

INTRODUCTION

Albert Camus was one of the most important writers of the 20th century, whose work reflected the historical and political realities of the period between 1930 and 1960 and the problems that these created for human existence. He focused not only on the relationship between humans and Nature, but also on the philosophical questions of Man's relationship to God and Nature;¹ human happiness; the existential problem of freedom, human action, and individual responsibility; and the ethical consequences and limits of political ideologies. Against the background of Marxism, Fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism; the philosophical ideas of nihilism, the absurd, and existentialism; and the intellectual and social developments of modernism and post-modernism, Camus' work explored the tragic struggle between the individual's search for existential and moral values, and the dehumanizing forces of ideologies and intellectual abstractions that determined and limited Man's fate in the 20th century.

The very foundations of Camus' work are to be found in the literary and the philosophical, the humanism of the philosophers of the Enlightenment and their ideas of freedom, the materialism of the body, and the concrete realities of Man's existence in the world. While Camus may not have been a systematic philosopher in the same sense as Hegel or Sartre, his focus on the opposition between materialism and metaphysical truths belongs to a long philosophical tradition that spans the Greeks, and notably the Stoics, through the French *philosophes*, to the Russian and French existentialists of the 19th and 20th centuries.

In this thesis, I will seek to highlight the aspects of Camus' moral and political philosophy that have not yet been sufficiently emphasized in the literature. I will explore facets of Camus' theory of freedom as they relate to the changing relationship between Nature, Man,

¹ I have chosen to capitalize the word Man in the same way as God and Nature to indicate an equal importance or weight of all three of these common ideas. This word should be read as a collective noun in the same manner as Humans and where possible, I have used alternative words such as individuals or people.

and God when absolute truths in the form of Christian metaphysics and political ideologies no longer provided humans with secure moral and ethical structures and the consequences that this had for Camus' views on human happiness, freedom, and justice. In order to explore Camus theory of tragic freedom, I will proceed chronologically, because I believe that only by looking at the development of his ideas can we gain a realistic appreciation of the genealogy of the moral and political positions that form the main unifying thread running through his work.

Before focusing on the thematic threads in Camus' thinking, however, I will begin with an examination of Camus' relationship to literature and philosophy and the importance of the connection between these two. This is important because Camus' work consists of different literary forms whose contents reflect some of the major themes of religious, social, and political philosophy, and it is on this basis that his work needs to be viewed. Stephen E. Bronner in his book on Camus rejected "the often artificial divorce made by critics between the art and the politics of Camus."² It will also be my contention that in Camus' work, literature and philosophy equally cannot be separated.

This will be followed in Chapter One by an analysis of his dissertation on "Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism," and an examination of how his research into early Christian theology and Hellenistic philosophy provided important premises for his philosophy and literary work. I will then proceed in Chapters Two and Three to examine Camus' concept of human happiness and his "philosophy" of the Absurd as it is defined in terms of the tragic paradigm, where he redefined the relationship between Nature, God, and Man. These chapters focus on two literary texts: *A Happy Death*, his first unpublished novel, and his most famous play, *Caligula*. These texts illustrate perfectly Camus' methods of philosophical thought through literature, and as such, they crystallize essential features of Camus' moral philosophy and his tragic conception of freedom. In particular, they indicate

² Stephen E. Bronner, *Camus: Portrait of a Moralist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) xii.

his, as yet insufficiently acknowledged, engagement with materialist writers such as the Marquis de Sade and Ludwig Feuerbach, who opposed Christian metaphysics and waged frontal attacks against the concepts of God and Immortality. Their affinity with Camus' ideas has not been adequately addressed.

In the following chapters, I will examine the question of Camus' moral, ethical, and political values as they relate to the individual and social institutions; the crucial idea of nihilism, and the influence that socialism, existentialism, historicism, and natural law theory had on Camus' ideas in his essays in *Combat* and the philosophy of revolt in *The Rebel*.

CAMUS AS PHILOSOPHER

Camus wrote in a wide variety of literary forms that included the early lyrical essays, short stories, novels, plays, philosophical essays, newspaper editorials, and letters. All his life he also wrote down his thoughts in a series of notebooks. However, Camus' first writing was of a more classical, academic style in the dissertation that he wrote for the *Diplôme d'études supérieures* in Oran, Algeria in 1936.³ I will argue in Chapter One that this work is essential to understanding his work as a whole and his philosophical thought. As Stephen Bronner has noted "it is a difficult text and rarely analyzed, but *Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism* provides a deep insight into the hotly contested issue of Camus's relation to religions."⁴

While Camus' literary reputation resulted primarily from his novels *The Outsider*, *The Plague*, and *The Fall*, far less attention has been given to the philosophical works and the influences that philosophy had on the development of Camus' thought over his lifetime, not

³ For a discussion of Camus' thesis and critical remarks on the dissertation, see Olivier Todd's *Albert Camus: A Life* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2002) 43-45. Also see Herbert Lottman's *Albert Camus: A Biography* (London: Axis Publishing, 1997) 115-6.

⁴ Bronner 9.

to mention the works that have not been translated into English.⁵ As Joseph McBride wrote, “It is impossible, ... to avoid the conclusion that while much of Camus’ intellectual output is of a literary kind, a great deal of this literary work is unquestionably philosophical.”⁶

Camus was a life-long student of philosophy, as his notebooks indicate. As both of his biographers Olivier Todd and Herbert Lottman have also pointed out, he had originally planned to become a teacher of philosophy before he was disqualified because of tuberculosis that began at the age of seventeen.⁷ His early dissertation, which was required for a teaching position, was entitled *Métaphysique chrétienne et néoplatonisme* and primarily dealt with the philosophy of Plotinus, St. Augustine, and their relationship to Christianity.⁸ The second philosophical essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* focused on the Absurd, Man’s existential existence in a world without God, and the philosophical problem of suicide; while in the third essay *The Rebel*, Camus looked at the subjects of nihilism, revolt, the problems of human action, terrorism, responsibility, and justice.

The vast majority of scholarship on Camus, however, has primarily focused on the themes in Camus’ literary works; his relationship to existentialism and the Absurd; and his relationship or comparison to other writers, rather than analyzing the ideas contained in his more philosophical works. This bias is reflected in the titles of the critical works and the labels that have been placed on Camus by various scholars and writers.⁹

⁵ Of all the philosophers, Nietzsche probably had one of the greatest influences on Camus’ thought, as the thesis will seek to establish. As Philip Thody remarks in a note in *Albert Camus: Notebooks 1935-1951* (See May 1935-September 1937): “...the four qualities which the two thinkers have in common are an admiration for “heroic” periods like the Italian Renaissance; a hostility to the “life-denying” aspect of Christianity; a determination to face up to the tragic nature of existence and see in this awareness the source of man’s greatness; and, finally, an ambition to combine an attentive concern for the body with intellectual lucidity” 97.

⁶ Joseph McBride, *Albert Camus: Philosopher and Littérateur* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992) 177.

⁷ Lottman 116. Lottman says that “...we can say with certainty that Camus’ first symptoms of tuberculosis were discovered in December 1930 or in the first half of January 1931” 43. See Todd pages 17-19.

⁸ Chapter One will discuss Camus’ relationship to Plotinus and St. Augustine and the themes and philosophical ideas that are covered in his dissertation.

⁹ Joseph McBride comments that “The last few decades have seen the publication of a great deal of literature on Camus’ writing, the greater part of which has little philosophical content” 65. Many critical works mention Camus’ relationship to philosophy, but very few discuss it in detail and almost all of the early works make no

Critics such as Germaine Bree, Philip Thody, John Cruickshank, Adele King, Robert J. Champigny, Leo Pollman and Robert de Luppé primarily discuss the themes in his literary works, the literary genres, or his role as an artist, and all commentators attach certain labels to Camus that reflect their different critical perspectives.¹⁰ Stephen Eric Bronner calls Camus “the great *moraliste* of twentieth-century French letters.”¹¹ Harold Clurman called him “a moment in the conscience of mankind.”¹² Howard Mumma refers to him as “an existentialist....and an atheist.”¹³ James W. Woelfel speaks of his agnosticism and describes him as a “devout Mediterranean pagan.”¹⁴ Richard H. Akeroyd calls him a “prophet at the end of an era.”¹⁵ Justin O’Brien describes him as a “novelist-dramatist-philosopher,”¹⁶ and Thomas L. Hanna says he was “the most prophetic and lucid philosopher of our time.”¹⁷ The

mention of his dissertation. Richard H. Akeroyd in *The Spiritual Quest of Albert Camus* (Tuscaloosa: Portals, 1976) does not mention Camus’ dissertation on Christianity and Neoplatonism. Robert Chester Sutton III in his work *Human Existence and Theodicy: A Comparison of Jesus and Albert Camus* (1992) also does not mention or cite Camus’ dissertation. The exception is Stephen E. Bronner who does focus on the importance of the dissertation. Also see Ronald D. Srigley’s introduction in his *Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007). Only recently have philosophers begun to focus on Camus’ philosophic thought (See Note 17).

¹⁰ See Germain Bree, ed., *A Collection of Critical Essays* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1962); Philip Thody, *Albert Camus: A Study of His Work* (New York: Grove Press, 1957); John Cruickshank, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* (New York: Oxford UP, 1959); Adele King, *Camus* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1964); Robert J. Champigny, *A Pagan Hero* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1969); Leo Pollman, *Sartre & Camus: Literature of Existence* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1970); and Robert de Luppé, *Albert Camus* (U.S.: Minerva Press, 1966).

¹¹ Bronner ix.

¹² Quoted in Henry Popkin’s “Camus as Dramatist,” *Partisan Review* 26:3 (1959): 499-503.

¹³ Howard Mumma, *Albert Camus and the Minister* (Brewster: Paraclete Press, 2000) 7. Mumma calls him “one of the best known existentialist writers of the day, certainly he was an atheist” 7. He also makes the statement that Camus suffered a spiritual crisis at the end of his life and asked to be baptized, and that Camus’ death was “obviously a suicide” 98. The greatest weakness of the book, other than some of the questionable opinions or statements, is the lack of specific dates for the events he describes.

¹⁴ James W. Woelfel, *Camus: A Theological Perspective* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1975) 18.

¹⁵ Richard H. Akeroyd, *The Spiritual Quest of Albert Camus* (Tuscaloosa: Portals Press, 1976) 15.

¹⁶ Justine O’Brien, “Albert Camus and the Christian Faith,” *Camus: A Collection of Critical Articles*, ed. Germain Bree (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1962) 21.

¹⁷ Thomas L. Hanna, “Albert Camus: Militant,” *Camus: A Collection of Critical Articles*, ed. Germain Bree (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1962) 48.

problem, however, is that these labels don't explain in detail or depth why they are applicable.

Camus did refer to himself as a Pagan, but he also stated on several occasions that he was not an existentialist or an atheist, and while others have claimed that he was not a philosopher or have criticized his philosophical knowledge,¹⁸ the label of *moraliste* is the one most commonly applied to Camus. Again, however, the question remains: What was his moral philosophy based on and what form did it take? Even Sartre in his tribute at the time of Camus' death emphasized this when he wrote:

He was the current heir, in this century and at odds with History, to that long line of moralists whose works represent perhaps what is most original in French literature. His humanism, unyielding, narrow and pure, austere and sensual, engaged in a dubious struggle against the mighty and misshapen events of our time. But, conversely, through the stubbornness of his opposition, in the heart of our age, against the Machiavellians and the sacred cow of Realism, he asserted the existence of morality.¹⁹

Many of these labels reflect only certain aspects or parts of his work: They fail to see that the problems of moral standards and the difficulties of human action and choice lie at the heart of Camus' literary and philosophical writings. Like Nietzsche, Camus developed his own genealogy of morals. This is what must be understood in order to grasp the importance of his thinking and to get a sense of the full implications, but also the logical contradictions of his thought. As stated earlier, this can only be done by a chronological study of his work and the philosophical influences on that development.

¹⁸ See endnote 73. Sartre, Jeanson and Raymond Aron also criticized Camus' philosophical knowledge.

¹⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Modern Times: Selected Non-Fiction* (London: Penguin Books, 2000) 302.

As Roger Quillot remarks in *The Sea and Prisons*, “Until about 1954, ...no overall study of Camus had been published, if one excepts the limpid work of Robert de Luppé.” In Quillot’s opinion, this was primarily the result of “our ignorance of the most important events in his life and of the genesis of his work.”²⁰ Stephen E. Bronner believed that:

Few [writers] offer a balanced philosophical, artistic, and political treatment of his work. Even fewer combine an overview of the grand themes with more sophisticated internal and historical interpretations over which specialists can argue.²¹

Except for David E. Denton’s *The Philosophy of Albert Camus*, which was published in 1967 and consisted of only 65 pages, no book in English dealt specifically with Camus’ philosophy until the late 1980s and early 1990s, with the following titles: David Sprintzen’s *Camus, A Critical Examination* (1988); Joseph McBride’s *Albert Camus: Philosopher and Litterateur* (1992); Stephen E. Bronner’s *Camus: Portrait of a Moralist* (1999); Richard Kamber’s *On Camus* (2002); and Robert Trundle’s *Camus’ Answer: No to the Western Pharisees Who Impose Reason on Reality* (2002).

None of these, except Bronner’s work, focuses on the chronological development of Camus’ moral thought in his philosophical works; his opposition to Christian metaphysics; his relationship to the materialists; how he redefined the modern relationship between Nature, God, and Humans; his tragic philosophy of happiness and freedom; his socialist ideas; his relationship to historicism or natural law; or the ethical implications that his philosophy has for modern politics, philosophy, and human existence.²² In addition, with the publication in English of his early dissertation in 1992, along with the biographies by Herbert R. Lottman

²⁰ Roger Quillot, *The Sea and Prisons: A Commentary on the Life and Works of Albert Camus* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1970) 6.

²¹ Bronner xi.

²² A good example is David Sprintzen’s *Camus: A Critical Examination* (1988) a very detailed study of Camus’ work, but with only one reference to his dissertation and no mention of the tragic. Richard Kamber in *On Camus* (2002) devotes the second chapter (22 pages) out of five to the religious roots of Camus’ philosophical thought and discusses the influence of Pascal, Plotinus, the Gnostics, and Saint Augustine.

(1979) and Olivier Todd (1997); the publication of *Carnets III* in French in 1989; and *The First Man* in 1995, a better understanding of the facts of his life and the genesis of his work now exists, making an overall study of his philosophy possible and important for both literary and philosophical scholarship.²³

Camus, like so many other writers of the 20th century such as Conrad, Malraux, Orwell, Sartre, Koestler, Beckett, Murdoch, Rand, and Saul Bellow, to name just a few, used the novel to present and explore philosophical ideas. By creating a matrix of human existence in their particular epoch, where human nature, psychology, character, and action take place, they were able to bring to light Man's inherent limits, ambiguities, contradictions, ironies, and the consequences of political, social, and individual ideologies on the individual. When Kierkegaard wrote in *The Concept of Anxiety* that Time only becomes the past, present, and future when it is "spatialized" in the moment and allows Time to be represented and not thought, he is also describing what the drama and the novel do.²⁴

Artistic representation establishes boundaries and frames of perception that allow the reader to experience the multiplicity of character as it develops through action and choice. Art stops the randomness, the ambiguity, and the fluidity of life and grounds Being in Time and Space in frames of reference that can be studied and that communicate human emotions and complex ideas.²⁵ As Simone de Beauvoir wrote "The artist and the writer force themselves to surmount existence in another way. They attempt to realize it as an absolute...Time is stopped, clear forms and finished meanings rise up. In this return,

²³ Camus' daughter Catherine prepared both *Carnets III* and *Le Premier Homme* (*The First Man*) for publication in French in 1989 and 1994, respectively. Camus' *Carnets III* was translated into English by Ryan Bloom in 2008. See *Albert Camus, Notebooks 1951-1959* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2008). However, the translations of *Carnet III* in this thesis are my own and refer to the French edition.

²⁴ Howard V. Hong and Edna Hong, eds. *The Essential Kierkegaard* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980) 149-150.

²⁵ See J. L. Styan in *Drama, Stage and Audience* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975): "It is for the audience to take from the play the impressions and images from which to construct its concepts: by this act of apparent discernment it enjoys the excitement of apparent discovery" (31). This equally applies to the novel or a novel of ideas.

existence is confirmed and establishes its own justification.”²⁶ This framing of Time also allows for reflection on the part of the reader. Time and Reflection are all key themes in Camus’ work, especially in *A Happy Death*, *Caligula*, and *The Outsider*. As Bronner remarked “There is a reason he [Camus] so often employed the mirror as a symbol in his works. Camus wanted to make people face themselves.”²⁷

This link between literature and philosophy is an ancient one. Thinkers have utilized myth, parables, allegories, dialogues, aphorisms, poems, and the drama to ground abstract ideas and philosophical questions in the particular, through the use of linguistic forms that could easily be disseminated and understood by the general public, despite limited levels of education or under the constrictions of religious and political realities. In this way these works of literature also functioned to educate the reading public and raise the awareness of philosophical ideas, as well as create a history and a development of a philosophical discourse that connected academic philosophy and the society at large. Whether we call philosophers who use literary forms philosopher-novelists or novelist-philosophers, what matters is the close connection that exists between these two endeavors. Indeed, this link grew even closer in the 20th century.²⁸

Iris Murdoch, by contrast, one of the most famous writers who combined literature and philosophy, insisted on the differences between them. She is a useful reference to raise as a foil against which Camus’ combination of the literary and the philosophical appears more strikingly. Murdoch started from the simple but profound point that “Literature is read by

²⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: Citadel Press, 1948) 69. Camus writes in *Lyrical and Critical Essays* that “Artistic creation, instead of removing us from the drama of our time, is one of the means we are given of bringing it closer” 353.

²⁷ Bronner 152.

²⁸ In addition to these two categories to describe writers of literature and philosophy, a third category of artist-philosopher could be used to describe Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Camus. Camus in his dissertation already viewed Plotinus in this way, stating that “Plotinus’ philosophy is not merely a religious mode of thinking but an artist’s way of looking at things as well” 126. And later that “Plotinus reasons as an artist and feels as a philosopher” 136.

many and various people, philosophy by very few.”²⁹ She cites Plato, St. Augustine, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche as philosophers and literary artists; she even goes as far as saying that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche were great writers and thinkers, but not philosophers. This again only illustrates the problem of defining precisely the boundary between philosophy and literature.³⁰

Murdoch’s argument for the differences between philosophy and literature stems from her belief that philosophy only does one thing, whereas literature does many; philosophy requires the removal of the personal voice; it mainly deals with repetition as it endlessly struggles with a problem; it involves perceiving things in a new way and formulating questions; and it must leave no space in the text for readers to play in as literature does.³¹ Conversely, she sees the role of literature as entertaining; a mode of self-expression; as fiction with its “invention, masks, playing roles, pretending, imagining, story-telling,”³² and as a “disciplined technique for arousing certain emotions.”³³

Murdoch concedes that despite their differences, philosophy and literature are “both truth-seeking and truth revealing activities,”³⁴ but she then immediately contrasts Plato’s fear of the emotional power of art to lie or to subvert the truth and Schopenhauer’s opinion that art strips away the façade that humans construct in order to reveal the truth--an idea that Nietzsche famously repeats in *The Birth of Tragedy* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*. While Murdoch goes on to say that she finds no “general role’ of philosophy in literature and that

²⁹ Irish Murdoch, “Literature and Philosophy: A Conversation with Bryan Magee,” *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Peter Conradi (New York: Penguin, 1997) 4.

³⁰ Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics* 4.

³¹ Murdoch 4-7. Note this very interesting entry in Camus’ *Notebooks 1935-1951*: “First cycle. From my first books (*Noces*) to *La Corde* and *The Rebel*, my whole effort has been in reality to depersonalise myself (each time, in a different tone). Later on, I shall be able to speak in my own name” 210.

³² Murdoch 6.

³³ Murdoch 10.

³⁴ Murdoch 10-11.

the amount of philosophy that writers end up expressing in literature is small,³⁵ she may have missed the point that perhaps literature is the only way for the general public to absorb philosophical ideas. And although she states that the ideas in a “novel of ideas” could have been better expressed elsewhere, it nevertheless did not prevent her from writing several of these novels. Indeed, in 1945, when she first encountered existentialism, she wrote “what excites me more than the philosophy itself is the extraordinary bunch of good novelists it is inspiring.”³⁶

Referring to the novels of Rousseau and Voltaire, which were canonical examples of novels of ideas, Murdoch calls them dated. For her, they highlight one of the weaknesses of this particular literary form. But again, this depends largely on the language, symbols or images, and the philosophical ideas that a particular literary form contains. Certainly Camus’ *The Outsider*, *The Plague*, and *The Fall* have not become dated in the sense she refers to.

Camus, by contrast, never dissociated literary from philosophical writing. He stated, for instance, that “People can only think in images. If you want to be a philosopher, write novels.”³⁷ For him, the great-novelists (Balzac, Sade, Melville, Stendhal, Dostoevsky, Proust, Malraux, Kafka) were philosophical novelists as opposed to thesis-writers.³⁸ He added:

But in fact the preference they have shown for writing in images rather than in reasoned arguments is revelatory of a certain thought that is common to them all, convinced of the uselessness of any principle of

³⁵ Murdoch 19.

³⁶ Peter Conradi, *Irish Murdoch: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2001) 214.

³⁷ Albert Camus, *Notebooks 1935-1951*, trans. Philip Thody (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1998) 10. Thody notes that in Camus’ review of Jean-Paul Sartre’s *La Nausée* in *Alger-Républicain* on October 20, 1938, he wrote that “A novel is only philosophy put into images, and in a good novel, all the philosophy goes into the images” 10-11. Camus also wrote in the same notebooks (see *Carnets III*: April 1939-February, 1942) that “Feelings and images multiply a philosophy by ten” 210.

³⁸ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O’Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1955) 74-75.

explanation and sure of the educative message of perceptible appearance.³⁹

Camus believed that both the philosopher and the novelist are creators and that the elements of fiction that Murdoch attributes to literature are a “metaphysical honor in enduring the world’s absurdity.”⁴⁰ In his view the play-acting, masks, the multiple loves and revolt are ways for humans to face the philosophical exigencies of life. As he writes, “all existence for a man turned away from the eternal is but a vast mime under the mask of the absurd. Creation is the great mime.”⁴¹ For if indeed philosophy and literature are both “truth-seeking activities,” or forms of dialectic, they both ultimately consist in asking questions as to the meaning and value of Man’s place in Nature and the world, and the meaning of reason and faith in a world with or without God. As Camus said of Dostoevsky’s heroes, for him one of the models to emulate, they “all question themselves to the meaning of life.”⁴²

CAMUS AND SARTRE: TWO MODERN *PHILOSOPHES*

To introduce further the intimate unity Camus sees between literary and philosophical practice, it is worthwhile to dwell briefly on the similarities with his famous contemporary and friend, Jean-Paul Sartre. The two friends, whose break-up would be so widely publicized and commented upon, are two eminent representatives of that very French tradition of the *philosophes*, writers-philosophers.

Philosophers such as Plato, Hume, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Santayana, and Sartre made use of creative literary forms to express their ideas, and this connection between philosophy and literature has probably never been as close in France as it was in the *philosophes* of the

³⁹ Camus 75. (One should also point out the use of images in the works of such philosophers as Plato and Plotinus.) I would have to argue here that several of these philosophical novelists, as Camus calls them, did indeed use reasoned arguments, and Sade is the perfect example.

⁴⁰ Camus 69.

⁴¹ Camus 70.

⁴² Camus 77.

Enlightenment. This was especially true in the writings of Rousseau, Montesquieu, Diderot, Voltaire, and later the Marquis de Sade in their fight against the authority and despotism of both church and state and their emphasis on human freedom, equality, progress, and reason.

Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre followed in that French tradition. They were confronted with political and social upheavals that were comparable to those experienced by the 18th century philosophers, and in a similar manner they both chose to use literature to express their philosophical ideas.⁴³ Through their early writings Camus and Sartre played a major role in the popularity of existentialism. As a result, for a whole generation during and following the War, the combination of literature, philosophy, and political action became the avenue of choice to raise pressing philosophical questions about fundamental aspects of human existence, moral values, and the essence of human thought and action.⁴⁴

Germaine Bree wrote that a book about Camus ends up being a book about Sartre, a remark that reflects the close connection that existed between these two writers.⁴⁵ It also certainly reflects the number of books devoted to them. Not only were there certain biographical similarities in their study of philosophy; their early interest in Marxism and Communism; their resistance activities during the war, and the social life they were a part of in Paris, but in the beginning, and most importantly, they also shared close literary and philosophical concerns.⁴⁶ Ronald Aronson remarks in his important *Sartre & Camus*,

⁴³ Writing about ideologies and 20th century novelists, Irving Howe makes the statement that “A novelist turning to political life in the twentieth century cannot help being attracted by the modes and devices of journalism, for they promise him the power of immediacy” 207. This applies perfectly to both Camus and Sartre.

⁴⁴ Malcolm Bradbury and John Fletcher in their essay “The Introverted Novel” *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930* (London: Penguin, 1976) argue that the novels of the period including Camus’ *L’Étranger* and Sartre’s *La Nausée* used prose “as a medium of communication, of action, of history” 413. For examples of Camus’ political writings and his comments on the role of the journalist, see *Albert Camus Between Hell and Reason: Essays from the Resistance Newspaper Combat, 1944-1947*. For Camus’ relationship to *Combat*, see chapter 23 in Herbert L. Lottman’s *Albert Camus: A Biography* (316-329).

⁴⁵ Bree 2.

⁴⁶ Irish Murdoch, “Literature and Philosophy: A Conversation with Bryan Magee,” in *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Peter Conradi (New York: Penguin, 1997) 9. Herbert Lottman quotes Camus as saying, “Sartre and I are always astonished to see our names associated. We are even thinking of publishing a little advertisement in which the undersigned affirm they have nothing in common and refuse to answer for the debts of the other.” Lottman then writes that Camus and Sartre “had published ‘all’

published in 2004, that they admired each other because of the “closeness of their starting points” and that they both recognized that “the other was writing both philosophy and literature.”⁴⁷ Leo Pollman calls both of them writers and philosophers and says that what links them was “a certain radical sense of what existence is for twentieth-century man, an endeavor not to dwell on fractional aspects...but to go after the essence of existence itself and seek a fundamental solution for the problem it poses.”⁴⁸ What both writers shared was a desperate interest in the problem of existence and the desire to understand the meaning of unity and of the totality of Being at their particular point in philosophical history and in history itself.

However, the differences between the two “*philosophes*” are also illuminating. It is clear that of the two, Sartre wrote more systematic philosophy, notably his *Being and Nothingness*, which followed in the tradition and used the language of Hegel and Heidegger. However, Camus’ philosophical essays are equally important when understood in the genealogy of his work and philosophical thought. Rather than focusing on the similarities or the differences between these two writers, as so many have done, or claiming that Sartre was a philosopher and that Camus an essayist, it is more fruitful to consider Camus’ kind of philosophy as deriving from a different tradition and different sources. I will focus on these different traditions and sources in the chapters that follow. Also it is particularly important to remember that it was primarily ethical differences, or more specifically differences in

their books before they met, and when they did meet it was to take note of their differences. Sartre was an existentialist, he [Camus] explained, while the only book of ideas he himself had published, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, was directed against so-called existentialist philosophers” 392. For a discussion of the educational and social differences between Camus and Sartre, see Tony Judt’s *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) 98-100.

⁴⁷ See Leo Pollman’s comment in *Sartre & Camus: Literature of Existence* that “...despite all their differences Sartre and Camus have much in common. They are children of the same century...They lived for many years in the same city, Paris. They were both close to the Communist Party...They were both writers and philosophers. Pollman adds that “they both believed that literature has a social function...” 206.

⁴⁸ Pollman 111-112.

political philosophy, that led to Camus' break with both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty.⁴⁹ The question is not whether Camus was a philosopher, but rather what the main philosophical issues or problems were that Camus struggled with, the tradition of thought that these belong to, and where this search for answers led him as a writer.

Camus wrote that he was not a philosopher because he thought in words and not ideas.⁵⁰ He considered himself first and foremost a writer.⁵¹ From his early journalism to the lyrical essays, the plays, the novels, and the philosophical essays, Camus used writing not merely to reflect or describe Nature or Man's role in it, but to question human values and morality and to search for a meaning to the problems of existence and human action.

Murdoch's earlier statement that philosophy "deals with repetition as it endlessly struggles with a problem" and that it "involves perceiving things in a new way and formulating questions,"⁵² can certainly apply to the works of Albert Camus. He chose to use literature and its different forms to ask questions and to pose problems, and by doing so he grounded philosophy in the realm of human existence rather than abstract thought in his quest for meaning and a sense of human authenticity situated in the body.

BETWEEN MATERIALISM AND CHRISTIAN METAPHYSICS

Before we begin the study of some of the main elements of Camus' moral philosophy and his conception of tragic freedom, one particular strand is worth noting as it runs through

⁴⁹ Camus' final break with Merleau-Ponty came after Merleau-Ponty published *Humanism and Terror* in 1947. Camus' final break with Sartre came after the publication of *L'Homme révolté* (*The Rebel*) in 1951, and a review by Francis Jeanson in Sartre's journal *Les Temps Modernes*. The philosophical differences that Camus had with both men, however, began much earlier, but the final break came after the series of letters exchanged between Sartre and Camus over *The Rebel*.

⁵⁰ Camus, *Notebooks 1935-1951*: 113.

⁵¹ Olivier Todd claims that Camus told a friend in 1933 that he was "thinking about journalism as a way to continue my studies" (25), and that he began by writing for the newspaper *Oran Matin* (26).

⁵² Irish Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics* 4-7.

his work and will therefore also continue throughout this thesis. It is Camus' very specific materialism, rooted in a radical kind of sensualism, but also paradoxically attracted to the metaphysical speculations of the early theologians and late Greek philosophers. Camus' "Mediterranean" beginnings and his avowed paganism placed the body at the center of his philosophy and Man's existence. This was one of the most important factors behind his attraction to Greece and Hellenism; it influenced the values defended in his work, as well as his sense of aesthetics. It explains his interest in the philosophy of the Marquis de Sade as a negative model for Camus' moral philosophy, and his connection to materialist thought and the ideas of Feuerbach. Furthermore, it also lies at the source of Camus' opposition to the philosophy of Hegel and his dislike of systems and abstractions.

Most importantly, this focus on the body also put Camus in conflict with Christianity and its tenets, as, for example, when he makes the statement:

After two thousand years of Christianity, the body's revolt. Two thousand years before we could again exhibit it naked on beaches. Whence excess. And the body found its place in usage. It remains to give it that place again in philosophy and metaphysics. This is one of the meanings of the modern convulsion.⁵³

Paradoxically, it is the very primacy of the body that attracted him to Plotinus and his third hypostases of the soul and matter. This focus on the body also found powerful echoes in, and helps explain, his early affinity with existentialists such as Merleau-Ponty and Simone de Beauvoir. John Macquarie wrote that existentialism begins with the human "as an existent rather than a thinking subject" and that it deals with such themes as freedom, decisions, and responsibility, which "constitute the core of personal being."⁵⁴ The additional themes that he

⁵³ Camus 128.

⁵⁴ John Macquarie, *Existentialism* (New York: Penguin Books, 1972) 15-16.

mentions of “finitude, guilt, alienation, despair, death...[and]...the emotional life of man,”⁵⁵ all derive from the reality of the body’s existence or of Man at the center. These are all core themes in Camus’ literary and philosophical writing.

Miguel de Unamuno once commented in the *Tragic Sense of Life* that “Man is said to be a reasoning animal. I do not know why he has not been defined as an affective or feeling animal. Perhaps that which differentiates him from other animals is feeling rather than reason...”⁵⁶ This aptly captures Camus’ “Mediterranean” view of the importance of the body and the senses, and the role that they must play in human existence, as in philosophy, in contrast to the emphasis on reason and abstract thought.

Camus follows in that tradition of the materialists by making the body, and the human individual as sentient being, the focal point of his moral, political, and aesthetic thinking and writing. It is from this premise that he raises the following philosophical problems: 1) Man’s relationship to Nature; 2) his desire for happiness in this life; 3) the problems of freedom, human choice, and action; 4) the moral dilemmas that confront the individual as he tries to create values and meaning for his existence; 5) divine versus human justice; 6) the realities of the human condition in the clash between the individual and the state, with its ideologies, and 7) the struggles arising from the tragic gap between Man and the world.

In his notebooks, Camus outlines four cycles he planned to complete: The Absurd, Revolt, Nemesis or Limits, and Love.⁵⁷ He completed the first two cycles on the Absurd and

⁵⁵ Macquarie 17.

⁵⁶ Miguel de Unamuno, *Tragic Sense of Life*, trans. J.E. Crawford Flitch (New York: Dover Publications, 1954) 3. This quote comes from his second chapter entitled “*The Man of Flesh and Bone*” where he also writes: “The man of flesh and bone; the man who is born, suffers, and dies—above all, who dies; the man who eats and drinks and plays and sleeps and thinks and wills; the man who is seen and heard; the brother, the real brother...The man we have to do with is the man of flesh and bone—I, you, reader of mine, the other man yonder, all of us who walk solidly on the earth” 1.

⁵⁷ In *Notebooks 1935-1951*, Camus lists five series of works: 1) The Absurd 2) Revolt 3) Judgment 4) Love and 5) Creation Corrected or The System (158). In the same notebooks dated March 7, 1951 he comments: “Finished the first writing of *The Rebel*. With this book the first two cycles come to an end. Thirty-seven years old. And now, can creation be free?” 270. In *Carnets III* he combines Love and Nemesis (187), and while he does make a few references to the fifth series of creation or the system in his notebooks, it is not clear from the entries what this might have entailed.

Revolt, but his death in a car crash in 1960 at the age of forty-six prevented him from completing the last two cycles on Nemesis and Love, although his last notebooks provide clues as to what those might have contained.⁵⁸

Camus' materialist approach to the morality and the tragic freedom of modern Man also developed against the background of the void left by the demise of religion, specifically Christianity. This gaping hole in the metaphysical systems that had so far protected humanity from its demons provided Camus with many of the themes that he would explore in his search for values and meaning.⁵⁹

Beginning with his dissertation on *Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism* and throughout his work, Camus continued to use literature as a form of philosophical dialectic to question the main themes and ideas in Christianity and its metaphysics, including ideas of natural law; to test the boundaries of Man's relation to its dogmatic system of thought; and to analyze the influence that it has had on Western civilization and its morality and ethics. Camus saw a profound poetic and philosophical significance in his double background and his identify as both a North African and a French national. For him, this reflected the great opposition between Pagan and European-Christian worldviews, and this is what he found powerfully articulated in the poetic-mystical systems of Plotinus, Saint Augustine, and the Gnostics. This duality between Greek and Christian philosophy formed the basis of his subsequent approach to metaphysics and the spiritual and the foundation for his religious, political, and moral positions. It is in his early dissertation and his dealings with Christian theology and late Hellenistic philosophy that we find the first premises of Camus' moral

⁵⁸ Love is one of the most common subjects in all of the notebooks and in many of his literary works, the theme of *Horos*, Limits, and Nemesis are discussed in his dissertation (118), and love is a core theme in *The Fall*. The idea of limits and Nemesis also constantly recur in his late notebooks.

⁵⁹ See James W. Woelfel's book *Camus: A Theological Perspective* (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1975) where he states that although Camus was a "lifelong pagan," he carried on a "serious lifelong dialogue with Christianity" 25.

philosophy, as well as the source of many of the main themes, and indeed the titles of much of his work.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Right through to this last work, *The Fall*. See Todd: “In mid-March 1956, Camus sent a typed manuscript of what would be called “La Chute” to Vivienne Perret....”No title so far, except for *A Hero of Our Time*, which has already been used or “The Last Judgment” or maybe “The Good Apostle” 341.

CHAPTER ONE: CAMUS AND CHRISTIANITY

CHRISTIAN METAPHYSICS AND NEOPLATONISM

(*Métaphysique Chrétienne et Néoplatonisme*) 1936.¹

Camus began work on his dissertation at the University of Algiers in 1935, and submitted it on May 8, 1936, as a requirement for the *Diplôme d'études supérieures*.² His main supervisor was René Poirier, the chairman of the philosophy department, who served on the jury along with Dean Louis Gernet, a historian of Greek law, and Camus' life-long mentor Jean Grenier.³ The primary aim of the dissertation was to distinguish the two basic lines of thought of early Christianity and later Greek philosophy (mainly Neoplatonism), as two paradigmatic and deeply influential modes in which human beings deal with their finitude, their embeddedness in nature, and their ideas about their relationship with God. Camus also sought to show how these two powerful onto-theological traditions came together through Gnosticism and Neoplatonism to form the theological and philosophical ideas, as well as the problems, that Christianity would create for Western civilization.

It is worthwhile to briefly survey the basic outline of the dissertation, as it gives a good idea of the rich content that Camus explored in the work itself. The complete dissertation is divided into an Introduction and four chapters: Chapter One entitled "Evangelical Christianity," deals with the early Christian themes, saints, and writers; Chapter Two entitled "Gnosis," looks at the philosophy of the Gnostic writers Basilides, Marcion, and Valentinus and their influence on the evolution of early Christianity; Chapter Three entitled "Mystical

¹ All quotations and references are taken from Joseph MacBride's *Albert Camus: Philosopher and Littérateur* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), which contains a complete translation of Camus' dissertation. For a second viewpoint, see Ronald D. Srigley's more recent *Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007). Srigley discusses the importance of Camus' early work and says that it was "essential to his own philosophical project and his critique of modernity" 8.

² MacBride 78.

³ See Lottman 116, and Todd 43-45. Todd refers to the dissertation as a "stodgy well-constructed essay" 43. I will try to show that this is in fact an essential document.

Reason,” divided into two parts, focuses on the teachings of Plotinus and Neoplatonism; Chapter Four, deals primarily with St. Augustine and is divided into two sections: I. “The Second Revelation,” and II. “Christian Thought at the Dawn of the Middle Ages.” This is then followed by a short Conclusion, thirteen pages of Notes, and a five-page Bibliography.⁴

By tracing the development of philosophical and religious thought during the period when Christianity and the Greek world first came into contact, Camus examines the differences in worldviews between two deeply influential intellectual currents and the values inherent in both of them. And throughout his life he would continue to compare and contrast Mediterranean and European values and their different philosophical perspectives.

As we will see again in later chapters, the Mediterranean origins of all the key philosophers, especially in the case of Augustine from Camus’ own motherland, was extremely significant for him. Camus clearly identified the power of these metaphysical systems with the power and grandeur of the Mediterranean landscapes and the brutal and sensual ways of its people. We might say that the tragic and speculative modes in which the Christian and Neoplatonic philosophers attempted to think about the relationships between God, Nature, and Man could also be found in what, for Camus, was a typically Mediterranean, and more precisely, Algerian way of feeling, being, and thinking.

In Augustine and his masterful synthesis of Greek and Christian speculative thought, Camus attempted to show a unification of theology and philosophy, which created the historical and philosophical conditions upon which Western civilization would be built, and which would come into crisis in the modern age, particularly in the horrors of the 20th century.

⁴ In his dissertation, Camus primarily used secondary sources rather than primary texts as the following six divisions of his Bibliography indicate: **The Supporters of Christianity** (6 sources); **Alexandrian Metaphysics**: Texts (4 sources), Studies (20 sources); **Gnosticism**: Texts (3 sources); Studies (8 sources), **Evolution of Christianity**: General Works (5 sources); **Hellenism and Christianity**: Studies (9 sources), Polemics (5 sources), On Saint Augustine: Works (1 source), General Studies (9 sources); and **Notion of Christian Philosophy** (4 sources) (167-171). The over-reliance on commentaries might also explain the criticism of his research by some scholars.

This chapter will consider the main themes Camus focused on in his historical study of early Christian metaphysics as it encountered the Neoplatonic heritage. The aim of this reading of Camus' dissertation is to show how crucial it was in determining the most important themes that he would deal with in his later works. In a sense, it can be argued that Camus' thinking and writing can to a large extent be traced back to this dissertation, despite its academic nature. As we shall see, Christianity for Camus was not only important for the void it left in humanity's moral thinking once it had lost its relevance. It can also be argued that early Christian metaphysics and late Hellenistic philosophy left a positive trace in Camus' thinking and writing, if only because of the grand visions and poetic force of these writings.

Before we focus more specifically on the sections in this work, it is worthwhile outlining the different themes that Camus focused on: 1) the problem of Unity and the idea of matter;⁵ 2) the concept of the Soul and Immortality;⁶ 3) the contrast between Greek and early Christian thought and the problem of Time; 4) the subject of Nature and Evil; 5) death, the Incarnation (Christ), and their implications for knowledge and truth, reason and faith, and virtue and salvation; 6) Neoplatonism and, in particular, the role of Plotinus, Augustine, and Pelagius; 7)) the place of Man between Nature and God;⁷ and finally and most importantly, 8) the problems of human happiness, freedom, and free will.

For anyone familiar with Camus' more famous writings, this list alone shows the significance of his early academic work as it already contains most of the themes that he would pursue throughout his literary canon.

⁵ The notion of matter is obviously one of the major differences between Christian thought and the materialists, as well as focusing human existence in the body and the physical world. As we will emphasize, this is a key aspect of Camus' work.

⁶ As Chapter Three will point out, Camus' specific brand of materialism was to some extent a response to the dogma of the immortality of the soul.

⁷ As shown in the Introduction, these three categories are the main ones that organize Camus' philosophical thought. They have also defined the philosophical concept of the tragic since early Greek Tragedy.

EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND THE GREEKS

According to the young apprentice philosopher, in its early stages Christianity was not a philosophy but a faith or “a gamut of inspirations” that operated on a very different plane than that of the Greek world.⁸ In Hellenism, by contrast, Man had the primary responsibility for determining his destiny and explaining the universe and his relationship with the Gods and Nature.⁹ In this world knowledge was the highest good and its attainment made the wise Man an equal of God. The Good was simply defined in terms of knowledge and viewed as a superior form of it.¹⁰

In turn, all human finitude was interpreted as a lack of knowledge, and ignorance and incomplete knowledge was seen as the real reason for human limitations and what caused them to err. It was those limits that defined the human condition and Man’s tragic fate.¹¹ Most significantly, Camus highlights the fact that Nature was the background that defined the way that the Greeks viewed the world. It was a cyclical world; a world that operated on an aesthetic plane where the concept of beauty, structure, and order were held in the highest

⁸ MacBride 93.

⁹ MacBride 94. In his *Notebooks 1942-1951*, Camus describes the Hellenes as “Daring of noble races, mad, absurd, spontaneous daring...their indifference and their scorn for every security of the body, for life and comfort” 260. For his thoughts on Greece during his two trips in August, 1955 and June, 1958, see *Notebooks III* pages 156-160, 162-173, and pages 224-233.

¹⁰ MacBride 94. Another source which might also have played a significant role for Camus were the Pre-Socratics. For them, as is well known and as Socrates and Plato will repeat after them, virtue is grounded in knowledge. However, this grounding of virtue in knowledge will be countered by the Christian view that faith is more important and that it completes reason. These are central concerns for Camus in his works although his ambiguous attitude towards rationalism also shows that his Greek affinities were always counterbalanced by the influence of Christian metaphysics.

¹¹ As Camus explains in the essay “Helen’s Exile”: “Greek thought was always based on the idea of limits. Nothing was carried to extremes, neither religion nor reason, because Greek thought denied nothing, neither reason nor religion” *Lyrical and Critical Essays* (New York: Knopf, 1968) 148. The idea of overstepping boundaries is a fundamental theme in the Greek Tragedies, especially in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* and Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*. Camus always remembered this. He noted for instance in *Notebooks 1935-1951*: “The body, a true path to culture, teaches us where our limits lie” 71.

esteem (as were virtues); where the body was closely connected to Nature; and Man's purpose was to accept and celebrate this connection.¹²

All these dimensions are represented in Camus' writing, notably in his early prose. We might say that they constitute a powerful "Greek" influence in Camus' sensibility, thinking, and writing. He will always judge the madness and the ugliness of the 20th century against the serene backdrop of a Greek view of the cosmos as ordered and knowable, where Gods, Nature, and Humans can communicate on a level plane. Camus' short essay "Helen's Exile" is the clearest expression of this idea along with other essays in *Noces* and *L'Été*.

NATURE AND EVIL

Christianity, on the other hand, saw Nature not as something that humans must find a place in and learn to perfect in themselves, but as something that they must escape from. From the Christian belief that Nature is matter and that matter is evil, the logical conclusion is drawn, as Camus shows, that this world is clothed in a darkness of sin and suffering.¹³ Christians saw it as a world of punishment and wretchedness where humans seek some form of salvation to release them from the bondage of misery and woe. In this view, the function

¹² MacBride 94-95. In Camus' opinion: "In the realm of nature, moreover, the Greeks also believed in a cyclical world, eternal and necessary, which could not be reconciled with creation *ex nihilo* and therefore with an end of the world" MacBride 94. Furthermore, "For a Christian who separates Reason from Beauty, the True from the Beautiful, Reason becomes merely the arbiter in questions of logic. And there can be conflicts between Faith and Reason. A Greek finds these encounters less acute, for Beauty, which is, at the same time, order and sensibility, harmonious arrangement and object of desire, remains an intelligible landscape:..." 126. In *Notebooks 1942-1951*: "Historicity leaves unexplained the phenomenon of beauty; in other words, relations with the world (sentiment of nature) and with persons as individuals (love)" (136), and "Greece introduced the notion of order and harmony into morals, as she did into aesthetics" 122.

¹³ MacBride 96. Camus discusses Marcion's Gnostic view that there are two divinities: "one, the superior divinity, is lord of the invisible world. The other, his subaltern, is the God of this world" 115. Christ, as Camus reconstructs the Gnostic view, "is nothing less than the envoy sent by the Supreme God to do battle with the wicked God, the creator of the world, and to free man from his domination. Jesus accomplishes a revolutionary mission here below. If he redeems our sins it is because he combats, in them, the work of the cruel God. Emancipator and Redeemer, he is the author of a sort of metaphysical coup d'état" 115. Camus says that as a result, Marcion proposes a morality based on an ascetic life and sexual abstinence to combat this material world and that "The goods of this world should be scorned out of hatred of the Creator: Marcion's ideal is to allow him least scope for his power" 116. The subject of matter, evil, and the corporeal body can be seen in the Orphic belief that "the body is the tomb of the soul." And Paul would later write in Romans 8:8: "those who are in the Flesh cannot please God."

of sin is to make humans conscious of their pride, wretchedness, and imperfection.¹⁴ In short, Nature and the world is a lightless morass of evil that humans are thrown into and where, more specifically, the flesh of the body is a symbol of death and evil.

Camus devotes a large section of his dissertation to the beliefs and teachings of some of the Gnostics, where he shows that they all shared an obsession with the problem of evil. He writes that “The importance of evil can be gleaned from the writings of even the least known Gnostic. The same is true of all Gnostic sects.”¹⁵ This Manichean dichotomy of Good and Evil in the world created a structure of thought and division into absolutes that separated God and humans and made their unity an impossible task. It also placed a hierarchical value in the relationship of God, Humans, and Nature. Finally, it directed human perceptions toward the abstract and toward an object that would do more than anything else to give meaning or identity to human existence through an idea of Absolute Unity.¹⁶

The crucial moment came when the Greek mode of thinking, i.e., the relationship between the realm of God and the human realm, based on a cyclical and ordered view of Nature and a faith in the power of reason, became more specific as it came into contact with a Judeo-Christian world that was based on the concept of a transcendent and all-powerful God, and the attendant concepts of faith, revelation, and teleology. This union was later shaped and influenced by the Gnostics and Neoplatonism, and Camus delineates four stages in this

¹⁴ As Camus writes: “In sin man become conscious of his wretchedness and pride.” He quotes from Paul’s *Epistle to the Romans*: “I do not understand my own actions: for I do not the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but the sin which dwells within me” 100.

¹⁵ MacBride 114. While most definitions of Gnosticism place it in the historical periods of pre-Christianity and the early Christian era, scholars disagree as to its origins and even the term itself. For a good discussion of Gnosticism, see Karen L. King’s *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). See pages 111-124 of Camus’ dissertation for his discussion of Gnosticism.

¹⁶ A brief historical reminder might be useful here. Manichaeism was founded by the Persian Mani (216-c. 275 A.D.) and like Zoroastrianism, it held as its central belief a metaphysical dualism according to which the world consists of a battle between good and evil or light and darkness. The division of the world or universe into this dialectical contrast of Good and Evil influenced many religious and philosophical schools, especially the Pythagoreans and the early Christians. In this worldview, the subject/object relationship between humans and God also helps to define human nature and the human condition. God becomes the mirror of human actions leading to the idea that God sees all.

evolution: the Gospel, Gnosis, Neoplatonism, and Augustinian thought. The first major theme around which this synthesis of Greek and Judeo-Christian speculation revolved is the problem of death.¹⁷

DEATH AND THE INCARNATION

While the Gnostics may have been obsessed with evil, Camus writes that early Christians were obsessed with the idea of imminent death. This was connected with the second coming (or parousia) of Christ, as well as the belief in the end of the world.¹⁸ Two essential states of mind emerged from this: pessimism and hope, the first referring to the tragic plane of death attached to this world and the second referring to the hope and faith in God and the desire to be transported beyond this world and beyond the realm of Nature. One had to choose between this world and God, from the sensible world to that of an intangible world not marked or bounded by perceptible limits, but an infinite expanse made even more distant by the apparent gap between this world and the other.¹⁹ This distance was so vast that no one could hope to bridge it, and since man was unable to reach God, only despair was open to him. Despite Man's wretchedness and his pleas for salvation, the immeasurable distance remained filled with an unresponsive silence.²⁰

¹⁷ Camus writes: "...the Gospel, Gnosis, Neoplatonism, Augustinian thought. We shall study these four stages of an evolution that is common to Greece and Rome, in their historical order and in the relationship that they maintain with the movement of thought in which they are inscribed" 97. All these stages will also become powerful themes in Camus' work.

¹⁸ MacBride 99. Camus relates that at the end of the fourth century, the proconsular bishop of Africa, Julius Quintus Hilarianus, wrote that the world would end in 101 years (99). The idea of the parousia or the Second Coming of Christ in early Christianity and the teachings of Paul emphasized the apocalyptic vision or belief that "time was short"; that the end of the world was imminent; and only those who had faith in Christ would be saved.

¹⁹ MacBride 98.

²⁰ Camus remarks that "The distance between man and God is so great that no one can hope to bridge it" 102. This gap between God and humans and the despair that results from the silence that arises between them is a theme shared by many poets and writers at the time of Camus, most famously represented, for instance, in Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*.

There is no need to insist on the great significance of this kind of analysis in view of Camus' later writing, both philosophical and literary. It is clear that in the early Christian writers Camus found a duality of pessimism and hope, a dialectic of necessary despair and illusory hope counterbalanced by the opposite dialectic of necessary hope and fruitless despair. Articulated in highly speculative, theological and philosophical arguments, this dialectic provided a fundamental mode of approaching the world that would be the hallmark of his later philosophy of the Absurd and his very specific brand of "existentialism."

With the Incarnation, which Camus calls the "privileged theme" and the center of Christian thought, the gap was bridged and the two realms were finally connected.²¹ In Camus' words: "Man being unable to rejoin God, God comes down to man,"²² which is a reverse of the process of Plotinus' Soul's ascent up the ladder to The One. In the figure of Christ, God's will is seen operating, and Camus cites Paul's comment that the sole purpose of this will was to save mankind. This act of will is seen as God's second revelation. After the first revelation in the Creation, the second revelation is Redemption.

By doing so, however, God comes into the material world through the Word made Flesh. Here Judeo-Christian thought provides its own solution to the mystery of the link between God, Nature, and Man. Through the Incarnation, God is no longer an abstraction or numenon: He becomes in a sense finite. By taking on flesh through Christ, God becomes earthly reality, forever uniting Himself with human thought, whilst at the same time, making this relationship more problematic. For in connecting human thought with a more finite and personified God through the body of Christ, the seeds of the "death of God" are already

²¹ MacBride 98. Camus calls the Incarnation "...the point where the divine and the flesh meet in the person of Jesus Christ: the extraordinary adventure of a god taking upon himself man's sin and misery, humility and humiliations being presented as so many symbols of Redemption."

²² MacBride 102.

sown, which under Nietzsche and other existential thinkers would explicitly develop many centuries later.²³

The Word became Flesh; God became Man; and Christ's purpose was to take on the burden of our sins. As such, the person of Christ functioned in the same way as the ancient Greek scapegoat which purified the people and the city from its evils and then was driven out and killed in the form of a blood sacrifice.²⁴ In Camus' words:

The only way to save us was to come to us, to take our sins from us by a miracle of grace, namely Jesus, of our race, of our blood, who acts on our behalf and has taken our place. Dying with Him and in Him, man has paid for his sins, and the Incarnation is at the same time the Redemption.²⁵

Nothing, Camus writes, is as specifically Christian as this idea of the Incarnation in the person of Jesus Christ in determining and developing the thinking and the ideas that will come to be known as Christianity. From this one central tenet the evolution of its theology and philosophy develops through the dialectic that it will create through years of opposing thoughts and heresies and the works of the apologists, eventually pushing it toward the structure of orthodoxy or dogma that will result in the construction of an institution of power and influence.²⁶

²³ MacBride 102. Unlike the idea of an abstract force like daimon, kami, orenda, or spirit that exists as a field of power rather than a personified figure, the Christian God became finite and took on human form through Christ, and therefore become non-negatable and a "being" that came to be tied to mankind. See Samuel Beckett's reference of being tied to Godot in Act I of *Waiting for Godot*.

²⁴ For a thorough discussion of the idea of the scapegoat and Christ as the sacrificial Lamb of God, see René Girard's *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986). Of the crowd who condemns Christ in front of Pilate, Girard comments: "Yet the crowd wins out; nothing is more important than this victory, nothing more significant for the revelation of the mechanism that selects a victim" 106-107.

²⁵ MacBride 102.

²⁶ MacBride 103. Two important early pagan writings against Christianity were Celsus' *On the True Doctrine*, which was countered by Origen in his *Contra Celsum*, and Porphyry's *Against the Christians*, which was countered by several Christian writers, including St. Augustine. For an analysis and discussion of these two works, see R. Joseph Hoffman's *Celsus On the True Doctrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) and his *Porphyry's Against the Christians: The Literary Remains* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1994). After the early evolution of Christianity and the merging of philosophy and theology, the next development would be joining these two with political power under Constantine.

Camus' emphasis on the body, on sensual experience as a locus where the world is revealed in its truth and the absurd is vanquished, is somehow the heir to this highly ambiguous Christian teaching of God made flesh. Early Christian speculation thus created the conditions for the emergence of institutions that modernity and postmodernity would strive to dismantle, but also captured, in theological and metaphysical garments, the sacred value of sensuous experience and bodily interaction with the world. In a sense, one might say that Camus' work attempts to write a dechristianized version of the theories of the Incarnation and the Redemption.

PHILOSOPHY, KNOWLEDGE, AND FAITH

Against the Greek ideas of knowledge and truth, as in principle attainable through philosophical speculation, stood the Christian ideas that knowledge is faith and that Man sinned or did evil not out of a lack of knowledge or ignorance, but by the very nature of existing.²⁷ Only faith was necessary for salvation. Indeed, the importance of evil or sin is probably even more decisive between these two systems than those of the Incarnation or Redemption, because it is sin and guilt that made the Incarnation and Redemption necessary.²⁸ The dialectic of knowledge and ignorance can be said to comprise the central theme in *The Myth of Sisyphus* and the dialectic of evil, sin, and redemption in *The Plague* and *The Fall*.

²⁷ This whole problem of knowledge and truth is one that pits the two realms of the philosophical and the religious and the belief that only the Gods are omniscient. According to Alcmaeon, "Gods possess clear knowledge of matters invisible." *Early Greek Philosophy* (London: Penguin Books, 2001) 36. As Heraclitus said, "For human ways have no insights, divine ways have." 67.

²⁸ While religion and the belief in God allow for the possibility of absolution and redemption, in a world without God the problem of guilt and absolution become intractable. This is the subject that Dostoevsky struggled with in *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, and that Camus focused on in *The Fall*. For existential man and the philosophy of existentialism where God is absent, the question of how Man gets rid of his guilt and the judgment of others has no solution.

The rational knowledge of the Greeks and the religious faith of the Christians were two competing epistemologies that not only had to do with the limits of knowledge, but also the limits of the human will and the idea of sin, as the early heresies illustrate. For example, Camus quotes Clement as saying that “Greek philosophy is merely a produce of human intelligence: it does not teach the truth,” and Camus relates that the opinions of the Christians in Alexandria was that “Faith is sufficient for man and all else is literature.”²⁹

The opposition of reason and faith or Greek philosophy and Christianity reached its climax in the works of Pagan philosophers like Celsus and Porphyry, who criticized the beliefs of Christianity and whose intellectual revolt was met with a forceful response from the early Church by Origen in his *Against Celsus*, and to a lesser degree by Macarius Magnes in his *Apocriticus*. As R. Joseph Hoffman has shown:

The criticism of Christianity for its lack of a coherent philosophical system--a criticism which cannot easily be separated from the sociomoral attacks on the sort of people who found the new religion appealing—becomes a fixture of pagan polemical writing from the mid-second century onward. Celsus himself, in a famous passage, alleges that most Christians ‘do not want to give or receive a reason for what they believe’ but rather win converts by telling them “not to ask questions but to have faith.”³⁰

It is primarily the opposition between these ideas of philosophical logic and faith that Neoplatonism sought to reconcile. In any case, this is how Camus viewed Neoplatonism, and the reason why it was significant to him early on. For him, Neoplatonism was “a constant effort to reconcile contradictory ideas with the help of a principle of participation, a principle which has a place solely in a logic divorced from space and time.”³¹ These contrasting ideas

²⁹ MacBride 107.

³⁰ See R. Joseph Hoffman’s *Celsus: On the True Doctrine* 27.

³¹ MacBride 139.

of intellect and faith created a dialectic from Plotinus to Saint Augustine, or as Camus calls it a “dialogue between heart and reason,” where he says the truths of this dialectic could only be expressed in images. These images used by Plotinus and others served to “mould the intelligibles into a shape that can be grasped by the senses, to restore to intuition what belonged to Reason.”³² In other words, Plotinus served as a mediator by joining the intellect with artistic images that could be understood on the sensible level of parables. This explains Camus’ earlier comment that these two systems of thought met “on the plane of philosophy.”³³ I would argue that Camus found in this a powerful model to follow. He himself would later attempt to recreate myths and sensible images in his novels to deal with the same tragic conditions of human existence that the early Christian thinkers and Neoplatonist philosophers explored in their theological and philosophical disputes.

Heart and reason and religious and philosophical thinking were brought together to create new frames of reference that helped to solve the problems that were raised by applying logic and doctrinal questions to a system of faith. Neoplatonism used the rational structures of Greek philosophy to construct the fundamental premises as well as the dialectic that created the basic truths of Christianity, and nowhere was this seen more clearly than in the writing of Saint Augustine, who borrowed many of his ideas from Plato, Plotinus, and Porphyry.

SAINT AUGUSTINE

Camus wrote of Augustine that his philosophy assimilated “all the uncertainties and vicissitudes of Christian thought.”³⁴ While Augustine was a follower of Manicheism, (which Camus calls a mere continuation of Gnosticism, primarily because of its focus on evil and

³² MacBride 139. This idea reflects Pascal’s comment that “the heart has a reason that the reason knows not of.” Pascal is mentioned at the beginning (100) and at the end of Camus’ dissertation 152.

³³ MacBride 139.

³⁴ MacBride 142.

death), it was the writings of Saint Ambrose and the Neoplatonists that led to his conversion, as Augustine relates in his *Confessions*.³⁵

Camus claims that the problem of evil obsessed Augustine, and while he was “Greek” in his need for rational coherence, Augustine was plagued with anxieties. It is this conflict between the mind and emotions that led him away from Manicheism in search of other forms of truth as he wrestled with the carnal and the spiritual.³⁶ Camus writes that “it seemed to him above all that the solution was not to be found in knowledge, that the resolution of his doubts and of his distaste for the flesh did not lie in intellectual escape but in the total acknowledgement of his depravity and wretchedness.”³⁷ In his search for faith and truth, Augustine ended up transforming Neoplatonism into Christianity.³⁸

According to Camus, the greatest contribution of Plotinus to Augustine’s thinking was the “doctrine of the Word as mediator” and “a solution to the problem of evil,” while the most important ideas that Augustine sought in Neoplatonism were Christ, the Incarnation, and the Trinity.³⁹ It is on this basis that Augustine sought to unite Greek and Christian thought. If we

³⁵ MacBride 142. In his *Confessions*, Augustine relates that he was an adherent of the Manicheans for nine years but that his encounter with Faustus and his apparent shortcomings led to a disenchantment. In Book V, Augustine talks about “The keen interest which I had had in Manichean doctrines was checked by this experience, and my confidence in the other teachers of the sect was further diminished when I saw that Faustus, of whom they spoke so much, was obviously unable to settle the numerous problems which troubled me” 99. He then goes on to explain the influence of Ambrose and his eventual preference for Catholic teaching (116).

³⁶ MacBride 142. Camus’ notebooks are filled with passages reminiscent of Augustine’s struggle with the carnal and the spiritual and the need for chastity. In *Notebook 1935-1951*, he writes: “It is legitimate to glory in the diversity and quantity of experience—and especially in the life of the senses and the surrender to passionate impulses—only if one is completely disinterested in the object of one’s desires. There is also the leap into material things—and many men who glory in the senses do so only because they are slaves to them. Here, too, they embrace the vulture which is eating them away. Hence the absolute necessity to have gone through the experience of chastity, for example, and to have been ruthless with oneself. Before any deliberately thought-out enterprise aimed at glorifying the world of immediate experience, a moment’s asceticism in everything” 162. Camus often contrasts the idea of chastity and that of sex as a distraction from artistic creation: “Sex leads to nothing. It is not immoral but it is unproductive. One can indulge in it so long as one does not want to produce. But only chastity is linked to a personal progress” 36. In *Carnets III*, Camus contemplated the idea of a tragedy about chastity (see page 23).

³⁷ MacBride 142.

³⁸ MacBride 142.

³⁹ MacBride 143. Celsus accuses the Christians of worshipping a man rather than a god (the heresy of Arianism), which precludes them from being called monotheists (116). Hoffman makes the statement in the *Notes* that “Such attacks as these stand behind later philosophical defenses of the unity of the godhead, and issue finally in the credal definitions of the fourth century” (*Note 197*) 142. By “unity of the godhead,” Hoffman is

list the themes that occupied most of Augustine's writing, we see once again how Camus' early encounter with Christian metaphysics provided him with a language to articulate his core beliefs and experiences. The basic Augustinian themes were: Happiness, Evil, Sin, Grace, Freedom, and Human Will.⁴⁰

The Neoplatonists taught that evil was a privation, not a reality in itself and while Augustine agreed, according to Camus, he stated that there were two kinds of evil: natural and moral evil.⁴¹ While natural evil results from the human condition or the wretched state and the tragedy of Man's "fall" into Nature and matter, moral evil was sin as a direct result of the human will. Sin came from our being given free will by God, but this was tainted by the ill use we make of it.⁴² Camus adds that "we have fallen so far that the proper exercise of free will is invariably to be traced to God alone," which reinforces the idea that we, or our Soul, have fallen so far into matter and darkness that humans, basically, only have the will to sin.⁴³ In that state, humans have forfeited their free will and are in bondage, slaves to evil and matter, which explains their wretchedness. Once again, it is extremely tempting to see in such speculation an anticipation of Camus' own anxieties, and to make the point that Camus will provide a dechristianized, secular version in his novels and plays of this deep feeling of "falling" and of Man's unhappy state.

Unlike the Greek idea of virtue, Augustine believed that virtue without God is useless and beyond human capacity. God bestows grace, and on that basis virtue can be achieved. This is opposed to Plotinus' idea that the Soul turns toward virtue and that an ascent to The Good is

referring to the concept of the Trinity, which was codified at the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. Camus discusses the conflict over Christ's divinity between Arius and Athanasius and the role of the Neoplatonists in solving this problem: "The Nicene Creed (325 A.D.) states the principle of consubstantiality and opposes the begotten Christ to the created Jesus of Arius..." 140.

⁴⁰ MacBride 143. Olivier Todd relates the following story in his biography, which is particularly telling: when a Dominican priest told Camus that he had not found grace, Camus replied: "I am your Augustine before his conversion. I am debating the problem of evil and I'm not getting past it" 230.

⁴¹ MacBride 144.

⁴² MacBride 144.

⁴³ MacBride 144. Camus quotes Augustine for whom "Man's sole possession is deceit and sin" 100.

achievable by contemplation and self-reflection. With Augustine, morality and values find their primary source in God rather than humans. As Camus remarks, this makes the virtues of the pagans useless, since for the Christian these virtues can become faults and even sins, such as pride. It is not the pagan idea of virtues seen as a Good or a form of excellence through which the powers of human life and human potentials can be extolled, as in Plato and Aristotle, but the idea that Man's first duty is not to himself, but to God. For the Christian it is faith, not virtue, that is the beginning of grace. Believing in God is the first step in submitting to that grace.⁴⁴

In speaking of Augustine's ideas of God and freedom, Camus then remarks that:

The grace of god is, in this context, totally arbitrary: man should simply put his trust in God. How then can one speak of Man's freedom?

Precisely because our sole freedom is the Freedom to do wrong.

Saint Augustine's final avowal on this question, vital for the Christian, is one of ignorance. God's will remains intact.⁴⁵

This question of God's will and human freedom is most clearly seen in *The Plague* in the sermon of Father Paneloux where he made it clear that "this plague came from God, for the punishment of their sins,"⁴⁶ and that "since it was God's will, we, too, should will it."⁴⁷

Camus also focuses on God's grace and human freedom at the end of *The Fall*.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ MacBride 144. This contrast between Christian faith and Greek virtues, between an absolute God and the importance of human character runs through the *Notebooks* and shapes Camus' moral reflections. For instance, Camus makes the statement in *Carnets III* that "Character is not virtue which we have: it is acquired" 15. Human character and action are bounded by vices and virtues and their extremes. This is reflected in Camus' comments in *Notebooks 1935-1951*: "an extreme virtue that consists in killing one's passions. A deeper virtue that consists in balancing them" 187; "There are some temptations which are so strong that they must be virtues" 134; and in *Notebooks 1942-1951* "All great virtues have an absurd aspect" 27.

⁴⁵ MacBride 144-145. Compare this idea to Pascal's Wager and Kierkegaard's Leap of Faith on putting your faith in God. This idea is also connected to predestination and the teleological belief in history as God's design or will, which is a major tenet in divine natural law theory. We will return to this in the concluding chapter.

⁴⁶ Camus, *The Plague* 83. It is interesting to note that in the novel, Father Paneloux is conducting research on St. Augustine and the African Church. See page 78.

⁴⁷ Camus 184.

⁴⁸ See pages 99-100 where in speaking of Christians, Camus remarks that "they believe in sin, never in grace."

AUGUSTINE AND PELAGIUS

This takes us to the central problem of freedom. For Camus, Pelagius' substantial discussion of free will, choice, and sin was highly instrumental in shaping Augustine's philosophy.⁴⁹ Pelagius, like the later existentialists, believed that Man was created free; that he is able to choose between doing Good or Evil; and that this free will is a freedom or emancipation from God.⁵⁰ Of course the logical conclusion that one could make from this statement would be that if a) Humans can choose, b) They can avoid sin, and therefore, c) Humans can be free from sin. This logical conclusion would render the Christian idea of original sin meaningless and would negate the need for grace, salvation, and ultimately the Incarnation. This is the reason behind the Pelagian heresy and Augustine's opposition to it. Pelagius' argument was that Adam was born mortal; his sin and the Fall were not our mistake; and therefore, his bad example should not condemn other humans. For Pelagius, grace was not something that could be given because creation itself was already a grace.⁵¹

For the young Camus, these theological disputes hide important truths about Man's freedom, God, and the reality of free will. He mentions the Council of Carthage (29 April 418 A.D.), where the teachings of Pelagius were attacked by the Church: "In general, this teaching puts its trust in man and scorns explanations which refer to the will of God. It is also an act of faith in the nature and independence of man." And Camus adds: "This thesis then, was above all a declaration of man's independence of God and a denial of that

⁴⁹ MacBride 145. According to the online *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Pelagius "denied the primitive state in paradise and original sin..., insisted on the naturalness of concupiscence and the death of the body, and ascribed the actual existence and universality of sin to the bad example which Adam set by his first sin. As all of his ideas were chiefly rooted in the old, pagan philosophy, especially in the popular system of the Stoics, rather than in Christianity, he regarded the moral strength of man's will (*liberum arbitrium*), when steeled by asceticism, as sufficient in itself to desire and attain the loftiest ideal of virtue" 2. The article also discusses Pelagius' friendship with Caelestius; Caelestius' six theses, which were deemed heretical and reflected the main ideas of Pelagianism; Augustine's response; and the attempts by the Church to counter Pelagius' teachings, which culminated in the Council of Carthage in 418 A.D. (5) See www.newadvent.org/cathen/11604.html.

⁵⁰ MacBride 145.

⁵¹ MacBride 145.

persistent need of the creator that is at the basis of the Christian religion.”⁵² What Camus could find in these old debates was already the kind of philosophical point made by later materialists and, of course, 20th century existentialists. Needless to say, questioning the “need for a creator” would also become one of his main intellectual endeavors.

Augustine countered Pelagius’ teaching by saying that Adam was immortal; that he originally had the ability not to sin; that he already had a form of grace; and that he was free. This all changed, however, when Adam destroyed this happy state in Eden by committing the original sin.⁵³ Our corrupt nature stems from this and since our human nature is corrupted, without baptism and God’s grace, we are damned. In essence, as a result of this we have no freedom not to sin. Humans are incapable of not sinning and we have no choice in this. We carry the original sin of Adam, and subsequently, are destined for Hell and Damnation unless we turn to God for salvation. Predestination is our fate and our only choice of history, since moral values exist *a priori*, and what limited freedom and actions we may have only exist within this linear movement of Time.⁵⁴

With this idea of predestination and of Man’s fate, salvation and grace become even more important, and Camus says that we depend on this idea of grace for three things: 1) “to protect us from our fallen nature,” 2) “to believe in the truths of the supernatural order,” and 3) “to enable us to act in accordance with these truths.”⁵⁵ We do have the freedom to reject or accept these graces, but as he puts it, our freedom is defined by this context and the concept of God, and freedom exists only within this context. What is most fascinating about his rendering of Augustine’s rejoinders to the Pelagian heresy is that, despite the fact that the

⁵² MacBride 145.

⁵³ MacBride 146. The logic here is that human reason, while given by God, is imperfect and that it can be used incorrectly, resulting in both sin and the need for faith.

⁵⁴ MacBride 146. The debates about Predestination between Dr. Rieux and Father Paneloux constitute one of the main themes in *The Plague*.

⁵⁵ MacBride 146.

latter already articulates the basic tenets of the existentialist position, Augustine continues to represent a positive reference and influence for him. It is as though the philosophical power and rhetorical mastery of his demonstrations contained some truth, beyond the untenability of the dogmas he defends. The relevance of the Augustinian idea of Man's "fall" needs to be rescued, as it were, from its theological clothes and rewritten in the prose of the modern novel. Meursault and the penitent Jean-Baptiste Clamence of *The Fall* could be seen as later, secularized incarnations of Augustinian Man.

THE TRINITY AND THE INCARNATION

In the last part of his dissertation, Camus focuses on Augustine's idea of the Word Made Flesh and the concept of the Trinity. Whereas in Plotinus "the pure soul dwells with the intelligibles" in the realm of Intelligible Forms, and he stresses the gap or the distance that exists between The One and the Intellect,⁵⁶ for Augustine the ideas (Plato's Ideal Forms) are like the first forms, which are eternal and unchangeable (and therefore true or absolutes). These ideas represent God or at the very least the divine presence in them.⁵⁷ Augustine thus places the emphasis on God, from which all things emanate, unlike Plotinus, who focuses on the Soul and the separation that exists between the three hypostases. Augustine's focus on God is represented most clearly in the Trinity of God, Man, and Spirit, which rather than a hierarchy, forms a unity, where each part contains the others. By doing so, Augustine defines and closes the distance that separates these ideas or realms in Plotinus.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ MacBride 147.

⁵⁷ MacBride 147.

⁵⁸ The notion of the Trinity and Christ's divinity were defined and codified at the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.), presided over by Constantine, and at the second, third, and fourth councils held at Constantinople (381 A.D.), Ephesus (431 A.D.), and Chalcedon (451 A.D.). The first three councils also dealt with the heresies of Arius, Macedonius, and Pelagius. For an account of these councils, see *The Catholic Encyclopedia* online at (www.newadvent.org/cathen/).

Camus remarks that the Word in Augustine is, however, not the Intellect of Neoplatonism and of Plotinus. For Augustine the Word was made flesh in the Incarnation of Christ, in what amounts to God taking on human form in the miracle of the Incarnation.⁵⁹ Through the Word becoming Flesh, humans would now be able to participate in God on earth, not as something that occurs only after death through the Soul's conversion and its return to a lost homeland. Christianity bridged the gap and the distance of silence that had characterized Man's relationship to God, thereby confirming that this separation was finally closed. As a result, one could say that Faith and Reason were also brought closer together, creating boundaries of thought that allowed the necessary elements for the beginning of Christian dogma.⁶⁰

It is important to follow Camus' patient reconstruction of these dogmas, as it shows the extent to which he sought to salvage the figure of Augustine for his role in bringing together the best of Christian and Greek metaphysics through the synthesis of the philosophical frameworks of Plato, Plotinus, and the Gnostics, and through his understanding of the Incarnation and the Trinity. In Camus' words:

Saint Augustine ends where Plotinus' conversion culminates. They both pursue the same conclusion, but while their paths sometimes overlap, they are different nonetheless. Augustine asserts at every step that philosophy is not enough. The sole intelligent reason is that which is enlightened by faith.⁶¹

⁵⁹ MacBride 148.

⁶⁰ In contrast to the emanations of the hypostases outlined in Plotinus, which were understood as manifestations of light and the soul descending into matter, Logos or the Word of God in Christianity was transmitted first through the law of Moses and then took on flesh in the Incarnation of Christ. This fundamental difference in the conception of "manifestation" was at the heart of the philosophical and theological disputes between the pagan philosophers and the early Christians. These debates directly informed the dogmas of the Trinity and the Divinity of Christ. It is important to keep this historical-philosophical background in view given the importance of both these elements in Camus' writing and thinking. In rediscovering these old debates, Camus saw at play gigantic struggles, waged simultaneously in thought and politics, over the exact definition of the tragic paradigm.

⁶¹ MacBride 149.

Again, Camus' paradoxical attraction to the Father of the Church is incontrovertibly represented here. What could easily appear as a dogmatic rejection of Man's true position in the world (free but finite) is interpreted by Camus in explicitly positive terms. Later on, just as for Augustine, philosophy won't "be enough" for Camus either. He will replace the trust in faith with a faith in sensual experience, engagement, and creation. However, he will always retain from Augustine the gesture of distrusting an overly rationalistic approach in dealing with the finitude of human existence.

Augustine's main contribution to Christianity was thus to "make Greek reason more supple and to fuse it with the Christian edifice, but in a sphere in which it can do no harm,"⁶² By contrast, the role of Neoplatonism was to "support this softening of Reason, to lure Socratic logic to religious speculations and so to transmit this tool, already fashioned, to the Fathers of the Christian Church."⁶³

Camus quotes Augustine as saying, "If you cannot understand, believe so that you may understand. Faith comes first, understanding follows. Therefore do not seek to understand, but believe so that you may understand."⁶⁴ Reason must be humble and pliant and in a subordinate position to Faith, and Camus writes that Faith in Augustine consists of two things: 1) the belief in supernatural truths, and 2) "man's humble abandonment to the grace of God."⁶⁵ Knowledge does not begin with reason, but with faith. The role of dogma is to give knowledge and certainty to that faith; critical reasoning is not important, but rather humility and submission. According to Camus, the Word or Logos that was brought into Christianity from Neoplatonism was not just Intellect, but God, and therefore Intellect is no longer just an effusion or emanation as in Plotinus, but a creation of God.⁶⁶ The Word,

⁶² MacBride 149-150.

⁶³ MacBride 150.

⁶⁴ MacBride 149.

⁶⁵ MacBride 149.

⁶⁶ MacBride 151.

Dogma, and Truth become joined into a Logos, and God can now communicate with his creation.

Camus concludes his dissertation by remarking that some speak of a Hellenization of early Christianity and agrees that, as regards morality, this is a correct statement. However, as has just been shown, this is not the final truth of the matter. More significantly, Camus felt that Christian morality cannot be taught, because it is an “interior ascesis which serves to ratify a faith.”⁶⁷ Again we find here Camus’ paradoxical attraction to a form of moral teaching that escapes the strictures of rationalism and goes beyond all of his disagreements about content. Rather than a Hellenization of Christianity then, we should speak, he says approvingly, of the Christianization of a decadent Hellenism.⁶⁸ According to Camus, Nietzsche’s thesis was that Greece was a culture of “pessimism, insensible and tragic,” while Christianity was a renaissance compared to “Socratism and its serenity.”⁶⁹ Christian Man replaced the Greek one. Despite Camus’ sympathy for the Greek spirit, however, he finds himself attracted to the Christian translation of Greek speculation as carried out in most exemplary fashion by Augustine.

In the final paragraph, Camus says that by the time of Augustine’s death, Christianity had become a philosophy and that it was “sufficiently armed” to resist attacks against its basic

⁶⁷ MacBride 151. While Camus may make the statement that Christian morality cannot be taught, it is quite clear that the Church and governments have tried to do just that, and in many ways, the fate of Meursault in *The Outsider* reflects the consequences when someone refuses to accept that morality.

⁶⁸ MacBride 126.

⁶⁹ MacBride 152. See this other amazing passage in *The Birth of Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), which speaks directly to Camus’ Nietzschean interpretation of the differences between Neoplatonism to Christian metaphysics: “If one can still speak of ‘Greek serenity’, then only as the cheerfulness of slaves who know no graver responsibility, no higher ambition, nothing in the past or future of higher value than the present. This appearance of ‘Greek cheerfulness’ was what so outraged profound and fierce natures in the first four centuries of Christianity. It seemed to them that his womanish flight from all that was grave and frightening, this cowardly contentment with comfortable pleasure, was not simply despicable, but was the true anti-Christian attitude of mind” 56-7. In his Introduction to Nietzsche’s work, Raymond Geuss comments that the key point for Nietzsche was affirmation, and “since both Schopenhauer and Christianity agree that *this* world is not to be affirmed, they are really instances of the same kind of weakness, and the difference in their metaphysical views (that the Christian thinks the underlying *reality* of the world, God, is to be affirmed while Schopenhauer thinks this underlying reality, the Will, is to be negated) is irrelevant” (xxvii). Such opposition between Nietzschean affirmation and Christian negation of the world finds its way most famously in the last chapter of Camus’ *The Outsider* in the confrontation between the Priest and Meursault.

tenets.⁷⁰ By this time the basic foundations of Christian thought had been constructed through the merging of Christian theology and Greek philosophy; through the suppression of the main heresies; and through the establishment of its basic themes and doctrines.⁷¹ The last sentence of his dissertation reads:

For many years now it has remained the only hope and the only real shield against the misfortune of the Western world. In this way Christianity won its catholicity.⁷²

This statement is highly significant in the context of Camus' philosophical thought. For at first glance the treatment in Camus' later writing of such themes as the death of God; the place of Man in the world; his relationship to Nature; the importance of the Body; the belief in Immortality; the problems of Evil, Sin, and Suffering; the need for Salvation; the powers of Reason and Knowledge; the nostalgia for Faith; the limits of Free Will, Freedom, and Human Happiness—appears as if it stands in sharp contrast and stark opposition to the Christianity that he presented in his dissertation. However, it should also, hopefully, be clear by now that the dissertation and the academic engagement with Christian metaphysics helped Camus gain invaluable insights into the continuing depth and magnitude of these early ideas, as they had engaged the minds of the early philosophers and theologians. What is most important is that Camus used these Neoplatonist and Christian themes to illuminate the travails of the 20th century and to show how these fundamental themes were still crucially relevant to the problems of human morality and moral philosophy.

⁷⁰ MacBride 152. Hoffman argues that “The moral critiques of Christianity antedate the philosophical assaults of writers like Celsus for an obvious reason: the Christianity of the first century had yet to develop an assailable system of belief or fixed canon of writings from which such beliefs could be educed. It is only as doctrine begins to supplant apocalyptic enthusiasm and the practices associated with it that the focus of pagan writers shifts from what Christians do to what they teach...” *Celsus* 24.

⁷¹ With the Emperor Constantine, this theology and philosophy would be united with political power, giving Christianity military, legal, and spiritual authority.

⁷² MacBride 152.

As Camus develops his thinking on the absurd, nihilism, the human condition, and the dangers and necessity of revolt, what appears is a philosophy that reflects a continuous dialogue questioning, yet constantly finding inspiration from, the basic premises and early formations of Christian thought. In his dissertation, Camus learned the full significance of these notions despite his rejection of the dogmas. Camus' materialist and "pagan" viewpoints, and his "Greek" affinities, led him to emphasize the concrete realities of human morality, ethics, happiness, justice, and social existence, where Man is placed at the center of importance rather than the absolutes and ideologies of religious and political systems. However, Camus' Man is also, in some ways, a "detranscendentalized" version of the fallen Augustinian Man.

The literary works and the philosophical essays of Camus that follow his dissertation all reflect the Christian influences outlined in this early work. These early Christian ways of perceiving and identifying the problems of human existence were translated into the main problems that would shape his own philosophical thought: the realities of human existence, Man's need for religious certainties and political absolutes, and the problems of moral and political action. When one examines Camus' opposition to the Christian worldview and its philosophy, we are better able to understand the influences that shaped his religious and political thinking; his moral philosophy; where this dialogue with Christianity led him in his search for meaning and value; and his vision of the tragic nature of human existence. In his first novel *A Happy Death*, written in 1937, we get the first glimpse of the contrast between the ideas that he outlined in his dissertation and those that will gradually develop in his work, beginning with the problem of human happiness.

CHAPTER TWO: CAMUS' PHILOSOPHY OF NATURE AND HUMAN HAPPINESS: A HAPPY DEATH

Camus' first novel was written a year after his dissertation but was not published until 1998. According to Jean Sarocchi, Camus refused to publish it because he considered it to be a flawed work and most critics have considered it primarily as the source of *The Outsider*.¹ However, while the work certainly has its weaknesses as a novel, I would argue that it is in itself a crucial work that serves as a bridge between the ideas Camus outlined in his dissertation and those that he dealt with in the literary works that follow. To date, no one has examined the role played by this first novel in the development of Camus' philosophical thinking as a bridge between his dissertation and his other well-studied literary texts of his Algerian years, not to mention the even more famous texts following *The Outsider*.

A Happy Death sets up the cycles of the natural world as an essential background against which Man struggles with the finite nature of his existence in Time and his desire for freedom and human happiness. Also central to this novel (as well as *Caligula* and *The Outsider*) are the problems of free will; how Man's inner nature in the forms of desire and needs drive human actions; and the limitations that Man is confronted with in his will to happiness. For Camus the causality of human action is not primarily found in reason nor in abstract concepts outside of Man, but rather finds its source in a materialist philosophy that is grounded in the body and Man's place in Nature. In this regard, the influence of the Greeks and Nietzsche is clearly evident in Camus' early writings. His moral philosophy begins with a literary exploration and philosophical meditation on the central issue of human happiness in a world without God, where humans struggle for happiness and freedom while facing the limits imposed by their presence in the physical world and the strictures of social life.

¹ In the Afterword to *A Happy Death*, Sarocchi puts it this way: "Apparently Camus felt, as he was creating it, the latent defect of his first novel, and another fictional possibility" 113.

Man's essential freedom begins with the fact that he is alone in the world. As a result, he must struggle to define his own freedom through the exercise of his will, while confronting the reality of death. The solution in Camus' early writings, and specifically in his first unpublished novel is to be found in the life of the body. In particular, this struggle involves a sensual opening onto the world, but at the same time, it also forces humans to create necessary limits to this freedom. As we shall see, this focus on the natural ground of human freedom and happiness, as the answer to the tragic loss of the divine sacred, leads to the discovery of a new form of the sacred in Nature itself. And this reflects the deep Nietzschean influence running through Camus' early work.

BETWEEN AUGUSTINE AND NIETZSCHE

The title of this novel directly echoes Augustine's *A Happy Life* (*De Beata Vita*), which Camus cites in the notes of his dissertation. Augustine treats the problem of human happiness in very concrete, one might say "materialist" terms, by focusing on such issues as love, needs and desires, the life of the body, Time, and death.² Camus' novel is dedicated to the same questions, but also to the problem of human crime in a world bereft of Christian morality and justice. The two-part division of *A Happy Death* into "Natural Death" and "Conscious Death" also reflects the division between Body and Mind, and between a life that is simply lived and one that is chosen. The contrast between a "natural death" and a "conscious death" also points to an important theme for Camus, namely the gap between Nature and human consciousness. From the early essays and notebook entries, this duality between Man and the world causes Camus to question what our place in Nature is; how one remains or tries to become a part of Nature; and how one reconciles the problem of the

² *A Happy Life* was the first of Augustine's Cassiciacum dialogues from the period he lived near Milan and in which eight people discuss the ideas of Truth, wisdom, happiness, the soul, and God. For Camus' references, see Notes 252 and 253 on pages 162 and 163 in MacBride. While MacBride points out that Camus attributed the source of Note 252 to Augustine's *Confessions VII*, the passage actually occurs in *A Happy Life*.

permanence of the self and the importance of the individual in the world against the reality of constant change, Time, and human mortality.³

Unlike the Christian God-centered worldview, which evinces the moral hierarchy of the One or the Good as in Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus, in *A Happy Death* the emphasis is solely on Man's relationship to Nature and the body, his inner nature of needs and desires, and the search for happiness. Nature is the source of Being, not God, and it is in Nature that Man must find the sacred or divine, as well as the source of his moral values. Camus' early essays, following his dissertation, reflect a consciousness that still acknowledges the sacredness of Nature, but have radically "detranscendentalized" it by placing the sacred in Nature's beauty, mystery, and the truth that it harbors. A passage in the first *Notebooks* states this in particularly striking fashion:

The world is beautiful, and this is everything. The great truth which it patiently teaches me is that neither the mind or even the heart has any importance. And that the stone warmed by the sun or the cypress tree swelling against the empty sky set a boundary to the only world in which "to be right" has any meaning: nature without men.⁴

This is a Pagan or "Greek" consciousness that connects humans to the animal world, re-centers human experience on the body and its limitations, and rediscovers the tragic inevitability of death and the stark truths of human existence. The questions that haunt Camus as a result of this return to Greek naturalism, away from the metaphysics of an afterlife, relate to the nature and the possibility of happiness, namely: How does one define it? Is happiness still possible in this world without the promise or the hope of immortality? How can one face

³ See the note by Philip Thody in *Albert Camus Notebooks 1935-1951*: 18.

⁴ Camus, *Notebooks 1935-1951*: 56. Richard Norman in *Is Nothing Sacred* (London: Routledge, 2004) makes the distinction between an "instrumental attitude to nature, treating it as something we can use and control to our advantage, and a sense of nature as 'sacred'" 8. Camus' early works clearly emphasize the sacred aspect of nature and Man's place in it, while in his later work, for instance in *The Rebel*, he focuses more on the struggle that humans have in their subject/object relationship with Nature: "But before man accepts the sacred world and in order that he should be able to accept it—or before he escapes from it and in order that he should be able to escape from it—there is always a period of soul-searching and rebellion" 21.

that truth with lucidity and still love life knowing that nothing lasts? All of these echo the problem that Nietzsche answered with the Dionysiac principle and the affirmation of the Hellenistic instinct, as when he writes in *Twilight of the Idols*: “Saying yes to life, even in its strangest and hardest problems; the will to life rejoicing in the *sacrifice* of its highest types to its own inexhaustibility—*this* is what I call the Dionysian, this is what I sense as the bridge to the psychology of the *tragic* poet.”⁵ Camus will come to the same conclusion in his philosophy of the Absurd and his emphasis on the Sisyphean task.

A useful note by Philip Thody in *Notebooks 1935-1951*, lists the main themes shared by Nietzsche and Camus: “a hostility to the ‘life-denying aspect of Christianity’; a determination to face up to the tragic nature of existence and see in this awareness the source of man’s greatness; and finally, an ambition to combine an attentive concern for the body with intellectual lucidity.”⁶ Thody also suggests that the title of the first part of *A Happy Death* was inspired by a passage in Nietzsche’s *Twilight of the Idols*.⁷ In another passage, Nietzsche writes:

One should never forget that Christianity has abused the dying man’s weakness in order to violate his conscience, that it has abused the very way he dies and turned it into value judgments about the man and his past!—Here we must defy all the cowardlinesses of prejudice and establish above all the correct, i.e. physiological appreciation of so-called *natural* death: which is ultimately just another ‘unnatural’ one, a suicide.⁸

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* (London: Penguin, 1990) 121. In *The Rebel* Camus comments that “Nietzsche’s paradoxical but significant conclusion is that God has been killed by Christianity, in that Christianity has secularized the sacred” 69.

⁶ Camus, *Notebooks 1935-1951*: 97. While several authors have noted the similarities between Camus and Nietzsche, the present work will show that Camus’ thinking also closely resembles that of Ludwig Feuerbach.

⁷ See Camus’ *Notebooks 1935-1951*: 96.

⁸ See Nietzsche’s *Twilight of the Idols* #36 on page 99.

Against this background, it is therefore no coincidence that Camus chose the name Zagreus for the character in the first part. Zagreus was another name for Dionysus, and it was through Zagreus' sacrifice in the novel that Patrice Mersault is brought face-to-face with life, appropriates his existence, and fully engages in the life of his body. Zagreus' wealth and his crippled body stand in sharp contrast to the poverty and physical health of Mersault at the beginning of the novel. As Zagreus writes in his suicide note: "I'm doing away with only half a man..."⁹ And in Chapter Two, Camus has him say "I don't like talking seriously. Because then there's only one thing to talk about—the justification you can give for your life. And I don't see how I can justify my amputated legs."¹⁰ As Zagreus remarks to Mersault, "...with a body like yours, your one duty is to live and be happy...[and]...To know your body's limits—that's the true psychology."¹¹

This natural Nietzschean duty, however, directly contradicts any basic moral intuition as soon as it is effectively followed through in the murder of Zagreus. Camus was always attracted to situations of moral impossibility, where humans experience in their flesh and in their conscience the clash of two incompatible yet necessary principles. This is one key aspect of his tragic worldview, and this tragic aspect of morality already appears in Camus' first draft novel. The immortality of Mersault killing Zagreus is complicated even more by the fact that it was Zagreus' intention to die, and Mersault was simply the means that carried out this Dionysian sacrifice for the sake of a higher, healthier being. In this case, the act of living leads to the act of dying and willing leads to the request of the other to kill.

Mersault realizes that the death of Zagreus was the primary factor that started this quest for happiness. Camus' character remarks, "What matters to me is a certain quality of happiness. I can only find it in a certain struggle with its opposite—a stubborn and violent

⁹ Camus, *A Happy Death* 8.

¹⁰ Camus 30.

¹¹ Camus 31.

struggle.”¹² In the only reference to any sense of consequences or perhaps remorse for his act, he remarks that: “If I’m happy, it’s because of my bad conscience. I had to get away and reach this solitude where I could face—in myself, I mean—what had to be faced, what was sun and what was tears.... Yes, I’m happy, in human terms.”¹³ The fact that Mersault had killed made him even more aware of his own death and that this act of murder served as a kind of communion in blood that forever tied him to Zagreus and grounded him in the species and human community.¹⁴ It brought him to a higher level of consciousness about the meaning of his existence and the fear of death:

Of all the men he had carried inside himself, as every man does at the beginning of his life, of all those various rootless, mingling beings he had created in his life with consciousness, with courage. That was his whole happiness in living and dying. He realized now that to be afraid of this death he was staring at with animal terror meant to be afraid of life. Fear of dying justified a limitless attachment to what is alive in man.¹⁵

This again reflects Nietzsche’s idea of *amor fati*, embracing the Dionysian aspects of life rather than the Apollonian, and the need to find happiness in the face of death. Camus’ novel could be seen as representing his Nietzschean meditations on the fate of a humanity still beset

¹² Camus 91.

¹³ Camus 91.

¹⁴ This idea of blood and murder as staining the person and forever connecting them with their victim is a major trope in Greek Tragedies, notably in *The Oresteian Trilogy*, as well as in René Girard’s *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1979). In Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 2000), Raskolnikov says to Sonia “Did I murder the old woman? I murdered myself, no here! I crushed myself once and for all, forever...” 353. Contrast this with Mersault’s connection to Zagreus after he committed that murder. In the last chapter of *A Happy Death*, Mersault says, “he let only Zagreus’ face appear, a sign of blood-brotherhood. He who had inflicted death was going to die” 103. As Roger Quillot notes in *The Sea and Prisons*: “Patrice Mersault and Meursault do not know themselves until the day they have killed, and see themselves condemned in their turn. The shock of death is revealing, purifying for one as for the other” 66.

¹⁵ Camus 103.

by the burning desire for *Vita Beata*, in conditions, however, where the help of transcendence has been withdrawn.

FREE WILL AND THE EXPERIENCE OF POVERTY

Man's search for happiness is also made more difficult by the fate of poverty and the bitterness and devaluation of life that ensues. It is this desire to escape from poverty and the need for money that motivated Mersault to kill Zagreus, as it was for Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.¹⁶ Against the metaphysical foundations from which Camus' thinking and writing emerged, we might say that poverty for him represented a lot more than just a social problem. It became a kind of metaphysical entity, compounding the tragic desolation of human experience by making life and happiness on earth inaccessible, but the only entity left after the disappearance of divine reassurance. Camus writes of Mersault:

He had become aware of the essential and immoral truth that money is one of the surest and swiftest means of acquiring one's dignity. He had managed to dispel the bitterness which besets any decent soul aware of the vile iniquities of the birth and growth of a splendid fate. This sordid and revolting curse, whereby the poor end in poverty the life they have begun in poverty, he had rejected by using money as a weapon, opposing hatred with hatred. And out of this beast-to-beast combat, the angel sometimes emerged, intact, wings and halo and all, in the warm breath of

¹⁶ In his 1932 essay "Jehan Rictus, the Poet of Poverty" Camus comments: "...the *Poor Man's Soliloquies* are an expression of the Poor Man's state of soul. This miserable creature, who finds only humiliation and suffering in his earthly life, seeks an outlet for his pitiful condition in dreams. More than any other man, this one is happy only when he forgets his is a man. But alas! harsh reality too often sends his dreams scattering, and then he is faced with the injustice of his lot, with feelings of violent revolt, alas, all too justified" *Camus Youthful Writings* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1976) 118. For studies comparing *Camus and Dostoevsky*, see Ray Davison's *Camus: The Challenge of Dostoevsky* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997), and Irina Kirk's *Dostoevskij and Camus* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1974).

the sea.¹⁷

Happiness is not something that is given to you; it is a struggle and something that a person must find for themselves. For Camus, this was a struggle he obviously knew only too well from his own personal experience and from his witnessing the extreme poverty in many parts of his homeland, especially in Kabylie.¹⁸

Camus quotes a significant thought of his first mentor Jean Grenier at the very beginning of his first *Notebooks*: "...in poverty, illness, or loneliness we become aware of our eternity."¹⁹ Camus's view, in sharp contrast to the socially privileged Marcel Proust, is that it is in poverty that Time is lost, and the pursuit of happiness is made even more difficult.²⁰ This idea is expressed by Zagreus in *A Happy Death* and is repeated by Camus in the following entry of the first *Notebooks*:

To be happy, you need time. Lots of time. Happiness too is a long patience.

And it is the need for money that robs us of time. Time can be bought.

Everything can be bought. To be rich means having time to be happy when you deserve happiness.²¹

Zagreus repeats this idea in Chapter Four: "And in almost every case, we use up our lives making money, when we should be using money to gain time."²² He remarks that his whole

¹⁷ Camus 94-95.

¹⁸ For more detailed information on Camus' experiences and his reactions to poverty, see the biographies of Todd and Lottman.

¹⁹ Camus, *Notebooks 1935-1951*: 5. This topic has been well studied in Camus scholarship. See V. C. Letemendia's, "Poverty in the Writings of Albert Camus" *Polity*. 29: 3 (1997): 442-449. She remarks the experience of poverty that converted him to Marxism and not his reading of Marxist theory. Also see the first chapter in Roger Quilliot's *The Sea and Prisons* entitled "The Universe of Poverty" (10-26), as well as Paul Viallaneix' Chapter IV "Poverty" in *Cahiers Albert Camus II Youthful Writings* (New York: Knopf, 1976) 41-51. This book also contains Camus' essay "Jehan Rictus, the Poet of Poverty" (116-125) and "Voices from the Poor Quarter." The subject of poverty is also central in Camus' newspaper articles *The Misery of Kabylie*. We will return to this in Chapter Six.

²⁰ According to Jean Sarocchi in the Afterword, "...the various materials of the novel are regrouped according to the pairing time lost and time won. Time lost is that of poverty, work, everyday life..." 111. Sarocchi also draws a parallel with Proust: "If we think of Proust, we see the novel proceeding from time lost, that of work, to time gained or won, that of idleness among the 'budding grove', from the House above the World, to time regained, which is harmony with nature in solitude and death..." 112.

²¹ Camus, *Notebooks 1935-1951*: 77.

life was devoted to the pursuit of happiness against a world that “surrounds us with its violence and its stupidity.”²³ Although he is at times painfully aware of the “tragedy” that robbed him of life and the possibility of happiness, he still felt a sense of horror at the thought of the negation of life. The chapter ends with Zagreus telling Mersault that it is this life that matters, not the next or an afterlife; that despite his reservations about dying and his present condition he still has hope; and that happiness is the only thing that should be taken seriously.²⁴

In the last chapter of Part One, Mersault returns to the poverty and loneliness of his existence thinking of the conversation with Zagreus. He realizes that “rebellion was the only authentic thing in him, and that everything else was misery and submission,”²⁵ in the same way that earlier he had told Zagreus that he was “constantly in revolt.”²⁶ It was the need to take action and revolt against his actual existence in poverty, as well as the desire to escape from this state of being, that changed his life and made Mersault struggle to find happiness or a sense of authenticity. These needs, desires, and the sense of lack also provided the motive for Mersault to accept Zagreus’ money and help him end his life. Poverty becomes an absolute scandal once life on earth, as Nietzsche relentlessly taught his contemporaries and immediate heirs, has become the only valid principle for action.

²² Camus, *A Happy Death* 34.

²³ Camus 35.

²⁴ The end of *The Outsider* repeats these same ideas about an afterlife and happiness. See specifically pages 114-117.

²⁵ Camus 41.

²⁶ Camus 33.

HUMAN DESIRE, HUMANISM, AND THE WILL TO HAPPINESS

In his treatise on *A Happy Life*, Augustine captured the fundamental principle of all later theories of natural law: “all persons want to be happy; and no persons are happy who do not have what they want.”²⁷ The problem for Augustine, however, was that want or desire of material things involved the possibility of their loss, and hence could not bring true happiness. The old devaluation of matter, body, and the senses meant that human desires, as realities of the material world, and all the needs of the body are ultimately doomed to pass away. Once the transcendent realm has vanished, however, this demotion of material and physical needs is no longer valid. The whole value system is overturned, and nothing can be held up against the urgency of needs and desires. Augustine described in the most powerful terms the importance of the sensuous presence of the world, only to reject it in favor of another, better world. Once the latter has disappeared, the necessity of desire becomes incontrovertible. With this, the immense problem already encountered of how human desires and passions can be accounted for in any moral system becomes paramount. Reconciling reason, the will, the body, and the search for happiness becomes the heart of Camus’ early reflections.

Zagreus’ death provided Mersault with the money that he wanted or thought he needed to satisfy his wants, allowing him to literally escape the world of poverty and enter a different world where the pursuit of happiness becomes possible. As Mersault takes the train north through Bohemia, Camus writes:

This train which was jolting him halfway across Europe suspended him
between two worlds—it had taken him abroad, and would deposit him
somewhere, draw out of a life the very memory of which he wanted to

²⁷ See *Augustine of Hippo Selected Writings* translated by Mary T. Clark (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1984) 163-193. In the Cassiciacum dialogue of *A Happy Life*, Augustine asked those present “Are we therefore in agreement on this point, that no one who does not have what he wants can be happy and not everyone who has what he wants is happy?” 175.

erase and lead him to the threshold of a new world where desire would be king.²⁸

Very logically, given all the philosophical background we have been highlighting, (Nietzsche and Augustine's paradoxical materialism), this escape or exile confronts Mersault with the discovery of a sense of almost mystical union with Nature:

On this earth, restored to the despair of innocence, a traveler lost in a primitive world, he retained contact, and with his fist pressed to his chest, his face flattened against the glass, he calculated his hunger for himself and for the certainty of the splendors dormant within him. He wanted to crush himself into that mud, to re-enter the earth by immersing himself in that clay, to stand on that limitless plain covered with dirt, stretching his arms to the sooty sponge of the sky, as though confronting the superb and despairing symbol of life itself, to affirm his solidarity with the world at its worst, to declare himself life's accomplice even in its thanklessness and its filth.²⁹

It was this very experience that persuaded him to return to Algiers, a rejuvenated being, with a renewed sense of life and a determination to find happiness and love in the world that he knew, free from any burdens of past memories and material chains. Mersault, of course, was able to do this because he was allowed the freedom to live without being held responsible for his murder and its social and legal consequences, unlike Meursault in *The Outsider*. In *A Happy Death*, Camus explores the positive implications of a full Nietzschean philosophy of the life force and free will.

²⁸ Camus 55.

²⁹ Camus 57. Compare this to Feuerbach's comment in his *The Essence of Religion* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004): "The world is not given to us through the act of thinking, not at least through the metaphysical and hyperphysical thinking which abstracts from the real world and founds its true and highest existence upon such abstraction—the world is given to us through life, by perception, by the senses" 24.

As a result of this struggle with freedom, Mersault decides that the will to happiness and the power of love would be the “dark god” that he would serve. He also realizes that in order to have both of these, he would have to submit to Time, but he also recognized that “to come to terms with time was at once the most magnificent and the most dangerous of experiments.”³⁰ Embracing life, love, and Time also meant embracing death and accepting the reality of human mortality without illusions or the hope of an afterlife. It requires of him a stoic acceptance of a conscious death--the title of the second part of the novel. This is strongly emphasized in the episode where he comes upon a dead man on the street in Prague with the gaping hole in his head, while people stand calmly by and one man dances around the body.³¹ This encounter with death forces Mersault to embrace life and creates in him a nostalgic desire for Mediterranean “cities filled with sunlight and women.”³²

The passage from “Natural Death” to “Conscious Death” thus corresponds to an experience of a transvaluation of values, from one’s innocent state of being delivered over to the natural world, without the help of any transcendent resource, to a conscious state where the promises and tragedy inherent in that natural state are accepted and lived to the full.

In “Conscious Death” then, Mersault strives to achieve some earthly form of it in love and solitude. It is here that the transformation Camus performs on the Nietzschean model becomes fully visible. The Will to Power has been transformed into a Will to Life and is now explicitly described as a “Will to Happiness.” Through the character of Mersault, Camus expresses the formula of this will most precisely: that “Happiness implied a choice, and within that choice a concerted will, a lucid desire.”³³ Zagreus’ comment, recalled by Mersault, also spells out one of the deepest truths of Camus’ early thinking: “Not the will to

³⁰ Camus 61.

³¹ This represents the image of the Dance of Death or *Danse Macabre* in literature that expresses the idea that Nature or Death claims all.

³² Camus 54. Having killed Zagreus and then finding himself in exile in the cold North or expelled from sacred nature, this coming face to face with death made Mersault turn back toward the sun and life.

³³ Camus 84.

renounce, but the will to happiness.”³⁴ Later on, Mersault stresses the same idea in equally powerful terms when he tells Catherine:

You make the mistake of thinking you have to choose, that you have to do what you want, that there are conditions for happiness. What matters—all that matters, really—is the will to happiness, a kind of enormous, ever-present consciousness.”³⁵

THE MIND, THE SENSES, AND THE BODY IN NATURE

This consciousness, as it is primarily about reconnecting the human existence with the world and to life, is not the product of an intelligence involved in a process of reasoning that divides Man from Nature and alienates him in a subject/object dichotomy. It is a consciousness that makes the human being an integral part of the world through a refocusing on bodily experience. It is a form of consciousness that, in fact, amounts to a denial of abstract, logical intelligence:

Just as there is a moment when the artist must stop, when the sculpture must be left as it is, the painting untouched—just as a determination *not to know* serves the maker more than all the resources of clairvoyance—so there must be a minimum of ignorance in order to perfect a life in happiness. Those who lack such a thing must set about acquiring it: unintelligence must be earned.³⁶

The second part of the novel is replete with passages that celebrate this union with Nature, which is both simultaneously purely sensuous and quasi-mystical. At the same time,

³⁴ Camus 84.

³⁵ Camus 91.

³⁶ Camus 86.

however, just as Nietzsche's Zarathustra achieves the highest form of consciousness through transformations (as did Dionysus), the perceptual, anti-intellectual return to life is the highest form of intellectuality.³⁷ It puts the human being in touch again with an absolute ground of truth, except that this ground now is perfectly immanent and can be reached simply by trusting the life of the body:

...--to rest one hand on a tree trunk, to take a run on the beach—in order to keep himself intact and conscious. Thus he became one with a life in its pure state, he rediscovered a paradise given only to animals of the least or the greatest intelligence. At the point where the mind denies the mind, he touched his truth and with it his extreme glory, his extreme love.³⁸

In another example, the immanence of life as a principle shared by the body and the world at large is beautifully expressed, and indeed is characteristic of the naturalistic poetry present in many passages of Camus' early writing:

The whole mountain quivered under the light. The cicadas were deafening as the heat assailed them under the oak. Patrice threw himself on the ground and pressed his chest against the stones, inhaling the scorched aroma. Under his belly he could feel the faint throbs of the mountain that seemed to be in labour. This regular pulse and the unrelenting song of the insects between the hot stones finally put him to sleep.³⁹

³⁷ The first part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (New York: Modern Library, 1937) entitled "The Three Metamorphoses" describes the process of human transformation where "the spirit becometh a camel, the camel a lion, and the lion at last a child" 43. Euripides' *The Bacchae* is full of transformations including Dionysus' assuming the form of a bull in Pentheus' mind.

³⁸ Camus 87.

³⁹ Camus 91.

Rather than acting upon Nature and looking at it as an object to be subjugated in the manner of the historical materialists, or looking at it as an idealized form filtered through our categories as in idealism, here, as in much of his early work, Camus describes the power of Nature in what could be termed naturalized Plotinian terms, as creating and animating the human body as one of its emanations. As we have already noted, Camus is also specifically concerned with the difficult moral implications of his view. Since Nature is free of values and provides no explicit source of morality or guilt, humans who submit to their senses are literally innocent in a state of nature. It is only through religion and its hierarchy of values or our projecting our desires and values onto an absolute God of authority that Man becomes guilty.⁴⁰

Motives and punishment have no meaning without values or religious and civil sanctions and laws. Humans in their “natural” state, as beings who are part of Nature, are innocent in an even deeper sense than the inhabitants of the Garden of Eden who were always destined to be expelled from it. Life flows out of Nature, and as such, grounds a purely naturalistic sense of the sacred—one that glorifies the rays of the sun and the emanations of life.⁴¹ At the end of Chapter Four in the second part of the novel in, Camus expresses this thought most clearly:

The evening falling on the world, on the path between the olives and
the gum- trees on the vines and the red soil, near the sea which whispered
softly, this evening flowed into him like a tide. So many evenings had
promised him happiness that to experience this one as happiness itself

⁴⁰ As previously mentioned in the section on Camus’ dissertation, Pelagius believed that birth was a form of grace and that humans could not sin (see page 145).

⁴¹ Paul Henry in “The Place of Plotinus in the History of Thought” in Stephen MacKenna’s translation of Plotinus’ *The Enneads* (London: Penguin, 1991) makes the point that Plotinus’ doctrine of emanation finds its source in Plato’s *Timaeus* (42e) and his principle of “undiminished giving,” which was a “cornerstone in their two systems and the counterpart of the doctrine of emanation” (lxxi). Augustine would later develop his theory of illumination from Plotinus. As the first two chapters have argued, this genealogy finds one of its most eminent expressions in modern literature in the writings of Camus, specifically in his early, Algerian writings. The sun and the emanation of light are central images in Camus’ work. In the “Notes and Variants” by Jean Sarocchi at the end *A Happy Death*, Sarocchi quotes this passage from the original manuscript: “The sun is the real mirror of the world” 129.

made him realize how far he had come, from hope to conquest. In the innocence of his heart, Mersault accepted this green sky and this love-soaked earth with the same thrill of passion and desire as when he had killed Zagreus in the innocence of his heart.⁴²

The sensuous experience of abandonment to Nature through the refocusing on bodily experience also impacts upon other aspects of existence, notably the way humans interact with each other through their bodies and the limitations and contradictions of love. Camus' early, radical naturalism exacted difficult implications for moral judgment and action, as it also does for inter-human relations:

The world always says the same thing. And in that patient truth which proceeds from star to star is established a freedom which releases us from ourselves and from others, as in that other patient truth which proceeds from death to death. Patrice, Catherine, Rose and Claire then grew aware of the happiness born of their abandonment to the world.⁴³

The discovery that the world is the sole ground of truth means both a communal foundation in which humanity can be shared, and, as the quote indicates, a detachment from others. In the case of Camus and earlier materialist thinkers like Feuerbach (see next chapter), Nature restores Man and gives him his true sense of being as "species being."⁴⁴ Humans are separate beings, but the forces of the natural world give them a sense of unity

⁴² Camus 96.

⁴³ Camus 74.

⁴⁴ According to Feuerbach in *Thoughts on Death and Immortality*: "Life is possible and actual only within the determinate and form of the elements, only within the general measure that nature on earth assumes. It is the essence of life itself to exist only on earth, to be possible and actual only within the limitation that nature possesses in the form and shape of the earth... Thus each species of animal and plant is its own kind and measure of life. But nature itself, as terrestrial nature, is the universal, sole, and ultimate measure that supports and embraces the different measures of life" 75-76.

and belonging by making humans a part of something much greater than themselves. As Camus writes elsewhere:

It is as if the suddenly cooler dew of the night were rinsing the signs of solitude from them, delivering them from themselves, and by that tremulous and fugitive baptism restoring them to the world. At this moment, when the night overflows with stars, their gestures are fixed against the great mute face of the sky.⁴⁵

And yet the ultimate conclusion from full immersion in Nature via a dedication to sensuous life is, as indicated earlier, the separation from others. Indeed, this detachment is even, to some extent, a separation from oneself. The abandonment of life through the primacy of the senses leads to a paradoxical form of indifference towards the self. Since it is now fully embraced as a natural entity, the end of the self is inscribed in its flourishing. Lucidity and facing the world with courage and without illusions is a direct extension of sensuous truth, as in the following remark by Mersault that "...he must be conscious without deception, without cowardice—alone, face to face—at grips with his body—eyes open upon death.”⁴⁶

Contrary to the Christian view, for which the ultimate individual salvation was always the whole point of positing absolute transcendence, Camus' position is that to accept life in the natural world without any promise of an afterlife also means accepting the reality that human existence consists of living between the polarity of despair and hope. Only by realizing the truth and facing it with lucidity will we be able to find happiness.⁴⁷ The influence of Nietzsche's insistence on the unity of suffering and joy is clear again in this remark: "And with pain and joy, their hearts learned to hear that double lesson which leads to the happy

⁴⁵ Camus 74.

⁴⁶ Camus 105.

⁴⁷ Dostoevsky quotes a similar idea in the last entry of his *Notebooks* on page 244: "Svidrigalov is despair, the most cynical. Sonia is hope, the most unrealizable...He [Raskolnikov] became passionately attached to both." See Keith Carrabine's "Introduction" to Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* xx.

death.⁴⁸ Another more surprising author who can also be mentioned in this regard is Ludwig Feuerbach, who in his *Thoughts on Death and Immortality* argues that "...joy and pain, as they rise to existence in the experience of the subject, are the principles and basic determinations of all existence. Joy is the feeling of life in life; pain is the feeling of death in life, the feeling of the deprivation of experience."⁴⁹

We can go even further. In Camus' early writing as well as in his later literary work, eternity is solely the province of Nature, which is reflected in the constantly recurring images of stone, the desert, and the sun, or the stars at the end of *The Outsider*. Life and Death constitute the contrasting boundaries that mark out human existence and to not embrace them with equal value or consciousness is to devalue both of them and live inauthentically. The fear of death and the subsequent desire for immortality that religion promises are not only a denial of death, but more importantly, they create a fear of living and an alienation from Nature and the body.⁵⁰

In *A Happy Death*, however, religion is only present as negative background; it is never thematized explicitly.

Mersault summarizes this radical naturalism by claiming that Man's only duty is to be happy and that it doesn't matter whether one lives for two years or twenty because "happiness was the fact that he had existed."⁵¹ This echoes Pelagius' comment in Camus'

⁴⁸ Camus 74.

⁴⁹ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Thoughts on Death and Immortality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) 39. Nietzsche famously discusses the idea of suffering and joy as one of the main symbolic aspects of the God Dionysus and Greek tragedy in *The Birth of Tragedy* (52). According to Walter Kaufman in his *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1974): "Nietzsche makes much of the fact that, as he sees it, suffering is a necessary stage on the way to ultimate pleasure. One cannot have one without the other. Pleasure and pain are 'twins'..." 272. (See the long quote about pain and joy from *The Will to Power* on page 273).

⁵⁰ Both Feuerbach and Nietzsche wrote about Man's desire for immortality as it relates to Christianity. See Van A. Harvey in *Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): "Feuerbach also argued that Christians live only for the hope of life in another world and, hence, have turned their backs on the existing world. But unlike Nietzsche, he argued that Man's faith was rooted not so much in the desire for moral justification of life as in the wish to be free from the limitations of nature" 223.

⁵¹ Camus 105. See the section on Pelagius in Camus' dissertation on page 145.

dissertation that grace existed in merely being born. Against Descartes' motto of "I think, therefore I am," the more fitting expression is the one expounded by Feuerbach: "I have a body, therefore I exist."⁵²

LOVE AND THE DARK GOD OF SEXUALITY

The separation of self from others, like all dimensions of Camus' early sensualism, and indeed, like most Nietzschean principles, is inherently ambiguous and paradoxical. The focus on the life of the body and participation in natural life obviously leads to an emphasis on those experiences which Camus calls the "dark god" of sexuality and love. The novel explores the tensions between attachment and separation, symbolized most clearly by the name of the house Mersault shares with the women after his return from Northern Europe: *The House Above the World*.⁵³

This house serves as a mirror in which they can reflect upon happiness, Nature, and love. The most important effect of the trip to Prague was that it created in Mersault an intense craving for a woman's love and a renewed desire for happiness. While he realized his past attempts to be happy were merely a form of playing, after killing Zagreus and leaving for the North, he learns that he had never "sought happiness with a conscious and deliberate desire."⁵⁴ His affairs with women had primarily been for his vanity and pride--not for the joy of life. Now, however, this "dark god" that he would serve would force him to join the will

⁵² See also the first words of *The Essence of Christianity* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1989): "The world is not given to us through the act of thinking, not at least through the metaphysical and hyperphysical thinking which abstracts from the real world and founds its true and highest existence upon such abstraction—the world is given to us through life, by perception, by the senses" 1. In *Thoughts on Death and Immortality*, Feuerbach also comments: "The organic body itself is the species, the essence, of your determinate, singly existing body (94)...only the species, the substance of this body, is the ground of death" 96.

⁵³ See Camus 64, 66, and 76.

⁵⁴ Camus 61.

to happiness with the love of life and by doing so, his violence, revolt, and despair would unite with a burning desire for living through love.⁵⁵

The problem that Mersault discovers, however, is that as a human quality, love also has its limitations when the object of that love is another person and a separate finite being. Again, the experience of detranscendentalization brings with it new difficulties if we compare this with Augustine's idea that it is only the love of God that is permanent and infinite.⁵⁶ The love of humans is tied to the natural world. One must accept the fact that the material world changes and that earthly existence is controlled by the cycles of life and death. Sexual Love is impermanent—a point brought out in the conversation among the women and in Rose's comment that "marriage dissolves love."⁵⁷ Mersault makes a similar point when he tells Catherine not to look for happiness in love or in a man, but to "find happiness in yourself."⁵⁸

Through the discussions among the people in *The House Above the World*, or *The House of Happiness* as Mersault calls it, he becomes aware of the limits of human love and the fact that while it can initially liberate a person, it can also restrict them and be the source of unhappiness for the people involved. Camus makes Mersault discover "the cruel paradox by which we always deceive ourselves twice about the people we love—first to their advantage when they are an object of his imagination, and then to their disadvantage" as a result of his

⁵⁵ Camus writes on page 62: "...it seemed that by caressing this life, all his powers of love and despair would unite. This was his poverty, that was his sole wealth."

⁵⁶ Augustine makes this remark about happiness in *A Happy Life*: "Then it must always be something enduring, not depending on chance, not subject to misfortunes, for we cannot have whatever is moral and transient whenever we wish it, and as long as we wish to have it" 175. He then asks "Does God seem to be eternal and abiding forever?" and when Licentius agrees, Augustine concludes, "Therefore... whoever possesses God is happy" 176. Hannah Arendt in her book *Love and Saint Augustine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) says that for Augustine "Man cannot reach either perfection or happiness as long as he lives in this world. He can only strain forward to it (*extensus esse*) and then come to terms with the world. And the order of love prescribes the rules, as it were, according to which this provisional reconciliation with the world and the present is to be achieved. However, insofar as this well-ordered love, derived from the absolute future, is still supposed to remain love (namely, the desiring and caring for something for its own sake), it is bound to founder" 41.

⁵⁷ Camus 69. He also makes the comment in *Notebooks 1935-1951*: People insist on confusing marriage and love on the one hand, happiness and love on the other. But there is nothing in common. This is why it happens, the lack of love being more frequent than love, that some marriages are happy" 228

⁵⁸ Camus 77.

pride.⁵⁹ These were the two poles of feelings between which he oscillated when dealing with an object of love, by first projecting onto them his desires and fantasies and then making them an object of control. In a clear statement to the woman he married (and would later leave), Mersault summarizes the ambiguity of love and sexuality against a larger truth found in life and human nature:

Believe me, there is no such thing as great suffering, great regret, great memory... Everything is forgotten, even a great love. That's what's sad about life, and also what's wonderful about it. There's only a way of looking at things, a way that comes to you every once in a while. That's why it's good to have had love in your life after all; to have had an unhappy passion—it gives you an alibi for the vague despairs we all suffer from.⁶⁰

DEATH WITHOUT GOD

The last chapter of the novel starts with a long description of the cycle of the seasons of Nature—the process that begins with the fecundity of spring and ends with the cold and sterility of winter. At this point, Mersault begins the last stages of his life. He uses this natural process of change to reflect on his existence, his relationship to the world, and to confront the fear of dying with the same level of consciousness and lucidity that he gave to the will to life and happiness.⁶¹ In the end at the time of Mersault's death, Camus reverts to the image of stones that he so often used in his early stories. The novel ends with the

⁵⁹ Camus 83.

⁶⁰ Camus 81. He also writes on page 81: "He recovered his complicity with the world, but by resting his hand on Lucienne's shoulder. Taking refuge in humanity, he escaped his secret dread. Within two days, however, Lucienne bored him."

⁶¹ This concept of lucidity is a central theme in Camus' works. Compare Camus' idea of lucidity with Feuerbach's idea of consciousness in his *Thoughts on Death and Immortality* on pages 46-49.

following line: “and stone among the stone, he returned in the joy of his heart to the truth of the motionless worlds.”⁶² In essence, Mersault returned to the eternity of the earth and back into the matrix of Nature.

This cyclical vision of Nature is a reoccurring pattern in the novel. Descriptions of the seasons--the eternally recurring aspects of Nature--are used as backdrops to the character's frequent desire to start over again. Earlier, for instance, Mersault had remarked that “As if by writing zero, he was starting over again,”⁶³ and that “By making the gesture of a fresh start, by becoming aware of his past, he had defined what he wanted and what he did not want to be.”⁶⁴ This is a theme that will be famously repeated in the last chapter of *The Outsider*. The Pagan, naturalist worldview underlying *A Happy Death* is one in which humans are seen as being an integral part of the cycle of Nature and are thus promised not only the destruction inherent in life cycles, but also rebirth and eternal return.

The alienation that Mersault felt in Northern Europe came from his separation from the natural world he was born into. This exile represents the real meaning of the word *absurd* as “not fitting in” in the most sensuous or bodily sense. The return to his homeland allows Mersault to again find the strength to engage in the Will to Happiness. The fact that the novel ends on this notion of Nature's cyclical logic is tremendously important for the ultimate moral, existential message of the text. It implies that the abandonment to sensuous life and the rediscovery of the natural ground of human existence do not equate with any determinism or fatalism, but ultimately, form the basis for the only realistic sense of freedom.

In consistent Pelagian logic, Camus has Mersault declare that Fate is not the condition that you are born into, but what you make of your relationship to the world: “A man is not born strong, weak, or decisive. He becomes strong, he becomes lucid. Fate is not in man but

⁶² Camus 106. For a discussion of the Camus' use of the imagery of stone, see Walter A. Strauss' “Albert Camus, Stone-Mason.” *MLN*. 77: 3 (1962): 268-281.

⁶³ Camus 62.

⁶⁴ Camus 84.

around him.”⁶⁵ Man’s only relationship is between his body and the natural world, not one where responsibility can be projected onto an abstract God or where religion and the hopes of an afterlife can assuage the fears of death. The Will to Life, The Will to Truth, and the Will to Happiness are what make humans heroic in the face of tragic existence and give life its values, while the denial of these devalues human actuality.

Camus’ very first texts, his academic dissertation, and his first novel *A Happy Death* are very important because they establish the foundation upon which he was able to contrast the Christian and the Pagan worldviews in ways that would define his literary and philosophical vocabulary and imagery. These works directed him towards a specific kind of materialism that can be aptly called sensualist, which Camus would continue to explore in the two remaining cycles of his work, in the philosophy of the Absurd and the philosophy of Revolt.⁶⁶ In the first cycle, Camus attempts to delineate the structure of the fundamental triangle of Nature, God, and Man and demarcate their boundaries. The struggle to find meaning and moral values in Man’s relationship with the world when the Christian ideas of God and the hope of immortality can no longer be sustained leaves humans to contend with the stark realities of Nature and a finite World.⁶⁷ This tragic form of consciousness is then counterbalanced by the rediscovery of the positivity of sensuous experience and the facticity of natural life.

⁶⁵ Camus 101. In his *Metaphysical Christianity and Neoplatonism*, Camus states that “Man, according to Pelagius, was created free. He is able to do Good or Evil as he wishes. This freedom is an emancipation from God” 145. He then goes on to quote Augustine’s *Against Julian* (Vol. XXXIX): “Freedom of the will, by which man is freed from God, lies in the possibility of committing sin or refraining from it” 145.

⁶⁶ Camus mentions in his *Notebooks 1935-1951*, that he finished the first cycle on February 21, 1941: “Finished Sisyphus. The three absconds are now complete. Beginnings of liberty” 189, and the second cycle of *The Rebel* on March 7, 1951: “Finished the first writing of *The Rebel*. With this book the first two cycles come to an end. Thirty-seven years old. And now, can creation be free?” 270.

⁶⁷ In one of the interviews in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, Camus remarks, “I don’t believe in God, that’s true, But I am not an atheist nonetheless” 320. On the subject of immortality, he wrote, “I don’t want to believe that death is the gateway to another life. For me, it is a closed door” (76), and “It assured me that but for my love and the wondrous cry of these stones, there was not meaning in anything. The world is beautiful, and outside it there is no salvation” 103.

In the last cycle of the Absurd and Revolt, Camus will seek to redefine, on the basis of this new premise, Man's relationship to social institutions and political ideologies, and to address anew the problems of the individual's essential freedom, and the moral values that should guide his actions. The Absurd arises as a result of Man confronting the finite world and death alone, without hopes of an afterlife or immortality. As Camus declared, the "secret of his universe" was to "imagine God without the immortality of the soul...I have a sense of the sacred and I don't believe in a future life..."⁶⁸ It is precisely this condition that lies at the heart of those works that he called his first cycle. The development of his philosophical thought moves from his early focus on the religious and the metaphysical to a more explicit development of materialism and the Absurd.

This philosophy of the Absurd and the extreme limits Man can go to in his need for unity and freedom become the focus of his most famous play *Caligula*, as we shall see in Chapter Four. This play will mark Camus' attempt to fully explore the tragic contradictions that beset the otherwise justified desire and will for happiness, freedom, and immortality when these needs are thwarted, and when humans seek moral boundaries that Nature cannot provide. As always, Camus does not shy away from the difficulties raised by his philosophical choices—indeed, he faces them head on. The decisive turn to naturalism and sensualism as the responses to Christian metaphysics leaves humans with a massive question mark concerning their ability to conduct their lives. They are left with tragic moral quandaries and two very fundamental questions: What will now constitute the boundaries of free will and action, and how can humans define the concept of justice on their own?

⁶⁸ Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays* 364.

CHAPTER THREE: CAMUS' PHILOSOPHY OF THE ABSURD

Within the intellectual context in which Camus' philosophy was formed, one might argue that the moral values attached to a system of thought and how these values relate to human action are connected to what might be called the Tragic Paradigm, defined as the relationship between Nature, God, and Man. The history of tragedy and the philosophy of the tragic, for instance, which had such a significant impact on the development of Western culture and on Camus more specifically, derive primarily from how this relationship is defined, the shifting importance of these concepts in relation to each other, and how they determine human freedom. Man's existence and his philosophical ideas largely reflect how he defines himself against God and Nature, and the power and freedom he actually has, thinks he has, or desires. Camus' entire work focuses on these changing relationships between Nature, God, and Man, and how individuals react to human limitations through both metaphysical and political revolt, while trying to find meaning and a sense of happiness and authenticity.

It is also out of this paradigm that Man has traditionally found the basis for the idea of the sacred, morality, ethics, and most importantly, natural law theories. Whether one considers morality as *a priori*, as Kant did, or as an expression of eternal laws based on the belief in a God as an absolute authority; or whether one considers morality as deriving solely from human thought and action, as materialists and the atheist existentialists contend, this tripartite structure must be examined to determine the source of the power and authority of moral principles in a particular era. As a materialist, Camus places most of his focus on Nature, Man, and the body as a mediating point between the two. However, God and religion are somehow always present in the background, if only because of the void they have left after their demise. The very notion of the divine is unavoidable, whether it represents a divine being coexisting with Nature as its creator; as a being separate from Nature or as Nature

itself; in the form of something considered sacred; as an illusory creation of Man; or as an idea that exists and then is negated, as in the Absurd.

In this chapter, I focus on the basic premises of Camus' views of the tragic paradigm and the fundamental intuitions at the core of his next cycle of works that contain *The Outsider*, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and *The Plague*.¹ I am arguing, therefore, that in order to get a full grasp of his philosophy of the Absurd, it is essential to see how it relates to the very specific way in which Camus constructs his own concept of the tragic. In fact, I will also claim that this is necessary to understand the later materialist, existential, socialist, and humanist ideas in *The Rebel*. Against the backdrop of Camus' critical reconstruction of the main tenets of Christian philosophy and theology concerning Nature, God, and Man, Camus develops his own tragic paradigm, which the idea of the Absurd embodies. By considering the Absurd as a tragic construct, we get a clearer understanding of the basis of his moral thinking.

In order to better define Camus' understanding of this paradigm, it is important to clarify the main philosophical references from which he drew inspiration. While it is true, as Roger Quillot has noted, that Camus' notebooks and his philosophical essays do not clearly indicate the works of philosophy he read nor the depth of those readings, one can look at the different philosophers that he mentions and their frequency in an attempt to identify the influences on Camus' thinking and the main sources of his ideas.² We already noted in the previous chapter the importance that Nietzsche had for him. What I will try to show in this chapter is that there is also a deep, insufficiently-noted similarity in thought that he shares with the tradition of materialists, utopian socialists, as well as other existential and humanist philosophers, specifically those cited in the Introduction to this dissertation who were opposed to Christianity and its ideology. Two of the most important philosophers or

¹ To recall, Camus outlined four cycles of work in his notebooks that he planned to write, which consisted of The Absurd, Revolt, Nemesis or Limits, and Love. The first three cycles all reflect the tragic paradigm and Man's search to find boundaries to human action in an absurd world.

² For Roger Quillot's comment see *Notebooks 1935-1951*: 65.

thinkers in this regard, who have escaped critical scrutiny so far, are Ludwig Feuerbach and the Marquis de Sade.³ By comparing Camus' ideas on the tragic paradigm with their ideas, especially their specific conceptions of Nature, one can clarify much more precisely the basic premises of Camus' philosophy of the Absurd.

In this chapter, I focus more particularly on Feuerbach and the striking similarities between Camus and Feuerbach in respect to their views of Nature, God, and Man, notably in relation to the great philosophical importance they placed on the body and the experience of love. Like Sade, Feuerbach was a direct heir of the Enlightenment materialists (philosophers like d'Holbach, Diderot and La Mettrie), but he also prepared the way for the most influential materialist of the next century. Emphasizing the as yet unnoticed parallelisms between Camus and Feuerbach on the underlying features of the tragic condition helps to reveal the rich philosophical context from which the most famous of Camus' ideas, the Absurd, emerged. Sade, Feuerbach, and Nietzsche, like Camus, attempted to redefine the traditional Christian construct of the relationship between Nature, God, and Man by placing the emphasis squarely on human freedom and the individual in order to change Man's existential perceptions and make humans more responsible for creating their own moral values.⁴ For all four thinkers, the starting point was a redefinition of the sacred and the primary role of Nature.

³ Camus refers specifically to both Feuerbach and the Marquise de Sade in *The Rebel*. For Feuerbach, see pages 136-137, and for the section on Sade see pages 36-47.

⁴ For a useful reminder of the place of Feuerbach in that intellectual tradition, see Ivan Sviták, "The Sources of Socialist Humanism" in *Socialist Humanism: An International Symposium* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966): "Feuerbach reversed the theological point of view and proclaimed that man was God, thus becoming one of the discoverers of modern man. Feuerbach's anthropology, a universal science of man, was the peak of pre-Marxist humanism" 18.

THE SACRED IN NATURE

Let us first sketch the way in which Camus came to attach a sense of the sacred to Nature itself, as a result of his early confrontation with ancient philosophy and Christian metaphysics in his initial prose work. The previous chapter already showed through the analysis of his first novel draft, *A Happy Death*, the importance of the sacred in Nature for Camus in Algiers. More generally, this idea of the sacred is present in all of Camus' early work in the lyrical essays *Nuptials at Tipasa*, *The Wind at Djemila*, *Summer in Algiers*, and *The Desert*. In these Algerian texts, Nature is viewed as a sacred source of life, beauty, and truth.⁵

For the young Camus, Nature is a source of value in an animistic sense of emanating a force that acts upon us in a powerful way. Because of this, any sense of eternity stems solely from the present interaction between the body and the natural world.⁶ Nature for Camus exists as the source of all life, the source of Man's being, as well as the source of his end. Instead of fleeing from its devouring aspect, Camus expresses a compelling desire to embrace and to immerse himself in the physical world, its beauty, and the truth contained in the overwhelming powers of Nature.⁷ Relating his materialist view of Nature to Plotinus' concept of Unity in God in the metaphysical realm and the soul's return to its lost homeland,

⁵ The early *Notebooks* and the early essays in *Noces* are filled with references to the relationship between Nature, Beauty, and Truth. In *Notebooks 1935-1937*, Camus writes, "The world is beautiful and this is everything. The great truth which it patiently teaches me is that neither the mind nor even the heart has any importance" 5.

⁶ Camus comments in *Lyrical and Critical Essays* on Jean Grenier and himself: "Once again, for a young man brought up outside traditional religions, this prudent, allusive approach was perhaps the only way to direct him toward a deeper meditation on life. Personally, I had no lack of gods: the sun, the night, the sea... But these are gods of enjoyment; they fill one, then they leave one empty" ("On Jean Grenier's *Les Iles*") 328. For Camus, Nature's emanations are primarily of an aesthetic quality.

⁷ This desire for an almost mystical immersion in Nature can clearly be seen in the quotes that were given in the previous section on *A Happy Death* and numerous other examples in his early *Notebooks* as in this passage: "When it's bathed in sunlight, when the sun beats down, I want to love and kiss, to flow into bodies as into patches of light, to bathe myself in flesh and sunlight" (*Notebooks 1935-1951*, 68), or in this passage from *Noces*: "How many hours have I spent crushing absinthe leaves, caressing ruins, trying to match my breathing with the world's tumultuous sighs!" *Lyrical and Critical Essays* 67.

Camus asks, “What is strange about finding on earth the unity Plotinus longed for? Unity expresses itself here in terms of sea and sky.”⁸

At a time of tremendous expansion of industry and a growing faith in the powers of science, these early essays are free of any instrumental attitude to Nature, where Man sees it as something to control for his own advantage rather than viewing it for its intrinsic and aesthetic worth.⁹ In *Noces* (1938), in particular, Camus assigns Nature a sacred value, approaching it with a sense of awe and wonder at the power of its elements and the beauty of its manifestations. In these essays the vastness of Nature and the power of its beauty bestow on it the attributes of a God. Nature and God merge into the one sense of divinity that Man must confront, and in which he has no choice but to acknowledge both the source of his existence and its eventual end.

The result of this for Camus is a stoic need for lucidity in the face of death and, simultaneously, the courage to celebrate life and the body. Both sides of this naturalist coin are conjoined in the rejection of a life grounded in the belief in immortality or the hopes in a future life. As he writes in *The Desert*: “The immortality of the soul, it is true, engrosses many noble minds. But this is because they reject the body, the only truth that is given them, before using up its strength.”¹⁰ Camus considered death not as a pathway to another life, but a point of finality.¹¹ The life of the body finds its greatest expression and culmination through its immersion in the power of Nature.

By acknowledging a sense of the sacred in Nature and Man’s capacity to relate to it, Camus establishes a horizontal relationship between the two. His dissertation helped him to concretely compare and contrast this “immanent” view of the relation between Nature, the

⁸ See “*Noces*” in *Lyrical and Critical Essays* 90.

⁹ For more information on the instrumental attitude to Nature, see Richard Norman, *Is Nothing Sacred?* (Oxford: Routledge, 2004) 7-27.

¹⁰ See *Lyrical and Critical Essays* 95.

¹¹ Camus writes in “The Wind at Djemila” in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*: “I do not want to believe that death is the gateway to another life. For me, it is a closed door” 76.

divine (as inherent in Nature), and Man to the vertical relations of all classical metaphysicians from Plato and Plotinus to the Christian theologians. Instead of the vertical hierarchy and the idea of transcendence culminating in the Christian tradition, Camus grounds humans in the natural world, and by doing so, reconnects with the materialist tradition. His moral philosophy derives directly from this materialist/naturalistic worldview, since the latter places humans at the center and makes them primarily responsible for creating their conscious world, its values, and indeed explains how they come to create abstract concepts, in particular, the master concept of God.

The materialist position helps not only to explain why humans necessarily create false concepts, such as that of a transcendent God, but it also explains the hold that such abstractions have on their consciousness. The materialist thinkers negate God and denounce religion and yet, God and religion remained one of their major concerns, precisely because of their continued importance in human existence. As Camus commented to an interviewer “I don’t believe in God, that’s true. But I am not an atheist nonetheless. I would even agree...that there is something vulgar...yes... ..worn out about being against religion.”¹²

THE FEUERBACHIAN PRECEDENT

This rejection of Christian metaphysics does not end in a reductive materialist position, but rather in an “immanentist” rediscovery of the “sacredness” of Nature that had been anticipated by Feuerbach. In his most famous work *The Essence of Religion*, Feuerbach gave the most explicit and best-developed account of the way in which religions “grows out” of nature, due to the structure of human faculties and needs, as well as the sense of awe felt by

¹² Camus *Lyrical and Critical Essays* 320. One would also have to add Freud’s name to this list of thinkers, especially in regards to his *Future of Illusion* (1927). As Van A. Harvey states in *Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion*: “For of these atheists [Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud], as Ricour has observed, their aim was not solely to destroy religion; rather, they wanted to ‘clear the horizon for a more authentic word, for a new reign of Truth, not only by means of a ‘destructive’ critique, but by the invention of an art of interpreting.’ Consequently, they viewed themselves in quasi-religious terms: as prophets and evangelists, as denouncers of mystification and heralds of good news” 5.

humans beings as they contemplate their place within the vast expanse of Nature. As he writes: “Nature is the first original object of religion...,”¹³ and “the being without human nature, without human qualities and without human individuality is in reality nothing but Nature.”¹⁴ Or elsewhere: “The existence of nature is not, as Theism imagines, based upon the existence of God but vice versa, the existence of God, or rather the belief in his existence, is only based upon the existence of Nature.”¹⁵ For Feuerbach:

All qualities or definitions of God which make him an objective, real being are only qualities *abstracted from Nature*, which presuppose and define Nature, and which therefore would not exist if Nature did not exist. It is true, if we abstract from nature: If in our thoughts or our imagination we destroy her existence, i.e., if we shut our eyes and extinguish all images of natural things reflected by our senses and conceive Nature not with our senses (not *in concreto* as the philosophers say) there is left a being, a totality of qualities such as infinity, power, unity, necessity, eternity; but this being which is left after deducting all qualities and phenomena reflected by our senses is in truth nothing but the abstract essence of Nature, or nature ‘*in abstract,*’ in thought.¹⁶

Feuerbach thus does not consider Nature to be simply a product of the human mind, ego, or an abstraction. As a result, he represents for Camus the antithesis of Hegel, probably the most important philosophical reference for his contemporaries, who developed an idealist

¹³ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Religion*. Trans. Alexander Loos (New York: Prometheus Books, (2004) 2.

¹⁴ Feuerbach 1.

¹⁵ Feuerbach 8. Freud expresses a similar idea in the *Future of an Illusion* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961) when talking about the development of the idea of God out of Totemism and the need for a protective animal spirit (see page 23).

¹⁶ Feuerbach 23.

account of the emergence and structures of the natural realm.¹⁷ For Feuerbach, “Nature is not only the first and original object but also *the lasting source, the continuous, although hidden background of religion.*”¹⁸

Furthermore, Feuerbach emphasized like no other classical philosopher the naturalist ground of humanity. He tirelessly argued that the qualities and traits of mankind do not come from a Divine Being above as in Christian natural law, but from “the very depths of Nature.”¹⁹ And “... above all man is a being who does not exist without light, without air, without water, without earth, without food,--he is, in short, a being dependent on nature.”²⁰ Because of this, divinity is no longer seen to derive from God through Nature to Man, but rather, any sense of divinity has its source in Nature and Nature alone: “The Divine Being which is revealed in Nature, is nothing but Nature herself, revealing and representing herself with irresistible power as a Divine Being.”²¹ And since Man’s existence and his thinking both have their source in Nature, he partakes in the sense of the sacred through this total immersion in Nature.

For Feuerbach, as for Camus, Nature therefore is the source and the matrix of Being, not only for human existence, but also for the concept of God and religion. Feuerbach is famous for his detailed explanation of the way in which God and religion are products of Man’s imagination, will, and affective dependency. Less noted is his emphasis on the naturalistic *content* of religion and religious feeling. Feuerbach not only explains through a naturalistic account of human faculties the *origin* of religious feelings, but he is also interested in the hermeneutics of religion, that is, he tries to explain in reference to Nature the very *content* of

¹⁷ See Feuerbach 8-9. In *Notebooks 1942-1951*, Camus specifically discusses this contrast: “Hegel against nature. Cf. Logic, 36-40. Why nature is abstract. What is concrete is the mind. It is the great adventure of intelligence—the one that eventually kills everything” 158.

¹⁸ Feuerbach 8.

¹⁹ Feuerbach 3.

²⁰ Feuerbach 2.

²¹ Feuerbach 7.

religion. Anticipating the animism prevalent in Camus' early essays or the one we encountered in *A Happy Death*, Feuerbach writes:

...these ancient nations...were fully justified in worshiping the mountains, trees, animals, rivers and fountains of their respective countries as divine beings; for their whole individuality and existence were exclusively based upon the particularity of their country and its nature—just as he who recognizes the universe as his home, and himself as a part of it, transfers the universal character of his being into his conception of God.²²

A quote like this one can be seen as an important anticipation and explanation of the many passages in Camus' lyrical essays and the descriptions in *A Happy Death*, where the awe and passion with which believers relate to their Gods is transposed to Nature in general, and more specifically, to the particular features of the Algerian landscape in which Camus grew up.

By separating Nature and God into two entities, however, Man objectifies himself in the deity and reflects this God in himself, especially when this Being is considered as One God rather than a plurality. As Feuerbach writes:

The belief that in nature another being is manifested, distinct from Nature herself, or that Nature is filled and governed by a being different from herself, is in reality identical with the belief that spirits, demons, devils & c. manifested themselves through man, at least in a certain state, and that they possess him; it is in very truth the belief, that nature is possessed by a strange, spiritual being. And indeed Nature, viewed in the light of such a belief is really possessed by a spirit, but this spirit is the spirit of man, his imagination, in his soul, which transfers itself involuntarily into Nature and makes her a symbol and mirror of his being.²³

²² Feuerbach 3.

²³ Feuerbach 8.

Both Feuerbach and Camus in their early works uncover in Man's relationship to Nature the source of the concept of an objectified being in the form of God or Gods, and they both emphasize the consequences and the limits that this religious idea places on Man's existence and his potentialities. Their attacks are directed against the traditional and still powerful hierarchy of Plotinus or Christian divine natural law, where God is seen as the First Cause. The difference between them, however, is that while Feuerbach acknowledges the necessity of a transcendental idea of God as an external being who is both immeasurable and infinite (while of course considering religion to be an illusion), Camus emphasizes the consequences of the untenability of a personified being separate from Nature. It constitutes the source of the Absurd for Camus. This is clearly expressed in his statement that: "Torn between the world that does not suffice and God who is lacking, the absurd mind passionately chooses the world."²⁴

THE CONCEPT OF UNITY, THE GAP, AND THE ABSURD

The Feuerbachian elements in Camus are not limited to the naturalistic anthropology (a theory of human nature and human faculties), or the naturalistic account of religion in terms of its origin and its content. One also finds in Feuerbach the premises of what Camus will later articulate as the conceptual structure of the Absurd. The need for a personified God and the development from polytheism to monotheism are for both Feuerbach and Camus a reflection of Man's innate desire and need for unity. Feuerbach had already explained that:

The Theists have declared the doctrine of the unity of God a
revealed doctrine of supernatural origin, without considering that
the source of monotheism is in man, that the source of God's unity

²⁴ Camus, *Notebooks 1942-1951*: 45-46.

is the unity of the human conscience and mind.²⁵

And that unity, Feuerbach added, is not only a given structure of the human mind, but also a requirement for creatures who are essentially vulnerable. This was the source of the intense human craving for a unified Being outside themselves that would pacify their need for unity inside. Of course, this same human desire for unity, meaning, and certainty is one of the central themes in Camus' work, which he repeats over and over again in his philosophical essays and in his notebooks. In a passage that is strikingly reminiscent of Feuerbach, Camus states that for Man:

...consciousness is the hardest thing in the world to maintain...

So he perceives the real problem, even without God, is the problem of psychological unity (the only problem really raised by the operation of the absurd is that of the metaphysical unity of the world and the mind) and inner peace.²⁶

And in *The Rebel* he writes:

There is not one human being who, above a certain elementary level of consciousness, does not exhaust himself in trying to find formulas or attitudes that will give his existence the unity it lacks.²⁷

Whether this craving for unity takes the form of God, religion, and love; rational creations such as philosophical and scientific systems; political and religious ideologies; art and literature; or practical forms of action in revolt, rebellion, or terrorism, it is, according to Camus, the most prevalent of human traits. As *The Myth of Sisyphus* puts it: "That nostalgia for unity, that appetite for the absolute illustrates the essential impulse of the human

²⁵ Feuerbach 42.

²⁶ Camus, *Notebooks* 1942-1951: 10.

²⁷ Camus, *The Rebel* 262. In a Note in the same work he writes: "Hegel saw clearly that the philosophy of the enlightenment wanted to deliver man from the irrational. Reason reunites mankind while the irrational destroys unity" 131.

drama.”²⁸ The drama that Camus speaks of is that of Man’s insecure relationship to the vastness, power, and chaos of Nature. In another great passage in *The Rebel* he writes:

This passion which lifts the mind above the commonplaces of
a dispersed world, from which it nevertheless cannot free itself,
is the passion for unity. It does not result in mediocre efforts to
escape, however, but in the most obstinate demands. Religion or
crime, every human endeavor in fact, obeys this unreasonable desire
and claims to give life a form it does not have. The same impulse,
which can lead to the adoration of the heavens or the destruction
of man, also leads to creative literature, which derives its serious
content from this source.²⁹

Man’s consciousness is thereby heightened and shaped by the confrontation with Nature and the world. In turn, this intentional consciousness projects its desires, fears, and needs onto both these objects.³⁰ The human condition stems from these interactions between the human mind and an obstreperous Nature in which individuals attempt to find cohesion and certainty, while also coming to terms with the limitations of their consciousness. This, as is well known, is the basic source of the Absurd: “And these two certainties—my appetite for the absolute and for unity and the impossibility of reducing this world to a rational and reasonable principle—I also know that I cannot reconcile them.”³¹ From these irreconcilable polarities, humans are forced to face this experience of the Absurd.

²⁸ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 13.

²⁹ Camus, *The Rebel* 262.

³⁰ This projection onto Nature or onto God is not only that of consciousness but also that of the human heart or feelings, as well as Man’s need for mastery and control. As Feuerbach writes “Really, man has made nature already subservient and subdued her to himself by assimilating her to his feelings and subduing her to his passions” *The Essence of Religion* 26.

³¹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 38. This also reflects the theme of epistemology or the limits of human knowledge in this work, and it also lies at the heart of Camus’ aesthetics and the difference between the ability to know Nature’s secrets or laws and the appreciation of its beauty or forms.

Humans are limited creatures in their knowledge and their existence when facing the vastness of the world. Most of all, this limitation arises from their will and their desire to be just as infinite and unlimited as Nature. Camus reiterates this in *The Myth of Sisyphus* when he “acknowledges the feeling that all true knowledge is impossible.”³² He also writes:

So long as the mind keeps silent in the motionless world of its hopes, everything is reflected and arranged in the unity of its nostalgia. But with its first move this world cracks and tumbles: an infinite number of shimmering fragments is offered to the understanding. We must despair of ever reconstructing the familiar, calm surface which would give us peace of heart. After so many centuries of inquiries, so many abdications among thinkers, we are well aware that this is true for all our knowledge...³³

This passage shows very clearly how the existential experience of the Absurd is not just an experience of the limits of knowledge, but also relates intimately to the sensualism we discussed in earlier chapters. What humans crave is “peace of heart,” something that Feuerbach already recognized and described as human wishes and the “longings” and “leadings” of the heart.³⁴ This need stems from the gap that opens up between the experience of Nature as ultimate ground and the incapacity to fully make sense of it. The sensuous experiences we referred to earlier, where the body returns to its natural basis and to the “familiar, calm surface” of the world’s elements, are ways to close the gap, beyond the psychological despair and epistemological failure entailed in the experience of the Absurd.

³² *The Myth of Sisyphus* begins with this fundamental assumption that “the method defined here acknowledges the feeling that all true knowledge is impossible” (9); “It is essential to consider as a constant point of reference in this essay the regular hiatus between what we fancy we know and what we really know, practical assent and simulated ignorance which allows us to live with ideas which, if we truly put them to the test, ought to upset our whole life” (14), and “I realize that if through science I can seize phenomena and enumerate them, I cannot, for all that, comprehend the world” 15.

³³ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 14.

³⁴ Feuerbach 140-147.

As Camus writes in *Carnets III*: “the absurd was not in this world or in us but in this contradiction between the world and our experience.”³⁵ This gap between Man and Nature is what humans attempt to bridge through a conscious effort at some form of unity.³⁶ The problem is this “divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints, my nostalgia for unity, this fragmented universe and the contradiction that bind them together.”³⁷ And yet, Man remains an existent in Nature, and in some exceptional experiences (sensuous immersion in the world, love, and sex) he can briefly retrieve the lost unity.

THE POST-KANTIAN PREDICAMENT

The proximity of Camus’ conceptual structure of the Absurd to the Feuerbachian model alerts us to the fact that an insufficiently explored philosophical source of, or at the very least, tradition germane to Camus’ philosophy is that of post-Kantianism. Camus’ vision of the gap between Man’s consciousness and the world, for example, could be shown to reflect Fichte’s point in his various *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre* where the fundamental question of the relationship between the certainty of the individual consciousness and the realm of the not-conscious is explored in systematic fashion. Fichte’s answer is that the I (*das Ich*) as self-positing I is the foundation of our being and consciousness: The I posits itself in the world and by doing so it grounds its own being, but this in turn automatically creates the Not-I (*das Nicht-Ich*). In other words, the world (the Not-I) is postulated as existing, yet

³⁵ Camus, *Carnets III: Mars 1951-Décembre 1959* (Paris: Gallimard) 25: “De même que l’absurde n’était pas dans le monde ou en nous mais dans cette contradiction entre le monde et notre expérience...” In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he restates this as “...I can therefore say that the Absurd is not in man (if such a metaphor could have a meaning) nor in the world, but in their presence together” 23.

³⁶ Hence the subject/object division that consciousness creates between Man and Nature and the problem between thought, action, and instinct that Camus discusses in *The Rebel*. Reminiscent of Jean Grenier in his essays in *Islands*, Camus writes in *The Myth of Sisyphus*: “If I were a tree among trees, a cat among animals, this life would have a meaning, or rather this problem would not arise, for I should belong to this world. I should *be* this world to which I am now opposed by my whole consciousness and my whole insistence upon familiarity” 38.

³⁷ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 37.

independent, by the acting subject. As Fichte writes “But a ground always lies outside of what it grounds; i.e., it is contrasted with or opposed to it,”³⁸ and “More specifically, in relationship to being, the subject in question is the acting subject.”³⁹ What lies outside of and helps to define the I is the Not-I that gives rise to the consciousness and grounds the possibility of both:

Insofar as the I exists only for itself, a being outside of the I must also necessarily arise for the I at the same time. The former contains within itself the ground of the latter, the latter is conditioned by the former. Our self-consciousness is necessarily connected with a consciousness of something that is supposed to be something other than ourselves.⁴⁰

This opposition between the I and the Not-I sets up the same contrasting structure as that between Nature and Man, which makes up the fundamental structure that Camus articulates in *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel*. Most importantly, this gap also points to the opposition between the unlimited idea of abstract Being and that of the limited, yet conscious, animal that is Man. Feuerbach directly inherits this problematic and translates it into his naturalistic language: “to be produced, to come into life, is nothing else but to be individualized,”⁴¹ Such reflections emerging from Kant’s ground-breaking transcendental questioning lead directly to the thinkers whose influence on existentialist and absurdist thought are much more readily acknowledged and studied--notably Schopenhauer and his *principium individuationis* or Nietzsche’s principle of the Apollonian, according to which a finite form (Man) is created out of an infinite source of God or Nature.⁴²

³⁸ J. G. Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre* (Indianapolis: Hackett) 39.

³⁹ Fichte 40.

⁴⁰ Fichte 41.

⁴¹ Feuerbach 18.

⁴² See Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation: Book Four* (London: Everyman 177) and Nietzsche’s quoting of Schopenhauer in *The Birth of Tragedy* on pages 16-17, as well as Nietzsche’s discussion of the *principium individuationis* and unity in Apollo on page 26.

Camus, however, follows the Feuerbachian lead. For him, this process of becoming individualized is reflected not in the mirror of God but in Nature. This makes Man very conscious of the distance that exists between his inner and outer world, not just in his rational projects but first and foremost in his affective and sensuous life. As a result of this, humans experience alienation and the Absurd. As Camus writes in *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

At this point of his effort man stands face to face with the irrational.

He feels within him his longing for happiness and for reason. The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human *need* and the unreasonable silence of the world (my emphasis).⁴³

Consciousness also makes Man aware that both Being and Becoming end in death. For those who believe in God and the promise of eternal life, Becoming may represent mortality and abstract Being eternity, with both of these reflected in the ideas of the physical body and the soul, respectively. By contrast, the materialist eventually realizes that while Nature may appear to be infinite, his own nature is not, and that the cycles of life and death are one of Nature's manifestations to which he is subjected. Despite all attempts of the human will, this is an obstacle that cannot be overcome or removed (the same idea lies at the heart of Sade's philosophy, as we shall see in the next chapter). Christianity takes a very different approach with its attempt to overcome death through the notions of the soul and immortality.

Camus' view of Nature is a materialist and stoic one where death is the total demise of the body and the end of life, and Man's greatest courage and nobility is in meeting that finality, as he so clearly shows in *The Plague*. Accepting mortality is to acknowledge that humans reach their completed destiny as natural beings in death. Conversely, however, to accept the body's limitations is also the way to celebrate it. This enables one to live in the present rather

⁴³ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 21. This gap is not only external but also internal as he writes in the same work: "This very heart which is mine will forever remain indefinable to me. Between the certainty I have of my existence and the content I try to give to that assurance, the gap will never be filled. Forever I shall be a stranger to myself" 15.

than in the hopes of a future life.⁴⁴ Camus stresses this dialectic most eminently in *The Myth of Sisyphus*: “One must live with time and die with it, or else elude it for a greater life. I know that one can compromise and live in the world while believing in the eternal. That is called accepting. But I loathe this term and want all or nothing.”⁴⁵

Camus in his earlier essays saw Man as coexisting with the rhythms of Nature and his existence grounded in Time and Nature rather than evolving into a more individualized being, who through consciousness becomes separated and possibly alienated from the vast matrix of the natural world.⁴⁶ Unlike in Kant or Fichte, in Camus’ early works human existence is not centered in consciousness where Nature is accessed only through the structures of the mind, but existence is asserted via the sentient body, and the mind reflects the structures of Nature. This is most clearly reflected in part one of *The Outsider*. When humans do become conscious of death and the finality of their existence, however, the need for unity in eternity and for the idea of immortality is unavoidably created.

IMMORTALITY AND THE MIRROR OF HUMANITY

The question to be asked then is the following: If through the reality of death humans become aware of the fact that their own conscious being immersed in Nature is in fact limited and that no hope exists of continuing this consciousness, do they then turn to a source other than Nature? Doesn’t the desire for immortality and for a continuation of the conscious Ego

⁴⁴ There is, of course, a difference in the development and structures of human nature in terms of biology and its teleology as a part of physical nature, and the development of human consciousness, morality, psychology and needs, and the religious, social and political structures that humans create. Here a distinction is being made between Man and his relationship to Nature, his animal nature, and human nature, however that is defined. The materialist focus is primarily on the first two of these.

⁴⁵ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 64. Camus also quotes Nietzsche as saying “What matters...is not eternal life but eternal vivacity,” and then Camus adds that “All drama is, in fact, in this choice” 61.

⁴⁶ Compare the conscious ego-centered or subject/object relationship of Man and the World with Camus’ description of Meursault in *Notebooks 1935-1951*: “Perhaps never before had he been so aware of the harmony between himself and the world, of the rhythm linking his movements with the daily course of the sun” 46. In Camus’ later works, this unity between Man and the world becomes more problematic, especially in *The Fall*.

in some form result in the creation of an abstract concept or personified Being who would ensure that life would not end in death?⁴⁷

Quite typically, all the great philosophers who highlighted the gap between human consciousness and the “in-itself” (Descartes, Kant, Fichte) also posited God as a necessary hypothesis. Is there a way to escape the philosophical necessity whereby as soon as one centers human reality in consciousness and in the separation from Nature a concept of God is created? Camus and Feuerbach both agreed that there was such a way. And an important part of their solution was to show that this concept of God, which the philosophers declared a necessary hypothesis, was in fact, nothing but a human projection. This, of course, stands in sharp contrast to Christian belief that Man was made in God’s image and is the most famous lesson from Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Religion*:

The gods are the embodied, realized wishes of man—the natural limits of man’s heart and will destroyed—creatures of the unlimited will, creatures whose physical powers are equal to those of the will... where in a *palpable* manner the mere will of man appears as god, commanding over Nature.⁴⁸

Camus expresses the same view in numerous passages, for instance in *Notebooks 1942-1951*: “It is up to us to create God. He is not the creator. That is the whole history of

⁴⁷ This is the way in which Feuerbach analyzes the thought of immortality in his early work preceding *The Essence of Religion*: “And how else could the individual think his way into his end, since he always thinks only of himself even in the infinite, since he finds in God, not his end and the principle of death, but only the principle of his existence, only the principle of his selfish reality, since to him God is only the beginning of his finitude and not also his end?” Also see Feuerbach’s *Thoughts On Death and Immortality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) 24.

⁴⁸ Feuerbach, *The Essence of Religion* 3. Even though he maintained the necessity of a transcendent being, Fichte has already developed a similar thought in his *From a Private Letter*, his answer to charges of atheism which resulted from his article “On the Basis of Our Belief in a Divine Governance of the World” in (*Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings 1797-1800*: 160): “We ourselves, therefore, either are or daily make God, and nothing similar to a God remains anywhere—nothing except we ourselves.” See Feuerbach’s famous statement in *The Essence of Religion*: “...God is a being the idea or conception of whom does not depend on Nature but on man, and that on religious man; an object of adoration is not without an adoring being, i.e. God is an object whose existence coincides with the existence of religion...but in whom objectively is contained no more than what religion contains subjectively” 68.

Christianity.”⁴⁹ In *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus comments on the human need for personification that teaches us a moral that “a man defines himself by his make-believe as well as by his sincere impulses.”⁵⁰

The key psychological/existential mechanism at play here is that of projection, and Camus seems to borrow the thought directly from Feuerbach. To create God apart from Nature in infinite space is to project being onto an unlimited background where human life has the potential of infinity or immortality, while it also provides Man with an object that he can love and from which he can receive love (and salvation and redemption) as opposed to the benign indifference of Nature.⁵¹ God is first a human projection, and then Man desires to become God. A personal God similar to the one in Christianity is a being like Man who can provide this vital need for love and also serve as a reflection of Man’s love of himself. God is to humans what the water was to Narcissus.

As Feuerbach writes in one of his early texts in *Thoughts on Death and Immortality*: “God is so conceived without depth, is only a smooth surface that reflects the human back to himself, is the prototype but also the exact image of human personhood.”⁵² Here the noumenon or thing-in-itself functions both as a mirror to reflect Man’s image, but also as a projection of human needs and desires in what Feuerbach considers to be an egocentric idea of religion that puts its focus not on God, but on Man:

Religion should be a matter of God, of the will of God, of God in and for himself. Yet does not everything seem to turn only on *their* deliverance and reconciliation, on *their* salvation and immortality?

⁴⁹ Camus, *Notebooks 1942-1951*: 97.

⁵⁰ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 9.

⁵¹ In *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus writes: “If man realized that the universe like him can love and suffer, he would be reconciled” 13, and in *Carnets III*: “The love of god is apparently the only one which we support because we want to always be loved in spite of ourselves” (L’amour en dieu est apparemment le seul que nous supportons puisque nous voulons toujours être aimés malgré nous-mêmes) 45.

⁵² Feuerbach, *Thoughts on Death and Immortality* 23.

God is only on the periphery of their religion; individuals themselves are its focus point. Individuals acknowledge a God beyond themselves only in order to possess in him a boundless space in which they can spread out and expand for all eternity their limited, particular, pitiable individuality without disturbance, without a reciprocal encroachment and restriction, without the push and shove that are inescapable in real life.⁵³

Camus holds similar views. For him, no God exists beyond Nature and its representations, but human nature is such that it still has need of a mirror or something to reflect its condition, because it cannot sustain the thought of a world in which the self is utterly insignificant. Humans still have need of something higher in value than themselves. As he writes in *The Rebel*: "In a certain way, the Absurd, which claims to express man in his solitude, really makes him live in front of a mirror,"⁵⁴ Or in *Notebooks 1942-1951*: "The absurd is the tragic man facing a mirror (Caligula). So he is not alone. There is the germ of a satisfaction or of a self-indulgence."⁵⁵

Humans need something to prove that they exist and to help define the self, but with the Absurd, Man is left to confront himself, his mortality, and the silence of the infinite. The philosophical problem that Camus has to answer, given that like Feuerbach he no longer

⁵³ Feuerbach 18-19. He also maintains: "The individualistic Christian can proclaim his or her unworthiness to the skies, but the fact remains that subjection to god is a form of egotism insofar as its goal is self-perpetuation" (xxxvii). In *The Fall*, the human being appears to have become lucidly aware of its unworthiness, its egotistical selfishness, and its strong desire for a master. As Jean-Baptiste Clamence remarks, "Ah, *mon cher*, for anyone who is alone, without God and without a master, the weight of the days is dreadful. Hence one must choose a master, God being out of fashion" 98.

⁵⁴ Camus, *The Rebel* 8.

⁵⁵ Camus, *Notebooks 1942-1951*: 71. This subject of self-satisfaction occurs several times in *The Fall* where Clamence declares "I have to admit it humbly, *mon cher compatriote*, I was always bursting with vanity. I, I, I is the refrain of my whole life and it could be heard in everything I said" (37)...It is not true, after all, that I never loved. I conceived at least one great love in my life, of which I was always the object" (44)... "I could live happily only on condition that all the individuals on earth, or the greatest possible number, were turned toward me..." (51)... "For more than thirty years I had been in love with myself exclusively" (74)... "Wasn't this the key to my nature and also a result of the great self-love I have told you about? Yes, I was bursting with a longing to be immortal. I was too much in love with myself not to want the precious object of my love never to disappear" 75-76.

wants to maintain the hypothesis of God, is the following: Without the concept of God, what constitutes that which is beyond Nature or Man's representations of it, and how do humans deal with the void that is thus revealed? How do individuals create moral and ethical values on their own, and how does one then define justice? Without the idea of the noumenon as an abstract space that is inhabited by divine will, spirit, or even the soul, and onto which humans can project their imagination, hopes, and desires, what is left? Camus asks: "What, in fact, is the absurd man? He who, without negating it, does nothing for the eternal... But he prefers his courage and his reasoning. The first teaches him to live without appeal and to get along with what he has; the second informs him of his limits."⁵⁶ *The Myth of Sisyphus* is the search for an answer to these philosophical problems, and as we will see in the following chapters, the rest of Camus' work will continue to explore their difficult implications.

For the materialists and the atheists, nothing exists except Nature and Man. For Camus, this is the beginning of the confrontation with the Absurd and the problems of despair and nihilism. The limits of human existence and experiences are dictated by this reality and meaning must be found within these boundaries, including the limits of both consciousness and the body. Ultimately, this forces humans to face the idea of the finality of death with lucidity and full consciousness instead of clinging to the hope in immortality and other such illusions.

IMMORTALITY AND THE SOUL

In contrast to the tenets of the philosophy of the Absurd, the concept of a personal God in Christianity not only provides humans with love and a mirror of their being, (not to mention a

⁵⁶ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 49. For some the void or the Absurd becomes as ineffable as God. In Camus' opinion: "Thus the absurd becomes god (in the broadest meaning of the word) and that inability to understand becomes the existence that illuminates everything. Nothing logically prepares this reasoning. I can call it a leap. And paradoxically can be understood Jaspers's insistence, his infinite patience devoted to making the experience of the transcendent impossible to realize" 25. He also writes that "For the existentials negation is their God. To be precise, that god is maintained only through the negation of human reason" 31.

stable system of morality, law, and justice), but the posited abstract Deity also serves as the embodiment of hope in immortality and the idea that life and consciousness will not end. God becomes a projection of Man's hope in eternity and his will for everlasting life. As Feuerbach writes:

As the life to come is nothing but the continuation of this life uninterrupted by death, so the divine being is nothing but the continuation of the human being uninterrupted by Nature in general—the uninterrupted, unlimited nature of man.⁵⁷

The contradiction that Feuerbach points out, however, is that if we acknowledge God as the source of our Being, then we must also acknowledge that God is our end: “God is not just a God who affirms you, but he is also a God who negates you; he is not just the beginning and the end of all *things*, but he is also the *beginning* and *end* of your *self*.”⁵⁸ God, like Nature, is the alpha and omega of human existence; the creator and the destroyer of the body. God is life and death, but in Christianity the human idea of the immortality of the soul ensures that death is not the end. The mortal body may wither and die, but the soul lives on.

Against this Christian view, and against the influential theories of the soul in Plato and Plotinus, which is carefully outlined in his dissertation, Camus pursues a long tradition from the 18th century materialists to Schopenhauer's Will to Life (*Wille zum Leben*), and Nietzsche's idea of the Dionysian Will to Power in which an impersonal life force and impulse in Nature that is without purpose or divine will infuse something like a soul-principle within the human being. Once again, Feuerbach's contribution is crucial in this genealogy, as he provides a more carefully delineated, naturalistic definition of the soul:

But the soul neither is contained in the body nor can be excluded from I; it exists neither in the body nor outside of it and thus

⁵⁷ Feuerbach 63.

⁵⁸ Feuerbach 31.

cannot depart from it. For in both cases, if it could exist inside or outside of the body, it would be a thing that is contained in determinate spatiality and determinate corporeality. Thus it would be a determinate, corporeal reality, for only that which is corporeal can exist inside or outside of a body.⁵⁹

As Feuerbach shows, soul and spirit are connected:

Thus the soul exists in the body only in a non-spatial manner, not in a sensible mode and manner, but in a spiritual, essential mode and manner. The soul exists in the body in the way that a painter exists in his brush, a musician exists in his instrument...the soul is related to the body as the fire to its fuel.⁶⁰

While this may in some ways resemble the idea of emanation or the soul as infusing matter, it is in fact interpreted in naturalistic terms as life principle:

Soul is no thing, no dead reality, no stable, fixed essence that sits in its body like an oyster in its shell; it is pure life, pure activity, sacred, supersensible fire. It is never completed, never a finished reality, never a product; static being is never proper to it. It always becomes, it never is. It is eternal arising; it remains forever in its beginning.⁶¹

Feuerbach's vitalistic take on the soul is the basis for his rejection of immortality, which he considers an illusion and the result of human's taking the soul to be a corporeal entity. By making it corporeal, the soul as it is constructed in metaphysical and theological thinking

⁵⁹ Feuerbach 99.

⁶⁰ Feuerbach 100.

⁶¹ Feuerbach 102. It is interesting to notice the image of fire that Feuerbach uses and how similar it is to Zoroastrian and Stoic ideas. For Feuerbach, Spirit is fire, God, and love. In *Thoughts on Death and Immortality* he writes: "God is total love. Yet love is not tranquil but is pure activity; love is consuming, sacrificing, burning; love is fire. It is wrath on that which exists singly and selfishly" 20. Also see pages 37, 40, and 55. Bertrand Russell remarks in *A History of Western Philosophy* (London: Unwin, 1984) that "Only the later Stoics followed him [Socrates] in regarding the soul as immaterial; the earlier Stoics agreed with Heraclitus in the view that the soul is composed of material fire" 261.

becomes an extension of the body, and thereby ensures the body's continuation in space and time in another place conceived of as Heaven or Hell:

For according to your belief, the soul should become free from the body only after death or at death, should really depart from the body, therefore, in a spatial, sensible manner. Thus your belief in immortality, in so far as you base it on the nature of soul, rests on extremely material representations of it. Except that your materialism is very different from the materialism that is commonly given the name.⁶²

Camus shares this rejection of the underlying premises behind the idea of immortality. Indeed, he expresses this thought not only in his notebooks, but also in his novels, most specifically *The Outsider*, and in his philosophical essays. In *Notebooks 1942-1951*, he writes “What could be (What is) immortality for me? Living until the last man has disappeared from the earth. Nothing more.”⁶³ The idea that humans have of the body after death in which the body continues to exist as a physical entity in another realm is one that has been promoted by Christianity in its concept of Heaven and Hell, but also in the works of art and literature that depict these realms. So is it any wonder that Man continues to entertain the idea that some kind or form of body continues? Camus repeats his critique of the representations of Heaven or Hell where death is not the complete end by commenting that for Christians “In Hell, we are still alive with this body—and this is better than annihilation,”⁶⁴ He also cites Ignatius Loyola referring to the human race as “Those men in a body moving toward hell.”⁶⁵ In Heaven or Hell some idea of the corporeal sense of the soul and body still continues to exist for those who believe in those two religious ideas.

⁶² Feuerbach 107.

⁶³ Camus, *Notebooks 1942-1951*: 111.

⁶⁴ Camus, *Notebooks 1935-1951*: 37.

⁶⁵ Camus, *Notebooks 1942-1951*: 269. The problem of course is to explain how humans can conceive of occupying a space without form or a corporeal sense. How can any consciousness occur without a body or mind as we know it? Plotinus dealt with his by transitions through light and the Intelligibles. In his *Thoughts on*

By contrast, without the hope of immortality or the projections onto the abstract thing-in-itself, (“the leap” as Camus calls it), Man is left to confront death, and this means that human thought and philosophy need to become focused once more on the body and the body alone. This time, however, it needs to be in a truly materialistic sense without projecting corporeal dimensions onto the soul and without attempting to salvage the body after death. Camus remarks that “To abolish hope is to bring thought back to the body. And the body is doomed to perish.”⁶⁶ However, by bringing thought back to the body, humans are able to refocus on the life in this world and their existence in Time.⁶⁷

Without God, without hope of immortality, and without the assurances that faith in a religion or something beyond the visible world of Nature provides, Man comes face to face with the Absurd. The human task, as Camus sees it, is to attempt to find meaning, moral values, and a temporary sense of unity as we are thrown into Nature, the world, and the mechanism of Time that shapes both our existence and our individual fate.⁶⁸ In Camus’ opinion, however, the Absurd and nihilism were never the answer, but only the starting point in his search for meaning and the development of his philosophy.⁶⁹ And it is in his first cycle of work on the Absurd (in *Caligula*, *The Outsider*, and *The Plague*) that Camus attempted to

Death and Immortality, Feuerbach writes: “Therefore individuals who exist after death, in order to exist as individuals, must have a place, a common space in which they can exist” 56.

⁶⁶ Camus, *Notebooks 1935-1951*: 105.

⁶⁷ In *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus writes “Knowing whether or not one can live *without appeal* is all that interests me...belief in the absurd is tantamount to substituting the quantity of experiences for the quality” 45. (This statement also helps to explain Camus’ fascination with Don Juan).

⁶⁸ Time is again one of the main themes in *A Happy Death* and in the “Afterword” Jean Sarocchi comments that “Time, having become the standard of happiness, the principal theme, gives the novel its frame and its rhythm” 112. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus says “Thus he asserts his youth. But simultaneously he situates himself in relation to time. He takes his place in it. He admits that he stands at a certain point on a curve that he acknowledges having to travel to its end. He belongs to time, and by the horror that seizes him, he recognizes his worst enemy. Tomorrow, he was longing for tomorrow, whereas everything in him ought to have rejected it. That revolt of the flesh is the absurd” 11. And on the same page, Camus talks about “Humans taking their ‘place in time’” 11.

⁶⁹ In *Lyrical and Critical Essays* in regards to Sartre’s *La Nausée*, Camus states “The realization that life is absurd cannot be an end, but only a beginning. This is a truth nearly all great minds have taken as their starting point” 201.

express his materialist ideas concerning the refutation of the idea of God, immortality, and the system of thought in Christianity.

THE GOD/MAN AND THE MAN/GOD

The final theme to explore in highlighting the proximity of Camus' absurdist philosophy to Feuerbach's materialism is the figure of Jesus. In his dissertation Camus already called the Incarnation the "privileged theme" and the "center of Christian thought," for in the figure of Christ the gap between God and Man was bridged and through the idea of the divinity of Jesus arose the possibility of the divinity of man.⁷⁰ Christ became the Man/God and divinity became flesh. This made Man in a sense more tied to the noumenon or God than it did to Nature, but it also turned his thoughts toward immortality and similar abstractions. As Camus states in *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

Solely in this sense Jesus indeed personifies the whole human drama.

He is the complete man, being the one who realized the most absurd

condition. He is not the God-man but the man-god. And, like him,

each of us can be crucified and victimized—and is to a certain degree.⁷¹

Feuerbach made a similar point regarding the need for personification and that in Christianity, "the idea which lies at the foundation of the incarnation of God is therefore infinitely better convened by one incarnation, one personality."⁷² In Man's longing for a

⁷⁰ See MacBride 98, and earlier in Chapter One, page 25. Feuerbach dismisses the idea of the Incarnation in his *Essence of Religion* by saying "To concentrate God upon earth, to plunge God into man, is about the same as to try to condense the ocean into one drop, to reduce the ring of Saturn into a finger-ring" 48. Camus expressed his view of divinity in his *Lyrical and Critical Essays*: "Christianity plunges the whole of the universe, man and the world, into the divine order. Hence there is no tension between the world and the religious principle, but at the most, ignorance, together with the difficulty of freeing man from the flesh, of renouncing his passions in order to embrace spiritual truth" 303.

⁷¹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 79. For an interesting study, see Robert Chester Sutton III, *Human Existence and Theodicy: A Comparison of Jesus and Albert Camus* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992).

⁷² Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* 145.

personal God lies the “necessity of feeling” and that feeling or longing of the heart demands “one personality alone, and this an historical, real one”—namely Christ.⁷³

Anticipating Camus’ comment above on suffering, Feuerbach stated that for humans, the “truth of real personality is—blood” and the materialism of the body:

The last proof...that the visible person of God was no phantasm, no...illusion, but a real man, is that blood flowed from his side on the cross. If the personal God has a true sympathy with distress, he must himself suffer distress...hence the passion of Christ is the highest confidence, the highest self-enjoyment, the highest consolation of feeling; for only in the blood of Christ is the thirst for a personal, that is, a human, sympathising, tender God allayed.⁷⁴

The religious viewpoint stresses the connection between God and Man, while that of the materialists focuses on Nature and Man, but in both cases the focus eventually comes down to the concept of human individuality and freedom. Once again, Feuerbach’s influence here is crucial. As Feuerbach writes in *The Essence of Religion*:

Therefore, although the feeling of dependence upon Nature is the source and motive of religion: its very purpose and end is the destruction of such feeling, the independence from Nature. Or, although the divinity of Nature is the basis, the foundation of religion generally and of Christian religion in particular, still its end is the divinity of man.⁷⁵

Whether one views God or Nature as divine, Man still struggles to free himself from this dependence and to reassert his independence. Freedom from the power and tyranny of God

⁷³ Feuerbach 146.

⁷⁴ Feuerbach 147.

⁷⁵ Feuerbach, *The Essence of Religion* 30. It is interesting to note that this idea of the divinity of Man is precisely one of the criticisms that Francis Jeanson directed towards Camus’ *The Rebel*.

or freedom from the tyranny of the body's limitations and death in Nature are the themes that we see expressed in the myth of Prometheus, Sisyphus, as well as in such crucial figures as the Marquis de Sade, Nietzsche, and the rebels in Camus' novels and essays.⁷⁶ The metaphysical revolt against God or Nature is Man fighting to free himself from his dependency, and all too often he revolts in order to become more like a God or a divine being, instead of accepting his limits and the possibility of life without Gods.⁷⁷

Camus writes in his *Notebooks* that this desire to be God "was felt by both Spinoza and Nietzsche: they could not accept not being God,"⁷⁸ and he also quotes Nietzsche as saying "There cannot be a God because, if there were one, I could not accept not being he."⁷⁹ Terry Eagleton in his book *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* shows that this is the core of the tragic: "Tragedy consists of the human quest for godlike status in the teeth of all despicable desire for security..."⁸⁰ If one does not believe in God, the specter of the idea still haunts human existence, if only because it is still an idea against which revolt is directed in Man's quest for individuality, power, and freedom that Camus portrayed in *Caligula*.⁸¹

For Camus, as for many existentialists in the 1930s, a key reference on this point was Leon Shestov [Chestov]. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, an important passage reads: "...Chestov discovers the fundamental absurdity of all existence, he does not say: 'This is the absurd,'

⁷⁶ For a discussion of the history of Prometheus, see Carol Dougherty's *Prometheus* (London: Routledge, 2006). Camus comments on Prometheus in *The Myth of Sisyphus*: "A revolution is always accomplished against the gods, beginning with the revolution of Prometheus, the first of modern conquerors" 65. In *The Rebel* he writes "Prometheus alone has become god and reigns over the solitude of men. But from Zeus he has gained only solitude and cruelty; he is no longer Prometheus, he is Caesar" 245. In *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, see the section entitled "*Prometheus in the Underworld*" on page 138. We return to this important theme in the concluding chapter.

⁷⁷ The history of man in the West from the classical world to the modern has reflected the development from a more God-centered world to a more egocentric or human-centered one, which reflects the changing tragic paradigm.

⁷⁸ Camus, *Notebooks 1942-1951*: 151.

⁷⁹ Camus, *Notebooks 1942-1951*: 151.

⁸⁰ Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003) 36.

⁸¹ It should be noted in view of Camus' criticism of Stalin in *The Rebel* that when he was young, Stalin studied for the priesthood. In *Stalin and His Hangman* (London: Penguin, 2005), Donald Rayfield argues that "The existence of God vexed Stalin all his life" 19.

but rather: ‘This is God: we must rely on him even if he does not correspond to any of our rational categories.’⁸² For Shestov, God is the Absurd in the sense that as a noumenon, it exists as something beyond our comprehension, and that if we were able to comprehend it, we would have no need of God. Or in his words: “We turn to God only to obtain the impossible. As for the possible, men suffice.”⁸³

The problem is that for many humans this world does not wholly suffice and if God is dead, as Hegel and Nietzsche suggested, this concept needs to be replaced by some other transcendent reference point.⁸⁴ Camus’ character of Caligula is the embodiment of this tragic and desperate need for transcendence, for instance when he expresses his desire for the moon, or as he literally declares his need for the impossible: “The world is unbearable. Therefore I need the moon, or happiness, or immortality or something that may be mad, but at least is not a part of this world.”⁸⁵ Even without God, humans appear to have a need for the leap into some beyond as Dostoevsky recognized. Even in the atheistic existentialism in the works of Sartre and de Beauvoir, transcendence remains a core problem in the shape of existential projects.⁸⁶

⁸² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 25.

⁸³ Camus 25.

⁸⁴ To emphasize once more the rich, and insufficiently noted, philosophical background to Camus’ theses, see Eric Von Der Luft “Sources of Nietzsche’s ‘God is Dead!’ and its Meaning for Heidegger” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45: 2 (1984): 263-276. Von der Luft shows that this phrase appeared three times in Hegel in his *Faith and Knowledge* (1802) and twice in the section “Revealed Religion” in *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) 263. Von der Luft further emphasizes the fact that “Heidegger notes the close agreement of Hegel, Pascal, and Nietzsche on the issue of the humanly caused loss of God in the world” 264. This can be compared to the following point in *The Myth of Sisyphus*: “If God exists, all depends on him and we can do nothing against his will. If he does not exist, everything depends on us. For Kirilov, as for Nietzsche, to kill God is to become god oneself; it is to realize on this earth the eternal life of which the Gospel speaks” 80.

⁸⁵ Camus, *Caligula* 12.

⁸⁶ We return to this at length in Chapter Five. Already we can note that for both Sartre (see his *Existentialism and Humanism* pages 33-34) and Simone de Beauvoir (see her *Ethics of Ambiguity* page 15), Dostoevsky’s often-quoted remark expressed a decisive philosophical conundrum: “If there is no God, then everything is possible.” They saw this as a nihilistic starting point of the ethical and philosophical premises of their philosophy of existentialism. It should be noted, however, that this was not actually a direct quote of Dostoevsky or his characters. In *The Brothers Karamazov* (London: Penguin, 2003), what Ivan Karamazov did say was “Everything is lawful” (343), and that “Without immortality there can be no virtue” 95. As Berdyaev wrote in his *Dostoevsky* (New York: Living Age Books, 1957): “To speak of wrongdoing raises the question of what is allowable. Everything? It is a question that always troubled Dostoevsky, and he was always putting it in one form or another: it is behind *Crime and Punishment* and, to a considerable extent, *The Possessed* and

Camus' thinking developed from a rejection of basic Christian beliefs to one that placed much more emphasis on Nature and then on Man's Absurd condition in a world without the ideological certainties of religion. In this regard, Camus resembles Feuerbach's humanism, where the divinity once granted to transcendent beings has descended from the heavens and now resides in the very beings who created transcendence in the first place: humanity itself. The divinity that human beings appear to be endorsing in the place of the now defunct God, however, also harbors much darker, problematic dimensions. A world that is devoid of transcendent certainties is also an Absurd world where God has been replaced by Man, and divine law and its moral structures no longer apply. As a result, power and authority, the basis of law, the meaning of justice, and what humans use to define the idea of freedom, all become problematic.

In *Caligula*, as we shall see, Camus grapples with the problem of human freedom and the creation of moral values and political justice, where unlimited freedom leads to nihilism, terror, and ultimately results in the need for limits to be placed on human action.

The Brothers Karamazov" 95-6. Like all European thinkers of his generation, Camus was deeply influenced by Dostoevsky's novels. After the war, he wrote a play as an adaptation of Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* (1959).

CHAPTER FOUR: CAMUS' PHILOSOPHY OF NIHILISM

CALIGULA AS MAN/GOD (1936)

Camus' early writings, as the first chapters have argued, conduct a retrieval and reversal of Christian and ancient metaphysics similar to that of Feuerbach. The works celebrate a new unity of humanity and Nature, most eminently revealed in the sensuous experiences and feelings of communion with natural elements rather than with a deity. In this early play,¹ Camus explores most thoroughly the extreme implications, the tragic side, of a world without God. Caligula as the supreme power and lawgiver is the incarnation of the Man/God; however, his flaws and crimes give a most powerful symbolic representation of Camus' concern with the tragic limits of Man's divinity on earth.²

In this chapter, it is not my intention to focus on the literary or dramatic aspects of this play, but rather to examine it in the light of the philosophy of Nature and Man and the problems that *Caligula* poses for human morality and freedom. I will seek to characterize the dark side of the process of "detranscendentalization" and "renaturalization" of the sacred that Camus became so concerned with, by outlining the tragic contradiction that the figure of Caligula incarnates. As we shall see, the writer who most closely anticipated and best described the potentially terrible implications of unlimited human freedom was the Marquis de Sade.

¹ Todd states that Camus first conceived of the play in 1935 (32), worked on it from 1936-1939, and finished it in July of 1939 (95). According to Lottman, the play was first performed in 1945, and "significant changes would be made between the published version of 1944 and that of 1947..." 384.

² According to Anthony A. Barrett in Chapter 9 of *Caligula: The Corruption of Power* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2990), in the ancient world the line between the human and the divine realm was not a clearly delineated one: "Many of the eastern peoples, notably, but not excluding the Greeks, had long been accustomed to honouring their rulers with the tokens of divinity and to identifying them during their lifetimes quite explicitly as gods made manifest on earth" 140.

CALIGULA'S TERROR AND THE TRANSMUTATION OF VALUES

Let us first briefly characterize the existential predicament that Caligula personifies. In his power and authority, Caligula has equaled the Gods, but his human finitude leads him into the self-destructive attempt to move beyond their power, because striving for unlimited freedom and unlimited power when one is inherently finite becomes an indefinite and ultimately doomed endeavor. As a consequence, authenticity and happiness remain out of reach, but they continue to be objects of desire. As Caligula remarks “At last I have finally understood the uses of power. It gives the impossible its chance. Today and for all time to come, my freedom knows no bounds,”³ and yet something is still inescapably missing in that he realizes that regardless of all of his power, “Men die and they are not happy.”⁴

Caligula's path of destruction is the direct result of this untenable situation. He decides to destroy the world around him precisely in order to recreate it. He appropriates the power of the Gods and Nature as creator and destroyer in order to accomplish a transmutation of values, but this transmutation ends in terror. Caligula asks “and what use is this amazing power, if I cannot change the order of things, if I cannot make the sun set in the east and make suffering disappear, and keep human beings from dying?”⁵ In order to change the world for the better, however, Caligula must first destroy it by leveling the hierarchy of moral values. Nietzsche's program of a transmutation of values ends up in this instance in catastrophe. When Caesonia tells Caligula that the dualities of “good and evil, noble and vile, just and unjust”⁶ will never change, he replies:

It is my will to change that. I shall give this age the gift of equality.

³ Camus, *Caligula* 18.

⁴ Camus, *Caligula* 13.

⁵ Camus, *Caligula* 20.

⁶ Camus, *Caligula* 20. In a revolution or in a classical tragedy, there is usually a destruction of the prevailing hierarchy and a reordering of values.

And when everything is leveled down, the impossible has descended
on earth, and the moon is in my hands, then perhaps I myself shall
be transformed and the world too, then perhaps there will be no more
death and men will be happy.⁷

In his desire to remake the world, aid mankind, and give them immortality and happiness, Caligula initiates a reign of terror and death. He becomes the figure of all modern tyrants and revolutionaries who killed to “save and liberate” humanity. Cherea remarks that “To be sure, this is not the first time that a single man in our state has had unlimited power, but this is the first time that such a man has used that power in an unlimited way—to the point of negating man himself and the world itself.”⁸ Caligula has destroyed the balance between Man, Nature, and God; overstepped human limits; and uprooted the sources of the sacred. When he is confronted with criticism of his reign of tyranny, Caligula replies:

For a man who loves power, there is something irritating about the
gods’ rivalry. I have done away with that. I have proved to those
capricious gods that, without previous training, a mere man, if he puts
his mind to it, can practice their ridiculous profession.....I have simply
grasped the fact that there is only one way of equaling the gods: all
that’s needed is to be as cruel as they.....A tyrant is a man who
sacrifices nations to his ideas or to his ambition. I have no ideas and
there are no further honors or powers for me to covet. I wield this power
as a compensation...for the stupidity and hatred of the gods.⁹

⁷ Camus, *Caligula* 20-21.

⁸ Camus, *Caligula* 25. In essence Caligula is seeking a form of unity through destruction and terror. Here the similarities to political leaders of the 20th century such as Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler are apt, since Camus will soon discuss them in *The Rebel*.

⁹ Camus, *Caligula* 50. See the interesting remark from Donald Rayfield in *Stalin and His Hangman*: “Stalin’s transition to atheism was neither abrupt nor complete. His atheism was a rebellion against God rather than a disavowal of the deity” 12.

Without the idea of God, and the moral values and law which derive from divine authority, how does Man determine the limits of his actions ? Are moral values and principles of justice simply human constructs created to protect society that do not realistically reflect the truth about human nature? Without the concept of the sacred, where does authority reside and what constitutes the boundaries that humans must not transgress? In *Caligula*, Camus confronts these questions and takes them to their ultimate logical conclusions. The character he creates in order to do this, as I will now seek to show, is the figurative equivalent of a system of thought most eminently articulated by the Marquis de Sade in his materialistic denunciation of God, his paradoxical take on Nature and its laws, and his subsequent glorification of destruction and crime.¹⁰

CAMUS AND THE MARQUIS DE SADE

It has not been sufficiently noted how much space Camus devotes to the Marquis de Sade in his *Notebooks*, in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, and specifically in *The Rebel*. In this latter text, under the heading of “Absolute Negation,” Camus importantly identifies Sade as a key historical figure in the process of desacralization: “Historically speaking, the first coherent offensive is that of Sade, who musters into one vast war machine the arguments of the freethinkers up to Father Meslier and Voltaire.”¹¹ Given the proximity between his character of Caligula and Sade’s philosophy, I think one can argue that Sade’s writings had a strong influence on Camus’ intellectual formation. The two basic premises in *Caligula* that Camus expresses are first: “...all Sade’s atheists suppose, in principle, the nonexistence of God for the obvious reason that His existence would imply that He was indifferent, wicked or

¹⁰ As Camus writes in *The Rebel*: “Progress, from the time of Sade up to the present day, has consisted in gradually enlarging the stronghold where, according to his own rules, man without God brutally wields power” 102. Camus rejects the basic premises of Sade’s destructive ideas and the “crimes of nature” that he promoted, because, in Camus’ view, this leads to nihilism.

¹¹ Camus, *The Rebel* 36.

cruel;”¹² and secondly, that when humans take on the mantle of divinity, “...human crime continues to be man’s answer to divine crime,”¹³ As Dostoevsky implied, without God “everything is possible”—a statement that encapsulates one of the core concerns of existentialist ethics, in particular that of Sartre and de Beauvoir.¹⁴ But to this must be added, as we can now see, that in this “everything is possible” axiom, what was in fact possible for Nature and God was quite specifically destruction, cruelty, random violence, and murder.

These basic premises of Caligula’s thinking can be found in Sade’s ideas on Nature and the consequences Caligula drew from them. Sade was one of the first to fully articulate (in one very specific direction) the moral and political consequences of a detranscendentalized, purely materialist vision of Nature, which considered it in a non-sentimental, one might say pre-Darwinian fashion, focusing on Nature’s power of destruction rather than on romanticizing its creativity. Without the idea of God, Nature has lost all teleological purpose and moral underpinning and instead becomes simply the manifestation of chaos and destruction.¹⁵

¹² Camus, *The Rebel* 37. The idea of a wicked or cruel God was at the heart of Marcion’s belief and also reflects aspects of Manicheanism that Camus discussed in his dissertation. Pierre Klossowski quotes the Marquis de Sade in his article “Nature as Destructive Principle” contained in *120 Days of Sodom & Other Writings* (New York: Grove Press, 1966): “This mode which is the very soul of the creator is also that of the creature who is shaped by it. It will exist even after the soul’s demise. Everything has to be wicked, barbarous, inhuman—as your God is—and these are the vices which must be adopted if one wishes to please him; not that there is much hope of succeeding, since that evil which always does harm, the evil which is God’s essence, could not possibly be susceptible either to love or gratitude” 68. And in *Juliette* when speaking of human crimes, he writes: “...all this in honor of the divinity, for it is upon that splendid machine all human iniquities must be blamed” 793.

¹³ Camus, *The Rebel* 37.

¹⁴ As we saw in the previous chapter, this phrase is not a direct quote of Dostoevsky’s character (See Chapter Three Note 95). Camus writes in *The Rebel* “Everything is permitted,” exclaims Ivan Karamazov” 50. Camus then goes on to say, however, that ““Everything is permitted’ does not mean that nothing is forbidden. The absurd merely confers an equivalence on the consequences of those actions. It does not recommend crime, for this would be childish, but it restores to remorse its futility” 50. In his book *The Philosophy of the Marquis de Sade*, Timo Airaksinen writes “The key point is that Sade’s natural attitude is that nothing is forbidden in nature” 55. La Mettrie in the chapter “The System of Epicurus” in his book *Machine Man and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) focuses on the subject of remorse and states “Thus remorse is, in itself, philosophically speaking, as useless after as during and before a crime” 137. Compare this to the subject of remorse in *The Outsider* and what Meursault says about shooting the Arab.

¹⁵ Timo Airaksinen also shows that for Sade: “Nature is said to be, at most, productive in the causal sense of being creative, not in the teleological sense. It is without purpose” 57. Elsewhere he maintains that “nature is a random device, independent of human goals and intentions” 51.

The initial premise of Sade's apology of destruction is a tenet of his philosophy of Nature. Sade sees Nature as perpetual motion and activity where matter is never destroyed, but simply resurrected and recast into other forms.¹⁶ In *Justine* Sade has the character of Coeur-de-fer say:

No, Thérèse, no, there is no God, Nature sufficeth unto herself; in no wise hath she need of an author; once supposed, that author is naught but a decayed version of herself, is merely what we describe in school by the phrase, a begging of the question. A God predicates a creation, that is to say an instant when there was nothing, or an instant when all was in chaos. If one or the other of these states was evil, why did your God allow it to subsist? Was it good? Then why did he change it? But if all is now good at last, your God has nothing left to do; well if he is useless, how can he be powerful? And if he is not powerful, how can he be God? If, in a word, Nature moves herself, what do we want with a motor? And if the motor acts upon matter by causing it to move, how is it not itself material?¹⁷

And in *Juliette*, the Pope while expounding his philosophy of Nature tells her that:

Nothing is essentially born, nothing essentially perishes, all is but the action and reaction of matter; all is like the ocean billows which ever rise and fall, like the tides of the sea, ebbing and flowing endlessly, without

¹⁶ For some of Sade's comments on matter and perpetual motion, see *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, & Other Writings* (New York: Grove Press, 1965) 518, 520; *Philosophy In The Boudoir* (London: Creation Books, 1991) 40; and *Juliette* (New York: Grove Press, 1968) 772-3. These materialist principles echo a powerful tradition in European thinking. See for instance, and just preceding Sade, La Mettrie in *Machine Man* who declares that "The human body is a machine which winds itself up, a living picture of perpetual motion" 7. In the previous century in his Introduction to *Leviathan*, Hobbes already stated that "For seeing life is but a motion of limbs,...For what is the *heart*, but a *spring*; and the *nerves*, but so many *strings*; and the *joints*, but so many *wheels*, giving motion to the whole body, such as was intended by the artificer?" (New York: Touchstone, 1997) 19. Indeed, this materialist tradition goes all the way back to Descartes, and then of course to illustrious Greek philosophical schools, notably the Epicureans.

¹⁷ Sade, *Justine* 496-7.

there being either the loss or the gain of a drop in the volume of the waters;
all this is a perpetual flux which ever was and shall always be, and whereof
we become, though we know it not, the principal agents by reason of our
vices and our virtues.¹⁸

From this follows the conclusion that death, naturalistically viewed, is not a destruction but only a transformation of matter. If Nature is a machine that creates forms with no intrinsic value;¹⁹ then the law of Nature and life is indeed one of “exhaustion... [and]...destruction”;²⁰ and Nature’s primary function is the creation of new forms through the destruction of old ones. A passage *The Philosophy of the Bedroom* expresses this quite eloquently:

If all individuals were possessed of eternal life, would it not become impossible for Nature to create any new ones? If Nature denies eternity to beings, it follows that their destruction is one of her laws. Now, once we observe that destruction is so useful to her that she absolutely cannot dispense with it, and that she cannot achieve her creations without drawing from the store of destruction which death prepares for her, from this moment onward the idea of annihilation which we attach

¹⁸ Sade, *Juliette* 772-3. To recall another important 18th century materialist directly preceding Sade, Baron d’Holbach devotes Chapter II and Chapter III in Part I of his *The System of Nature* (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 1999) to the subject of motion and in Chapter II argues that: “Every thing in the universe is in motion: the essence of matter is to act: if we consider its parts, attentively, we shall discover there is not a particle that enjoys absolute repose” 19. Again there are, of course, significant Greek precedents to this, specifically Heraclitus, to which Camus would have been quite sensitive.

¹⁹ In his *Dialogue Between a Priest and a Dying Man*, Sade compares Nature to “a mechanical operation, perhaps as simple as the workings of electricity, but which we are unable to understand.” He also remarks that “Your god is a machine you fabricated in your passions’ behalf, you manipulated it to their liking” *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom & Other Writings* (New York: Grove Press, 1965) 168. In *Juliette* he writes that “Nature’s unthinking operations, they are like vapors....and this steam...has in itself no intrinsic value...” 766. Sade’s thinking, like that of d’Holbach and La Mettrie, reflect the mechanistic view of many of the materialists or *philosophes* that was prevalent at the time. In *Machine Man* La Mettrie expresses the opinion that “Man is a machine” (5)...”and the body is nothing but a clock...” 31.

²⁰ See Sade’s *Juliette*; “The first generation, which we call life, is as it were an example. Only from exhaustion do its laws become operative; only through destruction are these laws transmitted...” 770. In *Philosophy of the Bedroom* he expresses the view that “nothing would be born, nothing would be regenerated without destructions? Destruction, hence, like creation, is one of Nature’s mandates” 275.

to death ceases to be real; there is no more veritable annihilation;
what we call the end of the living animal is no longer a true finis, but
a simple transformation, a transmutation of matter, what every modern
philosopher acknowledges as one of Nature's fundamental laws.

According to these irrefutable principles, death is hence no more than
a change of form, an imperceptible passage from one existence into another,
and that is what Pythagoras called metempsychosis.²¹

This view of Nature, as the notes have already indicated, is not particularly original. It has its roots in Cartesian materialism; can claim Spinoza as a major source of inspiration; and was widely shared amongst 18th century materialists (La Mettrie, Diderot, D'Holbach, and Helvetius). Sade's originality stems from the fact that he translates and appropriates the factual, destructive dimensions of natural cycles directly into a fully-fledged moral theory. Natural destruction as a simple fact, becomes a moral imperative. As Timo Airaksinen writes of Sade's philosophy:

The principle of nature which governs...is that of universal chaos,
death, and destruction, and of the blind proliferation of life. In both
of its aspects the world is a vortex of forces which neither display
any natural or rational laws, nor show the influence of a benevolent
supernatural mind.²²

In this, Sade's thought appears as a direct anticipation of great 19th century philosophers such as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, who will also embrace the same challenge of drawing a morality from the apparent immorality of Nature's destructive cycles.

²¹ Sade, *The Philosophy of the Bedroom* (Grove edition) 330. La Mettrie states in "The System of Epicurus" that "Men and roses appear in the morning and have vanished by nightfall. Everything is replaced, everything disappears and nothing is destroyed" 104.

²² Airaksinen, *The Philosophy of the Marquis de Sade* 46.

All along, of course, this collection of themes is significantly linked to the death of God or a Feuerbachian world where God has been supplanted by Man. Sade begins his philosophical thought with a thorough attack on the existence of God in *Dialogue Between a Priest and a Dying Man* (1782). In his later writings of *Justine* (1791), *The Philosophy of the Bedroom* (1795), and in *Juliette* (1797), he then proceeds to expound the philosophy of Nature that emerges from the void left by a defunct God, and logically draws his own moral conclusions. Incidentally, it is striking to note how closely the trajectory of Sade's thinking parallels the development of Feuerbach's own work, starting from a naturalistically-grounded rejection of transcendence to a moral and political philosophy based on natural principles. However, Sade's political philosophy ends up creating what appears to be the very antithesis of the idea of morality.

Another significant thematic overlap worth mentioning between these authors, linked to the idea that matter remains indestructible underneath its cycles of transformation, concerns the status of the self and soul, which the old theory of metempsychosis captured in symbolic terms and which theology formulated as the problem of immortality. As the previous chapter recalled, this was the central problem in Feuerbach's first important works, notably his *Thoughts on Death and Immortality* (1830). The critique of doctrines concerning the permanence of the self was his initial entry point into the critique of religion. The consequent emphasis on death as an anthropological fact made him a direct, if insufficiently acknowledged, forerunner of existentialism. Of course, Camus fully shares this view about the defining significance of death and the soul. As a result, and despite his rejection of the label, Camus is certainly within the philosophical contours of existentialist philosophy. What we can now add, however, is that Sade once again already provided a strong, if highly ambiguous, anticipation of these thoughts. In *Juliette*, the Pope remarks:

To the initial folly stemming from pride, to that revolting stupidity
of considering he was sprung from some divinity, of supposing

himself in possession of an immortal soul, to this atrocious blindness
he was doubtless obliged to add the other of esteeming his mortal self
beyond price.²³

And in regards to the idea of the soul, he states:

Indeed, how could the beloved masterpiece of a bountiful divinity,
how could heaven's favorite have come to any other conclusion?
The severest penalties had incontrovertibly to be prescribed for whoever
should wreck such a splendid machine. This machine was sacred;
a soul, the brilliant image of a yet more brilliant divinity, animated
this construction whose destruction must be the most dreadful crime
it would be possible to commit.²⁴

These are all thoughts that would be echoed only a few decades later in Feuerbach's early work, but in very different prose and drawing very different moral conclusions.

Now that the naturalistic background of Sade's worldview has been outlined, we can focus on the way in which he derives from it a moral theory. The naturalistic premise that destruction is Nature's fundamental law leads Sade to denounce the illusory belief that once Nature has cast Man into existence their connection is more or less finished, and Man is no longer dependent on Nature but depends only on his own laws: "Once cast, man has nothing further to do with Nature; once nature has cast him, her control over man ends; he is under the control of his own laws, laws that are inherent in him."²⁵ Sade holds that these human laws consisting of self-preservation and propagation are, in fact, in direct opposition to

²³ Sade, *Juliette* 765-6. For a more complete statement on the belief in immortality, see Coeur-de-fer's comments in *Justine* page 495.

²⁴ Sade, *Juliette* 866. See Domance's comments on the soul in *The Philosophy of the Bedroom* in the Grove edition of *Justine, Philosophy and the Bedroom, & Other Writings* on page 249.

²⁵ Sade, *Juliette* 767: "With his casting man receives a direct and specific system of laws by which he must abide, under which he must proceed ever after; these laws are those of his personal self-preservation, of his multiplication, laws which refer to him, which are of him, laws which are uniquely his own, vital to him but in no way necessary to nature, for he is no longer of Nature, no longer in her grip, he is separate from her" 767.

Nature's primary desire to destroy in order to create new forms. Therefore, the condemnation of both murder and the imperative to procreate is in essence anti-natural:

Observe as well that were these creatures to cease propagating, or to destroy themselves, Nature's original rights, contested hitherto, would be restored to her; whereas in propagating, or in not destroying, we confine her to her secondary functions and deprive her of her primary powers.²⁶

As a result, and if this is the first explicit program of a full transmutation of values, much more radical and frightening than Nietzsche's, then all the moral and legal apparatus created by humans to protect human life are in fact immoral, since they are anti-natural, and should be overturned:

Thus, all the laws we humans have made, whether to encourage population or to prevent its destruction, necessarily conflict with all of hers; and every time we act in accordance with our laws, we directly thwart her desires;...²⁷

By contrast, Nature's logic of destruction can be seen as directly inspiring, in a "natural" and thus legitimate way, the instinct of murder. This implacable logic of the Marquis de Sade is very useful to understand Camus' constant concern with the issues of murder and crime. Rather than a personal attraction on Camus' part, Sade's "anti-moral" morality, as it directly emerges from his naturalistic outlook, shows that the problem of regrounding morality once transcendent values are lacking and finding the arguments to reject the violent drives in humanity, become intractable issues. As Sade constantly argues, crime is a passion that Nature instills in her creatures "since she is a great murderess herself and since her single reason for murdering is to obtain, from the wholesale annihilation of cast creatures, the

²⁶ Sade, *Juliette* 768.

²⁷ Sade, *Juliette* 768.

chance to recast them again.”²⁸ If, as a materialist, one seeks the source of normative values in Nature, then it seems at first impossible to denounce this passion. A person who murders merely serves as a expression of Nature’s power by becoming the “spokesman of her desires, the vehicle of her will, and the surest agent of her caprices.”²⁹ Meursault’s killing of the Arab in *The Outsider*, seemingly under the dictates of the Sun, could be interpreted as a reflection of Sade’s philosophy in Camus’ work. The naturalistic instinct behind murderous intentions of course applies to all other “vices.” Inasmuch as human actions and desires are all inspired by Nature, they are, according to Sade, morally justified. In *Justine*, Sade writes:

...all the impulses she puts in us are the agents of her decrees; man’s passions are but the means she employs to attain her ends. If she stands in need of more individuals, she inspires lust in us and behold! there are creations; when destructions become necessary to her, she inserts vengeance, avarice, lechery, ambition into our hearts and lo! you have murders; but she has not ceased to labor in her own behalf, and whatever we do, there can be no question of it, we are the unthinking instruments of her caprices.³⁰

In Sade’s universe, Nature creates conflict, wars, plagues, and disasters primarily as a means to destroy the forms that have been created and in order to make new ones. When one joins this with the idea of indestructible matter, we have the concept of an eternal cycle.

With this idea, as mentioned earlier, Sade again directly anticipates the great nihilists of the 19th century. As Pierre Klossowski correctly argues: “Sade, rather than setting off on the

²⁸ Sade, *Juliette* 768-9. It must be stated that if Nature has no intrinsic value or purpose in the functions of creation or destruction, then murder is a value or value judgment that humans place on natural destruction. Sade touches on this in *Philosophy of the Bedroom*: “’Tis our pride prompts us to elevate murder into crime. Esteeming ourselves the foremost of the universe’s creatures, we have stupidly imagined that every hurt his sublime creature endures must perforce be an enormity: we have believed Nature would perish should our marvelous species chance to be blotted out of existence,...” 238.

²⁹ Sade, *Juliette* 769.

³⁰ Sade, *Justine* 520. He goes on to ask “Since it is proven that she cannot reproduce without destructions, is it not to act in harmony with her wishes to multiply them unceasingly?” 520. In *Philosophy In The Boudoir* Sade writes: “...even the briefest glimpse at Nature’s operations reveals that destructions are just as important a part of her plans, if not more, than creations...For without destruction, there can be no regeneration; thus, the urge to destroy is one of Nature’s prime mandates” 127.

path which Schopenhauer searched for, thrashes out the one Nietzsche was to follow: the acceptance of Samsara, the *eternal return of the same thing*.”³¹ This would have been a great challenge for Camus, who discovered the power of the metaphor of the eternal return in his study of ancient metaphysics and Nietzsche’s retrieval of this idea, but who would have strongly reacted to the possible implications of Sade’s version of it.³²

By substituting Nature and its laws for those of God and divine will, the concepts of good and evil and vice and virtue are exactly inverted in Sade’s world. This is what the transmutation of values can mean. Crime and vice become manifestations of the perpetual motion of matter, and thus moral imperatives, while virtues relate to *stasis* or the refraining from action. As a result, vice becomes a virtue. In Sade’s most libertine characters, as in Camus’ *Caligula*, action, as the direct manifestation of Nature in Man, creates the essential character of human nature and human existence. The echoes of Sade in Camus’ *Caligula* are clearly evident if one considers passages like the following from *The Rebel*, where he summarizes Sade’s philosophy in the following way: “The law of this world is nothing but the law of force; its driving force, the will to power;”³³ and a few pages later: “We must become, according to Sade’s formula, nature’s executioner.”³⁴ In Sade’s own words:

The primary and most beautiful of Nature’s quality is motion, which
agitates her at all times, but this motion is simply a perpetual
consequence of crimes, she conserves it by means of crimes only;
the person who most nearly resembles her, and therefore the most

³¹ Klossowski in *120 Days of Sodom & Other Writings* 73. For a discussion of Nietzsche’s idea on eternal recurrence, see Lawrence J. Hatab’s *Nietzsche’s Life Sentence: Coming to Terms with Eternal Recurrence* (New York: Routledge, 2005). Also see Camus’ *The Rebel* 73-74.

³² This opposition to Sade’s conception is expressly indicated in Camus’ direct reference to Nietzsche and Heraclitus when he discusses the idea of the eternal return in *The Rebel*: “The primordial sea indefatigably repeats the same words and casts up the same astonished beings on the same seashore. But at least he who consents to his own return and to the return of all things, who becomes an echo and an exalted echo, participates in the divinity of the world” 73.

³³ Camus, *The Rebel* 41.

³⁴ Camus, *The Rebel* 44.

perfect being, necessarily will be the one whose most active agitation will become the cause of many crimes; whereas, I repeat, the inactive or indolent person, that is to say, the virtuous person, must be in her eyes—how may there be any doubt of it?—the least perfect since he tends only to apathy, to lethargy, to that inactivity which would immediately plunge everything back into chaos were his star to be in the ascendant. Equilibrium must be preserved; it can only be preserved by crimes; therefore, crimes serve Nature;...³⁵

Crime is thus necessary in the world simply because it fulfills the most basic natural law. According to Sade “Murderers, to be brief, are in Nature as are war, famine, and cholera; they are one of the means Nature disposes of, like all the hostile forces she pits against us.”³⁶

This produces a vision of society as a state of Nature which should, as opposed to classical natural law doctrine, reflect the expression of its basic laws. According to Timo Airaksinen, in Sade’s world “human development is from scavenger to avenger to predator.”³⁷ If one follows Nature’s law by becoming an instrument of her destruction, then we all become criminals or predators feeding on each other. This reflects the comment by Cottard in *The Plague*, one of the numerous criminals that appear in Camus’ novels, where he comments that “Big fish eat little fish.”³⁸ The moral conventions that regulate human interaction are no

³⁵ Sade, *Justine* 520-1.

³⁶ Sade, *Juliette* 777. See Caligula’s remark to Lucius and the others “Up to now, my reign has been too happy. No sweeping plague, no cruel religion, not even a revolution—in short, nothing like to give you a place in history. In a sense, you see, that’s why I’ve been trying to make up for fate’s modesty. I mean-- I don’t know whether or not you grasp my meaning. In short, I’m your plague” 69.

³⁷ Airaksinen, *The Philosophy of the Marquis de Sade* 48. Compare this to Camus’ entry in his *Notebooks 1935-1951*: “Three principles of development: physical man, thought, revolt” 178. See Hobbes’ famous image in *The Elements of Law* where he writes that “...the state of men without civil society (which state we may properly call the state of nature) is nothing else but a mere war of all against all;...” See Hobbes’ *Human Nature and De Corpore Politico* (New York: Oxford Press, 1994) xvii.

³⁸ Sade states very clearly that Ego or the individual is the most important in Nature’s eyes, for example, in *Philosophy In The Boudoir*: “How could Nature, who always urges us to delight in ourselves, who never suggests any other instincts, other notions, other inspiration, assure us in the next moment that we must not, on the other hand, choose to love ourselves should it cause others pain? Ah, believe me, Eugenie, Mother Nature never speaks to us save of ourselves; there is nought so egotistic as her message, and what we most clearly

longer the Biblical Golden Rule or Kant's Categorical Imperative, but absolute self-interest and destruction of the Other, or as Sade puts it:

Neither does it [Nature] tell us not to do unto others that which unto our own selves we would not that there be done; if we care to listen closely to it, 'tis quite the opposite message we will hear....Be ever mindful, Nature says to us instead, be ever mindful that all which though wouldst not have done unto thyself, being the grave harm done a neighbor when there is much profit to be had, is precisely that which thou must do to be happy; for it is writ in my laws that ye destroy yourselves mutually, and the true way to succeed therein is to harm they neighbor without stint or cease.³⁹

In other words, "Do unto others before they can do unto you!" The implication of this logic is that in Nature the weak are destroyed and the strong survive. By killing, humans take on the power of Nature, assume once again the mantle of the Man/God, and take on the power of the divinity. The primary law then becomes the primordial concept of kill or be killed, eat or be eaten. Sade's idea that by killing one fulfills the will of Nature⁴⁰ is echoed in the words of Caligula: "I must answer the overwhelming desires that nature prompts"⁴¹

divine therefrom is the immutable and sacred counsel: prefer thyself; love thyself; no matter at whose expense" 96-7. Also on page 141: "After all, no-one is more egotistic than Nature, let us follow suit, if we wish to remain in harmony with her." And on page 172 he writes: "You would be foolish indeed to care about anyone but your own selves." (Compare Feuerbach's comment in Note 56). For Cottard's quote see *The Plague*, pages 49-50.

³⁹ Sade, *Juliette* 780. For a similar comment, see *Philosophy In The Boudoir* 96. Sade expresses a different view in his early work of the *Dialogue between a Priest and a Dying Man* (1782), where he has the Dying Man say "Render others as happy as one desires oneself to be, and never inflict more pain upon them than one would like to receive at their hands" 174.

⁴⁰ For comments on murder and Nature's will, see *Justine* pages 519-520: "...no person exists who in the depths of his heart does not feel the most vehement desire to be rid of those by whom he is hampered, troubled, or whose death may be of some advantage to him;...all the impulses she [Nature] puts in us are the agents of her decrees; man's passions are but the means she employs to attain her ends." And in *Philosophy In The Boudoir*: "We are but the blind instruments of her impulses..." 181.

⁴¹ Camus, *Caligula* 34.

Sade's transmutation of values is thus complete: the ultimate morality is to be absolutely immoral; the social bond consists in absolute distrust of others and the constant attempt to destroy them. In one final twist, however, the inversion turns against Nature itself. Precisely as creatures of Nature, human beings become conscious of the limitations that Nature places on them, not only in regards to their desires, but also in terms of their freedom. Like those who would aspire to become God or to have the power of God, Sade desires to have the same destructive power of Nature, and he therefore rails against the fact, precisely as Caligula does, that human abilities cannot compare to those of Nature. In *Juliette* the Pope remarks:

Regret nothing but that we are unable to do enough, lament nothing but the weakness of the faculties we have received for our share and whose ridiculous limitations so cramps our penchants... And far from thanking this illogical Nature for the slender freedom she allows us for accomplishing the desires she inspires in us, let us curse her from the bottom of our heart for so restricting the career which fulfills her aims; let us outrage her, let us abominate her for having left us so few wicked things to do, and then giving us such violent urges to commit crimes without measure or pause.⁴²

Ultimately, Sade, like Caligula, wants to be Nature or God and in this vengeance against Nature and in his bid to become as destructive as Nature, he approaches the extremes of nihilism. As Sade writes:

When I have exterminated all the creatures that cover the earth, still shall I be far from my mark, since I shall have merely served Thee, O unkind Mother, for it is to vengeance I aspire, vengeance for what, whether through stupidity or malice, Thou doest to men in never furnishing them the means to translate fairly into deeds the appalling desires Thou dost ever

⁴² Sade, *Juliette* 781-2.

rouse in them.⁴³

CALIGULA AS SADEAN FIGURE

This ultimate desire to outdo Nature in its destructive logic in order to escape from the very Nature to which we owe our finitude and values is exactly the one that Camus wants to explore through Caligula and his “god-like lucidity of the solitary man”⁴⁴ Once he has achieved his position of power and taken on Nature’s destructive power, Caligula actually feels that he has achieved human happiness in this freedom:

I live and kill. I wield the frenzied power of the destroyer which make
the creator’s power seem laughable. That’s what it is to be happy.

That’s what happiness is—this unbearable liberation, this universal
contempt, blood and hatred all around me, this unparalleled isolation
of the man who sees his whole life at once, the measureless joy of the
unpunished assassin, this ruthless logic that crushes human lives,
this is crushing you Caesonia, to complete at last the eternal solitude

I desire.⁴⁵

Sade says that it is in this sense of vengeance against Nature itself (and through it against God as Creator) and the destructive desires she instills in humans that Man’s cruelty originates. This would be the direct opposite of the Will To Happiness that *A Happy Death* extolled. Indeed, we remember how at the center of that story of liberated human freedom, murder and crime were present. Murder was investigated as a possible moral option in an

⁴³ Sade, *Juliette* 782. In *Juliette* Sade has the Pope say “Unable to please her by the atrocity of a global destruction, at least provide her the pleasure of local atrocity, and into your murderings put every imaginable foulness and horror, thereby showing utmost docility in your compliance with the laws she imposes upon you; your inability to do all she wants does not exempt you from doing all you can” 775.

⁴⁴ Camus, *Caligula* 78.

⁴⁵ Camus, *Caligula* 79.

unchallenging sense, as a liberation of a crippled body (the suicide of Zagreus) that provided the material conditions for Mersault's realization of freedom. Sade presents another, much more sinister, interpretation of what the morality of cruelty and murder might mean. As he summarized it, for instance in this passage from *Philosophy of the Boudoir*, cruelty is one of Man's primary characteristics:

Thus, my dear Eugenie...I may add thereto that cruelty, far from being a vice, is the primal sentiment Nature injects in us all...Cruelty is natural... All of us are born imbedded with a seed of cruelty, later cultivated by education... You see, cruelty is simply the energy within a man not quite corrupted by society; therefore 'tis a virtue, not a vice.⁴⁶

In *Caligula*, similarly, cruelty becomes the logical outcome of unbridled natural freedom. Cherea remarks that "Caligula used to tell me that there is no vital passion without a touch of cruelty," and Helicon replies, "Nor any love without a touch of rape."⁴⁷ Caligula later tells the patricians that "any man can play celestial tragedy and become a god...All that's needed is to harden one's heart."⁴⁸

It is important to note that Caligula's crisis of consciousness at the beginning of Camus' play has been brought about by the death of his sister Drusila. This is what awakens him to the reality of death and the limitations of human existence. It also ultimately confronts Caligula with the absurd gap between Man and the world, and the limits of human love and Time. In his words, "...here I am today far freer than I was years ago because I am liberated from memory and delusion. I know that nothing lasts."⁴⁹ Caligula reacts to death and the absurd human condition by rejecting love and adopting a murderous philosophy:

All that is needed is to remain logical to the bitter end...But what is love?

⁴⁶ Sade, *Philosophy in the Boudoir* 97.

⁴⁷ Camus, *Caligula* 34.

⁴⁸ Camus, *Caligula* 51-2.

⁴⁹ Camus, *Caligula* 78.

Not much. That death doesn't matter, I assure you...It is the symbol of a truth that makes the moon necessary to me...Men die and they are not happy.⁵⁰

Sade's frightening example explains perfectly the logic behind this step--from the realization of the Absurd to the embrace of violence and destruction. That step is not properly explained by the realization of human finitude. It makes sense, on the other hand, if it is understood as the (mad) embrace of one's radical naturalism. Sade's mad logic is quite significant. It shows that the experience of the Absurd, the most famous aspect of Camus' thought, is not simply an existential problem brought about by the gap between human intentionality and an indifferent world, but is rooted in the difficulties of a humanity striving to define its place in it. This has become particularly problematic since that place is now solely defined in terms of Nature after the second element in the tragic paradigm, the divine, has disappeared. To speak in philosophical terms, beyond the classical articulation of freedom in terms of consciousness and intentionality by the grand philosophical tradition, the Absurd is also (and indeed firstly) a problem arising from the difficulties in interpreting naturalism and materialism.

What Caligula seeks is to break through the illusions and the lies in which humans find security and comfort, and to tear off the masks that hide them from the Dionysian terror that lurks behind the façade of institutions and civilization. Through his power, Caligula wants to expose Sade's idea of Nature and the cruelty and destruction that form the true basis of Man's real relationship with a world without God and without the hope of immortality. As Caligula tells Cherea "Security and logic don't go together."⁵¹

Crucially though, Caligula's quest for total freedom and his desire to overcome the absurd elements of human existence by competing with Nature do not succeed. This is

⁵⁰ Camus, *Caligula* 13.

⁵¹ Camus, *Caligula* 57.

unlike Sade's novels in which the evil characters escape human justice and immanent retribution through incredible turns of events. Sade's writings represent for Camus a desperate exploration of a radical paradox, the morality of immorality. As such, they are to be admired for the intellectual courage with which the contradiction is pursued, but they fail to convince. In the end, the philosophical demonstrations cannot hide their status as mere fictions.

Caligula embraces Sade's philosophy, but unlike the torturers in the *120 Days of Sodom*, he cannot escape his fate. He lacks the power to overcome Nature. The solution to the Absurd was not the path of crime and the hubristic competition with Nature in the cycle of violence; it was the hedonistic embrace of life and sensuality described in the other texts, or in the ironic wisdom and narcissism displayed in Camus' last complete novel, *The Fall* (1956).⁵² Caligula experiences the Sadean madness and eventually realizes the fallacy behind it. He learns that no matter how much Man rebels or what form it takes, Nature eventually destroys and consumes him. No matter how strong human desires and passions for life may be, Caligula comes to the conclusions that it is our tragic fate that we will always fall short in our expectations and our aspirations; we will always come face to face with the limitations and imperfections that Nature has bestowed on us. In the end he realizes that:

Neither this world nor the other world has a place for me. Yet I know, and you know that all I needed was for the impossible to be. That impossible! I searched for it on the confines of the world, on the frontiers of myself. I stretched out my hands—I still stretch out my hands and I always find you confronting me, and I have a loathing for you. I have taken the wrong path. My freedom is not the right one.⁵³

⁵² Camus' last novel *The First Man*, which was published in 1994, was unfinished at the time of his death.

⁵³ Camus, *Caligula* 79-80.

As an expression of Nietzsche's Will-to-Power and Sade's philosophy of radical freedom, Caligula becomes the supreme example of human freedom from Nature, God, and society taken to the very extremes. He becomes both God and Nature and attempts to rise above the human condition and the fate that Man was born for. He eventually realizes, however, that this freedom is as much an illusion as was his desire to use his power to destroy the people around him because ultimately, "One is always free at the expense of others."⁵⁴ His struggle for authenticity through violence and nihilistic destruction failed to give him the freedom he desired.

Caligula's reign eventually comes to an end. His last words and actions testify to the inescapable difficulties implied in being both a natural being and one inherently dissatisfied with this status. As he becomes the recipient of Nature's destructive will through those who attack him, he continues to maintain his revolt against Nature and death by exclaiming at the very moment of his death "I'm still alive!"⁵⁵ Caligula confronted the Absurd without God or the promise of immortality through a solitary leap into nihilism and destruction and attempted to achieve an individual freedom that he eventually realized was false. The play is a demonstration, through the horrors of Sade's method and the unveiling of the contradiction at the heart of the choice of violence and egoism, that notwithstanding what Caligula thought was true, human freedom and happiness resided in human solidarity.

In all the works that follow, especially in *The Plague*, *The Rebel*, and *The Fall*, Camus' attention and his response to the Absurd will move away from characters who live as solitary, self-absorbed individuals to narratives and arguments that underline the essential need for solidarity and community.⁵⁶ We might say that Caligula represents Camus' demonstration of

⁵⁴ Camus, *Caligula* 36.

⁵⁵ Camus, *Caligula* 104.

⁵⁶ Camus states in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*: "Compared to *The Stranger*, *The Plague* does, beyond any possible discussion, represent the transition from an attitude of solitary revolt to the recognition of a community whose struggles must be shared. If there is an evolution from *The Stranger* to *The Plague*, it is in the direction of solidarity and participation" 339. Compare this to Jeanson's remarks on *The Plague* in his criticism of *The Rebel*. Many critics who have primarily focused on Camus and the Absurd and the works that certainly address

the dangerous temptation and consequences of Sade's philosophy. A passage in *The Rebel* provides a good summary of this development in Camus' thinking:

But they prove, at the same time, that they cannot dispense with mankind; they satisfy a terrible hunger for fraternity. 'The human being needs happiness, and when he is unhappy, he needs another human being.' Those who reject the agony of living and dying wish to dominate. 'Solitude is power,' says Sade. Power, today, because for thousands of solitary people it signifies the suffering of others, bears witness to the need of others. Terror is the homage that the malignant recluse finally pays to the brotherhood of man.⁵⁷

The next three chapters will delineate some of the key dimensions, both negative and positive, moral and political, of Camus turn to solidarity as an essential element in human experience within an absurd world.

the Absurd fail to note that for Camus, this was only a starting point that it needed to be surmounted. A particularly telling and influential example of this is Francis Jeanson's review of *The Rebel* (see pages 82-85 in David Sprintzen's *Sartre and Camus: A Historic Confrontation* (New York: Humanity Books, 2004), where he focuses on *The Stranger*, *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Plague*. Jeanson discusses the themes of the absurd, evil, Camus' "Red Cross morality," and metaphysical rebellion as the premises for his criticism of *The Rebel*. Herbert Hochberg's article "Albert Camus and the Ethic of Absurdity" *Ethics*, 75:2 (1965): 87-102, also criticizes Camus primarily because his idea of the Absurd rejects God and the Absolute and for Camus' failure to replace it with a comparable ethic.

⁵⁷ Camus, *The Rebel* 248.

CHAPTER FIVE: CAMUS AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF EXISTENTIALISM

Camus is traditionally associated with existentialism more than any other philosophical school of thought, primarily because of the period in which he wrote and his close relationship with Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Merleau-Ponty. However, if one considers Camus' actual statements in relation to existentialism and more specifically his position regarding some of the key aspects of existential philosophy, one starts to ask to what extent this label is actually justified. To better understand where Camus stood in relationship to existentialism and the reasons for his partial opposition to it, I will briefly examine Camus' position on German philosophy-- Hegel and Marx in particular; his views on history and human progress; his specific concept of freedom; his reliance on a concept of human nature; as well as his views on humanism and moral values.

This chapter aims to give an insight into the important philosophical content of Camus' writing and thinking as they emerged from the poetic and philosophical reflections and meditations of his formative years, which the previous chapters have studied. Against the widespread prejudice concerning the depth of Camus' own "philosophy" and against the background of his Algerian years, this chapter seeks to highlight the sophisticated and original positioning of Camus within the history of philosophy itself.

CAMUS AS EXISTENTIALIST

The first problem is the simple one of defining exactly what the term existentialist means and what it includes. The *Lyrical and Critical Essays* contains an explicit passage in which Camus clearly states, "No, I am not an existentialist;"¹ and in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he

¹ Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays* 345.

specifically rejected the Christian existentialists Kierkegaard and Chestov.² Furthermore, Camus has stated throughout his writing that he does not agree with the German tradition of philosophy that spans from Hegel and Marx to Heidegger. To the extent that French existentialism in the works of Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Merleau-Ponty is mostly indebted to this strain of philosophy, it constitutes another reason for questioning the suitability of placing this existentialist label on Camus. As he remarked to students after the Nobel Prize ceremony in Stockholm in 1954:

I am not an existentialist although of course critics are obliged to make categories. I got my first philosophical impressions from the Greeks, not from nineteenth-century Germany, whose philosophy is the basis for today's French existentialism.³

This once again confirms the emphasis we placed earlier in this thesis on the importance of Camus' dissertation in the formation of his thinking.

If, on the other hand, an "existentialist" is defined in a broader and vaguer sense as a thinker whose philosophy focuses primarily on the realities and problems of human existence where the individual is placed at the center of importance, then we have a line of humanistic thought that goes back much further than the traditional genealogies acknowledge (with Pascal and Kierkegaard), and can be said to begin in fact with some of the Greek tragic playwrights and philosophers, continuing through to St. Augustine, Pelagius, the French *philosophes*, and as I argued in earlier chapters, the Marquis de Sade, Feuerbach, and Nietzsche.⁴ As Camus himself states:

It is a serious error to treat with such frivolity a philosophical research as

² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 17. See also pages 28 and 100.

³ Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus: A Life* (New York: Carrol & Graff Publishers, Inc., 2000) 379.

⁴ The classical Greek tragedies move from a focus on myth in Aeschylus to more of an emphasis on human knowledge and consciousness in Sophocles and Euripides. As these tragic dramas develop, humans take a much more central place.

serious as existentialism is. Its origins go back to Saint Augustine and its chief contribution to knowledge certainly resides in the impressive wealth of its method. Existentialism is above all a method....⁵

As the previous chapters have tried to show, the thinkers listed above (Augustine, Sade, Feuerbach, and Nietzsche) helped Camus to form his own philosophical thought. In a sense, these were all “existential” thinkers who were primarily concerned with the human being as the focal point and, more specifically, with human existence, freedom, and the problematics of transcendence. Camus is an existential writer in that sense, but not an existentialist in the same way as Heidegger, Sartre, de Beauvoir or Merleau-Ponty (even though Heidegger famously took issue with Sartre’s existentialism in his *Letter on Humanism*).⁶ It is important to note that in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus never mentions the words existentialism or existentialists. Instead, he refers to “existential thought,” and “existential philosophy;” for existentialists, he uses the word “existentials.”⁷ When he refers to existential philosophy, Camus is drawing attention not only to the beliefs specific to the modern Christian and Marxist existentialists, but also to basic humanistic themes that have a long history in Western literature and philosophy.

As Charles Guignon points out: “The problem of determining the existentialist “canon” arises because the term existentialism did not come into use until the 1940s, and even then it was embraced as a label only by specific philosophers, primarily Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir.”⁸ One would also have to add Merleau-Ponty as well in view of their

⁵ Herbert Lottman, *Albert Camus: A Biography* (London: Axis Publishing, 1997) 496.

⁶ See Heidegger’s rebuttal of Sartre in his letter: “Sartre’s key proposition about the priority of existential over essentia does, however justify using the name “existentialism” as an appropriate title for a philosophy of this sort. But the basic tenet of “existentialism” has nothing at all in common with the statement from Being and Time—apart from the fact that in Being and Time no statement about the relation of essentia and existential can yet be expressed,...” (*Basic Writings* San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993) 232.

⁷ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 22-48. He also refers to “existential attitude” and “existential preaching” (See pages 31 and 43).

⁸ Charles Guignon, *The Existentialists: Critical Essays on Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004) 2.

close connection and the references to existentialism in his work.⁹ Camus' identification with existentialism for the general public came with the publication of *The Outsider* in 1942, and its resemblance to and the comparisons that were made with Sartre's *Nausea* (1938), not to mention their early, and very public, friendship in Paris.¹⁰ Camus, however, early on sought to clarify the exact extent of their philosophical overlap in an interview in 1945:

No, I am not an existentialist. Sartre and I are always surprised to see our names linked. We have even thought of publishing a short statement in which the undersigned declare that they have nothing in common with each other and refuse to be held responsible for the debts they might respectively incur. It's a joke actually. Sartre and I published all our books, without exception, before we had even met. When we did get to know each other, it was to realize how much we differed....¹¹

And Herbert Lottman quotes Camus as saying:

The similarities that one generally remarks between Sartre's work and my own come naturally from the chance or the misfortune that we have to live in the same era and in confrontation with common problems and concerns.¹²

⁹ As Stephan Priest writes in *Merleau Ponty* (London: Routledge, 1998): "Understanding existentialism is necessary for understanding Merleau-Ponty because his 'existential phenomenology' is a synthesis of existentialism with Husserlian phenomenology" 36.

¹⁰ They first met in Paris in 1943, although previous to this they had reviewed each other's work. Herbert Lottman writes on page 301 that Sartre and Camus first met at the opening of Sartre's play *Les Mouches*, and he cites Simone Beauvoir, who was not present at the opening, as saying that it was on June 2 when Camus came up to Sartre in the lobby. He also says on page 314 that "Their common plight, Beauvoir was convinced, developed the solidarity between Camus and their group that tastes and opinions alone would not have been able to explain." See the same page for Beauvoir's description of Camus. For more information on the "Era of Existentialism," see Chapter Three in Anne Cohen-Solal's *Jean-Paul Sartre: A Life* (New York: The New Press, 2005) 247-269.

¹¹ Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970) 345.

¹² Lottman, *Albert Camus*, 498.

A closer analysis of their relationship very clearly shows the differences in their philosophical backgrounds and their thinking, and nowhere is this more apparent than in their relationship to German philosophy, Marxism in particular, and in their political choices.

Camus later drew an even sharper distinction between Sartre's existentialism and his own thinking in a letter to Nicolas Daniloff, a student at Harvard University who was preparing a dissertation for a degree in political theory in February of 1956.¹³ Daniloff wrote to Camus to ask him whether the philosophy of existentialism, as interpreted by Sartre, was capable of creating a theory of political obligation in light of the problems of authority and freedom that occurred after the liberation of France. In his letter of February 23, Camus replied:

It is important in effect to note that I am not an existentialist in the actual sense of the word and that the existentialism of Sartre seems to me to be a contradictory philosophy full of confusions and bad faith (*mauvaise foi*), and that, far from offering a decent solution to the problem of authority and freedom, as you have asked, [this philosophy] cannot but lead to servitude. The actual evolution of the movement has shown this. This evolution is inevitable and leads to a moment where, unable to find any long-lasting values, modern existentialists in reality make an absolute value of history. They have condemned themselves to only elaborating a philosophy that does exactly this...My position is different.¹⁴

In his *Resistance, Rebellion and Death*, Camus also writes "I do not have much liking for the too famous existential philosophy, and, to tell the truth, I think its conclusions false."¹⁵

¹³ Nicolas Daniloff was kind enough to send me copies of his letter and Camus' response.

¹⁴ The translation of Camus' letter to Nicolas Daniloff is my own. In it, Camus wrote: "Il est important en effet de noter que je ne suis pas existentialiste au sens actuel du mot et que l'existentialisme de Sartre me parait une philosophie contradictoire, où abondent confusions et mauvaise foi, et qui, loin de mener à une solution décente du problème liberté-autorité, comme vous vous le demandez, ne peut mener qu'à la servitude. L'évolution actuelle du mouvement le prouve assez. Cette évolution est inévitable à partir du moment où, refusant de reconnaître aucune valeur stable, les existentialistes modernes font en réalité une valeur absolue de l'histoire. Ils se condamnent alors à élaborer seulement la philosophie du fait accompli...Ma position est différente."

¹⁵ Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion and Death* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974) 58.

This statement applies to both the Christian and the Marxist existentialists. Camus' main disagreement with the former was their idea of the leap into faith and God, which he dealt with in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. As for the Marxist existentialists, the source of his dissatisfaction was their concepts of history, freedom, and human values, which he outlined in *The Rebel*. Another source of disagreement stemmed from the fact that Camus objected to the utopian nature of both Christianity and Marxism--utopias that promised eternal happiness and a perfect society via a historical process through which people were willing to sacrifice human lives for an ideal that leads them to believe that the ends justify the means.

The above statements that Camus made about existentialism clearly show that calling him an existentialist or considering him as a proponent of this philosophy is not justified. It is evident that he did not accept this label nor did he agree with many tenets of either Christian or Marxist existentialists. However, Camus' work does deal with some of the basic themes of existentialism or those used by 20th century existentialists that derive from older philosophical traditions.

EXISTENTIAL THEMES IN CAMUS

Richard Appignanesi in his *What Do Existentialists Believe* (2006) makes an important remark about the significance of existentialism as a general philosophical position. As he shows, our language becomes stale, the meanings of words ossify, and it is the role of philosophy to revitalize or indeed to rescue these words: "Existentialism restores such words [freedom, value, humanity, reality...] to their original summons of meanings—to the absurd, in Kierkegaard's sense of being 'unheard of.'"¹⁶ The great achievement of existentialism is to have restored the urgency and significance of several common existential and humanistic themes from literature and philosophy, by reinterpreting or redefining them in the context of

¹⁶ Richard Appignanesi *What Do Existentialists Believe?* (London: Granta Books, 2006) 279.

the challenges to human existence in the late 19th and 20th centuries. Existentialism has been able to rejuvenate conceptual language in this way by focusing on notions and forms of experience that are specifically existentialist.

Despite the great variations between existentialist authors, the common themes that emerge are the following: 1) first and foremost freedom, which takes a central place in all of these writers; 2) the importance of individual intentionality (subjectivity and the relationship between the existential subject, the phenomenal world, and others); 3) human action, responsibility, and ethics; and 4) consciousness (Mind/Body) and psychological moods. In addition to these key questions, the inclusion of other topics such as ontology, death, nothingness, authenticity, and morality and values greatly depends on the influence of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, or Heidegger and Sartre. Comparing these major themes of existentialism to the works of Camus, it is now an easier task to identify which of these he focused on and which ones were the most important to him.¹⁷

It is clear that death and mortality were central to Camus' early thinking from *A Happy Death*, to *The Outsider* and *The Plague*, all the way to *The Fall*. In both a literal and a metaphorical sense, death represents the finitude of human existence that Man must face and accept. It also, however, gives meaning and form to life. In Camus' view: "What would the world be without death—a succession of forms evaporating and returning, an anguished flight, an unfinishable world."¹⁸ In *The Myth of Sisyphus* he also writes that "The consciousness of death is the call of anxiety and 'existence' then delivers itself its own

¹⁷ William Barrett in his work *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1958) calls Camus the "most sensitive" of the trio (Sartre, Beauvoir, Camus) and he writes that Camus "continued his exploration into themes that belonged to the original Existentialist preoccupations" 8.

¹⁸ Camus, *Notebooks 1942-1951* 68. Camus also states that "Death gives its shape to love as it does to life—transforming it into fate" 68. Compare this to Simone de Beauvoir's comment in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: Citadel Press, 1948): "What stops them is that as soon as they give the word 'end' its double meaning of goal and fulfillment they clearly perceive this ambiguity of their condition, which is the most fundamental of all: that every living moment is a sliding toward death. But if they are willing to look it in the face, they also discover that every movement toward death is life" 127.

summons through the intermediary of consciousness.”¹⁹ And in *The Fall*: “Have you noticed that death alone awakens our feelings?”²⁰ while at the end of the novel Jean-Baptiste Clamence remarks: “Then it was that the thought of death burst into my daily life. I would measure the years separating me from my end.”²¹ As we noted in the previous chapter, death is one of the central themes in Camus and lies at the heart of his philosophy.²² The quotes above indicate that he uses the theme of death in a way very similar to the other existentialists. However, our earlier chapters also show the very important ways in which Camus differs from them on that score. His focus on death as a determining factor of existence stems first and foremost from his reading of the Greeks, early Christian writers, and materialist philosophers. From them, he borrowed the idea that the limits to human existence should not be the cause of anguish, but rather the reason for us to embrace our sensual presence in relation to the world.

The second important theme in Camus’ work and one that he also shares with the existentialists is that of human intentionality and subjectivity, and the gap between Man and the World. This subject/object, or Mind/World, relationship leads to the deep divide between the physical, phenomenal world of appearances and the metaphysical idea of the transcendent. For Camus, the idea of the Absurd arises from the gap between subjectivity and the objective world of Nature: “...the Absurd is not in man...nor in the world, but in their presence together.”²³ It is human consciousness that creates and maintains the absurd sensitivity or as Camus puts it “...everything begins with consciousness and nothing is worth

¹⁹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 18.

²⁰ Camus, *The Fall* 26.

²¹ Camus 66.

²² Lulu M. Haroutunian in her article “Albert Camus and the White Plague” *MLN* 79:3 (1964): 311-315, draws a connection between Camus’ tuberculosis and the subject of death in his work.

²³ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 23. Camus also says “...what is absurd is the confrontation or this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart” 16.

anything except through it.”²⁴ With the death of consciousness the Absurd ceases to exist, because “There can be no absurd outside the human mind. Thus, like everything else, the absurd ends with death.”²⁵ In this regard, Camus seems to repeat a theoretical position that the other existentialists share.

As Richard Appignanesi writes: “Consciousness is existentialism’s jewel in the crown. The lucidity of consciousness is always there, always in light, even in the murkiest states of existential perturbation.”²⁶ Yet once again, this existentialist theme undergoes an important nuance. Even more important than this gap between human consciousness and the world for Camus is the idea of the irrational, the chaos, and the unknown that lie beyond the world of appearances in the thing-itself. Whereas existentialists assume that the objective world obeys regular laws, Camus is unique in insisting (following Nietzsche but also, as we suggested, Sade) on the chaotic, destructive aspects of Nature.

Another theme that Camus has in common with the existentialists concerns human action, responsibility, and the question of the creation of individual moral and ethical values, especially if one does not subscribe to those held by the prevailing religious structure, in particular, Christianity. While still acknowledging the existence of the metaphysical plane in human thought but without believing in the personification of God, Camus questions how values are created and from what source they originate. Like many existential writers on this subject, Camus repeats, along with Sartre and de Beauvoir, Dostoevsky’s implication that if God is dead or there is no immortality, then everything is possible or lawful.²⁷ Camus rejects this seemingly logical conclusion because he holds that it ultimately ends in nihilism.

²⁴ Camus 10.

²⁵ Camus 23.

²⁶ Appignanesi, *What Do Existentialists Believe?* 86.

²⁷ The phrase that Camus uses most often in his works to reflect Dostoevsky’s idea is “Everything is possible” or “Everything is permitted.”

Instead, he attempts to develop a non-religious naturalistic ethics.²⁸ In this regard, he could appear closer to thinkers like Nietzsche and Sartre who also start from a premise that rejects God and Christianity, and who search for an ethics that will somehow guide action without the overriding moral structures of religion. The difference for Camus, however, is the decisive rejection of nihilism and relativism in favor of a difficult morality of lucidity and “rebellion” that is indeed individualistic, yet also aims at universalism.

The key word leading to an existential ethics is the concept of freedom, the most common theme among existential writers and 20th century existentialists, and one of Camus’ core concepts as well. Freedom is by far the most important subject in his later works, especially *The Rebel*, but it also figures prominently in all of his other writings in one form or another. Once again, however, Camus’ concept of freedom is also specific, inasmuch as it derives from his study of early theological and metaphysical debates and his interest in the materialist tradition. Rather than postulating freedom, and then asking how it should be used--in the manner of Sartre and de Beauvoir--Camus considers freedom as a problem that arises from a detranscendentalized and desacralized naturalism. For him, it is as much a question of how to make use of one’s existential body, as it is a question of dealing with the anguish that it brings with it.

Now that I have briefly outlined the most important themes that Camus shared with existentialist writers, we can consider in more detail the main points with which he differed from philosophical existentialism. By doing so, it will allow us to better position Camus’ thinking within the history of philosophy and especially with the different forms of existentialist thought.

²⁸ As he writes in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, the absurd “does not authorize all actions. ‘Everything is permitted’ does not mean that nothing is forbidden. The absurd merely confers an equivalence on the consequences of those actions” 50. Camus deals extensively with the subject of nihilism in *The Rebel*, where his position is that the logical consequence of nihilism is murder (page 6). Sartre also makes use of Dostoevsky’s idea in his *Existentialism and Humanism* (pages 33-34), but again, the phrase used is not a direct quote from any of Dostoevsky’s novels.

CAMUS AND CHRISTIAN EXISTENTIALISTS

Camus states that *The Myth of Sisyphus* was "...the only book of ideas that I have published," and that it "was directed against the so-called existentialist philosophers."²⁹ Camus is referring here to the religious or Christian existentialists such as Kierkegaard, Chestov, and Jaspers, and his primary objection is to their idea of hope and the leap of faith as a way to rescue a sense of transcendence. Camus refuses to limit himself to existential philosophies because they "without exception suggest escape."³⁰ And any futile attempt of these theistic existentialists to escape from the reality of Man's existence in the world or "laying claim to the eternal" is, for Camus, a form of "philosophical suicide."³¹

Camus writes in *The Myth of Sisyphus* that "For the existentials negation is their God. To be precise, that god is maintained only through the negation of human reason,"³² He also states that "the theme of the irrational, as it is conceived by the existentials, is reason becoming confused and escaping by negating itself. The absurd is lucid reason noting its limits."³³ By substituting faith in the eternal and the idea of God with the notion of a human consciousness striving toward the Absurd, the gap between human consciousness and the objective world is negated or weakened. As a result, the reality of death and human facticity are not faced. In this sense, it is a form of inauthenticity or a denial of truth in existence³⁴

²⁹ Olivier Todd states that Camus also wrote a thirty-six page philosophical parody called "L'Impromptu des philosophes," under the pen name of Antoine Bailly, but it was never published. The play "made fun of pseudo-existentialists of the basement nightclubs of the Saint-Germain quarter in Paris. The satirical target was the heavy-mindedness of some of Sartre's crowd" 234-5.

³⁰ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 24: "Now, to limit myself to existential philosophies, I see that all of them without exception suggest escape."

³¹ Camus 31.

³² Camus 31. Again, Camus uses the word "existentials" rather than "existentialists."

³³ Camus 36.

³⁴ In his book *In Search of Authenticity: From Kierkegaard to Camus* (London: Routledge, 1995), Jacob Golomb makes the statement that "Unlike the ontologists, Camus rarely uses the term 'authenticity.' Nonetheless, the concept of authenticity pervades everything he wrote" 171.

Camus' position on the need for transcendence, however, was not simply that of an Enlightenment critic of religion who rejects it as mere illusion. As a result of his deep interest in Christian metaphysics and following a methodology well illustrated by Feuerbach, he also sought to re-examine the symbolic and metaphorical wealth of religious thinking and writing and to explain the inescapable human desire for leaps of faith. From his dissertation on Christian metaphysics to his later works, Camus never ceased examining the conflict between faith and reason, the relationship between the human desire for the metaphysical, and the need for lucidity. Clear evidence for this can be found in the frequent philosophical dialogues that appear in his work featuring a priest and a materialist non-believer, as in the penultimate scene in *The Outsider* or in the dialogue between Father Paneloux and Dr. Rieux in *The Plague*.³⁵

Camus is sensitive to the fact that when the human mind meets its own limit, it is unavoidably drawn to the irrational or the idea of a transcendental plane. Humans try to overcome these limits through religion and other ideological systems that are supposed to give unity or meaning to that which lacks shape or form. Camus, like Feuerbach, is very interested in the fact that human psychology consists of a combination of the mythological and the logical. Indeed, it is striking to see how much Camus himself makes use of mythological figures in his own writing (Sisyphus, of course, but also Prometheus, Dionysus, Helen, the Minotaur, and so on).³⁶ Like Feuerbach, Camus is also drawn to the metaphors

³⁵ With Camus' knowledge of the Marquis de Sade (See for instance his "*Dialogue of a Dying Man and a Priest*" (1792), which Camus specifically mentions in *The Rebel*, page 37), one cannot help thinking that Camus patterned these dialogues on Sade's work, where the belief in God and immortality comes up against a purely materialist view in which the body or Nature is the only reality. In both Sade's and Camus' dialogues, the priest tries to get the person to repent or to accept God and the certainty of his existence, but without success in either case. In Sade's dialogue, however, the dying man attacks the idea of any divine or creative design and ends up by convincing the priest to renounce the idea of another world and introduces him to the pleasures of Nature, the body, and sexual pleasure.

³⁶ In "The Function of Myth in Existentialism" *Yale French Studies* 1 (1948): 42-52, Harry Slochower remarks that "Existentialism has seized one aspect of the literary myth and raised it to an absolute. It centers on the second stage of the myth, that which is concerned with the revolt of the individual against the mythical collective" 42. He focuses on Sartre's and Camus' use of myth in their literature, and he writes that "The literary myth objectifies man's communal existence" 43. In his *Notebooks 1935-1951*, Camus declared "The world in which I am most at ease: the Greek myth," 249. On page 257, he articulates his work around three

of the Christian religious universe, which, on the other hand, he obviously finds illusory and deceptive.³⁷

Another fundamental difference between Camus and Christian existentialists concerns the relationship between their account of the place of human beings in the world and their insistence on ontology. A primary example in that regard is that of Heidegger, for whom the question of Being is a central one, even if his relationship to Christianity is far from straightforward. An influential commentator like Robert Olson reminds us that “Heidegger has several times said that he is not an existentialist, that he is interested in Being rather than man.”³⁸ Similarly, Frederick Copleston makes the point:

It is often said that the existentialists are primarily concerned with man. A critic can of course, immediately object that this statement does not fit the facts. It will not, for instance fit the case of Heidegger...so that for him the ontological problem of Being is more central than any discussion of man.³⁹

Camus’ relationship to fundamental ontology is a fascinating one. At one level, his primary concern is Man as existent subject and his purpose is to attempt to free the human being from abstractions. For him, Man is not the “shepherd of Being,” nor are humans caretakers of Being, as though that mission had been bestowed upon them from a higher source. Humans are, in Camus’ view, the creators of their own existence as the sole agents

fundamental myths: “I. The Myth of Sisyphus (absurd)—II. The Myth of Prometheus (revolt)—III. The Myth of Nemesis (limits).”

³⁷ See Arthur Goldhammer’s “Camus at Combat” (available only online): “However metaphysically absurd religion may have appeared to Camus in the wake of God’s death, he could not as a student of human nature deny that faith seemed to leave a residue of ethical concern and seriousness even after its ontological armature had been eaten away by modernity and rejected by philosophy. This incessant recourse to religious language [in his editorials for *Combat*] prompted Mauriac to remark that ‘my young colleague is more spiritualist than I imagined—more than I am, in any case....The young masters of *Combat* have yet to flush certain scraps of Christianity entirely out of their system” (<http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~agoldham/articles/Camus> 6/11/07) 6.

³⁸ Robert G. Olson, *An Introduction to Existentialism* (New York: Dover Publications, 1962) 138.

³⁹ Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Logical Positivism and Existentialism* (London: Continuum Books, 1956) 132-133.

responsible for their freedom and responsibility. Man is alone in the universe--that is his fate and, one might also add, his tragic dilemma, since he cannot quite fully negate the need for God and the transcendent. As Camus writes in *The Rebel*: "...nothing can discourage the appetite for divinity in the heart of man."⁴⁰ At the same time, however, this craving of human beings for unity often leads to detrimental consequences in terms of their freedom, value, and dignity. As a result, Camus' naturalism forces him to consider the broader ontological context in which that tragic freedom is exercised.

It is in the naturalistic and sensualistic passages we highlighted in the earlier chapters that something like an alternative Camusian ontology can be seen developing. That alternative ontology, it is important to note, is not used as a transcendent source of value. It simply provides the context of humanity's tragic freedom, but also, in happier moments, an alternative mode of reconciliation with the world. Typically and in opposition to theistic and ontological metaphysics, that reconciliation remains grounded in the body and immanent to the natural realm, devoid of any leap into a form of transcendence.

The differences that Camus had with the theistic existentialists also carried over to his relationship with German philosophy and the Marxist existentialists, indeed for similar reasons, as he discusses in *The Rebel*. Camus' disagreement with metaphysical abstractions, specifically those relating to the question of Being and the ideas of transcendence and unity provided by an eternal God, are also to be seen in his rejection of historicist thinking. This was the basis for his critical attitude towards Hegel and Marx, the two most important influences on non-Christian existentialism.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Camus, *The Rebel* 147.

⁴¹ According to Stephan Priest, "In 'L'Existentialisme Chez Hegel' (SNS, 109-21) Merleau-Ponty claims that the philosophies of Marxism, phenomenology and existentialism find their origin in Hegel... Without providing precise criteria for 'essentially Hegelian' Merleau-Ponty sets about establishing qualitative identities between existentialist thoughts and Hegelian thoughts" 37. Sartre would also later on attempt to place existentialism as a category of Marxism or as Steven Crowell puts it: "This commitment [to the value of freedom] finally led Sartre to hold that existentialism was only an 'ideological' moment within Marxism..." *Merleau-Ponty* (London: Routledge, 2003) 26.

CAMUS AND GERMAN PHILOSOPHY

In examining Camus' understanding of German philosophy and the philosophy of existentialism, I think it is important first of all to remember the cautionary statement that he made at the beginning of *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

...I am not examining the philosophy of Kierkegaard or of Chestov, or later on, of Husserl (this would call for a different place and a different attitude of mind); I am simply borrowing a theme from them and examining whether its consequences can fit the already established rules. It is merely a matter of persistence.⁴²

This statement applies to any examination of Camus' philosophical thought. It points out that rather than an in-depth analysis of specific philosophers, notably Hegel and Husserl, Camus' primary interest lies in borrowing certain themes in their philosophies to explore the consequences of their ideas for human freedom and existence.⁴³

It is also important to remember that Camus was not a philosopher in the academic sense of the term, and this was important in his time in understanding the criticisms and comments that were made about his knowledge of philosophy by Sartre and others.⁴⁴ For us, of course, and for so many readers, this partial approach to the history of philosophy does not diminish

⁴² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 28.

⁴³ See this note: "My work during these first two cycles: persons without lies, hence not real. They are not of this world. This is probably why up to now I am not a novelist in the usual sense. But rather an artist who creates myths to fit his passion and anguish" *Notebooks 1942-1951*: 255.

⁴⁴ In regards to his early dissertation, Todd remarks that "the Augustine expert Paul Archambault, called Camus' work [his thesis] 'very muddled and confused.' (44), and that "Camus' study of Hegel was hardly academic based mostly on a selective reading of excerpts and of studies by experts like Jean Hippolyte and Alexander Kojève; and his reading of Marx was also fragmentary, mainly from a standard anthology" 302. He also states that Camus "was reproached by some for not knowing enough of Marx and for never having learned about freedom in Marx's writing" 246. When *The Rebel* was published, "Sartre accused Camus of secondhand knowledge of Marx" 310. Raymond Aron in his *The Opium of the Intellectuals* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2001), criticizes both Camus' and Sartre's knowledge of Marxism and he says of *The Rebel*: "In the book, the main lines of argument lost themselves in a succession of loosely connected essays, while the style of the writing and the moralizing tone militated against philosophic exactitude" 54. Todd relates that "Camus owned two copies of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, but in the one read and annotated, he does not seem to have gone past page 183 of the vast tome" 273.

the value of his questions and thinking. It does, however, require that any critical analysis of Camus' relation to classical philosophers takes into account his very specific angle and interest. Only by doing so can one determine to what extent Camus' "persistence" succeeds in exploring the logical consequences of these philosophers' thought.⁴⁵

First of all, in order to understand the philosophical and political differences that Camus had with Marxist existentialists like Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, one has to take a close look at his general attitudes toward German philosophers. While Camus certainly had an affinity with Nietzsche, as we have indicated, and also with certain aspects of Marxism in his early years in Algeria, he subjected Hegelian and Marxist philosophy to constant criticism in his notebooks and especially in *The Rebel*, where he devotes more space to Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche than any other thinkers. As he wrote in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*: "The evil geniuses of contemporary Europe bore the label of philosopher: They are Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche."⁴⁶ What Camus objected to in all of these philosophers was the human consequences of their models of reason, which when taken to their rational extremes, had destructive effects on human values and morality. In his view:

The prophetic dream of Marx and the over-inspired predictions of Hegel or of Nietzsche ended by conjuring up, after the city of God had been razed to the ground, a rational or irrational State, which in both cases, however, was founded on terror.⁴⁷

This danger of descent into terror on the basis of grand philosophical designs was the very objection he would voice against Sartre's, and especially Merleau-Ponty's, Marxist

⁴⁵ In the short space that Camus devotes to Husserl in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, it is difficult to ascertain the depth of knowledge that Camus had of his philosophy, since he mainly focuses on certain themes that appear to primarily fit the needs of his essay. Camus' discussion of Hegel in his works is much more substantial.

⁴⁶ Camus *Lyrical and Critical Essays* 354. When an interviewer, however, asked Camus if Nietzsche was not one of his spiritual advisors, Camus remarked: "He is, undoubtedly. What is admirable, in Nietzsche, is that you always find in him something to correct what is dangerous elsewhere in his ideas. I place him infinitely higher than the two others" 354.

⁴⁷ Camus, *The Rebel* 177.

existentialist position after the publication of the latter's *Humanism and Terror* in 1947.⁴⁸ Indeed Camus saw a direct connection between German philosophy and existentialism in passages such as this: "Existentialism kept Hegelianism's basic error, which consists of reducing man to history. But it did not keep the consequence, which is to refuse in fact any liberty to man."⁴⁹ What lies at the heart of Camus' opposition to Christianity, Hegelianism, Marxism, and existentialism is his view that they share a teleological belief in utopian ideals that promise human perfection and a perfect society, in the form of transformation and transcendence, through a historical process in which slavery and human sacrifices are justified.

In fact, it is in Hegel that Camus sees the root of existentialism's errors. Camus' opposition to Hegel is perhaps one of the strongest elements demarcating him from the other French "existentialists," and it is important to note briefly what Camus' main objection to Hegel was. Although it might look superficial and formulaic at first glance, it does in fact fit in with his original philosophical outlook and pertains directly to the influence drawn from his early years.

The core objection Camus raises against Hegel is that he replaced the idea of God with Absolute Reason and rationality in order to give Man another form of unity through abstract principles—one that views human existence and Being as encompassed in a total movement of becoming. Camus' work consistently contrasts the ideas of fixity and becoming between those of the Greek world and German philosophy. In his notebooks he writes that "German philosophy introduced movement into things of the reason and of the Universe—whereas the

⁴⁸ Camus would have rejected passages in *Humanism and Terror* such as this one: "The theory of the proletariat as the vehicle of history's meaning is the humanist face of Marxism. It is a Marxist principle that the Party and its leaders should translate into words and ideas what is implicit in the practices of the proletariat....Occasionally, it pushes the proletariat forward. Conversely, it may have to restrain them, it being the work of geometrical minds—and of provocateurs—to encourage communism to march straight ahead...Otherwise the proletarian will not see what he is sacrificing himself and we shall have returned to the Hegelian philosophy of the State: a few functionaries of History who possess knowledge for all and carry out the will of the World Spirit with the blood of others" 118-119.

⁴⁹ Camus, *Notebooks 1942-1951*: 141.

Ancients saw fixity,”⁵⁰ and this was primarily the result of Kant’s ideas of evolution and Hegel’s dialectic. In Camus’ literary sensibility, this dualism translates into the metaphorical differences between the Mediterranean world of the senses and the Northern European world of reason and logic.⁵¹

Like Feuerbach, Camus saw Hegel’s philosophy as a late development of Christianity that had substituted the concept of God for that of history. Camus contrasts the German, especially the Hegelian, conception of history with the Greek conception:

The philosophy of history springs from a Christian representation, which is surprising to the Greek mind. The Greek idea of evolution has nothing in common with our idea of historical evolution. The difference between the two is the difference between a circle and a straight line. The Greek imagined the history of the world as cyclical... Christianity was obliged, in order to penetrate the Mediterranean world, to Hellenize itself, and its doctrine then become more flexible. But its originality lay in introducing into the ancient world two ideas that had never before been associated: the idea of history and the idea of punishment. In its concept of mediation, Christianity is Greek. In its idea of history, Christianity is Judaic and will be found again in German ideology.⁵²

We now see that this key opposition also forms the basis for his philosophical differences with Marxism and existentialism—the two main offshoots of Hegelianism. According to Camus, “In contrast to the ancient world, the unity of the Christian and Marxist world is

⁵⁰ Camus, *Notebooks 1942-1951*: 157. Camus writes in *The Rebel* that “...German ideology...consummates twenty centuries of abortive struggle against nature, first in the name of a historic god and then of a deified history” 299.

⁵¹ As we saw, this structural dualism is at the heart of his first novel, *A Happy Death*, and his early lyrical prose.

⁵² Camus, *The Rebel* 190. This idea of cyclical versus linear time could be seen to underpin the structure of the first and second parts of *The Outsider*.

astonishing. The two doctrines have in common a vision of the world which completely separates them from the Greek attitude.”⁵³ It is clear which of the two doctrines Camus favors. These statements also are quite interesting when read in the context of French philosophy of the 20th century, because they effectively demonstrate Camus’ unique philosophical position, despite the common notion of his belonging to “existentialism.”

The problem with the Christian view of history emerging from Hegel’s absolutizing of Spirit is that it destroys the sources of values and humanity that could protect the human being. The teleological view of history leads to a conception of punishment and redemption, which takes away the responsibility of individual action. Through historical development, the dialectic makes every action suspect while at the end of history, a general atonement occurs. As Camus writes: “Hegel, of course, permits the forgiveness of sins at the end of history. Until then, however, every human activity is sinful.”⁵⁴ This problematic dissolution of individual responsibility within the course of history is, for Camus, fully at play in French existentialism. The absolutist, teleological vision of history inherited from German philosophy and most notably Hegel, ends up denying that there is any human nature. Camus writes of German philosophy and existentialism:

The whole effort of German thought has been to substitute for the notion of human nature that of human situation and hence to substitute history for God and modern tragedy for ancient equilibrium. Modern existentialism carries that effort even further and introduces into the idea of situation the same uncertainty as in the idea of Nature. Nothing remains but a motion. But like the Greeks I believe in nature.⁵⁵

⁵³ Camus 189.

⁵⁴ Camus 143.

⁵⁵ Camus, *Notebooks 1942-1951*: 136. See Sartre in *Existentialism and Humanism* (London: Methuen, 1948): “Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is...Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism” 28.

Early on in *The Rebel* Camus also states that “Analysis of rebellion leads at least to the suspicion that, contrary to the postulates of contemporary thought, a human nature does exist, as the Greeks believed.”⁵⁶ In another passage, he characterizes the eighteenth century as one where classifications and rigid thought prevailed, which changed in the nineteenth century, and he makes clear who was primarily responsible:

From this moment dates the idea (hostile to every concept of ancient thought...)...that man has not been endowed with a definitive human nature, that he is not a finished creation but an experiment, of which he can be partly the creator.⁵⁷

This dissolution of the idea of human nature leads to the dangerous conclusion that humans are the product of an experiment, who can be changed and refashioned on the basis of rationally set plans. Man has no human nature or *a priori* essence but rather is what he makes of himself and the world. In denouncing such a “socially-engineered” view of humanity, Camus anticipates later critiques of modernity which see in the radical historicist streak of modern thoughts the origin of contemporary massacres.⁵⁸ The emphasis is placed exclusively on the dialectics of history and the belief that humans can perfect themselves and also create the perfect State or society. As a result, Hegel’s system and philosophy of history appear as the most important influence on all utopian and revolutionary thought: on Marx and the Left-Hegelians of course, but also on the nihilists in Russia in the 1830s-1840s, especially Stankevich, Bakunin, Belinsky, Herzen, Chernyshevsky, and later Lenin.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Camus, *The Rebel* 16.

⁵⁷ Camus 134.

⁵⁸ This certainly connects Camus’ ideas of “legitimized murder” with the work of Zygmunt Bauman, especially Bauman’s views on the Holocaust in *Modernity and The Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), and those expressed in *Conversations with Zygmunt Bauman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).

⁵⁹ One of the best discussions of the influence of Hegel on Russia in the 1840s is Isaiah Berlin’s *Russian Thinkers* (London: Penguin, 1948). Berlin comments: “At the time of which I speak, Hegel and Hegelianism dominated the thought of young Russia. With all the moral ardour of which they were capable, the emancipated young men believed in the necessity of total immersion in his philosophy. Hegel was the great new liberator; therefore it was a duty—a categorical duty—to express in the very act of your life, whether as a private individual or as a writer, truths which you had absorbed from him. This allegiance—later transferred to Darwin,

As Camus writes: “The movement which starts with Hegel, and which is triumphant today, presumes that no one is virtuous, but that everyone will be”⁶⁰ and that “The political movements, or ideologies, inspired by Hegel are all united in the ostensible abandonment of virtue.”⁶¹ Hegel’s master/slave relationship and the general movement of the dialectic are the cornerstones of all revolutionary thinking. They lead to a vision of historical change as an expression of Absolute Spirit itself. The result is a fetishistic vision of historical necessity which leads to the devastating emphasis on the ends rather than the means and the destruction of all values. In this sense, then, as Camus analyzes it, absolutist historicism leads to the conclusion that there are no absolutes or absolute values, since “ideas realize themselves in time.”⁶² He uses a quote of Hegel to emphasize this:

It must therefore be said of the Absolute that it is essentially Result and that it is only when it reaches its conclusion that it succeeds in being what it is in truth, its nature consisting precisely of being at one and the same time its own fact, subject or becoming.⁶³

The question that Camus raises here is how can stable values, virtues, and morality exist without some absolute standards if human existence is seen primarily as the Absolute Spirit working itself out in history through the idea of the transformation of Man and society?⁶⁴ If

to Spencer, to Marx—is difficult to understand for those who have not read the fervid literature, above all, the literary correspondence of the period” 131. Berlin also says that Belinsky would eventually reject Hegel’s philosophy for a more humanistic approach (169), as would Herzen (194), and Berlin (170). Camus (*The Rebel* 152) quotes Belinsky’s rejection of Hegel’s morality and Belinsky asking him to “account for all the victims of life and history.”

⁶⁰ Camus, *The Rebel* 136.

⁶¹ Camus 143.

⁶² Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays* 235.

⁶³ Camus 235. He uses a quote of Hegel’s in a book by Brice Parain, but Camus does not identify the specific work of Hegel’s as a source.

⁶⁴ It is interesting to note that this emphasis on the end result of a process, which is obviously central in Christian eschatology, is just as important in Hegel’s concept of history and Sartre’s idea of authenticity, where Man’s essence is judged by the totality of his life or his projects. According to Sartre in his *Notebooks for an Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992): “Happiness (U.S.), end of History (Hegel), end of prehistory (Marx), unity of the world under German domination: the characteristic of History, once it is *discovered*, is to intend its end. Our history is defined by the project of ending History or, if you will, since it is

perfection comes only at the end of history, then humans are in the same relationship with this concept as they were with those of God and immortality.⁶⁵

As we shall now see, the same key objection Camus raised against Hegel, namely that his historicism ended up destroying the value of human existence and led to a false kind of humanism, was the same one he raised against Marx. In Camus' opinion, Marxism, like Hegelianism, was just another utopian system where the idea of a classless society promised on earth what Christianity promised in an afterlife by simply substituting "the Beyond by the Later On."⁶⁶ In Camus' view, Marxism had simply taken over from Christianity and Communism had simply created another form of religion that provided a unified system of thought and ultimate salvation—one that specifically believed that achieving the end goal justified any means necessary. To him the Marxist world was, like Christianity, "a dogma imposed on an entire ideological empire."⁶⁷

Marxism was just another attempt, like Christianity, humanism, and utopian socialism, to free humans from their misery and slavery and achieve the promise of happiness. All that was required was for human beings to understand the dialectics of the historical process and transform the world by changing themselves into Communist Man or Total Man through a scientific approach to remaking society. The problem, as Camus saw it, however, was that in these rationalist approaches that placed an excessive faith in history, "dialectical truths were superior to psychological truths,"⁶⁸ and that this error was one of the reasons that "Utopias

a failure, through this failure of our project to end History" 88. Despite being an avowed atheist, Sartre constantly defines his existential ontology in reference to theological concepts, notably as he interprets the ontological nature of the human being as a "desire to be God. As he writes in *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (New York: Kensington, 1957), this desire is only the totality of his impulse toward being, his original relation to himself, to the world, and to the Other, in the unity of internal relations and of a fundamental project" (61), and that "the fundamental project of human reality is to say that man is the being whose project is to be God" 63.

⁶⁵ Camus, *The Rebel* 189.

⁶⁶ Camus 79.

⁶⁷ Camus 225.

⁶⁸ Camus 207.

have almost always been coercive and authoritarian.”⁶⁹ The result, unfortunately, is that the defense and the protection of the ideological system ultimately become more important than human lives, human values, and freedom.

According to Camus, “Marx thought that the ends of history, at least, would prove to be moral and rational.”⁷⁰ However, the emphasis on science and reason--to the detriment of the realities of human nature--guaranteed that this utopian idea, like so many, was destined to fail. As Camus puts it “The will to power, the nihilist struggle for domination and authority, have done considerably more than sweep away the Marxist Utopia.”⁷¹ These utopian schemes eventually collapse and in the destruction of their failed ideas, they transform themselves into political States of authoritarianism and terror.⁷²

Camus remarked that “Marxism is a philosophy based on procedure, but without jurisprudence,”⁷³ and this goes to the core of his disagreement with Marxist existentialists and their relationship with the form that Communism took in the Soviet Union under Leninism and Stalinism. While French existentialists did not explicitly condemn these two ideologies until quite late, in the case of Merleau-Ponty and never fully in the case of Sartre, very early on Camus warned of the dangers they posed.

In his clear rejection of Hegel and Marx, in the name of a Greek concept of immanence in the world and a defense of the individual, Camus stood as a lone figure in his philosophical time, especially in his early rejection of Stalinism. Of course, many also rejected Marxism, but none did so whilst upholding a radical defense of human freedom as he did, and certainly

⁶⁹ Camus 208.

⁷⁰ Camus 209.

⁷¹ Camus 220.

⁷² See Camus’ *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*: “The evil is the State, whether a police state or a bureaucratic state. Its proliferation in all countries under the cover of the most varied ideological pretexts, the revolting security granted it by mechanical and psychological means of repression make of the State a moral danger for everything that is best in each of us. From this point of view, contemporary political society, in any form, is despicable” 78.

⁷³ Camus, *Notebook 1942-1951*: 225.

not in reference to his kind of grounded humanism. Indeed, it was Camus' specific views of Hegel, Marx, and Soviet Communism that led to his break with Merleau-Ponty, with whom he shared the closest intellectual proximity because of their shared focus on the body. In addition, the expression of these views in *The Rebel* resulted in the public feud with Francis Jeanson and his split with Sartre.

For Camus, freedom and human happiness are tied to basic human rights, the concept of human dignity, and the obligations and responsibilities that the individual has for both himself and others. The real problem is the following: how do the actions and choices of individuals contribute to or hinder social justice in relation to other individuals and the laws and morality that society has created? More importantly, how does a society foster individual rights and freedom; or, conversely, why does a society more often end up dehumanizing the existence of others all the while proclaiming the ideas of humanism? This is the key conundrum for Camus. We have just seen that, very much alone in his time, he rejected rationalist and historicist philosophies and ideologies that promised the liberation and happiness of humanity but in reality ended up enslaving and murdering it. He did not, however, fully embrace humanism either. One version of humanism that he clearly did not accept was the one defined by Sartre at the end of the war and that was synonymous with existentialism. Sartre defined it in these terms:

...because we remind man that there is no legislator but himself; that he himself thus abandoned, must decide for himself; also because we show that it is not by turning back upon himself, but always by seeking, beyond himself, an aim which is one of liberation or of some particular realization, that man can realize himself as truly human.⁷⁴

Such a passage seems to capture Camus' own emphasis on the responsibility of the individual towards himself and towards others. However, the problem that such a position

⁷⁴ Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism* 56.

creates for Camus, which Sartre's own example shows most strikingly, is that this view of the human being as "abandoned" often leads directly to a dogmatic politics putting its faith in terrorist actions in the name of the liberation of the "truly human." By contrast, the tragic dilemma of humanism must always be kept in view for Camus, captured in questions such as these: If there is no legislator other than Man, then it becomes highly problematic to determine the limits of what is permitted in a society; what freedoms are possible; what exactly humans seek beyond themselves; and what means they use to achieve these ends? Who determines the paths open to human potential or liberation, not to mention the limits, and is it really the individual who determines these or is it the social, religious, economic, and political ideologies created by the institutions of society and supported by the power of the State?

Neither the Sartrian nor more classical forms of humanism could provide the answer. Camus adopted an attitude toward humanism similar to the one he had towards existentialism, based on his distrust of their dogmatism and their denial of the tragic nature of human freedom. In *Lyrical and Critical Essays* he wrote: "But I owe him [Grenier], instead, a doubt which will never end and which, for example, has prevented me from being a humanist in the sense that it is understood today—I mean a man blinded by narrow certainties."⁷⁵ In his notebooks he also states that "It seems that I still have to find a humanism. I have nothing against humanism, of course. I just find it inadequate."⁷⁶ And in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he criticizes humanists for being "accusers of man."⁷⁷

The problem for Camus was very simple: With all of the humanist philosophies and abstract ideologies that have purported to enhance the position of the individual, hold him

⁷⁵ Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays* 328.

⁷⁶ Camus, *Notebooks 1942-1951*: 135.

⁷⁷ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* 148. In *Notebooks 1942-1951*, Camus gives an example of this when he writes that "Radici, a member of the French militia who had volunteered for the Waffen SS and was tried for having had twenty-eight prisoners in La Santé shot (he was present as the five groups were executed), belonged to the Humane Society for the Protection of Animals" 151.

responsible for his actions, and create a new morality and ethics based on Enlightenment principles of human worth and dignity, how can we explain human history and indeed the twentieth century with their record of wars, killing, mass murders, institutionalized death camps, torture, and the technological and organizational realities of State Terror? The words of Lenin, in his famous manifesto, *The State and the Revolution*, capture all that is wrong with the overly confident historicisms and humanisms of the modern era:

...if ever success is to be obtained in such an undertaking as the systematic suppression of the exploited majority by the exploiting minority, there exists a need for the utmost ferocity and savagery and this process of suppression, for the seas of blood through which mankind has to wade in a condition of slavery, serfdom and wage labour.⁷⁸

As Camus puts it in *The Rebel*:

The ultimate contradiction of the greatest revolution that history ever knew does not, after all, lie entirely in the fact that it lays claim to justice despite an uninterrupted procession of violence and injustice. This is an evil common to all times and a product of servitude or mystification. The tragedy of this revolution is the tragedy of nihilism.⁷⁹

The contradiction between the humanistic intentions of the predominant philosophies of the 20th century and their deadly consequences—a contradiction that the existentialists did not escape—form the fundamental background against which Camus developed his mature political reflections. In particular, this contradiction is the basic premise in *The Rebel*, his most important philosophical work and the work of which he was most proud, despite the

⁷⁸ Lenin, *The State and the Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1992) 81.

⁷⁹ Camus, *The Rebel* 240.

strong reaction that it created from the French Left and his former friends amongst the Marxist existentialists.⁸⁰

The next two chapters will be dedicated to Camus' mature moral and political thought. They will aim to show how Camus sought to answer the questions of moral values, freedom, and justice without falling into the traps in which rationalistic, historicist, and humanist philosophies had fallen, and in view of the overwhelming, destructive power of modern social institutions and political ideologies. As Camus wrote in an article in *Combat*, his goal was to try to bring the "language of morality into politics."⁸¹

We want to understand precisely what such a program entails and how Camus thought he could achieve this. As we shall see, on the way to fulfilling that goal, many of the themes and ideas gathered in the development of his political thinking would be mobilized. His early engagement with Christian and Greek metaphysics, his early concern with the problem of human happiness, his leaning on a particular materialist tradition, and his ambiguous relationship to Nietzsche—all these nourish his mature political thought, in particular his brief involvement with the Communist Party, his highly idiosyncratic embrace of socialism, and his defense of notions of freedom in human history, social progress, and social justice. When we examine what Camus wrote in regards to these subjects, especially his strong interest in the problem of poverty, it is clear that he shares much in common with the

⁸⁰ Olivier Todd quotes Camus as saying "“but if I had to do it all over again, I would rewrite my book just as it is. It's the book of mine which I value the most” 315. The political differences over Marxism and The Soviet Union were already present in the friendship with Sartre much earlier than the publication of *The Rebel* (1951) and Camus had earlier broken with Merleau-Ponty over their disagreements with the latter's *Humanism and Terror* (1947). The case of the Marxist Francis Jeanson has much more to do with their differences over Algeria and Jeanson's support for the FLN. Alistair Horne remarks in *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York: New York Review of Books, 1977) that "During the war Jeanson had escaped into Spain to join the Free French but had been thrown into a concentration camp,...On being released he had made his way to Algeria where he acquired many nationalist friends,...” 237. Later he created the Jeanson network that supported the F.L.N and supplied them with weapons, and this would have brought him into conflict with Camus, who did not support the F.L.N. and its acts of terrorism.

⁸¹ Camus makes the following remark in *Combat* on October 7, 1944: "That is the method we are attempting to apply today. We hope that others will grant us the right to make such an attempt in good faith. The intention is not to reinvent the country's politics from top to bottom. It is to undertake a very limited experiment: to introduce the language of morality into the practice of politics by means of simple, objective criticism. What this comes down to is saying yes and no at the same time, and saying both with the same seriousness and the same objectivity” 63.

tradition of French Utopian socialists and those whose work challenged the prevailing social structures, political ideologies, and political systems that in the end failed to achieve basic levels of human dignity and social justice. It is to this that we now turn, starting with Camus' activity as a journalist, in which his strong commitment to social justice and his denunciation of poverty clearly emerge.

CHAPTER SIX: CAMUS' POLITICAL ETHICS: LIBERAL VERSUS REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM

The awakening of Camus' political consciousness began in his youth in Algeria as a result of the poverty and the inequalities he witnessed in the economic and political freedoms between the French colonialists and the Arab population. As he stated in his *Lyrical and Critical Essays*: "Poverty kept me from thinking all was well under the sun and in history; the sun taught me that history was not everything."¹ As we noted in Chapter One, poverty is at the center of Camus' literary canon. In this chapter we will focus on the political and philosophical dimensions of the issue and show how the problem of poverty substantially determined his commitment to social justice and human freedom.² Camus' criticism of colonialism and his support for the Moslem Arabs in Algeria, which differed from the attitudes of the French *pied noirs*, also formed a significant basis for his political activism. For Camus, "The injustice from which the Arab population has suffered is linked to colonialism itself, to its history, and its administration."³

The result of these early years on Camus was a life-long interest in social reform and socialist ideas that would form the basis of his later political, social, and humanistic philosophy. These ideas would find their expression in his novels, but it is specifically in the articles he wrote for newspapers and magazines in Algeria and in France, notably in *Combat*, that we find them most clearly articulated.

¹ Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays* 7. Roger Quillot relates that Camus once remarked "I have not learned about freedom in Marx, I have learned about it in poverty." See *Critical Essays on Albert Camus* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1988) 37.

² Malcolm Crowley in "Camus and Social Justice" (*The Cambridge Companion to Camus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) divides Camus' social justice into two categories: "First, there is the kind of concern...in which what is at stake is the equitable organization of social structures, especially as they relate to the distribution of wealth. Secondly, Camus's commitment to the idea of justice is also articulated through his engagement with world historical events" 94.

³ Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion and Death* 144.

This chapter will focus on the development of Camus' political thinking, as it transpires through his substantial journalistic activity, and on Camus' relationship to the philosophy and politics of socialism. This is another aspect of his thinking and writing that seems to me to be both highly significant and yet, not sufficiently acknowledged and studied. Indeed, this is a facet of Camus' intellectual world that is closely connected to the topics I have highlighted in the earlier chapters, especially the repercussions of the demise of Christian metaphysical structures. All this is important background to gain a better understanding of his reasons for writing *The Rebel*, and the troubled relationship he had with left-wing politics over his lifetime. As he once remarked "I was born into the leftist family, and I'll stay there until I die."⁴ It is this commitment to leftist politics and the belief in the need for social change that would eventually lead to his interest in and association with both Communism and Socialism. This association, however, also led to the struggles in his political thinking and the conflicts that arose between his ideas and principles, and the flaws that he perceived in Communism and Marxism, as well as in Christian left-wing positions.

CAMUS' FIRST INVOLVEMENT WITH JOURNALISM:

THE COMMUNIST YEARS UNDER THE "FRONT POPULAIRE"

Camus' association with anarchist socialism has been noted by many commentators, but the importance of his early association with Communism and the Communist Party is far less acknowledged. In his early years, his desire for political action to improve society outweighed his reservations. In a letter to Jean Grenier in August of 1935, he wrote:

Je vous avoue que tout m'attire vers eux et que j'étais décidé à cette expérience...Toute doctrine peut et doit évoluer. Cela est suffisant pour que je souscrive sincèrement à des idées qui me ramènent à mes origines,

⁴ Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2000) 408.

à mes camarades d'enfance, à tout ce qui fait ma sensibilité... Vous comprenez
quels peuvent être mes doutes et mes espoirs. J'ai un si fort désir de voir
diminuer la somme de malheur et d'amertume qui empoisonne les hommes.⁵

In the same letter, Camus also writes:

Vous avez raison quand vous me conseillez de m'inscrire au parti
communiste... Ce qui m'a longtemps arrêté, ce qui arrête tant d'esprits
je crois, c'est le sens religieux qui manque au communisme. C'est la
prétention qu'on trouve chez les marxistes d'édifier une morale dont
l'homme se suffise...⁶

At the age of twenty-two and at the urging of Claude de Fréminville and Jean Grenier, Camus joined the Communist Party in Algeria out of a desire to improve the economic and political injustices that he witnessed and to promote the nationalistic aspirations of the Moslem population.⁷ Through a mutual friend of his, Camus met a Communist militant, Emile Padua, who persuaded Camus to first be responsible for a committee in his own neighborhood of Belcourt and then to become a member of a cell of young intellectuals called the Plateau Salulière.⁸ In his biography, Herbert Lottman cites the lack of interaction or communication that existed in Algiers between the Moslem Arabs and the French

⁵ See *Correspondance: Albert Camus—Jean Grenier 1932-1960*. Paris: Gallimard, 1981: (I confess to you that everything attracts me to it [Communism] and I have decided to undergo this experience.... Any doctrine can and must evolve. It is sufficient that I firmly subscribe to ideas that bring me back to my origins, to the friends of my childhood, to everything that formed my perceptions and feelings... You understand what my doubts and my hopes are. I have such a strong desire to see a decrease in the amount of misfortune and bitterness that poisons men.) 22-23.

⁶ *Correspondance* 22. (You are right to advise me to join the Communist Party... What has stopped me for a long time and what stops so many minds, I believe, is the religious sense that is missing in communism. It is also the claim that Marxists make about constructing a morality where man is self-sufficient).

⁷ This was the French Communist Party since at the time that Camus joined, the Algerian branch did not have any autonomy (see Herbert Lottman, *Albert Camus: A Biography*. London: Axis Publishing, 1997) 97. Olivier Todd notes that Camus attended many Communist Youth meetings and that he joined the Party in the spring of 1935 (37). Todd also states that in 1936, "there were only 150 members of the Algerian Communist Party and only 10 percent of those were Arabs..." 40.

⁸ Lottman 84. According to Lottman, Emile Padua eventually felt that Camus "would have been ill at ease in a strictly working class cell" because of his inability to "communicate with the rank and file members" (98), and that this more youthful and intellectual cell was more appropriate for Camus' talents.

colonialists. However, through his membership in the Communist Party, his theatre groups, the House of Culture, and the Union Franco-Musulmane, Camus interacted and communicated directly with the local Arabs and became actively involved in recruiting them to join the Communist Party.⁹

What seems to have been Camus' first attempt at journalism was to write for a literary-political magazine, *La Nouvelle Journée*, in 1934, again at the suggestion of de Fréminville, where Camus wrote essays and surveyed articles from the *Nouvelle Revue Française* and the left-wing *Europe*.¹⁰ At the same time, Camus organized a political theater group called the "Théâtre du Travail." He was also the leader of a Communist front or adult-education group called the "Collège du Travail."¹¹ It is worth noting that all of this took place before he began work on his dissertation. As the quote at the beginning of this chapter beautifully indicates, Camus always saw a direct connection between what we might call his "solar" metaphysics, his interest in the pagan, pantheistic traditions, and his involvement in issues of social justice.

Camus also became the secretary-general of the Algiers Culture Center, which was supported by the *Front Populaire* government of Léon Blum, whose goal was to promote

⁹ See Lottman 158-168. Two Algerians that Camus would meet at this time and with whom he would remain closely associated until his death were Messali Hadj and Amar Ouzegane. Messali Hadj belonged to both the Communist Party and the ENA (Etoile Nord Africaine) that was formed in 1926, the same year that Messali quit the Communist Party. In 1927, he took over the leadership of the ENA. This organization was aligned with the Communist Party and the Popular Front. When Stalin changed the Party line at the expense of colonialism, the Popular Front ended up banning the ENA in 1937. Before this happened, Camus recruited young Arab militants into this organization (Lottman 165). Messali responded to the ban by setting up the Parti du Peuple Algérien (PPA) in March of 1937, with the slogan "Neither assimilation nor separation, but emancipation" 164. This eventually led to a split between the Communists and Moslem nationalists and to Camus being expelled from the Party because of his support for the Moslems. Messali Hadj would spend most of his life in prison, but he would have a lasting influence on Algeria and other organizations such as the Amis du Manifeste et de la Liberté (AML) and the Mouvement pour le Triomphe de la Liberté Démocratique (MTLD). Amar Ouzegane, as a leader of the Communist Party in Algeria, knew Camus at an early age and their association would continue into the 1950s during the Algerian crisis, the growth of the FLN, and Camus' attempts to promote the idea of a civil truce.

¹⁰ Lottman 85. Camus told Fréminville in 1935: "I've joined the Communist Party, where I will work loyally as a soldier, not in the leadership committee. My skills will be used in journalism for *La Lutte Sociale* [the Party's bimonthly journal] and in Marxist classes, etc..." 37. Amar Ouzegane was the clandestine editor of *La Lutte Sociale* from 1934 until 1937 (see Lottman 158, 164), but neither Todd nor Lottman give any information of what Camus might have contributed to this Communist publication.

¹¹ Lottman 96.

cultural life and a French-Moslem union. The Blum government took office on June 5, 1936 and lasted until June 22, 1937.¹² The Popular Front consisted of a tenuous alliance of the Socialist, Communist, and Radical parties, which had been formed in an attempt to forge an alliance against the right-wing Fascist tendencies that were occurring in France and in Europe. However, the lack of unity in the Popular Front was apparent from the very beginning.¹³ Even though the Communist Party supported the government, it refused to fully participate due to the fact that it was controlled by the Soviet Union and had its own political agenda. As James F. McMillan writes:

...Historians sympathetic to Blum and the Socialists also criticize the Communists' ambivalent attitude to the government. Their non-participation and 'ministry of the masses' could be interpreted as an attempt to create a 'dual power' situation as in the Russia of Kerensky in 1917. Certainly, the Communist stance did not make life easier for the Socialists. Nor were the Radicals any more reliable as allies, since many of their number had joined the Popular Front only with extreme reluctance and with the aim of checking, rather than promoting, the structural reforms sought by the Socialists.¹⁴

¹² For a discussion of Léon Blum and the Popular Front, see James F. McMillan's *Twentieth Century France: Politics and Society 1898-1991* (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1992) 112-115; Maurice Larkin's *France Since the Popular Front: Government and People 1936-1996* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); and Joel Colton's article "Leon Blum and the French Socialists as a Government Party" *The Journal of Politics* 15:4 (1953): 517-543. Blum would form three cabinets in all.

¹³ In his book *A L' Echelle Humaine* or *For All Mankind* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1969) Léon Blum writes "The grouping of forces (rather than of parties) that we have called the *Front Populaire* was no more than a defensive coalition, formed spontaneously after February 6, 1934, by a kind of instinct of preservation, for the defense of democratic principles" 77. Tony Judt in his book *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) comments on the different political factions: "All this changed in 1934: the French Communists, at Stalin's behest, offered to work in coalition with other "anti-Fascist" parties; Blum's Socialists, thoroughly frightened by the events of February 6, 1934, when a right-wing mob nearly succeeded in occupying the National Assembly and the Radical government of Edouard Daladier resigned in terror, decided to collaborate more closely with Radicals and Communists in building a political alliance" 45-46.

¹⁴ McMillan, *Twentieth Century France*, 115. A unified Socialist Party in France (the *Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière*—*SFIO*) was created at the Amsterdam congress in 1904, which lasted until the Communists split from the Socialists in 1920 to form the French Communist Party (PCF). The main reasons for

Léon Blum was the first Socialist and the first Jewish prime minister in France. Despite the social reforms achieved through the Matignon Agreements of June 7, 1936,¹⁵ the political factions within the Popular Front; the virulence of right-wing opposition; the mounting social and economic problems; and the international realities (primarily the rise of dictatorial forces in Germany and the civil war in Spain) led to the failure of the first socialist government after the Great War.

While the government was in power, however, a former Governor General of Algeria, Maurice Viollette, introduced a bill in the Chamber of Deputies in France that would have given the vote to a select group of Moslems in Algeria.¹⁶ Camus wholeheartedly supported the Blum-Viollette bill and when the Radical Socialists in Algeria opposed the plan, Camus wrote an article in the Culture Center magazine in 1937, entitled “A Manifesto of Algerian Intellectuals,” in which he attacked the colonial attitude towards the Algerian population.¹⁷

This would mark the beginning of the mutual disillusionment and split between Camus and the Communists, which eventually led to his expulsion from the Party. Following the publication of the “Manifesto,” the French Communist Robert Deloche sent a report to the

this split were differences in their ideas on revolution as well as their participation in government. These main differences in policies between the Socialists and the Communists in France would later be replayed in Algeria.

¹⁵ As a result of the Matignon Agreements, workers in France received “...pay raises of up to 15 per cent, acceptance of the principle of compulsory collective bargaining and recognition of trade-union rights.....[a] 40-hour week and paid holidays...” (See McMillan 113). As Léon Blum recalls in *For All Mankind*: “The Front Populaire government thrown up by the election of 1936 had introduced laws reducing working hours, consolidated wage increases by the operation of collective agreements, secured recognition for trade unions, and legalized the status of shop stewards” 124. Blum also claims that these reforms “were the price we paid to avoid civil war” 120.

¹⁶ Alistair Horne in his book *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2006) says of Viollette: “His declared ideal was that ‘Muslim students, while remaining Muslim, should become so French in their education, that no Frenchman, however deeply racist and religiously prejudiced he might be...will any longer dare to deny them French fraternity’. It spelt, in one word ‘assimilation’” 37.

¹⁷ Todd 59-61. Lottman remarks that the Blum-Viollette Plan called for the vote to be given to 21,000 Moslems (165), and Todd writes that as a result of opposition from the Radical Socialists (the rich colonists) and other French political classes, the bill was defeated (see p. 60-62). According to Camus in *Combat* (May 18, 1945): “In 1936, the Blum-Viollette plan marked a first step toward a policy of assimilation after seventeen years of stagnation. It was by no means revolutionary. It would have granted civil rights and voting status to roughly 60,000 Muslims. This relatively modest plan aroused immense hopes among the Arabs. Virtually the entire Arab population, represented by the Algerian Congress, indicated its approval. But leading colonists, banded together in the Financial Delegations and the Association of Mayors of Algeria, mounted a counteroffensive powerful enough to ensure that the plan was never even presented to the Chambers” (See *Camus At Combat: Writing 1944-1947* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) 208-9.

Comintern in Moscow calling Camus a “Trotskyite agitator” and asked that he be purged from the party for not following the Party Line.¹⁸

This was not helped by Camus’ previous support for Messali Hadj, a Moslem political leader, who founded the Algerian Popular Party (APP) and who favored a policy of national liberation. Amar Ouzegane, a prominent Algerian Communist leader, had warned Camus that his support of Messali was in conflict with the party line. As a result of Camus’ views and his support of the Arabs, he was called before the Communist Party who voted to expel him.¹⁹ In the end, Camus’ independent thinking and his ideas about Algerian nationalism and freedom from colonialism reflected the fate of many intellectuals within the Communist Party whose beliefs ran counter to the accepted doctrine dictated from Moscow. It also reflected Camus’ long identity with both sides in the Algerian problem of self-determination, which would be a source of great anguish for him up to the time of his death.

Camus’ membership in the Communist Party lasted from 1935 to 1937, and had a profound impact on his philosophical vision of political problems and his subsequent activism. His interest in politics continued, but was now sustained through literature, the theatre, and a more personal form of journalism.²⁰ Although he was no longer a political activist, he would soon find a new outlet in journalism in a left-wing newspaper, the *Alger Républicain*, which supported both the socialist policies of the Popular Front headed by Léon Blum and the Moslem population in Algeria. Founded in October, 1938 by Jean-Pierre

¹⁸ Todd 61-62. According to Lottman, at the time of the creation of the Algerian Communist Party on July 4, 1936, the anti-colonialism stance of the Communist Party was relegated to a secondary role by Stalin, who was more concerned with the Fascist threat. The result of this policy both in France and Algeria would be a greater division between the Moslem population, its leaders like Messali Hadj and Amar Ouzegane, as well as its supporters like Camus. It would also create an unbreachable divide between those who favored the idea of Moslem integration into French-Algeria and those who advocated Moslem nationalism and independence. In this debate, Camus came down clearly on the side of the Moslems (see Lottman 161-168).

¹⁹ According to Lottman, a vote was first taken in Camus’ cell, the Plateau Saulière, and that only one other member, Maurice Girard, supported him (Girard would be expelled with Camus). When Camus was then called to Party headquarters, he refused to change his position and supported the Moslem nationalists, which was contrary to both the Communist line and that of the Radical Socialists (see pages 166-168).

²⁰ Lottman states that Camus’ membership lasted between “autumn 1935 until 1937,” (160), while Olivier Todd states that it ran “sometime between July 1937 and early 1938” (62). In 1937, Camus also created his own independent theatre group called “Théâtre de l’Equipe.”

Faure, who hired Pascal Pia as editor, the *Alger-Républicain* was modeled on the *Oran Républicain*, and promoted itself as “the daily newspaper of the Popular Front, that is, of Democracy.”²¹

THE MISERY OF KABYLIE

Camus’ first articles in 1938 were book reviews. However, with the right-wing government of Edouard Daladier now in power in France and the subsequent shift to the right in the French-Algerian government, Camus began to defend the policies of Blum’s government and to criticize the right-wing administration in Algiers through letters to the Governor General.²² As Lottman relates, at the beginning of his time at the *Alger Républicain*, Camus was responsible for covering criminal trials and investigating the social and political problems of the local population, which brought him face to face with the problems of colonial justice and the rights of the Moslem population, especially in the cases of Michel Hodent, Sheikh El Okbi, Abbas Turki, and the arsonists of Auribeau.²³

It is striking to note how this involvement with the inequities of the colonial judicial system later translated into a major thematic thread in Camus’ literary work. The great majority of his novels, short prose, and plays, as well as his essays, revolve around crime and

²¹ For a discussion of the founding of the *Alger Républicain*, see Lottman 198-200. For the source of the quote and a complete list of the dates and the articles that Camus wrote for this paper, see the article by Charles A. Viggiani (C.A.V.) entitled “Camus and *Alger Républicain* 1938-1939” *Yale French Studies* 25 (1960): 138-143. Olivier Todd remarks that “The politics of *Alger Républicain* were that of the failed political movement of the Popular Front, led by the socialist Léon Blum. The paper declared that its enemies were ‘the traveling salesmen of fascism, and industrial, agrarian, and banking feudalism’”⁷⁴.

²² Viaginni 139-140. Camus’ first articles appeared under the heading of “Le Salon de Lecture” beginning on October 9, 1938 (138), and on January 10, 1939, Camus published an open letter to the Governor General 140.

²³ Lottman, *Albert Camus* 207-210. Michel Hodent had been charged with the theft of wheat by a rich farmer, along with six other Moslems and one French Algerian and through the paper Camus “exposed methods used to obtain false testimony, the bias of the judge, making it clear that he and his newspaper felt Hodent was completely innocent” 208. The El Okbi affair concerned the assassination of the Grand Mufti of Algiers on August 2, 1936, who supported the colonial administration (208), and the last case concerned ten farm workers who were arrested for setting fire to straw huts and were sentenced to hard labor. Camus insisted they were innocent and he showed that torture was used to get them to confess to the crime. He also demanded that the torturers be brought to justice and that the wage system should be looked into (210).

the justice system as core issues. As earlier chapters have sought to show, Camus' interest in issues of crime and justice was not just sociological and political. It also coincided with his deepest philosophical intuitions. We might venture to say that Camus' propensity to juxtapose the ephemeral (and in some cases sordid) aspects of everyday existence with the metaphysical, reflects his particular genius. Camus also used crime as a mirror that he held up to society to question its fundamental values about freedom and justice.

More important than these judicial accounts, however, was the series of eleven articles that Camus wrote on the poverty in the region of Kabylie between June and July, 1939, entitled "Misère de la Kabylie," in which he describes the economic and social conditions of this area.²⁴ The articles focus on the destitution and the agricultural realities of the Kabyle, which Camus supports with facts, statistics, and vivid descriptions of the struggles of poor families forced to depend on government supplies of wheat for survival,²⁵ as in the following passage: "I believe I can affirm that at least 50% of the population feed on grasses and on roots and the rest wait for administrative charity in the form of distributions of grains."²⁶ Camus points out that these handouts, which were often inadequate, were used for political purposes.²⁷ They were also alarmingly unfair. For instance, in the area of Bordj-Meanail, the

²⁴ These articles began on June 5, 1939 in the *Alger Républicain* and appeared daily until June 15. The first article was entitled "La Grèce en haillons," but does not appear in the *Oeuvres complètes* edition (Paris: Gallimard et Club de l'Honnête Homme, 1983). For a list of the dates and the titles, see the article by Viaginni. The translations of these articles are my own.

²⁵ Camus, *Oeuvres complètes* 311. Camus relates that "Un rapport officiel évalue à 40% les familles kabyles qui vivent actuellement avec moins de 1000 francs par an, c'est-à-dire...moins de 100 francs par mois....Quand on saura que la famille kabyle compte toujours au moins cinq ou six membres, on aura une idée du dénuement indicible où vivent les paysans kabyles" (According to an official report, 40% of Kabyle families currently live on less than 1,000 francs a year, that is to say, ...less than 100 francs a month...when one realizes that a Kabyle family always consists of at least five or six members, one gets an idea of the inexpressible destitution in which the Kabyle peasants live." ().

²⁶ Camus 311. (Je crois pouvoir affirmer que 50% au moins de la population se nourrissent d'herbes et de racines et attendent pour le reste la charité administrative sous forme de distribution de grains).

²⁷ Camus remarks that "On affirme à Tizi-Ouzou que les dernières élections au conseil général ont été faites avec le grain des distributions...Et je sais...qu'aux Issers on a refusé du grain à ceux des indigents qui avaient voté pour le parti populaire algérien" (They maintain in Tizi-Ouzou that the last elections of the General Council were determined on the basis of the distribution of grain...and I know... that in Issers they refused grain to those poor people who had voted for the Algerian Popular Party) 317.

poor got 10 kilos of wheat every month, but in other localities it was every three months, and a family of eight needed 120 kilos a month just for bread.²⁸ As a result of this:

On m'a affirmé que les indigents que j'ai vus faisaient durer leurs 10
kilos de grains pendant un mois et pour le reste se nourrissaient de racines
et de tiges de chardon que les Kabyles, avec une ironie qu'on peut juger
amère, appellent artichauts d'âne.²⁹

In addition to the problems of hunger and food supplies, Camus focused on the unemployment and the problems of emigration, as well as the consequences of colonial exploitation in the form of low wages paid to the workers in the area and long working hours.³⁰ Camus later remarks that:

Quant à l'idée si répandue de l'infériorité de la main-d'oeuvre
indigène, c'est sur elle que je voudrais terminer. Car elle trouve sa
raison dans le mépris général où le colon tient le malheureux
peuple de ce pays.³¹

²⁸ Camus 311. (À Bordj-Menaïel, cette charité se renouvelait tous les mois, dans d'autres localités tous les trois mois. Or il faut à une famille de huit membres environ 120 kilos de blé pour assurer le pain seulement pendant un mois).

²⁹ Camus 311. (They maintained that the paupers whom I saw prolonged their 10 kilogrammes of grains during the month and for the rest fed on roots and on stems of thistles that Kabyles, with an irony which it is impossible not to consider bitter, call donkey's artichokes). He also writes "Je savais en effet que la tige de chardon constituait une des bases de l'alimentation kabyle. Je l'ai ensuite vérifié un peu partout. Mais ce que je ne savais pas c'est que l'an passé, cinq petits Kabyles de la région d'Abbo sont morts à la suite d'absorption de racines vénéneuses" (I did know that the stem of the thistle constituted one of the basic Kabyle food sources. I later verified that this was true pretty much everywhere. But what I did not know is that last year, five small Kabyle children of the region of Abbo died following the consumption of poisonous roots.) 315.

³⁰ For his discussion of wages and working hours, see Camus' *Oeuvres complètes* 319-323. He also discusses the importance of the Kabyle peasant's freedom to emigrate to France and the benefit that this had on relieving their poverty. Camus advocated steps to make it easier for the Kabyles to emigrate and suggested that they replace the Italians who were leaving southern France. While some countered that the Kabyles were too tied to the mountains, Camus replied by writing "Je répondrai d'abord en rappelant qu'il y a en France 50 000 Kabyles qui les ont quittées. Et je laisserai répondre ensuite un paysan kabyle à qui je posais la question et qui me répondit: "Vous oubliez que nous n'avons pas de quoi manger. Nous n'avons pas le choix" (I would respond by first reminding them that in France there are 50,000 Kabyle who left them. And I will let a Kabyle peasant answer to whom I posed the question and who answered: "You forgot that we do not have enough to eat. We have no choice.") 336.

³¹ Camus 322. (As for the idea that has been spread about the inferiority of the indigenous work force, it is on this that I would like to end. Because it finds its source in the general contempt in which the colonist holds the unhappy people of this country).

It is in the article on education, however, that Camus expresses some of his harshest criticism of the colonial administration and its educational policies in Kabylie, beginning with the number of children who were deprived of education due to the lack of schools.³² He points out that “...aujourd’hui, un dixième seulement des enfants kabyles en âge de fréquenter l’école peuvent bénéficier de cet enseignement.”³³ He also faults the colonial government for failing to live up to the promises made in regards to the construction of schools and the flawed policy of building “palace schools” in economic and tourist areas--when many more schools could have been built elsewhere for the same cost. Camus writes that:

Mai j’ai l’impression que ces écoles sont faites pour les touristes et les commissions d’enquête et qu’elles sacrifient au préjugé du prestige les besoins élémentaires du peuple indigène...Rien ne me paraît plus condamnable qu’une pareille politique.³⁴

In his concluding remarks on education, Camus expresses his desire to see full equality between the two populations, and a complete assimilation of the indigenous subjects:

Les Kabyles réclament donc des écoles, comme ils réclament du pain.
Mais j’ai aussi la conviction que le problème de l’enseignement doit subir une réforme plus générale....Les Kabyles auront plus d’écoles le jour où

³² Camus 323. In Camus’ view: “La soif d’apprendre du Kabyle et son goût pour l’étude sont devenus légendaires. Mais c’est que le Kabyle, outre ses dispositions naturelles et son intelligence pratique, a vite compris quel instrument d’émancipation l’école pouvait être...c’est tout le problème de l’enseignement en Kabylie: ce pays manque d’écoles, mais il ne manque pourtant pas de crédits pour l’enseignement” (The Kabyle’s thirst for learning and his taste for study are legendary. But it is because the Kabyle, besides their natural disposition and practical intelligence, quickly understood what an instrument of emancipation the school could be...this is the whole problem of education in Kabylie: this country lacks schools, but nevertheless it does not lack the desire for education) 323. In the pages that follow, Camus gives specific figures on the number of students who were turned away from classes or schools because there was no place for them.

³³ Camus 324.(...today only a tenth of Kabyle children who are old enough to attend school can benefit from this education

³⁴ Camus 326-327. (But I have the impression that these schools are made for the tourists and investigating committees and that they sacrifice to the prejudice of prestige the elementary needs of the indigenous people....Nothing seems to me more reprehensible than this same policy).

on aura supprimé la barrière artificielle qui sépare l'enseignement européen de l'enseignement indigène, le jour enfin où, sur les bancs d'une même école, deux peuples faits pour se comprendre commenceront à se connaître... si l'on veut vraiment d'une assimilation, et que ce peuple si digne soit français, il ne faut pas commencer par le séparer des Français.³⁵

In the remaining articles, Camus considers the economic and social future of the Kabyle and what policies the government should enact. In these pages, the connection between the concrete realities he witnessed and reported and his vision of the absolute centrality of the notion of justice comes out very strongly. In the final article, for example, he concludes with these words:

Il paraît que c'est, aujourd'hui, faire acte de mauvais Français que de révéler la misère d'un pays français. Je dois dire qu'il est difficile aujourd'hui de savoir comment être un bon Français... Mais, du moins, on peut savoir ce que c'est qu'un homme juste. Et mon préjugé, c'est que la France ne saurait être mieux représentée et défendue que par des actes de justice... Ce n'est pas pour un parti que ceci est écrit, mais pour des hommes. Et si je voulais donner à cette enquête le sens qu'il faudrait qu'on lui reconnaisse, je dirais qu'elle n'essaie pas de dire: "Voyez ce que vous avez fait de la Kabylie", mais: "Voyez ce que vous n'avez pas fait de la Kabylie." ³⁶

³⁵ Camus 327. (Kabyles desire schools as they desire bread. But I also have the conviction that the problem of education must undergo a more general reform.... Kabyles will have more schools when they will have abolished the artificial barrier which separates the European education from indigenous education, on the day where on the benches in the same school, two people will begin to understand each other by getting to know each other.... if they really want assimilation, and that these worthy people are French, you should not begin by separating them from Frenchmen).

³⁶ Camus 341-342. (It seems that it is, today, bad for a Frenchman to take action that reveals the misery of a French country. I must say that it is difficult today to know how to be a good Frenchman... But, at least, it is possible to know what it is like to be a just man. And my prejudice is that France will never be better represented and defended than by acts of justice.... It is not for a political party that this is written, but for men. And if I wanted to give to this inquiry the sense that it would make them admit it, I would like to say that it is not trying to say: 'Look what you have done in Kabylie,' but 'Look what you have not done.').

It is hardly necessary to insist on the significance of remarks such as these in the context of Camus' overall writing. From his perspective, it may have been unclear what a national culture or the specific program of a political party should be, but it was perfectly clear what justice and a true humanism demanded. This, more than anything, encapsulates the basic premise at the heart of Camus' political thinking. It is precisely this intuition which will drive his famous polemics with Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, as well as the Communist-leaning philosophers, and that will fuel his reflections in *The Rebel*.

These articles on Kabylie resulted in Camus being criticized by the rightists and the colonial government. He was also accused of idealizing the poor, a criticism later brought against Sartre and Fanon in similar fashion for their portrayal of the Algerian peasantry.³⁷ More importantly, Camus' attempts at exposing the poverty and the injustice of colonial policies sustained his fervent desire for social reform in Algeria, an interest that would continue unabated in his writing, especially in his next journalistic activities as editor and writer of *Combat*. It is also worth noting that Frantz Fanon would later be stationed in the Kabylie area in the French army. His books *The Wretched of the Earth* and *A Dying Colonialism*, however, would show a different approach to colonialism and the Algerian problem. This difference in viewpoint also helps to explain the conflicts that would later develop between Camus and the group of Fanon, Jeanson, and Sartre.

Camus wrote his last article for the *Alger Républicain* in August of 1939 (the paper eventually closed on October 28), and in September of that year, Camus became the editor-in-chief of a small paper called *Le Soir Républicain*.³⁸ Pia and Camus reportedly turned it

³⁷ Todd 83. This following note is particularly interesting: "After his articles appeared, Algerian Governor General Le Beau went to Kabylia, perhaps in part impelled by the reporter's descriptions. Some ethnologists who read Camus's articles found they idealized the poor too much, and spoke from too haughty a position, yet no journalist in memory had written such a powerful series of articles."

³⁸ See Vigianni 138. Lottman states that "...the war was making printing and distribution more costly, and *Alger Républicain* lost readership beyond the city limits. Pia decided to publish a two-page afternoon paper which could be sold by street hawkers. Thus was founded *Le Soir Républicain*, on September 15, which would coexist with *Alger Républicain* until October 28, when the latter was shut down because of the scarcity of newsprint" 223.

into an anarchist paper that did everything it could to resist the military censorship that started in July of 1939.³⁹ Camus signed his own name to the editorials, in particular an article called “Explanation of the War,” which attracted the attentions of the authorities. After several criticisms by the censors, he was told to stop writing it.⁴⁰ *Le Soir Républicain* was eventually closed by the police and the copies seized on January 10, 1940, and the board of directors blamed Camus for the closure.⁴¹ After this, he found it very difficult to find any job in journalism in Algeria, which forced him to leave for Paris on March 14, 1940.⁴² Through the help of Pascal Pia, Camus found work at *Paris-Soir* before ending up as the editor of the resistance paper *Combat*. It is in the articles that he wrote for that paper that we find the clearest development of his political philosophy in regards to socialism and democracy, most notably on the issues of freedom, justice, and morality in politics.⁴³

³⁹ According to Lottman: “Indeed, their anarchistic tendencies were similar, which is certainly why they worked so well together at the time.... Their skepticism, their outspoken dissent, had to cause difficulties with the censors.... it [*Le Soir Républicain*] would be a pure journal of opinion, and Pia and Camus, twin mischief-makers, had soon turned it into an anarchist organ” 222-224.

⁴⁰ Todd relates that in a letter to Francine Faure, Camus said “... Things will get nastier when we publish a new column of ‘Explanation of the War’ in the paper. A captain in the censorship office told one of the writers about me that I’d better watch out, adding, ‘What a shame that boy with such talent should be a bad Frenchman—sic and double sic! This morning, as I was again asked to stop running the ‘Explanations of the War,’ I replied that to fight Hitler, we had to fight Frenchmen who wanted to introduce Hitler’s methods in France. That’s where things stand now” 88-89.

⁴¹ See Lottman 227. He also says that “The board discovered (so said the unpublished statement), by examining articles that had not appeared in the paper because of censorship, that Camus had tried to give the afternoon daily an orientation absolutely contrary to the opinions of the paper’s backers.... While the board would not go so far as to say that Camus had willfully scuttled the newspaper, it felt that he was responsible for the present situation” 227-228.

⁴² See Todd 101. Regarding this period, Lottman says that “All sorts of stories have been told about Camus’ own situation at this time. That he had to hide out in Oran, that he was expelled to France—as if a man considered subversive would be expelled toward the battlefield.... What seems to have happened is that Camus found it difficult to obtain a job (although with so many eligible males away at war that should have been easy), and when he did find one, the government stepped in deftly and took it away from him” 230.

⁴³ At *Paris Soir*, Camus worked as an editorial secretary. He started at the paper in March of 1940 and was dismissed in December of the same year after which he returned to Algiers (Lottman 244). Camus was back in France in August of 1942 (274) and visited Paris in January of 1943 (290), in June (301) and was working there for Gallimard in November 308. Pascal Pia introduced him to *Combat* the same month 318.

Camus' articles in *Combat* appeared over a period of more than three years from 1944 to 1947.⁴⁴ The social analyses and the political positions he expressed there form the basis of many of the ideas that he would later develop in *The Rebel*. Indeed as Lottman has indicated, in October 1945, Camus wrote an article for an anthology published by Jean Grenier entitled "Remarque sur la révolte," which was already the draft of the first chapter of *The Rebel*, six years before the book was actually published in 1951. This clearly indicates the crucial importance of his writing for *Combat* in the formation of his political ideas.⁴⁵ Indeed, as the biographical and historical notes gathered at the start of this chapter try to suggest, one might well argue that the source of the ideas contained in *The Rebel* is in fact to be found not just in the *Combat* articles, but indeed in Camus' sustained journalistic activity before his arrival in Paris, in particular, in his articles on the poverty in Kabylie.

In *The Rebel*, all the themes that we have considered in the previous chapters-- the legacy of Christian spirituality, materialism, poverty and human happiness, the Absurd, nihilism, Marxism, and existentialism—are brought together and revisited from the perspective of the problems of moral judgment, social justice, and the possibility of progressive politics. It is in this work that Camus' philosophical thought reaches its culmination. In the *Combat* articles, Camus sought to examine more specifically his position towards the tradition of socialism in terms of how to define it; how to interpret its history; and how to understand its relationship to Christianity and Marxism. As we will see, this in fact remained the primary focus in Camus' mature political and social philosophy, namely, how to solve the difficulties linked to

⁴⁴ Arthur Goldhammer in "Camus At Combat" gives the dates as "from March 1944 until November of 1945" (1). In the introduction to Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi's book *Camus at Combat: Writing: 1944-1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), David Carroll states that "Camus published a total of 165 entries in *Combat* between August 21, 1944, and June 3, 1947: 138 editorials and 27 articles..." vii. Goldhammer also makes the point that "Camus had become an important public figure in France more because of his journalism than because of his fictional and quasi-philosophical texts" (1). Lottman explains that Camus retired from *Combat* at the end of August in 1945 (382), returned for a short time, contributed articles, and returned again in 1947 (see page 438). Camus did, however, continue to contribute articles to *Combat* until 1949.

⁴⁵ See Herbert Lottman 386 and Olivier Todd: "The idea of revolt had obsessed Camus since at least 1943," and that the fifteen-page article on revolt was printed in the magazine *L'Existence* (300). Roger Quillot also comments in *The Sea and the Prisons* that "The first chapter of *L'Homme révolté* is, except for a few nuances, nothing more than the essay *La Remarque sur la révolte* written between 1943" 205.

the definition of socialism and, more specifically, its connection to reform, revolt, revolution, and social progress. Before we turn to these questions, a brief historical sketch on the development of modern socialism is in order to identify what is at stake in Camus' reflections on socialist politics.

THE TRADITION OF UTOPIAN SOCIALISM

The development of Camus' thought is particularly apt at drawing our attention to the fact that the definition and the history of socialism, and how it relates to revolt or revolution, are all intimately related to ontological understandings of the structures that define Man and the limits of human freedom. These are the subjects that the previous chapters have discussed in terms of the dimensions of human existence that metaphysical and theological outlooks, in particular the Christian one, strove to define. The philosophical questions that these raise are: whether humans are to be considered as a part of Nature or creatures and subjects of God; whether they should be defined as souls or spirits, in terms of Being, or simply as creatures of flesh and blood; or whether they should be defined as subjects of the authority of kings and the rulers of the church rather than as free individuals capable of creating their own rules for themselves?

The hierarchies created by the old structures defined specific notions of human nature, freedom, and dignity, which created and sanctioned different forms of economic and political slavery, resulting in widespread poverty and human unhappiness. Gradually, however, the desire for freedom and a better life rose to become a historical force. It coincided with the questioning of religious dogmas, which propped up political and social hierarchies. What followed in the history of socialism, communism, and later on existentialism was an attempt by theorists and activists to promote human freedom and to center any ontological argument on the human being and the collective society of individuals in an attempt to improve the

human condition and to achieve happiness in this life. For these philosophers, social theorists, and revolutionaries who became active in the wake of the old regimes' demise, the only way to achieve this was through social reform, both gradual or by radical means.

Thomas Kirkup pointed out in his classic *A Primer of Socialism* that "Socialism had its origin in two historical changes. One was the Industrial Revolution,....the other was the great movement for freedom which had its climax in the French Revolution."⁴⁶ The Industrial Revolution pitted human labor against the power and the dehumanization of the machine and technology, while the French Revolution represented the human desire for equality and justice against the institutions of divine law and the divine right of kings, the disparities of the rich and the poor, and the hierarchical political structures that ruled them.

As a result, the period directly preceding and following the French Revolution saw the rise and great development of utopian thinkers such as Abbé Morelly, Saint-Simon, François Babeuf, Charles Fourier, Etienne Cabet and Louis Blanc in France; Robert Owen in England; and Moses Hess and Ferdinand Lassalle in Germany, whose ideas defined the history of socialism and modern socialist thinkers, including Camus. While these thinkers may have disagreed on nearly all the concrete issues through which social justice could be achieved, such as the nature of equality, the place of private property, the importance of human labor, or the role of the State, they all adhered to the belief that society could be reformed and that the ultimate aim of this reform and of progress was freedom, social justice, and human happiness.⁴⁷ These key ideas were precisely those that mobilized Camus' philosophical

⁴⁶ Thomas Kirkup, *A Primer of Socialism* 2nd Edition (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1913) 21. This work is still one of the most succinct in outlining the origins of socialism and its early development.

⁴⁷ See Joyce Hertzler's *The History of Utopian Thought* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926). On the issue of property, for instance, she shows that Morelly "advocated common ownership" (187) as did Babeuf who considered that "private property was the enemy of justice" 190; Saint-Simon advocated "state ownership of the land, capital, and all instruments of labor" (195), but he did not believe in the communal sharing of wealth; Fourier permitted "private property and interest within the limits of associative use" 203; Cabet advocated "absolute equality" (206) and "communal ownership" 207. In this tradition, no text is more important than Proudhon's "What is Property" written in 1840, with its famous motto: "Property is theft." Although Camus did not focus very much on this question, we can note that in *The Fall*, an echo of Proudhon can be heard in Clamence's remark that "Property, gentlemen, is murder" 94. In regards to State power, those who favored a strong state or hierarchy were Saint Simon who stated "No society of equals!" 194; Cabet, who in order to maintain absolute equality said that "a State was required and its control was all-inclusive" 206; Louis

thinking, literary imagination, and journalistic activity in his youth; hence, the strong connection throughout his life, with this utopian, socialist tradition.

As philosophy in France and Germany became more grounded in positivism, it gave rise to “social sciences” through the work of Saint-Simon, Comte, Lorenz von Stein and others, in which a greater emphasis was placed on human beings themselves and the idea that they were responsible for creating both history and their social and economic environments. With that came the belief that they could improve the human condition through the promotion of programs of “scientific” certainty whose methods would transform social structures.⁴⁸

The basic tenets of a social science were created which would be commensurate with the natural sciences and would identify the laws governing human institutions and behavior. By understanding the laws of society and the place of the individual within that collective, “rational” planning and concrete steps could be taken to redress social evils, improve human beings, and create a more perfect society. The end result would be justice and happiness for all. As early utopian socialists and social reformers focused on the economic structure and political economy as the predominant factors determining human freedom and happiness, they constructed visions of ideal societies, which depicted a very different social structure in regards to religion, property, economic equality, education, and social relationships than those that existed at the time.⁴⁹ As Joyce Hertzler observes in *The History of Utopian*

Blanc accepted a social hierarchy as did Saint-Simon and also the “role the state could play in the reconstructions of the existing economic fabric if its powers were properly utilized.” 210; and for Owen the State would eventually be replaced by a federation of villages and communities 220.

⁴⁸ See Alice MacIver’ article “Saint-Simon and his Influence on Karl Marx” *Economics* 6 (1922): 242: “The study of the history of communistic theory during the half-century preceding the publication of *The Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels proves that the materialistic conception of history did not spring fully developed from the brain of Marx. We can trace it back in the works of the French Socialists through Considerant (the most distinguished disciple of Fourier) to Saint-Simon, who in reality got it largely from Condorcet, and it is probable that Hegel knew and was influenced by the works of the latter.”

⁴⁹ Several of these utopian socialists like Cabet, Fourier, and Robert Owen attempted to establish utopian communities in the United States based on their socialist ideas and most of these failed. For a discussion of these communities in Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa, see Morris Hillquit’s *History of Socialism in the United States* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1903). Another utopian socialist, Wilhelm Weitling, was involved with the experimental community in Communia, Iowa. See Carl Wittke’s *The Utopian Communist: A Biography of Wilhelm Weitling* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950). Considerant also tried to set up a

Thought, “One and all believed that with proper environment man would be actually perfect.”⁵⁰

The problem, of course, is that humans are not perfect. The failure of so many of the utopian communities resided in the fact that these had to exist as part of a larger (capitalistic) society that shared neither the values nor their ideal economic structures or communal social experiments. Hertzler also makes the point that the early utopian socialists “had not learned that profound respect for history so essential in the conception of realizable social reform. For them the ideal state was a finished state and not a process.”⁵¹ This changed, however, with the great influence of Hegel’s ideas of Spirit and the dialectic, which, as they were interpreted and promoted by the Young Hegelians, and most particularly Karl Marx, became the driving force behind the subsequent conceptions of history, progress, and social reform.⁵²

The inherent contradictions in social and economic structures created a dynamic that was considered a fundamental law of society and human existence, which some agreed was and was not entirely within Man’s control. The transition to the scientific socialism of Marx and Engels, however, gave more credence to the belief that humans could fully control and reform society through scientific and rational means that would lead to a more perfect society—one that would dispense with the romantic ideals of the earlier socialists.⁵³ Marx, throughout his work, notably in *The German Ideology* and the third part of his *The Communist Manifesto*, criticizes the utopian socialists because “they reject all political, and

Fourier-inspired community in Texas (see Joan Roelof’s translation of *Considerant’s Principles of Socialism: Manifesto of Nineteenth Century Democracy* Washington D.C.: Maisonneuve Press, 2006) 23-24.

⁵⁰ Hertzler 222.

⁵¹ Hertzler 224.

⁵² For a classic study of the influence of Hegel’s dialectic on Marx, see A. Cornu, *The Origins of Marxian Thought* (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1957). With Hegel’s dialectic, contradictions and the negative become the driving force behind life, process, history, social reform and revolution.

⁵³ According to Hertzler, Louis Blanc, through the influence of Saint Simon, “desired the creation of a social science that would produce the facts that would create a harmonious society” and he “sought to use political means and not revolutionary spirit, religion, self-interest, brotherly love, or public opinion to change things” 209. For a discussion of Saint Simon and Fourier’s ideas of social scientists or engineers, see *Considerant’s Principles of Socialism* pages 19-22.

especially all revolutionary, action; they wish to attain their ends by peaceful means, and endeavor, by small experiments, to pave the way for the new social Gospel.”⁵⁴ For him, the utopian socialists were not sufficiently concerned with class struggle, and did not focus on the proletariat but wanted “to improve the condition of every member of society, even that of the most favored.”⁵⁵

Once philosophy, social science, and the political economy became grounded in a “scientific” form of socialism and the full realization of progress and human freedom were seen as an achievable goal and the demonstrable rationale for history, the question of the means and the pace of social change and the forms it would take emerged as two objects of conflict between the socialists and the communists. Two antithetical sets of choices opened up within the socialist factions: reform or revolution; peaceful means or violence; socialism “from above,” led by an elite, or socialism “from below,” led by the masses;⁵⁶ the need for religion or the promotion of atheism; allowing private property or abolishing it; social harmony or class conflict; and the choice between a strong centralized State or the “withering away” of the State and its final dissolution.⁵⁷ Utopian socialists also differed in their conceptions of the social hierarchy and the question of equality. James H. Billington provides a useful contrasting comparison between the divergence that started to appear as early as the 1840s, between communism and socialism. As he shows, these two possible directions of utopian politics diverged for four reasons:

First, communism suggested more far-reaching social control than

⁵⁴ Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 35-36. Marx and Engels also criticize them because “The undeveloped state of the class struggle, as well as their own surroundings, causes Socialists of this kind to consider themselves far superior to all class antagonisms. They want to improve the condition of every member of society, even that of the most favoured” 35.

⁵⁵ Marx 35. As Hertzler says of the utopian socialists: “Their intention was not to free a particular class but all of humanity at once” 221.

⁵⁶ Not all believed that it should be the poor or lowest classes who should lead the revolution. Marx hated the lumpenproletariat (the “rag or rogue proletariat”), which Bakunin favored. See *The Communist Manifesto* 14.

⁵⁷ For an excellent discussion of the two different “souls of socialism,” see Hal Draper, *Socialism from Below* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1992).

socialism—control over consumption as well as production...Second, communism was increasingly associated with a scientific and materialistic worldview in contrast to moralistic and idealistic socialism....Third, communism was widely associated with political violence in a way that socialism seldom was...The fourth way in which communism generally differed from socialism by the late 1840s was in its reliance on the power and the authority of the working class.⁵⁸

SOCIAL JUSTICE, INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM, AND COMMITMENT

The primary theoretical issues relating to the growth of socialism, as they have been briefly sketched in this rapid overview, form an essential background for the study of Camus' moral and political philosophy. It is in this background that his moral and political thought finds its basis, more particularly in the contradictions that oppose the socialist and the communist ideologies. His own intellectual development reflects this, from his joining the Communist Party in Algeria; his support for the Blum government; his articles on the poverty of Kabylie; the articles on socialism and communism in *Combat*; up to the long analyses developed in *The Rebel*. Camus' political philosophy continues the long tradition of French and German socialist philosophy, and the thoughts of the great social reformers of the 19th century, such as Saint-Simon, Fourier, Considerant, Proudhon, Moses Hess, Leo Tolstoy and indeed, as noted earlier, the ideas of the socialist leader Léon Blum.

In an early *Combat* article of November 10, 1944, Camus committed to the socialist ideal in the most explicit fashion and lays out very clearly what he understands it to be: "The idea of socialism is a great idea. And the Socialist Party is one of the great hopes of France

⁵⁸ James H. Billington, *Fire In The Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith* (New York: Basic Books, 1980) 273-274.

tomorrow, but only if it can translate into reality the principles of renewal...”⁵⁹ He identifies the most important socialist ideas for France as “...the reconciliation of justice and freedom, the simultaneous pursuit of a collective economy and liberal politics, [and] the good of all combined with respect for each...”⁶⁰ Camus also saw socialism primarily as a commitment. In his words “socialism is a permanent engagement on all issues,”⁶¹ and “there can be no socialism without a full commitment of one’s entire being.”⁶² These fundamental ideas of social justice and individual freedom, and the absolute commitment to defend and implement both of these, constitute the core of his socialist agenda, and indeed, as we shall see, his opposition to communism. Camus very early on, and quite consistently, defined his socialist commitment via the opposition between two kinds of socialism and two types of political philosophies at work—Marxist versus liberal socialism, which he equated with the German and the French traditions, respectively. He clearly identified with the second one. In the same article of *Combat* he wrote, for instance:

The latter form of socialism, insofar as one can make out its content, tends to invoke a French collectivist tradition that has always made room for individual freedom and that owes nothing to philosophical materialism.⁶³

In the confrontation between these two types of socialism, Camus hoped for “a French socialism fueled by freedom’s energy and uncompromising on matters of justice might at last emerge for the good of the country...”⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi, ed., *Camus at Combat: Writing: 1944-1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) 108.

⁶⁰ *Camus at Combat* 108.

⁶¹ *Camus at Combat* 121.

⁶² *Camus at Combat* 123.

⁶³ *Camus at Combat* 121.

⁶⁴ *Camus at Combat* 121.

In an earlier piece, dated October 1, 1944, Camus had given an even more substantial definition of this ideal of a combination of social justice and individual freedom as the true meaning of socialism. This passage is particularly significant as it articulates very precisely the fundamental content of Camus' political thinking:

As we have said more than once we hope for a reconciliation of justice with liberty. Apparently this isn't clear enough. We shall therefore define "justice" as a social state in which each individual is granted every opportunity at the outset and in which the majority of the country's population is not kept in a shameful condition by a privileged minority. And we shall call "liberty" a political climate in which the human person is respected as to what it is and what it expresses.⁶⁵

Camus goes on to emphasize that it is in economics that justice must be guaranteed, while liberty belongs to the realm of politics. A collectivist economy and liberal politics are therefore the only two ways of realizing the socialist idea.⁶⁶

Against this positive definition of socialism, however, Camus opposed other aspects which belonged to some version of the socialist tradition, most notably the embrace of political realism where difficult moral questions are superseded by the need for expediency and where the ends justify the means.⁶⁷ Camus states it in these terms:

We do not believe in political realism. Lies, even well-intentioned lies,
Separate men from one another and relegate them to the most futile
Solitude. We believe that, on the contrary, men are not alone and

⁶⁵ *Camus at Combat* 55.

⁶⁶ *Camus at Combat* 108. Camus states that both a collective economy and liberal politics are core "socialist ideas."

⁶⁷ *Camus at Combat* 15.

that when faced with hostile conditions, their solidarity is total.⁶⁸

Camus wanted this realism in politics to be replaced by morality or moral values that would govern action and he makes it clear that "...we are determined to replace politics with morality. That is what we call a revolution...morality must ultimately govern politics."⁶⁹

Camus acknowledges the problems of purity and action or the concept of dirty hands, but in regards to action, he states "And of course the problem of realism came up: the question was whether the ends justify the means."⁷⁰ However, this is not enough to supersede the need for moral consideration of the other human being.

Another passage directly links the two principles of justice and freedom to the core notion of personal (existential) engagement, against the "scientific," abstract philosophical (German) foundations of socialist practice:

Social justice can easily be achieved without an ingenious philosophy.

It requires only a few commonsensical truths and such simple qualities as foresight, energy, and unselfishness....Second, it is not novelty that makes political doctrines effective but rather the energy they embody and the sacrifices they inspire...⁷¹

Here Camus explicitly distinguishes between two different socialist conceptions: one that involves abstract ideas, and one based on personal commitment and individual sacrifice:

There is a certain form of socialist doctrine that we detest, perhaps even more than we detest the politics of tyranny. It is a doctrine that rests on optimism and invokes the love of humanity to exempt itself from serving human beings, the inevitability of progress to evade the question of wages, and universal peace to avoid necessary sacrifice.⁷²

⁶⁸ *Camus at Combat* 56.

⁶⁹ *Camus at Combat* 28.

⁷⁰ *Camus at Combat* 101-2.

⁷¹ *Camus at Combat* 122.

Camus supports the idea of commitment that is determined to pay the necessary price and envisions a socialism that:

...rejects both falsehood and weakness. It does not waste its breath with talk of progress, yet it is convinced that man's fate is always in man's hands. It does not believe in absolute and infallible doctrines but in obstinate and tireless if inevitably halting improvement of the human condition. It holds that justice is well worth a revolution.⁷³

In a passage like this one, the link between "existential" engagement and commitment to socialist politics is expressed most succinctly. What the passage also shows, however, is Camus' very clear view of the philosophical implications of this "committed" view of socialism, that is, the rejection of the (German) version of "scientific" socialism, posited on a teleological philosophy of history and a blind faith in the powers of reason.

"NEITHER VICTIMS, NOR EXECUTIONERS": BEYOND SOCIALISM AND CAPITALISM

It is on these premises that Camus bases his objections to alternative types of socialism, notably Marxism, existentialism, and even on some forms of humanism, because of their focus on abstract or absolute concepts, to the detriment of the reality of human existence.⁷⁴ In his objections, Camus can be compared to another important figure of political philosophy in the mid-20th century, namely, Hannah Arendt. Like Arendt, Camus criticized the dominant form of socialism for its failure to actually achieve any significant measure of

⁷² *Camus at Combat* 122.

⁷³ *Camus at Combat* 122.

⁷⁴ This is also the main reason for Camus' criticism of Christianity as a form of socialism. In Camus' opposition to abstract ideals and nihilism, one can draw a parallel because Camus and Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, who criticized the Idealism of Kant and Fichte for similar reasons. Camus does mention Jacobi in a footnote in *The Rebel* (120).

reform that would improve the human condition, and for having instead turned into another form of power and oppression. As Jeffrey C. Isaac writes in *Arendt, Camus and Modern Rebellion*:

Thus for both Camus and Arendt, Marxist socialism is a form of rebellion against injustice whose underlying metaphysical currents—a labor metaphysic, a modernizing optimism, a faith in history—have helped to undermine, indeed devour, its own rebellious impulses.⁷⁵

The problem for all utopian schemes is the disconnect between theory and actual practice; the difficulties of implementation; the sustainability of social reform, revolt, or rebellion; as well as the difficulty of applying “scientific” principles to social structures and human beings.⁷⁶ Too often, for Camus, socialist and humanist attempts to improve human society eventually end up in disillusionment, followed by nihilism and violence, because of the inherent contradictions that plague utopian plans due to their ignorance of the complexities and realities of human nature.

Despite his deep distrust towards the fateful consequences of utopian social thinking, however, Camus himself made a series of programmatic proposals in an important series of eight *Combat* articles in 1946, entitled “Neither Victims nor Executioners,” which amounted to a moderate version of utopian thinking that rejected both nihilism and political realism.⁷⁷

Camus wanted a form of utopian politics that would be, in his words, “less ruinous.”⁷⁸

Having given it considerable thought, he comes to the conclusion that:

⁷⁵ Isaac *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 91.

⁷⁶ Ironically, this was precisely one of Marx and Engel’s main objections to the utopian socialists in regards to theory and practice. In *The Communist Manifesto* for instance, Marx writes: “Hence they reject all political, and especially all revolutionary action; they wish to attain their ends by peaceful means, and endeavor, by small experiments, necessarily doomed to failure, and by the force of example, to pave the way for the new social Gospel” 36 .

⁷⁷ These articles ran from November 19 to November 30 under the following subtitles: “The Century of Fear,” “Saving Bodies,” “Socialism Mystified,” “The Revolution Travestied,” “International Democracy and Dictatorship,” “The World Moves Quickly,” “A New Social Contract,” and “Toward Dialogue.” 257-275.

⁷⁸ *Camus at Combat* 264.

...those who want to change the world effectively today have to choose among carnage, the impossible dream of bringing history to an abrupt halt, or the acceptance of a relative utopia that leaves some chance for human action....It is not difficult to see, however, that the relative utopia of which I speak is the only real possibility, the only one inspired by the spirit of reality.⁷⁹

These articles were crucial in formulating the ideas that he would later develop in *The Rebel*. In the *Combat* articles, Camus already defined the narrow path between necessary utopia and dangerous messianic dreams that modern socialism must travel:

We must therefore admit that the refusal to legitimize murder forces us to reconsider our notion of utopia. In that regard, it seems possible to say the following: utopia is that which is in contradiction to reality. From this point of view, it would be completely utopian to want people to stop killing people. This would be absolute utopia. It is a much lesser degree of utopia, however, to ask that murder no longer be legitimized.⁸⁰

He also writes:

Deception, violence, and blind human sacrifice have been tried for centuries, and the experience has been bitter. Only one thing is left to try, and that is the plain middle course of disillusioned decency, scrupulous fairness, and steadfast support for human dignity. We believe that idealism is futile.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Camus at *Combat* 266.

⁸⁰ Camus at *Combat* 261.

⁸¹ Camus at *Combat* 102.

Against this ideal of a socialism that would unite justice with individual freedom, Camus describes in detail how the human desire for progress and the forces of lethal ideologies and abstractions, with their promise of a better future, have destroyed human dialogue and human values, creating, in his words, a “century of fear.”⁸² As a result,

We live in terror because persuasion is no longer possible, because man has been delivered entirely into the hands of history and can no longer turn toward that part of himself which is as true as the historical part, and which he discovers when he confronts the beauty of the world and of people’s faces.⁸³

The bureaucracy that is produced when abstractions and absolutes, or what Camus calls “messianism without subtlety,” are incarnated in concrete political realities imposes its ideas on human society and develops a monopoly on truth.⁸⁴ Dialogue is one of the first victims, followed by silence, fear, and terror. Too often in modern history these institutional doctrines have been imposed by individual or collective murder, creating in Camus’ words “a world in which murder is legitimate and human life is considered futile. Therein lies today’s primary political problem.”⁸⁵ For his part, Camus states “I have learned over the past two years in particular that there is no truth I would place above the life of a human being.”⁸⁶ What Camus desired was utopian thinking that promoted peace, and more importantly, like Tolstoy, stopped or at least reduced legitimized murder and capital punishment.⁸⁷

⁸² *Camus at Combat* 257.

⁸³ *Camus at Combat* 258-259.

⁸⁴ *Camus at Combat* 259. The full quote is from an article dated November 19, 1946, in “The Century of Fear”: “And because we live in a world of abstraction, a world of bureaucracy and machinery, of absolute ideas and of messianism without subtlety. We gasp for air among people who believe they are absolutely right, whether it be in their machines or their ideas. And for all who cannot live without dialogue and the friendship of other human beings, this silence is the end of the world.”

⁸⁵ *Camus at Combat* 259.

⁸⁶ *Camus at Combat* 260. Roger Quillot in “Camus’s Libertarian Socialism” quotes Camus as saying “I will always resist placing a volume of *Das Kapital* between life and man.” See *Critical Essays on Albert Camus* 37.

⁸⁷ We can see here how Camus’ famous opposition to the death penalty is in fact rooted in a much broader idea

His counter-utopia, therefore, is one where individual life is considered as sacred and the need for social justice primordial. However, Camus' "relative utopia" is not simply a humanistic, liberal defense of individual rights. It is also one based in "the beauty of the world and of people's faces" that he mentioned. We can see here how the early pantheistic philosophy and the sensualist embrace of the world are transformed into concrete political principles to combat what is, for him, the deadly consequences of historicism. Earlier on, we saw how he had declared: "the sun taught me that history was not everything."⁸⁸ Camus makes the "Greek" truth that Nature is a cyclical, ordered whole, where it is possible for the human being to be a vitally harmonious part of the cosmos, into a principal of ethical conduct. The Absurd, in other words, is far from being the sole moral principle in Camus' philosophy, despite what many have suggested.

Camus was heavily criticized for such utopian statements. He was accused of being naïve about the reality of political truths, the necessity of "dirty hands," and the risks of political decisions.⁸⁹ Camus acknowledged the degree of good intentions of so many of these people who believe that their ideology of truth will make men happy, but whose good intentions still ended up in violence and murder:

For what strikes me amid all the polemics, threats, and eruptions of

of justice. In *Resistance, Rebellion and Death*, he writes: The death penalty as it is now applied, and however rarely it may be, is a revolting butchery, an outrage inflicted on the person and body of man" 233. David Carroll comments in his foreword to Camus' articles in *Combat* that "The failure of justice in the purge trials increased Camus' doubts about the legitimacy of capital punishment in general and led him to become a resolute opponent of the death penalty" Xv. It is interesting to compare this to Tolstoy's similar rejection of executions and killing in his essay "Thou Shall Not Kill" written in 1900 (see *The Last Steps: The Late Writings of Leo Tolstoy*, London: Penguin Books, 112-118). A.N. Wilson in *Tolstoy: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988), relates that in a letter after he witnessed a man guillotined in Paris in 1857, Tolstoy condemned "not just the killing, but the system which produced it" 146. Camus also relates similar stories of witnessing an execution in *The First Man* (See pages 62-64), as well as in *The Outsider* and in *The Plague*.

⁸⁸ Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays* 7.

⁸⁹ From this perspective, it is interesting to compare Sartre's play *Les Mains sales* (Dirty Hands) and Camus' play *Les Justes* (The Just Assassins), in which similar questions about politics, morality, and the idea of justice are raised. In *Combat*, Camus writes "We are not men of hate. But we are men of justice. And justice dictates that those who killed and those who permitted murder are equally responsible before their victims, even if those who covered up the murders speak today of "double-edged politics" and "realism." This is the kind of language we despise most" 14. For an interesting article on the problems of action, innocence, and guilt, see Roger W. Smith's "Redemption in Politics", *Political Science Quarterly*, 86: 2 (1971): 205-231. Smith primarily focuses on Camus' *The Fall*.

violence, is everyone's good intentions. Everyone, on the right and on the left, apart from a few rogues, believes that his truth is likely to make men happy. And yet the conjunction of all these good intentions leads to this infernal world, in which men are still being killed, threatened, and deported, preparations are being made for war, and it is impossible to say a word without instantly being insulted or betrayed.⁹⁰

Camus, as we saw, defined his "relative utopia" as "that which is in contradiction to reality."⁹¹ He admitted that at the time in which he wrote, wanting people to stop killing each other was an absolute utopia and one that was not at all practical. For Camus, however, this impractical utopia was in fact the only realistic option. This is because his defiance of the Marxist faith in history did not throw him into the arms of the other camp either. He remained fully committed to a politics that would resist the existing order. This comes out clearly in a passage like the following, in which the danger of historical materialism is equated with that of capitalism:

... the Marxist and capitalist ideologies, both of which are based on the idea of progress and both of which are convinced that application of their principles must inevitably lead to social equilibrium, are utopias of a much greater degree. Beyond that, they are even now exacting a heavy price from us.⁹²

What Camus wanted was another utopian ideology that would somehow counteract these two ideologies of Marxism and capitalism. His conception of utopia would "set forth the

⁹⁰ *Camus at Combat* 260.

⁹¹ *Camus at Combat* 261.

⁹² *Camus at Combat* 261.

conditions necessary for pacifying minds and nations.”⁹³ He envisioned a more just philosophy, or a third way, that would reflect the peaceful desires of those people who wished to be neither victims nor executioners. Camus contemplated a different kind of socialism based on moral principles, an international democracy, and a world organization that would promote peace and justice.⁹⁴ Indeed, in 1948, he took part in a movement called the Citizens of the World led by a former U.S. pilot named Gary Davis (Sartre refused to join), and Todd recounts: “Hoping for peace, Camus helped to found the Group for International Liaisons in the Revolutionary Union Movement.”⁹⁵ The purpose was to “create communities of men beyond borders which are united by things other than the abstract ties of ideology.”⁹⁶ Davis advocated a world government or one government for one world—a very utopian idea. As Camus expressed it in 1945:

We have always maintained that alliance politics was not enough and that our only goal was a world organization that would at last bring peace among nations....The best course open to us is to plead unremittingly in favor of an international democracy that will harm the interest of no one while fostering solidarity among nations.⁹⁷

This democracy, in his view, needed to be based on a form of economic collectivism:

For six months we have called for the creation of a true popular democracy based on economic justice and liberal politics. For six months, aware of the contradictions that are suffocating the world caught between an economy that is now international and politics that remains stubbornly national, we have called for a world

⁹³ *Camus at Combat* 261.

⁹⁴ *Camus at Combat* 170.

⁹⁵ Todd 250.

⁹⁶ Todd 251.

⁹⁷ *Camus at Combat* 239.

economic federation, in which raw materials, commercial markets, and currency would be internationalized and which would also lay the groundwork for a political federation that might prevent the nations of the world from slitting each other's throats every twenty years.⁹⁸

For this modest utopia, Camus thus engaged in a rejection of capitalism and a demystification of socialism: one that could free itself from the ideologies and myths of Christianity and Marxism (read Hegelianism) with their eschatology, the absolute faith they put in history, and the nihilistic consequences of the belief that the end or the future are the sole sources of meaning and value:

The goal, in short, will be to define the conditions for a modest political philosophy, that is, a philosophy free of all messianic elements and devoid of any nostalgia for an earthly paradise.⁹⁹

For Camus, the common source of historical-materialism and capitalism's dangerous ideologies and the common source of the terror that they harbor was thus to be found in that very form of thinking he had identified early on in his first academic writing and that he followed in his Algerian years--namely, the desire for transcendence and the denial of the "Greek" emphasis on this present world. In order to combat this messianic thinking, in his view, we need to look at the ideologies and moral attitudes toward human action that are implied in programs of social reform and progress:

This raises the problem of Western socialism. For terror can be legitimized only if one adopts the principle that the end justifies the means. And this principle can be embraced only if the efficacy of the action is taken to be an absolute end, as in nihilist ideologies (everything

⁹⁸ *Camus at Combat* 170.

⁹⁹ *Camus at Combat* 261.

is permitted, success is what counts) or philosophies that take history as an absolute (first Hegel, then Marx: since the goal is a classless society, anything that leads to it is good).¹⁰⁰

This is a point where we see a discernible demarcation, in principle if not in the complex reality of real political life, between Marxist socialism and what Camus saw as the superior form of French socialism, as it was applied by the Blum government. Camus clearly emphasizes this in *Combat*:

It is quite clear that our Socialists, under the influence of Léon Blum and even more under the threat of events, gave unprecedented priority to moral issues (the end does not always justify the means)... Their legitimate desire was to invoke a small number of principles more important than murder. It is no less obvious that the same Socialists want to maintain Marxist doctrine, some because they believe that it is impossible to be a revolutionary without being a Marxist, others because they are understandably loyal to the history of the party, which persuades them that one cannot be a Socialist, either, without being a Marxist.¹⁰¹

The fundamental differences, in Camus' opinion, between socialism and Marxism are based on history, logic, and moral values:

For it is clear that if Marxism is true, and if there is a logic to history, then political realism is legitimate. It is equally clear that if the moral values favored by the Socialist Party are fundamentally right, then Marxism is absolutely false because it claims to be absolutely true.

From this point of view, the well-known idea that Marxism will ultimately

¹⁰⁰ Camus at *Combat* 262.

¹⁰¹ Camus at *Combat* 263.

be transcended in favor of a more idealist and humanitarian philosophy is merely a joke, an inconsequential dream.¹⁰²

Camus goes on to state:

I chose this example not to condemn the Socialists but to illuminate the paradoxes of our time. To condemn the Socialists, one would have to be superior to them. This is not the case. On the contrary, this contradiction seems to me to be shared by all the people I've mentioned, who want a society that is both happy and worthy, who want men to be free in a condition that can at last be described as just, but who still hesitate between a freedom in which they know full well that justice is finally duped and a justice in which they see clearly that freedom is eliminated at the outset.¹⁰³

By pointing out this contradiction, Camus hoped that it would force socialists to choose between accepting the belief in Marxism that the end justifies the means, which, in his opinion, legitimized or institutionalized murder, and one that rejected Marxism as a philosophy while acknowledging the valuable critical aspects of its interpretation. According to Camus, accepting the first proposition would resolve the contradiction and give them a clear conscience, however, by choosing the second option:

...they will demonstrate that the end of ideologies is upon us, that is, the end of absolute utopias that destroy themselves owing to the heavy price they eventually exact when they seek to become part of historical reality. It will then be necessary to choose another utopia, one that is more modest and less ruinous.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² *Camus at Combat* 263. An interesting comparison can be made with Rosa Luxembourg's famous response to Edward Bernstein: "Either revisionism is correct in its position on the course of capitalist development, and therefore the socialist transformation of society is only a utopia, or socialism is not a utopia, and the theory of "means of adaptation" is false. There is the question in a nutshell" *Reform or Revolution* (New York: Pathfinder, 1970) 19.

¹⁰³ *Camus at Combat* 262.

This other utopia ties into his idea of what revolution might mean at the time he wrote these articles. He defines it as “a change of political and economic institutions intended to increase freedom and justice in the world.”¹⁰⁵ He also defines it, however, quite ironically, as “a series of often unfortunate historical events that brings about this change for the better.”¹⁰⁶

Camus believes that in the 20th century the figure of the solitary revolutionary and the romantic ideal of the individual rebel have been replaced by the masses (the proletariat) up against the mass weaponry and the mass politics of giant state machines. As a result, for a smaller nation like France: “...we, as Frenchmen, are not free to be revolutionaries. Or at any rate we can no longer be solitary revolutionaries” because politics is no longer confined to the “borders of a single nation.”¹⁰⁷ International politics of competing ideologies and power (the U.S. and the Soviet Union) are now the central powers, and as a result:

...the only revolution we can talk about is an international one. To be precise the revolution will either be international or it will not happen. But what can this phrase mean today? There was a time when it was possible to believe that international reform would come about through successive or simultaneous national revolutions—a series of miracles, as it were.¹⁰⁸

This reform, however, did not happen, and the two forces of “revolutionary” socialism and conservatism, represented by the Soviet Union and the United States, appear to have made the idea of revolution meaningless and to have replaced it with ideological warfare. In essence, the word revolution has returned as a philosophical ideal (abstract concept) which no longer means practical human action or revolt. One of the main conundrums, therefore, for

¹⁰⁴ *Camus at Combat* 264.

¹⁰⁵ *Camus at Combat* 264.

¹⁰⁶ *Camus at Combat* 264.

¹⁰⁷ *Camus at Combat* 265.

¹⁰⁸ *Camus at Combat* 265.

Camus' "relative utopia," becomes that of defining what the socialist idea of social reform and the possibility of revolution could mean in a world divided between two military powers armed with the most destructive weapons in history and threatening total nuclear war. War has become the primary focus of politics and not justice or the improvement of the human condition.

Camus' program in *Combat*, for a modest, socialist utopia, based on the twofold defense of justice and freedom, continues to be premised on the possibility of truly emancipatory action (something he will begin to question in *The Rebel*). However, despite all his wariness towards the dangerous precedents of modern uses of this notion, he continued, as we saw, to maintain the necessity of a "revolution":

In any case, it should give pause to those who speak lightly of revolution.

What this word portends *today* must either be accepted or rejected in total if you accept it, you must consciously acknowledge responsibility for the war to come. If you reject it, you must either admit that you prefer the *status quo*, which is a completely utopian position insofar as it assumes that history is immobile, or else you must redefine the word "revolution," which means accepting what I shall call a relative utopia...I have come to the conclusion that those who want to change the world effectively today have to choose among carnage, the impossible dream of bringing history to an abrupt halt, or the acceptance of a relative utopia that leaves some chance of human action.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Camus at *Combat* 266.

A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT

Camus' proposal of a third way, or different utopia, was a proposal for a new social contract—one that would unite free individuals and communities at both the national and international level. This would be a new international democracy, where “the law is above those who govern, the law being the expression of the will of all.”¹¹⁰ What Camus envisioned in the seventh article in this series dated November 29, 1946, was a collective human response to the political realities of the dictatorships that had resulted from these other forms of utopias and the disastrous results they had had on human freedom:

Hence individuals, working both within their countries and across borders, must one by one enter into a new social contract that will unite them again in accordance with a more reasonable set of principles.¹¹¹

The utopian element in this new social contract was for him not an intractable problem. Instead, he was striving for a merging of utopian ideals with a practical realism that focused on, and indeed was made possible by, dialogue:

More precisely, the tasks of these groups should be to meet the confusions of terror with clear language and at the same time to set forth the values that a world at peace will find indispensable: their first objectives could be to formulate an international code of justice whose first article would abolish the death penalty everywhere and to give a clear statement of the principles necessary for any civilization based on dialogue.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Camus at *Combat* 268. Camus discusses Rousseau's *Social Contract* in *The Rebel* under the heading “The New Gospel” 114-124.

¹¹¹ Camus at *Combat* 272.

¹¹² Camus at *Combat* 272-273.

Only dialogue can restore the moral values that are necessary to establish institutions that will guarantee human freedom and justice. Most importantly, only through a dialogue that makes redundant and demystifies the alleged powers of violence, crime, and murder, can humans ever develop a morality that can replace that of religion. As noted earlier, Camus considered socialism as a commitment. We can see now that this personal “existential” commitment in fact entails not just the expression of human freedom through choice, but also the need for dialogue and individual responsibility. Camus’ position on this is quite clear:

I, for one, am practically certain that I have made my choice. And having chosen, it seemed to me that I ought to speak, so say that I would never count myself among people of whatever stripe who are willing to countenance murder, and I would draw whatever consequence followed from this.¹¹³

This summarizes Camus’ fundamental differences with all teleological and messianic ideologies, whether in their modern communist or reactionary form, or in the dogmatic versions of Christianity. The statement also outlines the main thesis that will be developed in *The Rebel*, which was published in 1951, three years after the last of these *Combat* articles. The last article in *Combat* entitled “Toward Dialogue,” ends with the following challenge:

What I think needs to be done at the present time is simply this: in the midst of a murderous world, we must decide to reflect on murder and choose. If we can do this, then we will divide ourselves into two groups: those who if need be would be willing to commit murder or become accomplices to murder, and those who would refuse to do so with every fiber of their being.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Camus at *Combat* 274.

¹¹⁴ Camus at *Combat* 275. This series of eight articles ended on November 30, 1946. Camus continued to write articles for *Combat* over the next three years, with his last one dated March 14, 1949 (309).

This moral choice prepares the way for the substantial work that will go into *The Rebel*, in which Camus will reconstruct the history and philosophical genealogy of that difficult dialectic between necessary utopian revolt and murderous, teleological revolution. The two fundamental political alternatives that Camus distinguishes on the basis of their attitude to murder, encompass the two types of socialism mentioned earlier in this chapter. On the one hand, we have the utopian version of Saint-Simon, Fourier, Robert Owen, Considerant, Louis Blanc, Tolstoy, Kropotkin, and Léon Blum, who abjured violence and advocated reform through peaceful means. On the other, we have such thinkers as Babeuf, Blanqui, Weitling, Marx, Engels, and Lenin, who advocated a revolutionary doctrine based on violence and that clearly reflected the nihilistic influences of Bakunin and Nechaev.¹¹⁵

In these latter proponents of violent revolution, Camus might well have found contemporary, political recurrences of Sade's advocacy of murder and destruction as creative acts.¹¹⁶ Against this political philosophy of violence, the challenge for Camus was to continue to defend a utopian program--one that would entail the necessity of resistance and revolt against injustice and oppression--yet avoid the murderous implications displayed in the discourse and concrete actions of one segment of utopian thinking. In a speech given in 1953, Camus' desire for a "relative," collectivist, but "liberal" social utopia, finds its perfect formulation:

The important thing today is this: without giving an inch on the judicial level and without abandoning anything on the level of freedom...the revolutionary struggle, the push for liberation is defined first as a double and constant rejection of humiliation.

freedom is not a gift that one receives from the State or from a

¹¹⁵ In *The Rebel*, Camus says of both of these nihilists: "...the cry of Bakunin and Nechaiev: "Our Mission is to destroy, not to construct" 144.

¹¹⁶ See *Bakunin on Anarchism* ed. Sam Dolgoff (New York: Black Rose Books, 1980): "Let us therefore trust the Eternal Spirit which destroys and annihilates only because it is the unfathomable and eternal source of all life. The passion for destruction is a creative passion too!" 57.

leader, but rather a benefit that one conquers every day through the effort of each person and the union of all.¹¹⁷

Olivier Todd stated that in *The Rebel*, Camus “sought to examine the revolutionary orthodoxy of the pseudo-Communist left-wing, who took Karl Marx as their messiah,”¹¹⁸ and that he “tried to incorporate his experiences, knowledge and readings in sociology, literature, and philosophy, as well as politics.”¹¹⁹ This is what we turn to in the final chapter, as we look at how Camus sought to examine the modern “myth” of revolt and revolution, both as a fundamental human characteristic and as an act of the will in Man’s desire for happiness and freedom, with often tragic consequences.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Roger, Quillot, “Camus’ Libertarian Socialism,” in *Critical Essays on Albert Camus* 41-42.

¹¹⁸ Todd 300.

¹¹⁹ Todd 301.

¹²⁰ For more on the search for happiness and the theory and practice of revolt, see John Cruickshank, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959).

CHAPTER SEVEN: CAMUS' ETHICS OF TRAGIC REVOLT

As noted earlier, *The Rebel* attracted much criticism when it came out in 1951. Camus biographers describe the angst in which the book was written and the difficulties, both physical and psychological, that Camus encountered in completing it. Some of the criticism at the time was savage, especially from his former associates. What I would like to show in conclusion, however, is that this work, which is by far not the one for which Camus' name has remained famous, in fact brings together the different threads that the previous chapters have uncovered and which define Camus' mature thought. In this work, all the intuitions and insights from his youth are upheld but combined in a new philosophical and poetic vision. We might say that in his characterization of the tragic need to rebel, and the risks that exist of this rebellion going dangerously awry, Camus formed a renewed, non-systematic synthesis of the specific themes that had nourished his literary, political, and theoretical work to date.

THE PROMETHEAN TRAGIC MYTH

What remains is the sense of the tragic predicament and the tragic responsibilities of revolt and rebellion. These tragic elements arise from what I have called the "tragic paradigm," that is, the sudden realization of the fraught relationship between the once amicable powers of Nature, God, and Man; however, Camus gives it a new twist. As we learn from his notebooks, the Greek world, in which he felt most at home,¹ helped him to center his entire work on three core myths: the Myth of Sisyphus, the Myth of Prometheus, and the Myth of Nemesis.² The Sisyphean tragic myth was defined by the issues of the Absurd, salvation, and

¹ Camus writes in *Notebooks 1942-1951*: "The world in which I am most *at ease*: the Greek myth" 249.

² Camus made the following entry in *Notebooks 1942-1951* dated May-September 1950: "I. The Myth of Sisyphus (absurd)---II. The Myth of Prometheus (revolt)---III. The Myth of Nemesis" 257.

the problematic “will to happiness.” In a world without God and without the resulting certainty, what was one to do with one’s freedom and one’s body? In *The Rebel*, the Promethean myth approaches these same questions from a very different perspective, focusing on new themes and key insights, which defines a different idea of the tragic. An individual’s life and the lives of others are no longer a negligible quantity, but the primary values underpinning all worthwhile action. Suicide is now rejected, and instead Camus insists on the “acceptance of the desperate encounter between human inquiry and the silence of the universe.”³

Accordingly, “it is obvious that absurdism hereby admits that human life is the only necessary good, since it is precisely life that makes this encounter possible and since, without life, the absurdist wager would have no basis.”⁴ The Promethean tragic myth no longer verges on nihilism, like the Sisyphean, but instead approximates forms of humanism. Like Prometheus’ revolt against Zeus out of his pity for humans, Camus’ “Rebel is a man who is on the point of accepting or rejecting the sacrosanct and determined on creating a human situation where all the answers are human, or, rather, formulated in terms of reason.”⁵

Similarly, the life-principle now expresses itself not so much in Dionysian sensuousness, but rather in decisive and clear-sighted, other-and-future-oriented, moral and political action. Revolt is the human’s new “*raison de vivre*” which “serves no other purpose but to help him live,”⁶ and “is one of man’s essential dimensions.”⁷ Against Scheler’s famous “man of resentment,” Camus stresses the “passionate affirmation” hidden in metaphysical and

³ Camus *The Rebel* 6.

⁴ Camus 6.

⁵ Camus 26. In Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* (London: Penguin, 1961), Prometheus says of Zeus: “Of wretched humans he took no account, resolved to annihilate them and create another race. This purpose there was not one to opposed but I: I dared. I saved the human race from being ground to dust, from total death. For that I am subjected to these bitter pains—Agony to endure, heart-rendering to beheld. I pitied mortal men;...” 27-28.

⁶ Camus 25.

⁷ Camus 27.

political revolt that “reveals a part of man which must always be defended.”⁸ In other words, the centrality of *logos* and *eros* has to some extent receded to make room for *thumos*. Much later, and in a completely different context, Plato’s concept of *thumos* would return as a key anthropological marker of human progress in Francis Fukuyama’s famous thesis *The End of History and the Last Man*:

Thymos [thumos] as it emerges in... [Plato’s] *Republic*...constitutes something like an innate human sense of justice, and as such is the psychological seat of all the noble virtues like selflessness, idealism, morality, self-sacrifice, courage, and honorability. Thymos provides an all-powerful emotional support to the process of valuing and evaluating, and allows human beings to overcome their most powerful natural instincts for the sake of what they believe is right or just.⁹

Three decades earlier, Camus had already made *thumos* the central value that the rebel upheld amongst and against the historical horrors of the century:

He rebels because he categorically refuses to submit to conditions that he considers intolerable and also because he is confusedly convinced that his position is justified, or rather, because in his own mind he thinks that he ‘has the right to...’ Rebellion cannot exist without the feeling that somewhere, in some way, you are justified....He stubbornly insists that there are certain things in him which ‘are worthwhile...’ and which must be taken into

⁸ Camus 25. At the same time, however, in his “In Defense of the Rebel,” Camus states that there is a “limit beyond which revolt negates itself” and that “Every human enterprise thus encounters a limit beyond which it changes into its opposite...” *Sartre and Camus: A Historical Confrontation* (New York: Humanity Books, 2004) 212.

⁹ Francis Fukuyama *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992) 171. An interesting connection lies with the tragedies of Euripides, which to some extent anticipate Camus’ problematic. See E. R. Dodds in *The Greeks and the Irrational*: “The daemonic world has withdrawn, leaving man alone with his passions. And this is what gives Euripides’ studies of crime their peculiar poignancy: he shows us men and women nakedly confronting the mystery of evil, no longer as an alien thing assailing their reason from without, but as a part of their own being—*ethos anthropo daimon*” (written in Greek) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951) 186.

consideration.¹⁰

However, rebellion's tragic nature lies in the dangerous risk that comes with the possibility of its developing into the historically grounded, absolutist revolution. Next to the positive use of the Promethean myth, the excesses of absolute forms can also serve as a critical guideline to question, in Camus' view, the idea of revolution itself.¹¹ Raymond Aron in 1955 famously attempted to expose the fallacies of the myth of revolution and that of the proletariat in his book *The Opium of the Intellectuals*.¹² Similarly, Camus four years earlier already sought to expose the dangerous nihilism lurking beneath the prevailing political ideologies that advocated rational murder.

METAPHYSICAL REBELLION AS LITERARY REBELLION

The Promethean revolt encompasses a series of other deleterious temptations, which *The Rebel* studies one by one. They form the negative side of Camus' positive, mature philosophy of rebellion. First, there are the "metaphysical rebels," or "Sons of Cain,"

¹⁰ Camus 19. This passage is important because it clearly proves wrong those readings of *The Rebel* that downplay the moral and political dimension of justified revolt for Camus. See for instance, Herbert Hochberg, "Albert Camus and the Ethic of Absurdity," who writes that "In death he [Camus] finds, paradoxically, a satisfaction for 'nostalgia for unity.' Death in its way 'unifies' all men, and in so doing, furnishes an 'absolute' (93); and later on: "The revolt against death is, in fact, the archetype for all rebellion. Thus nihilists of either kind cannot be rebels. Much of the argument of *The Rebel* is devoted to this point. In establishing this betrayal of rebellion in history Camus feels he has established the intellectual impotency of nihilism... Thus the rebellion against death becomes the model for the denunciation of injustice and is the dominant motif of *The Rebel*" 96. Such a reading fails to distinguish between the two types of rebellion (metaphysical and historical rebellion) analyzed by Camus.

¹¹ In his letter "In Defense of *The Rebel*," which was not published until 1965, Camus writes about the Marxist "myth" of the liberation of the worker: "That is why it seemed to me proper and useful to proceed with a reasoned criticism of the only instrument that claimed to liberate the workers, in order that this liberation might be something other than a long and disheartening mystification. This criticism does not conclude by condemning revolution, but only historical nihilism" 212. Camus also writes "Today everyone would like to take credit for the revolution without paying the price, or wear their revolt in their buttonhole while true revolt is without adornment. In order to avoid this temptation I have preferred to investigate the consequences of the rebellious and revolutionary attitudes" 209.

¹² Despite his criticism of Camus, Aron is in fact close to him in stressing the connections between Christian messianic thinking and revolutionary eschatology. As Aron writes: "In Marxist eschatology, the proletariat is cast in the role of collective savior. The expressions used by the young Marx leave one in no doubt as to the Judaeo-Christian origins of the myth of the class elected through suffering for the redemption of humanity" *The Opium of the Intellectuals* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2007) 66.

foremost amongst which is the figure of the Marquis de Sade, whom we studied in Chapter Three.¹³ Whilst in Camus' early work Sade represented the possible dark side of a Nietzschean embrace of life beyond good and evil, in his later work, Sade becomes the anticipation of the historical horrors of the next century, as well as a dangerous literary model.

Let us focus on the first aspect of the metaphysical rebel: Instead of embracing the world, Nature, and other human beings, this rebel engages in a fight against creation (God and Nature) and against the human condition. Like the Promethean hero, he seeks a sense of clarity and unity against life and death, and strives to resolve the contradiction between the sense of injustice and deeply-felt principles of justice; however, his rebellion often tragically ends in utter destruction.¹⁴

The metaphysical rebel strives to force God's power into human nature (as Feuerbach or Marx did) and by doing so, Man "drags" this power into history.¹⁵ Only when humans accomplish the overthrow of the divinity do they realize that with this comes the responsibility to create, in Camus' words, "justice, order, and unity."¹⁶ The loss of the transcendent, however, does not lead to a new humanism where the sacred would now be found in natural experience and the lives of others, as Prometheus had hoped. Instead, by putting the individual at the center and robbing him of all source of meaning and value, the overthrow results in "appalling consequences" in the form of human crimes.¹⁷

Nowhere is this better represented than in the philosophy and the actions of the Marquis de Sade, who in his emphasis on radical individual freedom, absolute rebellion, and the

¹³ Camus 32-49.

¹⁴ Camus 32.

¹⁵ Camus 31. Camus' argument here is that by integrating or subsuming God's power, which places the focus on Man as the primary source, this power is brought into history through the idea of materialism and then into human institutions. This is what he is primarily referring to when he speaks of the divinity of man.

¹⁶ Camus 31.

¹⁷ Camus 31.

inescapable rule of human desire makes sacrilege a basic tenet and the hatred of virtue the principle of his libertine manifesto.¹⁸ The only law that Sade believed in was that of his own desire, which gives him a license to destroy, to administer punishment, and to commit crimes against other human beings.¹⁹ In Camus' opinion, Sade's fortresses have become a transparent metaphor for the modern political and social systems to come.²⁰

For Sade, the law of force implies barred gates, castles with seven-foot walls from which it is impossible to escape, and where a society founded on desire and crime functions unimpeded according to an implacable system.

... The system, which plays a role of capital importance in Sade's fabulous castles, sanctifies a universe of mistrust. It helps to anticipate everything so that no unexpected tenderness or pity occurs to upset the plans for complete enjoyment... In Sade's fortress republic, there are only machines and mechanics.²¹

The debauchery of killing in Sade's castle in *The 120 Days of Sodom* bears witness to the unstoppable operation of the guillotine in search of more and more victims, and it announces

¹⁸ In Camus' view, "Metaphysical revolt, in the proper sense, does not appear in any coherent form in the history of ideas until the end of the eighteenth century: modern times begin with the crash of falling ramparts. But, from this moment on, its consequences develop uninterruptedly and it is no exaggeration to say that they have shaped the history of our times. Historically speaking, the first coherent offensive is Sade's: he musters, into one vast war machine, the arguments of the freethinkers up to Voltaire and Father Meslier" 37. An interesting comparison can be made with Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "But the totalitarian order has granted unlimited rights to calculating thought and puts its trust in science as such. Its canon is its own brutal efficiency. From Kant's *Critique* to Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, the hand of philosophy had traced the writing on the wall; one individual put that writing into practice in all its details. The work of the Marquis de Sade exhibits 'understanding without direction from another'—that is to say, the bourgeois subject freed from all tutelage" (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) 67-68.

¹⁹ Camus 34. He quotes Sade as saying "What are all the creatures of the earth in comparison to a single one of our desires." Camus also writes "However, in a world that knows no other rule but murder, beneath a criminal heaven, and in the name of a criminal nature, Sade, in reality, obeys no other law but that of inexhaustible desire" 37.

²⁰ Again, compare this with Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in the chapter "Juliette or Enlightenment and Morality": "Finally it passes from the expropriated citizens to the totalitarian trust-masters, whose science has become the quintessence of the methods by which the subjugated mass society reproduces itself. Sade erected an early monument to their planning skills" 68.

²¹ Camus 38.

the even more efficient torture and murder mechanisms of the 20th century.²² The consequences of Sade's philosophy and logic were therefore "hermetic totalitarianism, universal crime, an aristocracy of cynicism, and the desire for an apocalypse."²³

The figure of Sade centrally returns in Camus' mature thinking because it encapsulates and illustrates with great force so many of the dangerous traits of the Promethean revolt gone wrong, and most of all, the rationally planned dehumanization and destruction of other people:

Sade's success in our day is explained by the dream that he had in common with contemporary thought: the demand for total freedom and dehumanization coldly planned by the intelligence.

The reduction of man to an object of experiment, the rule of which specifies the relation between the will to power and man as an object, the sealed laboratory which is the scene of this monstrous experiment, are lessons which the theoreticians of power will learn again when they have to organize the age of slavery.²⁴

However, Camus also considers Sade in terms of his influence on literature and romanticism. What we might term the Sadean temptation resides not only in the master plans and machinations the next century will reproduce, but also in his great influence on the history and the tragedy of the romantic rebel. Camus interprets Romanticism as a separation from earlier forms of rebellion, which focuses on the negative aspects of rebellion in an attitude of defiance and an obsession with figures of evil. The counterpart to Prometheus is thus Satan and all the Satanic figures, in particular the poets of evil and crime such as

²² Camus 39-40: "But from the moment when sexual crime destroys the object of desire, it also destroys desire which exists at the precise moment of destruction. Then another object must be brought under subjection and killed, and then another, and so on to an infinity of all possible objects."

²³ Camus 42.

²⁴ Camus 43. And again in *Notebooks 1942-1951*, Camus makes the statement: "The strongest passion of the twentieth century: slavery" 262.

Baudelaire, and the glorified romantic dandies. For these individuals, when transcendent reference is no longer possible, it is not enough for them to seek to construct a human world of justice on earth—they desire to take the place of God:

If the romantic rebel exalts evil and the individual, he does not do so
On behalf of mankind, but merely on his own behalf. Dandyism, of
whatever kind, is always dandyism in relation to God. The individual,
in so far as he is created being, can oppose himself only to the Creator.
He has need of God with whom he carried on a kind of baleful intrigue....
despite the Nietzschean atmosphere of such works, God is not yet dead
in them.²⁵

Probably no character in modern literature takes this rebellion of the individual against God and the moral problems it poses to humanity to a more extreme point than Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov in *Crime and Punishment*. For Camus, this is the central moment in the modern imagination, which he discusses at length in "The Rejection of Salvation."²⁶ Karamazov represents an important counter-figure to Camus' positive philosophy of rebellion. As we just saw, Camus interprets the romantic ambition as the attempt to talk to God as an equal. Faced with the absence of divine justice, the Romantics' revolt does not consist in trying to gather all finite human forces in order to ensure justice on earth, but rather in denouncing God and embracing negative, and indeed for the most consequent of them, evil figures in reaction.²⁷ This is exactly Karamazov's predicament. He feels that human

²⁵ Camus *The Rebel* 50. This reflects the comment that Camus made in *Caligula* about "living in front of a mirror." See *Notebooks* 1942-1951: 71.

²⁶ Camus 50.

²⁷ Camus 50: "The romantic rebel's ambition was to talk to God as man to man. Here evil was the answer to evil, pride the answer to pride. Vigny's ideal, for example is to answer silence with silence...The romantic rebels broke with God for being the fountainhead of hate."

mortality is unjust, and this leads him to reject the idea of God's grace, out of his inability to understand the death of innocent children.²⁸

Karamazov rebels against what he considers to be a murderous God and like Sade, (and indeed, as we saw in Chapter Four, like Caligula) he concludes from the fact that all humans die that crime is justified.²⁹ The primary difference with Sade stems from Karamazov's despair at no longer being able to hold on in absolute fashion to values and justice, once the ideological structure of Christianity is rejected. His dilemma is the following: "to be virtuous and illogical; or logical and criminal"³⁰ If God is overthrown and Man takes his place, then humans must accept crime, but this conclusion, rather than being enthusiastically embraced as in Sade, leads to a situation of utter despondency and despair. Karamazov is caught up in irresolvable contradictions of "unjustifiable conceptions of virtue and unacceptable crime, consumed with pity and incapable of love."³¹

Unable to find a way out of this dilemma, Ivan eventually goes mad because his search for an unattainable absolute in the form of justice alienates him from the world and from life. Karamazov rebelled against creation and this led him to "the desire to despair and to negate" or in Camus' word—nihilism.³² This "despairing nihilism" represents an important figure for Camus because it is an avenue that is clearly open to the Promethean tragic myth. In other words, it forms one of the major literary, metaphysical, and indeed political temptations that he must fight against, at the very moment when he acknowledges its force.³³

²⁸ Camus 50-51: "Ivan explicitly rejects mystery and, consequently, God as the fountainhead of love. Only love can make us consent to the injustice done to Martha, to the exploitation of workers, and, to go a step farther, to the death of innocent children."

²⁹ Camus 53: "Ivan rebels against a murderous God; but from the moment that he begins to consider the reasons for his rebellion, he deduces the law of murder... Long reflection on our condition as people sentenced to death only leads to the justification of crime."

³⁰ Camus 53. This struggle between faith and reason is one that Karamazov can't resolve because he cannot completely reject God or Christianity to the degree that Sade did by substituting Nature.

³¹ Camus 54.

³² Camus 52.

³³ Camus 55.

While Karamazov's madness makes him collapse upon himself, the other form of expression of this despairing nihilism is the attempt to create universal happiness by the domination and unification of the world, as in the figures of Caligula, Hitler, or Stalin. The Promethean route is to make the difficult moral choices between good and evil; to accept living with contradictions and amongst contingencies; and to create a morality and a form of justice that would benefit the greatest number. By contrast, the desire to conquer and rule creates what Camus calls "Caesars," who will use every means, since everything is permitted, to impose their form of unity on the world at the expense of the lives of the "common man" or the "silent prisoners in history."³⁴ In referring to politics and religion or the state and the church, Camus writes that:

From Paul to Stalin, the popes who have chosen Caesar have prepared the way for Caesars who quickly learn to despise popes. The unity of the world which was not achieved with God will, nevertheless, be attempted without Him.³⁵

The famous question of what becomes of morality if "God is dead" is answered by the Sons of Cain and their political counterparts, the "Caesars," through their elevation of power as the main value, and domination as the main virtue. This constellation of themes: the desire to replace God; the problems associated with defining a morality once the transcendent resources have disappeared; the turn to power and domination as ways to enforce a just order—all these lead to the most important philosophical influence ushering in the new century, and the one to which Camus in his later years was probably the closest, namely Nietzsche.

³⁴ Camus 55: "The kingdom of heaven will, in fact, appear on earth, but it will be ruled over by men—a mere handful to begin with who will be the Caesars, the ones who were the first to understand—and later, with time, by all men. The unity of all creation will be achieved by every possible means, since everything is permitted." In the section on "The Rejection of Salvation," Camus also says that Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor knows that "men are lazy rather than cowardly and that they prefer peace and death to the liberty of discerning between good and evil" 55.

³⁵ Camus 56.

NIETZSCHE AGAINST HISTORICISM

Nietzsche is a central figure for the mature Camus because in his philosophy, Camus can find tied together in brilliant literary expositions and profound philosophical analyses many of the major themes that inspire his own work. Indeed, it can even be claimed that in his rereading of Nietzsche, Camus found many of the features that could positively define his quest for a new humanist and modest Prometheanism. As we will see, however, even Nietzsche's philosophy is not exempt from ambiguity in the end.

In contrast with the metaphysical rebels, Nietzsche, for Camus, no longer seeks to replace God, because he doesn't have to. As he writes, Nietzsche did not kill God, but rather "he found it dead in the soul of his contemporaries."³⁶ Nietzsche's attack on Christianity thereby focused not so much on the source of morality, but on the content of the moral system.³⁷ Nietzsche draws the consequences from the collapse of the old order and strives to replace its morality with a system of virtues that is both radically new and also very ancient (very "Greek"), based on the virtues of strength, courage, action, and creativity. These values quite clearly can count as core values in Camus' modest Prometheanism. By contrast, the morality of Christianity, which Nietzsche condemns as a slave religion, curtailed or suppressed human instincts. Christian morality also condemns, in Nietzsche's view, "the universe of passion and emotion in the name of an imaginary world of harmony."³⁸ If, however, God no longer exists, then it is up to humans to act and become the master of their own destiny; define their

³⁶ Camus 59: "Contrary to the opinion of certain of his Christian critics, Nietzsche did not form a project to kill God. He found Him dead in the soul of his contemporaries."

³⁷ See *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998): "In this manner Christianity *as dogma* perished of its own morality; in this manner Christianity *as morality* must now also perish—we stand at the threshold of this event" 117. As Camus writes: "If he attacks Christianity in particular, it is only in so far as it represents morality. He always leaves intact the person of Jesus on the one hand, and on the other the cynical aspects of the Church" 60.

³⁸ Camus 59.

own laws; and create their own order in themselves and not in idols or systems of thought that simply replace the Deity. As Camus writes:

‘If we fail to find grandeur in God,’ says Nietzsche, ‘we find it nowhere; it must be denied or created.’ To deny was the task of the world around him which he saw rushing toward suicide. To create was the superhuman task for which he was willing to die.³⁹

Clearly, such a reading puts a positive emphasis on someone seen as willing to take the greatest risk to recreate a human order out of the destruction of a life-denying older order. The most important aspect in Nietzsche is his emphasis on action. In Camus’ view, Nietzsche felt that Christianity had corrupted the teachings of Jesus by putting the focus on faith rather than deeds or action, and the result of this blind faith and the acceptance of religious morality was a form of slavery. In that regard, Camus followed Nietzsche in thinking that religious and political dogmas or ideologies amounted to the same thing.⁴⁰

The grandeur of Nietzsche, therefore, is that with him, “nihilism becomes conscious” for the first time. Nietzsche is to be taken seriously when he states that he is the “first complete nihilist of Europe.”⁴¹ He recognized with utmost acuity the problem that humans would face without the ideological structure of God and what the ultimate consequences would be. Nietzsche’s system of negation was primarily concerned with “the determined destruction of everything that still hides nihilism from itself, of the idols which camouflage God’s death.”⁴²

³⁹ Camus 63.

⁴⁰ Camus 60: “Not faith but deeds—that, according to Nietzsche, is Christ’s message. From then on, the history of Christianity is nothing but a long betrayal of this message. The New Testament is already corrupt, and from the time of Paul until the Councils subservience to faith has led to the obliteration of deeds.” (Compare this to Tolstoy’s attack on the Church in his story *The Resurrection of Hell*). In *Notebooks 1935-1951*, Camus quotes Luther: “It is a thousand times more important to believe firmly in absolution than to be worthy of it. This faith makes you worthy, and constitutes true satisfaction” 35. This also reflects the ideas of St. Augustine that Camus discussed in his dissertation where, for example, he quotes Augustine as saying “If you cannot understand, believe so that you may understand. Faith come first, understanding follows. Therefore do not seek to understand, but believe so that you may understand” (See MacBride 123).

⁴¹ Camus 54. It is assumed that Camus took this from the beginning of Nietzsche’s *Will to Power*, where he calls himself the “first perfect European nihilist” (Breingsville: Digiread, 2010) 4.

⁴² Camus 58.

His primary goal, as he perceived it, was to “provoke a kind of crisis and a final decision about the problem of atheism.”⁴³

Such heightened consciousness of the moral and political dilemmas of the time is of course particularly attractive for Camus. It largely represents the ambition he set for himself in his personal life and his literary work. Nietzsche’s view of the world is that “it continues on its course at random and there is nothing final about it.”⁴⁴ Full lucidity about this lack of unity and finality is for him (and for Camus) the key to a real morality. It is also on that basis that nihilism and rebellion are to be accepted as necessary burdens. Instead of judgments being based on what should be, and on eternal concepts and moral imperatives, Man needs to focus on the reality of the present, and to reject “the inability to believe in what is, to see what is happening, to live life as it is offered.”⁴⁵ All this clearly crystallizes Camus’ own views regarding the tasks of humanity, once it has been deprived of any stable and secure metaphysical and moral foundations.

Such a critical perspective on modern times also unveils the intimate link that ties the defunct metaphysical order with the new faith in history. The continuity is ensured through the messianic reflex, which is, in this case, “the strictly moral ends of a narrative that has already been written.”⁴⁶ The old totality is replaced by a new idea of human totality, underpinning an ontology of history that redefines humans. This idea of history already at play in the old metaphysics and imported into the modern one is opposed to the cyclical idea

⁴³ Camus 58. See *On the Genealogy of Morality*: “Unconditional honest atheism (--and *its* [sic] is the only air we breathe, we more spiritual human beings of this age!) is accordingly *not* in opposition to that ideal [truth], as appearance would have it; it is rather only one of its last stages of development, one of its final forms and inner logical consequences—it is the awe-inspiring *catastrophe* of a two-thousand-year discipline in truth, which in the end forbids itself the *lie involved in belief in God*” 116.

⁴⁴ Camus 58.

⁴⁵ Camus 58.

⁴⁶ Camus 60.

of the eternal return. Instead, it propounds a linear concept of development working toward an end goal where reward and punishment redeem the truth and value of history.⁴⁷

Under this interpretation, socialism and humanitarianism themselves can be considered as degenerate forms of Christianity, since in Nietzsche's (and Camus' view), they all maintain "a belief in the finality of history which betrays life and nature, which substitutes ideal ends for real ends, and contributes to enervating both the will and the imagination."⁴⁸ Even if, as we saw in Chapter 5, Camus in fact was much more positive towards a certain tradition of socialism, what he found particularly inspiring in Nietzsche's account was his unwavering insistence on the inescapable mixture of anguish and happiness or pain and joy that besets humanity in its new paradigm. For Camus the question becomes "Where can I feel at home?"⁴⁹

This existential angst, for Nietzsche, is not a "comfort but an achievement" and probably more importantly, a challenge.⁵⁰ Camus writes that in this difficult freedom that Nietzsche refers to, humans must find the freedom of mind "in the acceptance of new obligations—because there must be a standard of values and an aim."⁵¹ In other words, behind the destructive side of Nietzsche's attacks on the Christian tradition, Camus also finds the positive values needed for his own, paradoxical humanism. Nietzsche allows him to find a creative solution to the problem of the absurd and the disappearance of the sacred.

⁴⁷ Camus writes that "For Christianity, reward and punishment imply the truth of history. But, by inescapable logic, all history ends by implying punishment and reward; and from this day on collective Messianism is born" 61.

⁴⁸ Camus 61. This idea of the enervation of the Will can be seen most clearly in Nietzsche's attitude toward pity or suffering in *The Antichrist*, where he writes: "Christianity is called the religion of *pity*.—Pity stands in antithesis to the tonic emotions which enhance the energy of the feeling of life: it has a depressive effect. One loses force when one pities. The loss of force which life has already sustained through suffering is increased and multiplied even further by pity. Suffering itself become contagious through pity; sometimes it can bring about a collective loss of life and life-energy...Pity on the whole thwarts the law of evolution, which is the law of *selection*...in every *noble* morality it counts as weakness...pity is *practical* nihilism." 130.

⁴⁹ Camus 62. This desire to feel at home and the problems of exile and nostalgia are reminiscent of Camus' writings on Plotinus in his dissertation, where he speaks of a "lost homeland" (See MacBride page 136).

⁵⁰ Camus 62.

⁵¹ Camus 62.

The problematic new freedom and morality that are thus created, through Nietzsche's overcoming of the Christian and historicist ideologies, relate directly to a kind of experience of the world very similar to the one Camus found in his rereading of Neo-Platonic metaphysics and which form the background for his early literary writings. To be free, according to Nietzsche, is "to abolish ends" and that maximum liberty is to be found in the "innocence of the ceaseless change of things,"⁵² which forces the mind to accept what is necessary. Camus states, with obvious approval, that the necessity of phenomena was Nietzsche's "most intimate concept" and that, if this is an absolute, it does not represent any kind of restraint. Nietzsche's paradoxical definition of freedom is the "total acceptance of total necessity."⁵³ The result is the acceptance or absolute affirmation of "human imperfection and suffering, of evil and murder, of all that is problematic and strange in our existence."⁵⁴

Rather than seek redemption or believe in the ideas of a moral God, pity, and love, Nietzsche preaches the virtue of accepting one's fate and embracing *amor fati*.⁵⁵ And because the world is illogical, Nietzsche believes--and Camus follows him on this point--that only art is "capable of grasping it," since art reproduces the world "just as the world reproduces itself in the course of its eternal gyrations" as the primordial sea "casts up the same astonished beings on the same sea-shore."⁵⁶ This concept of the Eternal Return is the source of a new idea of divinity, one that is again fully immanent with the world:

But at least he who consents to his own return and to the return of all things, who becomes an echo and an exalted echo, participates in the

⁵² Camus 64.

⁵³ Camus 64.

⁵⁴ Camus 64.

⁵⁵ Camus *The Rebel* 64. Camus writes that "*Amor fati* replaces what was an *odium fati*."

⁵⁶ Camus 64.

divinity of the world.⁵⁷

With this comment we seem to have landed at the exact opposite of the idea of rebellion. However, Nietzsche's greatness is precisely in his showing how radical revolt, the embrace of *amor fati*, and the full acceptance of the world go hand in hand. If one accepts the divinity of this world, then by embracing the world as it is, one also transcends one's finite destiny--no longer in illusory, life-denying ways--but in a radically affirmative way. Nietzsche's message is that the only way for humans to become God is to renounce illusory rebellion and instead to embrace the world as it is.⁵⁸ To participate in Nietzsche's detranscendentalized idea of divinity requires one to "consent to say yes to the world and life," but it is also to say yes to one's death and finality.⁵⁹ The key word in this human affirmation of life is creativity, in which critical, pathological values are replaced by creative values. Dionysian nature and the poles of joy and suffering have to be embraced because "Only the 'sad and suffering' world is true—the world is the only divinity....and man should allow himself to be engulfed in the cosmos in order to rediscover his eternal divinity and to become Dionysos himself."⁶⁰

What Nietzsche admired, according to Camus, was the "egotism and austerity proper to all creators."⁶¹ Combined with the Will to Power and the virtue of strength, which Nietzsche defined as "courage combined with intelligence," he dreamed not of philosopher kings, but of "tyrants who were artists."⁶² It is precisely at this point, however, that the ambiguity of Nietzsche's position comes into view. As Camus argues, despite Nietzsche's optimistic assumptions on the matter "tyranny comes more naturally than art to mediocre men,"⁶³ and

⁵⁷ Camus 64. Compare this to the last paragraph of *The Outsider*.

⁵⁸ Camus 65.

⁵⁹ Camus 65. These are obviously the main themes in *A Happy Death*, as Chapter Two shows.

⁶⁰ Camus 65-66.

⁶¹ Camus 66.

⁶² Camus 66.

⁶³ Camus 66.

“tyrants secularize the philosophies which give them their rights.”⁶⁴ Nietzsche’s philosophy of affirmation was only too easily misinterpreted by those who followed him and who subsequently used this philosophy “in support of definitive murder.”⁶⁵ The problem with saying yes to life was that it also requires one to say yes to murder and crime. In his early writings, in *A Happy Death* in particular and right through to *The Outsider*, Camus was clearly intrigued by the figure of the criminal, but after the war his decisive stance against institutionalized and historically justified murder makes him a lot less tolerant of Nietzsche’s ambiguities on this subject.

Like his predecessors in the 20th century, Camus sees Nietzsche as desiring a strongman of history, or in his case, a “Roman Caesar with the soul of Christ.”⁶⁶ To Nietzsche’s question “How can one make the best of crime?” Camus remarks that the Caesar would answer “by multiplying it,” in much the same way that Sade or Caligula did.⁶⁷ Nietzsche also did not hesitate to state that when the ends are great or are given great value, then humans change their values or their standards by which they judge crimes even when the means are extreme or reprehensible.⁶⁸

As the “most acute manifestation of nihilism’s conscience,”⁶⁹ Nietzsche was instructive in warning of the clarity of thought that would be required in the madness of the next century. He also foreshadowed the future of the human race in the 20th century and prepared the way for the ideologies, which through the ascendancy of destructive forms of nihilism, sought the

⁶⁴ Camus 70.

⁶⁵ Camus 68. The reference here is clearly to National Socialism and the Nazis. On page 70 he writes: “National Socialism in this respect was only a transitory heir, only the speculative and rabid outcome of nihilism.”

⁶⁶ Camus 68.

⁶⁷ Camus 68.

⁶⁸ Camus 68.

⁶⁹ Camus 77. Again, this comes from the very first part of Nietzsche’s *Will to Power*.

domination of the world.⁷⁰ The idea of nihilism and the concept of the Will to Power that formed a large part of Nietzsche's philosophy led, Camus argues, to National Socialism in the same way that Marxism was misconstrued by Lenin and Stalin to form Marxist-Leninism and Soviet Communism.⁷¹ Camus writes that the rebellions of both Nietzsche and Marx end by "merging into Marxism-Leninism."⁷² The difference between the two was that Nietzsche focused on what exists while Marx was more concerned with what was to come. With their concepts of the "superman" and the classless society, however, they challenged Christianity by "replacing the Beyond by the Later On."⁷³

THE PROBLEM OF HISTORY

The ambiguity of Camus' later cautious return to Nietzsche also relates decisively to his relationship to history and historicism. As we saw in Chapter 5, historicism is for him the main philosophical culprit behind the crimes of modernity. Hegel, and Marx in his Hegelian strands, are the names that encapsulate this terrible faith in the "end of history" and the belief that in the end historical necessity and historical teleology will absolve all crimes. However, Nietzsche's anti-Hegelian, "Greek" stance is not per se anti-historical. Camus aligns the difference between Marx and Nietzsche with the difference between the Christians and the Greeks in their view of Nature and history, and he states that "For Marx nature is to obey

⁷⁰ Camus 69: "Nietzsche laid claim to the direction of the future of the human race,." Camus quotes Nietzsche as saying 'The task of governing the world is going to fall to our lot...The time is approaching when we shall have to struggle for the domination of the world, and this struggle will be fought in the name of philosophical principles.' In these words he predicted the twentieth century."

⁷¹ Camus 70-71. See Robert Gellately, *Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007): "Lenin advocated thoroughgoing violence and even civil war in the name of the higher cause of Communism. Terror was employed on a scale unprecedented in Russian or European history, and Stalin, who was Lenin's keenest disciple, learned his lessons well...Lenin's role was crucial in the creation of the regime, but he did not act alone. The disciples in his entourage grew in number and, whatever their earlier beliefs, came round to his view that the revolution justified the use of violence. They saw no contradiction in the fact that utopian Communism could be kept in power only by using untrammelled terror" 142-143.

⁷² Camus 70.

⁷³ Camus 70.

history, for Nietzsche nature is to be obeyed in order to subjugate history.”⁷⁴ The problem for Nietzsche was that he considered socialism as a form of Jesuitism that sought to “make instruments” of humans resulting in the loss of their freedom and their ability to freely affirm their creative existence, which eventually ended in a form of “spiritual slavery.”⁷⁵ In the end, however, this is not a negation of history but rather, it points to a new non-teleological, cyclical, and open-ended vision of history. In his article “In Defense of *The Rebel*,” Camus makes a particularly explicit statement in this regard:

A similar attitude, equally distrustful of Stirner and his “liberties” and of the Hegelian left and its submissions, leads to the simultaneous rejection of both absolute individualism and the doctrines in which history remains the sole value, in a word, historicism. Simplifying slightly, the two attitudes could be summarized as follows: for the first, only the individual can judge himself; for the second, it’s up to the society of men finally unified at the end of history to judge the individual...these two attitudes lead to the most extreme nihilism, unless they appeal to values that would be contradictory to them. Pure individualism justifies everything done out of solitude and despair; historicism justifies every humiliation by reference to a future of grandeur....Pure Historicism, for its part, at the same time identifies value with history and, in order to justify this history, with the future, that is to say with precisely that which is not yet history, and which it is not certain ever will be.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Camus 71.

⁷⁵ Camus 71.

⁷⁶ Camus “In Defense of *The Rebel*” 215-216. Camus is referring to a form of historicism that is based on the ideas of progress and social engineering. In this same article Camus writes “...my true thesis: namely, that whoever seeks to serve history for its own sake ends in nihilism” 116. Compare this with R. N. Stromberg, “History in the Eighteenth Century” *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 12:2 (1951): 295-304. It also reflects Camus’ attitude toward historicism in Stromberg’s statement that “It is also possible to criticize pure historicism

Camus' difficult "Promethean" position is obviously situated in between these two attitudes, but it is not anti-historical. He continues to believe that humans make their own history. He upholds this key idea, however, by positing the basic values upon which that history should be formed: the respect for others, a sense of the Absurd, and a sense of awe towards the world—without translating these into ends.

As Camus says "With the death of God, mankind remains: and by this we mean the history which we must understand and shape."⁷⁷ It is clear in a passage like this one that the appeal to history is an affirmation. Nihilism, which "smothers the creative force in the very core of rebellion, only adds that one can shape it with all the means at one's disposal."⁷⁸ In Camus' opinion, history and progress consist primarily of the growth of human power. The tragedy of modern man begins when, through both deicide and regicides, humans "decided to murder God," because by doing so they removed themselves from the power of the sacred, which resulted in a loss of a sense of order, values, and morality.⁷⁹ As a result, the universe, as he puts it, has become a "fortress against God,"⁸⁰ and the previous kingdom that was

as intolerably anarchic—leading us to a wilderness of the unique where there is no general, which is not as the human mind requires" 304. See also Glenn Tinder ("The Necessity of Historicism") who states that "Historicist theories are also said to tend to undermine concern for the individual; the needs of the present, living persons are likely to shrink into apparent insignificance before the imagined events of a future age" *American Political Science Review* 55:3 (1961) 560-565.

⁷⁷ Camus *The Rebel* 75. Again, according to Stromberg, historicism was created "out of the bankruptcy of religious authority and then of abstract reason" ("History in the Eighteenth Century") 296. See Marx's famous comments in Chapter One of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, written in 1852, that: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living..." (New York: International Publishers, N.D) 15.

⁷⁸ Camus 75.

⁷⁹ On the subject of power, Camus writes: "The entire history of mankind, is, in any case, nothing but a prolonged fight to the death for the conquest of universal prestige and absolute power" 139. He devotes a full chapter in *The Rebel* to both the subjects of regicides (pages 82-103) and deicides (pages 103--117). Against the radical historical tradition in France which always tried to justify the trial of the king, Camus was against the execution of Louis XVI: "Undoubtedly, it is a crying scandal that the public assassination of a weak but good-hearted man has been presented as a great moment in French history" 90. See Susan Dunn, "Camus and Louis XVI: An Elegy for the Martyred King": "Only counterrevolutionaries considered the execution of the king a "murder" or an "assassination." Camus aggressively distances himself from the revolutionary tradition and especially from Jaurès' vision of a proud France 'éternellement regicide" *The French Review*, 62:6 (1989): 1032-1040.

⁸⁰ Camus 74.

founded on Natural Law and God's Grace has been replaced by one based on the fallibility of human justice and positive law. Humans, however, still have a need for and struggle to find a substitute for this Grace—a subject that Camus continues to explore up to the end and which forms a central theme in *The Fall*.⁸¹

In Camus' view, the desacralization of the world and the replacement of transcendent divine power by the human ego, the Will to Power, and nihilism in the creation of human history, result in the revolutions and the struggle for freedom that ultimately led to murder and killing. As a result, revolutions then somehow have to accept the burden of guilt for these crimes: "The servile rebellions, the regicide revolutions, and the twentieth-century revolutions had thus, consciously, accepted a burden of guilt which increased in proportion to the degree of liberation they proposed to introduce."⁸²

Against this destructive trend characterizing the 20th century, Camus searches for another concept of history as "the sum total of [Man's] successive rebellions,"⁸³ one, however, that does not seek to close the gap between the ideals and their realization.⁸⁴ This is what distinguishes his position from that of conservative philosophers who also appeal to the Greeks as the standard of a practical use of reason in politics and historical life.⁸⁵ There was

⁸¹ Camus has Jean-Baptiste Clamence remark: "Ah, the little sneaks, play-actors, hypocrites—and yet so touching! Believe me, they all are, even when they set fire to heaven. Whether they are atheists or church-goers, Muscovites or Bostonians, all Christians from father to son. But actually there is no father left, no rule left! They are free and hence have to shift for themselves; and since they don't want freedom or its judgements, they ask to be rapped on the knuckles, they invent dreadful rules, they rush out to build piles of faggots to replace churches. Savonarolas, I tell you. But they believe solely in sin, never in grace. They think of it, to be sure. Grace is what they want—acceptance, surrender, happiness..." 99.

⁸² Camus 76. Camus makes it clear in his reply to Jeanson's first letter (*Sartre and Camus: A Historic Confrontation*) that the central theses of *The Rebel* were: 1) "the definition of a limit revealed by the very movement of rebellion" 2) "the criticism of post-Hegelian nihilism and Marxist prophecy" 3) "the analysis of the dialectical contradictions concerning the end of history" and 4) "the criticism of the notion of objective guilt" 112.

⁸³ Camus 78.

⁸⁴ Camus 78: "A superficial examination seems to infer, rather than any real emancipation, an affirmation of mankind by man, an affirmation increasingly broad in scope but which is always unrealized."

⁸⁵ One is tempted to draw a comparison and contrast between Camus and Leo Strauss' in this respect. See Leora Batnitzky's interesting remark in her *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article on Strauss: "Another recurrent theme in Strauss' work is what he calls 'the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns.' Most

an unmistakable nostalgia in Camus' thinking towards the idea of the sacred, Natural Law, and his search for a principle higher in value than Man himself that would limit, yet also give sense to, human actions. In a powerful passage in *The Rebel* for instance, he writes:

He who cannot maintain his position above the law must find another law or take refuge in madness. From the moment that man believes neither in God nor in immortal life, he becomes 'responsible for everything alive, for everything that, born of suffering, is condemned to suffer from life.' It is he, and he alone, who must discover law and order. Then the time of exile begins, the endless search for justification, the aimless nostalgia...⁸⁶

That said, however, this nostalgia does not suffice to ground a full-fledged theoretical moral system. Rather, it is translated into an ambiguous appeal to human values and an immanentist sense of wonder towards the natural world, in contradistinction to traditional natural law theories.

specifically, the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns for Strauss is about the excesses of modern claims for the authoritative claims of reason and the philosophical moderation of the ancients. As we saw above, according to Strauss, the trajectory of modern philosophy's demise begins with the belief that modern philosophy has refuted revelation once and for all. This false belief is based on an overreaching view of what philosophical reason alone can accomplish and it leads to the equally false belief that there are no rational standards because reason is always imbedded within and determined by history"...(11). And also: "...for Strauss, the tension between revelation and philosophy is not one between irrationality and rationality but between fundamentally irreconcilable criteria for what constitutes the *rational starting point of truth*. Philosophy begins and ends for Strauss with the philosopher's sense of wonder, while revealed religion begins and ends with adherence to the divine law" 12. Batnitzky also states that "Strauss argues, both in his early work on medieval Jewish rationalism and in his mature American work, that only revelation, and not philosophy, can provide the basis of a universal morality. To be sure, this universal morality is based on faith and not certain knowledge. Nevertheless, it does underscore a moral weakness in the philosophical position" (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/strauss-leo/12/10/10>) 15-16.

⁸⁶ Camus 70. Camus also writes in *The Myth of Sisyphus*: "Above all, a man's thought is his nostalgia" (36); and that the problem is "that divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints, my nostalgia for unity, this fragmented universe and the contradiction that binds them together" 37.

CAMUS AND NATURAL LAW

When one looks at Camus' early writings on Nature in his poetic prose and essays; the development of his early philosophical ideas through the metaphysics of Christianity and Hellenistic philosophy; the shifts he explored in the paradigm links between Nature, God, and Man; and his attempts to refocus the attention away from God and onto Man through a form of materialism (not to mention his ideas on the philosophies of the Absurd, existentialism, socialism, and nihilism), it seems as though one way to characterize his intellectual and literary development is as a consistent attempt to replace the tradition of natural law and, more specifically, divine natural law theory. One could argue that Camus' entire work is an attempt to deal with the reality that arises when divine natural law no longer applies, and its demise leaves a void that humans try to fill in order to give meaning to their existence, as well as find a moral basis for their actions.

Divine natural law begins with the assumption of the authority of God and acknowledges the expression of this authority in human reason, moral theory, and as the basis for the concepts of sovereignty, law, and justice. The framework of divine natural law theory also has profound repercussions for the conceptions of human nature, values, actions, and the question of progress as it first pertains to the individual, and then to society and human history, as the focus moves to human or positive law.

By viewing Camus' work against the edifice of divine natural law theory, we can better sense the profound nostalgia that he felt with the loss of an absolute source of moral norms, and the problems that this posed for social laws and the idea of human justice in much the same way as Karamazov. The loss of God as a symbol of moral authority and the desacralization of the world that was associated with it had, in Camus' view, tragic consequences for human life. His search for non-transcendent, human-centered forms of the sacred is strongly reflected in the comment he made that while he did not believe in God, he

was not an atheist. In his early work, the nostalgia for the sacred inspired his interest in pantheistic conceptions of Nature and his sensualist embrace of the world. In *The Rebel*, this nostalgia nourishes his ambivalent attitude towards the history of rebellion.⁸⁷

This is why, however surprising as this may sound, Camus' overall moral philosophy receives sharper contours if we posit it against the tenets of natural law theory in its various forms, and if we examine how his ideas compare and contrast with these theories. To label Camus as a *moraliste*, as so many have done, only has meaning if one considers the prevailing moral theories, including Christianity; the long tradition of the relationship between Nature and morality; and Camus' perspective on these theories.

In his dissertation on Christian metaphysics and Neoplatonism, Camus focuses specifically on Plotinus' idea of the One and relates it to Plato's idea of the Good. This One/Good is the source of everything and constitutes pure unity for the ancient metaphysicians, encompassing both the Beautiful and the Good. It also supported a hierarchy of values and the principles of virtue and morality. Camus was particularly struck by this notion of unity. Even though, as he writes, it is "merely a void," the very thought of it poses the most preeminent philosophical question--one that marks the very beginning of the philosophy with the Pre-Socratics and their puzzlement as to how the One can become the Many?⁸⁸

This problem of Unity raises the questions of how out of the One the Many arise, and how God as unchangeable and eternal can create the multiplicity of forms that continually change and die. These are ancient questions that in a sense continue to haunt Camus in his approach to Nature. Indeed, materialist writers like Feuerbach and Sade are not just relevant

⁸⁷ Camus 64: "The present interest of the problem only springs from the fact that nowadays whole societies have wanted to discard the sacred. We live in an unsacrosanct moment in history" (21); and later: "To break with what is sacred, or rather to destroy the sacred, could become universal."

⁸⁸ MacBride 127-128. For one of the best articles on Camus' relationship with Plotinus and the idea of the One, see Hochberg's "Albert Camus and the Ethic of Absurdity," which argues that Camus was "intoxicated with the Plotinian pattern, man's freedom, and evil...around...[which]...he attempted to contract an ethic." He goes on to claim that in his idea of the absurd, Camus "accepts Plotinus' pattern, but rejects its culmination of the One" 89.

comparative references for their moral and political philosophies, but also because the naturalistic foundations of their philosophy represent the modern, post-theological way of confronting the logical dilemma of the abstract God (as ultimate source of unity) against the diversity and dynamics of Nature. In these philosophers the decisive question finds its source in the comparison between the creative power of God and that of Nature.⁸⁹

This idea of the One leads to the notion of the human soul and spirit as imperfect extensions of divine understanding and will. It also translates into the old ideas of providence and revelation, Spirit as reason, and as a principle operating in the unfolding of history through a human species seeking freedom and meaning. Humans in their lack of knowledge cannot predict the outcome of history simply because as humans, they are limited creatures and where reason finds its limit, faith must come to their aid. This, of course, is one of the central problems for Camus: what to do when faith is no longer possible.

The consciousness of the radical limitation of human knowledge and our ability to understand and foresee, which formed the basis of the Greek tragedies and the modern philosophic concept of the tragic is, however, more acute than ever. Self-erasure at the hands of sacred nature, sensual experience, or fulfilling the “will to happiness” constituted the early answers. They provided something like a new faith. Later on, these forms of Nietzschean, self-centered approaches were replaced by the political values of humanist Prometheanism with its emphasis on the defense of human life. This, however, is only a very partial and uncertain response by comparison with the grand and once fully-transparent structures of divine natural law. Hence the bitter, self-critical tone in Camus’ last complete text, *The Fall*,

⁸⁹ See an old but still excellent study in William Orton, “The Sources of Natural Law” *International Journal of Ethics*, 36:2 (1926): 147-161: “The oldest and the most fundamental of all problems is that of the one and the many. Unity and diversity—order and chaos—direction and spontaneity—coexisting in the same time and space in the cosmos as a whole, in inanimate nature (if such there be), or in the community of mankind: that is the problem with which, in some phase or other, thought is perennially confronted” 148.

in which the possibility of any secure knowledge and of any faith leads only to the self-destructive sarcasm of the critical penitent judge-author.⁹⁰

The fact that humans have both a facticity and grounded structure of existence in conjunction with a transcendent structure and transcendent needs means that they inevitably fluctuate between rational beliefs and religious and irrational ones. Humans are influenced by rational and non-rational elements in their make-up, and one must take into consideration the importance of the psychological aspects of human nature and their relationship to both morality and history. All of this is reflected in Camus' work. Throughout his writings, we find this twofold consideration of human actions: the perspective from human interests and the nature of the human soul versus the influence from higher, transcendent powers. The murder of the Arab by Meursault on the beach is a typical example of this.

To say that God is the source of Unity and that all emanates from him, including good and evil, law, justice, determinism, and history, is also to logically conclude that universal laws exist because God created them and hence, all that exists is rational, or the real is the rational.⁹¹ Universal law creates universal reason and with a supreme authority and eternal laws comes a stable (or static) system of moral norms, ethics, and justice. Conversely, any human action considered contrary to this authority or these laws can clearly be judged as evil or as sin, and therefore one is irrefutably guilty in the eyes of God and religious institutions. Justice can then be pronounced and carried out without fear of ambiguity because the moral and legal systems' ideas of good and evil, right and wrong, are justified and sanctioned by an absolute power.⁹²

⁹⁰ Jean-Baptiste Clamence in *The Fall* reflects this in his comment that "...we are all judges, we are all guilty before one another, all Christs in our cheap way, one by one crucified, always without knowing" 86.

⁹¹ See Orton: "The proposition that the real is the rational, implicit in Heraclitus, explicit in Plato, is in fact a piece of anthropomorphism not yet recognized as such, prompted by the human need to resolve the conflicts of sensory and reflective experience. From this proposition follows a second basic element which we may roughly indicate by the phrase, 'the right is the real': that is, right conduct is conduct according with the true (rational) nature of man and the universe" 154-155.

⁹² This can be clearly seen where the idea of divine natural law and natural law are seen as giving legitimacy to the divine right of kings and then conservative political systems, and also how they connect divine law to civil or positive laws to dispense justice.

Once God and divine natural law are removed and Man has become the source of values and moral structures, humans become responsible for determining law, justice and its limits, while trying to ground these in some form of authority or legitimacy. Camus' moral-philosophical explorations, in his essays as in his literary texts, revolve around these problems, right through to *The Fall* with its focus on human-centered consciousness and a narcissistic selfishness.⁹³

Another effect of the divine natural law theory concerns the idea and the meaning of human nature and human history. The theories of Plato, Plotinus, and Christianity that Camus discussed in his dissertation considered human nature to be an emanation of the soul that is immersed in matter, and yet is still a reflection of God. Man was made in God's image and natural law was innate in human nature, as was reason, but because they were mired in sin, only through Christian virtues and the idea of goodness, faith, and suffering could humans aspire to improvement, and by doing so, gain acceptance in the eyes of God through redemption or salvation.

This old construct is the one against which modern atheists and materialists rebelled, whose later descendants would be found in Camus' companion existentialists. What these later critics didn't see was precisely the extent to which they remained influenced by the kind of essentialist thinking they sought to overcome, if only negatively, by the way in which they posed the basic questions. Coming from a sustained study of the old metaphysics, Camus could see the historical short-sightedness of their pronouncements. This, and not just the more direct moral and political problems (notably the question of violence) caused his split with the existentialists and Camus' reserve towards their faith in revolutionary politics.

⁹³ Camus emphasizes this in *The Fall*: "But you can already imagine my satisfaction. I enjoyed my own nature to the fullest and we all know that therein lies happiness, although, to soothe one another mutually, we occasionally pretend to condemn such joys as selfishness (17)...The obligation I felt to hide the vicious part of my life gave me, for example a cold look that was confused with the look of virtue; my indifference made me loved; my selfishness culminated in my generosity" 63.

Divine natural law also postulated God's will and the role of providence in history as the prime mover and determining factor in the development of human spirit and action. Humans were subordinated to God's design through religious eschatologies that clearly delineated the realms of good and evil, virtues and vices, and defined human nature according to these moral systems and the idea of the Good as it relates to Life and Happiness. These eschatologies placed their emphasis on the ends, the future, and the natural law idea that the definition of a living thing in Nature is to be found in its fulfilling its purpose or the perfection of its form. In the case of humans, true perfection was connected to the eventual union with God, which provided a specific perspective from which to better define the idea of the soul, and its potential goodness and virtue. To revolt against the authority embodied in this transcendent was not only not permitted, but considered a moral sin and a supreme form of crime. As a result, divine natural law led fairly directly to a justification of the authority of all natural law, the divine right of kings, and also positive law. As Jon T. McNeill writes of Luther, for example:

...[he] employed a natural-law argument against rebellion, and in his stress upon obedience to authority he recognized the emperor as having a divine commission. He might freely criticize emperor and princes, but he accords them authority under God. Though 'they are usually the greatest fools and the worst knaves on earth...they are God's jailers and hangmen and his divine wrath needs them to punish the wicked and preserve outward peace'...Rebels, making themselves judges in their own case, go against God's command but also against all natural law and equity."⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Jon T. McNeill "Natural Law in the Thought of Luther" *Church History* 10:3 (1941): 170-171. McNeill also adds that "In writings of the twenties he employed a natural-law argument against rebellion, and in his stress upon obedience to authority he recognized the emperor as having a divine commission" 171. This did not, however, stop Luther from signing a manifesto against Charles V "setting forth strongly the natural right of resistance of lower ranks of government against the supreme political ruler, where the latter is unjust and tyrannical and opposes the gospel" 171. Princes were allowed to take this action but not the individual, and

It is against this belief in divine natural law and the political implications of the divine right of kings that Camus examines the ideas of metaphysical and historical revolt in *The Rebel*. In this book he gathers all his moral and political thought on the subjects of revolt, freedom, justice, and human values in his attempt to re-examine the difficult morality entailed in the actions of human beings as they struggle to free themselves from the power and the authority of political and social institutions.⁹⁵ Metaphysical rebellion sought to free people from the power and the authority of religious institutions and their extension in the political power of kings, who in Camus' words, "tried to construct existence with appearances."⁹⁶

Historical rebellion, on the other hand, reflected Man's attempt to gain freedom from political, social, economic, and psychological structures that continued to limit freedom and that subjected humans to the violence and terror inherent in these institutions of power. Camus stated that "historic thought came to say that to be was to act," and that "Our revolution is an attempt to conquer a new existence, by action which recognizes no moral strictures. That is why it is condemned to live only for history and in a reign of terror."⁹⁷ Such ambiguous pronouncements about the moral and political search for freedom are better understood against the earlier metaphysical background. Camus is not denying the need to

McNeill states that "The document argues from natural law the right and duty of princes to defend their subjects against an unjust ruler and against the emperor, especially in matters of religion. There is here, of course, no suggestion of the right of resistance or rebellion on private initiative. Political authority is firmly upheld as being approved by the Gospel and natural law" 171.

⁹⁵ See these passages in *The Rebel* for instance: "Saint-Just, therefore, postulates that every king is a rebel or a usurper. He is a rebel against the people whose absolute sovereignty he usurps... (88)...the crime of the king is, at the same time, a sin against the ultimate nature of things. A crime is committed; then it is pardoned, punished, or forgotten. But the crime of royalty is permanent; it is inextricably bound to the person of the king, to his very existence. Monarchy is not a king, 'it is crime'" 89. In Camus' view "...the fact remains that the condemnation of the King is at the crux of our contemporary history. It symbolizes the secularization of our history and the dematerialization of the Christian God. Up to now God played a part in history through the medium of the kings. But his representative in history has been killed, for there is no longer a king. Therefore there is nothing but a semblance of God, relegated to the heaven of principles" 90. And later, "These revolutions, particularly after the First World War had liquidated the vestiges of divine right, still proposed, with increasing audacity, to build the city of humanity and of authentic freedom" 146.

⁹⁶ Camus 216.

⁹⁷ Camus 216.

create new institutions of freedom, now that the old structures have collapsed, but he is stressing the fact that the consciousness that results from this must be used to prevent the terrible errors of modern politics.

Without an idea of limits, or Nemesis, human principles lose their moral sense and in Camus' view, the result is nihilism, inhumanity, violence, murder, and terror. According to Camus, "Revolution, in order to be creative, cannot do without either a moral or metaphysical rule to balance the insanity of history."⁹⁸ Without morality, revolt and rebellion in the desire for freedom and human dignity too often end in the opposite. This, as we just saw, was the main truth defended in *The Rebel*. He concludes the section on "Rebellion and Revolution" with the following words—a clear testament to his tragic, "Greek" view of freedom—as something that must simultaneously inspire real struggles of liberation, and yet also lead to a form of acceptance of the world as it is:

...let us only note that to the 'I rebel, therefore we exist' and the 'we are alone' of the metaphysical rebellion, rebellion at grips with history adds that instead of killing and dying in order to produce the being that we are not, we have to live and let live in order to create what we are.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Camus 217.

⁹⁹ Camus 218.

CONCLUSION

As Yves Simon wrote in a classical study on natural law: “There would be no eternal return of natural law without an everlasting opposition to natural law.”¹ Any moral philosophy in the West has always had to recast itself against the long religious and humanist normative tradition that finds its source in Christianity and divine natural law. Philosophers have had to confront this tradition in their attempts to adapt it to the moral problems arising from the changes in their particular society. Camus’ work is a particularly clear example of this. His focus on Christianity, socialism, and reactionary political ideologies, atheism, the Absurd, nihilism, and revolt reflect the modern development of Man’s relationship to Nature, God, and society, and the difficulty of establishing moral values and ethics in the wake of the collapse of the secure grand narratives and ideologies that were based on this normative tradition. He had an acute vision of the problem of the moral autonomy of the individual at a time when notions such as virtue and values became problematic as a result of radical shifts in the social and political ideologies and structures in modern life, and the tremendous effect that these had on human happiness and freedom.²

In the older metaphysically-supported models, virtue, values, and happiness could be linked together unproblematically. In a paradigmatic definition, Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* saw happiness as “an activity of the soul in accordance with perfect virtue,” but he made it clear that virtues are not given to us by nature--humans only acquire them by practice and habit.³ He adds that virtues are acquired “by first exercising them, just as happens in the arts” and that “Legislators make their citizens good by habituation; this is

¹ Simon, *The Tradition of Natural Law: A Philosopher’s Reflection* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992) 4.

² These would continue to be concerns of postmodern ethics, especially in the works of Zygmunt Bauman.

³ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (London: Penguin Books, 2004) 31-2.

the intention of every legislator, and those who do not carry it out fail of their object.”⁴

While this view could hold in the classical world, in the 20th century, social institutions and new ideologies promoted social and political structures that no longer allowed humans to develop virtues and broke the link between happiness and virtue. On the contrary, as Camus saw it, political ideologies based on historicist thinking, false utopian promises, and unrestrained economic structures reduced humans to objects and forced them to conform to the ideas, values, and power of these structures.⁵ Instead of focusing on any real development of human virtues and character, modern social infrastructures impose themselves on individuals primarily to control them rather than promote the happiness and freedom that these ideologies promised.⁶ Virtue ethics is replaced by a value system that is mass-oriented and created by ideologies intent on creating a utopia with no consideration of the human cost.

Progress, modernity, and change became the primary social values that eroded the normative tradition in morality and ethics, leaving individuals without the stable structures that had underpinned the boundaries of actions and legality in a society. This shift was at the heart of Camus’ quest for meaning and values, and in his search, he precisely outlined and anticipated some of the main themes that postmodernist thought would have to confront. Camus certainly felt a nostalgia for the loss of the stability of natural law theory, but it is precisely the conflict between the past moral code and the values of the 20th century that we see at work in Camus’ writing, especially in *The Rebel*.

⁴ Aristotle 32.

⁵ Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the emphasis on labor, which creates a strong conformity between communism and capitalism. See Foucault’s comment in “Strategies of Power”: “...in a bourgeois, capitalist, industrial society in which labor is the essential value, it was considered that people found guilty of crimes could not be condemned to a more useful penalty than to be forced to work” *The Truth About the Truth: De-Confusing and Re-constructing the Postmodern World* (New York: Putnam, 1995) 42.

⁶ Camus remarks in *The Rebel*: “Economically speaking, capitalism becomes oppressive through being what it is, it accumulates in order to increase what it is, to exploit it all the more, and accordingly to accumulate still more...Slavery then becomes the general condition” 219. Martha Nussbaum addresses this problem in her concepts of a human development driven versus an economic driven society. See Nussbaum’s *Not For Profit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), and specifically chapter two entitled “Education for Profit” on pages 13-26.

If one did not accept the realities of the philosophy of destruction that took place and the dehumanization of life and the murders that ensued, how could a person act morally and take any ethical stand against the power of the State and its institutions? Zygmunt Bauman, one of the outstanding social analysts to have reflected on the moral collapse of the modern project, wrote quite astutely that “morality, after all, (perhaps rather *first of all*) is about *choice*. No choice, no morality;”⁷ and that under the circumstances that humans confronted in the 20th century, “Clearly then, moral acts meant *breaching* rather than *following* the socially designed and monitored norms.”⁸ The postmodern sociologist Bauman is a direct heir of Camus when he argues that revolt or rebellion becomes a moral act, and more importantly, the necessary outcome of a moral decision in an age that has undermined all principles of moral conduct towards others. Bauman cites Hannah Arendt’s observation that:

...those who managed to break out from the genocidal orgy had to stand up against the dominant standards of their society and could not count on any support from socially imposed norms and official ethical precepts, and that the ability to go against one’s society could be a prerequisite of a moral act.⁹

Just like Camus, Bauman criticizes the so-called “guardian institutions of morality” for not preventing the mass slaughter and crimes against humanity that were such an integral part of the 20th century, where abstractions, rules, and conformity to the State and social institutions became one of the primary justifications for human actions and replaced individual morality and moral responsibility.¹⁰ The traditional moral centers of authority were themselves too preoccupied with their own power and privilege or too weak to serve as

⁷ Zygmunt Bauman and Keith Tester *Conversations with Zygmunt Bauman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001) 45

⁸ Bauman and Tester 53.

⁹ Bauman and Tester 53.

¹⁰ Bauman writes of the “failure of all of the ostensible ‘guardian institutions of morality’ to arrest, let alone prevent the death industry from doing its job” 54. Camus directed some of his strongest criticism at the religious institutions for their silence and inaction.

a moral voice against totalitarianism and fascism. As a result, the legitimization of institutions determined human value and dignity--not a universal moral or ethical code. The individual, however, was still confronted with making moral choices and confronting the consequences of his or her actions.

Throughout his work, Camus focused on the problems of human happiness within the confines of Man's struggle and desire for freedom. And, for him, these problems were always related to the difficulties of human action and the moral choices that the individual is required to make in a society. While some have claimed that humans are moral by nature, whereas ethics are determined by the society and the patterns of its social institutions, the larger moral and ethical questions today still have more to do with our relationship to others and social responsibilities than they do to the individual alone—precisely the point that Camus seeks to explore in *The Fall*.¹¹

As we noted earlier, this concern for the possibility of happiness under the constraint of moral respect for others explains Camus life-long interest in crime, murder, and the ambiguities of justice, and how these relate to moral and ethical philosophies. He found the moral systems at the heart of the dominant ideologies of Christianity, Socialism, Marxism, Existentialism, and Capitalism to be inadequate in promoting, let alone protecting, human dignity and social justice. He saw the destructive philosophies of the Marquis de Sade and the Russian nihilists as capturing the spirit and basis of Fascism, Nazism, and totalitarian State terror.

In contrast, like Aristotle's doctrine of the mean, Camus' idea of *mesure* and Nemesis focused on the need for limits to human actions. He was concerned with how these limits need to be present in a world where the remnants of the moral structures of divine natural law

¹¹ While the main focus of *The Fall* is on the character's self-love and narcissism, the last line of the novel has Jean-Baptiste Clamence saying "O young woman, throw yourself into the water again so that I may a second time have a chance of saving both of us!" 108. Zygmunt Bauman makes the comment that "Society engraves the pattern of ethics upon the raw and pliable stuff of morality. Ethics is a social product because morality is not" 45.

have been replaced by a greater focus on the liberal democratic ideas of the individual and individual rights, equality, and freedom, but also by the capitalistic values of narcissism and consumerism, or the horrors of self-assured historicist thinking.¹² Aristotle believed that the supreme good or the primary pursuit and end of human actions was happiness. He defined a happy man as:

...one who is active in accordance with complete virtue, and who is adequately furnished with external goods, and that not for some unspecified period but throughout a complete life.¹³

And while Aristotle acknowledged that humans consist of a rational and an irrational part in their makeup that causes them to act at times in excess, it is the mean that balances them and that virtue is such a mean:

...it follows that virtue aims to hit the mean. By virtue I mean moral virtue since it is this that is concerned with feelings and actions, and these involve excess, deficiency and a mean...excess and deficiency fall under evil, and the mean state under good;...¹⁴

Camus' focus on the problem of good and evil throughout his work reflects an attempt to understand the basis of human action, especially at it pertains to crime and limits, but also to the subject of justice. Justice points to the need for a mean or balance that society has to define in order to restrict certain actions in human relationships, as well as between the individual and society, and to outline the responsibilities of each to realistically achieve any possibility of human happiness and freedom. Camus once wrote that "There is no justice; there are only limits,"¹⁵ and in *Resistance, Rebellion and Death* he states:

¹² See "Helen's Exile" in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*: "In our madness, we push back the eternal limits, and at once dark Furies swoop down upon us to destroy. Nemesis, goddess of moderation, not vengeance, is watching. She chastises, ruthlessly, all those who go beyond the limit" 149.

¹³ Aristotle 24.

¹⁴ Aristotle 41.

¹⁵ Camus, *Notebooks 1942-1951*: 185.

To be sure freedom is not the answer to everything, and it has frontiers.

The freedom of each finds its limits in that of others; no one has the right to absolute freedom. The limit where freedom begins and ends, where its rights and duties come together, is called law, and the State itself must bow to the law.¹⁶

Against the optimism of Aristotle, the ideas of happiness, freedom, and justice are, for Modern Man, states of fluidity that are goals and aspirations but never guaranteed ends--nor are they states that can necessarily endure over a long period of time. The elusive nature of these concepts are made more tenuous by human needs and desires (both rational and irrational), and the prevailing political, social, and economic structures that proscribe and define human actions and human freedom.

Camus' death at forty-six prevented him from completing the work on *Nemesis* and *Love* that he planned for the last two cycles of his work. As a result, Camus' moral philosophy remains incomplete. While he did return to certain aspects of human love in *The Fall*, after his embrace of sensualism in his early prose, the work on *Nemesis* and *limits* was never finished, and we are left to wonder how Camus would have approached the problems of moral and ethical limits and the ideas of freedom, justice, and human happiness in the decades that followed.

More than anything else, Camus' writings anticipated many of the themes that would become central with the demise of the grand historicist narratives as key themes of postmodernism. One can arguably see the genesis of the ideas of so many postmodern ideas in the subjects that he focused on. These include the One and the Many in Universals and the emphasis on Plurality;¹⁷ the subsequent emphasis on fragmentation and diversity; the

¹⁶ Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion and Death* 101.

¹⁷ See for instance, Ihab Hassan, "Pluralism in Postmodern Perspective" in *Critical Inquiry* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 12:3 (1986): 503-520: "Pluralism in our time finds (if not founds) itself in the social, aesthetic, and intellectual assumptions of postmodernism—finds its ordeal, its rightness, there" 503.

deconstruction of myths and metanarratives; the loss of meaning; the suspicion of binaries and the focus on the limits of language;¹⁸ the focus on the limits of rationality; the rejection of teleology and the rethinking of history outside the games of power and war; the critique of ideologies that lead to the marginalization or exclusion of The Outsider; a critical analysis of the power and the legitimation of institutions; a new approach to human revolt and the tragic; and a problematic appraisal of nihilism and narcissism.¹⁹

Most importantly, Camus focused on the loss of moral and ethical values that coincided with the shift from modernity to postmodernity and the decline of a humanism based on divine natural law or its successor in teleological narratives. The events of the 20th century destroyed many of the myths and the very foundations of the principles and values that had sustained human societies in the West for centuries, leaving humans with a loss of meaning and direction. In the aftermath of World War II, Camus asked how moral and ethical values could be created without God or Christianity and the loss of the sacred, and he placed all responsibility on the society and the individual. If we take *The Fall* as his last word on this, however, we are left with the feeling that he feared that the individual remained too narcissistic, selfish, self-righteous, and guilty to create the kind of values that would replace this normative tradition.²⁰ In this late work he also comes to question the very idea of freedom and implies that this too may be another myth that humans have yet to deconstruct and whose ambiguity has not been fully faced.²¹

¹⁸ Ihab Hassan also lists eleven facets of postmodernism as: “1. *Indeterminacy*. (uncertainty) 2. *Fragmentation*. 3. *Decanonization*. 4. *Self-less-ness*, *Depth-less-ness*. 5. *The Unrepresentable*, *Unpresentable* (silence). 6. *Irony*. 7. *Hybridization*. 8. *Carnivalization*. 9. *Performance*, *Participation*. 10. *Constructionism*. 11. *Immanence*.” 504-508. A close examination of Camus’ work will show that most of these are reflected in his writing.

¹⁹ For an interesting discussion of the stranger in society and the dynamics of marginalization, see Zygmunt Bauman’s “The Making and Unmaking of Strangers” in *Postmodernity and Its Discontents* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997) 17-34.

²⁰ Despite Jean-Baptiste’s narcissism and selfishness, the problem of humans judging others and being judged, without the moral authority deriving from traditional natural law, still plagues him. In the novel, the sound of laughter serves as both judgment and guilt, as well as moral conscience.

²¹ In several places in his work Camus suggests that freedom is limited and that it is not a given. Camus points out the burden of freedom in *The Fall*.

Without slavery, to tell the truth, there is no definitive solution. I very soon realized that. Once upon a time, I was always talking of freedom....At the end of all freedom is a court sentence; that's why freedom is too heavy to bear, especially when you're down with a fever, or are distressed, or love nobody.....But on the bridges of Paris I too learned that I was afraid of freedom. So hurrah for the master, whoever he may be, to take the place of heaven's law.²²

Zygmunt Bauman stated that "Most of us are morally awake most of the time in small matters" and that "There is never enough of moral sensitivity, and its cultivation is the preliminary condition of the 'just society.'"²³ The primary value of Camus' work in its entirety is that it confronts us with its heightened moral sensitivity and at the same time it serves as a mirror to our moral conscience. He forces us to question our own values and our actions concerning happiness, freedom, and justice and our moral and ethical responsibilities to others.

In this search for new humanistic, non-hubristic values, Camus' moral philosophy reserves a special place to the principles of Beauty and Truth, as in the classical worlds of Plato and Aristotle—the Greek references he never abandoned. This is especially true in his early essays where the idea of Beauty is related to the Good and is to be found most eminently in Nature and the world. The beauty of Nature is in itself one of the highest values for him and the place for a modern experience of the sacred. Camus felt that human existence could be redeemed in a renewed relationship between Nature and Man, to replace the old relationship between Man and God.

Camus' moral philosophy is grounded in the reality of Nature and the price of human existence: "Yes, there is beauty and there are the humiliated. Whatever difficulties the

²² Camus, *The Fall* 97-100,

²³ Bauman and Tester 68.

enterprise may present, I would never like to be unfaithful either to the one or the other. But this still sounds like ethics, and we live or something that transcends ethics. If we could name it, what silence would follow!”²⁴ For Camus, it is only between the beauty of Nature and the struggle against human suffering that we can find the real principles for happiness, freedom, and justice by creating new, valid universal moral and ethical values. For Camus, human morality depends on absolute lucidity about the limits of our knowledge and freedom, and about our accepting our presence in Nature. He believed that it is the actions and the choices we make that ultimately create our moral world and determine whether or not Man finds himself “betwixt Heaven or Hell” or on the “Wrong or the Right Side.” Human limitations and the lack of virtue and moral lucidity in our choices and actions continue to define our tragic nature and make the search for morality and ethics fundamental to our existence.²⁵

Above all, Camus’ work teaches us that any moral system must have Man at its center and must be based on the dignity of the individual and the respect for human life. Between the beauty of the natural world and the struggle for existence, the only realistic moral values must be founded on the realities of human life and the certainty of human mortality. Only there does Man find his greatest meaning:

In the dream that life is, here is man, who finds his truths and loses
them on this mortal earth, in order to return through wars, cries, the
folly of justice and love, in short through pain, toward that tranquil

²⁴ Camus 169-170. These lines appear in the essay “Return to Tipasa.” Zygmunt Bauman mentions these lines several times in his books. He also argues that “Humiliation is an ‘invariant state’. It is invariantly odious, loathsome and deplorable...that as a rule, in any society and at any time, there is more humiliation than this society notices, more still than it admits, and much more than it resolves to alleviate or rectify. This is the prime reason why justice is always outstanding, ahead of everything we do for human well-being and dignity” *Conversations with Zygmunt Bauman* 65.

²⁵ See Michel Maffesoli, “The Return of the Tragic in Postmodern Societies”: “The vanity of human actions, the sense of their precariousness and of the brevity of life, are more or less consciously expressed in the latent tragic mood or the fervent hedonism that characterizes this fin de siècle...It is no longer a question of mere consumption, but of intense consummation...An art of living that is no longer based on a search for absolute freedom, but rather for small freedoms that are interstitial, relative, empirical, and lived from day to day” *New Literary History* Boston: John Hopkins University Press, 35:1 (2004): 134-135.

land where death itself is a happy silence.²⁶

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²⁶ Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays* 16.

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