

Dearest Father,

You asked me the other day why I said that I was afraid of you. As usual, I didn't know how to answer you, partly because of my fear of you, partly because there are too many particular reasons for that fear for me to be in any way able to put them all together in one talk. And if I'm trying to answer you here in writing it'll thus be very incomplete, because even in writing fear and its consequences hinder me in my dealings with you, and because the dimension of the subject far exceeds my memory and my understanding.

The matter has always seemed very simple to you, at least insofar as you've talked to me about it and, without any reserve, before many others. It seemed to you to be something along these lines: you've worked hard all your life, you've sacrificed everything for your children, above all for me, and as a result, I've lived "up to the hilt", I had complete freedom to learn what I wanted to, I had no cause to worry about food, and moreover no worries at all; you didn't expect gratitude for that, you know all about "the gratitude of children", but you expected at least some kind of agreeable behaviour, some sign of mutual understanding; instead of that I've always kept away from you, in my room, with books, with crazy friends, with extravagant ideas; I've never spoken openly with you, I didn't come over to you in the temple, I never visited you in Franzensbad [2] nor did I ever have any other sense of family, I've never taken any interest in your business or your other affairs, I was a burden for you in the factory and then I left you, I've supported Ottla [3] in her obstinacy, and while I never lift a finger for you (I don't even bring you theatre tickets!), I do everything for my friends. If you summed up your opinion of me it turns out that you don't reproach me for anything really indecent or evil (with the exception perhaps of my recent intention to marry), but of coldness, of distancing myself from you and of ingratitude. And you reproach me with that as if it were my fault, as if I could have arranged everything differently by going in a different direction, whereas you aren't the least bit to blame, other than that you were perhaps too good to me.

I consider your usual version of the situation to be correct only to the extent that I too think that you're entirely blameless for our alienation. But I'm equally as entirely blameless. If I could get you to acknowledge that, then – not that a new life would be possible, we're both much too old for that, but a kind of

peace, not a cessation but a softening of your incessant reproaches. Strangely enough you have some idea of what I want to say. For example, you recently told me: "I've always liked you, even if I haven't outwardly been like other fathers tend to be, just because I can't pretend like others can." Now, Father, on the whole I've never doubted your kindness towards me, but I consider that remark to be incorrect. You can't pretend to be what you aren't, that's true, but to say for that reason alone that other fathers are pretending is either mere arrogance that can't be discussed any further, or else is — and in my opinion it really is — the veiled expression of the fact that something's really wrong between us and that you've helped to cause it, but without being guilty of it. If you really mean that, then we're in agreement.

Of course, I'm not saying that I've become what I am only because of your influence. That would be a great exaggeration (although I'm even inclined to believe it). It's very possible that even if I'd grown up completely free of your influence I couldn't have become a person after your own heart. I would probably have become a weak, anxious, hesitant, restless person, neither Robert Kafka [4] nor Karl Hermann [5], but quite different from what I really am, and we could have gotten along splendidly. I would have been happy to have you as a friend, as a boss, as an uncle, as a grandfather, even (albeit more hesitantly) as a father-in-law. But just as a father you were too strong for me, especially since my brothers died young [6] and my sisters came long after me, so I had to bear the first blow all by myself, and I was much too weak for that. Compare the two of us: I'm, to put it very briefly, a Löwy [7] with a certain Kafka foundation, that, however, isn't set in motion by the Kafka will to live, to do business and to conquer, but by a lion-like incentive that works more secretly, more shyly, in a different direction and often stops altogether. You on the other hand are a real Kafka in strength, health, appetite, power of voice, gift of speech, self-satisfaction, worldly superiority, endurance, presence of mind, knowledge of human nature and a certain generosity, naturally also with all the faults and weaknesses belonging to those virtues that your temperament and sometimes your quick temper drive you to. Perhaps you aren't quite Kafka in your general view of the world, as far as I can compare you with my uncles Philipp, Ludwig and Heinrich. It's strange that I don't see things quite clearly here either. They were all more cheerful, fresher, more informal, more easy-

going and less strict than you (in that, by the way, I've inherited a lot from you and managed the inheritance far too well, without however having the necessary counterweights in my nature as you have them). In that respect you've also gone through different periods, you were perhaps happier before your children, especially me, disappointed you and made your life difficult at home (when strangers came to visit, you were different) and have perhaps become happier again now that the grandchildren and the son-in-law are again giving you something of that warmth that your children, with the exception of Valli perhaps, couldn't give you. In any case we were so different and in that difference so dangerous to each other that if one had wanted to calculate in advance how I, the slowly developing child, and you, the developed man, would relate to each other, one could have supposed that you would simply run roughshod over me, that nothing of me would remain. That didn't happen, the nature of living people can't be so simply calculated, although perhaps something worse happened. But I must ask you not to forget that I've never in any way believed in any guilt on your part. You had the effect on me that you had to have – but you must stop thinking it a special malice on my part that I succumbed to it.

I was a timid child; nevertheless I was certainly also stubborn, as children are; my mother certainly spoiled me, but I can't believe that I was particularly difficult to bring up, I can't believe that a kind word, a calm taking me by the hand, a benevolent glance couldn't have obtained everything from me that was wanted. You're now basically a kind and soft person (what follows won't contradict that, I'm only talking about the way you appeared to be that had an effect on the child I was), but not every child has the perseverance and the force to keep searching until he discovers benevolence. You can only treat a child the way that you're made yourself, with strength, clamour and irascibility, and in my case that also seemed to you to be very suitable because you wanted to raise me to be a strong, courageous boy.

Of course I can't directly describe your way of educating me in the very first years, but I can imagine it by drawing conclusions from later years and from your treatment of Felix [8]. In that context it's important to keep in mind that you were younger then and therefore fresher, wilder, more original, even more carefree than you are today and that you were also completely tied up in your business – you could scarcely see me once a day and thereby made an

impression on me that was all the more profound, and that I can hardly ever become accustomed to.

I only specifically remember one incident from my first years. You may remember it too. Once I kept whimpering for water in the night, certainly not from thirst but probably partly to annoy you and partly to entertain myself. After a few strong threats that didn't help, you picked me up from my bed, carried me out to the back courtyard and left me standing there alone for a while in my nightshirt in front of the closed door. I don't want to say that that was wrong, perhaps there really was no other way to get a good night's sleep at that time, but with that I want to characterise your way of educating me and its effect on me. I was very obedient after that, but I suffered innerly from it. Because of my nature I could never establish the connection between having asked for water without any good reason, that seemed perfectly natural to me, and the extraordinarily terrible punishment that ensued. Even years later I suffered from the tormenting idea that the huge man, my father, could in the last resort come along almost without reason and carry me out of bed into the courtyard in the night and that thus I was nothing for him.

That was only a small beginning then, but the feeling of nothingness that often dominates me (a noble and fruitful feeling in other respects, however) stems in many ways from your influence. I would have needed a little encouragement, a little kindness, a little leeway in choosing my path forward, but instead you blocked it for me with of course the good intention that I should go in another direction. But I was no good for that. You encouraged me for example when I saluted and marched well, but I wasn't a future soldier, or you encouraged me when I ate heartily or even could drink beer with my meal, or when I could repeat incomprehensible songs of yours or babble your favourite sayings, but none of that had anything to do with my future. And it's significant that even today you only actually cheer me up in matters where you yourself are concerned, when it's your self-esteem that I'm affecting (for example, by my intention to marry [9]) or my own that's hurt (for example, when Pepa [10] insults me). Then I'm cheered up and reminded of my value, of what that I'm capable of doing, and Pepa is completely condemned. But apart from the fact that at my age I'm already practically insensitive to encouragements,

what good is it to me if it only comes when it's about matters that aren't primarily about me?

At the time I have needed encouragement in all circumstances. I was already depressed by your sheer physicality. I remember for example how we often undressed together in a cabin. I was lean, weak and thin and you were strong, tall and broad. Already in the cubicle I felt pathetic, not only in front of you but in front of the whole world, because you were the measure of all things for me. But when we went out of the cabin in front of everyone, me holding onto your hand, a little skeleton, unsteady, barefoot on the planks, afraid of the water, incapable of imitating your swimming movements, that you constantly showed me with good intentions but in fact to my deep embarrassment, for I was then really desperate and all my bad experiences in all domains would all crashingly come together at such moments. I felt most comfortable when sometimes you undressed first and then I could stay alone in the cabin and delay the shame of appearing in public until you finally came back to look for me and took me out of the cabin. I was grateful to you for not seeming to notice my distress, I was also proud of my father's body. Moreover, that difference between us still exists today.

You had a corresponding spiritual supremacy. You had worked your way up so high by your own forces alone and as a result you had unlimited confidence in your own opinions. That wasn't even as dazzling for me as a child as it was later when I was a developing young man. In your armchair you ruled the world. Your opinion was the right one and every other opinion was foolish, exaggerated, crazy, not normal. Your self-confidence was so great that you didn't have to be consistent and yet you never stopped being right. It could also happen that you had no opinion at all about a matter and as a result all opinions that were at all possible on the matter had to be wrong without exception. You could, for example, rail against the Czechs, then against the Germans, then against the Jews, not only in particular matters but in every respect, and finally there was no one left but you. You acquired for me the enigmatic quality that all tyrants have, who are right because of their personality and not because of their thinking. At least that's how it seemed to me.

Well, you were in fact right about me astonishingly often, evidently in conversation because there was hardly any conversation, but also in reality. However there was nothing particularly incomprehensible about that either: in all my thinking I was under heavy pressure from you, even in thoughts that didn't agree with yours, and especially in those. All those thoughts that were seemingly independent of you were burdened from the beginning with your negative judgements; it was almost impossible to continue a line of thought until it was fully and thoroughly completed. I'm not speaking here of any elevated thoughts but of every little undertaking of childhood. I only had to be happy about something, to be filled with it, to come home and talk about it, and the answer was an ironic sigh, a shake of the head, tapping your finger on the table: "I've seen better!" or "To come here and tell me that!," or "Excuse me, I don't want to hear about such things!" or "So what?" or "What a big event!" Of course, you couldn't be expected to be enthusiastic about every little thing when you were living in worry and distress. That wasn't the point. It was rather a question of the fact that you always had to cause such disappointments for the child by virtue of your antagonistic nature, and that that antagonism was constantly intensified by the its accumulation, so that it finally became habitual even when you were by chance of the same opinion as me, and that finally these disappointments of the child weren't the ordinary disappointments of life, but, since it was a question of your person who was decisive for everything, they struck into my heart. My courage, my determination, my confidence, my joy in this and that didn't last to the end if you were against it or even if your opposition could simply be assumed; and it could be assumed in almost everything I did.

That applied to people as well as to thoughts. It was enough that I was a little interested in someone – it didn't happen very often because of the way I am – that you came along with insults, calumnies and denigrations without any consideration for my feelings and without any respect for my opinions. Innocent, childlike people like the Yiddish actor Löwy, for example, had to pay for it. Without knowing him you compared him to vermin in a terrible way that I've already forgotten, and as so often for people who were dear to me you automatically had on hand the saying about dogs and fleas [\[11\]](#). I remember that actor in particular because I noted down your comments about him at the

time with the remark: "My father only talks about my friend (whom he doesn't know at all) like that because he's my friend. I'll always be able to hold that against him when he reproaches me with a lack of filial love and gratitude." It was always incomprehensible to me that you were so completely insensitive to the suffering and shame that you could inflict on me with your words and judgements, it was as if you had no idea of your power. I, too, have certainly often offended you with words, but then I was always conscious of it, it hurt me but I couldn't control myself, couldn't hold the words back, I regretted it even as I said them. But you struck out with your words without further ado, you didn't feel sorry for anyone neither at the time nor afterwards, I was completely defenceless against you.

But that was you were brought up. You have, I think, a talent for bringing up children; you could certainly have been useful in bringing up someone of your own kind; he would have seen the reasonableness of what you told him, he wouldn't have cared about anything else and would have calmly done things the way you did. For me as a child however, what that you cried out to me was just like a commandment from heaven that I never forgot, it was always for me the most important way to judge the world, above all for judging yourself, and there you failed completely. Since as a child I was mostly with you at mealtime, your lessons were to a large extent lessons about proper table manners. What was put on the table had to be eaten and the taste of the dishes wasn't to be discussed – but you yourself often found the food inedible; you called it "the fodder" – the "cow" (the cook) had spoiled it. Because on account of your powerful hunger and your special preferences you ate everything fast, hot and in great big bites, the child had to hurry up, there was a gloomy silence at the table interrupted by admonitions to: "eat first, then talk!" or "faster, faster, faster!" or "you see, I've already finished eating for a while!" Bones weren't to be gnawed, but you could. One couldn't sip vinegar, but you could. It was most important to cut the bread neatly, but it didn't matter if you did it with a knife dripping with sauce. It was important not to let any pieces of food fall on the floor, but most of them were under you. At the table one was only allowed to be occupied with food, but you cleaned and cut your nails, sharpened pencils and cleaned your ears with a toothpick. Father, please understand me properly: those would have been completely insignificant details in themselves, they only became depressing for me because you, who was such a tremendously

authoritative person for me, didn't obey the rules that you imposed on me. Thus the world was divided for me into three parts: into one where I, the slave, lived under laws that were invented only for me and that moreover, I didn't know why, I could never fully comply with; then into a second world infinitely distant from mine, where you lived, busy with administration, with issuing orders and without the bother of having to obey them; and finally into a third world where other people lived happily and were free from orders and from having to obey them. I was always in a state of shame: either I obeyed your orders, which was shaming because they only applied only to me; or I was defiant and that was shameful too, for how could I be defiant towards you; or I couldn't obey them, for example because I didn't have your strength, your appetite and your dexterity, although you demanded it of me as something self-evident; that, however, was the greatest disgrace. This wasn't the way my reasoning worked, but those were the feelings of the child I was.

My situation at the time becomes clearer when I compare it with Felix's. You treat him in the same way, and even use a particularly terrible way of educating him in that when he does something unclean in your opinion at dinner you don't content yourself with saying to him, as you used to do to me: "You're a big pig!", but you add: "You're a real Hermann!" or "You're just like your father!". Now that perhaps – one can't say more than "perhaps" – doesn't really do much essential harm to Felix, because for him you're just a grandfather, albeit a particularly important one, but you're not everything as you've been for me; moreover Felix is a calm, already to a certain extent a masculine character, who may be consternated by a thunderous voice but can't be enduringly effected by it over the long term, and above all he's only in your company relatively rarely: as he's also under other influences, you're rather something endearingly curious for him, from which he can choose what he wants to take. You weren't at all like that to me: I couldn't choose, I had to accept everything. And without being able to object to anything because it's *a priori* impossible for you to speak calmly about something with which you don't agree or that simply doesn't come from you – your imperious temperament doesn't allow for it. In the last few years you've explained that by your cardiac susceptibility; I don't know that you've ever been essentially different – at the most that susceptibility is a way for you to exercise sterner control, since the thought of it stifles any



last objections in others. Of course, that's not an accusation, just a statement of fact. Regarding Ottla for instance, you're usually say: "You can't talk to her at all, she jumps up at you right in your face," but in reality she doesn't jump at you at all, you confuse the thing with the person; something's brought up and you decide on it right away without listening to the person; what's brought up afterwards can only irritate you further and never convince you. Then all one hears from you is: "Do what you want; as far as I'm concerned you're free; you're of age and I have no advice to give to you!", and all that with a terrible, hoarse undertone of anger and of complete condemnation, before which I tremble less today than I did when I was a child only because the child's exclusive feeling of guilt has been partly replaced by an insight into the helplessness of both of us.

The impossibility of calm intercourse had another, really very natural consequence: I lost the ability to discuss. I wouldn't have become a great orator in any case, but I would certainly have mastered the normally fluent flow of human language. But you forbade me to speak early on. Your threat: "Not a word of contradiction!", and that raised hand, have always accompanied me. In front of you – you're an excellent speaker when it's about your own matters – I acquired a halting, stuttering way of speaking; even that was too much for you and finally I kept silent, at first perhaps out of defiance, then because I was incapable of either thinking or of speaking in front of you. And because you were my real teacher, that had an effect everywhere in my life. It's certainly a strange mistake if you think that I never submitted to you. "Always against everything" really hasn't been my principle in life towards you, as you believe and reproach me with. On the contrary: if I'd followed you less you'd certainly be much happier with me. In fact your way of bringing me up was quite correct: I didn't avoid any of your measures; the way I am is – apart from the basics and the influence of life, of course – the result of your education and of my docility. That the result is nevertheless embarrassing to you, indeed that you unconsciously refuse to acknowledge it as the result of your upbringing, is precisely because your manner and my material have been so foreign to each other. You said: "Not a word of dissent!" and with that wanted to silence the forces of resistance in me that were disagreeable to you, but that influence however was too strong for me, I was too obedient; I became completely silent, hid myself from you and only dared to move when I was so far away from you

that your power, at least directly, was no longer sufficient. But you stood there and everything seemed to be "dissent" to you again, while it was only the natural consequence of your strength and of my weakness.

Your extremely effective oratorical means of education, that never failed, at least with regards to me, were: scolding, menacing, irony, mocking laughter and – strangely enough – self-accusation.

I don't remember you ever insulting me directly and with explicit swear words. Nor was it necessary – you had so many other ways, and in conversation at home and especially in business the swear words flew down on everyone all around me in such quantities that as a little boy I was sometimes almost stunned by them and had no reason not to refer them to myself, for the people you insulted were certainly no worse than I was, and you were certainly no more dissatisfied with them than with me. And there was also your enigmatic innocence and unassailability; you upbraided without any concern about it, indeed you condemned swearing in others and forbid it.

You reinforced your berating with threats that were then also directed at me. For example, it was terrible to me when you said: "I'll tear you apart like a fish!", even though I knew that nothing worse would follow (however as a little child, I didn't know that), but it almost corresponded to my idea of your power that you would have been able to do it. It was also terrible when you ran screaming around the table to catch someone, obviously not wanting to catch him but pretending to, and mother finally seeming to save him. Once again it seemed to the child that I was that I was kept alive by your grace and that it was your undeserved gift. That's also where the threats about the consequences of disobedience belong. When I began to do something that didn't please you and you threatened me with failure, my reverence for your opinion was so great that my failure was inevitable, even if perhaps only later on. I lost confidence in my own actions. I was unstable, full of doubts. The older I became the more examples there were that you could hold up to me to prove my worthlessness; in general you were really right in some respects. Again, I'm careful not to say that I only became like that because of you; you just strengthened what was there, but you strengthened it so much because you were so powerful towards me and you used all your power to do so.

You had a special trust in education through irony; it also best corresponded to your superiority over me. An admonition usually took this form with you: "Can't you do it like this and like that? Is that really too much for you? Of course you don't have enough time!" and suchlike. And every question like that was accompanied by a nasty laugh and an angry face. In a way I was punished even before I knew that I'd done something wrong. Also irritating were those rebukes where I was treated as a third person, not even worthy of being spoken to angrily; when you formally talked to Mother, but in fact to me who was sitting next to you; for example: "Of course that can't be tolerated from your son!" and the like. (This was then counteracted by the fact that initially for example I didn't dare, and later out of habit didn't even think of asking you questions directly when Mother was present. It was much less dangerous for the child to ask Mother who was sitting next to him about you; thus I'd ask Mother: "How's Father?" and thus protected myself from surprises).

Of course, there were also cases where I was very much in agreement with the worst irony, namely when it concerned someone else, for example Elli with whom I was angry for years. It was a feast of malice and joy for me, at the displeasure of others, when at almost every meal you would say: "She must be sitting ten metres away from the table, that fat girl", and you would then sit angrily in your armchair trying to imitate her in an exaggerated way, without the slightest trace of friendliness or humour but as a bitter enemy, showing how extremely disgustingly she was sitting there according to you. How often that and similar things had to be repeated and how little you actually achieved with them! I think it was because the display of anger and of being angry didn't seem to be in any proportion to the thing itself; one didn't have the feeling that the anger was produced by that trifle of sitting far away from the table but that it was present in all its fullness from the start and was only being used as an excuse to burst out. Since one was convinced that an occasion would be found in any case, one didn't particularly pull oneself together, and one also became inured under the continual threats; one was almost certain that one wouldn't be beaten. One became a sullen, inattentive, disobedient child, always thinking of a way to escape, usually an inner one. So you suffered and so we suffered. From your point of view you were quite right when, with clenched teeth and the gurgling laugh that had first given the child such hellish ideas you used to say

bitterly (as you did only the other day because of a letter from Constantinople):  
"What people!"

It seemed to be quite incompatible with this attitude towards your children when you complained publicly about it, something that happened very often. I confess that as a child I had no feeling for that at all (quite later I did) and didn't understand how you could expect to find any sympathy at all from anyone. You were so gigantic in every respect; what could you care about our pity or even our help? You had to despise that, as you so often despised us. Thus I didn't believe your complaints and looked for some secret intention behind them. It was only later that I understood that you were really suffering a lot because of your children, but at that time, when your complaints could still have under other circumstances encountered a childish, open, ready mind ready to help in any way, they seemed to me to be nothing more than overly obvious means of education and humiliation, not very strong in themselves, but with the harmful side effect that the child got used to not taking very seriously things that he really should have.

There were fortunately also certain exceptions to this, mostly when you were suffering in silence and love and kindness overcame all opposition with their power and immediately took effect. That was certainly rare, but it was wonderful. For example, when I used to see you wearily sleeping on a hot summer day at noon in the shop after lunch with your elbow on the desk, or when you came all tired out to our summer retreat on Sundays; or when during a serious illness of Mother you held on to the bookcase, shaken with tears; or when you came quietly to me in Ottla's room during my last illness, staying on the threshold just stretching out your neck to see me in bed, and out of consideration just greeted me with your hand. At such times I lay down and wept with happiness, and now I'm weeping again as I write this.

You also have a particularly nice, very rarely seen kind of quiet, contented, well-meaning smile that can make the person to whom it applies quite happy. I don't remember that it was ever bestowed on me in my childhood, but it must have been, for why would you have refused it to me then, since I still seemed innocent to you and was your great hope. By the way, even such friendly

impressions have achieved nothing more in the long run than to increase my feelings of guilt and to make the world even more incomprehensible to me.

I preferred to stick to what was real and permanent. In order to hold my own against you just a little, partly out of a kind of revenge, I soon began to observe, collect and exaggerate little ridiculous things that I noticed about you. For example, how easily you allowed yourself to be dazzled by people who mostly only appeared to be superior and how you could go on and on about it, for example about some Imperial Council or the like (on the other hand, something like that also hurt me that you, my father, thought you needed such trivial confirmations of your own value and made such a fuss about them). Or I observed your predilection for indecent turns of speech, uttered as loudly as possible, at which you laughed as if you'd said something particularly excellent whereas it was just a flat little vulgarity (at the same time however it was certainly also another expression of your vitality that was shaming me). Of course there were a number of different observations of the kind; I was happy about them as it gave me cause for whispering and for making fun of you; you sometimes noticed it and got annoyed about it, you thought that it was malicious and disrespectful of me, but believe me it was nothing else for me than an admittedly unsuitable means of self-preservation, they were jokes, such as one spreads about gods and kings that not only can be connected with the deepest respect, but even are a part of it. Moreover, you too tried to use a kind of counter-defence with me, corresponding to your own attitude towards me. You used to point out how exaggeratedly well I was doing and how well I'd really been treated. That was true, but I don't think that it was of much use to me under those circumstances.

It's true that Mother was boundlessly good to me, but for me that was with regards to you, and so wasn't positive for me. Mother unconsciously had the role of a beater in a hunt. If even in some unlikely case your way of bringing me up could have put me on my own feet by producing defiance, aversion or even hatred, Mother made up for it by being good, by talking so reasonably (she was the epitome of reason in the confusion of my childhood), by her intercessions, and I was again driven back into your circle, from which I might otherwise have escaped, to your and my advantage. Or if it was the case that there wasn't any

real reconciliation, that Mother simply protected me from you in secret, giving me something in secret, allowing me to do something, then I was once again in your eyes the child hiding in the shadows, the deceiver conscious of his guilt who, because of his nullity could only get what he thought was his right by stealth. Naturally I then got used to seeking that way for things that even in my own opinion I had no right to. Thereby again enhancing my consciousness of guilt.

It's also true that you hardly ever really hit me. But the shouting, the reddening of your face, the rapid undoing of your braces and placing them ready on the back of the chair were almost worse for me. It's like when someone is to be hanged. If he's really hanged, then he's dead and it's all over. But if he has to witness all the preparations for being hanged and only learns of his pardon when the noose is hanging in front of his face, he can suffer from it for the rest of his life. Moreover, from these many times when in your clearly shown opinion I would have deserved to be beaten but had narrowly escaped by your grace, I again just accumulated a great consciousness of my guilt. I was guilty for you on all counts.

You've always reproached me (either alone with me or in front of others: you had no feeling for how humiliating that was for me, as the affairs of your children were always public matters for you) for living in calm, warmth and abundance without any privations thanks to your work. I'm thinking of remarks that must have literally made scars in my brain, such as:

"Already at the age of seven I had to drive through villages with the cart... We all had to sleep in the same room... We were happy when we had potatoes... For years I had open sores on my legs because of insufficient winter clothing... When I was a little boy, I had to work in the shop in Pisek... I never got anything at all at home, even when I was in the military I still sent money back home... But still, still – Father was always Father to me. Who knows that today? What do children know? No one suffered all that! Does a child understand that today?"

Under different circumstances such stories could have been an excellent means of education, they could have encouraged and strengthened the children in overcoming the same plagues and hardships that their father had gone through. But you didn't want that at all, the situation had just become different

through the results of all your efforts, there was no way to distinguish yourself in the way you'd done. Such an opportunity would have had to be created by force and rebellion, one would have had to leave home – provided that one had had the decisiveness and strength to do so and that Mother on her side hadn't opposed that with other means. But you didn't want that at all, you called it ingratitude, extravagance, disobedience, betrayal and madness. So while on the one hand you tempted people to do it by your examples, your stories and your shaming of us, on the other hand you forbade it in the strongest possible terms. Otherwise you should have, for example, apart from the secondary circumstances, been really delighted with Ottla's adventure in Zürau [12]. She wanted to go to the countryside from which you'd come, she wanted to work and have privations as you'd had them, she didn't want to benefit from your professional success, just as you'd been independent of your own father. Were those such terrible intentions? Were they so distant from your example and your teachings? It's true that Ottla's intentions failed in the end, perhaps they were carried out a little ridiculously, with too much ado, and she didn't show enough consideration for her parents. But was that exclusively her fault and not also the result of the circumstances and above all of the fact that you were so hostile to her? Was she less estranged from you (as you later tried to convince yourself) when she worked in your business than she was later in Zürau? And didn't you most certainly have the power – assuming that you could have overcome yourself to do so – to make something very positive come out of that adventure by encouraging, advising and supervising, perhaps even just tolerating it?

After such experiences you used to say in bitter jest that things were going too well for us. But in a certain sense that joke wasn't a joke. We got from you what you had to fight for, but the struggle in the external world, that was immediately accessible to you and that of course we aren't spared from either, we have to fight for late in life with the strength of a child in adulthood. I'm not saying that our situation is thereby necessarily less favourable than yours was, on the contrary it's much more likely that it's equal to yours (although the basic conditions aren't comparable): we're at a disadvantage only in that we can't boast of our hardships and can't humiliate anyone with them as you did with your hardships. I also don't deny that it would have been possible for me to really benefit from the results of your great and successful work, to make use

of it and to continue working with it for to your satisfaction, but our estrangement stood in the way of that. I could benefit from what you gave me, but only in shame, weariness, weakness and consciousness of my guilt. That's why I could only be grateful to you for everything like a beggar, but not by my deeds.

The next external consequence of that way of being brought up was that I fled from everything that even from a distance reminded me of you. First of all, your business. In itself, especially in my childhood when it was a little shop on a side street, I must have been very happy in it, it was so lively, lit up in the evening, you saw and heard a lot of things there, you could help now and then, you could be seen and heard, but above all you could admire your great commercial talents, how you sold articles, how you treated people, how you made jokes, were untiring, knew immediately what decision to make in cases of doubt and so on; even how you packed or opened a box was a spectacle worth seeing, and all in all certainly not the worst school for children. But since you progressively frightened me on all sides and since the shop and you were all the same for me, I was no longer comfortable in the shop either.

Things that I'd taken for granted there at first bothered and shamed me, especially your treatment of the staff. I don't know, maybe it was like that in most shops (in the Assicurazioni Generali [\[13\]](#), for example, it was really like that in my own time and I explained to the director there, not quite truthfully, but also not completely untruthfully, that I was resigning there because I couldn't stand the insults, that incidentally didn't affect me directly at all; I was already too painfully sensitive about that at home), but I wasn't interested in the other shops in my childhood. But I heard and saw you in the shop shouting, insulting and raging in a way that in my opinion at the time had never happened before in the whole world. And it wasn't only the ranting, there were also other acts of tyranny. For example the way you violently threw down on the floor goods from the counter that you didn't want to be mixed up with others – only the instinctive thoughtlessness of your anger excused you a little – so that the employees had to pick them up. Or your constant exclaiming about a clerk with a lung disease: "Let him die, the sick dog!" You called the employees "paid enemies" – they were in fact, but even before they became like that you seemed



to me to be their "paying enemy". There I also had the great lesson that you could be unjust; I wouldn't have noticed it all by myself as soon as I did, as I had accumulated too many guilt feelings that justified you, but according to my childhood understanding, which of course was later corrected a little but not too much, there were foreigners there who worked for us and had to live in constant fear of you. Of course I exaggerated and no doubt because I assumed that you were just as terrible to them as you were to me. If that had been true they really wouldn't have been able to survive there; but since they were grown-up people with mostly excellent nerves they shook off the ranting without effort and in the end it did much more damage to you than it did to them. For me, however, it made the shop unpleasant, it reminded me all too much of my relationship with you: quite apart from your interest in the business and apart from your imperiousness, you were already as a businessman so much superior to all those who had ever learned from you that none of their achievements could ever satisfy you; in the same way you had to be eternally dissatisfied with me. That's why I necessarily took the part of the staff, incidentally also because of my timidity I didn't understand how anyone could insult strangers like that, and therefore wanted to somehow reconcile the staff, who in my opinion were terribly upset, with you and with our family, if only for the sake of my own safety. For that, ordinary decent behaviour towards the staff was no longer enough, not even modest behaviour; rather I had to be humble, not only to greet them first but if possible also to repel any counter-greetings. And if I, such an insignificant person, had licked their feet downstairs it still wouldn't have been compensation for the way you, the lord, hacked away at them upstairs.

The relationship I entered into with fellow human beings there had an effect beyond the shop and further into the future (something similar, but not as dangerous and profound as it was with me, is also for example Ottla's preference for contacts with poor people, sitting together with the maids and the like, that annoyed you so much). In the end I was almost afraid of the shop, and in any case it had long since ceased to be something important to me before I went to secondary school and was thus drawn even further away from it. It also seemed quite beyond my capabilities since, as you used to say, it used up even all of yours. You then sought (for me it's an emotional and shameful memory today) to extract a little sweetness for yourself from my aversion to

your business and to your life's work, that was so painful for you, by claiming that I lacked business sense, that I had higher ideas in my head and the like. Mother was naturally pleased with that explanation that you forced upon yourself and I too, in my vanity and distress, let myself be influenced by it. But if those "higher ideas" had really been only or mainly the reasons that turned me away from the shop (that I now, but only now, honestly and truly hate), they would have had to be expressed differently than by calmly albeit nervously navigating my way through grammar school and the study of law until I finally finally ended up at an office worker's desk.

If I'd wanted to flee from you, I would have had to flee from the family, even from Mother. One could always find protection with her, but only in relation to you. She loved you too much and was too devoted to you to be an independent spiritual power in a child's struggle in the long run. The child that I was sensed that correctly, by the way, for Mother became even more closely attached to you as the years went by; while she always, as far as she herself was concerned, preserved her independence nicely and delicately within the smallest limits and without ever substantially offending you; nevertheless as the years went by she more completely and blindly – more in feelings than by reasoning – accepted your judgments and condemnations concerning the children, especially in the certainly serious case of Ottla. Of course, one always has to remember how harried and exhausting Mother's position in the family was right up to the end. She toiled in the shop and in the household, she suffered all the illnesses of the family twice over, but what crowned of all that was how she suffered in her intermediate position between us and you. You were always loving and considerate to her, but in that respect you spared her just as little as we spared her. We hammered blows on her pitilessly, you from your side and we from ours. It was a distraction, we thought of nothing bad of it – you thought only of the combat you were having with us and we thought of ours with you and unleashed our rage on Mother. It also wasn't a good contribution to the upbringing of your children the way you tormented her – without any feeling of guilt on your part, of course – because of us. It even seemed to justify our otherwise unjustifiable behaviour toward her. How she suffered from us because of you and from you because of us, not counting those cases where you were right so that she forgave us, even if even that "forgiveness" may

sometimes have been only a silent, unconscious revolt against your system! Of course, Mother wouldn't have been able to support all that if she hadn't gained the strength to support it from her love for all of us and from the happiness that that love brought her.

My sisters were only partly on my side. Valli was the one who was happiest in her relationship with you. The one closest to Mother, she similarly submitted to you without much effort or damage. But you also treated her more kindly, on account of Mother, even though there was little Kafka material in her. But perhaps that was just what you wanted; where there was nothing Kafka, even you couldn't demand something of the kind; you didn't have the feeling, as with the rest of us, that something was being lost here that had to be saved by force. Incidentally, you may never have particularly loved the Kafka king, insofar as it expressed itself in women. Valli's relationship with you might even have become friendlier if the rest of us hadn't disturbed it a little.

Elli is the only example of one of us almost completely successfully breaking away from your circle. When she was a child I would have least expected it from her. She was such a ponderous, tired, timid, sullen, guilt-ridden, excessively humble, spiteful, lazy, gluttonous, stingy child that I could hardly bear to look at her, not even speak to her, she reminded me so much of myself, she was educated so much in the same way as I was. Her stinginess especially was abhorrent to me, as I probably had even more of it. Stinginess is one of the most reliable signs of profound unhappiness; I was so uncertain of everything that I effectively only possessed what I already had in my hands or in my mouth, or at least what was on its way there, and that was precisely what she, who was in a similar situation, preferred to take away from me. But all that changed when she left home at a young age [14] – that's the most important thing – got married and had children; she became cheerful, carefree, courageous, generous, unselfish and full of hope. It's almost unbelievable how you didn't even notice that change and at least didn't judge it on its merits, you were so blinded by the grudge you'd always had against Elli and basically still have, although that grudge has become much less intense now that Elli no longer lives with us and, moreover, your love for Felix [15] and affection for

Karl [16] have made it less important. Only Gerti still has to pay for it sometimes.

I hardly dare to write about Ottla – I know that if I did I would jeopardise the whole hoped-for effect of this letter. Under normal circumstances – i.e. when she wasn't in any particular difficulty or danger – you just hate her; you yourself have admitted to me that in your opinion she constantly causes you suffering and makes you angry deliberately, and that when you're suffering because of her she's satisfied and rejoices. So she's a kind of devil for you. What a terrible estrangement – even greater than between you and me – must have occurred between you and her to have made such a tremendous misjudgment possible. She's so far from you now that you hardly see her any more, but instead there's a ghost where you suppose she is. I admit that you had a particularly hard time with her. I don't quite understand that very complicated situation, but in any case there was something of Löwy there, equipped with the best Kafka weapons. There was no real fighting between you and I, as I was soon overcome: the result for me was flight, bitterness, grief and inner conflict. But you two were always fighting, always fresh, always strong. It was a spectacle as magnificent as it was bleak. Right at the beginning you were no doubt very close to each other, for even today, of the four of us, Ottla is perhaps the purest manifestation of the marriage between you and Mother and of the forces that joined you together. I don't know what deprived you of the happiness of a harmonious relation between father and child, I can only believe that its development was similar to mine. On your side there was your tyrannical personality, on her side the Löwy defiance, sensitivity, sense of justice and restlessness – all strengthened by consciousness of the Kafka power. I too have influenced her, but hardly of my own account, rather through the simple fact of my existence. Incidentally, she was the last one to enter into those already established power relationships and she was able to form her own judgement from all the available material. I can even imagine that she hesitated for a while as to whether she should throw herself on your breast or on your opponents'; you obviously at the time let the opportunity pass and you repulsed her, but if it had been possible you would have become a splendid, harmonious couple. I would have lost an ally, but the sight of the two of you would have compensated me richly, and you would have been transformed favourably in my eyes by the incalculable happiness of finding full satisfaction in at least one

child. But all that's just a dream today. Ottla has no contacts with her father now and has to seek her own way, just as I do, and because she has more assurance, self-confidence, good health and unscrupulousness than I do she's more wicked and more treacherous than I am in your eyes. I understand that; from your point of view she can't be otherwise. Yes, she's able to look at herself with your eyes, to sympathise with your suffering and to be very sad about it – not to despair, despairing's my domain – but to be very sad about it. In apparent contradiction to that you often see us together: we're whispering and laughing and now and then you hear yourself mentioned. You have the impression that we're cheeky conspirators. Strange conspirators! You've always been a main topic of our conversations and our thoughts, but we really don't get together to think up something against you but rather do our best, in a spirit of gaiety, seriousness, love, defiance, anger, antipathy, surrender and guilt, with all the powers of our heads and hearts, we analyse together the terrible process that's hovering between you and us in all its details, from all sides, on all occasions, from far and near, in order to surmount it, this process in which you always claim to be the judge, while you, at least for the most part (here I leave the door open to all the errors that I can naturally commit) are just as weak and blinded a party as we are.

In that context an instructive example of the effect of your way of bringing us up was Irma [17]. On the one hand she was a stranger who came into your business already grown up, for whom you were essentially her boss and therefore she was only partly exposed to your influence and was at an already resistant age; on the other hand however she was also a blood relative who worshipped her father's brother in you, and you had much more than the mere power of a boss over her. And yet she, who in her weak body was so capable, clever, hard-working, modest, trustworthy, unselfish and faithful, who loved you as an uncle and admired you as a boss, who proved herself in other positions before and after, wasn't a very good employee for you. Of course she was also urged on by us and she was close to being a child for you, but the enveloping power of your personality had such a great effect on her that there developed in her (though only towards you and, hopefully, without deeper suffering on the part of the child) forgetfulness, carelessness, dark humour and perhaps even some defiance insofar as she was capable of it at all, whereby I

don't even take into account that she was sickly, wasn't very happy in other respects either and that a dreary domesticity weighed on her. You summed up what for me was the complex richness of your relationship with her in a sentence that has become classic for us, almost blasphemous, but that very much shows the off-handed innocence of your way of treating people: "God in His grace has bestowed swine on me."

I could describe further other spheres of your influence and the struggles of people against it, but there I would already enter into the uncertain and would have to divine; besides, the further you distance yourself from business and family, the friendlier, more yielding, more polite, more considerate, more empathetic you always become (I mean outwardly too), just as, for example, even an autocrat once he's outside the borders of his country has no reason to still be tyrannical and can good-naturedly get involved even with the lowest people. Indeed, in the group pictures from Franzensbad, for example, you always stood out so big and cheerful among the other morose little people, like a king on a journey. The children could certainly also have benefited from it, but they would have had to be able to recognise it in their childhood, which was impossible, and I for example would have had to not always live in the innermost, strictest, most constricting circle of your influence, as I really did.

I thereby didn't just lose my sense of family, as you claimed; on the contrary, I still used to have a sense of family, although a mainly negative one as regards my (of course never-ending) detachment from you. My relationships with people outside the family, however, suffered even more if possible because of your influence. You're quite mistaken when you think that I do everything for other people out of love and loyalty, and nothing for you and the family because of my coldness and of betrayal. I repeat for the tenth time: I probably would have become a timid, anguished person in any case, but there's still a long, dark way to go from there to where I've in fact arrived. (So far I've deliberately concealed relatively little in this letter, but now and later I'll have to conceal a few things that – between you and me – are still too hard for me to confess. I say this so that, if the overall picture becomes somewhat unclear here and there, you'll not think that a lack of evidence is to blame, but rather that there's more evidence that would make the picture unbearably crude. It's not easy to find a middle ground here). Here, moreover, it suffices to remind you of

past events: I'd quite lost all self-confidence in face of you and had exchanged it for a boundless consciousness of guilt. (In memory of that boundlessness, I once accurately wrote of someone: "He's afraid that his shame will outlive him!") I couldn't suddenly change when I came in contact with other people; on the contrary I became even more deeply conscious of my guilt towards them, for as I've already said, I had to make amends to them for what you, under my joint responsibility in the business, had caused them. Furthermore, you had something to say against everyone with whom I had dealings, openly or secretly, and I had to apologise for that too. The mistrust that you tried to instil in me towards most people in business and in the family (name me one person who was important to me in some way during my childhood whom you didn't fundamentally criticise at least once) and which, strangely enough, didn't bother you in the slightest (you were quite strong enough to bear it; it was moreover perhaps really just a symbol of mastery for you) – that mistrust, that as a child was nowhere confirmed for me in my own eyes as everywhere I saw only irreproachably excellent people, became in me a mistrust of myself and a perpetual fear of others. So in general I couldn't in any way escape from you in my relations with others. The fact that you were mistaken about that was perhaps because you didn't really know anything about my contacts with other people, and suspiciously and jealously (do I deny that you love me?) assumed that I would have to compensate myself elsewhere for the loss of family life, since it would be impossible for me to live the same way elsewhere. Incidentally, in my childhood I still had a certain comfort in that respect, precisely because of my mistrust in my own judgement; I used to say to myself: "You're exaggerating, you're putting, as youth always does, too much importance on little exceptions." However later I was practically deprived of that consolation as my understanding of the world developed.

I didn't find my salvation from you in Judaism either. Salvation would have been conceivable there, but it would have been even more conceivable that we would have found each other in Judaism or that we could even have come united out from the synagogue. But what kind of Judaism did I get from you! In the course of the years, I've come to see it in three different ways.

As a child I reproached myself, as you did, for not going to the temple enough, for not fasting and so on. I didn't think I was doing wrong myself, but that I was

doing wrong to you, and the consciousness of guilt, which was always there, penetrated me.

Later as a youth I didn't understand how you, whose Judaism was so non-existent, could reproach me for not trying (out of piety as you put it) to maintain a similar empty Judaism. It was really nothing, as far as I could see, it was a joke and not even a joke. You went to the temple four days in the year, you were at a minimum closer to those who were indifferent there than to those who took it seriously, you patiently did the prayers as a formality, you sometimes amazed me by being able to show me the passage in the prayer book that was being recited, moreover when I was in the temple (that was the main thing) I was allowed to roam around where I wanted. So I yawned and dozed through the many hours there (I think I was ever as bored as that only later in dance class) and tried to enjoy as much as possible the few little diversions there were there, for example when the Ark of the Covenant was opened, that always reminded me of the shooting galleries where a box door also opened when you hit a black one, except that something interesting always came out there and here it was always old dolls without heads. By the way I was also very afraid there, not only, evidently, because of the many people with whom I came into close contact but also because you once mentioned in passing that I too could be called to the Torah [\[18\]](#). I trembled for years before that prospect. Otherwise, however, I wasn't ever really disturbed in my boredom – at the most by the Bar Mitzvah, which just required a ridiculous amount of memorisation that only led up to a ridiculous performance at the examination and then, insofar as you were concerned, by small, insignificant incidents, for example, when you were called to the Torah and survived that – to my mind – exclusively social event, or when you stayed at the memorial service in the Temple and I was sent away, which for a long time, obviously because of having been sent away and excluded from any deeper participation, gave me the barely conscious feeling that there was something indecent about it.

That's what it was like for me in the Temple, at home it was perhaps less interesting and was limited to the first Passover dinner, that became more and more a comedy with fits of laughter, certainly under the influence of the bigger children. (Why did you have to bow down to that influence? Because you provoked it!) So that was the religious material that was handed down to me, to which was added at most the outstretched hand that pointed to "the sons of the



millionaire fox" in the temple when we were there with your father on high holidays. I didn't understand how one could do anything better with this material than to get rid of it as quickly as possible – precisely that getting rid of it seemed to me to be the most pious way of acting.

But later I looked at it differently and understood why you could believe that I was betraying you maliciously in that respect too. You really had brought some Judaism with you from your small ghetto-like village community; it wasn't much and you lost it a little in the city and in the military, but at least the impressions and memories of your youth were just enough for a Jewish life of sorts, especially since you didn't need much help for that as you came from a very strong stock and you could hardly be shaken by religious misgivings, as long as they weren't very much mixed up with social concerns. Basically, the faith that guided your life consisted in the fact that you believed in the unconditional correctness of the opinions of a certain Jewish social class and thus, since those opinions were a part of your essential nature, you in fact believed in yourself. In that too there was still enough Judaism, but it was too little to be passed on to the child, it dried up completely while you passed it along. That was partly because your impressions of youth couldn't be handed down, and partly because of your fearsome character. It was also impossible to make a child who was so anxiously attentive understand that the few trifling exercises that you carried out in the name of Judaism, with an indifference quite corresponding to their nullity, could have a higher meaning. For you they had meaning as little souvenirs from earlier times, which is why you wanted to pass them on to me, but since they no longer had any inherent worth for you either, you could only do so either by persuasion or by threatening; on the one hand that couldn't succeed and the other hand, since you didn't have the slightest idea of what a weak position you had, it necessarily made you very angry with me because of my apparent stubbornness.

All that wasn't an isolated phenomenon, it was just like that with a large part of that Jewish transitional generation that had emigrated from the relatively still-pious countryside to the cities; that was self-evident but it added a quite painful element to our relationship that was already sharp enough. While you can certainly believe in your guiltlessness in that, just as I do, you should

explain that guiltlessness by your character and by the circumstances of the time, and not just by external conditions as you did by saying that you had too much work and worries to be able to bother with such things. Like that you turn your undoubted blamelessness into unjust reproaches against others. That's an attitude that's always very easy to refute, and is here too. It shouldn't have been a question of the kind of instruction that you should have given your children, but of an exemplary life; if your Judaism had been stronger your example would also have been more compelling; that's of course again not an accusation at all but just a defence against your reproaches. You recently read Franklin's memoirs of his youth. I really did give them to you to read on purpose – not, as you ironically remarked, because of a small passage about vegetarianism, but because of the relationship between the author and his father as it's described there, and the relationship between the author and his son, as is naturally recounted in those memoirs written for his son. I don't want to go into the details here.

I also received a certain subsequent confirmation of this view of your Jewishness in your behaviour in the last few years, when it seemed to you that I was becoming more concerned with Jewish things. Since you've had an aversion from the outset to all of my preoccupations and especially to the way I take an interest in things, you felt that way there too. But beyond that, one could have expected you to make a small exception in this case. After all, it was a Judaism that arose from your Judaism that was beginning there, and thus also the possibility of establishing new relations between us. I don't deny that that if you'd shown interest in it, that could have made me suspicious. I wouldn't dream of claiming that I'm somehow better than you in that respect. But it never came to the test. Because of me, Judaism became abhorrent to you and Jewish writings became unreadable, they "disgusted you". That could mean that you insisted that the kind of Judaism that you'd shown to me in my childhood was the only right one, that there was nothing beyond it. But that you should insist on that was hardly conceivable. But then the "disgust" (apart from the fact that it initially wasn't directed against Judaism but against my person) could only mean that you unconsciously recognised the weakness of your Judaism and of my Jewish upbringing, that you didn't want to be reminded of it in any way and that you responded to all reminders of it with open hatred.

Incidentally, your negative esteem for my new Jewishness was very exaggerated; first of all it incarnated your anathema for me and secondly, fundamental relationships with fellow human beings was decisive for its development, and thus in my case fatal.

You were more on the right path in your aversion for my writing and for what, unknown to you, was connected with it. There I had indeed become somewhat independent of you, even if it was a little like the worm that, trampled down by a foot at its back, then tears itself loose with the front part and drags itself aside. I was in security there to some extent, it gave me a breathing spell; the dislike you immediately had for my writing was, of course, welcome to me there for once. My vanity and ambition did suffer from your way of welcoming my books that's become well-known: "Put it on the bedside table!" (you were usually playing cards when a book arrived), but basically I felt good, not just out of rebellious malice, not just from joy at a new confirmation of my understanding of our relationship, but quite spontaneously because that formula sounded to me just like: "Now you're free!" Of course I was deceiving myself; I wasn't free, or at best not yet. My writing was about you, I was just complaining there about what I couldn't complain about leaning on your chest. It was an intentionally protracted farewell to you, that while it was imposed on me by you nevertheless went in the direction that I had determined. But of what little importance all that was! It's only worth mentioning because it was a part of my life – elsewhere it wouldn't even have been worth noticing – and then only because it dominated my childhood as premonition, later in life as hope and often still later as despair; and dictated to me – taking your form again, if you like – my own few little decisions.

For example in my choice of profession. Certainly, you gave me complete freedom in that in your generous and even patient way. However with that you also were following the usual way of treating the sons of the Jewish middle class, or at least of applying the value judgements of that class that were decisive for you. In fact one of your misunderstandings about me also played a part in this. You've always considered me to be particularly industrious out of paternal pride, out of ignorance of my real nature and because of certain of your inferences about my poor health. As a child I was always in your opinion

studying and later always writing. That's not in the slightest way true. One could rather say with much less exaggeration that I studied little and learned nothing; that something has remained in the course of many years with an average memory and not the absolutely worst powers of comprehension isn't very strange, but in any case the total result in knowledge, and especially in the fundamentals of knowledge, is extremely miserable in comparison with the expenditure of time and money in the middle of an outwardly carefree, calm life – especially in comparison with almost all of the people I know. It's pitiful but understandable to me. Ever since I can remember I've been so deeply concerned about affirming my spiritual existence that I've been indifferent to everything else. Our Jewish grammar-school pupils are often quite peculiar, they are often the most improbable characters, but my cold, barely veiled, unshakable, childishly helpless, tending to the ridiculous, self-satisfied animalistic indifference of a self-sufficient but coldly quixotic child is something I've never found anywhere else, although there it was also the only protection against a nervous breakdown because of fear and guilt. I was only absorbed by caring about myself, but in the most varied ways. For instance, worrying about my health; it began in a trivial way, now and then there was a little concern on account of digestion, of loss of hair, of a curvature of the spine and so on; that increased in innumerable gradations until finally it ended with a real illness. But as I wasn't sure of anything, as I needed at every moment a new confirmation of my existence, as I there was nothing that was really and undoubtedly in my sole possession and determined only by myself, as I was in truth a disinherited son, naturally I began to doubt what was the closest thing to me, my own body; I grew in height but didn't know what to do with it, the burden was too heavy and my back became crooked; I hardly dared to move or even to do gymnastics, and I remained weak; I marvelled at everything that I still disposed of, such as my good digestion, and that was enough to lose it, and that opened the way to all kinds of hypochondria, until under the superhuman stress of wanting to get married (I'll talk about that later) blood started coming out of my lungs, for which a good part of the responsibility was no doubt the apartment in the Schönborn Palace [19] – that I only used because I thought I needed it for my writing, so that also belongs here. So all that didn't come from working too hard, as you've always imagined. There were years in which I spent more time loafing on the sofa in full health than you did in your

whole life, all illnesses included. When I used to leave your presence appearing to be particularly busy, it was usually to go to lie down in my room. My total work output both in the office (where, however, laziness isn't very conspicuous and, moreover, was kept within limits by my anxiety) and at home has been minuscule; if you'd had an overview of it you'd have been horrified. I'm probably not really essentially lazy, but there was nothing for me to do. Where I lived I was rejected, condemned and beaten down, and to flee elsewhere was a great strain on me but it wasn't work, because it was stress about something impossible that was beyond my powers, with a few small exceptions.

So in that state I was given the freedom to choose a profession. But was I still at all capable of really using that freedom? Did I have enough confidence in myself to be able to acquire a real profession? My self-evaluation was much more dependent on you than on anything else, such as being outwardly successful for example. Success was only a momentary comfort, nothing more, and on the other hand your weight always pulled me down much more. I thought I'd never get through the first grade of primary school, but I succeeded and even got a prize; then I certainly wouldn't pass the grammar-school entrance exam, but I succeeded; and then I'd definitely fail the first grammar-school grade, but no, I didn't fail and I succeeded further and further. But that didn't give me any confidence, on the contrary, I was always convinced – and I saw proof of it in your dismissive expressions – that the more I succeeded, the worse it would turn out in the end. I often saw in my mind the terrible assembly of professors (the Gymnasium is only the most coherent example, but everywhere around me it was similar) and how they would all get together if I survived the first grammar-school grade, in the second grammar-school grade if I survived that, in the third grammar-school grade and so on, to investigate the unique case of how I, the most incompetent and in any case the most ignorant pupil, had succeeded in sneaking up to that grade and how, once general attention was drawn to me, they would of course immediately throw me out to the rejoicing of all the righteous people who'd been freed from that nightmare.

Living with such notions isn't easy for a child. Under those circumstances, what did I care about my lessons? Who was able to strike a spark of empathy out of me? I was interested in the lessons – and not only in the lessons, but in everything around me at that crucial age – about the same way as a bank

defrauder who's still in position and is trembling from fear of discovery is interested in the small day-to-day banking business that he still has to do as a bank official. Everything was so small, so distant compared to what was important to me. Thus it carried on until the school-leaving examination, that I really only got partly by a swindle, and then it was over, then I was free. If I'd only cared about myself in spite of the pressure of the Gymnasium, what would it be like now that I was free? Thus I wasn't really free in my choice of profession: I knew that compared to what was essential for me everything would be just as indifferent to me as all the subjects that I'd been taught at school, so it was a question of finding a profession that would best suit that indifference without hurting my vanity too much. So law was the obvious thing to do. Occasional vain little attempts to do something else, nonsensical aspirations such as studying chemistry for a fortnight and studying German for half a year, only strengthened that basic conviction. So I studied law. That meant that in a few months before the examinations I submitted myself to nervous exhaustion by literally feeding myself spiritually on sawdust that, moreover, had already been chewed over by thousands of mouths. But in a certain sense I enjoyed it, just as I'd enjoyed the grammar school and later the work in an office, because all that perfectly suited my situation. In any case I showed astonishing foresight there; even as a small child I had clear enough premonitions about my studies and profession. I didn't expect any salvation there: I already given up on that long ago.

However I had no foresight at all about the significance and possibility of marriage for me; that greatest horror of my life until then came upon me almost completely unexpectedly. The child had developed so slowly that such things were outwardly too remote for him; now and then the need arose to think about it, but there was no recognition that there a lasting, decisive and even extremely bitter test was looming. In reality nevertheless my attempts at marriage were extremely splendid, optimistic attempts at salvation – and the failures were correspondingly splendid.

I'm afraid that because those attempts at marriage were all a failure for me I therefore won't be able to make you understand them. And yet the success of this whole letter depends on it, because on the one hand all the positive forces

that I disposed were concentrated in those attempts, and on the other hand all the negative forces that I've described as a result of your upbringing – i.e. my weaknesses, my lack of self-confidence and my guilt consciousness – were concentrated with fury there and literally drew a barrier between marriage and me. The explanation will also be difficult for me because I've thought and dug through everything here over and over again in so many days and nights now that thinking about it confuses me. The explanation will only be made easier in my opinion by your complete misunderstanding of the situation, and to improve such a complete misunderstanding a little doesn't seem to me to be excessively difficult.

First of all you see the failure of my effort to get married in the light of my previous failures; I would have nothing against that in itself, provided that you accepted my previous explanations of those failures. It belongs indeed in that sequence but you underestimate the importance of that and underestimate it to such an extent that when we talk to each other about it we're actually talking about quite different things. I dare say that nothing has happened to you in your whole life that has had such significance for you as my attempts at marriage have had for me. By that I don't mean that you haven't experienced anything so significant in itself; on the contrary, your life has been much richer and more full of sorrows and more crowded than mine, but that's precisely why nothing like that has happened to you. It's as if one person has to climb five low steps and another only one step, which, at least for him, is as high as those five all together; the first person will not only have mastered the five steps but hundreds and thousands more; he'll have led a full and very strenuous life, but none of the steps he's climbed will have had as much significance for him as that first high step for the other person, that he finds impossible to climb with all his strength, to which he can't attain and beyond which, of course, he cannot go.

To get married, to found a family, to accept all the children that come along, to maintain them in this uncertain world and even to lead them a little is in my opinion the very utmost that a human being can succeed in. That so many seem to succeed so easily is no proof to the contrary, for in the first place not many really do succeed, and in the second place those not-many usually don't 'do' it,

but rather it merely 'happens' to them; that's not the utmost but it's still really great and very honourable – especially since 'doing' and 'happening' can't be strictly separated from each other. And after all it's not at all a question of achieving that utmost success, but just of a distant but proper approach to it – it's not after all necessary to fly into the middle of the sun but it just suffices to crawl over to a nice little spot on Earth where the sun sometimes shines and where one can warm oneself a little.

How was I prepared for this one? As badly as possible. That's already evident from what's already been said. But as far as there's a direct preparation of the individual and a direct creation of the general basic conditions, you haven't intervened much externally. That couldn't have been otherwise; here the general sexual mores specific to a nation and a period are decisive. Nevertheless you intervened there too, but not much, for the prerequisite for such an intervention can only be strong mutual trust and we'd both lacked that for a long time at the decisive point, rather unfortunately, because our needs were quite different; what concerns me scarcely touches you and vice versa, what's innocence with you can be guilt with me and vice versa, what remains inconsequential with you can be the lid of my coffin.

I remember once I went for a walk with you and Mother in the evening, it was on the Josephsplatz near today's regional bank, and I began to talk about interesting things in a stupidly boastful, superior, proud, cool (that wasn't true), cold (that was true) and stuttering manner, as I usually did with you, and I reproached you for having left me so uninstructed in those matters that my classmates had to tell me about them first, and that I'd been in the vicinity of great dangers (there I was impudently lying, according to my nature, in order to show myself brave, because due to my timidity I had no exact idea of the 'great dangers' in question), but finally I hinted that fortunately I now knew everything and that I no longer needed advice and that everything was all right. In any case, I'd started talking about it mainly because I wanted to at least talk about it, then also out of curiosity and finally also in order to somehow take revenge on you for something or other. You took it very simply, as was your way, and you just said that you could give me advice on how I could do those things without any danger. Perhaps I'd wanted to elicit just such an answer that



corresponded to the lustfulness of a child overfed with flesh and all good things, physically inactive and eternally preoccupied with himself, but nevertheless my outward shame was so hurt by it, or I believed it must be so hurt, that I just couldn't talk to you any longer about it and haughtily broke off the conversation.

It's not easy to judge how you answered me then. On the one hand, there was something openly crushing about it, something primeval in a way, but on the other hand what you said was certainly very modern and unhesitating. I don't know how old I was at the time, certainly not much older than sixteen. For a boy like that it was however a very strange answer, and also the distance between the two of us was shown by the fact that it was actually the first direct lesson about life that I'd had from you. But its real meaning, that had already penetrated into me at that time but that I only became half-aware of much later, was that what you advised me to do was in your opinion, and even in mine at that time, the dirtiest thing of all. The fact that you wanted to make sure that I didn't physically bring any of the dirt home was secondary, because by doing so you were just protecting yourself and your home. The main thing was much more that you remained on the exterior of your advice, you were a husband, a pure man who was elevated above such things; that was probably aggravated for me at the time by the fact that I thought that marriage itself was shameless and it was therefore impossible for me to apply what I had generally heard about marriage to my own parents. That made you even purer, that elevated you even higher. The idea that you could have given yourself similar advice before your own marriage was completely unthinkable to me. So there was almost no trace of earthly muck on you. And you pushed me down into that muck with a few straightforward words, as if it was my destiny. So if the world consisted only of me and you, an idea that was very close to me, then the purity of the world ended with you and the dirt began with me by virtue of your advice. In itself it was incomprehensible to me that you condemned me like that; only an ancient fault on my part and the deepest contempt on your part could explain it to me. And so I was once again affected, and certainly very deeply, in the most intimate, innermost centre of my person.

That's perhaps where the blamelessness of both of us becomes clearest. A gives B clear advice that corresponds to his view of life; it's is not very nice but it's something that's nevertheless quite common today, and it's advice that possibly prevents damage to one's health. The advice isn't very morally strengthening for B, but why shouldn't he be able to work his way out of the damage over time? – moreover he doesn't actually have to follow the advice at all, and in any case the advice on its own is no reason for B's whole future world to collapse. And yet something of the kind happens, but only because A is you and B is me.

I can also perceive that mutual lack of guilt particularly well because a similar clash between us took place again some twenty years later under completely different circumstances, in fact horrible circumstances but in and of themselves certainly much more harmless because in what way was there anything about me at thirty-six years old that could still be harmed? I'm referring to a little discussion we had on one of the agitated days after I'd announced my recent intention to get married. You said to me: "She probably put on some kind of select blouse, as the Jewish women in Prague know how to do, and then of course you decided to marry her. And as quickly as possible, in a week, tomorrow or today. I don't understand you: you're an adult, you live in the city and you don't know any other advice than to marry a random woman right away. Aren't there any other possibilities? If you're afraid of them I'll go there with you myself!" You spoke at greater length and more clearly, but I can't remember the details, perhaps I became a little misty-eyed and was almost more interested by how mother who, although she completely agreed with you, just took something from the table and left the room.

You've hardly ever humiliated me more deeply with words and never shown your contempt for me more clearly. When you'd spoken to me in a similar way twenty years ago one could have even seen in it, from your point of view, even as a little respect for the precocious city boy who, in your opinion, could already be introduced into life that way without detours. Today that kind of respect could only increase your contempt for me because the boy who got mired down in his attempt then doesn't seem to you richer now by any experiences but just twenty years more miserable. My choice of a young woman meant nothing to you. You'd always (unconsciously) repressed my ability to

make decisions and now (unconsciously) you believed that you knew what that ability was worth. You knew nothing of my attempts to save myself in other directions, therefore you also couldn't know anything of the train of thought that had led me to that marriage attempt, you had to try to divine them and, in accordance with the overall judgement that you had of me, you divined in the most disgusting, ungraceful, ridiculous way. And you didn't hesitate for an instant to talk to me in the same way. The shame that you caused me was for you nothing compared to the disgrace you thought I'd do to your name by the marriage.

Now it's easy for you to reply many things to me about my marriage attempts, and you've done so: that you couldn't have had much respect for my decision when I broke off the engagement with F. twice and then took it up again twice, when I uselessly dragged you and Mother to the engagement ceremony in Berlin and the like. All that's true, but how did it come about?

The basic idea of both marriage attempts was quite right: to start a household and to become independent. An idea that's sympathetic to you, except that in reality it turns out like in the child's game where one holds the other's hand and even squeezes it while shouting: "Oh go on, go on, why don't you go?". In our case however it's complicated by the fact that you've always meant the "Go on!" sincerely, since you've always held me, or more exactly held me in your power, without knowing it, just by the very power of your personality.

Both young women were chosen by chance, but extraordinarily well chosen. Another sign of your complete misunderstanding of me is that you can believe that I, such a timid, hesitant and suspicious fellow, could decide to marry on a whim, perhaps charmed by a blouse. Both marriages would have been marriages of convenience in a way, to the extent that it can be said that day and night, the first time for years, the second time for months, all my mental powers were concentrated on the project.

Neither of the young women disappointed me, I just disappointed both of them. My judgement of them today is exactly the same today as when I wanted to marry them.

It's also not the case that I disregarded the experience of my first marriage attempt in my second one, that I was reckless. The two cases were quite

different and it was precisely the earlier experience that gave me hope in the second case, that was much more promising. I don't want to talk about the details here.

So why didn't I get married? There were particular obstacles, as there are everywhere, but life consists in taking on such obstacles. But the essential obstacle, unfortunately independent of the individual case, was that I'm obviously mentally incapable of getting married. That's shown by the fact that from the moment I decide to get married I can no longer sleep, my head burns day and night; there's no life left in me and I stagger around in despair. It's not really worries that cause that, although it's true that countless worries are entailed by my heavy-handedness and my pedantry, but they aren't the decisive factor, they finish the work on the corpse like worms do, but I'm decisively affected by something else. It's the general pressure exerted on me by my anguish, by my weakness and by my self-contempt.

I shall try to explain it in more detail: In my attempts to get married two seemingly contradictory things come together in my relationship with you more strongly than anywhere else. Marriage is certainly the guarantee of the greatest self-liberation and independence. I would have a family, the greatest thing that one can achieve in my opinion and thus also the greatest thing that you've achieved; I would be your equal, all the old and eternally-renewed shame and tyranny would merely be past history. That would be like a fairy tale, but that's what's so questionable about it. It's too much, that much just can't be achieved. It's as if someone were imprisoned and he not only intended to escape, which might be achievable, but he also and at the same time intended to convert the prison into a pleasure palace for himself. But if he escapes he can't rebuild, and if he rebuilds he can't escape. If I want to become independent in the special unhappy relationship that I have with you, I have to do something that has as little relationship to you as possible – marriage is certainly the greatest thing and confers the most honourable independence, but it also at the same time stands in the closest relationship to you. There's something mad about wanting to escape from that dilemma, and my tentatives have almost always been punished by it.

It's precisely that close relationship that, in part, makes me want to get

married. I think that the equality that would then develop between us and that you could understand like no one else is so beautiful precisely because I could then be a free, grateful, blameless and upright son, and you could be a relaxed, non-tyrannical, compassionate and contented father. But for that everything that's happened would have to be undone, that is: we ourselves would have to be obliterated.

But as we are, marriage is excluded for me precisely because it's your territory. Sometimes I imagine the map of the earth stretched out and that you're stretched out across it. And then it seems to me as if the only areas that come into consideration for my life are those which you either don't cover or which don't lie within your reach. And according to the idea I have of your greatness, there aren't many of those areas and they're not very comforting ones – and marriage in particular isn't one of them.

That comparison alone proves that I don't mean to say that you've driven me away from marriage, as you did from business, by your example. It's the contrary, despite all of the distant similarities. In your marriage I saw someone who was exemplary in many respects: exemplary in faithfulness, in mutual assistance, in number of children, and even when the children grew up and disturbed domestic peacefulness more and more the marriage as such remained unaffected. Perhaps my high concept of marriage was formed precisely by that example; the fact that my desire for marriage was ineffectual had other reasons. They lay in your relationship with your children, which is what this whole letter is about.

There's a school of thought according to which the fear of marriage sometimes derives from the fear that children will later pay you back for all the wrongs that you have committed against your own parents. I don't think that that has much importance in my case because my consciousness of guilt actually comes from you and so is too permeated throughout by its uniqueness, indeed that sense of its uniqueness is part of its tormenting essence: going through all that again is inconceivable. Nevertheless, I must say that having such a silent, dull, dry, decayed son would be unbearable to me; if there were no other possibility I'd probably flee from him, I'd emigrate as you first wanted to do because of my marriage. That might also play a role in my inability to marry.

But much more important than that is my anxiety for myself. That has to be understood as follows: I've already indicated that I've made little attempts at independence with my literary activity and in everything connected with it, little attempts to escape that have met with the smallest success; they'll hardly lead any further, much has confirmed that to me. Nevertheless it's my duty, or rather my life consists of watching over them, of defending them from any danger that I'm able to ward off, indeed to not let any possibility of such dangers menace them. Marriage is the possibility of such a danger, admittedly the possibility of the greatest encouragement, but it's enough for me that it's the possibility of a danger. What would I do then if it really was a danger after all? How could I continue to live in marriage with the perhaps unprovable, but in any case irrefutable sense of that danger? I might waver in the face of it but the final outcome is certain, I'd have to give it up. The comparison of the sparrow in the hand and the dove on the roof [20] is only remotely apt here. I have nothing in my hand, everything's on the roof, and yet – as determined by the conditions of my struggle and the necessities of my life – I have to choose nothingness. I had to make a similar choice when I chose my profession. The most important obstacle to marriage, however, is my already ineradicable conviction that everything that I've recognised in you is necessary for the preservation of the family and certainly for its leadership, and indeed everything all together, the good and the bad, as they're organically united in you, namely: strength and mockery of others, good health and a certain excessiveness, the gift of speech and inadequacies, self-confidence and dissatisfaction with everyone else, worldly superiority and tyranny, knowledge of human nature and distrust of almost everyone – and also virtues without any disadvantages such as industriousness, perseverance, presence of mind and intrepidity. In comparison, I had almost nothing or very little of all that –yet I still dared to want to get married while I saw that even you had to struggle hard in your marriage and had even failed towards your children? Of course I didn't ask myself that question expressly and I didn't answer it expressly, otherwise ordinary thinking would have taken hold of the matter and shown me other men who are different from you (to name one very different from you: uncle Richard [21]) who got married and at least didn't break down under the strain, which is already a lot and would have been enough for me. But I didn't ask that question – I lived with it from my childhood onwards. I didn't wait for marriage

to put myself to the test, I put myself to the test about any sort of little thing whatever; you'd convinced me of my inability to cope with every little thing – by your example and by your upbringing, as I've tried to describe it – and what was true in every little thing and that had proved you right had of course to be enormously true about the biggest thing, that is, about marriage. Until my tentatives to get married I grew up somewhat like a businessman who gets through the day without proper accounting, albeit with his worries and his worrisome forebodings. He makes a few small profits that he always fondles and exaggerates in his imagination because of their rarity, and otherwise he just has daily losses. Everything's entered into the accounts, but they never balance. Then there's a compulsion to draw up a balance sheet, that's to say: the attempt to get married. And it's as if, with the great sums that have to be reckoned with there, there'd never been even the smallest profit, just one great debt. And then to get married without going mad!

That's how my life has been with you so far, and those are the prospects that it implies for the future.

If you cared to examine my explanations of my fear of you, you could reply to me: "You claim that I make it easy for myself when I explain my relationship with you simply by your faults, but I believe that in spite of seeming to make an effort, you don't make it more difficult for yourself in any way, but much more rewarding for yourself. At first you reject any guilt and responsibility on your part, so in that we proceed in the same way. But while I then, expressing myself as openly in words as in my thoughts, attribute the sole guilt to you, you want to be "overly clever" and "overly tender" at the same time and thereby absolve me of any guilt. Of course, you only seem to succeed in the latter (that's all you want), and it emerges between the lines, despite all your 'declarations' about existence and nature and opposites and helplessness, that I was really the aggressor while everything you did was only in self-defence. So now you've already achieved enough through your insincerity, for you've proven three things: firstly that you're innocent, secondly that I'm guilty and thirdly that you're prepared out of sheer magnanimity not only to forgive me but – what's at the same time more and also less – also to prove and to want to believe it yourself that I, contrary to the truth moreover, am also innocent. That could be enough for you, but it's not yet enough for you. You've taken it into your head to want to live entirely at my expense. I admit that we fight with each other, but

there are two kinds of combats. The chivalrous combat, where the forces of independent opponents measure themselves against each other, where each one remains steadfast for himself and loses for himself or wins for himself. And there's the battle of vermin, who not only sting but also suck blood to sustain themselves. That second kind is the real professional soldier and that's you. You're unfit for life; but in order to make yourself comfortable, to be carefree and without self-reproach, you show that I've taken all your fitness for life from you and put it in my pocket. What do you care now if you're unfit to live, for it's my fault. But you stretch calmly out and let me drag you physically and mentally through life. An example: when you recently wanted to get married, at the same time, as you've admitted to me in this letter, you didn't want to get married but wanted me to help you not to marry – so as not to have to make the effort yourself – by forbidding you to marry because of the 'disgrace' the union would bring to my name. But that didn't occur to me at all. Firstly, I never wanted to 'hinder your happiness' there or ever elsewhere else, and secondly, I never want to hear such an accusation from my own child. But did overcoming my reserves to be able to give you the option of marriage help in any way? Not at all! Refusal on my part to approve your marriage wouldn't have prevented it; on the contrary, it would have been even more of an incentive for you to marry the girl, because the 'attempt to escape', as you put it, would have become complete. And my permission to marry didn't prevent your reproaches, for you still maintain that I'm in any case to blame for your not marrying. But basically you've proved nothing else for me than that in that and in everything else all my reproaches were justified, and that among them one particularly justified reproach was missing, namely of your being insincere, of pandering and of being a parasite. If I'm not very much mistaken, you're also parasitising on me with this letter in itself."

To that I reply that first of all that whole reproach, that can also be partly turned against you, doesn't come from you but from me. Your mistrust of others isn't as great as my mistrust of myself that you've brought me up to have. I don't deny a certain justification for that reproach, which in itself contributes new elements to the characterisation of our relationship. Of course in reality things can't fit together like the proofs in my letter, life is more than a simple game of patience; but with the correction that results from this



objection, a correction that I neither can nor want to elaborate on in detail, in my opinion something so close to the truth has been achieved that it can calm us both a little and make both living and dying a little easier.

Franz