Otherness in self and organisations:
Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* to stir moral reflection

Cécile Rozuel

Abstract

Informed by Jung's analytical psychology, this paper discusses Kafka's short-story *The metamorphosis* in relation to moral reflection on organisational life. Adopting the view that fiction offers a promising path to engage the reader's imagination and reflection on moral issues, I explore such process in light of *The metamorphosis*. I argue that this story not only outlines important moral issues of relevance to workers in modern organisations, but is also particularly effective in eliciting a reaction from the reader which calls for further analysis. Reading about Gregor Samsa's transformation precludes indifference; instead, it asks us to reflect on our own moral values and behaviours, and to ponder on our tolerance for what is 'other'. In turn, this enhanced knowledge and understanding of ourselves help explore ethical issues in organisations in a more subjective, creative and holistic manner.

Introduction

Rare are the literary works that can, from the very first line, startle the reader while being so simply descriptive as Franz Kafka's *The metamorphosis*: 'As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect.'[1] Kafka's life itself is an interesting story. A frail boy dominated by his father, Kafka struggled to accept himself as a person of worth, and to assert himself towards his family and society. His fairly mundane (yet important) work at the Workman's Accident Insurance Institute in Prague provided him with the necessary financial resources to live, but he only truly expressed himself in his writings. These were apparently published against his will, following his death of tuberculosis in 1924, a few weeks short of his 41st birthday (Mairowitz and Crumb, 2011). It is debatable whether Kafka's wish that his manuscripts be burnt after his death should have been respected, for we would never have been exposed to some remarkable pieces of writing.

The influence of Kafka on popular culture is undeniable, whether people have read his books or not. He is one of a few authors who have had their names adjectified. Situations or organisations are called 'kafkaesque' to denounce an absurdly painful series of events or experiences usually set in or involving a bureaucratic organisation (see for instance Hodson et al., 2013). The term itself echoes senselessness, an existential struggle that does not convey much hope, or that even exhausts any thought of hope. It is life itself which does not seem to make much sense. It is existence that is estranged from happiness. Yet, in the very questioning of the situation, in the absurdity of the context and the content, we are invited to ponder on the meaning of our own life, and subsequently on the extent and nature of our moral responsibility. It is that precise point which, I believe, informs reflection on organisational ethics.

Much has been written about Kafka's novels. Such materials range from literary analysis (e.g. Collignon, 1955; Stine, 1981) to political or metaphysical interpretation of hidden themes (e.g. Bennett, 1991; Margolis, 1958; Ryan, 1999), from debate on the sources and influences of Kafka's ideas (e.g. Spilka, 1959) to discussion of the philosophical contribution of Kafka's novels and stories (e.g. Straus, 1989; Swales, 1981). In these commentaries and analyses, the ethical dimension of the quest for meaning is ever present, demonstrating how Kafka's stories call forth at least some moral discussion. Parallels are often drawn between stories, notably between *The metamorphosis* and *The judgment*, or between those stories in which the main protagonist is K (*The trial* or *The castle*). That Kafka's works have attracted so much interest from so many different perspectives and disciplines is evidence of the richness and subtle complexity of his writing and existential philosophy. It certainly would be possible to analyse systematically the ethics or lack of ethics of Kafka's characters and organisations, and attempt to draw some lessons or parallels with contemporary issues of moral commitment or

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[1] All of the quotations from *The metamorphosis* are from: Kafka, F. (2005) *The complete short stories* [edited by N.N. Glatzer]. London: Vintage Books (pp.89-139). The translation of *The metamorphosis* in this edition is by Willa and Edwin Muir.

responsible agency. Certainly, Kafka's contribution to scholarship on bureaucratic forms of organisations and their ethical flaws has been duly noted (e.g. Huber and Munro, 2013; Munro and Huber, 2012; Warner, 2007). My intent in this paper is slightly different however. Rather than focusing on the story itself and what it symbolises, I wish to invite reflection on how engaging as a reader with a specific story (*The metamorphosis*) stirs up serious questions about our own moral agency and responsibility. In other words, I propose that the reading experience is itself a source of insightful moral knowledge about ourselves, and that some stories - such as *The metamorphosis* - are particularly rich in revealing our deep moral ambiguity.

Tastes in reading are very subjective: whether one likes or dislikes a story depends on many factors, starting with one's disposition towards the story. Some people love factual narratives and loathe fictional stories; others cannot get through a biography but devour fantasy novels or literature classics. Not everyone likes Kafka – though there is a fair chance that some of those claiming to have an opinion on Kafka's works have never read any of his books. In truth, Kafka's stories are distinctive in content and form. They may not 'speak' to everybody in the same way. I would nonetheless venture that it is difficult not to react to the very idea of a man waking up one day to discover he has turned into a giant insect. This impossible indifference, I argue, is the special gift of *The metamorphosis*, particularly effective given all is said in the very first sentence. At minima, one could find the very idea rather silly – which already implies a reaction and position on the matter. More elaborate reactions would include imagining what it would feel like if one were to witness a loved one turning into a giant insect, or further, what it would feel like if one were to be in Gregor's position. From this very simple premise, the reader is thus already confronted with many questions of moral significance.

My purpose in the present paper is to outline how reading *The metamorphosis*, a seemingly simple if supernatural story, forces the reader to confront their own fear of otherness, their own disgust at what is 'abnormal', their own (in)ability to empathise with a variety of characters, and their own complex moral positions. I propose to explore these deeply personal considerations through the lens of Carl G. Jung's analytical psychology, which recognises the importance of the subjective experience of life whilst also accounting for the influence of collective structures on the choices and behaviours of individuals. After a brief overview of analytical psychology's approach and exploratory value, I outline the two most important themes for moral reflection identified in the story, namely alienation of self and otherness. I then discuss how fictional material engages the imagination, and explain how *The metamorphosis* is particularly effective in stimulating moral reflection on issues that relate to individuals and to life in work organisations.

Analytical Psychology and Fictional Material to Know Oneself

Analytical psychology, developed by Carl G. Jung at the turn of the last century, offers a unique and holistic pathway to understand the influence of the unconscious on our conscious behaviour. Distinct from other approaches in the depth psychology tradition, analytical psychology acknowledges that an individual's psyche is not merely influenced by the actual experiences, history or memories of the individual, but also carries traces of collective memories pertaining to humanity as a whole. This collective unconscious is 'inhabited' by archetypes, that is, collective motifs, primordial images or patterns of instincts that are commonly observed across communities and throughout ages (Jung, 1970, par.847). Archetypes manifest through characteristic behavioural or emotional expressions or tendencies, both at the individual and group or collective level (i.e. a community or a whole nation), although these are not consciously expressed (Haule, 2011, pp.11-15 esp.). They are often captured figuratively through images, or literary through folk tales and myths. Thus, archetypes such as the Great Mother, the Wise Old Man, the Fool or Trickster, the Divine Child, the Hero or the Shadow are conjured up through stories in different cultural traditions, but are equally present in each individual's psyche, expressed in one form or another.

These archetypes, both source and drivers of psychic energy, can have a strong influence on an individual's conscious life: they are found in complexes, in psychological projections, in inflated identifications, in role playing and deception (Jung, 1970). An understanding of archetypes, and an appreciation of the influence of the unconscious on conscious behaviour, are thus highly relevant to studies of organisational life. As organisations are shaped and peopled by individuals with complex psyches which they do not entirely control (the conscious part of the psyche is indeed fairly small, although it appears to the individual ego to be all there is and all that counts), many of their internal dynamics are subjected to archetypal influence by default. It seems therefore relevant to pay close attention to the psychological life of individual organisational members in order to analyse ethical issues in organisations. Jung argued that psychological work is inherently moral work as well, whose implications are felt not merely by the individual agent but also by their social environment (see Rozuel, 2010). The extent to which an individual is consciously aware of the unconscious' influence on and interference with their behaviour is important in ascribing moral responsibility and facilitating ethical development. The more a person knows who they actually are and what they actually are capable of (morally speaking), the more insights they have on their moral values, moral strength and moral integrity. These insights in turn help understand how and why people behave in certain ways in situations of moral conflict - whether such behaviours are morally praiseworthy or ethically condemnable. By definition, of course, the unconscious can never be known; however, some of its effects can be consciously observed and analysed. This forms the basis of self-knowledge and self-understanding.

Self-knowledge and self-understanding are not achieved purely through rational observation of the mind; rather, emotional and affective reactions are as valuable as cognitive processes to capture psychological and moral insights. Inner work - that is, conscious engagement to unveil the unconscious parts of the psyche - necessitates both rational sense-making and

creative imagination, withholding judgement that one means is better or more reliable than the other. This implies taking into account the subjective experience of each individual when examining a moral issue, a process which puts the spotlight back onto the individual and their degree of self-knowledge. Jung believed that the process of inner work is essential for the development of a socially and morally healthy psyche (see 1970, par.489-524 for instance). To know ourselves in depth is no trivial matters, and it demands great courage to face our inhumanity and ugliness – what Jung called the archetypal shadow. Because inner work requires that we suspend judgement in order to capture what is really there and what lies further below, it has been argued that fictional stories offer a useful alternative to real-life examples or even self-experiences (e.g. Boylan et al., 2006; Townsend, 2006).

Factual stories can implicitly constrain our interpretation of the situation and, more importantly, our behaviour in this situation. It may thus be harder to suspend judgement when examining the process of reaction and action which we undertook then, although it is necessary to do so if we want to reveal patterns of behaviour and deep complexes that unconsciously influence how we behave (Jung, 1969; Neumann, 1969). In contrast, fiction frees the imagination from the limitations of facts and scientific evidence. Anything is possible, for example awakening one morning as a giant insect for no explicit reason. Because there are no limits as to what could happen, we are made more acutely aware of the importance of moral questions: anything could happen, but *should* anything happen, or should we place limits as to what could be allowed to happen? If something different happens, then how should we cope with it? How stringent should our moral rules be? How flexible should we afford to be in ascribing rights to moral agents? How honest are we with regards to living in accordance with our proclaimed values of care, love and justice? It is not incidental that science-fiction novels are well-loved amongst ethics teachers as they offer a more drastic account of the challenge of maintaining a coherent moral behaviour in extremely different circumstances and contexts (e.g. Gerde and Foster, 2008; Pease, 2009).

Moral reflection on life, work and organisations: Themes from *The metamorphosis*

The story of the metamorphosis of dutiful and duty-bound Gregor Samsa into a giant insect (i.e. a vermin) is rich of meanings and can be interpreted in a multitude of ways. I propose here to identify some important themes of moral significance for economic and social organisations, in particular those which engage implicitly or explicitly our individual moral responsibility. I thus address below the question of the alienation of the individual, and the attitudes towards 'the other' and the ugly. These two themes are not only central moral concerns for modern work organisations, but also set the tone for a substantial reflection on what it means to be human in a supposedly tolerant and multicultural world, and what we should and can expect from work in a business-oriented society. Although each of these questions deserves thorough attention (far beyond the scope of this paper), they lie at the heart

of any debate on the moral responsibilities of organisations towards people and society, and shape how we analyse moral issues within organisations.

Alienation of self

Gregor Samsa is by every definition of the term an alienated individual. He works in a job he does not particularly enjoy to support his family and to pay back his father's debt. At work, he is bullied by his ungrateful and self-centred chief, and does not receive any acknowledgement for the care and dedication he puts into his work (pp.94; 97; 101). At home, he does not allow himself to think about his needs and desires, and instead accepts the responsibility of providing for the needs of his parents and younger sister; yet, there too, he does not receive much acknowledgement for his commitment (e.g. p.106). Indeed, when he does not get out of his room that morning, his family shows concern at first, but then reminds Gregor of his duty (p.92). He is trapped twice: trapped by his body and trapped by his social obligations.

In fact, Gregor cares very much about his family: he is supportive of his sister's talent for music, and is sensitive enough to appreciate the music she plays; he does not condemn his father for letting him carry the duty of providing for the whole family, and does not rebel against his father's authority; he cares for his mother, and does not want to scare or worry her. Gregor also shows a remarkable work ethos, getting up earlier than any of the other commercial travellers to achieve more in the day, moved only by a sense of duty (p.90). Gregor may think he is somewhat happy or at least satisfied with his life. Gregor may not even ponder on whether his life is fulfilling. Nonetheless, Gregor is alienated from his own desires as a man and as a human being. Prior to his metamorphosis, Gregor already had no voice. After then, his inability to communicate with his family or his manager only becomes more obvious, and more painful for Gregor. Except for his physical appearance, Gregor feels the same, thinks the same. He wants to get up; he feels guilty he cannot do so promptly and fulfil his duty, that is, go to work, come back home for the evening supper, start again the following day and the day after. His will remains – so he must be human, mustn't he? Yet, slowly, his transformed body alters his reactions: he notices changes in his taste in food, his impulses and instincts, and those physical positions which feel right and those which feel uncomfortable. He becomes further alienated from his humanity, on some levels at least. When he dies, of physical (and perhaps moral?) exhaustion, he still is Gregor however. To others, he is indeed a disturbing and inconvenient insect that needs to be discarded. To him, he is a man who has tried and, perhaps, failed to support his family in whichever way he could.

Systematic alienation in work organisations

The process and experience of alienation operates on different levels. The economic alienation of the individual, however, plays a particularly significant role in the background to the story itself. Indeed, Gregor leads the life he leads primarily because of economic needs: someone has to work, so it has to be Gregor since his father cannot. It does not matter whether his job corresponds to what Gregor aspires to do or to be; rather, from society's viewpoint,

what matters is whether this job pays enough to cover the bills and the needs of the family. Furthermore, or logically perhaps, the job itself does not nurture the development of the individual worker in a meaningful way (see Bowie, 1998 on what constitutes meaningful work). Gregor is a human resource, not a human being (see Legge's thorough and critical assessment of human resource management, 2005). The reaction of his manager, the chief clerk, who comes to Gregor's house upon realising he is not at work, is telling of how organisations value (or devalue) their agents: Gregor is at first accused of faking an illness to get out of a workday, then is suspected of having abused his position and stolen cash payments (which demonstrates how little attention his manager or the organisation has really paid to Gregor as an individual, for else they would know it would be absolutely out of character for duty-bound Gregor to act in such a way); then, once the chief clerk sees Gregor as an insect, he runs and flees, unable or unwilling to accept any change in his employee's physical being. Once the organisational man ceases to be a dutiful organisational agent, then the organisation rejects him and nothing is left of the man but a hollow shell (effectively what is left of Gregor at the end of the story).

As Whyte (1956) noted, the organisational man does not merely work for the organisation, but belongs to the organisation, and therefore dilutes his identity and his deep sense of self in the social and organisational rhetoric. The organisational man is 'good' because he conforms entirely to the organisational ideal. Any hint of dissent or disruption, either voluntary or a mere effect of external circumstances, is met with artificial benevolence at best, or stern remonstrance more frequently. The organisational man is told to get back in line, get back to work, get on with it - for that is how things ought to be, that is how things work. For Jung (1970), nothing is more dangerous than a society made of formatted people, for the organisational man is no longer an individual but a malleable part of a collective with a merely artificial sense of moral autonomy and agency. The organisational man is easier to control and easier to manipulate; it is, consequently, easier to convince him to take part in systems that harm others (e.g. fellow organisational men, external civilians, the natural environment) without anybody challenging the legitimacy of the systems or methods employed. This is also what Fromm denounces as a substantial element of the moral problem of past and present: 'Man's submission to this combination of threat and promise [of care and protection] is his real "fall". By submitting to power = domination he loses *his* power = potency. He loses his power to make use of all those capacities which make him truly human' (2003, p.184).

This, in turn, invites reflection on how modern work organisations care for and value the dreams and aspirations of individual workers, especially in the context of slow economic growth and high employment uncertainty. What would Gregor have been had he had a choice in the matter? Would he have embraced so earnestly (if artificially) the suit of the organisational man had he not felt bound by duty to his family? Would he have transformed into an insect had he been working for an organisation which would have valued his individuality and given him space to explore and express it further? Do our organisations push individuals towards the edge by accounting for them in purely economic terms, despite the rhetoric of humanisation and social responsibility? The answer to the latter question is most

probably 'yes', the result of a combination of factors including the market society mindset with its ability to turn everything and everyone into a marketable commodity (Sandel, 2012), the rhetoric of 'human resource management' which has enhanced concern for organisational strategy at the cost of individual human needs that do not directly support the organisation's goals (Legge, 2005), and their implicit contribution to the 'fragmentation in man's existence and consciousness which impedes the wholeness of experience and activity' so essential to a meaningful human life (Blauner, 1964, p.32). In this context, the moral and social responsibility of employers towards the well-being of their employees is of paramount importance. Yet, only a handful of research studies have tackled the emerging phenomenon of 'suffering at work', and the term remains more prominent in France than in the Anglo-Saxon world.

Stories of violence and distress in the workplace are sadly more commonplace than one might think (e.g. Herreros, 2012; Pezé, 2008). In fact, Terkel's opening line in his compilation of workers' stories in the early 1970s sets the tone: 'This book, being about work, is, by its very nature, about violence - to the spirit as well as to the body' (1975, p.1). The modern, technology-oriented workplace is most often denounced as enticing suffering because of (1) the increasingly unrealistic expectations of performance placed upon employees, along with a comprehensive system of disciplinary measures and 'motivation schemes' which further isolate and devalue the individual employee; and (2) the perceived impossibility to take some time off to care for oneself, leading to tendencies to contemplate suicide as the only escape route from a hopeless life. Psychoanalyst Marie Pezé, who established some fifteen years ago one of the first consultation services in France dedicated to suffering at work (now closed following her departure), states that out of the 900 patients or so she met every year, most of them mentioned death as a possible solution to their problems at work. These individuals are not all predisposed to melancholia or suicide fantasies. Rather, 'intensification of work, pressure of targets impossible to achieve, strategic conviviality, geographical fragmentation of teams, individualised work performance evaluations are so many examples of organisational models leading to a loss of solidarity and reinforcing the loneliness of the worker. Alone, so alone! Death becomes hope that "this will stop".' (2008, p.162). The phenomenon may not characterise all work organisations, but the existence of such experiences and their recurrence in various countries and industries are enough to call for a serious reassessment of the system. This sense of isolation, and consequently of alienation, certainly characterises Gregor, both prior to and following his metamorphosis.

Rejection of the 'other'

Whilst the sense of alienation is perceived subjectively, the attitude of rejection is, for itself, expressed socially. When Gregor turns into an 'other', his closed ones struggle to recognise him. His physical appearance is of course entirely different, and he cannot even speak to reassure them that *that* is *him*. The shock at the metamorphosis and the struggle to come to terms with the change are understandable, both from Gregor's and from his family's part. The ultimate rejection of Gregor by those who should care for him the most is, perhaps, less understandable, or at least less morally acceptable. The rejection is likely facilitated by the

fact that Gregor can no longer prove he remains himself by telling his family it is *him* and *he* is there. Although his sister and mother at first recognise that *it* must be *him*, they slowly lose interest in caring for *it*, and justify this by telling themselves that *it* has completely taken over *him*. He, Gregor, cannot possibly still be there, otherwise he would have done the decent thing and left the house (or died) for the sake of his family's welfare, as his sister remarks (p.134).

By projecting onto Gregor-the-insect an image of total otherness – and, further, of total ugliness and uselessness – the family members allow themselves to disengage from any moral responsibility towards what happens to *it*. This moral distance (embedded in the ideal of the efficient bureaucracy) is in itself dehumanising (Huber and Munro, 2013), and is one of several ways through which we consciously or unconsciously disengage from our moral responsibility (Bandura, 2002). Blaming the victim for the situation is a particularly efficient way of evading (albeit artificially) one's responsibility. In a twisted way, the cruel actions are presented as the only decent thing to do because the victim is partly responsible for their situation: 'By fixing the blame on others or on compelling circumstances one's own injurious actions are excusable but one can even feel self-righteous in the process. [...] Exonerated inhumanity is, thus, more likely to instill self-contempt in victims than inhumanity that does not attempt to justify itself' (Bandura, 2002, p.110).

What is other and does not prove useful in any socially acceptable way is condemned, implacably and without hope of salvation. Individuals discriminated against in the workplace because of age, gender, ethnicity or disability, often have to walk a fine line to prove that their otherness is not a burden, especially when the primary criterion for performance assessment is a mainstreamed definition of one's contribution to organisational goals and strategy. Strangely, the charwoman's pragmatism is almost more honest than the family's ambivalence and ultimate shift in attitude: 'Just look at this, it's dead; it's lying here dead and done for!' (p.136) reveals the charwoman; 'you don't need to bother about how to get rid of the thing next door. It's been seen to already' (p.138) she later informs the family whilst 'giggling so amiably'. The family, on the other hand, does not even acknowledge the news, as if pretending nothing so disturbing even happened. Instead, the parents go for a trip in the countryside, and positively assess their daughter's value for social (and economic) promotion and validation. Life goes on, the system remains.

In an individualist yet de-individualised society, what remains of our humanity? Is our self-awareness enough to define us as human, and therefore to claim that we deserve respect and dignified care? Do we need to speak and be heard to be entitled to claim for moral rights? What if we do not speak the language or have access to the ears of the decision-makers? What if we cease to conform for no fault of ours? These questions emerge from Gregor's situation, and they are essential. Gregor's metamorphosis somehow illustrates how much one's humanity is fragile, and how much of one's humanity depends on the willingness of the social environment to accept a more or less broad view of the notion of 'humanity'. From the standpoint of history, only recently have healthy white heterosexual male Westerners granted equal human status and the subsequent inalienable rights to other races, to disabled people, and to the female gender (up to a point…). Still, we struggle with facing the other. The other

evokes fear, distrust, disgust (Pelzer, 2002). The other fascinates too, because its otherness makes it strangely powerful; this is why it must be kept at bay. The other captures what we could be, what we do not want to be – anything but what we are. To ensure preservation, the other is thus rejected, repressed or destroyed. Besides, the greater the otherness, the easier the process of rejection since it is arguably easier to lack empathy and understanding for what is not close to us or does not look like us. If, like Gregor's family, we can convince ourselves that the insect we have in front of us is not a man but just an insect, *that* thing, then we feel limited guilt when stripping *it* of any moral rights or claims to dignified care. This process, we often forget, works both ways however: '...the power of humanisation to counteract cruel conduct also has important social implications. The affirmation of common humanity can bring out the best in others' (Bandura, 2002, p.110).

Shadow in individuals and communities

We can then ponder on whether such process occurs frequently, especially in our supposedly tolerant and multicultural societies. Jung's notion of the shadow is here extremely useful in apprehending the complexity of our relationship to the other. As the archetype containing all that is repressed, rejected or censored, the shadow carries a tremendous amount of energy which has the ability to disrupt conscious behaviour. Everyone carries a personal shadow, and at once also contributes to and carries the collective shadow – that is, the dark side of humankind, the destructive potential of work organisations and institutions made by men (Jung, 1970, par.572). However, most of us struggle to face the shadow or even appreciate its influence, for this would mean admitting that we are not masters of our lives (Jung, 1963). Because of such lack of consciousness of the scope of unconscious influences on our behaviours, we project the unacceptable onto an external other – be it an individual or a group, either way a scapegoat (Brinton Perera, 1986; Johnson, 1993).

To face the shadow implies accepting the fact that we are far less good than we ever thought we could be, and that evil and ugliness lie in our soul on the same par as goodness and beauty. Rare are those individuals capable of accepting such truth, and few are those societies able to operate in awareness of such paradox. We much prefer the safety of rules and clear boundaries than the implacable uncertainty which emerges from a constant struggle between good and evil. This explains why the 'organisational man' ideology is so pervasive and powerful, hiding the dark complexity of life behind a veil of illusory control and progress (Whyte, 1956). The individual living in a complex world of constant tension of opposites apparently bears greater moral responsibility for his or her actions than the organisational man who relies on external collective structures to guide his life. The latter, in effect, is no less responsible than the former from a moral perspective; however, he likely feels less anxious about his moral responsibilities for these are seemingly shared by the collective and most of his actions are seemingly condoned by the collective.

Shadow work is difficult but essential for moral awareness and moral integrity. Truly human and humane communities, either in the shape of work organisations or social gatherings, need to make space for shadow work if they are to be sustainable. As Jung (1970, par.579)

explains: 'recognition of the shadow…leads to the modesty we need in order to acknowledge imperfection', which in turn allows human community to be defined through real connections of actual individuals who need the support of one another *because* they are imperfect. This is not unsubstantial. What Jung describes, and what Gregor fails to achieve (for lack of social support and personal strength), is the need to embrace our own (moral) deformity and otherness in order to engage in an authentic caring relationship with the other. This does not mean we ought to excuse evil; rather, it implies that we recognise the objective existence of evil in each individual, each community, each organisation, and that we consciously discipline our tendency for evil without pretending we can eradicate it. And then, we may perceive good potential in what we thought was pure darkness or ugliness. Johnson (1993, p.30) warns us that:

> Apparently, the collective need for shadow expression supersedes the individual determination to contain the dark. And so it happens that an era of disciplined creativity is always followed by an astounding display of annihilation. There are better ways of coping with the shadow, but until they are common knowledge we will continue to have these outbursts in their most destructive form.

Identifying and implementing the 'better ways of coping with the shadow' are no small tasks, not least because they implicitly challenge the foundations of our modern economic order. Johnson (1993) recommends rituals to rehabilitate the sacredness of unconscious forces and thereby bound their influence on human consciousness to a dedicated time and space. Jung (1970, par.572) urged us to engage in inner work and develop some 'imagination for evil' so as to avoid feeding evil by our naivety and inflated ego. Either way, the approach we take cannot rely on reason alone, for the shadow is not rational. Instead, imagination provides a more uncertain but richer path to understand the shadow, integrate the other, and tolerate if not love the ugly. As Jung (1970, par.574, *original emphasis*) recalls:

> It is not that present-day man is capable of greater evil than the man of antiquity or the primitive. He merely has incomparably more effective means with which to realize his propensity to evil. As his consciousness has broadened and differentiated, so his moral nature has lagged behind. That is the great problem before us today. *Reason alone no longer suffices*.

This is why fiction has much to contribute to organisational ethics. Fiction frees the individual mind from the constraints of factual reality, and opens up the possibility to relate to the other in a more creative, yet at once more intimate manner (Boylan et al., 2011, p.72). The following section will consider such process through the experience of reading *The metamorphosis*.

Fiction and moral development: Imagination to nurture individual and organisational ethics

The narrator describes the story from the viewpoint of Gregor, but seemingly offers an objective or factual description of what happens. We read what Gregor sees, what he thinks, what he feels, what he says or wants to say, what he hears. And we read what his family does once he has died. The tone is morally neutral, thus deliberately allowing the reader to make up their own mind as to the meaning and moral of the story. Besides, the beauty of Kafka's story lies in that although he never provides an explanation as to why Gregor has turned into a giant insect, this does not matter. The reader at first cannot help wondering *why* and *how* this has happened – and indeed, Gregor and his family (his mother mainly) keep on hoping this is merely a temporary situation, and that all will get back to normal in due course. We never understand why or how this has happened (though we can speculate), but by the end of the story, the *why* is no longer important. As we read through the struggles, emotions and endeavours of Gregor to accommodate his situation, we realise that the important aspect of the story is the *what*: What now? What shall we do? How shall we react and respond to that unsettling situation? What is the right attitude and behaviour? What does it reveal about ourselves? What do we have to learn from this? My argument in this paper is that we can learn more about ourselves and our moral attitudes by observing our reactions to *The metamorphosis*. Besides, this learning can be translated into a broader reflection on how we respond to challenging situations in the context of work organisations.

The appeal to the imagination as a source for moral knowledge, moral reflection and moral development is generally well accepted in the context of the moral imagination (see for instance Guroian, 1996; Rozuel, 2012; Werhane, 1999). I presently argue that discussing *The metamorphosis* contributes to enhancing the moral imagination of individuals and of groups, and I explore this process in the remainder of the paper. As the reader proceeds with the story, he or she is invited to reflect upon Gregor's situation and subsequent behaviour, as well as upon the reactions of Gregor's family (and, to some extent, the secondary characters, including the chief clerk, the maid and later the charwoman, and the three lodgers). I suggest that our reactions towards the various family members and secondary characters is revealing of the limits of our moral resources, in particular our ability to tolerate otherness; whilst the extent to which we relate to Gregor's experience reflects our ability to engage with the inhumane in ourselves. I will discuss each of these points further below.

Testing the limits of our tolerance

In his essay *The undiscovered self*, initially published in 1958, Jung stresses the need for love and care for one another: 'Where love stops, power begins, and violence, and terror' (1970, par.580). The relevance of this statement to *The metamorphosis* is striking: when the relationship with the other is not grounded in love, we cease to see the other as an individual worthy of care just like us (moral distance ensues). Then we start to treat each other in harmful ways. When Gregor becomes the insect, his father reacts with violence (repeatedly),

his sister and mother try their best to contain their terror, whilst the chief clerk does not even hide his fright. *That* is not the person they arguably loved. *That* is not lovable. *That* does not deserve love. Interestingly, although the family feels powerless in light of what has happened, they have the power to contain Gregor by locking him inside his room. This physical distance echoes the emotional and moral distance that will slowly grow between Gregor and his family.

In truth, Gregor's situation is most unsettling, particularly because he quickly loses the ability to communicate with others. Would the family react differently if Gregor could at least still speak 'human'? Perhaps. Nevertheless, as an insect, his inability to be economically productive and socially presentable would undoubtedly still be a matter of concern and reproach from his parents, especially his father. As readers, we are thus witnesses to a range of behaviours in response to a dramatic turn of events, and we can ponder on the extent to which we sympathise with or recognise ourselves into such or such character. The characters we spontaneously identify with the most would reveal aspects of our psyche and our moral make-up. Furthermore, this process can serve as a basis for a broader reflection on how we actually tolerate otherness, let alone accommodate it or embrace it.

Of all the family characters, the father is the least able to relate to his emotions and feelings. He lives for social conventions, and does not sympathise the least with Gregor following his son's transformation. His ability to think beyond his short-term interests and to contemplate how Gregor might feel is very limited. He may even be slightly dishonest, having set aside money from his bankrupt business without revealing this to his son, even though Gregor is the one who has to work to provide for the whole family (p.110). The father represents the uncaring, strategic and materialistic aspects of a capitalist economy, in which a man is valued as a means towards economic growth. He is a ruler, but an autocratic, unsympathetic one. In fact, he is not unlike the chief clerk, Gregor's manager, or the lodgers to a large extent. Ethics, in this sense, is about rules and duties, albeit whoever has power can adapt the rules to better suit their interests. The father is the character who lacks moral imagination the most, but he is also the one who learns the least from the story. Set in an organisational context, and facing a drastic change, a team of workers with the father's profile would be driven by anger and would likely scapegoat the change agent, all the more so if the change carries a sense of betrayal. This pattern can explain some instances of workplace bullying, especially when the 'weak' element is condemned because he or she has not managed to prove their worth, to bond with the rest of the team, to integrate as prescribed, to do as they were told (e.g. Herreros, 2012; Pezé, 2008). Ethically speaking, the situation cannot sustainably improve if tolerance and deep understanding of the other (in whatever shape or form) is not consciously nurtured in the organisational culture.

The feminine characters, especially the mother and the sister, display greater sensitivity but eventually also reject the other. The mother is caring but helpless; she cannot really face the truth, she cannot be in the presence of the other. She lacks strength, despite her good intentions. She represents an ethical attitude one would qualify as feeble. Her heart may seem in the right place, but without the willpower to act in accordance with the heart, no

meaningful change can take place. This is the case of many who want to help in a situation but fail to do so, for they have not developed the moral resilience and psychological grounding to face and accept a painful transformation. In fact, it is the mother who hopes the most that things will go back to normality, thereby showing that she does not really accept the change and the otherness. Being attached to how things were can turn counterproductive and ethically limiting, for it also does not activate the moral imagination to address the needs of the new situation, especially the needs of the people affected by the situation.

The sister (Grete), on the other hand, reacts to the shock more insightfully than the rest of the family, and proves she is much more resourceful than her parents initially thought her to be. Over the course of the story – a few months, perhaps a year – she grows into an independent, assertive young woman capable of taking charge and leading initiatives. Ironically, she is at once the most caring towards Gregor, and the most upfront when it comes to dealing with the weakened and wounded insect. She first tries to engage with the other and somehow succeeds in making a connection with Gregor-the-insect, identifying which types of food he now likes, and attempting to clear up the space in the room so that Gregor can crawl around more easily. She faces the change, but only up to a point. Indeed, she remains physically distant from the other, never entirely at ease. As time passes, she becomes busier with work obligations and running the household, and no longer pays much attention to Gregor, until she states out loud what the rest of the family probably did think but did not want to admit – out of fear of failure for the father, out of commiseration for the mother: this is no longer Gregor, it is time to try and get rid of *it* (p.133). When she reaches that conclusion, she echoes the pragmatic attitude of the charwoman, a secondary character who plays an important part in 'dealing with' Gregor-the-insect.

The charwoman provides an interesting moral perspective: she does not fear the insect, in fact she almost engages with it more than the rest of the family. She sees it as it is, but she only sees it as an insect (that 'old dung beetle', p.127), and not as a man-turned-into-an-insect. Her moral attitude is not sophisticated but draws upon a 'good old common sense' which has its appeal: it helps get things done, in a sensible and efficient way. It also has its limits: she only deals with the present situation, but does not activate her moral imagination to make sense of the situation and put herself in other people's shoes. She only processes what is of interest and of concern to her, but does not think beyond that. Thus, she delights in finding a way to discard the body of Gregor, but only because it provides her with an opportunity to use her practical imagination (as opposed to her moral imagination) in a way that is efficient. Again, this moral attitude is limited and limiting, for it does not allow the moral agent to take into account the broader needs and wants of others in so far as it does not ponder on the actual *nature* of the other. Yet, moral responsibility and moral agency lie in the nature of beingness, and not merely in the external appearance of one's being.

The sister is possibly the most appealing character from a moral perspective, for she is considerate and caring, but also responsible and pro-active. She combines many qualities which would be considered desirable in a work organisation run responsibly. Yet, her virtues are not enough to redeem the other, to recognise the humanity left in the now disgusting and

unproductive insect. She represents an ethic of care that does not stretch far enough to include more than the primary stakeholders. She is morally imaginative, but only applies her imagination to parameters already set by external institutions: she effectively reshapes her role, challenges the prescriptive guidelines attached to her role, but she does not go as far as challenging the organisational script itself (see Gioia, 1992). In this purview, she also somehow remains prisoner of a system that encourages people to think strategically and economically rather than dynamically and humanely. Thus, all three family members illustrate the limits of moral commitment when confronted with a disturbing other. Their inability to successfully integrate otherness suggests that more conscious work is needed to understand how the other can be better perceived and respected (Rozuel, 2012). This issue, however, is even more acute when we experience this otherness in ourselves.

Feeling human, being a beast

I would venture that most readers would find it hard not to sympathise with Gregor, at least partly. He is a man who suffers, and a man who tries to cope with his suffering with silent resignation and quiet dignity. He occasionally expresses anger at his situation, anger at the behaviour of his manager and colleagues, anger at the fact that his family does not treat him with greater care. He expresses sadness and loneliness, and a desire to love and be loved. He tries to be brave and perceives being brave as ultimately letting go of life, out of love for his family. He could be defined as a sadly or tragically heroic figure, although we could wish he would try harder, fight further to assert himself. But it seems Gregor cannot fight any harder for he has been defeated a long time ago by the system in which he lives and to which he belongs. Gregor is a man who has internalised his social duty to such an extent that he cannot free himself from its grip, even if he so desired. His individuality, the richness of his personality had already been annihilated by the collective norms which determined he would solely be a bread-winner, and would receive little gratification for this. And somehow, Gregor has resigned himself to such a life.

Two questions arise: is it enough to live a life of collective duty at the cost of personal meaningfulness? And how can an individual cope with discovering in himself an otherness that is not socially acceptable? To address the first question, we need to consider what a worthwhile life or a life well lived would consist in. If we turn to humanistic traditions (e.g. Maslow, 1971; Frankl, 2006; Fromm, 2003), we note that a life worth living is a life that has meaning for the individual in question, or rather, it is a life in which the individual finds substantial meaning that he or she personally and subjectively values. A sense of duty may well be an honourable and meaningful source of motivation, but it may not be enough to sustain the quest for meaning so essential to the human experience. Indeed, Gregor's outbursts of anger and secret dream of sending his sister to the Conservatory to study music demonstrate that his routine-life is too narrow, and that he would lead a different life if only he felt free to do so. This is a major moral concern in modern societies, for a perceived lack of meaning is the cause of great suffering (Moore, 1992). We thus need to question the extent to which we successfully embed meaningfulness in our work organisations (see Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009 for a critical discussion on the matter). More precisely, we need to question

the extent to which we allow the individual to search for and affirm personal meaning in their working life.

This can become a very personal question: do we tend to accept our fate, with dignified resignation, like Gregor did? What do we miss out on if we do so? What does society miss out on when we do so? What is the moral cost of such attitude? For Jung (1970), the psychological, social and moral cost is great. The individual fails to manifest his or her potential, and only suffers without understanding why. Society (or the work organisation) does not benefit from the virtues, qualities and skills that lay dormant in the individual stuck in a collectively-defined role, and remains static or repeats harmful patterns of development (see Whyte, 1956, p.366). Furthermore, de-individualised people are more likely to blindly follow orders from the collective leader, even when these orders are detrimental or harmful to them or to others (Jung, 1970). Fromm (2003, p.187) would concur: the ability to support sustainable and socially meaningful development 'rests upon [man's] ability to take himself, his life and happiness seriously.... It rests upon his courage to be himself and to be for himself.' If moral development aims to strengthen moral agency and integrity of character and actions, then in this context, moral development cannot be pursued in any significant manner, for the individuals are discouraged from expressing their authentic subjectivity.

But is it always desirable to express one's authentic subjectivity? What if we feel human but are truly a beast? Will society not be hurt more by individuals who uncover their ugliness? Should not individuals hide their inner bestiality rather than let it rise to consciousness? Jung (1970) advises here that it is in fact more dangerous to ignore the beast than to face it, bearing in mind that facing the beast is not the same as unleashing it without care for the wellbeing of one's fellow companions. The beast in us is in fact a complex sum of potentialities, which need to be explored carefully and consciously. To start with, it is important we learn to accept that 'normalcy' is forever deceptive. Jung (1970, par.494) asserts that we should consider each person as a statistical anomaly, 'an irregular phenomenon', whilst Whyte (1956, p.366) comments:

> Everyone knows that they themselves are different...but they are not sure that other people are different too. ...It is hard enough to learn to live with our inadequacies, and we need not make ourselves more miserable by a spurious ideal of middle-class adjustment. Adjustment to what? Nobody really knows – and the tragedy is that they don't realize that the so-confident-seeming other people don't know either.

This positioning challenges the tendency to normalise, standardise and mainstream processes and relationships for the sake of consistency. When the individual is diluted in the mass, or worse, when he or she willingly abandons his or her individuality to merge with the mass, the integrity of moral agency is profoundly jeopardised, and the strength of organisational ethics is questionable. Thus, if we are not normal and should not aim to be, we are left with the need to deal with the beast in a more constructive manner than purely seeking to destroy it or repress it. The dynamic of shadow awareness and its subsequent conscious integration, as discussed by Jung, can serve as a guide not only to learn how to face otherness, but also to

learn how to love otherness, especially when it takes the form of a socially unacceptable beast. If we do not learn to accept that otherness lies in ourselves, that is, that we are less good and less perfect than we want to believe, and that what we find disturbing and disgusting in others is also present in ourselves in the form of the shadow, then we will not learn to live with ourselves fully and meaningfully. Like Gregor, we will restrain ourselves through duty and, once life becomes unbearable, the beast in us will take over and we will not be able to engage with it constructively. In contrast, if I know that I am also a beast and I learn to live with that bestial part of myself within a negotiated space, then the beast can be contained and its influence can be used just as it needs to be, for instance as a way of self-assertiveness, of greater empathy or humility, of deeper reflection on past mistakes or recurrent behaviours (Johnson, 1993; 2008).

This may seem easy or simplistic, but it is one of the most difficult and morally challenging tasks any individual faces (Jung, 1970; von Franz, 1964). This is the task Gregor fails to complete because he lives in a society and works in a community that do not value such task and do not give individuals the means to engage with their inner otherness. In turn, we may ponder on whether we know how to value such task and how to facilitate such inner work in the context of modern organisations. Most organisations fail in that respect. As Herreros (2012, pp.162-163) underlines, the rhetoric of organisational reality as offering to each worker opportunities for self-realisation, for valuable relationships and human adventures, technological enchantments and greater autonomy, is divorced from the actual reality of organisational life, which is characterised by much violence and suffering. For Herreros (2012), stories of workers who suffer, however 'anecdotal', are in themselves meaningful and revealing. Researchers and organisational members alike have a duty to listen and hear the distress, for the distress is real and forms the basis for meaningful change through reflexivity. Listening to the stories that emerge from reading Gregor's story can provide rich material to better perceive the actual limits of the supposedly moral organisations we are so proud of. Many questions emerge, answers are more elusive; the themes for moral reflection and organisational responsibility discussed in the paper are thus summarised in Table 1 to help guide self-exploration at the individual, organisational and collective level respectively. In square brackets are listed the risks we most likely face or would face if due attention is not given to each of the core factors.

[Insert Table 1 here]

Conclusion

Human beings are storytellers and story-makers. Myths and stories are the foundations of our cultures and traditions; narratives are the foundations of our history and self-knowledge. Stories are a primary vehicle for learning, partly because they are able to convey a wide range of issues in more or less complex forms, and partly because they stimulate not only the mind,

but also the heart and the soul of the learner. This is why fiction offers rich material to make sense of, interpret and reflect upon organisational ethics, both collectively and individually.

In this paper, I have proposed that the story of *The metamorphosis* is particularly evocative of moral issues relevant to modern life, and particularly effective in engaging the reader and inviting him or her to reflect upon their own moral stance. I argue that reading *The metamorphosis* can help stir moral reflection in individuals and groups, with relevance to life both within and outside of work organisations. For example, it can be used (as I have done) as core material for class discussions with university students on ethics-related modules. Even when students are from very different cultural backgrounds, they usually appreciate the moral dimensions of the story and start reflecting upon their own values in light of Gregor's reactions and those of his family. When encouraged to explain which character they identify with the most, a more refined reflection and discussion on their moral preferences emerge. Some argue Gregor is somewhat responsible for his condition because he could have rebelled - but then, how many of us would rebel when this risks jeopardising our financial security? Some empathise with Gregor's fate but find his sister's driven reactivity more appealing - so how many of us have already been acculturated to the view that a praiseworthy life is about efficient action with results visible short-term, whilst standing still or collapsing in the face of deep suffering and injustice is a sign of unforgivable weakness? The class discussion opens up a space to explore and examine a more intimate aspect of ourselves, something we often avoid revealing or admitting to.

By all means, the originality and bluntness of *The metamorphosis* is gripping, and students are never indifferent. Not being left indifferent is the first and most essential step in moral development. This is why we need fiction: fiction frees imagination, and imagination is what helps us find meaning in life. Organisations would do well to remember that 'the meaning of life is not exhaustively explained by one's business life, nor is the deep desire of the human heart answered by a bank account' (Jung, 1964, p.93). We, in turn, would do well to remember the desire of the heart so as to avoid waking up one morning, after uneasy dreams, to find ourselves transformed into a less-than-human being.

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Table 1. Moral lessons from *The Metamorphosis*

Theme	Inner work	Organisational responsibility	Societal concerns	Some questions to ponder on
Alienation of self	Choice Affirmation of self [*Fear to separate from the group to explore own potential*]	Offering personal space and support for the worker as an individual being [*Undifferentiated pressure*]	Allowing the expression of individual citizen voices Valuing individuality [*Conformity, cult of individualism*]	Do I speak with my own voice? To what extent do I conform? Why? Do I feel I am my self?
	Personal meaning Sense of worth [*Surrendering own sense of agency to group/authority*]	Adopting a more holistic and humane view of performance [*Mere economic valuation of all things and beings*]	Balancing collective duty with right to pursue individual creative expressions [*Senseless and unfair sacrifice*]	What is a life worth living? What do I aspire to do in my soul? Who do I feel I am?
Rejection of otherness	Authenticity Acceptance of own complexity [*Inflated view of self, unrealistic expectations and demands placed on others*]	Understanding the deep layers of diversity and otherness [*Extensive formatting of individuals, diluted personalities - organisational men prevailing*]	Identifying inclusive values Supporting diverse, creative and nurturing communities [*Moral disengagement, unreflective mass-obedience, collective projection*]	What am I really capable of? Why do I value what I value? Am I honest with myself? How tolerant am I of myself? Of others?