brod compares the young Jews who seek to make their way as German writers to insects stuck with their hind legs in the Judaism of their fathers.
but finding no new ground for their front legs. One is also reminded of Kafka's letter to his non-Jewish lover, Milena Jesenska, in which he compares Jews, insisting on living in an environment that hates them, with cockroaches one cannot get rid of.

In linking *The Metamorphosis* to Kafka's view of Jewishness, we should consider two factors. One is the disdainful and frequently disgusted perspective from which assimilated Central European Jews looked down upon their co-religionists from Eastern Europe. The latter's Yiddish-speaking Jewishness reminded Central European Jews too embarrassingly of their own, or their parents', recent past. It had not been so long ago that they themselves had escaped the condition, universally despised by the gentile world, which Yiddish symbolized. They wanted nothing more than to forget and wipe out all associations that could implicate them in those despised and therefore odious origins. In the implicitly and explicitly anti-Semitic environment in which they had to make their way, they desperately wanted to preclude any reminder of the state from which they came. With a scorn bred from near panic they rejected anything that, or anyone who, would threaten to direct attention to their and their families' past.

Kafka's father Herrmann was a particularly crude example of Jewish self-contempt projected onto fellow
Jews less assimilated than himself and thus a potential source of painful embarrassment. A few months before he wrote *The Metamorphosis*, Franz brought his disreputable Yiddish-speaking friend from Warsaw, Yitzhak Levi, to the apartment where he lived with his parents. Kafka senior did not conceal his deep annoyance. Within hearing of his son's guest, he made sneering comments about him. For Kafka senior, his son's friend did not count as a human being with a right to have his feeling considered. No, he was only an Eastern Yid, not really human. He made him a dog—several years later Kafka was to write a dog story in which allusions to Judaism can be found—a dog and a carrier of vermin. Vermin was what one had to expect when associating with an Eastern Jew. And vermin, of course, is what Gregor becomes when he ceases to earn money and support his family. Such a son is vermin in his father's eyes, and having thoroughly internalized his father's bourgeois perspective, Gregor sees himself as vermin as soon as he ceases to go to work.

There is a second factor of crucial importance to be considered when linking *Metamorphosis* to the meaning authentic Jewish life had for Kafka. Judaism for Kafka meant more than a return to one's roots. It also signified a liberation, that is, the possibility of breaking out from stifling, oppressive, and deeply flawed patriarchal
tyranny. All the Jewish figures that were to recall Kafka to Judaism were rebels with the courage to defy their fathers, to break away from stifling surroundings, and to follow their urge to independence. His encounter with authentic Jewishness was for Kafka not nostalgia, but discovery. Authentic Jewishness offered Kafka the vision of his own liberation from his family and its spiritual emptiness and hypocritical conventionality. A middle ground between outright desertion and authenticity, his family's Jewishness appeared hopelessly compromised to him. Genuine Judaism held forth the promise of escape from that compromise which he saw poisoning all authentic emotion and relationships. Judaism seemed to offer the integrity he longed for—in his case, the integrity of following his own deepest bent, to live a life of literature. It was a freedom he encircled with his thoughts, but he never dared to grasp for himself. Rebels and bohemians all, the young Eastern Jews whom Kafka admired were for him exemplary figures of successful revolt. Ironically, it was they who embodied emancipation whereas he was the one who, from an anxious need for security, shied away from freeing himself from the stranglehold of his bourgeois family. Yitzhak Levi and the men and women of this group had achieved what he himself could not. They dared to make a living from art. They were examples that shamed him.
This paradigm of explanation of Jewish alienation and consequent struggle for emancipation is a picture of crisis in the individual and social worlds of Jews, to which Kafka and his characters allude to in terms of existential conditions. Such existential conditions can be described only in terms of disclosing what is concealed in the ontic and factical existence of peoples. Gregor enacts the role of opening up the 'bare life' of Jews in the context of a temporal disjunction between identity and its denial. Such a disjunction assumes new historicity in the form of opening up the form of life to an experiment of turning humans into non-humans that exert its fullest power in unfolding the travestying aspects of human life. But such an unfolding is historically rooted in the event such as Auschwitz, in which the survivors merely escape the fate, while the large majority is reverted to the bare life of an animal to be sacrificed, "whose own Being is at issue in its very Being". How the Being is at issue can be understood from the paradoxical situation in which, like Gregor's insecthood, one bearing witness to human relations is transformed into non-human, although there is an identity between these two modes of being human and insect. The transition is never complete and demarcated as belonging to two different form of life, it is rather a strange mix between human and insect, a reification of human life that never fully destroys the
human. It is the remainder between humanness and insecthood that remains there to disclose the in-authenticity of the temporal flow of experiences, while it resists the transition to the non-human by enacting what is disclosed in the horizon. The result is a paradoxical refusal to disclose the animality, the insect-like features of the human, which is not an object of mastery, but remains in the transition between human and non-human as a moment of abandonment. Gregor's insect being represents this moment of abandonment. But the paradox lies in an exposure of one's own inactuality, while the central notion of being human remains connected with one's own existence as possibility or potentiality. The tale of metamorphosis represents an original constitution of this potentiality.

**Potentiality and Being in Metamorphosis**

*The Metamorphosis* is also a tale of shame incarnate in the insecthood of an unqualified, rejected and thrown out humanity. The verminous hulk of the traveling salesman is a figure of shame, shame of a dual nature. That is, it presents itself from two opposite perspectives. As seen from the bourgeois perspective of his family and firm, which is also, at least in the beginning, the perspective of Gregor's conscious self, his ceasing to work has made him a figure of shame and disgust. He
who does not go after his commercial job is a parasite no better than vermin. The victim of the system has internalized its perspective. It is his own ways of not just experiencing victimhood, but a deeper connection between life and its anomic vulnerability.

But Gregor appears shameful from an opposite perspective as well. He appears shameful for not having had the courage to defy his family and openly break out of a world that confines him. He appears shameful for his failure to fulfill his secret craving for freedom. One might say that Gregor’s metamorphosis represents Kafka’s life as seen from an internalized Yitzhak Levi’s perspective—the perspective of that part of his self that accused and condemned the half-hearted and self-divided existence of the Westernized bourgeois Jew.

_The Metamorphosis_ is not only an allegory of Kafka’s view as an assimilated or half-assimilated Jew. That would be a gross simplification. What I am trying to point out is the striking resemblance of structure between Kafka’s representation of fictional characters with his presentation of the relationship between use of the German language and Jewish being. This parallelism of structure applies not only to _Metamorphosis_. An even stronger resemblance can be seen in _The Judgment_ and _The Trial_.

In both Kafka’s narratives and his observations on the
Jewish and German elements in the psyche of his class and generation of Jews, we can discern structurally the dichotomous coexistence of everyday consciousness with a repressed reality which is repressed because it is considered shameful. This inner division brings an element of profound wrongness into the lives of those whom Kafka describes, whether they are fictional or actual characters.

What he said to his audience in the Jewish Town Hall of Prague might, one is tempted to say, also apply to the fictional protagonists of his fantastic tales of punishment, provided we substitute for the word “Yiddish” a term like “submerged being.” I shall repeat the passage from Kafka’s address: “And once Yiddish has taken hold of you . . . you will no longer recognize your former complacency. [Your former self we might add.] At that point you will so powerfully feel the true unity of Yiddish [with yourself] as to make you afraid—not of Yiddish any longer, but of yourselves.” That is, when this submerged part of our being comes into sight, becomes evident, and confronts consciousness, we can and will no longer be as we seemed to be before. We will be changed. We will, Kafka adds, have to “bear the burden of our fear.”

In his speech to his fellow Jews, Kafka does not stop at this point, and this marks the difference from his fiction.
Kafka goes on, offering a redeeming side of this self-confrontation that he denies to his fictional heroes and largely to himself as well. In his address, he puts the unbearable burden of fear in the conditional subjunctive: “You would not be able to bear the burden of this fear alone, if”—and this “if” is decisive—“if, at the same time, Yiddish did not also endow you with a self-confidence that resists this fear and is even stronger.” It was Kafka’s goal to make available to others this self-confidence, which would arise from open acknowledgment of and reconnecting with the past, and he even sought to make it available to himself. But he never really believed he could succeed in that task. And this profound belief in the impossibility of reconnecting is what he imparted to his fiction.

The Aesthetic Phenomenon
Kafka uses such states of fear and angst as the background for revealing the transformation of human life that renders it shameful, surprising, immobile and meaningless. This world of Metamorphosis, for Kafka, is an aesthetic phenomenon in two senses—one active and the other passive. In the active sense, it is aesthetic as the arena of creativeness with a live response to one’s state of existence (being a Jew or any other figure of persecution); in the passive sense, it stages performances
(just as Gregor does it for himself and others in a sad remembrance of his relations) for spectators. Just to draw a parallel, in Schopenhauer’s terms, the former can be termed as the world as Will, as the creative energy of the universe, which in Nietzsche’s term, the Dionysian. Further, the world as Representation, in Nietzsche’s term is the Apollonian, as contemplation, observation, and judgment of what the Will has created and creates. The interaction between the two sides produces perspectives for both actors and spectators.

In all his thinking Kafka takes the view of the spectator/judge of the subject caught in a given state of existence, which is also the ‘given’ of human life and history. He demands of the reader to share the same experience of the creator in the greatest possible complexity, the creation of suspense and the excitement that accompanies existential states of being. His philosophy seeks to promote conditions most favorable to producing realization of the inherent crisis of being. In a sense he takes the position of the Subject in question such as Gregor, one who not only watches from inside, but also struggles to produce ever more real and yet agonized picture of life on earth, but who is also mortally afraid that the tragic spectacle might fizzle out and amount to only being a state without redemption.

What Kafka combats most is a normalized vision of life.
Herein lies his affinity to an existential uncertainty. He finds several, or at least two, sides to any question and not infrequently affirms opposite positions simultaneously. Far from banishing self-contradictoriness from the precincts of experience, he advocates it and finds total self-consistency in pernicious simplification.

This view is built into the notion of the Metamorphosis as a picture of being. Like God in late medieval thought the being is too tremendous to be equated with any single—and thus limited—perspective. True to its multiple characteristics, it contains, in Nicholas Cusanus's term, the *coincidentia oppositorum,* the coexistence of opposite qualities and attributes. The *coincidentia oppositorum,* or self-contradictoriness of all possible assertions about the whole of being, informs the very manner and structure of Kafka's thinking. It is a thinking not only profoundly dialectical, but also transcending the self-limitations of logical concepts, the necessary one-sidedness of signifiers of being.

A supreme example of the coincidence of opposites is the Being itself. In the idea of the Being, that all-embracing, all-informing, and ever-moving vision of reality, mutually exclusive notions—exclusive in terms of logical definitions—are united and together constitute the Being. As humans and insects exclude each other
from the sphere of defined beings, it is the creative knowledge of the state of being that binds creation and its opposite, destruction, inseparably together. At times Kafka seems to celebrate distortions and disabilities to enhance the significance of ever-renewed creation. Without its opposite, Kafka’s thought emphasizes, there cannot be creation. The absence of the coincidence of opposites entails nothingness. Defamilairization of existence and being, for Kafka, is only the other side of creation and vice versa. The two, so fundamentally contradictory in the individual’s experience, from the view of the whole are only two phases of a process of becoming.

The same coincidentia oppositorum at the heart of being can be found again in Kafka’s tragic narration of Gregor Samsa’s life, which is for him a reenactment of the whole of being. As in Nietzsche, the Apollonian individual is only apparently the opposite of the Dionysian whole, in the same way, Kafka’s settings are doubly conflicting. One example shall suffice. In Metamorphosis, Gregor’s sister Grete offered his insect brother a bowl of bread and milk, which she remembered to be his most favourite food item. This becomes an expression of care from a sister to a brother, yet it strangely also serves as a token of gratitude of the brother toward the sister and much more poignantly, bread and milk symbolizes Gregor’s
regress to infancy. The uncanniness built into the creative acts of everyday human transactions gets revealed from the very core of such transactions. But this is only the temporary result of the Dionysian activity. The destruction of the individual in a creative description seems an absolute end, thus tragic, in our colloquial and misleading meaning of sad. This view is inexact because it is partial. Through the chorus consisting of a series of pleasure and pain, the dance of being continues. In Kafka’s Penal Colony, the condemned man is stuffed with first the sugar candy and then they must accept the green felt teat and the white rice pap of the machine, all very motherly items. In Kafka’s affirmative view of the Being, life always outlives death. From the perspective of the whole of being, Apollonian individual and Dionysian chaos are one. Seen in the totality in which they belong, they are two manifestations of a single whole—life. Shame comes from seeing oneself through another’s eyes, from Gregor’s seeing himself through Grete’s eyes, and from the reader’s seeing Grete through the narrator’s eyes. The text graphically mirrors how we see each other in various shameful (and comic) conditions. Though Gregor’s condition is ultimately shameful because he is reduced to the dependency of an ugly baby. Life unites the individual and the collective that remains as absent perceiver and spectators. From
this view the apparent opposites are, in the Hegelian sense of the word, aufgehoben, repealed as two phases of the all-inclusive whole of being. This aufgehoben is experienced in The metamorphosis occurs both in the first sentence of the text—"As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect" and in the last paragraph of the story, which describes Grete’s transformation into a woman blooming and stretching toward the family’s “new dreams” once Gregor has been transformed into garbage. Grete’s final transformation, rendered in concrete bodily terms, is not only fore-shadowed but also reflected by Gregor’s initial transformation from human into insect. Only when Grete blooms into an eligible young woman, ripe for the job and marriage markets, can we recognize that her empowerment is also an ironic reification. She has been transformed at another’s expense, and she will carry within her the marketplace value that has ultimately destroyed Gregor, a value that may destroy her as well.

The ultimate identity of Apollonian individual and Dionysian creativity shows itself in the strict proportionality of their relationship. The greater the individual, the more powerfully alive and self-possessed s/he is, the greater, and thus more tragic, will be his/
her fall. Crisis requires preeminent heroes. Yet the more tragic the fall of the hero the more powerful will be the reassertion of life with an element of starkness built into it. It is the greatness of the individual, and consequently the all the more shattering witnessing of his fall, that enhances and magnifies all the more powerfully the transcending greatness of life in surmounting even the most momentous loss. In tragedy the proportionality and the intimacy between death and life, individual and whole, makes its appearance.

The image of this proportionality emerges when Gregor is referred to as a “thing,” an “it.” “It’s dead,” the charwoman announces. “It’s lying here dead and done for!” The increasing reification or it-ness of Gregor’s body is the ground for Grete’s ultimate repudiation of him as a brother and for her own transformation. “But how can it be Gregor?” she asks, a question which echoes Kafka’s own response in writing to Felice Bauer; “I just don’t rest in myself. I am not always ‘something,’ and if I ever was ‘something,’ I pay for it by ‘being nothing’ for months on end.” Such cryptic self-disclosures intimate that this “something” from which Kafka sought to escape by way of ambiguous writings and from which Gregor escapes through his transformation into an insect is Kafka’s image of an unequivocal, completely virile and powerful body. In contrast, we must imagine Kafka’s
own body, a body with which he felt that nothing could be achieved, and that body's imagistic parallel in the "pitifully thin".

The final irony of Kafka's text is that despite the bizarre experiences that the Samsas have endured, no tragic meaning has been attached to them. The exchange of Grete for Gregor represents the idea that persons, like utilities, can be replaced. Grete can serve as her family's breadwinner either as a woman married to a salaried husband, or as a woman who has learned to exploit (and be exploited by) the system that has exploited her brother. The disappearance of Gregor simply means that the Samsas will move into a cheaper house, "but better situated," and that they will take more journeys to improve the chances of procuring a husband for Grete. It is Grete who will now sell and be sold, who will perpetuate the system of exchanges and debts that was formerly Gregor's business. The significance of Gregor's death is referred to with the utter confidence of a patriarchal blindness that all three Samsas now share equally: it is all a matter of letting "bygones be bygones". And Grete, not surprisingly, has become a little patriarch. The sale or sell-out of her brother Gregor is the "first fruit" of her new rights.

It is as though there was a balance of dependence in the house- before Gregor's transformation, he was the bread
winner but still dependant on his family for several things, such as shelter and love. However, after the transformation, Gregor’s family becomes completely independent, since they need nothing from Gregor, or he has nothing to offer them. Since, finally, he serves no purpose, it is only fitting that he (peacefully) pass away to leave his family their newfound freedom.

Politics of Representation
Kafka’s use of literary elements becomes so complex that the story is almost transformed into a parody of itself. Kafka, due to the extremely stark style that he uses, utilizes very little characterization. Most of the characters in the book are very flat, and remain static. Gregor’s character, however, contains a high degree of complexity. Again, Gregor tries with all his might to be accepted by his family, but because of a fundamental difference, that of his greater psychological depth, or complexity, compared to that of his family, he finds this acceptance impossible, and eventually dies. Kafka represents this problem with a very original technique, one that can be called “beastification.” Ironically, as the story progresses and Gregor becomes more beast-like outwardly, depicted by his loss of vision and his hanging from the ceiling, he becomes more human-like inwardly. Does it show that animalization has a place in
post-human politics of representation? This brings into picture a being that is situated at the margin of human and animal that brings into focus the relationships within human life as well as in the area of transition. At the start of the book, Gregor considers himself a very business-like man, concerned with the basic, day-to-day jumble of life, without time to ponder over philosophical nonsense. In fact when he first wakes up and finds himself transformed into a bug, he tells himself 'What if I went back to sleep for a while and forgot all this foolishness.' However, later on when the family clears his room of furniture, the one thing which he desperately throws himself over to protect is a picture of a lady swathed in furs, which evidently symbolizes love. As the story progresses, Gregor apparently becomes more human, and less of a machine built for society. From this point of view Gregor could be labeled the only dynamic character in the book. In the last chapter, Gregor becomes so human that he displays a wonderful appreciation of music. In third time and final scene in which he escapes from his room, he is drawn by his sister's violin. Kafka asks 'Was he a beast if music could move him so?' The reader is obviously supposed to answer that no, he is not really a beast at all, his family is more beastish than he. However, it is questionable whether Kafka himself understood this concept; his
inferiority complex in relation to his father and his hesitation to express himself openly would suggest otherwise.

**The Existential Angst**

Kafka's depiction of Gregor Samsa and Grete as characters serves the double purpose of immanence and transcendence. It is immanent in the sense that the being of Gregor Samsa represents a rational clarification of existence. Gregor maintained that existence, as the quest for Being, is human's effort of rational self-understanding, or universalizing, of communicating—a method that presupposes that existence and reason are the two poles of man's being. Reason is possible existence, which contrasts with the actual. In case of Gregor, the actuality of insecthood lies in sharp contrast to the reasonable form of existence. Gregor's reasons for understanding his own plight face this strange feat of being transformed into something unexpected. Application of reason at the state of being an insect by Gregor is self-referential, yet it cannot provide a satisfactory explanation to the very state of existence. It is rather the state of existence that defies any attempt of explaining the event of being turned into an insect in order to unleash a series of reversals to human condition. It produces an angst, whether the human
condition purvey an idea of not-being-human, which in turn, exposes the inherent contradictoriness of the very human condition. Such a contradictoriness manifest to itself and as such real, if, *with, through* and *by* another existence, it arrives at itself.” This activity, however, is never consummated; thus, when the impossibility of its achievement is recognized, it is changed into a plight that can be overcome only by way of being in it. In other words the ‘subjectivity of the subject’ transforms the grounds of its existence into reasons that explains how the human being dwells in the world. Kafka provides the grounds of human existence in the metaphor of being an insect that purveys the full consciousness of being not-human.

Similarly, on the question of the authority of first-person self-awareness, Kafka is apparently quite clear that little is to be gained ontologically from such self-awareness. First, though it is true that the ‘question of the “who” (of being) answers itself in terms of the “I” itself, the “subject”, the “Self”, Kafka is quick to point out that this gives us nothing more than a mere ‘formal reactive awareness of the “I”.’ Such a question concerns itself with that which makes life possible. It seems obvious, as Kafka argues, that ‘such self-referential consciousness is not the subject-matter of *Metamorphosis*, since such consciousness is a special
mode of revealing and a derivative one at that'. A deliberate, reactive 'I-awareness' is 'only a mode of self-apprehension, but not the mode of primary self-disclosure. This latter is a self-awareness mediated by social practices: human being 'never ends itself otherwise than in the things themselves'; it does not 'need a special kind of observation' because when 'being gives itself over immediately and passionately to the world, its own self is reflected back to it from things'. This mode of self-awareness is typical of Kafka's anti-essentialist description of human existence. It can be understood from the point of view of Kafka's parables. Let us take into account two of Kafka's parables that run close to Gregor's sense of the self. The parable entitled, "The Truth abot Sancho Panza" tells us that Sancho Panza didn't have a 'pre-ordained object'. Kafka cites the parable in the following, Without making any boast of it Sancho Panza succeeded in the course of years, by devouring a great number of romances of chivalry and adventure in the evening and night hours, in so diveriting from him his demon, whom he later called Don Quixote, that his demon thereupon set out in perfect freedom on the maddet exploits, which, however, for the lack of a pre-ordained object, which should have been Sancho Panza himself, harmed nobody. A free man,
Sancho Panza philosophically followed Don Quixote on his crusades, perhaps out of a sense of responsibility, and had of them a great and edifying entertainment to the end of his days. This act of philosophical following and the lack of a pre-ordained object are not just elements of a world of entertainment, but they represent the existential state of human intimacy and sharing of visions. The parable presents the paradoxical absence of any object of this vision and hence makes the agency of Sancho Panza somewhat indiscernible by only disclosing the possibility of carrying out responsibility towards Don Quixote, who himself does not find an enemy. Gregor Samsa, similarly, doesn't find the reason for his transformation, while he reasons out the role that he is supposed to play to others and vice versa. His transformation into an insect and his banishment from his family are both symptomatic of another transformation of Grete, who now enjoys a positive freedom of being-in-the-world. Gregor banishment from human world is paradoxically compounded by his strange sense of being the part of the world from which he is banished. Gregor experiences the thinginess of banishment in the things that his sister offers him, old newspaper: old, half-rotten vegetables; bones left over from the evening meal, caked with congealed white sauce; some raisins and almonds; a
piece of cheese, which two days before Gregor had declared inedible... In addition to all this she put down some water in the bowl permanently earmarked for Gregor's use.\(^6\)

Gregor realizes the mundaneness of the disvalue that is attached to giving to an 'insect', whose identity is determined by his previous self, a being-for-itself to Gregor, while the insect stands out as the materiality of his present state of existence and becomes the 'sense' of his being to other, the being-in-itself.\(^7\) Using Husserlian sense of constitution of sense, one can also say that the state of insect is phenomenologically reducible only in terms of the self-consciousness of Gregor, also the self of Gregor is only liminally present in the body of the insect. The moot question is, is Gregor the victim of his own self-consciousness? Kafka's interpretation of Don Quixote reveals the state of self-consciousness as a perpetually fluctuating, engaged and searching consciousness that gets anchored to its own constructs, the being of which remain un-captured in the acts of consciousness. In effect, consciousness comes to a cropper. The situation is better depicted in Kafka's parable of three leopards,

Leopards break into the temple and rink to the dregs what is in the sacrificial pitchers; this is repeated over and over again, finally it can be calculated in
advance, and it becomes part of the ceremony. What Kafka wanted to convey through this parable is the transformation of the ritual into real leopards, an instance of becoming. Just as three leopards, in Metamorphosis, three bearded, black-coated and synchronized boarders wanted to roost with Samsas by laying claim to become a part of the ceremony and they are no more superfluous than the monstrous insect Gregor himself. This is a production of an ambience of existential fear and angst that establishes synchrony between disparate nature of beings, while they themselves remain disparate to give rise to a situation of 'no exit' that states about the very human condition. Gregor is reduced to a state of onlooker when these three aliens conquer the paternal chair and table to devour the food that his mother and sister prepare. Ironically enough Gregor do not get to see how his father evicts the three lodgers at the end of the story as by that time he is dead. That Gregor’s living room is transformed into a theater, becomes a stage in the consciousness of Gregor, who only feels the following, (...) in his own opinion he was sufficiently compensated for the worsening of his condition by the fact that towards evening the living-room door, which he used to watch intently for an hour or two beforehand, was always thrown open, so that lying
in the darkness of his room, invisible to the family, he could see them all at the lamp-lit table and listen to their talk, by general consent as it were, very different from his earlier eaves-dropping. This state of being a passive and disabled persona who only can mutely listen and see what others do, especially when Gregor’s father and sister both go to work now. The world of Gregor gets further twisted when the narrator comments, ‘it had become a habit in the family to push into his room things there was no room for elsewhere (...).’ This reminds us of the Heidegger’s ‘nothing of the world’ that now constitutes Gregor’s consciousness. This thing-ness is again hardly an encounter with the things of the world, it is rather an alienation of Gregor from his own self where his own family members are alien to him. Further, Gregor’s state of existence merely externalizes everything without any attribution of being in it, which is a crisis of not only his own self but of being, especially when one is transformed into an externalized body without being. Such a body without being is simultaneously a pale reminder of the lost identity as well as a receptacle for a reflexive recuperation of being that cannot overcome its own loss of identity. The angst lies in Gregor’s non-understanding of his miserable state, as if his current state of existence effaces the being of his self-identity. The state of Gregor’s being
is characterized by Kafka at a moment when the three strangers take him to the dinning table as Gregor begins ‘to crawl to and fro, over everything, walls, furniture, and ceiling, and finally in his despair, when the whole room seemed to be reeling about him, fell down onto the middle of big table’. This is further accentuated when Gregor’s father chased him, who is now an insect and then decided not to chase him just before he decided to hit him with apples. Such an incident comes in sharp contrast with Gregor’s construction of a self-caricature. He construes gestures after gestures, images after images all drawn from his past ‘lived experience’ as if the past is re-enacted in Gregor’s externalized consciousness, which no longer can belong to his current state of being. Such externalization of events that happen to Gregor qua an insect prepares the ground for Gregor’s banishment from his family. The question about his identity continuously haunted Grete, his apparently caring sister, who also later turned skeptical about the true identity of Gregor. How can an insect be Gregor was the thought that disturbed every member of his family. Kafka interpreted this question in an ontic sense, where the human being cannot bear a relation with an insect in its own being. As the insect cannot have the world, while the human being is in the world in terms of relationality, the insect can become the unmediated form of experiencing, which Gregor in this case is.
Reconstructing Being from Experience

An unmediated state of experiencing without the self, as in the case of Gregor, is an exposure that being-in-the-world are prone to and therefore the entity that experiences so much assume an identity only by subtraction. Such a subtracted identity of Gregor in many ways is more conscientious than the contentious and intervening self-identity of other characters. Gregor assumes a superimposed selfhood that actually is never present in an inferior life like that of an insect. The situation can be understood in terms of Agamben’s notion of ‘being-held-in-suspense’,

What appears for the first time... in the deactivation (... of possibility, then, is the origin of potentiality-and with it, of Dasein, that is, the being which exists in the form of potentiality-for-being (...). But precisely for this reason, this potentiality or originary possibilization constitutively has the form of a potential-not-to (...), of an impotentiality (...), only in beginning from a being able not to (...), that is, from a deactivation of a single, specific and factual possibility.¹¹

Gregor’s insecthood, therefore, is a deactivation of the possibility of being human, which interestingly is a potentiality. The potentiality of the insect can only be expressed in an apparent remembrance of the past that
keeps Gregor observing his family members and experiencing the agony of how the three alien lodgers disrupt the family. The potentiality also gets deactivated in the factual possibility that Gregor cannot be an insect. Such a possibility opens up the transition of Gregor’s family to a more appropriate place. Further, the decision of the family to ask Gregor to leave their home, which Gregor has sustained so far comes as a shocking revelation or disclosure of the inherently fractured human relationality. Finally when Grete uses her broom to throw Gregor out of their home becomes happy at the death of Gregor, apparently a catastrophic and unexpected end for Gregor. The narrator recounts Gregor’s agony at his death. The absence of Gregor in his dead incarnate is surpassed by Kafka’s parody, when Gret yelled at Gregor’s corpse, ‘Come and look. It’s kicked the bucket. It’s lying there. It’s completely snuffed it!’ This ploy of Kafka in killing the isolated insect-being of Gregor can be explained as a state of existence that comes as a fulfillment of life by the insect as if it is a life outside history. Agamben explains it in this manner, If ontology is the more or less felicitous relationship between language and world, then parody (...) expresses language’s inability to reach the thing and the impossibility of the thing finding its own name. The space of parody—which is literature—is therefore
necessarily and theologically marked by mourning and by the distorted grimace (just as the space of logic is marked by silence). Gregor mourns for his loss of human self as he does not find a name for his current state of metamorphosis. Grete’s responses to her brother’s presence is marked by a distorted disbelief in the being of the insect, which ontologically cannot be related to her as a sibling. Her joy at the fratricide symbolizes Kafka’s parody of human relations that simultaneously undermines the human existence as well as indicts humans for their cruelty and inconsiderate relationship with others. Kafka portrays this failure of human relations through Gregor. He has a side-wound from the rotten apple his father threw at him; his sense of duty to his family supersedes his own desires to live; and he has been betrayed by his sister when she removes the furniture from his room and also when she convinces her parents that Gregor is not human anymore and that they must get rid of him rather than endure him. His situation worsens as the maid, upon advice from Grete, moves discarded furniture in to his room. The room closes in on Gregor; he is trapped in this prison, suffocating from further loss of free will.

Gregor’s lack of freewill does not completely make him succumb to pressures on him. It is rather the case that the state of existence of Gregor is a display of the sovereign
logic of being that is anti-essentialist, but no anti-human. What the insect motif succeeds in is the pre-subjective conditions that structure the human subject such that it can be affected and transformed by the exposure to material relations of power. The subjectivity of the human needs to be invented in this process of transition from animal/insect to human and vice versa, both of which are material modes of experiencing the human condition from inside and outside both as a witness and a participant. Gregor, a participant to human affairs as an insect does not necessarily fly at tangent with his role of being a spectator to the unfolding drama of mundane interests. Both these modes of Gregor's existence present the traumatic interior of his being, while Gregor as a human being remains indistinguishable from Gregor as an insect. The question that needs to be addressed, can the distinction between human and animal be erased altogether in reconstruction of being as spectator and participant in the anti-essentialist mode of conceiving the self? The next chapter discusses the issue in a greater human context.

Endnotes:


Kafka, *Metamorphosis*: 93


Ontic sense concerns the body and not the being.
