

## The Metamorphosis: Existence

Existence is truly the greatest gift given to all human beings. As one exists, paths are followed and decisions are made. The way one uses his or her existence determines one's usefulness of living. A person cannot just exist as an individual; one must live their life to its fullest extent in all aspects of reality.

Merely existing is one thing; while living is another. The act of living requires complete connection and a sense of involvement with the community and the rest of the human world. Living entails basing the concepts of one's existence on truth, hope and reality. One cannot be living if one's life has no truths or needs and desires. If one's life has not been lived to its fullest, one truly does not know how to live. The two contrasts, between existence and the act of living, are fully and clearly portrayed in the novella, The Metamorphosis, written by Franz Kafka.

The Metamorphosis explains the significance of living a life rather than merely existing. The main character in this novella, Gregor Samsa, is one of the many characters who exist yet do not know how to live. He isolates himself from the sharing of the community and disables his communication with the human world. Gregor's connections to the human world were drifting further away from him and at last he no longer possessed any. The lives of the characters were based upon absolute deceit and therefore, the characters were existing in a life of a complete lie. This lie led to a life of disappointment and therefore an unwanted way of

living. In particular, Gregor and his sister Grete were victims of lives not decided

on their own. By becoming completely isolated from the human world, it is impossible to communicate with the "living" society and therefore one cannot be a part of and unfulfillment. One must do more than exist; one must learn how to live.

have a sense of the community. In The Metamorphosis, isolation and alienation

are at the heart of this surreal story. Prior to Gregor's metamorphosis, he confesses to the reader of his alienation from the real world. He states,

What a gruelling job...I've got the torture of traveling, worrying about changing trains, eating miserable food at all hours, constantly seeing new faces, no relationships that last or that get more intimate...That's all I'd have to try with my boss; I'd be fired in the spot...If I didn't hold back for my parents sake, I would have quit long ago. (pg 4)

Gregor passes time by avoiding his boss, trying to earn enough money so that he can pay back his parents, which he claims will take up to "five or six years" and painlessly avoiding intimate relationships, a side effect he argues comes with the profession. Gregor is alive and existing; however, Gregor goes out of his way to isolate himself from the community. Gregor Samsa's transformation into a vermin presents self-alienation in a literal way. The travelling salesman wakes up one morning and cannot recognize himself. Seeing himself as a gigantic specimen of vermin, he finds himself in a fundamental sense estranged from himself. No manner more drastic could illustrate the alienation of a consciousness from its own being than Gregor Samsa's startling awakening. He states, "What's happened to me?" (Kafka 3) He is now unknown to even himself. As a bug, he cannot live in the community for he is no longer a human and therefore, does not fit in. Gregor is no longer a part of society for he cannot communicate and share with the human world. Gregor's relationship with the magazine cut out, rather than of a real woman, demonstrates his alienation from his recent being. Over the table stands the picture of a recently being out of a glossy magazine and lodged in a pretty frame. It showed a lady done up in a fur hat and a fur boa, sitting upright and raising up against the viewer a heavy fur muff in which her whole forearm had disappeared. (Kafka 3) Because Gregor completely isolated himself from intimacy, he only had this very picture to remind himself of the human world which he was not apart of. This cut out is a reminder of all the aspects in his life that he is secluded from and this is a

confirmation of his segregation. Gregor refuses to develop intimate relationships and therefore, he has this picture to replace his missing reality. He does not share with the community for he ignores all women in which a relationship is likely to occur since it is not something he has the time for. This prevention to live the typical life is an awareness that Gregor truly does not know how to live. The father alienates himself from the outside world until the transformation of his son. He is described as an old man who used to sit around lazily and feebly. In respect to Mr.Samsa, Kafka declares,

He used to lie wearily buried in bed when Gregor left on a business trip...he had difficulty getting to his feet...and on the rare occasions when the whole family went out for a walk on a few Sundays in June and on major holidays, he used to shuffle along with great effort. (Kafka 38)

Mr. Samsa, like Gregor, lived his life secluded from the outside world. He allowed for his inabilities to get in the way and gave up sharing and communicating with the “living” community. He was merely existing; just breathing. There was no change or opportunity in his life. He spent his days reading, eating and sleeping. Mr.Samsa truly did not know how to live for his life was embedded in isolation.

Once in isolation, all one has to live for is one’s links to humanity, Even through isolation from the “living” community, there can still be links to the human world however, once these final links are completely shattered, there can be nothing worth living for and therefore, one finds it difficult to live the proper life. Gregor’s picture in the wall of his room, showing a woman largely concealed in fur as if she is turning into an animal herself, symbolizes Gregor’s metamorphosis. “It showed a lady done up in a fur hat and a fur boa.” (Kafka 3)

This picture then represents the personal human identity he has lost and he asserts himself for the first time in the novella in opposition to his family in order to preserve his identity. When Grete was trying to remove this photo from Gregor's room, he reacted intensely.

He saw the picture of the lady all dressed in furs, hurriedly crawled up on it and pressed himself against the glass which gave a good surface to stick to and soothed his hot belly. At least no one would take away this picture, (Kafka 35/36)

He holds on tightly to his humanity. The glass of the picture acts as a reminder that he can never possess this picture and therefore his humanity is out of reach. Yet, he seems to be stuck to the photo when he would not let Grete get rid of it. His struggle for humanity is something he cannot entirely let go of. Grete and her mother also began to clear out Gregor's room "They were cleaning out his room and depriving him of everything he loved." (Kafka 35) Now that Gregor's final links to his humanity, and his last sense of hope for renewal, have been taken away, Gregor has nothing to live for and he finds it difficult to survive on his own when all of his reminders of the human world have vanished. When Gregor hears his sister play the violin, he is automatically drawn to it for it reminds him of the bond the two of them used to share. It was his very last sense of humanity before his destruction. "His sister began to play. Father and mother, from either side, attentively followed the movements of her hands. Attracted by the playing, Gregor had dared to come out." (Kafka 48/49) For once in his life, Gregor felt fulfilled when he heard his sister playing, for it reminded him of the former human world that once existed. The sound he hears returns him to his humanity,

allowing him to recognize his love for his sister and his desire to send her to the Conservatory. The music has touched Gregor in a completely new way. While he was the human Gregor Samsa, he had never experienced Grete's playing in this profound manner. Gregor has reclaimed his humanity only by becoming an insect. However, this realisation of his family and their happiness, ultimately leads Gregor's to his death. Gregor realises that he must please his parents, yet again, and in order to make them happy, he forces himself to die. Gregor has now officially lost all of his links to the human world for he has hit the bottom of his deterioration and died.

A shattered link to humanity is a true consequent of a life centralized on deceit and misconception for a beneficial life should be based on hope and truth. For the majority of Gregor's life, he spent each day working because he was led to believe that his family would deteriorate if he did not, given that Gregor was held responsible for paying off his parents' debt.

What a gruelling job...I've got the torture of traveling, worrying about changing trains, eating miserable food at all hours, constantly seeing new faces, no relationships that last or that get more intimate...That's all I'd have to try with my boss; I'd be fired in the spot...If I didn't hold back for my parents sake, I would have quit long ago. (Kafka 4).

However, after his metamorphosis, Gregor realizes, on the contrary, that his family is in a very good financial situation. The author states,

In the course of the very first day his father explained the family's financial situation and prospects to the mother and the sister...These explanations by his father were to some extent the first pleasant news Gregor had heard since his imprisonment. He had always believed that his father had not been able to save a penny from the business. (Kafka 28)

All of Gregor's hard work and dedication was unnecessary and was a waste of time. He committed his entire life to paying off their debts yet the parents would have easily done so on their own. The parents were the cause to Gregor's insufficient life for they lied to him. This deceit did not allow for Gregor to live the life he intended and therefore, he was unable to live in freedom. Ever since Gregor assumed the position of power in the household, barriers had arisen between him and his family. Deceitfully, his father, before the metamorphosis was described as an old man who used to sit around lazily and feebly. Now after the transformation, he stands tall, dressed in a uniform and with his hair neatly brushed. "Now, however, he was holding himself very erect, dressed in a tight-fitting blue uniform with gold buttons...his usually rumpled white hair was combed flat, with a scrupulously exact, gleaming part." (Kafka 38) Prior to his transformation, Gregor had to support his family for he believed that his father could not. Now, his father has taken the role of his son and is shown to be quite capable to do so. Because Mr. Samsa was not truthful with his son, this allowed Gregor to sacrifice his entire well-being to the sole purpose of his family's financial support. Gregor wasted his entire life doing so since his father was capable the entire time to support his own family on his own. The continuous stress of this unnecessary work brought to Gregor, leads him to his isolation, to his loss of humanity and eventually his death. After Gregor turns into a vermin, Grete seems like the only one who cares about her brother, even in the body of a giant bug she keeps his room clean and brings him things to eat twice a day. She

worried about what he might like to eat “But he would of never been able to guess what his sister in the goodness of her heart actually did. To find out his likes and dislikes, she brought him an assortment to food.” (Kafka 24) She gave him a reason to live. As time passed, Grete practically stops caring about her brother. She treats him differently given that, “No longer considering what she could do to give Gregor a special treat, his siser shoved any ole food into Gregor’s room with her foot.” (Kafka 43) Shoving him old food with her feet is an example of her showing him that he is a bug because bugs are usually stomped on with feet. The state of Gregor’s room shows how much she does not care for him. “The cleaning up of Gregor’s room, which she now always did in the evenings, could not be done more hastily. Streaks of dirt ran along the walls, fluffs of dust lay here and there on the floor.”(Kafka 43) Grete no longer cares for her brother and never actually did. She was selfish and deceived her brother completely. He thought she was his best friend, always there to help, yet she was the exact opposite; she was too busy with her own life to help her brother when he was in a time of major need. Unsurprisingly, by the end of the novella, Grete now wants to get rid of her brother. ““It has to go” cried his sister.” (Kafka 52) She now even refers to him as an “it”. Gregor has no influence on her anymore. She cannot deal with him there only as a nuisance and an extra “thing” to look after. Grete despises her brother and becomes noticeable that she never intended on being there for Gregor and taking care of him. These truths have finally been revealed to Gregor and there is a sense of disappointment that his life was a basis of lies

and misconceptions, even though he was too ignorant to see them. This knowledge forces Gregor to die and therefore, no longer exists.

Living centralized on deceit can be a result of a life not decided upon on one's own. A life not decided upon on one's own, ultimately leads to a life of unfulfillment and therefore a bad way of living since living entails using one's existence to their fullest and greatest potential. The Samsa's established a life for their children and they did not present them with any choice. The Samsa's used their son's, Gregor's, life to satisfy their own life. They made him believe that he was responsible for paying his parents' debt and so Gregor took on this responsibility. Gregor despised his job, but he remained dedicated to it since he believed he had no choice because he needed to support his parents. With frustration, Gregor states,

What a gruelling job...I've got the torture of traveling, worrying about changing trains, eating miserable food at all hours, constantly seeing new faces, no relationships that last or that get more intimate...If I didn't hold back for my parents sake, I would have quit long ago (Kafka 4)

Gregor definitely did not live the life he initially wanted which therefore leads to his deterioration. As a result, his parents were to blame for his metamorphosis, his death and for his entire unfulfilling "existence." The Samsa's set Gregor up, and sacrificed his life to better their own. They did not give Gregor any choice; they merely lead him on and used him until his death. Gregor lived a life not of his own and therefore did not live the way he initially intended to. After his death, it is now time for the Samsa's to decide upon the life of their daughter Grete. After the Samsa's and Grete left their apartment together, following Gregor's

death, the parents contemplate on the life of their daughter now. "Growing quieter and communicating almost unconsciously through glances, they thought that it would soon be time, too, to find her a good husband." (Kafka 58)

After having exploited and dehumanizing their son, the Samsa's will now do the job on the daughter. They will find her a husband and a new life whether she accepts it or not. She, as well, will not be able to live her life to the ultimate fullest for it will be the desired life of merely her parents will. She cannot and will not learn how to live for she will not be given any choice or judgement in her existence. Her parents control will lead her as well through her life. It has become a cycle of misfortunes and unfulfilling lives that the parents have begun and will continue.

An individual must do more than exist; they must learn exactly how to live. The Metamorphosis shows clearly the ways people can exist but do not actually "live". A life in isolation is not the way of living, but is merely a form of existence; however, since there are no connections with the human world, one can no longer apart of the community or society. As well, lives based on negative values, deceit and misconception are not realities. Lives cannot be centered on these factors for it will eventually lead to disappointment and unfulfillment. This unfulfillment can be a cause of lives not decided on by oneself. They are lives predetermined and without choice in one's life, this ends in deterioration and in a life not worth existing since it is one without satisfied potential and expectations. Nevertheless, apart from the novella, a life should be lived in absolute freedom. One should decide their own path of life to follow and should share and be a part

of the human community; for this is what actual "living" entails. Merely existing does absolutely nothing in a person's life; existence should be taken advantage of so one must use his or her existence to its greatest possible potential and live their fullest so that absolute disappointed, at all cost, will be avoided.