How Jewish was Franz Kafka? How Jewish was his writing? There are no explicit references to Jews or Judaism anywhere in his fictional work, yet so many of the characters, situations, and existential scenarios he depicts seem to allegorize modern Jewish experience. Moreover, there is substantial biographical evidence that Kafka was exposed to Jewish thought and religious practice and that he sustained active interest in such topics as Yiddish, Hebrew, Chasidism, and Zionism. This quandary has been central to much Kafka scholarship, from his earliest critics – including Max Brod, Margarete Susman, and Walter Benjamin – to contemporary biographers, writers, and literary critics. Recent scholarship – such as that of Vivian Liska, Dan Miron, and David Suchoff – has resisted the previously dominant tendency to quantify Kafka’s Jewishness, so as to account more subtly for the precise ways in which his writing can be thought of as Jewish.

The philosopher, writer, and activist Günther Anders (1902–1992) was an early contributor to the discourse on Jewish Kafka: he presented a lecture on Kafka in Paris in 1934, and produced two written versions of this study between 1946 and 1952. Nevertheless, in the introduction to a 1984 collection of his essays in which the Kafka essay was republished, Anders made clear that he considered literary criticism, and even literature itself, a luxury in which he and his contemporaries could barely afford to indulge. Indeed, Anders had spent much of his postwar career writing against nuclear proliferation and the dangers of technological modernity, though he did not publish his major treatise on the atomic threat until

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2 Excellent examples include Vivian Liska, When Kafka Says We. Uncommon Communities in German-Jewish Literature, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2009; Dan Miron, From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2010; and David Suchoff, Kafka’s Jewish Languages: The Hidden Openness of Tradition, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2012.

I would like to thank Vivian Liska for her kind invitation to participate in this volume, as well as my friends and colleagues Marc Caplan, Doreen Densky, and Ann-Kathrin Pollmann, whose astute comments on drafts of this essay were of inestimable value.
1956. How, then, can one explain his own persistent attention to Kafka, especially in the late 1940s and early 1950s?

It merits noting the forcefulness with which Anders made his claim about the superfluousness of literature in the face of the Holocaust and nuclear catastrophe, twin manifestations of the twentieth century’s technocratic “machine world,” against which Anders militated. For him, these human tragedies render literary study not only frivolous and impractical, but morally dubious. Of his original 1934 lecture, which he had given in exile, Anders later reflected:

_That’s how Kafkaesque our situation back then was. And one could think that it must have actually been “difficile” for the likes of us not to write about Kafka. However he who is forced to live a Kafkaesque life does not read Kafka and does not write about Kafka. Even K. would not, under these circumstances, have read Kafka. We had more urgent matters to attend to._

Anders dismisses the idea of a simple connection between the experiences Kafka depicts (marginalization, powerlessness, suffering) and the motivation to study his literary works. Without denying that Jewish exiles in the 1930s might have found points of identification with Kafka’s characters, Anders argues that this alone could not have motivated them. As for his own exilic work on Kafka, he claims that the French academy sought a lecture on Kafka and that he needed money: Kafka was thus “useful” as a source of income. This, Anders suggests, and not the plight of Josef K. or Gregor Samsa, is _real_ existential angst.

Nevertheless, Anders continued to engage with Kafka quite intensively during his years in New York (1936–1950), though he distanced himself from the scholarly academic discourse on the writer. He writes about this period in the 1984 introduction, and notes, rather dismissively, that there was at the time already an overabundance of scholarship – over 11,000 works – on Kafka.

_I have not read a single one of these 11,000 secondary texts – [...] because I would find it inappropriate to dawdle away our time sifting through wagons of German literary philology in this age of ours, where the main concern is to combat the onset of certain catastrophe._

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5 Anders, “Einleitung,” XXXIII–IV.

6 Anders, “Einleitung,” XXXVIII.
When standing before the greatest ethical and political crisis of the modern age, one did not waste time reading (much less writing) esoteric tombs on Kafka – or at least one should not have. And yet during these years this is precisely what Anders did, more than once. I explain this apparent contradiction by arguing that, for Anders, writing about Kafka was a means to another end. This is true not only in the mundane sense that Anders himself acknowledges – earning a bit of money when resources were scarce – but in the deeper sense that writing about Kafka was a means for Anders to channel thoughts about both the coordinated mass annihilation of European Jewry and postwar German society’s insincere relationship to its crimes. Anders’s Kafka book is his reckoning with the Holocaust.

The hidden thesis of Anders’s 1951 book, Kafka, Pro und Contra. Die Proceß-Unterlagen [Kafka, Pro and Contra: The Trial Documents], takes the form of a moral judgment. Anders believes that Kafka, often taken as the exemplar of Jewish suffering, in fact absolves Germans of their responsibility for this suffering. Thus, critics who think that Kafka somehow predicted the plight of the Jews under Nazi rule and exemplified the condition of the victimized Jew have inverted the true meaning and implications of his writing. Their arguments are not only historically untenable on the grounds that they render Kafka into a prophet of doom; they are also a misreading of power relations in Kafka’s work. Anders makes the somewhat radical claim that Kafka, who is generally thought to have given voice to the weak, the oppressed, and the victimized, is actually doing major psychological and moral work to liberate a generation of Nazi sympathizers from their guilt. According to Anders, Kafka offers them a painless distraction from their crimes, in the form of a morally neutral and spiritually edifying “Kunstbewunderung,” or appreciation of artistic mastery. While Anders is ostensibly critiquing Kafka’s readers and not the author himself, my analysis will show that Anders in fact holds Kafka responsible for a moral and religious system that enables this kind of facile absolution.

Anders’s claims about postwar Kafka reception are inextricable from his ideas about Kafka’s supposedly universal (but actually Christian) perspective and his conviction that Kafka represents the position of oppressor rather than oppressed. By attributing this viewpoint to Kafka, Anders can argue that Kafka’s works become available for postwar Germans to absolve themselves of a guilt they

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8 Anders, “Einleitung,” XXXIX.
possess but do not properly feel or acknowledge. Anders wishes to hold Kafka morally responsible for this. Anders claims that Kafka in some sense stands for
(which is not to say stands with) the “winner,” and that this allegiance ultimately enables the unholy marriage between a suffering Jew and criminal Germans. Without denying that Kafka also appeals to Jews struggling to understand twentieth-century Jewish experience, Anders claims that Kafka, who presented a world in which guilt and punishment are uncoupled, also allows Germans to sidestep their collective guilt for Nazi crimes. According to Anders, this is not a distortion or misreading of Kafka, though it might be a misappropriation, perhaps even an ethically unsound reading. Kafka's German readers do not betray him; rather, Kafka betrays the weakling or “loser” at the center of his literary universe, and Anders feels compelled to identify this act of treason and to pronounce judgment, to be pro or contra. Indeed, his book is laden with anger, resentment, and grievance, much of which is directed against Kafka and reflects a discernible vengefulness. It is not only Anders's final judgment, but also this intensity of undigested and unresolved affect that make his Kafka study legible as a Holocaust book. Thus Anders's account of Kafka tells us less about Jewish suffering than about German guilt during and after the Nazi era.

1 Franz Kafka: Universal and Particular

The complex history of Anders's work Kafka, Pro and Contra has been further colored by Anders's own somewhat polemical and mythologizing statements about it. Anders delivered a lecture on Kafka at the Institut d'Études Germaniques in 1934, during his Parisian exile. Among the (future) luminaries in attendance were Walter Benjamin, who wrote his essay on Kafka the same year in Paris, and Hannah Arendt, who was married to Anders at the time. Ten years later, now an émigré in New York, Anders revised the lecture for Commentary, a magazine recently founded and published by the American Jewish Committee. The essay appeared, in English translation, as “Kafka: Ritual Without Religion: The Modern Intellectual’s Shamefaced Atheism,” in the December 1949 issue.9 Anders had written a prefatory note in New York in 1946, which was published by the German press C. H. Beck, in 1951, alongside a significantly expanded German version of

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the essay. The essay was republished, with a new introduction, in Anders’s 1984 collection *Mensch ohne Welt: Schriften zur Kunst und Literatur* (also published by Beck).

Though the text of the original lecture has been lost, the extant versions and prefaces suggest that the central tension in the argument remained the same over five decades. On the one hand, Anders wants to treat Kafka as an abstract thinker – of metaphysics, aesthetics, and religion; on the other hand, he insists on the Jewishness of Kafka’s writing and experience, which signify their cultural and social specificity. Anders’s Kafka is caught between the universal and the particular, a point illustrated and exemplified by the fact that Anders’s central (universalizing) thesis about Kafka’s “religiosity without religion”\(^\text{10}\) co-exists with a series of (particularizing) Jewish readings of Kafka’s works. Anders resolves this apparent contradiction by arguing that while Judaism has no role, so to speak, in Kafka’s “theology” – which he identifies as a typically modern “shamefaced atheism” – it is nonetheless an important aspect of Kafka’s cultural and social experience, and thus essential to the interpretation of individual literary works by Kafka. To rephrase this in somewhat schematic terms, in Kafka the problem of group belonging (identity, affiliation, exclusion, alienation) is Jewish, whereas the theological problem (guilt, redemption, punishment, sacrifice) is not.

This “division of labor” is both convenient and plausible, and Anders’s readings of Kafka’s works largely bear it out. He argues that Kafka’s view of guilt is decidedly non-Jewish, since it is based in a conception of original sin and redemption. According to Anders, this is a Christian notion of guilt that is assumed to be universal, and it is what allows Kafka to be a modern *homo religiosus*: someone for whom the absence of God results in a nonetheless rigid commitment to ritual, officialdom, protocol, and punctiliousness, albeit bereft of any higher purpose or meaning. Anders argues that nineteenth-century secularism and atheism amount to a “history of shame-faced atheism,” by which he means a rejection of specific religions but a continuation of their ethos, “religiosity without religion,”\(^\text{11}\) exemplified by such writers as Nietzsche and Kafka. For Anders, the topics that fall under the rubric of “religiosity without religion” – which include reflections on public life, bureaucracy, the impenetrability of the law, inexorable guilt, and

\(^{10}\) Günther Anders, *Kafka, Pro und Contra. Die Prozeß-Unterlagen*, C. H. Beck, Munich 1963 [1951]: 76 (my translation). At times I will quote from the English-language essay that preceded both the German publication (from 1949) and the book’s English translation (from 1960), though the latter, as its translators note, is more an adaptation than a translation (see Anders, *Franz Kafka*, 7). Here, and in some other instances, I provide my own translations.

\(^{11}\) Anders, *Kafka, Pro und Contra*, 71, 76.
punishment without cause – have nothing to do with Jewishness. Rather, they relate to a secular universalist theology that derives from Christian thought and tradition, and they are inflected neither by Kafka’s experience as a Jew nor by his ideas about Judaism.

Where, then, does Kafka’s Jewishness lie? For Anders, there are two major Jewish questions in Kafka; these questions are pervasive and significant, yet not “religious”:

few statements can be advanced about Kafka with more certainty than the statement that his religiosity has no direct connection with the Jewish religion. Wherever he dealt with the Jewish question, he either formulated the position of the Jew in the world or that of the de-Judaized Jew confronting the “Jewish Jew.”

These two aspects of contemporary Jewish experience – the Jew’s ineluctable status as outsider and the post-Enlightenment encounter between traditional and modern Jews – are central to Anders’s “Jewish readings” of Kafka. For instance, Anders argues that Kafka’s story “Der Riesenmaulwurf” (“The Giant Mole”) stages a textual battle between the “orthodox [E]astern European Jew and the cultured Jew who only tenuously belongs to Judaism.” Anders convincingly draws out the condescension and misguidedness of the Western secular narrator’s apologetic defense of the pious teacher’s earnest and unpretentious academic treatise. This brief reading evinces a nuanced understanding of Kafka’s ambivalence towards various aspects of Jewish social existence (assimilation, Yiddish, Zionism). Anders is clearly alert both to the prejudices and misconceptions that Kafka thematizes and to those to which Kafka himself falls victim.

If the reading of “The Giant Mole” exemplifies the second main Jewish topos in Kafka’s work (“the de-Judaized Jew confronting the ‘Jewish Jew’”), then Anders’s reading of the fragment “Forschungen eines Hundes” (“Investigation of a Dog”) illustrates the first (the inescapability of non-belonging as a Jew), though the two topoi in fact converge in his analysis. Anders sees Kafka himself as the narrator: caught between “the bourgeois European Jews from whom he descends” and the “the [E]astern Jews, who really did live as a nation [Volk],” he is a “pariah twice over, caught between two groups of Jews, neither of which can ever be ‘his people.’” This “double dog-life” offers insight into competing models of Jewish

12 Anders, “Kafka: Ritual Without Religion,” 568 (text slightly modified). This passage, taken from the English version of the essay that preceded the book’s German publication, is simply omitted from the book’s English translation, along with many other important passages.
13 Anders, Franz Kafka, 93.
existence, but actual affiliation with neither. The dog’s narration amounts to an explanatory lamentation on the “ambiguity of non-belonging,” which Anders associates primarily though not exclusively with Kafka’s own Jewish experience.

These are insightful readings, yet also highly particularizing: they imply that the significance of Jewishness in Kafka’s works derives from experience rather than concepts, that it represents a reaction to a specific lived situation rather than a theological position, and that it is historically contingent rather than timeless. There is Jewishness in Kafka’s works, but no Judaism. He is a homo religiosus, Anders claims: he belongs to a Western Christian-cum-secular tradition of “shamefaced atheism,” and even views and experiences Judaism from this perspective. Kafka, in short, is a Jewish outsider and an outsider to Judaism.

Whether Anders’s “division of labor” implies a normative judgment is unclear. Is there an intellectual hierarchy at work here, in which Kafka’s Jewishness must remain of local interest whereas his religiosity is granted universal significance? Is Anders attempting to “save” Kafka from mere particularism and “elevate” him to a position of universal importance – i.e., to rescue him from his own Jewishness? It would not be surprising if some of these sentiments and intentions were at play, given the intellectual milieu in which Anders was writing. In the following section, I present an overview of this scene and its stakes, and then return to Anders’s Kafka study to show how it both engages with and transcends this debate about the status of Kafka’s writing. For Anders, Kafka’s Jewish particularism is not something from which Kafka needs to be “saved,” since, per Anders’s analysis, it can co-exist with his Christian theology – though this particularism does reflect a fundamental detachment from Jewish sensibility that Anders finds alienating and potentially treacherous.

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15 Anders, Kafka, Pro und Contra, 18–19.
16 Somewhat less plausibly, Anders’s comments on Kafka’s “Josefine, die Sängerin oder das Volk der Mäuse” (“Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse People”) are meant to prove his explicit (though encoded) rejection of Jewish theology. Josephine is read as a religious leader who cannot in fact hold the attention of the people and who will fade into history: the Jewish people will live on (i.e., their social existence matters), but the Jewish religion is irrelevant. As Anders puts it, “How little Kafka conceived of his writings in the spirit of Jewish theology is evident from the beautiful […] story Josephine, in which he clearly represents [the] Jewish religion as an incident in the history of the Jewish people” (see Anders, Franz Kafka, 92).
2 Seeing the World Through Christian Eyes: Ansers’s Critique of Kafka

In June 1947, William Phillips, co-founder of the Partisan Review, published a review article, in the newly launched magazine Commentary, of a translation of Kafka stories and a volume of critical essays on Kafka. Phillips’s remarks about the essay collection constitute a scathing critique of their particularism. For Phillips, Kafka’s great achievement is his capacity “to maintain a kind of permanent crisis, which loads each particular experience with the sum of all experience.” The error of nearly all the essays in the volume, he argues, is that they “ride some personal notion or some half-baked thesis”:

[T]he theoreticians present us with a variety of “interpretations,” all plugging some extreme view of Kafka’s work and all canceling each other out. Perhaps the oldest distortion is Max Brod’s attempt – in a kind of Zionist Emersonianism – to squeeze a Jewish oversoul out of Kafka. Less sectarian and more fashionable, however, is the Protestant non-denominational view taken by a number of critics who have transferred Kafka into a pure theologian. On the secular side, there are a number of “social” approaches, some of which argue that Kafka’s fiction was basically a protest against the injustices of modern society, while others berate Kafka for his reactionary and “escapist” attitudes.

Phillips continues in this vein: all these efforts to appropriate Kafka for a particular religion, cause, or ideology misconstrue the main strength of Kafka’s writing, which is to reflect the universal in the particular. According to Phillips, the search for alternative particular encodings in Kafka’s works renders them provincial and flat.

Two months later, in the August 1947 issue, the Viennese writer Friedrich Torberg published a sharp critique of Phillips’s review. Torberg was living in New York at the time, working as a translator, journalist, and critic. His mentor, Max Brod, who also wrote a response to Anders’s book, had been integral to the publication of Torberg’s first novel. Torberg did not hold back in his retort to Phillips:

There seems to be in this country a general critical tendency to discard Brod’s insistence on Kafka’s Jewishness as a kind of sectarian queerness, and it seems particularly outspoken

17 Hannah Arendt was also a member of the “New York Intellectuals” and had written for Commentary within its first year of publication. Anders and Arendt, both students of Martin Heidegger, were married from 1929 to 1937.
among Jewish critics – obviously as part and parcel of that glorious Jewish attitude which refuses to look at a problem, be it ever so Jewish, from a “merely” Jewish standpoint. This Jewish standpoint, if rightly understood, might easily be the most reliable graduator of any spiritual or cultural situation, and there is nothing “mere” to it but, on the contrary, quite a catholicity.\(^{20}\)

Torberg’s statement is, first, a provocative accusation of Jewish self-hatred: he regards Phillips’s insistence that Jewish writers transcend Jewish issues as a charge of Jewish particularism. Torberg’s critique is moreover a remarkable intervention in the Kafka debate: he argues not only that it is unnecessary to choose between the particular and the universal when it comes to Kafka, but that it may well be that Kafka’s Jewishness – that aspect of his person and writing which is taken to be most local, personal, contingent, and particular – is in fact the best measure of his universalism (what Torberg cleverly refers to as his “catholicity”). Torberg adds, “As a matter of fact, I believe that if something is ‘good for the Jews,’ it is usually good for all others, too; but then, it could be that this is just a personal notion and a half-baked thesis of mine.”\(^{21}\) Rather than set aside Kafka’s Judaism and thereby attempt to stand above or outside of it – as if this were the only way to grasp his universality – Torberg insists that Jewish concerns are in fact universal concerns. Thus, by identifying with Kafka’s “Jewish standpoint,” one can grasp the universalism of his writing.

Torberg’s rhetoric and positioning are crucial to understanding Anders’s conflicted relationship to Kafka: the overt concern with particularism versus universality; the question of perspective, i.e., seeing and judging matters “as a Jew” or “universally”; the thinly veiled accusations of self-hatred and treason. Indeed, this miniature postwar New York Kafka debate provides the context for Anders’s central claim about Kafka, to which I have alluded: namely, that Kafka views Judaism from a Christian perspective. Thus, Anders writes:

> It is quite misleading to interpret Kafka as carrying on the tradition of Jewish faith or theology. But at the same time it is partly as a result of his Jewishness, through the fact of his being a Jew, and as a Jew socially an outsider, that he comes to feel “sinful” and “in need of salvation.” He judges his position as a Jew from a Christian perspective. He is not a Jewish theologian but a Christianizing theologian of Jewish existence.\(^{22}\)


\(^{21}\) Torberg, “Kafka the Jew.”

\(^{22}\) Anders, *Franz Kafka* 91–92; translation slightly modified.
Anders’s “particularizing” readings of Kafka – he detects aspects of modern Jewish experience encoded in Kafka’s stories – are in fact central to his understanding of Kafka as a universal *homo religiosus.* Anders does not think that Kafka’s Jewishness can simply be set aside in order to discover the universal aspects of his thinking and writing. Nor does he believe that there is any Jewish theology in Kafka’s religiosity (the “shamefaced atheism”), which for Anders is the source of Kafka’s universalism. He asserts, instead, that Kafka stands outside of Judaism, and that this standing outside is at once the archetypical expression of Kafka’s Jewishness and what precludes him from truly adhering to Judaism. Moreover, this positioning is what gives Kafka a decidedly Christian view of Judaism. This relates to Torberg’s notion of Kafka’s Jewishness constituting his universalism (or catholicity), but Anders is far more skeptical than Torberg about how neatly Judaism, Christianity, and universalism fit together in Kafka’s oeuvre.

What exactly does Anders mean when he states that Kafka looks at his being a Jew with Christian eyes? He argues that this is more than just a preoccupation with guilt, redemption, punishment, and sacrifice. Indeed, Kafka sees the Jew’s outsiderhood through a Christian lens, i.e., Kafka reads a socio-cultural condition theologically. For Kafka, according to Anders, the “expulsion from Paradise” is an “eternal condition” from which we cannot be redeemed in this world, and this produces a “frozen striving for redemption.”\(^\text{23}\) Anders considers this notion decidedly Christian for at least two reasons: first, because the existential situation of unshakeable guilt reflects an internalization of the idea of original sin; and second, because Kafka’s insistence on non-belonging to the Jewish people is fundamentally non-Judaic. For instance, Anders invokes Abraham’s covenant on behalf of the Jewish people to suggest that Judaism is founded on an idea of (Jewish) inclusivity, such that, theologically speaking, the Jewish religion emphasizes the belonging and inclusion of Jews, not the exclusion of non-Jews.\(^\text{24}\) Without disputing Kafka’s feelings of outsiderhood as a fact of social experience, Anders contends that Kafka Christianizes this condition by expressing the need to be redeemed from a state of permanent exclusion.\(^\text{25}\)

Significantly, it is precisely those aspects of Kafka’s writing that supposedly reflect a Christian perspective that Anders painstakingly distanced himself from in his own personal efforts at Jewish self-fashioning. In his 1978 essay “Mein Judentum” (“My Judaism”) Anders identifies the essence of his identification as a Jew in his rejection of the doctrine of original sin and the imperative to correct


the Christian misunderstanding of Jewish chosenness. Two passages from this essay are particularly revealing. The first is an anecdote from his schoolboy days, in which Anders answers the question of when he first felt himself to be Jewish. Asked by another child about redemption and sin, the young Anders already then refuses to accept the state of affairs that the Christian child takes as given – namely, that we are all born into sin, that we are awaiting redemption, and that Christ is the redeemer. He states quite explicitly that “being a Jew” (“ein Jude sein”) took on a certain significance at this point: it meant a firm rejection of the guilt internalized by Christians and imposed by them onto Jews.26 Anders thus asserts that even he, whose Jewish upbringing was significantly less traditional and observant than Kafka’s, feels an innate disconnect from the doctrine of original sin. His unwillingness to internalize inescapable guilt and participate in a “frozen striving for redemption” is the foundation of Anders’s self-understanding as a Jew, whereas Kafka’s whole oeuvre struggles with guilt and redemption. Anders’s own Judaism is rooted in a few essential beliefs and convictions that are contradicted by Kafka’s writing.

The second aspect of Anders’s self-description as a Jew that sheds light on his critique of Kafka concerns his understanding of Jewish election, which also relates to the matter of inclusion and exclusion.27 He explains that much anti-Semitism derives from misunderstandings of this idea, which in facts stems from a rather commonplace and uncontroversial passage in the Bible: the Jews were “chosen” in the sense that they had a “unique reciprocal covenant” with their God; they could worship no other God, and God could “choose” no other people. Yet there were other groups who had their own gods, perhaps with the same covenant as the Jews; this is the concept of henotheism, according to which a monotheistic group does not necessarily deny the existence of other deities that might be worshipped by other groups. During this “‘henotheisitic’ epoch of Judaism,” monotheism did not mean that there was only one God in an absolute sense, but rather that each people had its own “tribal god” and was potentially “chosen” by that God. The problem, Anders explains, arose when other groups, i.e., non-Jews, adopted the Old Testament and transformed the God of the Jews into the God of all people. This led non-Jews to believe that the Jews were asserting an arrogant

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27 My claim is that there are two theological ideas – one relating to original sin, the other relating to Jewish election – that are crucial for Anders’s own Judaism and for his critique of Kafka. There are additional social, historical, and cultural dimensions of his Jewishness that he describes in “My Judaism.”
and exclusionary claim that only they were the chosen people of the one true God, a misevaluation which fostered centuries of resentment and hatred. Thus, according to Anders, the problem of Jewish election exists only for non-Jews who misunderstand the henotheistic period as simply monotheistic and who misconstrue Jewish claims to chosenness as universal rather than private. Anders feels a “Jewish duty” to clarify this misunderstanding about Jewish election to his Christian readers.

Anders’s well-intentioned but unorthodox interpretation of Jewish election appears to stem from distaste for the concept of chosenness. His explanation reflects a left-wing universalism that relativizes this idea. And yet it also invokes and advances the rhetoric of inside and outside, and treats his Jewish perspective as privileged. For Anders, it is natural – and forgivable – that his Christian readers would misconstrue the idea of Jewish election; as a Jew, he is uniquely poised and morally compelled to clarify the matter. Anders thus reaffirms, this time through his own ability and need to see the world from a Jewish perspective, the outsider position of the Jew. Indeed, he thoroughly embraces and participates in this brand of Jewish outsiderhood: the Jew stands outside, according to Anders, but he stands outside together with other Jews, and this confers certain benefits and enables certain insights. The privilege of this outsider position is what allows and obligates Anders to help bring about religious harmony and understanding.

In Anders’s view, Kafka is fundamentally alienated from Judaism: he adopts a Christian perspective on original sin and Jewish chosenness. This is what makes him a “double pariah” not only in the sense that Anders explicitly intends – belonging fully to neither Eastern nor Western Jewry – but also in the sense that he experiences exclusion as a Jew (Eastern and Western), and then again on account of his Christianizing perspective. This actually makes him a triple pariah, though Anders does not himself state this. To claim that Kafka looks at his being a Jew with Christian eyes is a highly personal charge: Kafka accepts original sin and the endless striving for redemption, the rejection of which lies at the heart of Anders’s own definition of his Judaism. Though he empathizes

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28 This is a paraphrase of Anders’s argument (see Anders, “Mein Judentum,” 245–246).
30 Anders, Kafka, Pro und Contra, 18.
31 Anders’s argument seems theologically flawed. After all, the endless striving for redemption belongs more to Judaism than Christianity, where the savior has already come and saved the souls of his followers. Anders seems aware of this objection, and responds with a preemptive but unsubstantiated claim: “The paradox of Jewish messianism (which might be said always to have rejected any Messiah appearing in the real world as a false Messiah) has nothing in common with the paradox of Kafka’s ideal of redemption, devoid as it is of a definite goal” (see Anders, Franz
with Kafka’s Jewish suffering, he cannot accept Kafka’s fundamentally non-Judaic worldview. Indeed, this is so insidious that it kindles suspicions of treason. Anders is not simply confused, alienated, and disappointed by Kafka; he feels, as a Jewish writer and thinker, a deep sense of betrayal.

### 3 Writing for the Perpetrators: Anders Sharpens His Critique

Though Anders’s ambivalence toward Kafka had been openly declared by 1951 via the title of his book about Kafka, it became most explicit in the Kafka section of the 1984 introduction to his essay collection *Mensch ohne Welt*, the tone and content of which oscillate between reverence and dismissal. Anders states that while re-reading Kafka’s works in preparation for the publication of his essay in *Commentary*, he had been caught between “Bewunderung und Abneigung,” or “admiration and aversion.” He explains that, on the one hand, he felt that he had established a quite accurate reading of Kafka’s religiosity, a reading “whose sharp and polemical tone and content stood out in the generally fashionable, pseudo-religious as well as pseudo-political, murmurings about Kafka.”

(To support this assessment, Anders mentions several important thinkers, including Ernst Bloch and Georg Lukács, who had praised his essay.33) On the other hand, he realized that the human catastrophes of the time – including the Holocaust and the bombing of Hiroshima – had rendered literary study, and even literature itself, a luxury. Anders’s ambivalence plays out not only on the level of Kafka criticism, or literary criticism in general, and its relationship to moral and political crisis, but also in his own “personal” relationship to Kafka. Indeed, it is here that Anders identifies the matter of original sin as having stood at the core of his resistance to Kafka:

> Since the (very belated) moment I realized that without the concept of original sin all of European culture would have been impossible, I have been outraged by the injustice of this concept. I have always rejected as presumptuous the meaningless and worthless demand that I, without awareness of sin or guilt of any kind (let alone an inherited one), should feel guilty, even savor the feeling of guilt – which many took as further proof of my guilt. He who

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Kafka, *Pro and Contra*: Günther Anders’s Holocaust Book

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Anders, “Einleitung,” XXXVI.

33 Anders, “Einleitung,” XXXVI–VII.
defends himself as non-guilty, insists even on his innocence, supposedly makes himself more guilty, for example of “self-righteousness.” To me, as opposed to Kafka, this was all absolutely unacceptable. To confess guilt, to go so far as to take pleasure in the confession of guilt – I was profoundly resistant to this while writing my Kafka essay.34

Anders is not merely skeptical of the authors of those 11,000-plus books on Kafka. He is, at some level, angry with – or at least disapproving of – Kafka himself for having provided fodder for this industry. Echoes of the story about the schoolboy from “Mein Judentum” resonate in the preceding quotation: Anders suspects that Kafka would have readily submitted to the Christian boy’s accusations and assumed the guilt ascribed to him. For Anders, such an action amounts to a kind of Jewish treason – felt all the more acutely because Kafka not only accepts Christian guilt, but takes pleasure in it.

Traces of Anders’s feeling of betrayal are present in the versions first published in English, in 1949, and in German, in 1951; however, it is most explicit in the 1984 introduction. Here Anders argues that Kafka does not in fact write for the weak, the victimized, the disenfranchised, the underdog, the Jew – the “loser sons,” as the literary scholar and cultural critic Avital Ronell has memorably called them – but for the winners, the authorities, the fathers, the Christians, the postwar Germans – the “Eichmannsöhne und -enkel” (“the sons and grandsons of Eichmann”), to use a phrase Anders employs in “Mein Judentum” and elsewhere.35 Anders’s response to Kafka’s supposed treason is decidedly vengeful: it involves not only a gesture of disavowal and expropriation, but also a literary and ethical subversion that strikes at the heart of Kafka’s writing. By claiming that Kafka falls on the side of winners rather than losers, Anders reverses the power dynamic that seems to undergird Kafka’s moral universe, thereby rendering him a far less sympathetic writer than he is generally taken to be. While other Kafka critics of the day – existentialists, atheists, Jews, Germans, Austrians, Czechs, etc. – were desperately trying to claim Kafka as theirs, Anders seemed eager to disavow him.

My reading is closely tied to Max Brod’s critique of Anders’s essay. Brod asserts that Anders misconstrues this power dynamic in Kafka, in that Anders mistakenly thinks that Kafka validates rather than criticizes those who exert authority, ascribe guilt, and exact punishment. By ignoring “that which is positive and active in [Kafka] that exists alongside the negative” – in particular Kafka’s capacity for belief in a higher power – and missing Kafka’s irony, the

34 Anders, “Einleitung,” XXXIII.
point of which is to expose and reject these arbitrary abuses of power, Anders, according to Brod, comes to the absurd conclusion that “Kafka was an anticipatory fascist.” This conclusion would be absurd, were it an accurate description of Anders’s position. It seems unlikely that Anders believed that Kafka displays a proto-fascist ideology. (It is similarly doubtful that Brod sincerely thought this about Anders.) However, Anders does declare Kafka guilty of a kind of treason – against the Jew, the weakling, the loser – which lends some credence to Brod’s admittedly exaggerated charges. Without ascribing to Kafka the invidious position that Brod claims it does, Anders’s characterization of Kafka’s failed or absent Judaism undermines the attitudes toward power and submission generally associated with Kafka’s writings.

The following passage from *Kafka, Pro and Contra* effectively illustrates Anders’s critique:

> In his own complicated but consistent way, then, Kafka is a realist; he shows what the world looks like from the outside. [...] The possibility that the newcomer might be right in suspecting that customs are in fact decrees, that the rationalist might in fact have an insight into truth, is an idea which Kafka never expresses. For him the newcomer is always wrong, on principle, for in a way Kafka sees the problem of the alien, the newcomer, the Jew, through the eyes of those who do not accept the alien. 

Anders is attempting to paraphrase the perspective that Kafka represents, not the belief that underlies this perspective, which is neither Anders’s nor Kafka’s. Brod misreads Anders: he thinks Anders is claiming that Kafka agrees with this perspective, and thus thinks that Anders attributes deep malice and even fascist inclination to Kafka. However, Anders is not claiming that the stranger is wrong to question authority, or that Kafka believes this: after all, the only one who possesses the “truth,” even in Anders’s account, is the stranger. But he is saying that Kafka only ever represents this position – the one according to which “the alien, the newcomer, the Jew” never finds acceptance or validation. According to Anders, Kafka writes the story of the loser, but from the perspective of the winner.

Anders’s reading does not quite attribute fascist attitudes to Kafka, and yet it is accusatory. Brod discerned this without having found the proper expression for it. If Kafka truly represents the perspective of the winner, even in a story about the plight of a loser, where does this leave the loser? If Kafka fails to give voice to the views and beliefs of the weakling, even if the reader senses that this weak-

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37 Anders, *Franz Kafka*, 28 (italics added to reflect the original).
ling is indeed the bearer of truth, then it would seem that Kafka has abandoned the very ones who most need him. To depict every situation “through the eyes of those who do not accept the alien” is to forsake all the aliens who seem to occupy the moral center of his stories and garner the reader’s attention, sympathy, and support. This is the charge Anders levels against Kafka: not proto-fascism, but abandonment – of the weaklings, the sons, the servants, the Jews. As he notes in the 1984 introduction, “if in this work I persuaded myself that I had discovered an enemy in Kafka, this was because every inclination to servility and assimilation rubbed me the wrong way.”38 This is the closest Anders comes to a confession: he thinks that Kafka champions – or at least takes some degree of pleasure in – weakness and submission, and Anders finds this intellectually and morally repellent. He is determined to show that there are dire and dramatic consequences to Kafka’s “Christian worldview” – not just for Kafka, but for his readers and above all for his “loser sons,” who are left with nothing. It is supposed to hurt to think that Kafka has forsaken his weaklings, his strangers, his Jews. This, it should be noted, is why Brod is so upset in his rejoinder to Anders’s essay.

According to Anders, Kafka adopts a Christian perspective on Jewish matters. This move by Kafka not only estranges Anders, but also results in a shift of narrative and figural allegiance away from the loser: the winner is validated, not in the sense that he is on the side of truth and right, but in the sense that the story belongs to him. Thus, Kafka’s fiction presents heroes, not anti-heroes; the weak are left with nothing, not even narrative perspective. The final, arguably most extreme step in Anders’s critique occurs in the final paragraph of the Kafka section of the 1984 introduction, which, as noted, teems with hostility and arrogance towards literary critics and even Kafka himself. Anders attempts to explain the postwar German resurgence of interest in Kafka in a way that indirectly but undoubtedly blames Kafka for making himself available to a society of guilty Germans who have consistently failed to take responsibility for their complicity in Nazi crimes:

The interest that Jews have taken in Kafka’s representation of Jewish existence is of course completely legitimate. In contrast, what requires explanation is the fervent curiosity that broke out among Germans after 1950. Those who were guilty of and complicit in the excessive crimes of the Hitler regime, who knew very well what they had done and yet were not only not charged with or punished for anything, but rather, with few exceptions, continued to live in a self-satisfied and smug manner – they were presumably thankful to have been supplied with an antipodal figure.39

38 Anders, “Einleitung,” XXXII.
39 Anders, “Einleitung,” XXXIX.
Anders suggests there was a perfect fit between postwar Germans – who were aware of their guilt but were neither charged nor punished for their crimes – and a character like Josef K., in *Der Proceß [The Trial]*, who is not guilty but is nevertheless accused and convicted of unknown crimes. Such characters, according to Anders, provide a kind of moral-psychological absolution for guilty Germans: “The deification of Kafka once again erased the fact that his family of millions had been killed. And if he is made famous, then primarily not as a writer, but rather as someone who provides a figure that, though not guilty, nevertheless gets punished.” For Anders, Kafka’s “counter-figure” offers a convenient escape from causal thinking about guilt and punishment, which is precisely what postwar Germans were seeking, given that their guilt had gone unpunished. By praising and deifying Kafka – not for his literary talent, but for creating this figure of moral absence – they find a means to erase their own crimes. Kafka thus enables postwar Germans to acknowledge their guilt without having to face any consequences for it, such as suffering or loss. This is the precise opposite of how things work in Kafka’s fictions, where there are consequences regardless of culpability, but in both situations guilt and punishment are uncoupled and exist in an unpredictable relationship.

Anders concludes the Kafka section of the 1984 introduction – his last word, so to speak, on the author – by claiming that this moral-psychological “Kafka epidemic” (the “Kafka-Seuche,” as he terms it) was most pronounced not necessarily among the most ideologically committed and criminal Nazis, but among the far more numerous group of fellow travelers. This epidemic, he notes, “arguably broke out in particular among those Germans who had participated halfheartedly and who wished to prove – also to themselves – that they could accept, at least in the form of literature, the guilt ascribed to them by the victors, and thereby work through their remorse in the form of artistic admiration.” According to Anders, Kafka upsets the moral order, enabling everyday Germans to cover over their crimes against the Jewish people with literary appreciation. He enables a generation of complicit Germans to sidestep their guilt by offering up “artistic appreciation” (“Kunstbewunderung”) as a valueless substitute for and distraction from ethical behavior. (Incidentally, this reading sheds light on Anders’s suspiciousness of German literary study, or Germanistik.)

Anders thus performs a radical reversal of the received wisdom about Kafka. Rather than give voice to the weakling, the victim, the Jew, Kafka actually offers a generation of Nazi fellow travelers a free pass, liberating them from their guilt not

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41 Anders, “Einleitung,” XXXIX.
through actual atonement but through a quick aesthetic fix. Kafka is thus deified not because he is a suffering Jew (though presumably this adds a useful note of piety and solemnity to the Nazi sympathizers’ interest in him), but because he presents a world in which punishment is uncoupled from crime. If there are people who suffer the consequences of transgression without having transgressed, so the thinking goes, then there must be people who transgress without suffering any consequences. By depicting a situation of moral chaos, Kafka makes himself available to soothe the collective conscience of the “sons and grandsons of Eichmann” that populate postwar Germany and facilitate their false and facile efforts to come to terms with the past.

The arguments about Kafka’s appeal to a postwar German audience are thus closely tied to Anders’s claims about Kafka’s supposedly universal but actually Christian perspective on guilt and his idea that Kafka tells the story of the loser from the perspective of the winner. His Christian “winner” perspective makes him appealing to and worthy of admiration among Germans, especially guilty ones. It is only because Kafka embraces a Christian worldview that he can be such a feel-good source of wonder to guilty Germans, which means not that Kafka is responsible for or had somehow predicted the Holocaust, but that he is part of the reason why postwar Germans continue to shirk responsibility for it. Thus, by identifying the heart of Anders’s critique in his claim about Kafka’s Jewish treason, we begin to understand Anders’s peculiar conclusion that Kafka helps complicit postwar Germans forget their guilt, or gives them license to ignore it.

4 Conclusion: On Not Forgiving Kafka

There is much to object to in Anders’s critique of Kafka. As a psychologistic reading of literature, it is not especially convincing: can matters of personal conscience and responsibility really be projected onto fictional characters in the way that Anders assumes, and will such projection achieve for the reader the kind of moral cleansing that Anders suggests? It is far from clear that literature works this way for any individual reader, much less for a (national) body of readers. As an ethical reading, Anders’s critique likewise misses the mark: as Brod notes, the fact that Kafka presents a world in which guilt and punishment are unlinked does not mean that he approves of such a world or is a moral nihilist. Kafka presents a modern existential condition; he does not validate it, and his fictions in fact leave much room for moral deliberation. Moreover, as concerns literary form, Anders’s reading seems simplistic: a detailed analysis of Kafka’s rhetoric and narrative strategies would reveal that he never really chooses sides, and thus he cannot
be accused of betraying his weaklings, servants, and Jews. He channels winners and losers, Jews and Christians, fathers and sons, often in close succession or even simultaneously. Kafka represents the world not simply from multiple perspectives, but from perspectives embedded within other perspectives; similarly, he never levels absolute judgment, be it pro or contra. It is senseless to argue that he writes from one position and against another, for Kafka’s work often evidences multiple shifts in perspective, reversals in voice, and acts of ventriloquism. This is true even within some of the short texts. Finally, the emotional charge of Anders’s commentary arouses suspicion: can someone so clearly driven by anger, resentment, and a sense of betrayal really be trusted to read Kafka fairly?

Anders seems eager – even fixated – to punish Kafka for having betrayed the principle belief at the heart of Anders’s own identification as a Jew, namely, the rejection of original sin. But why should Kafka have felt Jewish in precisely the same way as Anders? Indeed, Kafka surely could never have written an essay entitled “My Judaism” (or, for that matter, “My Jewishness”), given his ambivalence and exasperation over these issues. It is only because Anders identifies so closely with Kafka that he can feel so betrayed when it turns out that Kafka’s sense of Jewishness lies elsewhere than his own. Anders’s deeply personal and idiosyncratic vendetta against Kafka casts suspicion on his interpretive motives.

And yet there is also an important point that speaks for Anders’s critique: it posits a meaningful connection between Kafka and the Holocaust without subscribing to the “Kafka-as-oracle-of-doom position,” as the literary critic Paul Reitter has termed it. Rather than claim that suffering and loss in Kafka have pre-

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42 See, for example, Avital Ronell on the “corruption” of perspective in Kafka’s Brief an den Vater [Letter to the Father], in Avital Ronell, Loser Sons: Politics and Authority, University of Illinois Press, Urbana 2012, 118.

43 Ronell serves as a counter-model to Anders, for she discerns precisely the same problem in Kafka (a siding with authority, a delight in submission), yet her response is earnest and straightforward. Ronell cites the “noble and fruitful feeling” that accompanies Kafka’s sense of domination by the father and notes that she is uneasy about this “miniscule supplement of profit when accounting for the losses” (Ronell, Loser Sons, 127):

the way Kafka aligns disruptive allegations within the frame of description makes one slow down and crawl under newly oppressive spaces. I would not be forced to crouch and strain in this way if our letter writer had not included-excluded the parenthetical bit about the noble feeling and fruitfulness, perverting an otherwise perfectly tranquil-seeming semantic field, shaking it up so as to expose uneven valences and intrusive tropes of encounter.

(Ronnell, Loser Sons, 128)

Ronell registers with dismay and distaste the very thing that Anders registers with thinly concealed anger and resentment, namely the pleasure Kafka takes in being a “loser.”

44 Reitter, “Misreading Kafka.”
dictive value, which always implies, implausibly, that he had somehow divined future catastrophes and that the Holocaust could be predicted, Anders suggests that literary expression can have a psychological *use value* for Kafka’s postwar German readers. He does not analyze Kafka’s works in order to explain an event that Kafka could not have anticipated. This alone puts Anders a step ahead of most readings that suggest a link between Kafka and the Holocaust. Rather, he looks at a contemporary phenomenon – the resurgence of interest in Kafka in postwar Germany – and tries to explain it as a matter of reception. According to Anders, suffering and loss in Kafka do not enable us to see the future; instead, they help us understand how a later generation of readers might have reacted to the reality that their undeniable guilt had gone unpunished. Even if this is a misreading of Kafka for the reasons outlined above, it is nonetheless a productive and revealing one vis-à-vis the society that Anders is critiquing.

First, regardless of whether Kafka can actually perform this work of collective postwar German absolution, the diagnosis itself is important and largely accurate. Kafka may not provide the solution to the moral problems of German guilt, but Anders has correctly identified the issue. He warns against substituting aesthetics for ethics; such substitution is why he worries that Kafka, in upsetting the moral order according to which guilt and punishment exist in a predictable causal relationship, has opened the door for *Kunstbewunderung* to fill the void of ethics. Anders seems keenly aware of the ease with which postwar Germans could let ideals of culture, art, and education stand for (and in the way of) a sincere reckoning with their moral failings. Indeed, he suspects that this is precisely what has motivated their exaggerated interest in Kafka. Let us not be fooled by superficial or self-serving philo-semitism, he seems to say. Let us not believe that a widespread social pathology has been cured simply because postwar Germans have elevated a Jew to the status of a literary god – a Jew, by the way, who can be deified thusly only because he himself died before he could become a victim of the Nazis. Regardless of whether Anders is correct about why postwar Germans read Kafka (and assuming, contra Anders, that Kafka is indeed free of any culpability for this possible misappropriation), he is right to admonish them for any possible attempt to transfigure literary appreciation into moral defense.

Second, Anders perceptively draws attention to the problem of mass complicity under the Nazis, a topic which Hannah Arendt had already written about in 194545 and which would be a cornerstone of Anders’s only other work on Nazi crimes and the Holocaust. In the latter work – an open letter to the son of

Adolf Eichmann, entitled *Wir Eichmannsöhne: Offener Brief an Klaus Eichmann* [*We Sons of Eichmann: Open Letter to Klaus Eichmann*], from 196446 – Anders acknowledges the centrality of Arendt’s concept of organized guilt to his thinking about postwar Germany. Arendt had developed this concept as a means to describe a totalizing politics in which everyone is guilty but no one can be held accountable. However, whereas Arendt’s theory is descriptive, Anders’s is prescriptive: he believes in the possibility for personal moral behavior despite the assembly-line character of modern life, in which individuals perform localized tasks and shirk responsibility for the end results of the “totalizing machine” – results that include such catastrophes as the Holocaust and the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.47 The mental abdication of responsibility leads Anders to dub postwar Germany and Austria an “Eichmann world” (“Eichmannwelt”) inhabited by “Eichmann sons” (“Eichmannsöhne”).48 Understanding the central claims about responsibility and moral action that Anders advances in the open letter sheds light on his critique of Kafka from thirteen years earlier, even before that critique had been fully elaborated in the 1984 introduction to *Mensch ohne Welt*. Moreover, it helps show that Anders’s Kafka book had always – or at least since 195149 – been an attempt to expose and explain postwar German society’s failure to take responsibility for its Nazi past. It is a Holocaust book not because it accounts for the source of Nazi atrocities, but because it accounts for and reflects upon their disturbing afterlife. Anders’s Kafka, *Pro and Contra* is thus an important intervention in the debates about responsibility and culpability under the

48 Anders, *Wir Eichmannsöhne*, 58. See also Ann-Kathrin Pollmann, “Ein offener Brief an Eichmanns Söhne. Günther Anders schreibt Klaus Eichmann” (“An Open Letter to Eichmann’s Sons. Günther Anders Writes Klaus Eichmann”), in *Interessen um Eichmann: israelische Justiz, deutsche Strafverfolgung und alte Kameradschaften [Concerning Eichmann: Israeli Justice, German Law Enforcement and Old Comraderies]*, ed. Werner Renz. Campus Verlag, Frankfurt/M. 2012, 241–258. As Pollmann argues, for Anders postwar Germany is an “Eichmann world” (“Eichmannwelt”), a society thoroughly in the grips of the legacy of National Socialism. Anders addresses and takes up the fates of “significant individuals” – e.g., Eichmann’s son, or the pilot of the airplane from which the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima – who enable an articulation of broad complicity in mass annihilation. Anders does not simply condemn this “Eichmann world,” but seeks to show how the catastrophes of World War II created new kinds of guilt and demanded new measures for atonement.
49 It is possible that this dimension of the text also goes further back, but nothing definitive is known about the content of the 1934 lecture. Ann-Kathrin Pollmann has searched in vain for lecture notes or a transcript.
Nazis, especially as it presents an early diagnosis of widespread moral failing that survived the defeat of the Third Reich.

In a curious way, it is the Holocaust that saves Anders’s Kafka book. As suggested earlier, his readings, though astute and quite intelligent at times, are nonetheless psychologically unconvincing, morally simplistic, insufficiently attentive to literary form and rhetoric, and too laden with affect to be considered neutral or objective criticism. We should read Anders less for his literary insights than for his account of postwar Germany’s lingering Nazi problem; for him, the enthusiastic reception of Kafka is merely a symptom of this problem. Anders does not blame Kafka for the Nazi genocide against the Jews, nor does he praise Kafka for having some sort of prescient vision of this horror. Instead, he evaluates the guilt of a society of “Eichmen” (“Eichmänner”) and blames Kafka for unwittingly helping them to assuage this guilt.

By reading Anders’s Kafka study as a book on the afterlife of the Holocaust in postwar Germany one comes to understand why his critique of Kafka grows sharper, not milder, over time. From 1951 to 1984, Anders seems to have become angrier and more resentful toward Kafka and to have formulated the charge of betrayal in increasingly direct and harsh terms. This development makes sense only if his book is meant not simply as a reading of Kafka but as an explanation of a postwar German pathology that Kafka’s writing allegedly exacerbates. If the evasion of moral responsibility for Nazi crimes was acute in 1951, it was even worse in 1984. The longer Kafka enables this evasion, the more guilty he becomes of betraying his Jewishness. This is why Anders articulates the disturbing implications of his original assessment of Kafka so explicitly in the final publication of the essay. It is also why Anders cannot simply forgive Kafka. Time does not heal this wound. Indeed, the effects of Kafka’s ostensible treason – that he takes a Christian view on the world and that he tells the story of the loser from the perspective of the winner – become more pronounced and far-reaching over time. This also explains why Anders’s reading of Kafka remained essentially unchanged from 1934 to 1984, even as his sense of its power as a tool of societal diagnosis further solidified.

Even if Anders would agree that Kafka, sixty years after his death in 1924, cannot possibly be blamed for the misuse of his writings by morally compromised Nazi collaborators in the decades after World War II, he would probably be unwilling to pardon him for his supposed acts of betrayal on ethical grounds. Anders holds that people must be held responsible not only for their actions and words, but also for the consequences of these actions and words. This is the essence of the practical ethics he puts forth in We Sons of Eichmann and elsewhere. Moral behavior, in his view, involves projecting beyond one’s particular place in the world and addressing one’s role in the totalizing “world machine.” This requires
acts of imagination through which we will finally learn to assume responsibility for our behavior and choices.\textsuperscript{50} Thus, to excuse Kafka for inadvertently facilitating a process of facile self-absolution for guilty Germans would constitute an abdication of moral responsibility.

And yet it is not the case that Anders’s belief system affords no possibility for forgiveness. A central point of his letter to Klaus Eichmann – a letter which fell upon deaf ears – is that Anders is willing to forgive him for having consistently supported his father, but only on a double condition: Klaus Eichmann must publicly renounce this position now that his father has been condemned and hanged, and he must join the fight against nuclear proliferation. This is not Christian forgiveness; rather, it is a forgiveness that hangs together with Anders’s moral pragmatism: forgiving someone, since it involves sanctioning or at least overlooking immoral behavior, can be justified only when past wrongdoings can be redressed via future good deeds – a kind of practical, this-worldly repentance. It is only the living, one must assume, who can be forgiven, since they remain capable of reforming themselves for moral action and preventing future catastrophe. Klaus Eichmann did not accept Anders’s suggestion for repentance. Kafka, however, was never even offered the chance. He died before he could prove himself worthy of forgiveness for an offense for which only Anders thought to condemn him.

Ironically, Anders transforms Kafka from a prophet into an agent of historical delusion, from someone who sees into someone who prevents others from seeing. Nonetheless, in the process Kafka also shifts once again from the particular to the universal. His Jewishness is not merely of local interest, relevant only for Jews, but something that relates to a large segment of postwar German society. Anders is speaking from both sides of his mouth: he is deriding and dismissing literary study as a senseless luxury, yet is also explaining the extremely damaging effects of a certain phenomenon in literary reception. He wishes to expose Kafka’s supposed universalism as actually Christian and to reveal Kafka’s betrayal of his fellow Jews, and yet he makes a remarkably convincing case for using Kafka as a cipher by which to understand the general phenomenon of postwar German guilt, and maybe even the universal problem of literature and critique.

\textsuperscript{50} Anders, \textit{Wir Eichmannsöhne}, 34–35.
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