CAMUS: A REBEL
AT THE JUNCTION OF EXISTENTIALISM AND SKEPTICISM

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
OF
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

BY

DİLEK (BAŞAR) BAŞKAYA

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

MAY 2011

Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

_____

Prof. Dr. Meliha Altunışık
Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

_____

Prof. Dr. Ahmet İnam
Head of Department

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

_____ _____

Co-Supervisor

Prof. Dr. Ş. Halil Turan
Supervisor

Examining Committee Members

Prof. Dr. Ahmet İnam	(METU, PHIL.)	_____
Prof. Dr. Ş. Halil Turan	(METU, PHIL.)	_____
Prof. Dr. Kurtuluş Dinçer	(H.U., PHIL.)	_____
Prof. Dr. David Grünberg	(METU, PHIL.)	_____
Prof. Dr. Cem Tezer	(METU, MATH.)	_____

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Name, Last name: Dilek (Başar) Başkaya

Signature :

ABSTRACT

CAMUS: A REBEL AT THE JUNCTION OF EXISTENTIALISM AND SKEPTICISM

(Başar) Başkaya, Dilek
Ph.D., Department of Philosophy
Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Ş. Halil Turan

May 2011, 190 pages

The purpose of this thesis is to examine Albert Camus's stance in existentialism and scepticism, to discuss his philosophy by referring to his life, which, in many respects, forms a foundation for his philosophy and to exhibit that he maintains his contemporariness in the 21st century.

As existentialism is treated differently by different philosophers, the main concern of the thesis is to discuss how Camus handles it. This is done by focusing on his approach to issues appearing commonly in existentialism, such as the absurd, suicide, God, rebellion, freedom, and alienation and by scrutinising the link between existentialism and skepticism.

According to Camus, the absurd is the paradoxical condition caused by a contradiction or a confrontation of two unequal concepts or situations. The merit, for Camus, is to survive despite the disillusionment the absurd brings about. Consequently, he is against suicide because he regards it as surrender to the absurd. Camus claims that it is man himself who can make his own life meaningful. Thus, man may question the existence of God and revolt metaphysically against the absurdity and injustice in the world. The metaphysical

rebel can then establish the unity and order that he believes is lacking in the world.

Camus attaches great importance to rebellion because it brings man freedom. And freedom is indispensable because being deprived of freedom means submission to an authority and, therefore, loss of human dignity.

Alienation is a major issue for Camus, too, as it is a result of man's 'thrownness' on to the world and displays the human situation.

The thesis analyses the above items in detail with reference to all Camus's major works.

Key Words: The Absurd, God, Rebellion, Freedom, Alienation

öz

CAMUS: VAROLUŞCULUK VE KUŞKUCULUĞUN KESİŞİM NOKTASINDA BİR ASİ

(Başar) Başkaya, Dilek
Doktora, Felsefe Bölümü
Tez Yöneticisi: Prof. Dr. Ş. Halil Turan

Mayıs 2011, 190-sayfa

Bu tezin amacı, Albert Camus'nün varoluşculuk ve kuşkuculuk akımları içindeki duruşunu incelemek, birçok yönden düşüncelerinin temelini oluşturan yaşamına da gondermeler yaparak felsefesini tartışmak ve bugün de güncelliğini koruduğunu göstermektir.

Varoluşculuğun farklı düşünürlerce farklı yorumlanması nedeniyle, bu tezin odak noktasında, konuyu Camus'nün nasıl ele aldığı bulunmaktadır. Bu amaçla, varoluşculuğa ait olduğu düşünülen saçma, intihar, Tanrı, başkaldırı, özgürlük ve yabancılaşma konularına Camus'nün nasıl yaklaştığına odaklanılmakta ve varoluşculuk ile kuşkuculuk arasındaki ilişki incelenmektedir.

Camus'nün düşüncesine göre saçma, eşit olmayan iki kavram veya durum arasındaki çatışmadır. Buradaki beceri ise, saçmanın yol açtığı düş kırıklığına rağmen yaşama tutunabilmektedir. Dolayısıyla, Camus intihara karşı çıkar, çünkü intihar saçmaya baş eğmektir. Camus'ye göre, insan kendi yaşamına yine kendisi anlam kazandırır. Bunu yapabilmek için, insan Tanrı'nın varlığını sorgulayabilir ve

metafizik bir başkaldırı yoluyla dünyanın saçmalığına, adaletsizliğine karşı çıkabilir. Ardından ise, dünyada bulunmadığına inandığı birlik ve düzeni kurabilir.

Başkaldırı insana özgürlüğün yolunu açtığı için, Camus başkaldırıya büyük önem atfeder. Özgürlük ise Camus için vazgeçilmezdir çünkü özgürlükten yoksun olmak demek, otoriteye boyun eğmek ve dolayısı ile, insan onurunu yitirmek demektir.

Yabancılaşma da Camus'nün ele aldığı ana temalardan biridir. İnsanın dünyaya 'atılmışlığı' nın sonucunda ortaya çıkar ve insan durumunu simgeler.

Tez, yukarıda sözü geçen konuları ayrıntılı biçimde incelemekte ve Camus'nün tüm önde gelen yapıtlarına göndermeler yapmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Saçma, Tanrı, Başkaldırı, Özgürlük, Yabancılaşma

To My Mother

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to express her deepest gratitude to her supervisor Prof. Dr. Ş. Halil Turan for his invaluable guidance, advice, encouragement and good will throughout the writing process of her thesis.

The author would also like to thank Prof. Dr. Ahmet İnam, Prof. Dr. Kurtuluş Dinçer and Prof. Dr. Rashid Haddad for their helpful suggestions and comments.

The author wishes to extend her thanks to her nieces Ms. Defne Türker Demir and Ms. Şilen Türker for their help in providing her with access to the most recent material on her work and to all the members of her family who encouraged her during her studies.

The technical assistance of Asst. Prof. Dr. Mehmet Turan is also gratefully acknowledged.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARISM iii
ABSTRACT iv
ÖZ vi
DEDICATION viii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ix
TABLE OF CONTENTS x
CHAPTERS
1. INTRODUCTION 1
2. WHY EXISTENTIALISM IS A PHILOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT 4
3. CAMUS—AND A HAPPY LIFE? 13
4. CAMUS IN EXISTENTIALISM, NIHILISM AND SKEPTICISM 27
5. THE PREDOMINANT THEMES IN CAMUS'S PHILOSOPHY 57
5.1 The Absurd 57
5.2 Suicide 81
5.3 God 97
5.4 Freedom 110
5.5 Revolt 115
5.6 Death Penalty 124
5.7 Alienation 127
6. CAMUS AS A PHILOSOPHER 140
7. CAMUS TODAY 158
CURRICULUM VITAE 172
TURKISH SUMMARY 174

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to examine Albert Camus's stance in existentialism and scepticism, to discuss his philosophy by referring to his life, which, in many respects, forms a foundation for his philosophy and to present views on why he is contemporary.

The thesis is made up of seven chapters, including the chapter being read.

Chapter II is intended to set the background for Albert Camus's philosophy and thus, serve as an introduction existentialism. Existentialism is traced back in history and some early 'existentialists' such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are referred to.

As existentialism is treated differently by different philosophers, some views or principles agreed by the most are chosen to be mentioned. However, the main concern of the thesis is to discuss how existentialism is handled by Camus. This is done by focusing on his approach to issues that appear commonly in existentialism, such as the absurd, suicide, God, rebellion, freedom, and alienation and by scrutinising the link between existentialism and skepticism.

Chapter III has Camus's life as its setting and discusses how his life experiences influence his thoughts and accordingly, how his philosophy is constructed by the twists and turns his life takes. The events in Camus's life are significant in the sense that his philosophy is grounded largely on these.

Chapter IV deals with Camus's place in existentialism, nihilism and skepticism. Camus refuses to be called an existentialist for various reasons albeit the fact that he displays plenty of existentialist characteristics in his thoughts and stance. The questions he asks and the problems he tries to settle are directly related to existentialism. He has no faith in reason or in

religion, he places man into the heart of the world and attempts to free him from the difficulties that being a human brings and his ideas are similar to those of Nietzsche and Sartre about the human situation. However, his approach to these issues is probably the most optimistic among the three.

Concerning nihilism, it is definite that Camus is not one. He deals with nihilism in his works with a different purpose, which is that he uses it to summon people to peace and solidarity. He argues that nihilism causes nothing but violence and that it destroys all values, together with everything else.

Skepticism is an important movement for Camus. He sees that what is correct or good depends on each individual. Then, he concludes, laws, rules and regulations, as well as 'the right' and 'the wrong' are merely subjective concepts. It happens that if there is no reliable or fixed foundation to base things on, everyone is free to construct his own morals or to live without any.

In Chapter V, Camus studies some themes that appear predominantly in his philosophy and hence, in his works. To start with, the absurd, according to Camus, is the paradoxical condition caused by a contradiction or a confrontation of two unequal concepts or situations. It is like a threat to man if he does not know how to cope with it. The absurd may lead man into pessimism and hopelessness. But for Camus, falling into despair is a great mistake. The merit, on the other hand, is to survive despite the disillusionment the absurd brings about. Camus suggests ways to struggle the absurd.

Naturally, Camus is against suicide because he regards it as surrender to the absurd. He also considers it to be the most important problem of philosophy. Camus claims that it is man himself who makes his own life meaningful. Thus, instead of committing suicide, man may question the existence of God and revolt metaphysically against the absurdity and injustice in the world. The metaphysical rebel can then establish the unity and order that he believes is lacking.

Camus attaches great importance to rebellion because it brings man freedom. And freedom is indispensable because being deprived of freedom means submission to an authority and, therefore, loss of human dignity. Like Nietzsche, Camus "kills God" and encourages man to shape his own life. But one crucial point is that Camus does not advocate limitless freedom because he believes that such a case may result in oppression and chaos that he is so much against.

Finally, alienation is a major issue for Camus, too, as it displays the human situation. Alienation may have advantages and disadvantages. It is good as it lets man live in his private and secluded world, if he chooses to do so. Yet, it may be to his detriment if he fails to comply with the rules of the society he lives in. As soon as the society finds out that he is 'different', it crushes him down.

While the thesis analyses the above items in detail with reference to Camus's major works, it also studies Camus not only as a writer but also as a philosopher. The issues handled in Chapter VI are the relationship between literature and philosophy, where Camus stands in this relationship and what makes him a philosopher as well as an author.

Chapter VII argues that despite the fact that fifty-one years have passed since his death, Camus is still popular in our day. The various reasons that render him contemporary are given. In addition, the reflections of some predominant personalities of the 20th century over his loss and his virtues are included.

CHAPTER 2

WHY EXISTENTIALISM IS A PHILOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT

The focus of existentialism is the being, or man. Existentialism takes man and scrutinizes him in various aspects and from different points of view. Man is examined from the inside and from the outside; in other words, in terms of his awareness of his own self and in terms of how he alters it, making it transcendent as if he were an authority interfering with it from the outside. Existentialism also studies man's relationship with the others around him, what entity he attaches to the others and how the others see him in return. This is significant in that existentialism appears initially on a philosophical level but, inevitably, moves onto a social one, taking philosophy to social grounds, thus, giving it a wider scope.

Existentialism stands as a very significant movement in the realm of philosophy since its fields of study are thoughts pertaining to existence, human behaviour per se, morality and ethics as well as a rational argument concerning existence as opposed to divinely-granted knowledge, or God.

The roots of existentialism can be traced back to Aristotelian thought. The question that is posed then is whether the subject matter of science is individual objects or the universe as a whole. According to Aristotle, it cannot be singular objects due to the fact that objects are infinite in number whereas the notions pertaining to them are only finite. This means that scientific laws are needed in order to study. They are obtained via induction or deduction, which indicates that prior to the rise of existentialism, generalizations are made about objects or cases rather than taking each of these individually. Naturally, objections are raised to these methods because results obtained by generalizations are prone to lead man to misjudgements and mistakes. As a result, existentialists refuse the conventional methods and direct their attention to individuals—a stance which makes existentialism a revolutionary movement put against tradition.

There are a set of philosophical questions that existentialism attempts to answer. Some of these are "What is it to exist? Does existence have a purpose? … Are we

free? Are we responsible for our actions? … How should we face death?"[1] Because these questions appear to convey a disturbing approach, existentialism is sometimes blamed for being pessimistic and for pushing aside the good things in life such as happiness, peace of mind or solidarity. Another point of criticism put against existentialism is that it is based on subjectivity, or that it is over-individualistic. There is a measure of truth in this claim; however, the subjectivity in existentialism carries a positive and humanistic quality. Existentialism attaches importance to man, takes him to the foreground and gives him the task of promoting himself. Figuratively speaking, it carries him from "nothingness" into "being". As Sartre says, man does not simply exist. If it were so, that would constitute only the phase of 'existence' in his principle "existence precedes essence". Not to remain as 'existence' but to become 'essence', however, man needs to keep creating himself and his world all through his life. In *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre explains what humanism means in existential thought:

> Fundamentally it is this: man is constantly outside of himself; in projecting himself, in losing himself outside of himself, he makes for man's existing; and, on the other hand, it is by pursuing transcendent goals that he is able to exist; man, being this state of passing-beyond, and seizing upon things only as they bear upon this passing-beyond, is at the heart, at the center of this passing-beyond. There is no universe other than a human universe, the universe of human subjectivity. This connection between transcendency (sic.), a constituent element of man—not in the sense that God is transcendent, but in the sense of passing beyond—and subjectivity, in the sense that man is not closed in on himself but is always present in a human universe, is what we call existentialism humanism. Humanism, because we remind man that there is no law-maker other than himself, and that in his forlornness he will decide by himself;[2]

Therefore, existentialism asks man to renounce all utopian dreams and beckons him to the concrete world of reality. As such, existentialism advocates a positive and humane look at life and the world.

---

[1] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Jean-Paul Sartre: Basic Writings*, ed. Stephan Priest (London: Routledge, 2001), 20.

[2] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (New York: Citadel Press Kensigton Publishing Corp., 1987), 50-51.

As stated, existentialists necessarily focus on individuality. Kierkegaard, who appears to be the earliest existentialist philosopher, displays strong feelings of individuality and attacks the Greek heritage seen in Christianity and in philosophy because Greek philosophy is deeply blended in maths, making everything over-rational and perhaps rigid, leaving little room for individuality. He seems to renounce reason and value passions, instead. Kierkegaard thinks that man is alone in the world and that he shouldn't be 'bothered by reason'. Since he is alone, he should be set free to make his decisions. So when God orders Abraham to take his only son and sacrifice him, Kierkegaard thinks Abraham faces *la condition humaine*, man's fate. This is for Kierkegaard man's situation. The world has no part in it; it is no help. Here is man, and "one thing is needful": a decision.[1]

From Kierkegaard's viewpoint, man needs to make his decisions with the help of his passions since passions are not only superior to reason but they also constitute the core of morals. He states that the conclusions of passion are the only reliable ones and that what his age lacks is not reflection but passion.[2] According to Kaufmann, Kierkegaard is partially correct in his opinion: Ethics is for Kierkegaard not a matter of seeing the good but of making a decision. The crucial difference between an informed and uninformed, a reasoned and un-reasoned, a responsible and irresponsible decision, escapes him. Yet he is unquestionably right in thinking that reason cannot absolve us from the need for decisions and, according to him, Greeks, Christians and modern philosophy have tried to ignore this important fact.[3]

So, whether one employs passions or reason, one still has to make decisions, says Kierkegaard. Contemporary existentialism deals with decision-making too but its focal point is different from that of Kierkegaard. It chooses primarily the tragic human condition as its topic. Among the other issues it studies are the absurd, the meaning of life, boredom, alienation, anxiety and dread—mainly caused by the notion of death. Moreover, existentialism evokes rebellion against the human condition, the religious dogmas imposed on man and the ironic

[1] Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), 17-18.

[2] Ibid., 18.

[3] Ibid., 17.

injustice they give rise to. Concepts such as freedom and protest are dominant. Evidently, existentialism does not necessarily deal with the ethical aspects of things. The works of Albert Camus, especially *The Myth of Sisyphus*, *The Stranger*, *The Fall* and *A Happy Death* are clear examples of the case. They do not handle the ethical aspect when they talk about the human condition. It is not that these works are devoid of ethics but that they are *free* of ethics. The characters such as Sisyphus, Don Juan, Meursault or Jean-Baptiste Clamence may appear to be selfish from a certain point of view since they do not care what happens outside them and who it happens to. It is sufficient for them if they themselves are content. Indeed, this is how it needs to be because absurd heroes, as they are, cannot be bound to ethics. If they were, they would not be absurd; neither would they be capable of revolting. If there is one thing these heroes are interested in, it is getting their share out of life in spite of death and feeling victorious by laughing at death in the face. Camus believes that if man is conscious of his fate but can still resist it or mock it, he surpasses it.

Existentialists in general have dissatisfaction with traditional philosophy as they think it is "superficial, academic and remote from life."[1] Again, traditional philosophy in this respect stems from Aristotelian thought, which claims that before something occurs or comes into being (l'act), there exists its potential (la puissance) as a notion. Existentialist philosophers reject *la puissance* because they believe that conflicts in philosophy arise due to using notions as tools. Therefore, they advise working with concrete worldly objects and acts tin order o be able to eliminate conflicts or mistakes.

Existentialist philosophers, therefore, all take the world as their subject matter but they are different from one another in their approach to existentialism. In addition, existential philosophers have different political views and opinions due to the fact that existentialism is independent of any special political view as well as being independent of other philosophical schools. Among such variety, then, it is through individualism that existentialism manifests itself in all. In other words, what binds these philosophers together is the common thread of individualism.

In existentialism, both man and the world he exists in are concrete. Man exists in a social and historical scope. That is to say, socially he is together with the others

[1] Ibid., 12.

despite his occasional indifference towards them. Also he is historical in the sense that he has temporality, as different from non-humans and non-living things. He is *aware* that he has a past, a present and a future but the time span he clings to is the present because the past is gone anyway and the future is treacherous, with death awaiting at the end of life.

Existentialism places man in the centre of things but this should not mean that it is an egotistical or self-centred approach to the self. Rather, it is a manner of looking at life through the self, or perhaps, through using the self as a screen before one might tell what life means. Existentialism suggests that man be aware of his presence, of who he is and what deed or function he is supposed to fulfil 'as he is'. Everyone observes the world through his own window as individualism requires, and everyone has his own ground to occupy. If man wants to share the world with 'the others', he needs to take an extra step. Then he experiences a kind of transformation, loses self-consciousness and he joins the crowd bearing his temporarily-altered self. However, on returning later to his original realm, he is back to his individualistic or subjective stance and to his awareness.

According to Sartre, subjectivism may be interpreted in two ways. The first interpretation says that man is what he makes of himself. In fact, it is solely *his* responsibility what he makes of himself. One objective of existentialism is to point to this issue and give man an awareness of it. The second interpretation of subjectivism is that man cannot transcend human subjectivity. This seems natural given that man accepts no authority above or beyond himself. He appears to have such a high esteem of himself that he thinks he does not need a dominant power.

The two advocates of this idea, Camus and Sartre believe in the dignity of 'being' as an entity different from things. When man becomes conscious of himself, and sees himself as a subject, he also becomes conscious of 'the others' and he realizes that the others can also think and act as opposed to non-living things that can do neither. As a result, a world of intersubjectivity is created. Sartre comments on being and his relations:

> He realizes that he cannot be anything (in the sense that we say that someone is witty or nasty or jealous) unless others recognize it as such.

> In order to get any truth about myself, I must have contact with another person.[1]

What creates intersubjectivity is the presence of some universal situations like existing in the world, being together with other people and sharing the fate of mortality. It helps people cover the gaps that may have opened by the differences of nationality, sex or age. Sartre affirms that existentialism is based on invention and creativity in that man is not a 'given character' at the beginning but he creates himself by and by, and he makes his choices and creates the direction that he will follow according to the situations he is in. As mentioned earlier, this is one of the positive and constructive aspects of existentialism. It enables man to create not only himself but also the others and thus, a whole world. Here, the world does not necessarily stand for the physical life world (Lebensweldt) onto which we are 'thrown', but a world of consciousness of the fact that we all exist and that we are in a mutual relationship, that it is a world of 'involvement' as Sartre calls it.

Consequently, in existentialism, the subject-object split, in the sense that man is the subject and the world is the object, is rejected. Hence, Heidegger's being-in-the-world, for example, is an individual who is a disclosure of the world he lives in. Whatever he may experience in his individuality, he is inseparable from the world where he shares a common fate with the others. Individuality in a Cartesian sense, however, is not totally ignored because the notion "I think, therefore, I am" carries man to the point of awareness of his own self. Sartre argues that, concerning existentialism as well as scepticism, the only truth one can be aware of is his own self. Awareness of self constitutes the fundamental consciousness and it serves as the sole truth or basis on which possibilities can be constructed.

Another view that the existentialists such as Camus, Heidegger and Sartre share is that there is no authority over man. In such existentialism, there is no God, hence, no force exerted on man from the outside, that is, no exertion of rules. To put it differently, existentialism offers man freedom—of choice and of taking chances. On the other hand, existentialism is criticised in this respect and is approached cautiously by its opponents. One reason is that the opponents are so

[1] Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, 37-38.

dependent on the existence of an authority that they are, as it were, afraid of taking chances on their own and they believe that existentialism deprives them of an authority they definitely need—a situation leading them into pessimism. Despite all, Camus and Sartre think that existentialism is not a movement of pessimism, as it is blamed, but of optimism, since it offers man a chance to use his free will although many people fail to appreciate it.

> You see that it cannot be taken for a philosophy of quietism, since it defines man in terms of action; nor for a pessimistic description of man—there is no doctrine more optimistic, since man's destiny is within himself; nor for an attempt to discourage man from acting; since it tells him that the only hope is in his acting and that action is the only thing that enables a man to live. Consequently, we are dealing here with an ethics of action and involvement.[1]

In short, for Sartre, action, decision and the employment of free will are what make a man, a man. And Camus adds that revolt, which is action itself, is essential, too.

Existentialism is criticised also because it argues that man is not born with a certain character, or that he does not bring any traits from birth. Instead, a man is what he makes of himself. The problem here is that people do not enjoy being in such a situation which is prone to disapproval. They prefer being born with a definite character in order not to be criticised in case their personality or behaviour which is based on this built-in character proves to be a not-so-good one. Sartre tells them they are wrong. Since a man is always in a process of becoming, he is not stuck but he can always change—for the better or for the worse; it is up to him alone.

At this point, one stops and thinks. Sartre says even if one decides not to make a choice, this is still a choice. Then, there seems to be a paradoxical situation: Man is absolutely free to choose but then, there does not seem to be any other possibility but making a choice. Agreement with Sartre suggests that, in a way, man is 'obliged' to choose, that there is no way out of it. Then one might ask "How free is man if he *has to* make choices all the time?" Disregarding the

[1] Ibid., 35-36.

paradox, however, one can see that freewill is an effective element tantamount to human life as it contributes to the meaning of life.

Founded on the above ideas is the view 'existence precedes essence', of which Sartre is the advocate. In his essay *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre explains what the conventional view 'essence precedes existence' means. The creator, may it be God or an artisan, has in his mind what he is creating. That idea in his mind is the essence. Consequently, man—or a production—is the actualization of an idea which was originally in the creator's mind. However, Sartre supports the opposite view, that 'existence precedes essence', which means "… that subjectivity must be the starting point."[1] Sartre elaborates on it:

> It means that, first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself. If man, as the existentialist conceives him, is indefinable, it is because at first he is nothing. Only afterward will he be something, and he himself will have made what he will be. Thus, there is no human nature, since there is no God to conceive it. Not only is man what he conceives himself to be, but he is also what he wills himself to be after this thrust toward existence.[2]

But even when man makes himself and constructs a world in which he lives with the others, nothing is over or complete for him since "The existentialist will never consider man as an end because he is always in the making."[3]

In other words, man is continually in an act of becoming and the process ends only with death. But existentialists hold that man has a lot to accomplish in the world before he dies. The attitude of the existentialists towards life is significant because what matters most is the 'being' and its existence.

Probably with the effect of their individualistic stances, only Sartre among the existentialist philosophers agrees that he is an existentialist. The others refuse to belong to any school of thought let alone being called 'existentialists'. Heidegger, for example, gives his reasons for such a refusal in *Letter on Humanism*, which

[1] Ibid., 13.

[2] Ibid., 15.

[3] Ibid., 50.

he writes as a reaction to Sartre's essay, *Existentialism Is a Humanism.* He criticises Sartre for attaching priority to 'existence' over 'Being', or Dasein. Throughout his book *Being and Time*, Heidegger keeps reminding his readers that his interest is not in man as such—not, as he put it repeatedly, anthropological. On the contrary, he insists that his efforts are directed to the study of Being, not of man's existence. Traditional ontology, he believes, does not get beyond the study of "beings as such" while he hopes to penetrate to Being itself.

Despite its prominent characteristics such as those mentioned above, existentialism is still hard to define since it is interpreted and treated differently by different philosophers. They deal with issues of death, despair and failure, but while these are predominant in Heidegger, Camus and Sartre, they are of secondary importance to Nietzsche, who takes 'death of God' and man's cruelty and hypocrisy to the foreground. Therefore, it may be appropriate that the dissertation concentrates in the main on how Albert Camus deals with it while referring to the other existentialist philosophers and writers, as necessary.

CHAPTER 3

CAMUS—AND A HAPPY LIFE?

Camus' life is an ironic one. Despite his desire for being happy and peaceful, he experiences struggle, frustration, disappointment and heartbreak throughout his life. He is born in Algeria into a rather poor family. His father, Lucien Camus, dies in a battle in Maine during the First World War at the age of twenty-nine, when Camus is only one year old. His mother, who is of Spanish descent, tries to look after her two sons by doing people's laundry. All his life, Camus is torn between two very different cultures, namely, the Arab culture in Algeria and the French culture. He does not really belong to either one because, on the one hand, he is not an Arab or a Muslim and therefore, he is not a member of the Muslim majority and on the other hand, he is different by class from the ruling French in Algeria. He tries to stand at an equal distance from both sides but at the same time, he is worried that his family may suffer from the terrorism in Algeria. For that reason, when he Works as a journalist, he feels the need of being cautious even in the language he employs in his newspaper articles.

> On this point terrorism as it is practiced in Algeria greatly influenced my attitude. When the fate of men and women of one's own blood is bound, directly or indirectly, to the articles one writes in the comfort of the study, one has a right to hesitate and to weigh the pros and cons.[1]

So while he admires the Western world for its cultural civilization, he is also deeply critical of it owing to the 'inhuman' attitude he observes in the European countries towards their colonies. The ongoing terror gives him a sense of revolt which can be easily felt in many of his works, with *The Rebel* and *The Myth of Sisyphus* taking the lead. All his life, he fights for unity and solidarity to be established between France and Algeria. Interestingly enough, however, he is not for the complete freedom of Algeria because he believes that the Algerians by themselves cannot achieve economic independence, which is the primary condition for political independence. He would rather Algeria remained a French colony but the oppression be stopped.

[1] Albert Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion and Death* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 113.

Camus suffers from ill health throughout his life. He catches tuberculosis at the age of seventeen and he returns from the brink of death at such a young age. The unfortunate experience leaves him with a strong sense of death and mortality and that may be one of the factors that turn him in his works towards the concepts of despair, finitude and the absurd. Also his ill health has an impact on his attitude towards suicide, making him regard it as a most crucial philosophical problem. Tuberculosis keeps recurring in his later life, always giving him the feeling that he may soon die. Thus, he cannot free himself from the idea of death and often talks about it. A case in point is when he is in the United States at the age of thirty-two.

> He repeated in his letters to friends that he was going to die, and he told Patricia that he feared the end was near, perhaps a year or two away. In his *Carnets* he wrote of his need to live intensely: "But why not put a name too to this desire I feel in my heart. And this tumultuous need that seizes me, to find once again the impatient heart I had at age twenty. …" He had an acute sense of passing time and of time lost.
>
> He noted: "Sadness to feel myself still so vulnerable. In twenty-five years I will be fifty-seven years old. Twenty-five years then to write my works and to find what I'm looking for. Then old age and death. I know what is the most important thing for me [sic.], yet I still find a way of giving in to little temptations to waste time in futile conversations or in sterile wanderings. …" He had attacks of suicidal despair, and he kept a copy with him a suicide note that one of Leon Trotsky's friends had written to the political leader, in which the suicidal Russian complained that his life had "lost meaning" and that he felt "obliged to leave it, to put an end to it."[1]

Tuberculosis returns with a serious fit when Camus is thirty-six. At the same time, he has the feeling of being a failure because in four years he has not been able to complete his works of "the revolt cycle" which are supposed to succeed those of "the absurd cycle". Then he thinks of suicide once again. Moreover, his personal depressive states are not all that he suffers from. Francine, his wife, is

[1] Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus—A Life*, trans. Benjamin Ivry (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 223-224.

also depressed most of the time and attempts to commit suicide twice. Despite the impressions such experiences leave on his soul, however, he is strictly against suicide—and murder—in principle and he is critical of his time in which both are common phenomena.

> Our epoch is one that, having pushed nihilism to its extreme conclusions, has accepted suicide. This can be verified in the facility with which it accepts murder, or justifies murder. … Men of Terror have promoted suicide's value until the final result, which is legitimized murder, or collective suicide.[1]

In his philosophy, Camus does not give in to despair and his philosophy reflects the view that it is always possible to fight against, and not submit to, death no matter in what form it may come. While he is reflecting on death, he can also think of life and the joy one would get out of it. He says,

> Dostoyevsky, announcing the new man, said he wouldn't care about dying. I'm not speaking about myself, but I think that all the heartbreaks of modern sensibility are heading towards that new man.
>
> … Even if you don't believe in religion, even if God is dead … something true remains in religious experience, just as in any experience, which is that personal life has only a distant relationship to happiness. The Greeks understood that well, and they are the ones who answered the question you asked and I asked: they did not deny the mystery, but simply gave it an idea of balance, which is a profound truth that Christians can't understand. Each evil is compensated by a pleasure—or a grandeur attached to it—and only love for life can justify a man (Epicurus said, 'Death is not our business').[2]

As can be seen in this positive approach, Camus is willing to establish good bonds with life and people at all times and he behaves sociably. When he is in high school, he takes part in the soccer team. Some years later, when he is still in Algeria, he sets up a theatre group for which he writes and directs plays. These,

[1] Ibid., 237.

[2] Ibid., 260.

together with his working-class origin, give him a feeling of community and integrity.

In spite of his craving for fraternity and solidarity, however, he is disillusioned because the society and life in general are not friendly. There are wars, oppression and maltreatment of people around the world. His interest in existentialism and in the problem of alienation finds some of its roots in his disappointment concerning life and people. He often reacts to this situation in his works as well as in actual life. For example, he criticizes Nazism harshly in *Letters to a German Friend* for its disrespect to humanity:

> As you see, from the same principle we derived quite different codes, because along the way you gave up the lucid view and considered it more convenient (you would have said a matter of indifference) for another to do your thinking for you and for millions of Germans. Because you were tired of fighting heaven, you relaxed in that exhausting adventure in which you had to mutilate souls and destroy the world. In short, you chose injustice and sided with the gods. Your logic was merely apparent.
>
> I, on the contrary, chose justice in order to remain faithful to the world. I continue to believe that this world has no ultimate meaning. But I know that something in it has a meaning and that is man, because he is the only creature to insist on having one. This world has at least the truth of man, and our task is to provide its justifications against fate itself. And it has no justification but man; hence he must be saved if we want to save the idea we have of life. With your scornful smile you will ask me: what do you mean by saving man? And with all my being I shout to you that I mean not mutilating him and yet giving a chance to the justice that man alone can conceive.[1]

His devotion to peace, reason and fraternity is expressed frequently in *Resistance, Rebellion and Death*, a collection of his newspaper articles and speeches. He worries about the feeling of hatred accumulated in the hearts of the French and calls out for common sense and justice.

[1] Camus, *Resistance*, 28-29.

> Our poisoned hearts must be cured. And the most difficult battle to be won against the enemy in the future must be fought within ourselves, with an exceptional effort that will transform our appetite for hatred into a desire for justice. Not giving in to hatred, not making any concessions to violence, not allowing our passions to become blind—these are the things we can still do for friendship and against Hitlerism. Even today certain newspapers still indulge in violence and insult. But that is simply still giving in to the enemy. Instead, it is essential that we never let criticism descend to insult; … It is essential, in short, that we remake our political mentality.[1]

His stance before France is as criticising as his stance before Germany since his concern is not for individuals but for humanity. He censures the French who do not use their intelligence but behave emotionally.

> When that intelligence is snuffed out, the black night of dictatorship begins. This is why we must maintain it with all its duties and all its rights. At that price, and only at that price, will French friendship have a meaning. For friendship is a knowledge acquired by free man. And there is no freedom without intelligence or without mutual understanding.[2]

Particularly the last two sentences above may also be taken as a call for people to come out of their probable alienation to the society and the world they live in.

Being a 'stranger' in this sense interests Camus and, from time to time, Camus himself experiences being a 'stranger', too and he has reasons for that. In the first place, when he is in Algeria, where he spends his childhood and most of his youth, it is highly probable that he feels that he does not really belong to either of the communities present there. This sense of disbelonging, which adds to his alienation and turns him more towards existentialism, continues all his life and brings him as a result to the point of declaring "Yes, I have a native land: the French language".[3] Indeed, alienation seems to be a part of his nature. Camus resembles Meursault, the absurd hero in *The Stranger,* in that he enjoys being

[1] Ibid., 62-63.

[2] Ibid., 64.

[3] *Bloom's BioCritiques*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003), 55.

alone from time to time. He prefers living in small and sparsely-populated places rather than big cities, especially Paris. Like Meursault, his behaviour can be detached and he can grow bitter and scornful of the people around him. When asked, for example, why he "did not respond to a derisory portrait of him by Simone de Beauvoir in *Les Mandarins,* Camus said, "Because you don't discuss things with a sewer.""[1]

And although he can be quite close and frank in his personal letters to women who he has affairs with, he is sombre and indirect in his diaries, which are published under the title *Notebooks.* These reveal very little of his personal life. If he wants to give a personal account, he does it indirectly. An example is that when he suffers from a fit of tuberculosis, he reflects it in his diary through a poem that Keats wrote when he was dying of the same disease. Instead of personal details, he prefers to put in these diaries outlines for future plays and novels, notes on his readings or remarks or comments that he observes in various sources.

A second reason why Camus feels alienated may be related to his poor state of health. He studies philosophy at The University of Algiers, writes a thesis on Neo-Platonism and Christianity and he receives Diplome d'Études Supérieures. He wants to become a philosophy teacher and he is supposed to take an exam to that end. But a recurring fit of tuberculosis hinders him because in those years tuberculosis patients in Algeria are not employed by the state as the state is reluctant to pay for their illnesses. So he cannot get a health report which would let him sit the exam. In other words, he is treated differently from the majority; he is made a 'stranger'. In addition to that, being a Frenchman from Algeria, he feels throughout his life that Algeria's European piednoirs—as they are referred to in France—are never the equals of Frenchmen born in France.

He moves to France in 1940 but it takes him some time before making friends and meanwhile he is alone in a new environment. During this period he has plenty of time to focus and ponder on man, the condition of man and the meaning of life and of the world. As stated above, he says that the only meaning that exists in the world is man. Despite being so special, however, man is not fully contented regarding his condition because, as Camus puts it in his

[1] Ibid., 23.

Notebooks 1951-1959, there is a certain thing that always gives man heartbreak. It is not the memories of a past but by the love of a future which man will not be able to live forever. In other words, the idea of death lurks in. Wars, epidemics and death penalty are agents that deprive man of his future. In *The Plague* and *The Stranger*, Camus elucidates how death exerts its pressure on people. Camus himself often feels the same pressure, too. But he does not want despair to ruin man so he brings in some consolation by saying that, if nothing else, there is honour and freedom which allow man to live in the present—and that with satisfaction, because these concepts do not necessarily refer to the future. Still, whatever consolation he may try to offer, such periods of frustration, loneliness and 'dis-belonging' seem to have added to his existentialist thoughts.

In time, his sociable personality earns Camus a wide circle of friends in Paris. The majority of these are outstanding figures from philosophical, literary and artistic circles, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Arthur Koestler, Simone de Beauvoir, Georges Bataille, Louis Aragon, Elsa Triolet and Pablo Picasso. They spend especially the years of war together, usually going around as a group, putting plays on stage, holding philosophical discussions but also having fun, partying and naturally, sometimes quarrelling. Inevitably, Camus is influenced by his friends who have existentialist and communist—or sometimes anti-communist—views while, in return, impressing them with his charming personality and intelligence. Among these people, however, the one with whom Camus has the firmest friendship is Sartre. The two men find out about each other through each other's books and meet at the premiere of Sartre's play, *The Flies*, in 1943. They grow close through their common interest in politics but it is ironic that they choose their diverse ways, again because of politics, in 1952. Their conflict arises from Camus' belief that Sartre is an advocate of communism and that he is a leader of the communists and from Sartre's belief that Camus is too passive to become a communist and that he is a spokesman of the anti-communists.

At the time they become friends, Sartre is already famous as a philosopher and he appears to be ahead of Camus in a philosophical respect. On the other hand, Camus starts his activist rebellion earlier than Sartre. He composes the first one of his *Letters to a German Friend* in 1943, as a political moralist. The next year, he becomes a leader in the French struggle against Germany whereas Sartre is still 'outside real life'. And in their works, where Camus includes physical and

sensual issues into his philosophy, as a sign of his being involved in actual life that goes on around him, Sartre prefers to focus on more abstract matters. Camus has his two most prominent works, *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus,* published in 1942 and 1943 respectively. The great fame he gains with them, however, does not make the two men see or treat each other as rivals. They respect the friendship that they enjoy and they are careful not to hurt each other—almost to the end. It may be concluded, therefore, that their friendship might have lasted if it hadn't been for their political opposition.

It may be asked, then, whether Camus and Sartre have always displayed different political views. The answer is negative. At the beginning, Camus has some interest in both Marxism and communism and he becomes a member of PCF (the French Communist Party) in 1934. Later, however, he is not happy with the attitude of the party because it mitigates its political stance against anti-colonialism for the sake of establishing a coalition with the European workers who are fanatically anti-Arab. Camus opposes such a policy and gets dismissed from the party, as a result.

In 1939, when he is still in Algeria, Camus has a tendency to ignore the war—just like Rambert does in *The Plague*—because the war has not touched Algeria. But soon he realizes that wars in general are a fact of existence. As Parker puts it, "But he knew that an *homme absurde* could not ignore the war, which only generalized the absurdity of life. It had to be faced and taken into consideration in the formulation of one's judgements."[1]

He now changes his attitude and begins to preach that one should not despair in the face of war or any other unpleasant or unfortunate event because despair is bound to fade away in time and thus, offers no solution. Instead, one should do everything possible to prevent or avert a war but if one cannot do so in spite of one's strife, what is best to do is not despair but attempt to shape history. To put it differently, there comes the choice between collaboration with war and a struggle against war. Camus' choice is always the latter and it appears as one of the corner-stones of his philosophy. In his *Notebooks 1951-1959*, he writes that people are creators in the sense that they create history with their acts. This is what he does in his actual life. His belief in rebellion is intensified when Gabriel

[1] Emmet Parker, *The Artist in the Arena* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), 53.

Péri, a brilliant communist and a journalist, is shot dead by the Gestapo in 1941. Now Camus literally joins the Resistance. This seems to be his battle against the absurd and his rebellion against death. He contributes articles to the journal *Combat* during and after the war and acts as the spokesman of non-communist resistants. He becomes *Combat*'s editor-in-chief in the post-war period. In his articles, he makes it clear that he is against violence in all cases.

> These articles voiced an anti-Cold War, anti-Communist, reformist leftism. Their strength lay in Camus' willingness to separate himself from all existing mainstream tendencies—the Right's move toward violent anti-Communism, the moderate Left's acceptance of the Cold War and abandonment of any hope of meaningful change, the Communists' easy rationalizing of violence and brutality en route to building a supposedly better society. After his experience of intense political activity, Camus had developed the capacity to create alternatives, the willingness to stand all by him, if necessary, and to articulate what *ought* to be done. This strength sprang, in part, from Camus' deepest commitment: to avoid making a virtue of violence. Not that he was, or ever claimed to be, a pacifist. We have seen in his *Letters to a German Friend* his insistence on going into battle with clean hands—on the use of violence only when absolutely necessary, within limits, in response to a vital threat. … Violence was a last resort.[1]

The post-war period finds Sartre still behind Camus. So far Camus has been involved in action; namely, he has formed a theatre group, has entered the Communist Party, has got dismissed, and has acted as a leader in the war with his fervent articles. But for Sartre, apart from the editorship of a left-wing magazine, *Les Temps modernes*, writing has almost been the sole activity he has been involved in. Yet, Sartre, too, deserves praise because he is prolific and thus, he has gained great fame. His ideas, particularly those on existentialism, are very popular among people. The difference between the two men is that Sartre has not yet been in touch with the actual world whereas Camus's philosophy stems out of life experience. Nevertheless, the political-intellectual efforts of both men

[1] Ronald Aronson, *Camus & Sartre, The Story of a Friendship and a Quarrel That Ended It* (USA: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 90.

follow a common channel after the war and they both aim at strengthening the non-communist left wing.

In the course of time, though, Camus grows totally against communism but Sartre now holds it as his favourite. He thinks that it is impossible to convert an oppressive and violent world into a peaceful one without inflicting violence in return and he wonders whether it would be possible to take France close to a socialist democracy through the application of some violence, provided that she obtains an equalitarian society at the end. This idea conflicts with Camus's stance, which rejects cruelty completely and in any case. As a political moralist, Sartre condemns the cruelty of the rulers and approves in advance the violence of the oppressed. He defends the idea that the violence exerted by the oppressed is inevitable and acceptable within certain limits. On exactly this point, Sartre's direction is most sharply in opposition with that of Camus. While Camus devotes all his energy to writing against bloodshed, Sartre begins to gradually embrace violence, especially revolutionary violence.

Such a difference in opinions signals the total disagreement that is to follow. As a matter of fact, from 1946 to 1948, both Camus and Sartre strive for finding reconciliation between communism and capitalism and for preventing the Cold War but they cannot succeed. When Sartre fails in this strife, he turns to communism as his final route. He says he has replaced his vague moral notions with realism. In other words, Sartre acts in accordance with and parallel to the flow of history, which Camus detests. Camus mocks communism—and perhaps Sartre—in his *Notebooks 1951-1959* with a fine sense of humour and a subtle despise: "The taste of creation is so strong that those who are incapable of it choose Communism, which assures them of an entirely collective creation."[1]

Being wholly against terror, Camus keeps on suggesting alternatives against it. And for him communism means terror, too. It is the greatest problem of the time and it can be as dangerous as fascism. And now that Sartre, his comrade, chooses communism, it becomes obvious that their friendship cannot last long. Indeed, it breaks in 1952, the same year that Sartre declares that he supports communism and Camus has *The Rebel* published.

[1] Albert Camus, *Notebooks 1951-1959* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2008), 136.

As a natural result of their conflict, the publication of Camus's *The Rebel* leads to further disputes and unpleasant events between the two men and it stirs up the public opinion, dividing most of the readers and the critics into two camps. *The Rebel* is a concealed attack on Sartre upon the latter's play *The Devil and the Good Lord*. At the end of the play, Goetz, the hero, shakes off his devilish character and decides to help the peasants for their freedom as well as his own. Sartre has concluded that individual salvation is not possible; therefore, one had better adopt collective behaviour. Since 'the others' are always important to him, it is rather easy for Sartre to quit individualism and shift into collective behaviour. He prefers to participate in the ongoing struggle and become a revolutionist because just one single person is not powerful enough to create a movement.

With Camus, however, keeping an individualistic stance is a more prominent feature. Besides, he claims that being a 'revolutionist' means being wild and beastly and it is entirely different from being a 'rebel'. Hence, his hero in *The Rebel* is by no means a revolutionist but solely a rebel. What he rebels against is not necessarily the set system but the condition of man, may it be regarded from an individual, social or moral point of view. So while modest leftists, together with some from the right wing welcome *The Rebel*, the book finds itself under the assault of the communists. They accuse Camus of not reading Marx and Engels but depending on secondary literature. Sartre can see that although his name is never mentioned, the book is a criticism directed at him as well as at communism. Still, he does not want to write an answer personally, probably not to hurt Camus or probably not to sound too harsh and reveal his anger. So he asks a neutral journalist, Francis Jeanson, to write a moderate criticism. The criticism, however, turns out to be quite sharp. Camus is sure that it is Sartre who stands behind it so he composes an answer saying that his book is misinterpreted. Sartre writes a letter in return in which he sounds so surly that his style may render Camus right and himself unfair. He blames Camus for escaping the reality of the times, i.e., communism.

> … He [Sartre] is posing the question, why did the exemplary Camus not adopt to history after the liberation? ... Sartre's question calls for translation. His missing premise, contained within parentheses "(myself included)", was the comparison between himself and Camus: I, Sartre—who was so much less involved in 1944—subsequently changed, and learned to live in history, and now I am fully committed and taking risks.

> You, Camus, so courageous and fully integrated then, didn't grow, have since been fleeting from history, and have decided to avoid taking any further risks.[1]

But it is impossible for Camus to reconcile communism with human freedom—a key element in existentialism. If for Sartre solidarity stands for a writer's act of establishing a relationship with a working class that could change the social system, it means for Camus a world where oppression is eliminated and peace is shared by all. He, therefore, accuses Sartre of embracing the historical necessity of Marxism, admitting no influence of human will**.**

Camus does not see a commitment to freedom in Sartre's turn toward Marxism, but an aspiration to submission. Existentialism, and especially its starting point of human freedom, is contradictory to Marxism's notion of historical necessity. To free humans from every sort of impediment is incompatible with imprisoning them in historical necessity.

Camus replies to both Sartre and Jeanson once again and then writes a defence of *The Rebel* but he does not publish it and it is published only posthumously. One reason for his keeping it unpublished may be his attitude towards friends and friendship, which clashes with that of Sartre. Camus wants to remain friends with people no matter how much they might disagree in their opinions. Yet, Sartre is different and in this particular case, he sees all anti-communists as enemies. He breaks with his friends Raymond Aron and Merleau-Ponty on grounds that they do not share his views. But things work differently for Camus; politics is not everything for him. At this point, he sees something deeper to be at stake, and it is personal loyalty and friendship. He responds to Sartre as if their opposing attitudes toward Communism could never shake these feelings.

But Sartre's attack is, as it were, to destroy Camus and he succeeds in it to a certain extent. Sartre may have a concealed enmity towards Camus because the latter's criticism of his books in 1938 and 1939 might have disturbed him. And this time, when Camus replies to Jeanson's criticism of *The Rebel,* he does not mention Jeanson's name at all. For Sartre, this is treating 'others' as 'things' and not as 'individuals' and he feels disturbed once again. After their split, Camus

[1] Aronson, *Camus & Sartre,* 153.

begins to feel self-conscious thinking that he has been humiliated by a 'master' before the world; consequently, his self-confidence is shaken. The split affects Sartre, too. Now, neither of them is very productive and they do not publish anything worthwhile for a few years. Nor do they meet any more but they continue to think and talk about each other. Camus returns to journalism and writes mainly about Algeria and the oppression there. In 1956, he goes to Algeria in great hope, to address a crowd of two thousand people. He also speaks with the governor calling for armistice and ceasefire but his attempt is rejected by the governor for the reason that the Algerian rebels would never accept it. Feeling like a failure a second time, Camus goes back to France. From then on, he chooses to remain silent about Algeria, being afraid that what he writes may be to the detriment of his family members in Algeria. He begins to write his novel, *The Fall*, for which he wins the Nobel Prize in 1957. In 1962, Algeria declares independence and becomes a republic but unfortunately, Camus cannot see the 'happy end', having died in a car accident two years earlier.

Can Camus bring his life into line with his philosophy? He appears to be uncertain of his own case. While advising people to be indulged in life and enjoy it up to the brim, he himself needs solitude at times. He finds tranquillity, serenity and happiness when he is in the countryside. But then he adds that when one is freed of others, one becomes a slave to oneself. In such a comment, one cannot help but feel the presence of existentialist traits. Solitude may result in becoming too self-conscious, or gaining a kind of "awareness", as Heidegger would call it. Consequently, one may keep thinking of one's fate and hence, fail to free oneself from oneself and end up losing one's peace of mind. In fact, this is what happens to Camus, particularly when he is obsessed with the idea of death.

This is not the only problem that Camus faces, though. He marries a second time in 1940 after his first marriage in 1934 that lasts only a year. Monogamy bores him but he promises his second wife Francine to be loyal to her. However, it turns out to be a vain promise because he cannot keep his word. Marriage constrains him and he feels that he is losing his freedom. His passion for freedom in actual life is a factor that contributes to the existential thoughts that are prominent in his philosophy and in his works. He is not so happy with his life particularly in its last ten years owing to the problems he is faced with. His wife suffers from recurring depression attacks and he does not know how to handle it. He has affairs with different women. He is claustrophobic. And he encounters

hard times in his career such as his arguments with Sartre and the criticisms he receives. Due to these problems, he cannot even enjoy the Nobel Prize that he is awarded with. To be brief**,** in spite of all his optimism in advocating happiness in existentialism, he cannot always live up to that principle too well.

CHAPTER 4

CAMUS IN EXISTENTIALISM, NIHILISM AND SKEPTICISM

Despite his rejection of being an existentialist, it is obvious that Camus is extensively influenced by existentialism and his place and role in the movement are undeniable. Camus has always been interested in existentialist philosophers like Pascal, Kierkegaard, Husserl, Chestov and Nietzsche, and those writers whose works display examples of existentialist thought, like Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. He does not take any one of them as a model but he reads their work and he is influenced by them to a certain extent.

Kierkegaard, for example, is influential on Camus with his argument that freedom is essential for man in order to be able to act and to experience life. Kierkegaard thinks that the people of his time have submitted to a kind of life style that pacifies them and makes them act along with the crowd, forgetting their individual entities and existence. He thinks in a manner parallel to that of Heidegger in his notion of 'the crowd' with the difference that in *his* crowd, people are never conscious of their individual existences. He is bothered to see that the crowd spirit takes precedence over the most essential characteristics of individualism, namely, the inner spirit, ethical behaviour and freedom. Therefore, he endeavours to bring people back to their consciousness and help them regain their self-determination and thus, freedom. Camus studies the notion of 'the crowd', too. In his works, the crowd is the society, which opposes and challenges the individual. Kierkegaard stresses individualism and thus, gives some early signals of modern existentialism. According to him, man is alone in the world so he has only his own self to depend on while taking decisions—and that, by following his passions rather than his reason. Different from Camus, Kierkegaard is a believer of Christianity and he firmly holds that faith is essential to become a "true self" and that faith is gained through passions. Such a self feels anxiety because when he is making his choices, he is supposed to make them suitable both for his personal freedom and for the afterlife in which he will be tried for his worldly deeds. In *Fear and Trembling*, he discusses the inconveniences, difficulties, stress and disturbance that religious faith may impose on man by mentioning Abraham's case in which Abraham has to kill Isaac, his own son, so

that he could obey the order of God. Kierkegaard points to the conflict but never thinks of becoming a non-believer due to it. Camus is also aware of the inconveniences and the conflicts that faith brings but his attitude is different from that of Kierkegaard. In *The Stranger,* Meursault shouts at the chaplain who comes to visit him in his cell and he is on the verge of beating the chaplain because the chaplain tries to console him through religion. Meursault is a non-believer on grounds that religion deprives you of your freedom to choose and act and he does not believe that faith can be of any consolation to someone who is sentenced to death. He cannot think like Kierkegaard and reconcile the affairs of this world with those of the after-world.

Camus is considerably influenced by Nietzsche, too. His *Notebooks* contain plenty of quotations from Nietzsche. *The Fall,* the novel for which he wins the Nobel Prize, is rich in motives from *Will to Power* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.*

To give a few examples, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche introduces 'the overman' reflecting the latter's power and self-confidence. "Behold, I teach you the overman. The overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the overman *shall be* the meaning of the earth."[1]

By the same token, Clamence, the hero in *The Fall* feels that he is an overman. "To tell the truth, just from being so fully and simply a man, I looked upon myself as something of a superman."[2]

He carries his arrogance to such extremes that he begins to feel like God.

> On my own admission, I could live happily only on condition that all the individuals on earth, or the greatest possible number, were turned towards me, eternally unattached, deprived of any separate existence, and ready to answer my call at any moment, doomed in short to sterility until the day I should deign to favour them. In short, for me to live happily it was essential for the individuals I chose not to live at all. They must receive their life, sporadically, only at my bidding.[3]

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (New York: The Modern Library, 1995), 13.

[2] Albert Camus, *The Fall* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976), 23.

[3] Ibid., 51.

In *Will to Power*, Nietzsche argues that nihilism has introduced the notion that everything, including life, is "in vain". "Let us think this thought in its most terrible form: existence as it is, without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without any finale of nothingness: *"the eternal recurrence"*."[1]

Neither can Clamence escape from the feeling of futility.

> To be sure, I occasionally pretended to take life seriously. But very soon the frivolity of seriousness struck me and I merely went on playing my role as well as I could.
>
> I was courteous and indolent enough to live up to what was expected of me in my profession, my family, or my life as a citizen, but each time with a sort of indifference that spoiled everything.[2]

Many of Nietzsche's outstanding ideas can be traced in Camus's thought. In *Ecce Homo,* Nietzsche says "Consciousness is a surface." Accordingly, in both dreams and real life, man's experiences are formed or shaped by the content he puts in them. He believes that "nothing lies in them in themselves", which seems to mean that there is nothing in-itself either pre-set in man's consciousness or in his experiences; nothing unknown to him. What he does is select and group the experiences that he has lived through or the character traits that he himself developed. It supports indirectly the idea that Sartre and Camus advocate, that man constructs his own life. In other words, this view of Nietzsche is one of the first loops of the chain of thought that takes philosophers to the existentialist scope of human life.

The wish to construct one's own life could be said to be based on the 'will to power', which is sought by both individuals and groups. In *Nietzsche ve İnsan,* İonna Kuçuradi states that will to power is an important characteristic of Nietzsche's concept of a 'herd'. According to the concept, the society usually behaves like a herd. Not only does it establish some laws, rules and regulations but it also expects all the members of the society to comply with them for the expectation that power will be gained by sticking together. Anyone who fails to obey them is declared to be an outsider, a "stranger". In *The Fall,* Camus shows

[1] Friedrick Nietzsche, *Will to Power* (New York: Random House, 1967), 35.

[2] Ibid., 64, 65.

Clamence, the narrator, having difficulty in following the rules of the herd; nonetheless, Clamence is careful to behave as though he does not. He appears to be gentle, polite and benevolent towards people, rendering them happy with his charitable behaviour. But in fact, he despises them and feels superior to them all despite the fact that he is good for nothing. He is what Nietzsche calls "last man" in *Thus Spoke Zarahustra*. Nietzsche's "Übermensch", or the "overman", who represents the highest kind of man is strong enough to create his own values and, consequently, strong enough to live without the herd and traditional morality. But in *The Fall,* the narrator is the exact opposite. He spends most of his life being a "last man" but at the same time, both making believe that he is superior to the society and trying to look like a part of the society because he knows that he will be discarded if he fails to do so. He can free himself of this attitude only on experiencing a moment of awareness, after which he tries to better himself as a person although he does not necessarily improve.

Nietzsche's herd finds a reflection in Camus's works. For Nietzsche, the herd comprises of believers and one had better avoid them if one wants to be free and independent. Nietzsche finds negative connotations in the concept. After all, it is just a 'herd', without an identity, simply pursuing a power, having no will power or freedom of itself; moreover, it is reluctant to let any member leave. He clarifies the idea in *Thus Spoke Zarahustra*:

> "He who speaks easily gets lost. All loneliness is guilt"—thus speaks the herd. And you have long belonged to that herd. The voice of the herd will still be audible in you. And when you will say, "I no longer have a common conscience with you," it will be a lament and an agony. Behold, this agony itself was born of the common conscience, and the last glimmer of that conscience still glows on your affliction.[1]

In Nietzsche's opinion, a herd is something to be disdained. Therefore, one acts correctly if one tries to become one's own master instead of following the herd. Besides, one should get "the very stars to revolve around" him. Nietzsche means that one should become God, as a result of which one not only breaks free but also gains a field of attraction.

[1] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 62.

Similar to Nietzsche's idea of a herd, in *The Stranger,* Camus displays a society whose sole purpose is to tear up Meursault, the hero, because he does not behave in accordance with its rules. In the trial scene, the persecutor is the spokesman of the society.

> This man, who is morally guilty of his mother's death, is no less unfit to have a place in the community than that other man who did to death the father that begat him. … This man has, I repeat, no place in a community whose basic principles he flouts without compunction. Nor, heartless as he is, has he any claim to mercy. I ask you to impose the extreme penalty of the law; and I ask it without a qualm.[1]

But Camus does not want to leave man to the mercy of the herd, or the society, and in his works he demonstrates ways of living independently despite the expectations of the society. One way of it is becoming a creator, thus, being free. Camus puts down a note in his *Notebooks*: "Without tradition the artist has the illusion of creating his own rule. Here he is God."[2]

Perhaps one cannot become a real God; perhaps one deceives oneself by assuming oneself God. Nevertheless, Camus shares the same line of thought with Nietzsche when he tells the reader that "Conquest or play-acting, multiple loves, absurd revolt are tributes that man pays to his dignity in a campaign in which he is defeated in advance."[3]

In brief, since man is mortal, the best thing for him to do is to declare his independence of the herd, do what the herd wouldn't do and, as it were, preserve his dignity by such deeds. Here it is possible to hear an echo of Zarathustra.

> An insight has come to me: let Zarathustra speak not to the people but to companions. Zarathustra shall not become the shepherd and dog of a herd.
>
> To lure many away from the herd, for that I have come. The people and the herd shall be angry with me: Zarathustra wants to be called a robber by the shepherds.

---

[1] Albert Camus, *The Stranger* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 128-129.

[2] Camus, *Notebooks 1951-1959*, 74.

[3] Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1955), 69.

> Shepherds, I say; but they call themselves the good and the just. Shepherds, I say; but they call themselves believers in the true faith.
>
> Behold the good and the just! Whom do they hate most? The man who breaks their tables of values, the breaker, the lawbreaker; yet he is the creator.
>
> Behold the believers of all faiths! Whom do they hate most? The man who breaks their tables of values, the breaker, the lawbreaker; yet he is the creator.[1]

In general, therefore, it is possible to talk about the influence of earlier existentialist philosophers on Camus. Nevertheless, he has his own existentialist ideas even as young as nineteen.

> Camus made stray notes at this time which would reflect on his later work: "Should one accept life as it is? That would be stupid, but how to do otherwise? … Should one accept the human condition? On the contrary, I think revolt is part of human nature. … Whether one accepts or revolts, one is confronting life."[2]

Considering the above point, together with his experiences of childhood and adolescence, it could be argued that Camus derives his philosophy basically not from theory but from life. And almost all the notable events and experiences in his life, as well as his beliefs and views, find an echo in his works. For example, his short affair with the French Communist Party and then the Resistance movement he joins and his hard work in the movement make him experience a revolt in actual life and he takes up revolt as a major topic in *The Rebel*. Also, apart from setting up and directing The Workers' Theatre in Algeria in the 1930's, he writes and directs various plays later, when in Paris and he does so with great pleasure because the theatre is one of the rare places where he is perfectly happy. In other words, the theatre is a place where he can set aside both life and his identity and turn into a different person. There he experiences a

---

[1] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 23.

[2] Todd, *A Life*, 21.

Heideggerian 'inauthenticity' and displays a character similar to the Actor he describes in *The Myth of Sisyphus.*

Camus has common features with Don Juan in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Camus is, in fact, Don Juan himself. He goes from lover to lover because according to him, different women offer him different sensual and spiritual pleasures. When he is with them, he not only forgets about his pains and problems which disturb him when he is by himself but he also enjoys his freedom. Don Juan resembles Camus in his endless interest in women. He forgets about his mortality when he has affairs with women. Don Juan believes that devoting all your love to a single person has perishing effects on both parties. Each new affair, on the other hand, is like a gift given to a new woman and a new exploration which lets one forget one's fate.

> If it were sufficient to love, things would be too easy. The more one loves, the stronger the absurd grows. It is not through lack of love that Don Juan goes from woman to woman. … it is indeed because he loves them with the same passion and each time with his whole self that he must repeat his gift and his profound quest.[1]

And Camus explains Don Juan's—and most probably his own—insatiability by saying, "If he leaves a woman it is not absolutely because he has ceased to desire her. A beautiful woman is always desirable. But he desires another, and no, it is not the same thing."[2]

Finally, Camus is Sisyphus. Sisyphus's act of pushing the rock uphill without a sign of becoming fed up is symbolic of the human condition. He pushes it up knowing that it will roll down each single time. The same is true for Camus as he continues living and embracing life with all that it has to offer although he knows that this is futile and that he will not be able to escape mortality. All these are very existential approaches on Camus's side, and all are derived from life itself.

In an essay in *L'Été*, he explains some of his reasons why he deals with existentialism—albeit the fact that he does not call himself an existentialist.

---

[1] Camus, *The Myth*, 51.

[2] Ibid., 53.

> I do not believe firmly enough in reason to subscribe to the idea of progress or some philosophy of history. But at least I believe that men have not ceased to make progress in becoming aware of their own situation. We have not risen above our common condition, but we understand it better. We know that we are the victims of a dilemma; that we must refuse to accept it and do what is necessary to eradicate it. Our task as men is to find some formulas to pacify the great anguish of human kind. We must put together what has been torn apart, make justice a possibility in an obviously unjust world, render happiness meaningful to peoples poisoned by the sufferings of our age. This is of course a superhuman task, yet one simply calls 'superhuman' those tasks which men take a very long time to accomplish.[1]

Here Camus refers to the oppression and injustice people in Europe and Africa suffer from in the first half of the 20th century. In *The Rebel*, *The Plague* and *Resistance, Rebellion and Death*, he carries his existentialism, which was formerly on an individualistic ground, to a social arena and he declares that he can accept neither the Nazi nor the Communist policies. The reason is that the former curtails individual freedom for the sake of the so-called freedom of a whole nation and the latter enslaves people with a staggering promise that one day everyone will be free. Initially, he is a sympathiser of communism but over time he loses faith in it. Along with the policy of the French Communist Party (PCF), the operations of the socialist or communist governments in Russia and Hungary terrify him. Camus makes his feelings clear when he writes about Hungary:

> Foreign tanks, police, twenty-year-old girls hanged, committees of workers decapitated and gagged, scaffolds, writers deported and imprisoned, the lying press, camps, censorship, judges arrested, criminals legislating, and the scaffold again—is this socialism, the great celebration of liberty and justice?[2]

He protests that torture or executions are never of any use. If mankind wants to improve, this will be possible only by living in truth and freedom.

---

[1] Albert Camus, *Caligula* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1965), 15.

[2] Camus, *Resistance*, 158.

> Alas, the people themselves spoke up! They began to talk in Berlin, in Czechoslovakia, in Poznan, and eventually in Budapest. All at once, everywhere, intellectuals tore off their gags. And together, with a single voice, they said that instead of progress there was regression, that the killings had been useless, the deportations useless, the enslavements useless, and that henceforth, to be sure of making real progress, truth and liberty had to be granted to all.[1]

The practices of such governments disturb him so much that, despite his friendly disposition, Camus even quarrels with Merleau-Ponty for the latter's good-humoured support of communism after the Moscow trials, in which many leaders and supporters of the 1917 revolution are trialled and executed or get sent to concentration camps.

In short, communism or socialism is, for him, a doctrine that has no respect for man and that denies him justice and liberty. In an article he writes for *Combat*, he defines these two concepts as

> We shall call … justice a social state in which each individual receives every opportunity at the start, and in which the country's majority is not held in abject conditions by a privileged minority. And we shall call liberty a political climate in which the human being is respected for what he is as well as for what he expresses. (*Com.*1 October 1944,1)[2]

And regarding the latter definition on an individualistic scale, its ultimate reflection can be found in *The Stranger.*

Another hard fact of life that directs Camus into existentialism is capital punishment. He writes on death toll and denounces it in many of his works and elaborates on it especially in *Reflections on the Guillotine*. Having great esteem for human life, Camus affirms that death penalty fails to intimidate many. That means, in their case, it cannot accomplish its function of preventing crimes. But then, a punishment that does not prevent wrongdoing can only be called the

---

[1] Ibid., 159.

[2] Parker, *The Artist*, 90-91.

revenge of a society on those who break the law. He disputes that if this is the situation that human beings put other human beings into, then there are necessarily no values or morals in a society. In that case, what is the place and the situation of the human being, he asks. Why is he born if he is going to be killed? Are there any criteria to grab onto? Camus makes clear why he opposes death penalty: First of all, it repudiates human identity and dignity by putting a person under the control of others. Secondly, the waiting period before the execution is a psychological torture, and is "worse than hell". That's why religious faith won't help the condemned person. If the hell in the world is worse than the hell in the other world, the threat of being sent down to hell after death will not affect a convict. And lastly, if man can kill man, then the convict loses faith in man, in the society or in the king that punishes him in the name of God. As a result, if God inflicts such pain on him, he loses faith both in religion and in mankind. In the end, nothing is gained but many values are lost or even destroyed.

> In fact, the supreme punishment has always been, throughout the ages, a religious penalty. Inflicted in the name of the king, God's representative on earth, or by priests or in the name of society considered as a sacred body, it denies, not only human solidarity, but the guilty man's membership in the divine community, the only thing that can give him life. Life on earth is taken from him, to be sure, but his chance of making amends is left him. The real judgement is not pronounced: it will be in the other world. Only religious values, and especially belief in eternal life, can therefore serve as a basis for the supreme punishment because, according to their own logic, they keep it from being definitive and irreparable. Consequently, it is justified only insofar as it is not supreme.[1]

Reflections on the Guillotine serves Camus as a field in which he expresses his thoughts on life and death comprehensively. Besides, the points of discussion in the book are handled in *The Stranger*, where it is as though Meursault experiences them all and even acts them out.

> Every criminal acquits himself before he is judged. He considers himself, if not within his right, at least excused by circumstances. He does not think

[1] Camus, *Resistance*, 222-223.

> or foresee; when he thinks, it is to foresee that he will be forgiven altogether or in part. How could he fear what he considers highly improbable? He will fear death after the verdict but not before the crime.[1]

And then he mentions a paradox.

> If the instinct to live is fundamental, it is no more so than another instinct of which the academic psychologists do not speak: the death instinct, which at certain moments calls for the destruction of oneself and of others. It is probable that the desire to kill often coincides with the desire to die or to annihilate oneself: Thus, the instinct for self-preservation is matched, in variable proportions, by the instinct for destruction. The latter is the only way of explaining altogether the various perversions which, from alcoholism to drugs, lead an individual to his death while he knows full well what is happening. Man wants to live, but it is useless to hope that this desire will dictate all his actions. He also wants to be nothing; he wants the irreparable, and death for its own sake.[2]

Despite admitting the paradox, however, Camus insists on choosing life and he sees capital punishment as a kind of injustice and terror, either of which he cannot stand. This, added to his dread of death and his constant pursuit of freedom, gives him a strong feeling of revolt. He advocates that one should rebel no matter in what condition one comes face to face with death, and revolt as a prominent element of existentialism appears in his major works.

In fact, Camus says he is not the only one who wants to revolt in order to compensate for the absurdity and injustice of the human condition. On being asked in an interview whether people will imitate him in rebelling against the world or whether this revolt will be limited to only a few wise men, Camus answers

> Is that position really so special? And do not the men of today, threatened and yet resisting, live in this manner? We stifle and yet survive, we think we are dying of grief and yet life wins out. The men of our time, whom we

[1] Ibid., 191.

[2] Ibid., 191-192.

> encounter in the streets, show in their faces that they know. The only difference is that some of them show more courage. Besides, we have no choice. It is either that or nihilism.[1]

Although Camus's name is seen side by side with Sartre's when existentialism is discussed, Camus is not the same as Sartre in his stance in existentialism. For Sartre, it is indubitable that existence precedes essence. He argues that man creates a character for himself rather than being born with a predetermined one. He says that the meaning of the title of his essay *Existentialism is a Humanism* is that man is the only law-maker and thus, he will decide for himself in his forlornness.

> Dostoievsky (sic) said, "If God didn't exist, everything would be possible." That is the very starting point of existentialism. Indeed, everything is permissible if God does not exist, and as a result man is forlorn, because neither within him nor without does he find anything to cling to. He can't start making excuses for himself.[2]

And man's freedom is inseparable from him.

> On the other hand, if God does not exist, we find no values or commands to turn to, which legitimize our conduct. So, in the bright realm of values, we have no excuse behind us, nor justification before us. We are alone, with no excuses. That is the idea I shall try to convey when I say that man is condemned to be free.[3]

Sartre's 'man' is "not what he is and he is what he is not." That is, man is in fact authentic in defining his character but he pretends that he is not by fleeing into bad faith. He assumes a hypocritical social role through bad faith in order to escape responsibilities. The statement may also mean that man is in an incessant process of making himself and that the change continues until his death. Sartre sees man in the centre of the world, which he is thrown onto.

---

[1] Ibid., 246-247.

[2] Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, 22.

[3] Ibid., 23.

Camus places man into the centre of the world, too. However, he deals with man and his condition somehow differently. In the case of freedom, Camus holds that an artist cannot stand aside and enjoy his own freedom but that it is his duty or responsibility to make others aware of their freedom and defend it in any case and under any circumstance. This is the viewpoint of a moralist and it cannot be expected to be the same as Sartre's. Camus is definitely an advocate of freedom; still, he finds the kind of freedom that Sartre suggests rather too limitless. In his review of *The Wall (Le Mur)*, Sartre's volume of short stories, he says,

> In M. Sartre's works there is a certain taste for impotence, in the broad sense of the word as well as in the physiological sense, which compels him to take characters who have reached their farthest limits and who stumble against an absurdity that they cannot go beyond. It is with their own lives that they collide, and, if I dare say so, through an excess of freedom. These beings remain without attachments, without principles, without any guide line, free to the point of being torn apart by their very freedom, deaf to the appeal of either action or creation.[1]

Hence, freedom is a must but excessive freedom is far from being beneficial. Moreover, Camus does not agree with Sartre in the latter's view that existence precedes essence. He makes a note of it in his *Notebooks.*

> Two common errors: existence precedes essence or essence existence. Both march and rise with the same step.[2]

The conclusion driven from this comment seems to be that man *is* and he *evolves* at the same time. Giving precedence to either one might impair man's abilities and dignity. Indeed, Camus has great respect for man and human life and he demands that man lead his life to the most. Yet, this does not necessarily mean an Epicurean style of enjoying life. He explains that the 'aware' man rejoices in each successive present moment as part of his revolt against a meaningless and finite existence.

---

[1] Parker, *The Artist*, 161.

[2] Camus, *Notebooks 1951-1959*, 67.

Revolt itself becomes the agent of joy. It is the feeling of "Yes, death hovers above me but it cannot threaten me. I am aware of it but I still enjoy my time on earth and live through my life". This may be ironic as a matter of fact, because whatever attitude one may adopt towards death, death cannot be evaded. But then, one who thinks and revolts in such a manner is an 'absurd' man who believes in what he is doing.

Camus himself is well aware of "each successive present moment" in the existentialist stance. When he visits some ruins during a trip to Italy, for example, he senses that love of the future causes heartbreak. Man desires to live eternally but he cannot do so and the idea of death lurks in his thoughts. But the point is that Camus describes it so softly in his *Notebooks* that the reader feels sorrow but not despair. It is a most optimistic approach to a crucial issue.

It is true that existentialism is often criticised for being a pessimistic movement and Camus and Sartre get their shares out of this accusation, too. Both, however, refuse being pessimists and they appear to have good reason for the rejection.

Camus answers those who call him a pessimist as opposed to the Christians and Marxists, who are supposedly optimists. He makes clear that he is indeed more optimistic than they are.

> By what right, moreover, could a Christian or a Marxist accuse me, for example, of pessimism? I was not the one to invent the misery of the human being or the terrifying formulas of divine malediction. I was not the one to shout *Nemo bonus* or the damnation of unbaptized children. I was not the one who said that man was incapable of saving himself by his own means and that in the depths of his degradation his only hope was in the grace of God. And as for the famous Marxist optimism! No one has carried distrust of man further, and ultimately the economic fatalities of this universe seem more terrible than divine whims.
>
> **...**

> This means that the words "pessimism" and "optimism" need to be clearly defined and that, until we can do so, we must pay attention to what unites us rather than to what separates us.[1]

His optimism and positive thinking, in fact, calls Christians to unite with him and with the people who think like him so that they might make the world a better place.

> But it is also true that I, and a few others, know what must be done, if not to reduce evil, at least not to add to it. Perhaps we cannot prevent this world from being a world in which children are tortured. But we can reduce the number of tortured children. And if you don't help us, who else in the world can help us do this?[2]

Camus argues strongly that he is an optimist, but about his stance concerning being an existentialist, Camus asserts firmly that he is not. In the first place, it may be that Camus sees his way of thinking to be different from that of Sartre. He does not talk about a "for-itself" or an "in-itself". He does not mention concepts such as facticity or transcendence. He does not argue that man is responsible for all the things that he is and he is not. But much more importantly, he may not want to share the same philosophy with Sartre for political, as well as for personal reasons. Particularly after their split in the 1940's and onwards, Camus does not want anything in common with his old friend. Not only do they have opposite political views but Camus has also been seriously hurt by Sartre's criticism of *The Rebel.* When he makes a trip to South America to give speeches, he receives a very warm welcome and enjoys being a celebrity but he is very much annoyed when he is announced as "existentialism's number-two man". He feels humiliated for being called "number-two" after Sartre. Hence, he takes every opportunity to declare that he is not an existentialist. In 1946, he states in a letter that he writes to the editor of *La Nef* that "The only book of ideas I have ever written, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* was directed precisely against the existentialist philosophers."[3]

---

[1] Camus, *Resistance*, 72-73.

[2] Ibid., 73.

[3] Parker, *The Artist*, 111.

He repeats his rejection during his visit to Stockholm to receive the Nobel Prize that he is awarded with. There some university students ask him whether he is for or against existentialism and his reply is,

> 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.[1]

Camus cannot be contented with these rejections but wants to proclaim his opinion about Sartre and his political attitude. In *The Fall*, he portrays Clamence as a base character who tries to share his personal guilt with others in order to free himself from such a burden and who declares himself to be a "judge-penitent" for that purpose. In fact, Clamence is Sartre. Camus criticises the Sartrean existentialism for it leads people into the slavery of Communism instead of freedom. And by depicting Sartre as a devilish character, Camus wants to take revenge of Sartre's disparagement of *The Rebel*.

Nevertheless, Camus has an existentialist view of his own. Necessarily, his focus is on man, on man's relationship with the world and his destiny in the absurdity of his life. To be brief, whether Camus accepts or rejects being an existentialist, his works are heavily loaded with existentialist characteristics. They also serve the argument that existentialism is not egoistic. On the contrary, taking individualism, i.e. man, as the starting point, it is a movement that proceeds into universality. Camus's actor in *The Myth of Sisyphus,* for example, identifies with the characters of different ages in history. He embraces them all. In *A Happy Death,* the change of seasons is given elaborately, like paintings of beautiful landscapes. This reflects love that man feels for everything around him, thus, for life itself. In *The Plague,* plague symbolizes all the evils that threaten humanity, not just one individual. And the people in Oran develop a deep love for one another, cling to one another and intensely miss the ones that are away from them in this period of disaster. A similar kind of universality is seen in other existentialist philosophers' works as well as those of writers whose works display existentialist features. Nietzsche's Zarathustra, a universal character who preaches wisdom and justice, is a case in point. And Dostoevsky's *The Devils,* or

[1] Todd, *A Life*, 379.

The Possessed, portrays Kirillov, who wants to commit suicide to make all humanity become conscious of their potential freedom.

Existentialism as a philosophical movement usually does not remain alone but it is intruded by nihilism. As a result, it is possible to encounter in Camus's works some signs of nihilism whose roots go down to Nietzsche, if not to Turgenev, in whose novel, *Fathers and Sons*, the origins of the movement appear.

Nietzsche sees much decay in traditional beliefs, views and values and he holds that the decay starts during Renaissance. In *The Will to Power*, he argues that Renaissance is a period in which nothing is collected, accumulated or set aside but that it proves to be a time when all values are wasted. A similar case is seen in reformation. In the reformation period, man is after his freedom and the popular motto is "Everybody is his own priest", which inevitably starts decadence in religious faith. Neither is Nietzsche's own time any different. Indeed, he finds his era to be a time of uncertainty and disintegration with a treacherous future. His is an age of experiments but these experiments are conducted so clumsily and unsuccessfully, he claims, that almost all of them fail, creating not only an atmosphere of decay but also contempt for man.

However, Nietzsche attributes the advent of nihilism not to social distress, scientific failures or psychological degeneration but to Christianity. Christian morality grants man an absolute value and teaches that God is perfect. On the other hand, Nietzsche argues that it is man who invents deity with the purpose of believing in his own value. But a time certainly comes when man begins to question values and asks "Why?"—and he has no answer. Nihilism makes itself felt strongly because there appears to be no meaning, no value and no purpose in the world. This is a time of gaining awareness.

> What has happened at bottom? The feeling of valuelessness was reached with the realization that the overall character of existence may not be interpreted by means of the concept of "aim", the concept of "unity", or the concept of "truth". Existence has no goal or end; any comprehensive unity in the plurality of events is lacking: the character of existence is not "true," is *false.* One simply lacks any reason for convincing oneself that there is a *true* world. Briefly: the categories "aim", "unity", "being" which

> we used to project some value into the world—we *pull out* again; so the world looks *valueless.*[1]

In such a situation, people do not want any more to make moral interpretations of the world and they try to avoid all motives that may direct them into conforming to any ethical or religious rule or law. The reason is that faith constrains the concept of existence. For example, in the face of faith, man cannot obtain the freedom of using his will power, which jeopardizes his self-respect and dignity. Being a believer means being dependent. He says in *The Antichrist,*

> … Men of conviction are not worthy of the least consideration in fundamental questions of value and disvalue. Convictions are prisons. … Freedom from all kinds of convictions, to be able to see freely, is part of strength. … Conversely, the need for faith, for some kind of unconditional Yes and No, this Carlylism, if you will pardon this expression, is a need born of *weakness.* The man of faith, the "believer" of every kind, is necessarily a dependent man—one who cannot posit *himself* as an end, one who cannot posit any end at all by himself. … The believer is not free to have any conscience at all for questions of "true" and "untrue"; to have integrity on *this* point would at once destroy him.[2]

In brief, a believer is weak and he cannot question anything. Contrarily, a non-believer has both power and freedom to question and deny convictions or beliefs. According to Nietzsche, nihilism is "an ideal of the highest degree of powerfulness of the spirit, the over-richest life—partly destructive, partly ironic."[3]

One can't help but agree with Nietzsche. Nihilism is destructive in the sense that it kills God, and with Him, all kinds of religious faith, not to mention 'values'; moreover, it is ironic because it exhibits the vain struggle of man against his destiny. Now that values which were attributed to things according to science and religion are knocked down, man needs, in this struggle, to look outside these concepts if he wants to construct new values. Unfortunately, this is not so easy. On losing faith in the existing values, Nietzsche claims, man becomes either a

---

[1] Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 13.

[2] Walter Kaufmann, *Discovering the Mind* Vol. 2 (USA: Mc Graw-Hill Book Company, 1980), 126-127.

[3] Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 13.

passive nihilist who has grown tired of life and the world, or an active nihilist who wants to obliterate any remaining values around him. The only type of nihilist who can construct new values comes out of the latter group, and that rarely, by judging and evaluating himself. Kuçuradi says in *Nietzsche ve İnsan* that such a person eventually learns not to reject everything. But this does not indicate that he agrees with everything. He finds a way in between and strips himself out of his nihilism. He gets enough discretion to say "No," when it is necessary to do so. Such ability renders him a liberated man. Camus's 'stranger' is an example of this latter type. Initially, he is a nihilist in the sense that he rejects faith in any religion; neither do social norms mean anything to him. One might say that his rebellion is partly concealed in his extreme alienation. After he commits a murder and is taken to trial, he does not care what happens there. He is not interested in the society, its values or its pressure on himself. Nor does he want to belong to it. Reality dawns on him only when he is sentenced to death. Now he begins to see life as something worthwhile and the world as a place that is hard to leave. In other words, he gains some values that add meaning to his life. He does not necessarily embrace everything: he still has no religious faith. But he definitely says "Yes," to life and "No!" to death while insisting on remaining separate from the society, or Nietzsche's "herd"—this time having gained awareness.

Nietzsche complains that there is a dominant "herd instinct" in the society and he despises the society for it. As he defines it, the "herd" is "the *sum of zeroes*—where every zero has "equal rights", where "it is virtuous to be zero". The members of the herd strongly support one another. They have their own rules and values, which, for Nietzsche add up to zero, and they have a collective power that is created as a result of their collective behaviour. Nietzsche might be implying that anyone who dare stay outside the herd may gain a certain kind of 'value' that the herd may subconsciously grow envious for lacking. Thus, such a person becomes a target of attack, as in the case of Meursault, 'the stranger'.

Naturally enough, the members of the herd are scared of nihilism because nihilism indicates separation from the herd and deterioration in the strength of the herd. Therefore, the members seek shelter in a religious belief or another concept that is regarded 'sacred'. One may gather from Nietzsche's attitude that, after all, a herd is simply a herd. It cannot survive on its own, without guidance or being devoid of some authority that it can turn to in case of necessity.

However, if man has killed God, he needs no guide in life except for his own self, Nietzsche holds. Hence, nihilism is nothing to be evaded. On the contrary, it is a kind of philosophy that needs to be supported.

Although Camus is not an advocate of nihilism, he appreciates Nietzsche's approach to the movement. In *The Rebel,* he discusses Nietzsche and nihilism and comments on him.

> … He diagnosed in himself, and in others, the inability to believe and the disappearance of the primitive foundation of all faith—namely, the belief in life. The "can one live as a rebel?" became with him "can one live believing in nothing?" His reply is affirmative. Yes, if one creates a system out of absence of faith, if one accepts the final consequences of nihilism…
> …
> According to Nietzsche, he who wants to be a creator of good or of evil must first of all destroy all values. "Thus the supreme evil becomes part of the supreme good, but the supreme good is creative."[1]
> …
> The world continues on its course at random and there is nothing final about it. Thus God is useless, since He wants nothing in particular.[2]

Camus's appreciation of Nietzsche may in part lie in the fact that he himself is also a disbeliever and that he and Nietzsche have similar views on matters concerning religion and faith. There are cases in which these overlap. For example, when Camus comments on Nietzsche's suggestion as to what man needs to do after God is dead, he almost specifies his own views.

> … Since the salvation of man is not achieved in God, it must be achieved on earth. Since the world has no direction, man, from the moment he accepts this, must give it one that will eventually lead to a superior type of humanity. Nietzsche laid claim to the direction of the future of the human race. "The task of governing the world is going to fall to our lot."[3]

[1] Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (New York: Alfred. A. Knopf, 1967), 66.

[2] Ibid., 67-68.

[3] Ibid., 77-78.

In fact, nihilism is influential in Camus's youth, as a philosophical and literary movement. It is only natural, therefore, that he studies it in his works. Apart from *A Happy Death*, *The Stranger* and *The Fall*, where the heroes are nihilists at least for some time in their lives, *The Rebel*, his notorious work, deals with nihilism as a historical fact. There he implies that nihilism produces a negative effect on man in that it suggests no principle of action. It merely opens up some new space for constructing a new world. The problem is that if man defies all values and ideologies, it may be difficult to find a re-starting point. He also states that the concept of nihilism changes as time passes. Present nihilists are not romantic heroes who think of committing suicide but hardened people who are marked by their indifferent attitude and "ironical detachment". Indeed, Meursault in *The Stranger* and Clamence in *The Fall* set examples of them. Camus studies nihilism in his articles, too. In *Pessimism and Courage*, an article he writes for *Combat* in September 1945, he claims that nihilism has diffused into the epoch.

> … If the epoch has suffered from nihilism, we cannot remain ignorant of nihilism and still achieve the moral code we need. No, everything is not summed up in negation and absurdity. We know this. But we must first posit negation and absurdity because they are what our generation has encountered and what we must take into account.[1]

So Camus feels the impact of nihilism and thinks that it needs to be dealt with. This attitude of his, however, often leads to misinterpretation that he is a nihilist, too. It may be true that what he lives through during the Second World War, the occupation of France by Germany and the combat against the enemy by means of underground journalism as well as his witnessing the oppression and injustice exerted by France in Algeria, as it were, force him to turn to nihilistic ideas. Camus can see that wars and oppression bring nothing but destruction and give way to nihilism at the end:

> Reprisals against civilian populations and the use of torture are crimes in which we are all involved. The fact that such things could take place among us is a humiliation we must henceforth face. Meanwhile, we must at least refuse to justify such methods, even on the score of efficacy. The moment they are justified, even indirectly, there are no more rules or

[1] Camus, *Resistance*, 59.

> values; all causes are equally good, and war without aims or laws sanctions the triumph of nihilism.[1]

He faces the same situation in the internal politics of France and feels frustrated:

> Most often the Right ratified, in the name of French honor, what was most opposed to that honor. And most often the Left, in the name of justice, excused what was an insult to any real justice. In this way the Right abandoned the monopoly of the moral reflex to the Left, which yielded to it the monopoly of the patriotic reflex. The country suffered doubly.[2]

However, he rejects being a nihilist. He knows for certain that there should be values in life and that they should be well-preserved. But at the same time he witnesses a loss of values not only in personal views but also in societies. As a moralist, therefore, he takes nihilistic ideas in order to ponder on them and to use them in his works.

Camus has good reason to reject nihilism because nihilism does not comply with his philosophy in the first place. To begin with, nihilism considers suicide to be legitimate. Camus, on the other hand, defends that suicide is spontaneously followed by murder; thus, murder becomes legitimate, too. This is a notion that he may never agree with. He criticizes nihilism sternly for it results in terrorism and in *The Rebel*, he explains how it happens:

> Nihilism, intimately involved with a frustrated religious movement, thus culminates in terrorism. In the universe of total negation, these young disciples try, with bombs, and revolvers and also with the courage with which they walk to the gallows, to escape from contradiction and to create the values they lack. Until their time, men died for what they knew, or for what they thought they knew. From their time on, it became the rather more difficult habit to sacrifice oneself for something about which one knew nothing, except that it was necessary to die so that it might exist.[3]

---

[1] Ibid., 114.

[2] Ibid., 117.

[3] Camus, *The Rebel*, 165-166.

Camus questions some Russian nihilists about the contradiction in their ideas. He finds it ironic that they value human life so much and see it as the sole value to be kept but then they see no problem if this sole value is taken away by means of murders.

> … For them, as for all rebels before them, murder is identified with suicide. A life is paid for by another life, and from these two sacrifices springs the promise of a value. Kaliayev, Voinarovsky, and the others believe in the equal value of human lives. Therefore they do not value any idea above human life, though they kill for the sake of ideas.[1]

Another point that bothers Camus about nihilism is that nihilism leads to a loss of virtues. Camus seeks a noble, virtuous and meaningful life in the sense that man maintains his dignity and human pride. Even when he gives signs of nihilism, Camus is not devoid of values and moral judgements that a nihilist is supposed not to have. On the contrary, he places man into the foreground and he has primary concerns that must be fulfilled for man's sake.

> … What is man? There I stop you, for we know. Man is that force which ultimately cancels all tyrants and gods. He is the force of evidence.[2]
> …
> … amid other great concepts—friendship … happiness, our desire for justice.[3]

As a matter of fact, Camus's opinion of nihilists is rather contemptuous. In his *Notebooks*, he writes, "Nihilism. Little demolishing dunces, contentious, thinking of everything in order to deny all, feeling nothing and relying on others—parties, leaders—to feel for them."[4]

Most of the ideas that Camus mentions on nihilism are not his own but reflections or reports from others. What Camus does is warn people against these ideas and try to replace nihilistic tendencies with a positive philosophy. When there is no

[1] Ibid., 169-170.

[2] Camus, *Resistance*, 14.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Camus, *Notebooks*, *1951-1959*, 71.

divine power to believe, man suffers from some type of despair. Deprived of an eternal source to support and sustain him, he finds himself in a spiritual void. He is stuck by a feeling of finitude. The merit, for Camus, is to get over this feeling by posing new values against nihilism and to lead the rest of one's life not in any way less earnestly or less wholeheartedly than before one has gained awareness.

> The struggle against nihilism was a battle against time; crying that time was too short was a waste of time, "But if we succeed during this time in defining what is opposed to nihilism, illustrate it, make others share it, then our chances of success will increase and we will gain more time." The true task of the artist, Camus insisted, was "to maintain amid outcries and violence our lucidity, our generosity and our will to live. …"[1]

His attempt to introduce a positive philosophy appears first on individual grounds in *The Myth of Sisyphus,* which will hereafter be shortly referred to as *The Myth*. He argues that discovering the 'absurd' cannot be an end in itself but that it is only a starting point. Camus wants to demonstrate its consequences and the ways of fighting it. Sisyphus has two choices in the face of his punishment: either to surrender to hopelessness or to survive by constructing new values in place of the ones that have been effaced. And he chooses the latter. Throughout the essay, Camus means to say that it is a wise act on the side of man if he manages to forget about suicide or a wish for an eternal life as both are vain. The former is a kind of submission and the latter is uncertain. The approach to be adopted is to hold fast on to what he has as a real value: his life. Life is the 'real' value because man has control over it and he can shape it the way he chooses.

Evidently, Camus's philosophy is a philosophy of survival; hence, his purpose is to show that nihilism can actually be converted into a positive concept. This proves to be possible by combining negation with a positive morality. And he approves of the "objective mind" which can combine the two.

> That objective mind would be right. For the coexistence, in certain minds, of a philosophy of negation and a positive morality illustrates, in fact, the great problem that is painfully disturbing the whole epoch. In a word, it is a problem of civilization, and it is essential for us to know whether man,

[1] Parker, *The Artist*, 118.

> without the help either of the eternal or of rationalistic thought, can unaided create his own values.[1]

Camus seems to be right in this view because as he reports from Nietzsche, "A nihilist is not one who believes in nothing, but one who does not believe in what exists."[2]

Thus, there is the possibility that he can construct or form new values depending on his own mind rather than borrowing them from the outside.

Necessarily, the values that one person depends on may not be so reliable for another. What criteria can be set so that they will be readily accepted by all without a dispute? How far is it possible for man to know about himself, the world and the universe? Existentialism attempts to answer these problematics together with others such as whether man is indeed a creator since he has "killed" God or whether he is simply a tragic and absurd hero in the world. While doing so, existentialism runs hand in hand and sometimes overlaps with another philosophical movement—skepticism.

Historically, skepticism starts with the question whether virtue can be taught. Plato employs epistemological scepticism, asking questions to do with knowledge and the act of knowing such as "How do we know?" and "How can we be sure?" in the hope that these will lead to truth. Moral skepticism that Camus deals with also dates back to antique philosophy. Pyrrhons such as Sextus Empiricus and Philo of Larissa argue that a certain thing may appear good or right to some people while for others it may be bad or wrong. Hence, values and justifications change from person to person. In other words, they are subjective and they are built on free choice so there is no solid reason why people will trust the opinions of others over their own. Consequently, there cannot be a moral judgement that is universally acceptable and in that case the best thing to do is to suspend judgement. Descartes says in 17th century that in old age man needs to reject all the prejudices he got when he was young because these interfere with wisdom. Then man needs to rebuild the world. Descartes' rebuilding process takes place via the 'Cogito Argument'. And three centuries later, Camus's Meursault rebuilds

---

[1] Camus, *Resistance*, 58.

[2] Camus, *The Rebel*, 69.

the world, or rather, rediscovers life, through a 'non-religious revelation' in prison.

Therefore, despite the fact that skepticism goes through slight changes throughout philosophical eras, one opinion appears to have defied time and remained the same—that man is the measure of all things. Naturally, in the 20th century, when existentialism makes itself felt in its full force, man is still the measure of all things because the statement, per se, offers a very individualistic stance, which blends perfectly with existentialism.

To determine Camus's place in skepticism, one needs to consider him both in relation to some philosophers who he is influenced by and also individually, in his own distinct place.

Kierkegaard, 'the first existentialist', is one of the philosophers who exhibit traits of skepticism in their works. He is totally against the Platonic thesis that man is born bearing 'the truth' in himself and thus is "in possession of the key to the ultimate secrets".[1] He calls this claim 'Socratism' and defends the opposite.

> For Kierkegaard, the opposite of Socratism was Christianity—the claim that man is not complete, is not in the truth, but rather can attain truth only by being re-created, by being made into a New Being by Grace. Kierkegaard thought that Socratism was Sin, and that Sin was the attempt by Man to assume the role of God…[2]

Camus has views similar to those of Kierkegaard in that he also believes that it is not possible to obtain true knowledge and that man is incomplete. But unlike Kierkegaard, Camus knows no Grace to round man off. His man is doomed to remain incomplete.

> Of whom and of what indeed can I say: "I know that!" This heart within me I can feel, and I judge that it exists. This world I can touch, and I likewise judge that it exists. There ends all my knowledge, and the rest is construction. For if I try to seize this self of which I feel sure, if I try to

[1] Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others* Vol 2 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 31.

[2] Ibid.

> define and summarize it, it is nothing but water slipping through my fingers. I can sketch one by one all the aspects it is able to assume … But aspects cannot be added up. 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.[1]

Kierkegaard also ponders on the issue of decision-making like the later existentialists, particularly like Camus and Sartre. For Kierkegaard, man is supposed to lead an ethical life in the sense that he obeys the social norms, but a time may come when he has to surpass social norms and 'leap into faith'; that's to say, he has to choose between the human-made social norms and God's orders. Such is the case with Abraham, Kierkegaard says, when he has to decide whether he should sacrifice his son, as God orders him to do, or not. His hesitation stems from the fact that sacrificing one's child is totally against moral principles. Kierkegaard holds that in such a situation, man should do what God tells him because God knows what is good and what is evil better than man does. Hence, man had better go for God and evade the moment of hesitation, which, if prolonged may take one to skepticism.

When Camus and Sartre need to make a preference between 'God and the individual' or 'the society and the individual', however, they always vote for the latter, which is unthinkable for Kierkegaard. Camus and Sartre "kill God" and treat the individual as the primary being since they have been influenced by Nietzsche in their skepticism.

Indeed, Nietzsche's works are overshadowed with skepticism and his influence is obvious on Camus. Nietzsche thinks that the developments in science have shattered people's beliefs in old values. So when he declares God "dead", he means that so many things that were taken as absolutes in the past, like Platonic forms, divine will or reason are indeed not absolute since they are created by humans. Neither is there any authority to dictate man how he ought to live. Heidegger, Camus and Sartre are in general biased against science as they have been influenced by Nietzsche. The problem, then, is that they cannot tell how far one can understand man or how far man can understand himself so that he

[1] Camus, *The Myth*, 14-15.

might proceed to know things other than himself. It follows that if this is the case with man, the things that constitute science cannot be reliable, either. There are no firm grounds to stand on and everything begins to fall apart.

Camus has the same attitude when he discusses science and knowledge in *The Myth*. Man thinks science is a safe source to get knowledge from but then he realizes that it is based on assumptions and hypotheses only.

> … And you give me the choice between a description that is sure but that teaches me nothing and hypotheses that claim to teach me but that are not sure.[1]

This means that, according to Camus, man is always at a distance from the world and even from his own self. Despite the absurdity of the world, man still insists on finding out its nature and meaning by using questionable rational and scientific criteria. In the same way, he makes justifications for his moral judgements but these do not rest on any solid moral knowledge. Such knowledge does not exist. If he never grows conscious of this situation, man keeps on setting his criteria. And contrarily, when he becomes aware of it, he has good reason to grow nihilistic or at least become skeptical.

Camus gives signs of skepticism at the very beginning of *The Myth*: "Galileo, who held a scientific truth of great importance, abjured it with the greatest ease as soon as it endangered his life. In a certain sense, he did right."[2]

In other words, when Galileo sees at the court that his life is at risk, he renounces his claim that the world rotates. Then, truth has only a relative value, which is prone to change even depending on the circumstances that a person is in. Not everyone, however, surrenders as easily as Galileo. The characters in Camus's works persist in keeping their opinions and making their decisions. In fact, the way they think and behave runs parallel to Nietzsche's philosophical views. Nietzsche says that Zarathustra is a skeptic and that freedom and strength are born out of skepticism. Anyone with a religious faith is not free. A believer is dependent and he cannot "posit *himself* as an end". Nor can he do the

[1] Ibid., 15.

[2] Ibid., 3.

same about any other thing by himself; he depends on an authority when he wants to take decisions. Only a skeptic would free himself of these bonds and would be able to act at will.

A similar skeptical approach exists in Camus's works. In *The Stranger*, Camus questions values through the acts of Meursault and claims that it is possible to argue that the moral behaviour which the society expects of Meursault does not bear any solid justification. Probably the 'correct' behaviour is what Meursault displays when his mother dies or when he loses his temper with the chaplain. To put it differently, moral values may change from person to person, from culture to culture or from era to era so they become disputable. Consequently, people's behaviour cannot, in fact, be judged or criticised.

Again, in *The Myth*, Sisyphus' values do not correspond with those of the Gods and he pays for this by receiving an eternal punishment. The punishment cannot be justified unless one assents to the idea that there may be some authority above man and that man cannot defy it. Concerning the four characters in the essay, namely, the actor, the conqueror, the creator and Don Juan, they are not to be appreciated or blamed for who they are and what they do. They decide for themselves and lead the lives that they choose. To quote Nietzsche, they "posit themselves as an end".

Deciding on one's own and seeing one's life as an end are two especially outstanding features of *A Happy Death* and *The Fall*. *A Happy Death* portrays Meursault, the hero, as a man who plans every step of his life so that he might lead a most fulfilling life completely free of care and embrace at the end the happiest death possible. From the very beginning, Meursault knows what he wants. "…I know what kind of life I'd have. I wouldn't make an experiment out of my life: I would *be* the experiment of my life."[1]

It is a clear example of positing one's life as an end. He murders Zagreus, a wealthy man, and gets his money to actualize his plans. He soon gets over the uneasiness that the murder gives him and never repents for his act. Meursault totally ignores the values of the society. He applies his own criteria and he obtains what he wants from life—and death.

[1] Albert Camus, *A Happy Death (*Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973), 32-33.

In *The Fall*, however, the hero is not as successful as Meursault in using his freedom to direct his own life. Camus presents a hero with a name that is extremely high-sounding and that makes religious connotations: Jean-Baptiste Clamence. In spite of the connotations his name may bring to mind, though, Clamence has no religious faith. He has a deep desire to win the adoration of others with his talk and behaviour—not for the purpose of being a perfect or ideal human being who is an obedient member of the society, but only for the sake of the feeling of bliss and satisfaction that being adored would bring. He is a hypocrite who, in fact, has no esteem for others. Soon, though, his desire to shape his own life using his free will is replaced with agony because, ironically, he cannot stand the stress of freedom.

> I didn't know that freedom is not a reward or a decoration that is celebrated with champagne. … Oh, no! It's a chore, on the contrary, and a long-distance race, quite solitary and very exhausting. No champagne, no friends raising their glasses as they look at you affectionately. Alone in a forbidding room, alone in the prisoner's box before the judges, and alone to decide in face of oneself or in the face of others' judgement. 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.[1]

Here Camus reminds one of Sartre's notions of freedom, viz., that man is thrown onto the world as the only person responsible for his future life but that he finds the amount of freedom in his hands too much and wants to find shelter in bad faith. Yet, from the skeptical point of view, Camus makes Clamence question values and discuss in detail who is in the right when setting values, the individual or the society, and to what extent. The clash of the individual with religion and the society stands as a distinct concern of his philosophy. And he argues that this is due to the lack of a firm basis to ground values on and that, consequently, every individual defines his own moral principles, which gives way to scepticism.

[1] Camus, *The Fall*, 97-98.

CHAPTER 5

THE PREDOMINANT THEMES IN CAMUS'S PHILOSOPHY

Despite the fact that Camus rejects being called an existentialist, certain themes that are predominant in his works place him into existentialist philosophy. Such themes as the absurd, suicide, death of God, the meaning of life, rebellion, freedom and alienation prove to be strongly interrelated so they will be studied in relation to one another as well as taken in their own stand.

5.1 The Absurd

The notion of the absurd that appears in Camus's works emerges earlier in the history of philosophy. According to Herbert Hochberg, in his article "Albert Camus and the Ethic of Absurdity", Camus's notion of the absurd might be understood by studying Plotinus' concept of "the One", or "the Good", as it is also referred to, representing the Absolute. The One stands for the first and simple principle on which everything else depends. Plotinus claims that everything is in need of something else in order to be explained. Therefore, all the explanatory principles need a higher-level and absolutely simple principle which can provide answers, or explanations, for all the rest. This is possible to attain with the One because the One is a kind of deity that includes everything in itself. However, not all difficulties are solved by reaching the One, or the Good. Now the question is how it happens that the Good can be a source of evil, too. Such a conflict leads to the rise of the absurd as well as the rise of a problem of personal freedom. Hochberg maintains that Camus wants to construct an ethic around the absurd and freedom by pursuing the same line of reasoning with that of Plotinus. This is true particularly in *The Myth*, in which Camus discusses the absurdity of man's condition and the problem of suicide that man is dragged into due to the absurd. Camus's aim is to point to the ways of fighting the absurd despite the existence of death in a world without God, and of using one's free will to avoid suicide.

All the same, Camus differs from Plotinus in certain respects. For Plotinus the One is a kind of God and people turn to it to flee the ordinary world. Camus, however, does not reach out for a spiritual world. The meaning he looks for is

supposed to be found—if ever—in this world. Another difference is that while Plotinus explains the presence of evil in the One as "non-being" or "the absence of goodness", evil according to Camus is death and it *does* exist in this world. Thus, an evil such as death cannot be called "non-being".

The concept of the absurd begins to appear in philosophy in the 19th. century. When Kierkagaard talks about the Christian concept of incarnations—such as the embodiment of God in Christ—as a paradox, he, consciously or not, points to the source of the absurd. He considers the concept to be paradoxical for the reason that it unites what is eternal and infinite with what is finite—human life. Another point that Kierkegaard puts forward is that man is sinful in that he keeps committing sins although he pays for them in his lifetime. Once again, then, something that is transcendental or that belongs to the religious realm becomes an issue of this world. Albeit the absence of the term 'absurd' at his time, Kierkegaard seems to indicate that the human condition itself is absurd. Therefore, the absurd is the union, or sometimes the clash, of opposing or inconsistent concepts or states of affairs. In time, Kierkegaard's viewpoint gains force and popularity among nihilists and existentialists and it proves to be quite close to Camus's view about the absurd.

Despite the fact that Camus thinks in a parallel manner with Kierkegaard concerning the absurd, he criticizes those who find refuge in escaping the absurd instead of defying it. And the ones he attacks in the first place are the existentialist philosophers including Kierkegaard. "Now, to limit myself to existential philosophies, I see that all of them without exception suggest escape."[1]

Camus proceeds, in *The Myth*, to give examples about the attitudes of two philosophers, Lev Chestov and Kierkegaard. In his book *Camus: a study*, Brian Masters says that Camus has no patience with thinkers who find an explanation for a world which is beyond the scope of human reason to comprehend and with those who either seem satisfied with the incomprehensibility of the world, or else identify it with God. In Camus's opinion, Kierkegaard and Chestov are examples of such philosophers.[2]

[1] Camus, *The Myth*, 24.

[2] Brian Masters, *Camus: a study* (Totawa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), 38.

Indeed, Camus criticizes Chestov because Chestov does not call the absurd, "the absurd", but "God". Paradoxically, Chestov turns to God simply to escape from the incoherence he thinks to exist in God. That is, he fails to understand the absurd so he concludes that it must be God. However, Camus thinks that if man integrates the absurd with God, like Chestov does, he causes the characteristics of the absurd, such as opposition or divorce, to disappear. In other words, the closer Chestov brings the absurd to God, the more tolerable it becomes. For Camus, this attitude is a leap, hence, an escape. Camus, however, is of the opinion that the absurd man does not want to leap, because he refuses to escape. Brian Masters states that Camus thinks that reason is all that man possesses to understand the world and his place within it, but that reason is not efficient enough to provide him with an answer. If that is the case, Camus thinks, man must be honest and recognize the limitations of human reason.[1]

Maurice Weyembergh has a similar line of thought when he states that Camus's concept of "philosophical suicide" aims at portraying the powerlessness of reason in its failure to explain and justify religious faith, which itself is irrational.[2]

In other words, Camus advises man to admit the existence of the absurd and get used to living with it. Masters adds that Camus's purpose in writing *The Myth* is to exclude the popular idea that it is reason that explains the world. Camus's thesis is that if one starts out with a philosophy which claims that the world lacks meaning, one may eventually end up finding a meaning and depth in it.

In this endeavour, he follows a train of thought resembling that of Nietzsche. George F. Sefler states that both Camus and Nietzsche focus on material existence and that they advocate that if man is to survive, he must accept and embrace life with all its dissonance—as Nietzsche puts it—and with its confused

---

[1] Ibid., 39.

[2] Maurice Weyembergh, «Absurde,» in *Dictionnaire Albert Camus,* 2009 ed. «C'est ce que Camus montre lorsq'il analyse dans *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* ce qu'il appelle le « suicide philosophique » : décrire l'impuissance de la raison à expliquer et trouver dans l'échec de l'explication rationelle la justification de la foi dans ce qui est irrationnel. »

and unachieved ends bringing about shattering consequences—as Camus comments on it.[1]

Indeed, Nietzsche says in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*,

> Behold, I teach you the overman. The overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the overman *shall be* the meaning of the earth! I beseech you, my brothers, *remain faithful to the earth*, and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes!
>
> …
>
> Once the sin against God was the greatest sin; but God died, and these sinners died with him. To sin against the earth is now the most dreadful thing, and to esteem the entrails of the unknowable higher than the meaning of the earth.[2]

In a similar manner, Meursault in *The Stranger* gets furious with the chaplain who visits him in his cell and who wants to console him by talking about the other world and God. Meursault believes that there is no other world to go to. What man has is this world and all there is in this world. Man should not be concerned about what is impossible to know, i.e. God, but about what he is already familiar with, i.e. the earth.

However, there are problems on earth, too and the most prominent one for Camus is the absurd. As a matter of fact, the notion of the absurd is prominent in Nietzsche's works, with his slogan "God is dead". If God is dead, there is nothing left to hold on to; hence, man's forlornness in the world and the absurd. In fact, Camus and Sartre are deeply influenced by this view and they display similar thoughts when they discuss the absurd. They both mention the inhospitability of the world in the face of human endeavours with its reticent attitude. Such an attitude is unfortunate as it does not lend any meaning, which gives rise to the absurd. According to Camus, the absurd is not a concept that can be clarified in one single definition. It is a paradoxical condition that man

---

[1] George F. Sefler, "The Existential vs. the Absurd: The aesthetics of Nietzsche and Camus," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* Blackwell Publishing on behalf of The American Society for Aesthetics, Vol. 32, No. 3, 415-421, Spring 1974 [journal on-line]; available from http://www.jstor.org/stable/428426; Internet; accessed 22 October 2009.

[2] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 13.

finds himself in. The paradox comes from the fact that there are two parties which encounter and clash but which are most often disproportionate.

Olivier Todd states in *Albert Camus: A Life* that Camus uses the word "absurd" in different meanings such as "contradictory", "incomprehensible" or "impossible". Indeed, Camus defines or explains it in various manners and points at its source, especially in *The Myth* and *The Rebel*. In *The Myth*, he says

> The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world.[1]

and

> The absurd is not in man ... nor in the world, but in their presence together. ... it is the only bond uniting them.[2]

To put it differently, life offers no absolute meaning. Man craves for knowledge about the world but his questions on it remain unanswered. No Plotinian absolute exists to explain to him what he does not know. Between this yearning and the actual condition of the world, there is a gap that can never be filled. "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. This must not be forgotten."[3]

The world behaves unsympathetically and does not offer man anything to meet his needs. So man is led into discomfort because he cannot construct anything on the incomprehensible, that is, the world. This is both a skeptical and anti-religious view on Camus's side, as Arnaud Corbic comments.[4]

Camus repeats that the absurd does not lie in one single thing, fact or situation. It arises out of their "confrontation" or their unexpected clash. The clash is unexpected because these two things—like man and the world—seem, or thought out of habit, to exist in harmony. But in fact, they contradict each other. When

[1] Camus, *The Myth*, 21.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Arnaud Corbic, *Camus et l'homme sans Dieu* (Paris: Les Ėditions du Cerf, 2007), 61.

man realizes this, he also realizes suddenly that his situation is that of a stranger—and one with a limited time period in the world. On gaining the awareness that he does not really belong to the world and that he is there only temporarily, he does not any more want the coming of 'tomorrow' that he has depended on so deeply until then. He revolts against death and this revolt, again, is the absurd. What is more, living in absurdity, man is not happy because his desire for clarity and his wish to acquire knowledge is not fulfilled. "On this plane, at least, there is no happiness if I cannot know."[1]

Man is limited to the knowledge of his own existence only; that is the one and only certainty within his grasp. Science cannot be depended on in this respect as it is bound to disprove itself continuously. Besides, knowing himself teaches him nothing further. Man, therefore, remains an alien to himself and to the world.

> A stranger to myself and to the world, armed solely with a thought that negates itself as soon as it asserts, what is this condition in which I can have peace only by refusing to know and to live, in which the appetite for conquest bumps into walls that defy its assaults?[2]

One can hear Camus's cry of revolt in these lines. But it seems that beneath the revolt, there lies a suggestion of a way out of the absurd: it would be wise for man to give up the idea of learning about the world because it looks impossible. It may be hard to suppress the appetite to learn but it seems to be the only way to stand against the absurd, to find peace of mind and to go on living. Camus's suggestion is based on his observation of those who encounter the absurd and on their behaviour after the encounter.

> ... A man who has become conscious of the absurd is forever bound to it. A man devoid of hope and conscious of being so has ceased to belong to the future. That is natural. But it is just as natural that he should strive to escape the universe of which he is the creator.[3]

---

[1] Camus, *The Myth*, 16.

[2] Ibid., 15-16.

[3] Ibid., 24.

In his opinion, people who lose all hope due to the absurd but who never try to do anything about their lives create a desperate world for themselves. They advocate escapism, which is a despicable attitude for Camus. The merit lies, maintains Camus, not in fleeing but in keeping one's stance and struggling.

Camus holds that, apart from craving for knowledge, another reason to feel the absurd is the presence of the others. Camus borrows the idea from Sartre, for who the presence of the others is a disturbing feeling, specifically when they make one feel like an object rather than a subject.

> Men, too, secrete the inhuman. At certain moments of lucidity, the mechanical aspect of their gestures, their meaningless pantomime makes silly everything that surrounds them. A man is talking on the telephone behind a glass partition; you cannot hear him, but you see his incomprehensible dumb show; you wonder why he is alive. This discomfort in the face of man's own inhumanity, this incalculable tumble before the image of what we are, this "nausea," as a writer of today calls it, is also the absurd.[1]

Sometimes the absurd may even become a threat to people. In *Caligula*, the emperor symbolizes the absurd, which upsets people's lives. Upon Caligula's question why Cherea wants to kill him, Cherea answers,

> I've told you why; because I regard you as noxious, a constant menace. I like, and need, to feel secure. So do most men. They resent living in a world where the most preposterous fancy may at any moment become a reality, and the absurd transfix their lives, like a dagger in the heart. I feel as they do; I refuse to live in a topsy-turvy world. I want to know where I stand, and to stand secure.[2]

Depending on all these explications and elucidations, Camus states that the absurd is contradiction. "The absurd is, in itself, contradiction. It is contradictory

[1] Ibid., 11.

[2] Camus, *Caligula*, 76.

in its content because, in wanting to uphold life, it excludes all value judgements, when to live is, in itself, a value judgement."[1]

There is another contradiction in the absurd in that, despite his loneliness, man is not aware of it because it is as if he were sitting before a mirror.

> In a certain way, the absurd, which claims to express man in his solitude, really makes him live in front of a mirror. And then the initial anguish runs the risk of turning to comfort. The wound that is scratched with such solicitude ends by giving pleasure.[2]

As Camus implies above, self-images usually make people admire themselves rather than lead them to self-criticism which might help them improve themselves. Complacency is inevitable as a result.

Still, Camus talks about pleasure or complacency in a limited sense. He writes down in his diary his real feelings: "Laughable death at the end of a laughable life. Only the death of great hearts is not unjust".[3] These lines seem to focus on the absurdity of life and the futility that death brings. There is nothing meaningful in either one. They are both devoid of meaning so they cannot be explained and one's only reasonable reaction could be laughing at them. In *The Myth*, he discusses life, creation and art and says, "Explanation is useless."[4] Here his opinion is that art is not able to explain the absurdity man encounters in life. Every artist would describe life in his own manner in the artworks he creates so one would never know which of the descriptions reflected the actual meaning of life. And concerning death, in addition to being meaningless, death is unjust. Only if man can render life meaningful for himself, then can he lead a fulfilling life and hence, does not deplore death, that his death is "not unjust".

As time passes, Camus's attitude towards the absurd changes and he begins to consider it in a rather positive light. He states that although the absurd teaches us nothing, it is an ultimate form of progress. He might be contradicting himself

[1] Camus, *The Rebel*, 8.

[2] Ibid., 9.

[3] Camus, *Notebooks 1951-1959*, 18.

[4] Camus, *The Myth*, 70.

by saying that the absurd teaches us nothing because he believes that the absurd is not an end but the starting point of everything else to come. Besides, it is hard to imagine any progress without the process of learning being involved. Whatever his assertion may be, it is still a noteworthy shift on Camus's side from what is vain and contradictory to "an ultimate form of progress". Olivier Todd mentions that Camus thinks the absurd ends in an impasse (cul-de-sac) and that he wonders whether one can live with an impasse. Todd adds that Camus answers his own question in *The Plague* by distancing his characters "from the absurd in order to find a pathway to revolt". That is remarkable progress for people who start with nothing in their hands but the absurd. The reason why Camus attaches a wide variety of meanings and interpretations to the absurd is quite possibly that he has, as Todd maintains, a humanistic approach to the absurd; the world does not possess a pre-set meaning but it takes on the meanings given to it by different individuals.

Camus's changing attitude becomes clear in *Notebooks 1942-1951*, when he writes "The end of the movement of absurdity, of rebellion, etc. … is compassion … that is to say, in the last analysis, love."[1]

Camus defines the absurd in various ways but he is careful about not letting it be confused with the irrational. "The theme of the irrational, as it is conceived by the existentials (sic.), is reason becoming confused and escaping by negating itself. The absurd is lucid reason noting its limits."[2]

Despite the fact that Camus thinks the absurd ends in positive feelings in the last analysis, most of the time, he associates the absurd with boundaries. He uses the image of walls and calls them "absurd" to mean that absurdity confines man. In addition to imagery, concrete walls appear in the form of a prison in *The Stranger* and that of city walls in *The Plague.* The absurd is a confining concept because it does not permit exploration or investigation. It covers up what man desires to know so it needs to be defeated. Camus devotes great space in the majority of his works to show people how to do it. *The Myth*, for example, begins with a quotation from Pindar: "O my soul, do not aspire to immortal life, but exhaust the limits of the possible". He goes on to saying that the absurd is the first step in

[1] Albert Camus, *Notebooks 1942-1951* (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 103.

[2] Camus, *The Myth*, 36.

the direction of exploring and determining one's limits as a mortal. Facing the absurd opens up a new path before man instead of confining him and this is the path to revolt. Exhausting the limits of the possible should mean for Camus living to the fullest; that is to say, becoming aware of one's situation as a mortal but not despairing because of it. It is struggling against one's absurd situation by maintaining high spirits, making the most out of one's life and retaining one's dignity at the same time. Otherwise, a feeling of despair prevails and man is drifted around, aimless and desolate. Sometimes he feels oppressed or he turns completely indifferent, like in the case of Meursault at the beginning of *The Stranger*. Camus believes that both are detrimental to man's existence as a human and he argues that it is possible to convert the absurd into a positive concept.

> Thus I draw from the absurd three consequences, which are my revolt, my freedom and my passion. By the mere activity of consciousness I transform into a rule of life what was an invitation to death—and I refuse suicide.[1]

It is this consciousness that points to the value that man can find in life and, as a result, lets him cling to life as fast as he can. Indeed, Camus thinks that consciousness is of utter importance if man wants to attach any meaning to life. Man needs to remain conscious so that he can see and fight the absurd. Besides, these three consequences render the absurd, and thus life, possible to be coped with. Revolt enables man to reject any answer or reconciliation on the side of the absurd, which may be to the detriment of his struggle against it and it gives him a reason to continue living. Freedom reminds man that he is absolutely free to think and behave the way he chooses and it offers man the ability to act. And lastly, passion dictates him to pursue a life of rich and diverse experiences. Camus's purpose in scrutinizing the absurd may be to point out that, in fact, life bears a certain meaning and that that meaning is man. According to Corbic, Camus argues that the only foundation to place philosophy on is neither the

[1] Ibid., 47.

world, nor God, nor the absurd but man himself. Man is the sole meaning ever.[1] This is a thesis reasonable enough to make man shun the notion of suicide.

Since Camus rejects any transcendent absolute or God, he holds that what man possesses solely is the world that he lives in. That is the only source he can turn to when he looks for a value. And there, man is the only creature able to set up values.When this is the case, he has no reason to commit suicide or to kill anyone. Thus, he becomes universally appreciative of values; he does not think in individual terms; besides, he grows moral.

The absurd goes hand in hand with the concept of time. Before man gains consciousness of the absurd, he leads his life in a supposedly wider time span. As he goes on living in the present, he thinks in terms of the past and especially, of the future. But when he gains consciousness, the absurd shows him that there is no future because it is blocked by death. Man realizes that the future is "his worst enemy"[2] for with each passing day, it takes him closer to death. The body rejects being destroyed so it revolts. This is what Meursault experiences in *The Stranger* when he is sentenced to death. Also, this is the consciousness Sisyphus gains. In *The Stranger*, the world becomes more attractive, more valuable and more beautiful for Meursault on becoming conscious of the absurd. In *The Myth*, however, Camus states that growing conscious of the absurd makes the world remote to man. That is why he should struggle not to surrender.

Camus argues that once man is caught by the absurd, he loses hope and his bonds with the future are broken or, at least, weakened. The absurd men he portrays act in accordance with this view. In *The Myth*, Camus quotes Goethe: ""My field" said Goethe, "is time."" Goethe seems to mean that he is limited with his life span. Like a footballer in a football field, he has to play and act within a certain time span and within the boundaries of the world.

> What, in fact, is the absurd man? He, who, without negating it, does nothing for the eternal. Not that nostalgia is foreign to him. 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.

[1] Corbic, *Camus et l'homme sans Dieu*, 43.

[2] Camus, *The Myth*, 11.

> Assured of his temporally limited freedom, of his revolt devoid of future, and of his mortal consciousness, he lives out his adventure within the span of his lifetime.[1]

Since life is devoid of a future, Camus wants to deal with people who expand themselves and to employ thought that does not reach out to the future, or that does not rest on hope but that is "sterile" in itself. The reason is that "In the absurd world the value of a notion or of a life is measured by its sterility."[2]

The four characters in *The Myth*, namely Don Juan, the actor, the conqueror and the creator suit his purpose and appear as four examples of absurd life. As a matter of fact, the characters Camus creates in his works do not necessarily comply with the ideal principles of ethics. What they do to transcend absurdity may not be adequate to be acceptable in an idealistic sense. Each one has a different manner of enjoying life; thus, considering *The Myth*, Don Juan, the first absurd character, pursues the passions of the moment; the actor condenses hundreds of passionate lives into his career on stage; the conqueror, or the rebel, finds a channel for his energy in his political struggles and the fourth, the actor, creates entire worlds.

Don Juan, to start with, is a man who knows his limits. He is a *conscious* seducer in the sense that he focuses on and enjoys the moment he lives in. He is misunderstood and blamed by people as he is different from them. In their eyes, his difference lies in the fact that he is a seducer. But Camus asserts that he is different because he is conscious.

> But it would be just as great an error to make an immoralist of him. In this regard, he is "like everyone else": he has the moral code of his likes and dislikes. … He *is* an ordinary seducer. Except for the difference that he is conscious, and that is why he is absurd. A seducer who has become lucid will not change for all that. Only in novels does one change condition or become better.[3]

[1] Ibid., 49.

[2] Ibid., 51.

[3] Ibid., 53.

He has numerous affairs with women but his aim is not to make a collection of them because the act of collecting refers to the past and thus, is an indication of a bond with, the past, which he refuses to have. Nor does he think of the past so he has no regrets. This is significant because regret is the reflection of hope in the past. Don Juan does not nourish any dreams or hopes for the future, either. He is aware that there is no future so he does not commit himself to something non-existing. His sole aim is to live his present time and expand his feeling of satiety.

It is worth adding here that Camus thinks hope and the absurd are opposites and that whereas hope could be called 'deceitful', the absurd is 'honest' as it offers no reconciliation in another life. Corbic comments that hopelessness is always the result of a broken hope but that if one never hopes, there cannot be hopelessness, either.[1] Camus rejects hope because it indicates an escape from the absurd and consequently, he makes his heroes, including Don Juan, avoid it and survive in spite of it.

In Camus's opinion, it is a 'figurative' suicide if one becomes over-indulged in love, forgetting oneself in the love of a single person. He thinks such love is enslaving. Don Juan rejects a single love also because he finds it to be impoverishing, especially on the party being loved. For that reason, he goes for liberation in love and each beautiful woman is a new quest for him. If man is to perish at the end, he wants it to happen through love. Camus does not think that Don Juan is selfish because he enriches the lives of others as well as his own. Every new love is like a rebirth for him and he shares it with a woman. He plays the game according to its rules and thus, behaves nobly although this enrages the others who are not like him.

> … and how easy it is to understand why the men of God call down punishment on his head. He achieves a knowledge without illusions which negates everything they profess. Loving and possessing, conquering and consuming—that is his way of knowing. … He is their worst enemy to the extent that he is ignorant of them.[2]

---

[1] Corbic, *L'homme sans Dieu*, 55. « Le désespoir est toujours consécutif à un espoir déçu. Qui n'espère rien ne peut désespérer. »

Introducing the actor, Camus implies that there are occasions when the present time by itself proves to be insufficient for man. That is exactly the case for the actor. He 'exists' as long as he acts on the stage and he cannot help being forgotten the moment he stops acting. When he retires or dies, there is nothing concrete he can bequeath of himself. The actor, remarks Camus, may not be necessarily absurd as a person, but his fate is absurd. So he acts out hundreds of lives, moving across centuries. Camus resembles him to a traveller, only, the actor travels in time. Each role he plays takes him to a time span that he cannot cover in his actual life. Often his life intermingles with those he acts out. As the lives of the characters he plays are not his own, Camus calls the actor's state an "absurd miracle", meaning that the actor cannot understand how a character in a play feels unless he plays that part. The actor's job is "to apply himself wholeheartedly to being nothing or to being several".[1] And such is his revolt against "becoming nothing", or death: becoming several on the stage.

As to the conqueror, predominantly his life is full of actions but he is also a good thinker. He is actively involved in the time he lives in. He can see that since one cannot detach oneself from time, the only option is that one becomes fully indulged in it. He is aware of his intelligence, which serves as a light illuminating his life. He knows, too, that intelligence will vanish with death but knowing this fact gives him freedom. Death should be defied by revolting against it because it symbolizes injustice and "supreme abuse". He argues that one cannot attain the eternal as one is mortal and he opposes those who lead their lives believing in the eternal. Such an attitude means accepting fate and submitting to it without using one's free will. The conqueror claims that the meaning of the word 'to conquer' has changed. Conquering does not refer to geography only; rather it refers to the concept of conquering and, thus, expanding oneself.

> There is a reason why the word has changed in meaning and has ceased to signify the victorious general. The greatness has changed camp. It lies in protest… … Victory would be desirable. But there is but one victory, and it is eternal. That is the one I shall never have. That is where I stumble and cling. A revolution is always accomplished against

[2] Camus, *The Myth*, 55-56.

[1] Ibid., 59.

> the gods, beginning with the revolution of Prometheus, the first of modern conquerors. It is man's demands made against his fate;[1]

Therefore, while it used to mean geographical conquest, it now means a search for eternal victory, that is, challenging fate and defeating mortality. But the conqueror knows that this is impossible because man's demands and his fate clash. Then, the solution is man being his own end. "And he is his only end. If he aims to be something, it is in this life. ... Conquerors sometimes talk of vanquishing and overcoming. But it is always 'overcoming oneself' that they mean."[2]

The most absurd character of the four is the artist, or the creator. Camus quotes Nietzsche: "... we have art in order not to die of the truth."[3] These words may sound as though a work of art is a refuge from the stark reality concerning man's fate, and the artist is a refugee who finds harbour in his own creations. However, that is not what Camus means. Camus explains that the creator does not try to explicate or solve things. He stands at an indifferent distance, solely experiencing things and then describing them. Works of art provide him with a channel to reflect the sensations he derives from the universe. Besides, an absurd work of art should be created with the use of "lucid thought" but the thought should not be made prominent. It should not be felt by anyone other than the artist because his purpose is not to provide answers to questions about life. The absurd artist is supposed to 'know and live' rather than 'know and do'; in his case, 'living' should transcend 'doing'. Here, Camus must be saying that for the absurd artist living means experiencing in the sense that the artist is more of an observer than an executer. He accumulates all the experiences he goes through and his thought functions as intelligence in the artwork he produces, covering "with images what has no reason". The ambiguity of the world helps art to flourish. That's why "if the world were clear, art would not exist."[4] The creator's fight against the absurd is, then, to observe life and describe it and suggest some meaning to it through the images he uses in his creations although his purpose is not to preach via these works of art.

---

[1] Ibid., 65.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., 69.

[4] Ibid., 73.

As can be observed, in Camus's philosophy, the absurd does not appear only as a concept to be comprehended but it turns into a characteristic of his heroes. These heroes are people who have gained consciousness of the human condition and, as a result, who have no hope of a future but who do not deplore their situation, either. They all try to find happiness after they survive the death of God. Each seeks and finds a different way to make the best of his present time and rejects suicide. For the heroes, suicide is not a moral but a personal problem to be dealt with. Camus maintains that an individual usually discovers his absurd situation, or he gains his "authenticity", as Heidegger refers to it, when he is in an extreme situation. When there is stability in the social order or the daily routine, man does not question himself. But when he finds himself in an extreme situation, he also notices the absurdity and the feeling of futility he is surrounded by. This extremity brings him face to face with the absurd.

Encountering the absurd, however, endows man with qualities, as Camus asserts. While Camus is commenting on the absurd heroes that he demonstrates in *The Myth*, he says

> Thus, I ask of absurd creation what I required from thought—revolt, freedom and diversity. … In that daily effort in which intelligence and passion mingle and delight each other, the absurd man discovers a discipline that will make up the greatest of his strengths. The required diligence, that doggedness, and lucidity thus resemble the conqueror's attitude. To create is likewise to give a shape to one's fate. For all these characters, their work defines them at least as much as it is defined by them. The actor taught us this: there is no frontier between being and appearing.[1]

So the absurd man can see that there are things that are possible to be derived from the absurd, such as freedom, revolt and diversity. In a world devoid of a future, hope and meaning, he pursues freedom and sense. In fact, Camus's absurd heroes do not feel or act like pathetic victims. They strive to find their path in a world indifferent to their existence and they manage to find meaning by rebelling against their condition.

[1] Ibid., 86.

The absurd hero is strong, too. Man is a typical creature in the world because the absurd exists only for him. The other beings, living or non-living, do not experience a conflict with the world. Man appears to be the cause of his absurd situation as he is the only creature with cravings for knowledge and with expectations which are not fulfilled. The absurd hero needs strength to bear the disillusionment created by his dissatisfaction and, according to Camus, he finds it mainly in his freedom and revolt.

Freedom, then, is of extreme importance to an absurd hero. Camus discusses 'absurd freedom', which means believing that one absolutely has free will to do what one likes in life. One knows no God or authority; thinking the opposite would result in a kind of enigma.

> For in the presence of God there is less a problem of freedom than a problem of evil. You know the alternative: either we are not free and God the all-powerful is responsible for the evil. Or we are free and responsible but God is not all-powerful.[1]

Camus maintains that a return to consciousness, or gaining awareness of the absurd, is the first step towards absurd freedom. Man cannot achieve eternal freedom, that is, immortality but he has absolute freedom of action in this world. It is wise to deal with the present and this world as these are what man has at hand and what he can comprehend.

Because one of Camus's chief purposes is to preach the impropriety of committing suicide, his heroes, having faced the absurd, search for the rationale that will enable them resist the lure of suicide. When they manage to reject it, this accomplishment helps them acquire a new attitude towards life. Brian Masters says that *The Myth* is an intellectual examination of this attitude and of the state of mind which it means to dispel. He holds that *The Myth* is the description of a feeling whereas *The Stranger* is the story of that feeling.[2] And

---

[1] Ibid., 42.

[2] Masters, *Camus: a study*, 35.

Corbic says that in *The Myth*, Camus poses, explores, supports and then surpasses the absurd.[1]

Indeed, what Camus means by an absurd hero is best observed in Sisyphus himself. For him, Sisyphus is not one of the countless heroes in mythology. He is special because he has gained awareness. Suffering from his dreadful punishment of futile and hopeless labour which will continue forever, he gains lucidity of his situation and of the impact the punishment puts on him and he is deeply affected by it. Formerly, during his revolt against Gods, he is, in fact, not conscious of his fate. He does not realise that there is nothing he can do to change it and that he will be doomed forever. That is a time of ignorance for him so he is not absurd but simply an ordinary mortal. The punishment, however, makes him gain wisdom. Now he is fully aware of his fate but he faces it in contemplation. Camus finds Sisyphus to be "superior to his fate" and "stronger than his rock" each time he descends the mountain after his rock rolls back down. The reason is that each descent is yet another period of consciousness for him. When Camus describes the struggle of an absurd hero, it is as though he were describing the struggle of Sisyphus with the rock:

> I must admit that that struggle implies a total absence of hope (which has nothing to do with despair), a continual rejection (which must not be confused with renunciation), and a conscious dissatisfaction (which must not be compared to immature unrest).[2]

Sisyphus's case is tragic not only because he is condemned to suffer from a vain act but also because he has learned to take this fact as it is and to live with it calmly. Each single case in which he begins his struggle anew at the bottom of the mountain represents the three consequences Camus derives from the absurd; namely, revolt, freedom and passion. And finally, knowing his dreadful fate and agreeing to its infecundity as well as its horror is what makes Sisyphus an absurd hero. "Thus, convinced of the wholly human origin of all that is human,

[1] Corbic, *L'homme sans Dieu*, 69. «Autrement dit, dans le même essai, Camus pose, explore, soutient, puis depasse l'absurde.»

[2] Camus, *The Myth*, 23.

a blind man eager to see who knows that the night has no end, is still on the go."[1]

This is how, then, Sisyphus can endure his endless torture without complaint: he is like a blind man who goes on living in spite of the eternal darkness he is in; he seems to have found the serenity he needs in his mind. Besides, Camus adds, Sisyphus is like an absurd creator, who knows that his work is doomed to be destroyed instantly but who still goes on creating. So it is a dual act of creating and negating and that's what he does by forever pushing his rock uphill and watching it roll down.

As stated before, there are times when the rock may be victorious over or become more prominent than Sisyphus himself. Figuratively speaking, those are the times in which he may remember and miss the brightness and happiness that exist back on Earth, to which he will never return. But such an experience is followed by a moment in which the anguish is acknowledged. In time, the anguish may lose its impact. Yet, the acknowledgement does not let tragedy vanish. On the contrary, Camus thinks that tragedy begins the moment one knows one's fate by becoming face to face with the absurd and he expresses his admiration of Sisyphus by saying, "The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn."[2]

Whereas Camus takes the absurd in its metaphysical implications in *The Myth*, in *The Stranger*, he studies the concept in the social realm. Neil Heims says that Camus uses the novel as a mirror to reflect a society where the absurd goes unnoticed except by Meursault, the hero. It is a society where people live senselessly but where the absurd prevails "just because conformity to empty convention prevents real feeling and creative thought."[3] The irony is that Meursault, the only member who becomes conscious of the absurd is condemned to death by the senseless society.

[1] Ibid., 91.

[2] Ibid., 90.

[3] Bloom, *BioCritiques*, 21.

There are various factors that make Meursault an absurd hero. As a matter of fact, he, too, behaves in a senseless manner in a considerable section of the novel. But his senselessness is different from that of the society and that is where the conflict begins.

Camus points to the conflict of an isolated individual with the society that has its own pre-established norms and religion. Meursault has no set criteria concerning either one, and once the society discovers it, he finds himself sentenced to death for a crime he could have gotten away with if he were an 'obedient' member of the society. The people in the society live like robots, or as members of a herd, in Nietzschean terms. Everybody is expected to act in certain ways or express uniform feelings when they are confronted with similar situations. They simply abide by the pre-set rules and norms and do not—maybe cannot—act contrarily. Naturally, anyone who acts contrarily is an enemy to them. Meursault fails to realise this fact as he is disconnected from reality so he sees no harm in choosing his own way and displaying behaviour quite contrary to the general expectations. He does not behave or react like the rest of the society on certain occasions such as death or a murder. He does not feel or display any sense of shock, sorrow or remorse about his acts. As Camus implies concerning absurd heroes, Meursault has a feeling of innocence all through. In his innocence, he sees the consequences of good or bad deeds as equal. He does not support crime, neither does he think there is a 'guilty' person so he is astonished to be considered 'a criminal' and he can never comprehend why he is imprisoned for killing a man.

Meursault is a person who is totally disinterested in life as a whole. He always prefers to remain detached and watch life and 'the others' go by. It is, as it were, life parades before him and he gazes at it without the slightest interest. It is only at the end of the novel that Camus lets Meursault face his absurd situation and, as a result, begin to express some emotions. In the rest of the novel, though, Meursault is like a robot which itself chooses and programs its behaviour and its conduct with people. Thus, with his 'weird' choices in his absurd world, he sticks out among the others in society. At this point, however, it should be questioned who really is absurd, Meursault or the society? Or, do both have their absurdities but they fail to see these? The society may be called absurd because people live in a pre-programmed manner with their standard rules, roles, beliefs and expectations and anybody who fails to conform to these should be expelled. They, therefore, have no freedom of choice whereas Meursault has "absurd

freedom" to choose the path he wants to follow, although, ironically, this path takes him to death.

As an absurd hero, Meursault perceives and lives in only the present time. His physical pleasures refer to the present although the present seems to be devoid of meaning. He focuses on neither his past nor his future and he retains this attitude until towards the end of the novel. The verdict given at the end of the trial sentences him to death, which is an event totally unexpected. After hearing the verdict, he becomes conscious of his fate but he tries to evade the idea as long as he can. Death awaiting him at such a short distance makes the future absurd and Meursault has no religious beliefs to let him find consolation in the idea of the existence of an after-world. That may be a reason for him to always try to enjoy the present rather than turn to the past for memories or to the future for an expectation. He is seized by a feeling of futility and nothingness. He thinks everybody is equal in the sense that they will all die one day. So he asks what it matters if one chooses to live this way or that, or believes in God or not. After all, death is a "dark wind blowing from my future".[1] And he wonders why the chaplain who comes to his cell to speak with him fails to see all these in addition to failing to see the fact that he [the chaplain] himself shares the same fate in the long run.

> "Living as he [the chaplain] did, like a corpse, he couldn't even be sure of being alive. ... Actually, I was sure of myself, sure about everything, far surer than he; sure of my present life and of the death that was coming. That, no doubt, was all I had; but at least that certainty was something I could get my teeth into—just as it had got its teeth into me. I'd been right, I was still right, I was always right. I'd passed my life in a certain way, and I might have passed it in a different way, if I'd felt like it. I'd acted thus, and I hadn't acted otherwise; ... Nothing, nothing had the least importance, and I knew quite well why. He, too, knew why. From the dark horizon of my future a sort of slow, persistent breeze had been blowing toward me, all my life long, from the years that were to come. And on its way that breeze had levelled out all the ideas that people tried to foist on me in the equally unreal years I then was living through. What difference could they make to me, the deaths of others,

[1] Camus, *The Stranger*, 153.

> or a mother's love, or his God; or the way a man decides to live, the fate he thinks he chooses, since one and the same fate was bound to "choose" not only me but thousands of millions of privileged people who, like him, called themselves my brothers. Surely, surely he must see that?"[1]

When Camus's explanation of the absurd is considered, it can be claimed that Meursault wouldn't have been an absurd hero if he could have ever existed outside a society. What makes him an absurd hero is his conflict with the society he lives in and the disconformity of his personal norms to those of the society.

In *The Fall*, Camus introduces another absurd hero whose value judgements are in conflict with those of the society. Jean-Baptiste Clamence is a vain man extremely self-contented and overcome with a groundless feeling of superiority. He does not care the least about other people; still, he treats them in a most gentle and perfect manner solely to receive their admiration and feel even more self-satisfied. One evening, however, he hears some laughter on the banks of the river Seine. This is his unexpected encounter with the absurd.

> I had gone up on to the Pont des Arts, deserted at that hour … Facing the statue of the Vert-Galant, I dominated the island. I felt rising within me a vast feeling of power and—I don't know how to express it—of completion, which cheered my heart. I straightened up and was about to light a cigarette, the cigarette of satisfaction, when, at that very moment, a laugh burst out behind me. Taken by surprise, I suddenly wheeled round; there was no one there. I stepped to the railing; no barge or boat. I turned back towards the island and, again, heard the laughter behind me, a little farther off as if it were going downstream. I stood there motionless. The sound of the laughter was decreasing, but I could still hear it distinctly behind me, coming from nowhere unless from the water. At the same time, I was aware of the rapid beating of my heart. Please don't misunderstand me; there was nothing mysterious about the laugh; it was a good, hearty, almost friendly laugh, which put everything properly to its place.[2]

[1] Ibid., 151-152.

[2] Camus, *The Fall*, 30.

But when everything is put in its proper place, Clamence is no more the same person. His vanity shatters and he finds it hard to face the absurd. First, he tries to laugh it away. A few days after he hears the laughter, however, he witnesses a woman commit suicide by throwing herself into the Seine. But he cannot go to help her.

> I was trembling, I believe from cold and shock. I told myself that I had to be quick and I felt an irresistible weakness steal over me. I have forgotten what I thought then. 'Too late, too far…' or something of the sort. …That woman? Oh, I don't know. Really I don't know. The next day and the days following, I didn't read the papers.[1]

Thus, he admits that he wants to escape from the absurd. By and by, he realises that, despite his initial feeling that gaining awareness of the absurd was an end, it is, in fact, a beginning. Now he needs to find a way to fight it. And he finds one peculiar to himself. His new beginning is sharing guilt with everyone and, thus, feeling relieved:

> When we are all guilty, that will be democracy. Not to mention the fact, *cher ami*, that we must take revenge for having to die alone. Death is solitary, whereas slavery is collective. The others get theirs too, and at the same time as we—that's what counts.[2]

Thus, Clamence spreads the guilt on everyone. This is exactly the behaviour that Meursault fails to adopt and becomes doomed for as a result. By acting as a penitent, Clamence, in fact, becomes the judge—and that on everybody!

Not all Camus's absurd heroes handle the absurd so cunningly as Clamence, though. In his play *Caligula*, Caligula the tyrant is defeated by the absurd. The message of the play is that a nihilistic approach to the absurd may be a reason for the emergence of tyrants and an atmosphere of violence and disorder.

---

[1] Ibid., 52-53.

[2] Ibid., 100.

Caligula, the Roman Emperor meets the absurd on the death of his sister Drusilla, who he has an incestuous love for. He has enough reason to fix the absurd as the problem of his life but his method of handling it proves to be a greater predicament for him and he is killed as a result.

On facing death, Caligula gains an "authentic life" in the Heideggerian sense. He expresses his anguish to his friend Helicon: "Really, this world of ours, the scheme of things as they call it, is quite intolerable. That's why I want the moon, or happiness, or eternal life—something, in fact, that may sound crazy, but which isn't of this world."[1]

The truth he has discovered is that men die and they are not happy for that reason. He agrees that ordinary people do not let it prey on their minds but it is because they are not aware of it. So he takes on the task of teaching them how to become conscious—albeit through bloody means.

> I wish men to live by the light of truth. And I've the power to make them do so. For I know what they need and haven't got. They're without understanding and they need a teacher; someone who knows what he is talking about.[2]

He finds life altogether absurd. "But what's intolerable is to see one's life being drained of meaning, to be told there's no reason for existing. A man can't live without some reason for living."[3]

Caligula, too, needs a reason for living and his reason, or rather purpose is "making the impossible possible".[4] That's why he is after the moon, which symbolizes immortality and happiness. Making the impossible possible is his revolt against the human condition, in other words, the absurd.

---

[1] Camus, *Caligula*, 35.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., 47.

[4] Ibid., 39.

Ironically, however, Caligula himself is symbolic of the absurd in the eyes of his subjects. So Caligula himself falls victim to what he struggles against. And that is his tragic fate.

Camus's purpose in studying the absurd is to point to the fact that since the absurd does not allow for the existence of a God, man often finds himself without values and without hope. Nevertheless, Camus is completely against the adoption of all kinds of metaphysical "leaps", or ways of escape and he condemns the tendency towards such a leap by calling it "metaphysical suicide". By contrast, his tendency is to employ the absurd to make man challenge the idea of suicide and to enable him to beat his paradoxical condition. His message appears to be that admitting the existence of the absurd is not enough to beat it. However, he has a constructive and positive viewpoint to offer against it. The absurd, he asserts, is advantageous if man knows how to use it. He posits that even if man does not believe in divinity, he can still be contented, creative and spiritually sound. So Camus's attitude towards the absurd could be explained as a purposeful act of self will, courage and high self-esteem. It may be concluded, then, that by remaining aware of the absurd, man can appreciate and retain the value of life.

5.2 Suicide

If the concept of the absurd is significant for Camus, the problem of suicide bears even greater significance for him. He considers it the sole issue in philosophy as he states it in *The Myth*.

Suicide is not a new issue in philosophy when Camus takes it up. It keeps occupying philosophers' minds throughout history. The aim of suicide is not necessarily to cause death; suicide is usually committed not to die for the sake of death but to actualize an objective other than death. In other words, one may wish to commit suicide for a number of reasons such as being relieved of physical or psychological pain, performing a moral duty or avoiding an unwanted deed that may be inflicted upon oneself, such as an execution. Epistemological issues like the kinds of knowledge available to someone who contemplates death may also be related to suicide. Because there is no antecedent knowledge about what death involves and what one meets after one dies, committing suicide may be regarded as irrational. Also, while some want to discuss whether suicide is evil for the person concerned, some see the issue only as a kind of normative scepticism, expressing that life is devoid of meaning and that nothing is of any value. This

point of view which allows no values is precisely the one that Camus wants to refute.

In the history of the western world, any suicidal act is regarded as a matter of ethics and philosophers vary in their opinions about it. For Plato, for example, suicide is basically wrong. He explains why one should avoid suicide in *Phaedo***.** Socrates is sentenced to death and as he waits for his execution, he discusses suicide with his friends.

> 'Put like that,' rejoined Socrates, 'it might certainly seem unreasonable; still, perhaps there is a reason for it. There is of course the reason given in mystery doctrine, that we men are in a sort of prison, and no one ought to attempt his release or run away from it; that seems to me an impressive saying, and not easy to get to the bottom of, but this much at least, I think, Cebes, is well said, that there are gods who look after us, and that we men are amongst the possessions of the gods.' … 'Well, perhaps that shows that it isn't unreasonable that a man ought not to put an end to himself until God brings constraint upon him, as he does now upon me.'[1]

Plato adds, however, that suicide can be acceptable in a certain number of situations such as suffering extreme poverty, getting involved in a shameful act or becoming exposed to "external compulsions" like social strain.

Plato seems to regard suicide from a social and moral perspective whereas the Stoics tend to stress its personal aspect. The Stoics discuss whether the quality or the quantity of life is important and they decide on the former. They hold that man may feel free to end his life if his expectations are not met and if he becomes miserable for that reason. In fact, they say, this is what a wise man should do because they consider suicide to be an act of principle or responsible control.

St. Thomas Aquinas is against suicide. He finds it contrary to natural law and self-preservation. His view seconds the Christian view which says life is God's gift and therefore, it is a sin to commit suicide. Also, he asserts, one of the ten amendments is the order "Though shalt not kill". Accordingly, he concludes that,

[1] Plato, *Phaedo*, Cambridge University Press, UK, 1998, p. 36

in the first place, committing suicide defers the will of God. In addition, it is contrary to self-love, which enables man to hold on to life and lastly, it injures the society of which man is a member.

According to Kant, too, it is wrong to commit suicide and those who commit suicide 'degrade' humanity by treating themselves as 'things' rather than as persons. In his discussion of suicide, he reminds people of the Divine ownership of man. He argues that human beings are placed in this world under certain conditions and for specific purposes. Hence, a suicidal act opposes the purpose of the Creator; the one who commits suicide must be regarded as a rebel against God.

Hume thinks differently. In his essay *On Suicide*, he argues that man has no such duty as *not* to commit suicide; that God does not expect any such thing from man. He states that God allows man to try to change the course of nature or to stand against it in order to secure happiness for himself. Man is already doing so in daily life through inventions. Similarly, therefore, if he will feel happier by committing suicide, he might as well do so. There does not exist a satisfactory reason to prove that committing suicide is against God's will. Besides, he adds, whatever its agent on earth may be, death fundamentally comes from God so there is nothing wrong in committing suicide.

> Do not you teach, that when any ill befals (sic.) me, tho' by the malice of my enemies, I ought to be resigned to providence, and that the actions of men are the operations of the Almighty as much as the actions of inanimate beings? When I fall upon my own sword, therefore, I receive my death equally from the hands of the Deity as if it had proceeded from a lion, a precipice, or a fever.[1]

Against the argument that it is solely God who decides on the time that each individual will die and therefore, it is wrong to kill oneself, Hume argues that, in that case, it is equally wrong to try to prolong life.

> Were the disposal of human life so much reserved as the peculiar province of the Almighty, that it were an encroachment on his right, for men to

[1] David Hume, *Four Dissertations and Essays on Suicide & the Immortality of the Soul* (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 1995), 13.

> dispose of their own lives; it would be equally criminal to act for the preservation of life as for its destruction. If I turn aside a stone which is falling upon my head, I disturb the course of nature, and I invade the peculiar province of the Almighty, by lengthening out my life beyond the period which by the general laws of matter and motion he had assigned it.[1]

Also, by asserting that man is no different from any other creature, Hume wants to refute the idea that human life is of special value. "… is it because human life is of such great importance, that 'tis a presumption for human prudence to dispose of it? But the life of a man is of no greater importance to the universe than that of an oyster."[2]

Schopenhauer approaches the issue of suicide from a different angle. His thesis is that the human body is an expression of phenomena and noumena combined in one. As opposed to Kant's view, his view is that things-in-themselves can be known. Indeed, they happen to be the object of man's inner experience; they are *the will*. But there is a problem with the will because it never leaves man alone, appearing in the form of one thing or another. It is a will-to-live. It makes man crave for one thing and when that wish is satisfied, the will reappears, demanding another thing. And it is always a source of pain because it may lead man into deeds which may result in suffering; moreover, it offers no remedy. However, Schopenhauer wants to call attention to an important difference concerning the issue. Man may want to deny will to free himself from it or he may want to commit suicide as he cannot bear suffering, but the two acts do not boil down to the same thing.

> Far from being denial of the will, suicide is a phenomenon of the will's strong affirmation. For denial has its essential nature in the fact that the pleasures of life, not its sorrows, are shunned. The suicide wills life, and is dissatisfied merely with the conditions on which it has come to him. Therefore he gives up by no means the will-to-live, but merely life, since he destroys the individual phenomenon. He wills life, wills the unchecked

[1] Ibid., 11.

[2] Ibid.

> existence and affirmation of the body; but the combination of circumstances does not allow of these, and the result is great suffering.[1]

In this argument of Schopenhauer's, one notices a line of thought resembling that of Camus. They seem to share a similar view on man's disillusioned condition in the world. What "a combination of circumstances" is for Schopenhauer may be 'the absurd' for Camus.

According to Schopenhauer, suicide is an act in vain because it solely means man surrenders to the will once again.

> We have already found that, since life is always certain to the will-to-live, and suffering is essential to life, suicide, or the arbitrary destruction of an individual phenomenon, is a quite futile and foolish act, for the thing-in-itself remains unaffected by it, just as the rainbow remains unmoved, however rapidly the drops may change which sustain it for the moment.[2]

When an individual fervently wills life but encounters suffering which hinders his efforts, will comes to the point of destroying itself. But in such a situation, it chooses to eliminate the body, which is its sole physical manifestation. In other words, will does not permit being destroyed by suffering and this is how it affirms itself. Schopenhauer seems to regard suicide almost merely as a natural process. He may not be an advocate of it, but he is not against it either. Rather, he has a neutral stance.

Nietzsche, who succeeds Schopenhauer, holds an opinion that is closer to the opinion of Hume. He believes that it is man's right and privilege to kill himself. In *Twilight of the Idols*, he goes even so far as to suggest that chronically sick people had better commit suicide. "Sick people are parasites on society. … There should be profound social contempt for the practice of vegetating in cowardly dependence on doctors … after the meaning of life … is gone."[3]

---

[1] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation (*New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1969), 398.

[2] Ibid., 399.

[3] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings,* Ridley & Norman, ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 209-210.

And he praises suicide by saying it is "Dying proudly when it is no longer feasible to live proudly. Death chosen freely, death at the right time, carried out with lucidity and cheerfulness…" [1]

Suicide is a serious concern for the twentieth century existentialists. Their view is that the choice to take one's life is imposed upon one by one's experience of the absurdity of the world and the meaninglessness of human endeavour in the face of it. Man is certain that he will die but he knows nothing else about it such as when, where or how it will take place. This feeling of ambiguity is disturbing so man wants to take everything about his death under control by killing himself. Also an awareness of futility in whatever he does brings about hopelessness so man wants to die. Sartre sees suicide as a means of trying to understand the reason for man's existence in a world where God is denied. He also presents a different extension of the notion of suicide in *Being and Nothingness*, when he talks about a person holding on to the banisters and looking down a creek, thinking whether he should throw himself down or not. He has an inner struggle with himself and at last decides to move back and continue his safe stroll. The incidence implies a subconscious flight from death; i.e. man is not always ready to commit suicide and leave life behind in spite of the fact that it offers no foothold for him in the world. It may be concluded that there exists a paradoxical relationship, as well as a conflict, between a wish to commit suicide and a dread of death. The idea of death horrifies man but he is nonetheless seduced by its lure. He runs to it while he is trying to flee from it.

Suicide constitutes the theme of *The Myth* as a basic philosophical problem. In *The Myth,* Camus studies man's absurd condition and suggests a rationale for keeping suicide at bay upon encountering the absurd. Camus looks down on suicide because it tempts man with the promise of an illusory freedom from the absurdity of his existence, but it is, in fact, an escape from his responsibility to confront the absurd. In fact, this wish to escape is related to what is called existential guilt. Accordingly, man desires to know why he exists but he cannot find an answer. He knows solely that he is thrown into the world and that he is the only source of power to direct his life. He realizes his absurd condition; at the same time, he can't help being involved in every single thing that happens

[1] Ibid., 210.

around him so the burden of responsibility grows exceedingly heavy. If he cannot stand it, he may 'find refuge' in suicide.

Camus criticizes the fact that suicide is usually regarded as a social phenomenon. He contends that it needs to be tackled on a personal level as it involves individuals and their personal problems and he argues that it is necessary to explore why people would want to flee from lucidity, or light, to darkness.

Camus agrees that man sometimes tends to kill himself in order to deplete himself instead of giving in to fate, which involves living a life that lacks meaning and dying a natural death at the end. In *Reflections on the Guillotine*, Camus discusses the instinct of death. He says it is paradoxical that man wants to die as much as he wants to live and he introduces the idea of suicide, which could be committed in various manners, at once or slowly.

> If the instinct to live is fundamental, it is no more so than another instinct of which the academic psychologists do not speak: the death instinct, which at certain moments calls for the destruction of oneself and of others. It is probable that the desire to kill often coincides with the desire to die or to annihilate oneself. Thus the instinct for self-preservation is matched, in variable proportions by the instinct for destruction. The latter is the only way of explaining altogether the various perversions which, from alcoholism to drugs, lead an individual to his death while he knows full well what is happening. Man wants to live, but it is useless to hope that this desire will dictate all his actions. He also wants to be nothing; he wants the irreparable, and death for its own sake.[1]

However, Camus claims that if, on the one hand, meeting the absurd denies man eternal freedom—in the sense that he is mortal—on the other hand, it restores his freedom of action. Since death renders everything absurd, as soon as man faces the reality of death, everything concerning the future collapses in his eyes. There is neither hope, nor freedom left for him and man begins to feel like a slave. It seems possible to support Camus's opinion and to argue that man has always been a slave, anyway. Before becoming conscious of death, he is a slave to his future dreams. His belief that life is meaningful and his hopes for the future are a kind of confinement for him although he might not be conscious of this

[1] Camus, *Resistance*, 191-192.

situation. Camus wants to call attention to his view that suicide cannot be the outcome of a revolt. Conversely, it is the full acceptance of, or surrender to the absurd and to despair. What he means by "freedom of action" is, then, the freedom to choose one's way out of the absurd once one has become conscious of one's condition.

According to Brian Masters, Camus wants to say that man is to learn to live without hope and that this is possible because to live without hope is not to live in despair; it is to live without illusion only.[1]

In fact, according to Camus, suicide appears to be the sole field in which man is to avoid using his free will. "Consciousness and revolt, these rejections are the contrary of renunciation. … It is essential to die unreconciled and not of one's free will."[2]

The right choice, he defends, is the opposite alternative: life. Life is worth living. The reason why life bears such significance for Camus is that it furnishes the world with a value. Hochberg states in "Albert Camus and the Ethic of Absurdity" that out of the conflict of a desire to understand the world and the wish to avoid death, both of which are impossible, man creates a value: Do not kill. Hence, life becomes an absolute value, and the drama of man is regarded as a struggle against death.[3] Camus demonstrates this point of view in his works by juxtaposing the two pairs of elements that clash and thus, create the absurd; namely, 'man and the world' and 'life and death'. These help him discuss the ways that may help reject suicide, for which a desire may arise as a result of the conflict between the elements of the two pairs.

Even the thought of suicide is, for Camus, what he calls "absurd reasoning" because, in the first place, death is absurd. It is inescapable and it negates life. By 'killing God', Nietzsche emphasises the idea that there is in fact no supreme power over man since all divine concepts are created by man. The lack of authority, however, gives man the opinion that the world and life are altogether meaningless, and a natural consequence is a wish to escape. While man is living

[1] Masters, *Camus: a study*, 45.

[2] Camus, *The Myth*, 41.

[3] Herbert Hochberg, "Albert Camus and the Ethic of Absurdity," *Ethics* Vol. 75, No.2, 87-102 [journal on-line]; (n.p., The University of Chicago Press, January 1965), accessed 22 October 2009: available from http://www.jstor.org/stable/2379406; Internet.

indifferently, sometimes in a state of alienation, the absurd gives him a sudden poke and man becomes authentic. In other words, he suddenly becomes aware of his mortality and the vain efforts he has spent so far to achieve this thing or that. The misery born with the experience of authenticity is hard to bear so man feels obliged to make a choice: it is either finding a way to recover, which is joining 'the others' for Heidegger and revolting for Camus, or committing suicide.

Camus can never comply with the last choice. Moreover, he complains in *The Rebel* that there may be extreme cases, as is in nihilism, regarding suicide. In nihilism, he says, the notion of suicide is followed by the notion of murder and it finds its peak in mass suicide, which is totally unacceptable. In the age of negation, he says, the problem was whether to commit suicide. But then came the age of ideologies and the problem has now become whether one has a right to kill.

> Equally, absolute nihilism, which accepts suicide as legitimate, leads, even more easily, to logical murder. … This logic has carried the values of suicide, on which our age has been nurtured, to their extreme logical consequence, which is legalized murder. It culminates, at the same time, in mass suicide. The most striking demonstration of this was provided by the Hitlerian apocalypse of 1945. Self-destruction meant nothing to those madmen, in their bomb-shelters, who were preparing for their own death and apotheosis. All that mattered was not to destroy oneself alone and to drag a whole world with one.[1]

And taking suicide on an individualistic level, Camus's idea appears to be that if one commits suicide claiming that there is nothing important in the world, it really means that there is indeed something that is important—but probably which is lost or wasted. "If the world is a matter of indifference to the man who commits suicide, it is because he has an idea of something that is not or could not be indifferent to him."[2]

In the chapter "Absurd Creation" in *The Myth*, Camus examines the problem of suicide from the viewpoint of Dostoevsky and some of his famous characters. One of them is Kirillov in *Devils* and Camus devotes a sub-chapter to him to

[1] Camus, *The Rebel*, 6-7.

[2] Ibid., 7.

present the reader with Kirillov's views and acts and to emphasize once again that it is the wrong attitude towards life to commit suicide, regardless of the motive behind it.

Camus points out that in Dostoevsky's novels, the characters question themselves about the meaning of life and they usually consider existence to be eternal. They are convinced that human existence becomes absurd if one does not believe in immortality and that only a belief in eternal life will bring happiness.

Kirillov, in *Devils,* thinks differently. He believes that happiness is achieved by committing suicide. Kirillov is an absurd hero but with an exception in that he kills himself, which is an act unlikely of an absurd hero. He claims that people choose to believe in the existence of God for the sake of their comfort. He, on the other hand, does not believe that God exists and this gives him a good enough reason to commit suicide. Kirillov thinks God gives people only pain and fear and that He deceives them, too. Referring to Christ, he says,

> One man on the cross believed so much that he said to another: "Thou shalt be with me in paradise today." The day ended, they both died and departed, but found neither paradise nor salvation. That which had been promised did not come true. … if the laws of nature didn't spare even *Him*, even their own miracle, but forced *Him* to live among lies and to die for a lie, then the entire planet is a lie and rests on lies and stupid mockery. In that case the laws of the planet are mere lies, and a devils' vaudeville. What's the purpose of living? Tell me, if you're a man.[1]

According to him, absolute freedom and happiness will come only when men do not care whether they live or die. "He who doesn't care whether he lives or dies—he'll be the new man. He who conquers pain and fear—will become God. And then the old God will no longer exist."[2]

Kirillov thinks that if people go on believing that there is God, they will also continue to believe that He is almighty and man is dependent. If, however, God dies, man will win his independence. In other words, since he is going to have his

[1] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Devils* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 693.

[2] Ibid., 121.

free will in his hands, man will become God. This is of utmost importance for Kirillov so he plans to commit suicide to set an example to all humanity about how to get hold of their independence. He believes that his act will prove that suicide is the only way to obtain one's self-will and become God oneself. He discusses the matter with Peter Stepanovich:

> I'm obligated to shoot myself because the greatest degree of self-will is to take my own life.
>
> But you're not the only person ever to kill himself; there's been a great many suicides.
>
> Each one had a reason. But to do it without any reason, simply out of self-will—I'm the only one.[1]

His revolt is a revolt against the condition of man so Camus calls Kirillov's logic "absurd" but also pedagogical. "Consequently, Kirilov (sic.) must kill himself out of love for humanity. He must show his brothers a royal and difficult path on which he will be the first. It is a pedagogical suicide. Kirilov sacrifices himself, then."[2]

Both Kirillov and Camus link the problem of freedom with the concept of God and Camus says, "Knowing whether or not man is free involves knowing whether he can have a master."[3]

Kirillov does not necessarily believe in an afterlife in the conventional sense. Rather, he believes in "an everlasting here and now."[4] He hopes to attain a moment when time stops and becomes eternal. He experiences moments of revelation in which "you suddenly feel the presence of eternal harmony;

---

[1] Ibid., 692.

[2] Camus, *The Myth*, 80.

[3] Ibid., 41.

[4] Dostoevsky, *The Devils*, 249.

completely attained."[1] and which is "not a flood of tender emotion, it's simply a sense of happiness."[2]

Obviously, Kirillov's ideas about committing suicide are in total opposition with those of Camus's. Kirillov advocates death whereas Camus clings to life. However, their purpose is the same: attaining freedom of will and happiness. Camus does not necessarily agree with Dostoevsky and some criticism of the latter can be felt when Camus ends the section 'Absurd Creation' as: "The surprising reply of the creator to his characters, of Dostoevsky to Kirilov(sic.), can indeed be summed up thus: existence is illusory *and* it is eternal."[3]

That existence is illusory might mean that existence is a concept which does not lend itself to comprehension because there are plenty of questions about it for which definite answers have not been found. This makes it hard to figure out its actual meaning and, as a result, it is prone to be interpreted differently by different people. To avoid confusion, then, Dostoevsky summons people into the preachings of religion and Camus is critical of it. Dostoevsky creates characters such as Aliosha in *The Brothers Karamazov*, who has unshakable faith in eternal life, and Kirillov in *Devils,* who cherishes some hope of eternity despite the fact that he is an atheist and commits suicide to disprove that God exists. Dostoevsky regards the matter from the stance of a theologian and he does not want to lead people into acting on their own due to a disbelief in God. He supports the belief that there is an afterlife where people will meet again and find happiness while for Camus all that man can accomplish is in this world only.

Camus studies the problem of suicide in his plays and novels, too. In the play *Caligula*, the Roman emperor turns into a tyrant and begins fighting the mankind upon facing the absurd. Indeed, this is a fight against the absurd for the sake of his own freedom. Soon, however, he realizes that he is after a mistaken solution and that one cannot gain freedom by destroying the mankind. Still, he cannot bear the burden of the anguish the absurd causes so he continues oppressing his subjects to such an extreme that they are, in a way, forced to hate him and kill

[1] Ibid., 662.

[2] Ibid., 663.

[3] Camus, *The Myth*, 83.

him as a consequence. His case, Camus contends, is a "high-minded type of suicide".[1]

In *A Happy Death*, Camus approaches suicide from a different point of view. Zagreus, a wealthy man in his mid-forties, who has become crippled a few years before, lives in a dilemma. Having become greatly dependent on others, he cannot decide whether it would be a wise decision for him to commit suicide or not.

> On days when the tragedy which had robbed him of his life was too much for him, he took out his letter, which he had not dated and which explained his desire to die. Then he laid the gun on the table, bent down to it and pressed his forehead against it, rolling his temples over it, calming the fever of his cheeks against the cold steel. For a long time he stayed like that, letting his fingers caress the trigger, lifting the safety-catch, until the world fell silent around him and his whole being, already half-asleep, united with the sensation of the cold, salty metal from which death could emerge. Realizing then that it would be enough for him to date his letter and pull the trigger, discovering the absurd feasibility of death, his imagination was vivid enough to show him the full horror of what life's negation meant to him, and he drowned in his somnolence all his craving to live, to go on burning in dignity and silence. Then, waking completely, his mouth full of already bitter saliva, he would lick the gun barrel, sticking his tongue into it and sucking out an impossible happiness.[2]

Yet, quitting life is no so easy. He explains Meursault his situation:

> This life which devours me—I won't have known it to the full, and what frightens me about death is the certainty it will bring me that my life has been consummated without me. … Which means, Meursault, that underneath, and in my condition, I still have hope.[3]

---

[1] Camus, *Caligula*, 22.

[2] Camus, *A Happy Death*, 35.

[3] Ibid., 36.

Obviously, the idea of hope Camus mentions here is not of a religious or transcendental kind. It is the hope that an optimistic approach to life brings or the hope created by a wish to hold on to life and to stick to this world. The above case is an example of how determined Camus is when he defies suicide.

The issue of suicide appears twice in *The Fall*. In the first case, the narrator hears one evening a woman throw herself into the river soon after she walks past him. However, he is so shocked that he simply stands where he is and does nothing to rescue her. Camus wants to emphasise the feeling of horror the act of suicide causes not only in the person who commits it but also in the ones who witness the act. In the second case, Camus presents yet another viewpoint in relation to suicide in order to deter people. He wants to show that it is a silly and futile endeavour.

> 'You'll pay for this!' a daughter said to her father who had prevented her from marrying too smart a suitor. And she killed herself. But the father paid for nothing. He loved fly-fishing. Three Sundays later he went back to the river—to forget, as he said. He was right; he forgot. To tell the truth, the contrary would have been surprising. You think you are dying to punish your wife and actually you are freeing her. It's better not to see that. Apart from the fact that you might hear the reasons they give for your action. As far as I'm concerned, I can hear them now: 'He killed himself because he couldn't bear…' Ah, *cher ami*, how poor in invention men are! They always think one commits suicide for a reason. But it's quite possible to commit suicide for two reasons. No, that never occurs to them. So what's the good of dying intentionally, of sacrificing yourself to the idea you want people to have of you? Once you are dead, they will take advantage of it to attribute idiotic or vulgar motives to your action. Martyrs, *cher ami*, must choose between being forgotten, mocked or made use of. As for being understood—never![1]

By committing suicide, then, man runs double risks: of losing his life and of being humiliated.

Camus has a viewpoint similar to that of Nietzsche about suicide. In "Attempt at a Self-Criticism", the preface Nietzsche wrote for *The Birth of Tragedy*, he states

[1] Camus, *The Fall*, 56.

that the only purpose of Christianity is the dominance of morality. He claims that Christianity hates life and wears a mask of faith, which promises "another, better life" because it finds life in this world to be amoral. But then what does morality do, Nietzsche asks, other than wishing to negate life? It aims at annihilating it and, therefore, it is "the danger of dangers". The same argument seems to be valid for the idea of suicide. Its sole function, in Camus's opinion, is to negate life so it is equally dangerous. His purpose in *The Myth*, is to explore the relationship between suicide and the absurd and to discuss whether suicide is a solution that defeats the absurd. He believes that man is physically attached to life; the body wants to live, not to crumble to dust.

In *The Myth*, Camus wants to prove that the absurd does not necessarily dictate death so he goes on to offer his own formulations to avoid suicide upon gaining awareness of the absurdity of the human condition. Each of the four characters he introduces feels the absurd fully and finds a different way to evade the dread of death or the notion of suicide. Their moral values can be called into question; still, each leads his life in accordance with the values they personally hold to be valid.

Finally, Camus asserts that suicide only makes things worse because man's fate does not change by committing suicide. The act simply serves to make man's situation more ironic, even pathetic or tragic. It means that in order to escape from death, which he dreads, man does the dreadful thing itself.

Camus agrees that man commits suicide because he finds life to be meaningless but he also argues that the more meaningless man may find life, the more worthy of living it appears to be.

> It was previously a question of finding out whether or not life had to have a meaning to be lived. It now becomes clear, on the contrary, that it will be lived all the better if it has no meaning. Living an experience, a particular fate, is accepting it fully. Now, no one will live this fate, knowing it to be absurd, unless he does everything to keep before him that absurd brought to light by consciousness. Negating one of the terms of the opposition on which he lives amounts to escaping it. To abolish conscious revolt is to elude the problem. The theme of permanent revolution is thus carried into individual experience. Living is keeping the absurd alive.

> Keeping it alive is, above all, contemplating it. … the absurd dies only when we turn away from it. One of the only coherent philosophical positions is thus revolt. It is a constant confrontation between man and his obscurity.[1]

Therefore, it seems wise to Camus not to try to abolish or soothe down the absurd by committing suicide; on the contrary, one should hold on to life and revolt.

> In its way, suicide settles the absurd. It engulfs the absurd in the same death. But I know that in order to keep alive, the absurd cannot be settled. … That revolt gives life its value.[2]

In other words, committing suicide destroys the slightest flicker of light to find any meaning whereas living by revolting leads to meaning. Even the act of revolting itself adds meaning to life because now it furnishes man with a purpose—to revolt.

Naturally, revolting is what Sisyphus does and Camus concludes *The Myth* as:

> But Sisyphus teaches the fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.[3]

Sisyphus's endless struggle with his rock makes him gain wisdom. As a result of his quest and desire for immortality on earth—that is, the impossible—he is ironically given an unending life in Hell. As opposed to that of Sisyphus, man's 'punishment' is death. Nevertheless, despite the contrasting nature of the punishments, the cases are similar. Camus's thesis is that if, after growing conscious of his condition, man can face his fate in contemplation like Sisyphus

[1] Camus, *The Myth*, 39-40.

[2] Ibid., 40.

[3] Ibid., 91.

does, then it is possible for him to be happy. Necessarily, Camus does not talk about a perfect state of bliss but a state of awareness of one's condition. Neither does he talk about 'everyman' but about man who is in need of learning, knowing, constructing things and making comments. It is the man who is conscious of himself as well as of the life he leads with all its possible impacts. And it is the man who can negate gods and shape his own destiny. Camus's quest concerns man and the world. He wonders whether the world ever lends itself for discovery on both individual and social contexts in which no God exists. He also argues that as long as Sisyphus, or man, admits that it is he himself who has created his fate and as long as man bears the anguish that his fate has brought in its wake, knowing that his life is nothing but an absurd struggle, then he can find 'happiness' in it. Such happiness also makes it possible for man to maintain his dignity and pride by rejecting suicide and embracing the absurd as it is.

5.3 God

If man has an existentialist stance, he has the awareness that freedom is essential for him because solely by freedom can he fight against the absurd. But how does he gain freedom? To the ordinary man, it is nothing easy to attain because there are two main barriers in the way; namely, God and the fear to revolt—because it would be a revolt not only against an existing mundane system or authority, but in most cases, against God, or some religious belief. To the existentialist man, however, there is no authority above himself. Man who has gained consciousness of his situation in the world, therefore, knows no barriers to his freedom. Because he needs power to become free, he may even 'kill' God for the purpose.

Naturally, religious existentialists would not hold sides with the party who could 'kill' God. Kierkegaard, for example, thinks that if faith pertains to a field that exceeds the limits of human reason, then it should be a matter of individual preference and inner commitment. Faith in God is not possible through reasoning or objectivity or still, knowledge; it is possible solely through subjectivity. God exists at all events and Kierkegaard has full faith in Him.

Dostoevsky has faith in God, too, but he sows early seeds of existentialism when he has Kirillov commit suicide so that he might declare himself God and teach

people how to break free from the 'tyranny' of the God dictated by the religion. He is of the opinion that there is no order or a rational pattern in the world and that reason helps only to make generalisations. He imagines a world without God and comments that if God did not exist, everything would be possible. To put it differently, there would be free will and no determinism. Sartre's comment on this view is:

> Indeed, everything is permissible if God does not exist, and man is consequently abandoned for he cannot find anything to rely on—neither within nor without. First, he finds there are no excuses. For if it is true that existence precedes essence, we can never explain our actions by reference to a given and immutable human nature.[1]

Camus's opinions bear some similarities with, as well as differences from, those of Dostoevsky. Like Dostoevsky, Camus supports the idea that reason by itself is of little help since it does not suffice to explain man's absurd situation and hence, it is not the right tool to make man's absurd life meaningful. But unlike Dostoevsky—or Kierkegaard—he does not advocate a 'leap into faith'. Rather, he tends to declare God 'dead' like Nietzsche does.

When Nietzsche declares God 'dead', he demands power that is conventionally believed to be in the hands of God. According to him, man is not necessarily going to use his power to suppress others but to be able to proclaim his freedom. He thinks that the ego emerges out of 'a people'. From 'the good' and 'the evil' that peoples agree on, comes out the ego with its individual will to power. The ego then becomes the creator by annihilating the values of the peoples who loved and obeyed God.

> Change of values—that is a change of creators. Whoever must be a creator always annihilates.
>
> First, peoples were creators; and only in later times, individuals. Verily, the individual himself is still the most recent creation.

[1] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007), 29.

> Once peoples hung a tablet of the good over themselves. Love which would rule and love which would obey have together created such tablets.
>
> The delight in the herd is more ancient than the delight in the ego; and as long as the good conscience is identified with the herd, only the bad conscience says: I.[1]

He introduces the idea of "will to power" for the first time in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and he says that man wants power and this is true for both the strong and the weak. Nietzsche explains how to estimate the value of such power: "I assess the *power* of a *will* by how much resistance, pain, torture it endures and knows how to turn to its advantage."[2]

This is a purely existentialist view which is often encountered in Camus's works, too. Life offers man nothing but the absurd, so man has to exert his own willpower not only to bear life but also to enjoy it. He should not depend on God, for God is dead in the sense that man's faith in Him is dead.

Defying God and breaking free is difficult, though. Nietzsche holds that if man manages to declare his freedom, people turn against him as his enemies. But his worst enemy is his own self: while man is struggling against the enemies all by himself, he has to try and create a God out of himself, as well. However, this is not all. Man, says Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, may become his own enemy because he might exhaust himself and perish as a result of this strife. But if he succeeds in remaining strong and independent and becomes a creator, it means he is victorious and deserves to be called an "overman".

As Nietzsche does not believe in God, he declares that "God is a conjecture".[3] Accordingly, man might make guesses about God but he is not supposed to go beyond the limits of his thinking and his creative will. In other words, if he cannot create a God, he should not talk about a God. Nevertheless, he can create overmen; thus, he is entitled to comment on them. All these seem to mean that man is to handle what he knows, or to the extent his knowledge allows him. He

[1] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 59-60.

[2] Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, (382).

[3] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 85.

should not try to transcend himself. This view is what Camus frequently recommends, too.

Nietzsche means to refute people's belief that there is God and that He is permanent.

> Evil I call it, and misanthropic—all this teaching of the One and the Plenum and the Unmoved and the Sated and the Permanent. All the permanent—that is only a parable. And the poets lie too much.
>
> It is of time and becoming that the best parables should speak: let them be a praise and a justification of all impermanence.[1]

And he explains why God cannot be permanent and why it is necessary that He die.

> But he *had* to die: he saw with eyes that saw everything; he saw man's depths and ultimate grounds, all his concealed disgrace and ugliness. His pity knew no shame: he crawled into my dirtiest nooks. This most curious, overobtrusive, overpitying one had to die. He always saw me: on such a witness I wanted to have revenge or not live myself. The god who saw everything, *even man*—this god had to die! Man cannot bear it that such a witness should live.[2]

Naturally, God is 'dead' also for Sartre, the only philosopher who accepts the title of "an existentialist". For him, atheism is a natural consequence of the human situation. He stresses what it means for existentialists 'of his type' to have no belief in God:

> Its [Existentialism's] purpose is not at all to plunge man into despair. But if we label any attitude of unbelief "despair", as Christians do, then our notion of despair is vastly different from its original meaning.

[1] Ibid., 86-87.

[2] Ibid., 266-267.

> Existentialism is not so much an atheism in the sense that it would exhaust itself attempting to demonstrate the nonexistence of God, rather, it affirms that even if God were to exist, it would make no difference—that is our point of view. It is not that we believe that God exists, but we think that the real problem is not one of his existence; what man needs is to rediscover himself and to comprehend that nothing can save him from himself, not even valid proof of the existence of God.[1]

According to Sartre, if there exists no God, man endeavours to become his own God:

> …if I've eliminated God the Father, there has to be someone to invent values. Things must be accepted as they are. What is more, to say that we invent values means neither more nor less than this: life has no meaning *a priori*. Life itself is nothing until it is lived, it is we who give it meaning, and value is nothing more than the meaning we give it.[2]

In other words, man starts life in his "facticity", which is the fact that he has been "thrown" on to the world. But then comes his "transcendence" phase in which he attempts to go beyond his "facticity" by constructing his life and furnishing it with meaning. Such behaviour also means that he tries to be God. In fact, becoming God is his sole purpose. "The best way to conceive of the fundamental project of human reality is to say that man is the being whose project is to be God."[3]

Despite his efforts, however, it is not so easy for man to become God, Sartre remarks.

> Although human reality is the desire to be God, this desire is forever frustrated. In this incompleteness, this perpetual deferral, lies our capacity for self-definition, our freedom. We make ourselves what we are

[1] Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 53.

[2] Ibid., 51.

[3] Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, 63.

> by our choices and this process of self-definition is only complete at the moment of death.[1]

Hence, man cannot become God because he cannot achieve the status of 'absolute knowing' or, become 'complete', which stands for the same idea.

Like Sartre, Camus has no religious faith, either. He firmly believes that life can be lived without the 'conventional' divine power or powers to guide it. Neither is there life after death. He remarks that death does not open up a new life but it is like a closed door.[2] But the problem is that man, so far, has got so much used to the domination of the divine that he does not know how to behave without the guidance he has been provided with. Men of religion always believe that there needs to be a divine power that they can turn to for refuge, salvation or self-confidence. Being aware of the situation, Camus tries to show how man can still be creative, contented and spiritually sound even if he does not believe in God. Arnaud Corbic explains Camus's approach to the matter. He says that Camus rejects the kind of religious logic of consolation that advocates reaching out for God to hide one's fears, to justify one's incapacity of dealing with life, one's impotence, or one's refusal to accept reality, (which is) the absurd, or, as a last resort, reaching out for a God for whom one does not feel that one needs when everything goes well.[3] Camus's argument is, in fact, that man should be able to survive even if things go badly. In his diary of 1942-1951, he says that "Buddha preaches a wisdom without gods" and his own maxim is in the same line. For him, man is to become wise without the teachings of a religion or God and he can do that by finding out values of his own. In fact, the first thing man should teach himself is to be his own master, that is, declare his freedom.

Camus has his reasons for rejecting God**.** One reason is that he contends that man can see and comprehend solely what is within his grasp and that happens to be the world he lives in. As he cannot know anything further, he has a hard time

[1] Sartre, *J. P. S.: Basic Writings*, 14.

[2] Corbic, *Camus et l'homme sans Dieu*, 139. «Il ne me plaît pas de croire que la mort ouvre sur une autre vie. Elle est pour moi une porte fermée.»

[3] Ibid., 150. «Or, Bonhoeffer comme théologien chrétien, et Camus comme penseur non religieux, se refusent … une logique de la faiblesse et de la consolation religieuse qui, dans le cas précis de "Dieu", en appele à Lui comme masque de nos peurs, comme *alibi* pour justifier notre incapacité à la vie, notre impuissance, ou notre refus d'accepter la réalité, l'absurde, ou qui en dernier ressort, en appele à un "Dieu" dont on n'a pas "besoin" quand tout va bien.»

reconciling the values and concepts that belong to this world with a transcendental authority. Secondly, Camus finds it difficult, or almost impossible, to bring to terms the concept of a benevolent God and the presence of evil. Nor can he agree with the view that one reason for God's existence is to punish the wrongdoers. As he mentions both in his diary and in *The Fall*, he holds that man is sufficient to create guilt and to punish one another so that no God is necessary for that purpose. Besides, he argues that man's desire to become God does not go with his craving for the presence of a God. Finally, Camus considers the presence of God to be a threat to man's freedom. A quotation he makes in his diary reads: "Ferrero. "One of these days the act of restrained will is going to explode." "[1]

Accordingly, no matter how strictly man may try to restrain will through religious or social rules or means, it is powerful enough to break the yoke. This may be due to the reason that man desires to be a creator and thus, cannot remain under artificial suppression. In a way, this proves to be the "will to power".

Camus makes various entries in his diaries reflecting his opinion of Christianity. He writes in one of them, "Behind the cross, the devil. Leave them together. Your empty altar is elsewhere."[2]

He is against Christianity because it is dogmatic and restrictive. His advice, therefore, is to turn away from Christianity, together with its preachings and principles, towards an empty altar. In other words, man is supposed to create his own values rather than adopting pre-determined ones. He criticises Christianity heavily in *The Stranger* and in *The Fall* and seems to think that what a religion may inflict upon humans as a punishment, such as capital punishment, is so humiliating that one would rather be an atheist or an agnostic than be a follower of a religion.

But he is not always grave in his criticism. He exhibits a refined sense of humour when, for example, he comments on a priest: "A priest who regrets having to

[1] Camus, *Notebooks 1951-1959*, 75.

[2] Ibid., 256.

leave his books when dying? Which proves that the intense pleasure of eternal life does not infinitely exceed the gentle company of books."[1]

All the same, in his works, newspaper articles and speeches, his disbelief in religion and his respect for the people who have religious faith are finely combined and politely expressed. His words in a speech he gives in a Dominican Monastery are an example of the case. "I share with you the same revulsion from evil. But I do not share your hope, and I continue to struggle against this universe in which children suffer and die."[2]

Indeed, Camus has faith in man rather than in God. He thinks that the Christian God is not benevolent and if one is to believe in God, he says, one also ought to see that God is despotic and that He is the cause of injustice, pain and death. This may be because, Camus suggests, God looks at the world from a different plane. He is aloof so He conceives the world only in an abstract manner.[3] On the other hand, man is directly in life and the world. Camus's comment is that, if that is the case, the Christian God probably does not have a significant role that He plays in the world.

Besides, there is another point that bothers Camus about God. God symbolizes power, but then, whoever has power tends to be unjust. Camus calls attention to the link between power and justice arguing that the two concepts are inseparable and even if it is used well, "Good power is the healthy and careful administration of injustice".[4] So he is afraid that God may tend to act unjustly, too.

In his diary, again, he makes an entry that testifies his faith in man. "In the Old Testament God says nothing, it is the living people who serve him with their words. It is because of this that I have not stopped loving that which is sacred in this world."[5]

---

[1] Ibid., 94.

[2] Camus, *Resistance*, 71.

[3] Camus, *Notebooks 1942-1951*, 182.

[4] Camus, *Notebooks 1951-1959*, 201.

[5] Ibid., 186.

When man is considered to occupy the primary place, God may be declared "dead". And that's what Camus does. But his is not a simple declaration. In *The Rebel*, he elaborates on why and how God is "dead". Accordingly, everything starts with the French Revolution.

> 1789 is the starting-point of modern times, because the men of that period wished, among other things, to overthrow the principle of divine right and to introduce to the historical scene the forces of negation and rebellion which had become the essence of intellectual discussion in the previous centuries. Thus they added to the traditional tyrannicide the concept of calculated deicide.[1]

Tyrannicide is actualised by the murder of King Louis XVI, who is the representative of God on earth. Nevertheless, Camus thinks that this particular act of murdering the king does not really suffice to "kill" God since there are still religious values and opinions that people hold on to. It is the Russian Revolution in the 20th century that "kills" God by an entire rejection of all kinds of authority over man. Camus explains that after the deicide, man starts a nihilistic revolution which brings wars and destruction in its wake. The aim is in fact, to obtain a unity at the end and establish eventually, "the religion of man". To found that "religion", even the memories pertaining to God needs to be erased, Camus says. As a natural consequence, nihilism gains great popularity in 20th century, with the Russian Revolution killing all there is left of God in principles. And when this is the case, man is consecrated and he becomes his own God.

He mentions in *The Rebel* that Nietzsche regards the world as divine due to its "worldliness" and that he thinks man is divine, too, not only because he belongs to the world but also because he can create things. Camus, however, does not see man as 'divine', in the sense that he does not attribute to man any 'sacredness'. On the contrary, he finds the idea dangerous since those who are considered to be 'divine' are people holding an authoritative status, such as kings, who can exert pressure of any kind on man. Nevertheless, man always has priority for Camus because man, particularly if he is an artist, can create things and values and can also stand against death with his grace as well as with his creations. These qualities are of absolute importance as they bestow man with a

[1] Camus, *The Rebel*, 112.

disposition that is thought to belong to God. In fact, Camus draws a parallelism between God and an artist. Herbert Hochberg states that Camus holds such an idea because, first of all, an artist can create; and secondly, he can rebel against reality and change it if he wishes.[1]

Perhaps being a creator makes man ego-centric from time to time. Camus makes a quotation in his diary from Montherlant. "According to Montherlant, all true creators dream of a life without friends."[2]

The statement could be interpreted with an existential approach. If man is a creator, he has surpassed the stage of wishing to become God but he *is* God; so he wants no equals. To get full satisfaction out of his status, he needs to feel that he is higher than everybody else, even unique. Such an attitude of superiority may be irritating for the others but perhaps the experience is worth it because the creator enjoys double satisfaction—of creating himself and other things—may they be works of art or values pertaining to life. Besides, creators have a positive effect on life in general:

> The opposite of reaction is not revolution, but creation. The world is in an unending state of reaction and thus unendingly in danger of revolution. What defines progress, if it is such, is that without compromise, creators of all kinds triumph over the mind, over reaction, and over inactivity without revolution being necessary. When there are no more of these creators, revolution is inevitable.[3]

Under ordinary conditions, therefore, the world does not lack creators. In addition, as mentioned earlier, man himself is enough to create guilt and punishment, which fills another realm in life. The conclusion Camus draws is that, if this is the case, the Christian God does not occupy a special place and hence, He is not essential. Indeed, Camus attaches such great importance to artists and creators that he thinks they can even defy death. "As a creator I have given life to death itself. That is all that I had to do before dying."[4]

---

[1] Hochberg, "Albert Camus and the Ethics of Absurdity."

[2] Camus, *Notebooks 1951-1959*, 78.

[3] Ibid., 111.

Since death already exists, "giving life to death" may be interpreted as the artist attributing to it a new meaning, not treating it as something distant, mysterious and fearsome but bringing it into life, making it ordinary, thinking about it and defying it.

The same thesis comes up in *The Plague*, where Camus juxtaposes two people of opposite views, Father Paneloux, a man of religion, and Doctor Rieux, who devotes his life to all those people suffering from plague in the town. Father Paneloux firmly believes that the plague is a punishment sent by God. He explains in his sermon,

> The first time this scourge appears in history, it was wielded to strike down the enemies of God. Pharaoh set himself up against the divine will, and the plague beat him to his knees. Thus from the dawn of recorded history the scourge of God has humbled the proud of heart and laid low those who hardened themselves against Him. Ponder this well, my friends, and fall on your knees.
> …
> If today the plague is in your midst, that is because the hour has struck for taking thought. The just man need have no fear, but the evildoer has good cause to tremble.[1]

Unfortunately, the sermon serves only to set panic among the listeners. Camus's message is that such faith does not help. What helps is struggling and that's what Doctor Rieux does. ""My question's this," said Tarrou. "Why do you yourself show such devotion, considering you don't believe in God? I suspect your answer may help me to mine.""[2]

> His face still in shadow, Rieux said that he'd already answered: that if he believed in an all-powerful God he would cease curing the sick and leave that to Him. But no one in the world believed in a God of that sort, no, not even Paneloux, who believed that he believed in such a God. And this was

[4] Ibid., 112.

[1] Albert Camus, *The Plague* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1974), 87.

[2] Ibid., 116.

> proved by the fact that no one ever threw himself on Providence completely. Anyhow, in this respect Rieux believed himself to be on the right road—in fighting against creation as he found it. [1]

And Rieux asks a question in return:

> … since the order of the world is shaped by death, mightn't it be better for God if we refuse to believe Him and struggle with all our might against death, without raising our eyes toward the heaven where He sits in silence. [2]

Later in the novel, Tarrou desires to become a saint, a wish almost the same as becoming a God; but Rieux thinks differently.

> "It comes to this," Tarrou said almost casually; "what interests me is learning how to become a saint."
> "But you don't believe in God."
> "Exactly! Can one be a saint without God?—that's the problem, in fact the only problem, I'm up against today."
> …
> "Perhaps," the doctor answered. "But, you know, I feel more fellowship with the defeated than with saints. Heroism and sanctity don't really appeal to me, I imagine. What interests me is being a man."[3]

While Rieux sets an example of a non-believer who has no desire to become God, in *The Fall*, Camus portrays Clamence as a wearisome character who sticks out of the crowd with his extraordinary thoughts and behaviour. Clamence does not believe in a religion. And although he declares himself to be a modest man, in fact, he stands aloof and he has an acute feeling of superiority. As a lawyer, he describes his position as

> Just consider this, *cher* Monsieur, I lived with impunity. I was concerned in no judgement; I was not on the floor of the courtroom but somewhere in

[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., 117.

[3] Ibid., 230, 231.

> the flies like those gods that are brought down by machinery from time to time to transfigure the action and give it its meaning. After all, living aloft is still the only way of being seen and hailed by the largest number.[1]

He places himself in such heights that he admits that once he had felt himself in a status to forgive the Pope. "…that's the only way to set oneself above him…"[2] After hearing a laughter which makes him grow conscious of who he actually is, he gradually begins to laugh at himself in a similar manner. Now he becomes aware of his 'human' situation and he knows he cannot be God. Still, he is unwilling to turn to modesty. He knows that it is difficult for non-believers to manage their lives so he tries different ways to continue feeling superior. One way is that he keeps in his cupboard the panel *The Just Judges*, stolen from a cathedral. The panel shows some judges who are on their way to express their adoration to the Lamb, or Christ, the symbol of innocence. Clamence, however, thinks that justice and innocence are two concepts that are separated. The reason is that innocence is on the cross; in other words, Jesus is crucified, or "God is dead" and there is no more innocence. And he himself has locked up justice in the cupboard. This makes him believe that he is still powerful and dominant and can 'interfere with' the way the world is ruled by keeping judgement under control.

Another way he tries to remain dominant is to begin acting as a judge-penitent. He speaks to people as though he were pointing out his own mistakes, shortcomings and repentance but he gradually makes these cover up everyone. So while he appears to share his disgraceful acts with the others, he places some of the burden on them and starting as a penitent, he ends up as a judge—judging others as well as himself. Now he feels that he has become God again.
"I dominate at last, but for ever. Once more I have found a height to which I am the only one to climb and from which I can judge everybody."[3]

[1] Camus, *The Fall*, 21.

[2] Ibid., 94.

[3] Ibid., 104.

5.4 Freedom

As can be observed in Clamence's behaviour, man's desire to rule and his "will to power" are insatiable and unavoidable. In a world without a God, man is supposed to find himself in himself. There are no fundamentals or roots that his being is based on except for himself. Under these conditions, man can't help but inevitably turn to his innate feeling of freedom. Camus thinks that, in fact, no freedom is absolute freedom if it does not offer man eternity but he still believes firmly that freedom is indispensable because being deprived of freedom means submission to an authority and, therefore, loss of human dignity.

Earlier than Camus, but being not so distant from the 20th century, Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche attach freedom great importance. In Dostoevsky's *The Notes from the Underground*, the narrator rejects the idea that nature determines everything, including the future, because such determinism dispossesses man of his freedom of choice and free will. However, man wants to live according to his desires, which are, in fact, life itself. In other words, desires constitute life and reason is simply a tool to enable man to think. Camus shares these thoughts and puts them into action in the character of Meursault in *The Stranger*. Meursault leads his life in accordance with his desires and free will, without thinking. If at the end he begins to think, it is merely in order to find out how he can regain his freedom.

In the prose poem *The Great Inquisitor* in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky discusses the question whether freedom or obedience to earthly rules is more important. The problem is caused by the dilemma of being free or being slaves at the pricey cost of being fed. As slavery also stands for some power to depend on, most people prefer that. They want to act as a community or, like a herd. The inquisitor sees that most people are not strong and capable creatures to hold on to their freedom and he turns to join the minority of "clever people". Meursault does the same thing and chooses freedom over the slavery that being a member of a society leads to.

Kierkegaard, together with Sartre, maintains that man has the freedom of making choices, and thus, decisions but he also worries that such freedom may lead to anxiety. In any case, Camus's views do not agree with those of

Kierkegaard's since Camus regards Christian existentialists as people committing "philosophical suicide".

On the other hand, Nietzsche asserts that a free man is a man who has broken his bonds with the "herd", or who has never become a member of it. He does not get stuck to conventions, prejudices or dogmas. He resists receiving orders—may they be personal, social or religious. From time to time, the kind of freedom Nietzsche advocates seems to be the freedom a nihilist would endorse. Camus, however, behaves cautiously so he criticises Nietzsche for allowing limitless freedom because it may paradoxically take one to slavery. He argues that a metaphysical rebellion leaves no room for God, and with it, moral nihilism is introduced. Then the only thing that man has at hand is will to power and a desire to do anything that he can imagine, which makes him relentless and in the long run, makes the society plunge into turmoil.

> Chaos is also a form of servitude. Freedom exists only in a world where what is possible is defined at the same time as what is not possible. Without law there is no freedom. If fate is not guided by superior values, if chance is king, then there is nothing but the step in the dark and the appalling freedom of the blind.[1]

At the same time, freedom without boundaries shakes people's faith in the state.

> 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 a right to absolute freedom. The limit where freedom begins and ends, where its rights and duties come together, is called law. If it evades the law, if it deprives the citizens of the benefits of the law, there is breach of faith.[2]

Camus places great emphasis also on justice and he believes that freedom and justice are interdependent. His idea is that if man succumbs to giving up some on one side, he will lose the same amount on the other side. But he proposes that the problem can be solved by adopting a principle.

---

[1] Camus, *The Rebel*, 71.

[2] Camus, *Resistance*, 101-102.

> The current motto for all of us can only be this: without giving up anything on the plane of justice, yield nothing on the plane of freedom.[1]

He wants to take cautious steps because he worries that, especially in the case of a rebel and a revolution, the emergence of terror as a result of excessive freedom proves to be to the detriment of the revolution made. Such a case, however, could be typical of a revolution due to the fact that what is initially a metaphysical rebellion that seeks innocence and makes "an appeal to the essence of being" results in a revolution that may inevitably embrace violence.

Still, all in all, freedom is of utmost importance to Camus and he displays similarities with Sartre in his perception of the concept. For both, it is not merely a human quality but it *is* man himself. Man's instinct for freedom equals to his being. Sartre thinks that liberty is, in fact, the void in man's heart, which forces him to mould and *create* himself rather than just to *be*. Camus thinks the same. Like Sartre, he argues that man creates himself through his actions based on his choices. So choices determine behaviour. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre gives the example of a waiter.

> Let us consider this waiter in the café. … All his behaviour seems to us a game. He applies himself to chaining his movements as if they were mechanisms, the one regulating the other; his gestures and even his voice seem to be mechanisms; he gives himself the quickness and pitiless rapidity of things. He is playing, he is amusing himself. But what is he playing? We need not watch long before we can explain it: he is playing at *being* a waiter in a café. … the waiter in the café plays with his condition in order to *realize* it. This obligation is not different from that which is imposed on all tradesmen. Their condition is wholly one of ceremony. The public demands of them that they realize it as a ceremony: … A grocer who dreams is offensive to the buyer, because such a grocer is not wholly a grocer. Society demands that he limit himself to his function as a grocer.[2]

The mechanism of the waiter that Sartre discusses comes up in *The Stranger*. There, the members of the society display behaviour patterns similar to those of

[1] Ibid., 93.
[2] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1984), 101-102.

the waiter. They choose to act so in order to fit in the society. But it can be argued that they *have to* choose what they choose because otherwise they will be dismissed. Thus, theirs is not an act of freedom. As a matter of fact, real freedom is Meursault's rejection of joining in the society, risking dismissal—a cruel one in his case because he rejects both the values of the society and the faith in Christianity. Camus must have designed the plot as such for a purpose. He wants to show that killing God gives man freedom and facing the absurd allows him to declare his freedom. The actor and the conqueror in *The Myth* enjoy freedom, too. The actor is free on the stage to do what people in actual life cannot always do.

> Not everyone can be "theatrical", and this unjustly maligned word covers a whole aesthetic and a whole ethic. Half a man's life is spent in implying, in turning away, and in keeping silent. Here the actor is the intruder. He breaks the spell chaining that soul, and at last the passions can rush onto their stage.[1]

As he creates characters on the stage, the actor experiences what Camus calls an "absurd miracle". He apprehends each character by acting him out; he leaves his own self temporarily to convert himself into that character. Still, the actor suffers a contradiction since, despite his attempts to "achieve everything and live everything", he is doomed as a human in an absurd world.

The same is true for the conqueror. Camus says that if a conqueror speaks of conquering, it is conquering, or surpassing, himself. And he surpasses himself through revolt, by employing free will and becoming spiritually liberated. Yet, there is a limit: he cannot go further than himself because "man is his own end. And he is his only end."

Caligula too, sets a good example for Camus's thesis concerning freedom. Caligula's freedom is based on defying both deity and mankind. He says that once man becomes aware of the meaninglessness of the world, he gains freedom. Caligula exaggerates the limits of his freedom with his cruelty but he is not conscious of it. He simply wants to be further than a God and asks for the

---

[1] Camus, *The Myth*, 60.

kingdom of the impossible. Yet, as Sartre states, he can never achieve happiness, never fill the void in his heart and become 'complete' by acquiring immortality.

Camus seems to associate freedom with innocence. Despite all the bloodshed Caligula causes, he does not consider himself to be a tyrant.

> I should say the real tyrant is a man who sacrifices a whole nation to his ideal or his ambition. But I have no ideal, and there's nothing left for me to covet by way of power or glory. If I use this power of mine, it's to compensate.[1]

The same holds for the two Meursaults, Sisyphus, and Don Juan. Meursault 'the stranger' murders a man but fails to see why he should be considered guilty and be given a death penalty for that. The Meursault in *A Happy Death* is a murderer, too. He commits the murder cold-bloodedly, to get the possession of the huge sum of money that Zagreus owns and, by that means, to lead a perfectly happy life that, in the end, will take him to a perfectly happy death. Similarly, Sisyphus finds himself innocent and so does Don Juan—although their behaviour is not approved of by Gods or the society.

In fact, Camus treats guilt as a concept that can be washed away in the sea, which he takes as symbol of freedom. The sea appears in his works such as *The Stranger*, *The Plague* and *The First Man*, and he also makes entries in his diary about the sea. In all these, the sea serves as a metaphor to refer to freedom and purification—which, in itself, is a kind of freedom, too. His entries in his diary read, ""Liberty is a gift of the sea." Proudhon."[2] And "If I were to die unknown to the world, in the depths of a cold prison, at the last moment the sea would fill my cell, would come and raise me above myself and help me to die without hate."[3]

The sea, then, becomes a source of freedom, a saviour stripped off its religious connotations, purifying man and cleansing him of his misdeeds. But whether man finds it in the sea or in his own being, freedom is ultimately essential for him

[1] Camus, *Caligula*, 68.

[2] Camus, *Notebooks 1942-1951*, 268.

[3] Ibid, 270.

although from time to time it may be hard to bear. Clamence, who finds freedom exhausting, sets an example for such a case. It is easier, Clamence asserts, to renounce freedom and become a slave. Since one has to die alone, one had better join the others and share his lot with the others when one is alive. "When we are all guilty, that will be democracy."[1]

Love of freedom in existentialism is not individualistic but it embraces the society, too. Once there is involvement, what man wants for himself becomes what he wants for the others, too. And Camus's political and ethical aim is to lead a life which bestows the individual with freedom and which provides justice for the society. He thinks that, for man, freedom of choice manifests itself in revolt. To put it differently, revolt is, in certain cases, a natural consequence of freedom. If any indignity, pressure or pain is exerted on man, he is not supposed to succumb to it but choose to revolt, instead.

5.5 Revolt

As a matter of fact, Camus treats rebellion as a key concept for the reason that it is an agent that brings man freedom. In other words, freedom and revolt, or rebellion, are closely related as revolt brings liberation. Basically, revolt should be against the absurd. For Camus, revolt is interrelated with the concept of existence. Awareness of his existence is what renders man different from lifeless things. He has a tendency for freedom and he accommodates in himself the power to become free. And his act of freedom, in Camus's opinion, is his revolt against death, which is unjust and oppressive.

Camus's feeling of rebellion against injustice and oppression have their sources in different incidents in his life such as his encounter with tuberculosis in his teens, his being denied from becoming a teacher due to his illness and the occupation of France. His rebellion which is focused on the human condition at the beginning, in time shifts focus and turns to the cruelty humans inflict upon one another, thus gaining social grounds. He never drops the former view but gradually turns against all kinds of totalitarian regimes for the reason that they maltreat, or even abuse, people. Whereas his concern is individualistic in *The Myth*, he expresses his social and humanistic concerns thoroughly in *The Rebel*. Yet, his discussion of

[1] Camus, *The Fall*, 100.

rebellion is not limited to these works. During the occupation of France, he helps to found *Combat*, which functions as both an intelligence network and an underground newspaper, and in which his articles and essays about social and political matters are published. As a moral existentialist, Camus asserts that one needs to rebel in order to protect and preserve one's values.

While Camus scrutinizes all aspects of rebellion in *The Rebel*, he refers to Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, with regard to the novel ways of thinking they introduced into the concept.

> Until Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, rebellion is directed only against a cruel and capricious divinity—a divinity who prefers, without any convincing motive, Abel's sacrifice to Cain's and, by so doing, provokes the first murder. Dostoevsky, in the realm of imagination, and Nietzsche, in the realm of fact, enormously increase the field of rebellious thought and demand an accounting from the God of love Himself. Nietzsche believes that God is dead in the souls of his contemporaries. Therefore he attacks, like his predecessor Stirner, the illusion of God that lingers, under the guise of morality, in the thought of his times.[1]

Camus seconds Nietzsche in the opinion that once man considers God to be morally unjust, he kills Him in his heart. In Camus's case, the rebel thinks that there is punishment, evil and suffering despite the presence of God. Therefore, if the rebel wants to liberate mankind from all these negative concepts, he must reject, or kill, God. But then, thinks Camus, Nietzsche meets the absurd because if God is rejected in the name of justice, man may fail to understand the idea of justice, since he does not keep in his heart a concept of 'God' any more.

> God is denied in the name of justice, but can the idea of justice be understood without the idea of God? At this point are we not in the realm of absurdity? Absurdity is the concept that Nietzsche meets face to face. In order to be able to dismiss it, he pushes it to extremes: morality is the ultimate aspect of God, which must be destroyed before reconstruction

[1] Camus, *The Rebel,* 33-34.

> can begin. Then God no longer exists and is no longer responsible for our existence; man must resolve to act, in order to exist. [1]

Like Nietzsche, Camus's means to fight the absurd is revolt. One of the entries in his diary reflects his opinion that one should not settle for moderation. "Moderation. They consider it the resolution of contradiction. It cannot be anything other than the affirmation of contradiction and the heroic decision to stay with it and to survive it."[2]

He makes his motto clear in a quotation at the beginning of the fourth letter of *Letters to a German Friend.* "Man is mortal. That may be; but let us die resisting; and if our lot is complete annihilation, let us not behave in such a way that it seems justice."[3]

As mentioned earlier, Camus takes rebellion both on personal and social grounds. Both grounds are present in *The Plague*. The epidemic is symbolic of evil, including all kinds of tyranny such as Nazism and communism. As a matter of fact, fighting against the plague is fighting against death; in other words, it is rebellion. The important thing is that Camus does not find it heroic but just sensible.

> The essential thing was to save the greatest possible number of persons from dying and being doomed to unending separation. And to do this there was only one resource: to fight the plague. There was nothing admirable about this attitude; it was merely logical.[4]

Therefore, revolt seems to be a deed man should take for granted in the face of death and human destiny. And while Doctor Rieux's struggle to save lives is rebellion against death in a literal sense, Camus implies that the same action needs to be taken against political regimes that take masses of people to death.

---

[1] Ibid., 62.

[2] Camus, *Notebooks 1951-1959*, 21.

[3] Camus, *Resistance*, 26.

[4] Camus, *The Stranger*, 122.

A Happy Death, too, argues for revolt. Meursault's initial encounter with the human condition takes place while he is talking with Cardona, the barrel-maker. He suddenly gains consciousness of man's desolation, poor relations with the others around him, his regrets and his helplessness. There he becomes aware of his revolt, too.

> Today, in the face of abjection and solitude, his heart said: 'No.' And in the great distress that washed over him, Meursault realized that his rebellion was the only authentic thing in him, and that everything elsewhere was misery and submission.[1]

However, Meursault of *A Happy Death* does not know how to handle revolt. Unlike "the stranger", revolt is not his weapon against the absurdity of life so he tries to "choke it down". Yet, this awareness is crucial for him, because combined with what Zagreus has told him about the value of life, his revolt motivates him towards a new start whose beginning point is the murder he commits. And now a new era begins in his life, in which he lives lavishly and happily on the wealth of his victim, aiming at a happy death at the end. Camus's message is that if death is unavoidable, at least one can make the path to it the most beautiful possible.

As stated earlier, Camus's concept of revolt has a wide scope. Camus maintains that a revolt does not leave a society without values; on the contrary, values can still arise. He aims at showing his opposition to nihilism because nihilism is on the side of death. In nihilism, "all is permitted" and, therefore, everything is slashed down, leaving no room for any values. Nihilists do not hesitate to kill as nothing, including human life, is worthy for them. A rebel, on the other hand, goes against death. So the point that Camus makes is that a rebel is not a nihilist and vice versa. With *The Rebel*, Camus attempts to restore to the human spirit the mood of rebellion that he believes was lost in 19th and 20th centuries due to the oppression exerted by states on people. Just like *The Myth* is on whether one should commit suicide or not, *The Rebel* is whether one should endure oppression and tyranny and thus, the absurd, or not. In the introduction he writes for the work, Camus says, "In the age of negation, it was of some avail to examine one's

[1] Camus, *A Happy Death*, 41.

position concerning suicide. In the age of ideologies, we must examine our position in relation to murder."[1]

And in his diary, he makes an entry about how revolt and absurd are connected.

> Relation of the absurd to revolt. If the final decision is to reject suicide in order to maintain the confrontation, this amounts implicitly to admitting life as the only factual value, the one that allows the confrontation, that *is* the confrontation, "the value without which nothing." Whence it is clear that to obey that absolute value, whoever rejects suicide likewise rejects murder. Ours is the era which, having carried nihilism to its extreme conclusions, has accepted suicide. This can be verified in the ease with which we accept murder. The man who kills himself alone still maintains one value, which is the life of others. The proof is that he *never* uses the freedom and the terrible power granted him by his decision to die in order to dominate others: every suicide is illogical in some regard. But the men of the Terror have carried the values of suicide to their extreme consequence, which is legitimate murder, in other words collective suicide. Illustration: the Nazi apocalypse in 1945.[2]

Now man is expected to rebel in the name of positive values he finds in the society. But these need be derived from life itself and not be the givens of a religion or philosophy, simply because it is man, not God, that is the source of man's values.

Camus is meticulous about the difference between a rebellion and a revolution. Whereas a revolution implies the establishment of a new government, a rebellion is an unplanned action which happens spontaneously. Besides, if only some regulations are changed or amended while there is no change in the government, this is only a reform and not a revolution. He clarifies the concepts:

> Rebellion is, by nature, limited in scope. It is no more than an incoherent pronouncement. Revolution, on the contrary, originates in the realm of

---

[1] Camus, *The Rebel*, 4.

[2] Camus, *Notebooks 1942-1951*, 149.

> ideas. Specifically, it is the injection of ideas into historical experience, while rebellion is only the movement that leads from individual experience into the realm of ideas.[1]

And total revolution demands the control of the whole world, Camus remarks. That may again mean putting societies under the mallet of tyranny so Camus rejects it. He calls attention, once again, to the differences between a rebellion and a revolution.

> Rebellion's demand is unity; historical revolution's demand is totality. The former starts from a negative supported by an affirmative, the latter from absolute negation and is condemned to every aspect of slavery in order to fabricate an affirmative that is dismissed until the end of time. One is creative, the other nihilist. The first is dedicated to creation so as to exist more and more completely; the second is forced to produce results in order to negate more and more completely.[2]

Throughout the book, Camus discusses in detail what rebellion and a rebel are. He argues that rebellion is a humanitarian act. Thus, a rebel is ready to sacrifice his life for the sake of humanity. In fact, rebellion and life are inseparable in Camus's opinion:

> Those who find no rest in God or in history are condemned to live for those who, like themselves, cannot live: in fact, for the humiliated. The most pure form of the movement of rebellion is thus crowned with the heart-rending cry of Karamazov: if all are not saved, what good is the salvation of one only? … Rebellion proves in this way that it is the very movement of life and that it cannot be denied without renouncing life. Its purest outburst, on each occasion, gives birth to existence. Thus it is love and fecundity or it is nothing at all.[3]

According to Camus, rebellion is first metaphysical and then historical. Metaphysical revolt is a revolt against the absurdity, injustice and the

[1] Camus, *The Rebel*, 106.

[2] Ibid., 251.

[3] Ibid., 304.

incompatibility in the universe, so the metaphysical rebel struggles to establish unity and order. Metaphysical revolt is also against any religious form of transcendence. Instead of trying to comprehend what is not of this world—and fail to do so—metaphysical revolt kills God and the rebel chooses to remain within the boundaries of this world. This seems to be the only possible way to Camus of keeping one's ground in a state of rebellion. In fact, rebellion asks the question "Is it possible to find a rule of conduct outside the realm of religion and its absolute values?"[1]

> "I rebel, therefore we exist," said the slave. Metaphysical rebellion then added: "we are alone," by which we still live today. But if we are alone beneath the empty heavens, if we must die forever, how can we really exist? Metaphysical rebellion, then, tried to construct existence with appearances. After which purely historical thought came to say that to be was to act.[2]

Camus explains how this works:

> … 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.[3]

Through metaphysical rebellion, argues Camus, man proclaims that everything is absurd and that there is nothing to believe. But making such proclaim indicates that man at least believes in his own proclaim. Therefore, the only valid thing in this world is rebellion. Also, he makes the assertion that despite the fact that rebellion is usually observed as negative, "since it creates nothing, it is profoundly positive in that it reveals the part of man which must always be defended."[4] Indeed, although it does not create something of its own, rebellion guides man into being creative and creativity must be the part of man that must always be defended. Rebellion provides him with freedom to create and meanwhile, freedom itself rises as a new value.

---

[1] Ibid., 21.

[2] Ibid., 250.

[3] Ibid., 252.

[4] Ibid., 19.

Camus talks about the rebel in terms of a slave who revolts against his master but the imagery can easily be carried onto a political level, and from there onto a philosophical one, where the absurd man rises up against the worldly order and the authority ruling him. Now, he gains awareness.

> Having up to now been willing to compromise, the slave suddenly adopts ("because this is how it must be…") an attitude of All or Nothing. With rebellion, awareness is born.
>
> But we can see that the knowledge gained is, at the same time, of an "all" that is still rather obscure and of a "nothing" that proclaims the possibility of sacrificing the rebel to this "All." The rebel himself wants to be "all"—to identify himself completely with this good of which he has suddenly become aware and by which he wants to be personally recognized and acknowledged—or "nothing"; in other words, to be completely destroyed by the force that dominates him. As a last resort, he is willing to accept the final defeat, which is death, rather than be deprived of the personal sacrament that he would call, for example, freedom.[1]

Such an approach, together with what Camus soon adds, displays similarity with the attitude of Kirillov towards rebellion, freedom and becoming God.

> If the individual, in fact, accepts death and happens to die as a consequence of his act of rebellion, he demonstrates by doing so that he is willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of a common good which he considers more important than his own destiny.[2]

Camus shares with Sartre the notable tendency to let man act like God—but in a rather different manner. His heroes try to be 'God' by means of using their free will and revolting against any supreme power, death being the first among them.

In Camus's opinion, death is like "a closed door" because he believes that everything ends with death. He, therefore, nourishes no hope for an afterlife. In

[1] Ibid., 15.

[2] Ibid.

The Plague, in a dialogue Dr. Rieux has with Tarrou, Camus reflects his philosophy concerning how to approach the concept of death. Rieux says,

> … since the order of the world is shaped by death, mightn't it be better for God if we refuse to believe Him and struggle with all our might against death, without raising our eyes toward the heaven where He sits in silence.
> Tarrou nodded.
> Yes. But your victories will never be lasting; that's all.
> Rieux's face darkened.
> Yes, I know that. But it's no reason for giving up the struggle.[1]

In Camus's last novel, *The First Man (Le Premier Homme)*, the theme of revolt recurs. Despite the fact that Camus either advocates revolt or makes his heroes rebel but does not personally come up on stage, in this autobiographical novel the reader can see young Camus rebelling against the disorder in the world. Jacques, the hero, manages to find years later the grave of his father, who died in World War I, when Jacques was a baby. Camus writes that as Jacques stands there in silence, he feels a surge of revolt in his heart because he is forty years old now whereas his father was killed at the age of twenty-nine. The feeling of tenderness and pity that fills his heart is not the feeling a son bears for a deceased father, but a feeling of revolt that an older man feels about a child killed unjustly in an unfair world.[2]

Camus keeps reminding the readers that what makes death so crucial is that it is irrevocable. For him, it is terrible that man cannot escape from natural death but death inflicted on man by other men through wars or court decisions are even worse because life cannot be restored. Wars deny man his future so a man who fights in a war has only his present, the consciousness of which is hard to tolerate. And there, freedom, together with honour, comes to his aid.

---

[1] Camus, *The Plague*, 117-118.

[2] Albert Camus, *Le Premier Homme* (*n.p.* Éditions Gallimard, 1994), 34-35. «Et le flot de tendresse et de pitié qui d'un coup vint lui emplir le coeur n'était pas le mouvement d'âme qui porte le fils vers le souvenir du père disparu, mais la compassion bouleversée qu'un un homme fait ressent devant l'enfant injustement assassiné—quelque chose ici n'était pas dans l'ordre naturel et, à vrai dire, il n'y avait pas d'ordre mais seulement folie et chaos là où le fils était plus âgé que le père.»

> Facing the constant threat of destruction through war—thus the deprivation of a future—which morals can allow us to live only in the *present*? Honor (sic.) and freedom.[1]

5.6 Death Penalty

He has similar concerns about death penalty. His greatest concern is that the condemned person may be innocent but that the execution is an irrevocable act. For that reason, Camus fights all his life for the abolition of capital punishment. He argues that man has a natural fear of death but that it becomes unbearable if he is sentenced to death because now he knows almost with precision when the execution will take place and that it will be painful. This makes the execution an act worse than a murder.

> Many laws consider a premeditated crime more serious than a crime of pure violence. But what then is capital punishment but the most premeditated of murders, to which no criminal's deed, however calculated it may be, can be compared? For there to be equivalence, the death penalty would have to punish a criminal who had warned his victim of the date at which he would inflict a horrible death on him and who, from that moment onward, had confined him at his mercy for months. Such a monster is not encountered in private life.[2]

Camus points to the conflict that capital punishment gives rise to. Societies enforce it in the hope that it may be discouraging for some. However, in most cases, it does not lead to the desired effect but to the contrary. "It is a penalty, to be sure, a frightful torture, both physical and moral, but it provides no sure example except a demoralizing one. It punishes, but it forestalls nothing; indeed, it may even arouse the impulse to murder." [3]

As a matter of fact, what the society does in *The Stranger* is a case in point, and it is a retaliation, which Camus mentions in his essay *Reflections on the*

---

[1] Camus, *Notebooks 1951-1959*, 161.

[2] Camus, *Resistance*, 199.

[3] Ibid., 197.

Guillotine. "A punishment that penalizes without forestalling is indeed called revenge. It is a quasi-arithmetical reply made by society to whoever breaks its primordial law."[1]

The reader learns in the same essay the reason why Camus is so profoundly affected by capital punishment. When Camus is very young, his father goes to watch an execution at the guillotine and he returns home terribly upset physically and psychologically. Camus listens to the story as he grows up, and years later he uses the same theme about Meursault's father in *The Stranger.* This is, indeed, almost the only piece of information given in the novel about the father so it seems to have been chosen deliberately. This somehow indicates that not only his father but Camus was also over-affected by the execution despite the fact that he heard it only as a story.

There are various points that bother Camus concerning death penalty. He argues that no one is perfect so as to be entitled to judge and sentence another one to death. It makes one lose one's identity and dignity as a human because in such a case, one is totally under the control of others. However, existentialism requires that one directs oneself, one has free will and one makes one's own choices until the very end. Another point is that the period the convict spends waiting before the execution is so terrifying that, instead of clinging to religion and repenting—as expected of one, one loses faith.

> During the three quarters of an hour separating him from the end, the certainty of a powerless death stifles everything else; the animal, tied down and amenable, knows a hell that makes the hell he is threatened with seem ridiculous.[2]

Besides, in a secular society, a convict may be a disbeliever, in which case there exists no hope for him to fear due to his belief and repent.

Camus seems to praise the ancient Greeks for they give the convict a choice between execution and suicide so that he might shorten or prolong his time before death. Although Camus is never an advocate of suicidal acts, he thinks

[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., 202.

this is more humane because there, one has a kind of free will. Modern time executions, on the other hand, are degrading, humiliating and despising. They put man in an absurd condition. All these reasons make man lose his faith in religion and his respect for the society as a community with values and morals. He is, as it were, forced to become a nihilist.

Camus also finds two paradoxical cases related to capital punishment. In the first one, after being sentenced to death, a great desire to live puts its check on the person—so much so that capital punishment stops once again being intimidating for some people. Their strong bonds with life make the punishment lose its impact.

> If fear of death is, indeed, a fact, another fact is that such fear, however great it may be, has never sufficed to quell human passions. [1]

The second paradox is that in the waiting period, there is the wish to live but it is possible that a wish to die prevails from time to time in order to free oneself from the torture of waiting. The same motive appears in *The Fall*, where Clamence keeps in his cupboard a panel stolen from a cathedral. He thinks he might be arrested for the theft and get killed for it. But at the same time, a secret desire to die lurks in his heart because getting killed will get rid of his fear of death too, and he will find peace. He admits his feeling: "I would be decapitated, for instance, and I'd have no more fear of death; I'd be saved."[2]

To Camus, it seems that acknowledging death may make it easier to tolerate the idea of it. In that sense, he relates death and freedom. "The only liberty possible is a liberty as regards death. The really free man is the one who, accepting death as it is, at the same time accepts its consequences—that is to say, the abolition of all life's traditional values."[3]

The abolition of all traditional values, though, is not as easy as it may sound, so not everybody can do it. Abolishing these values requires disregarding as a whole the society one lives in and stepping out of it to step into a world of one's own, or

[1] Ibid., 190.

[2] Camus, *The Fall*, 107.

[3] Albert Camus, *Notebooks 1935-1942* (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 95.

alienation. Alienation appears as a significant motif at various points in Camus's works but it is in *The Stranger* that it comes up as the most striking.

5.7 Alienation

In the centre of Camus's works lie the questions what a human being is and what his status in the world is. He finds the answers to be rather obscure and this obscurity forms a basis for the state of alienation. In *The Stranger*, Camus criticises the injustice in the world by illustrating what happens to an individual in a society if he chooses to remain alienated. The point he makes is that although the world, and thus, the society, can offer no criteria for what is right or wrong, and although there seems to be no definition for 'morals', individuals are expected to act and behave 'morally'. Camus argues that it is merely the absurd that is in operation in the world, and not morality. This is why Meursault has an amoral approach towards life and, as a result, he fails to see why or how he could be 'guilty' of anything—of not being a devoted son, of not crying at his mother's funeral or of murder. Alienation, therefore, involves loss of values, which makes Meursault adopt a nihilistic attitude towards the whole world. He observes no values and shares no emotions with anyone. It is only after his verdict that he begins to feel that he is a member of a society and of humanity, even though he does not belong to it in the actual sense of the word. He notices that the only bond between himself and other people is the human condition they all share.

Alienation, however, should not be regarded as one-sided. Nietzsche thinks that clinging to conventional morality and religion is the reason that leads man to alienation. In a similar sense, in *The Stranger*, Camus wants to show that the members of the society are strangers to anyone who may be different from them so they fail to identify with the opposite party and cannot appreciate what or how they feel. Camus accuses those societies to be despotic due to their attitude and explains why a rebel—Meursault—behaves the way he does.

> The climax of every tragedy lies in the deafness of its heroes. … Dialogue on the level of mankind is less costly than the gospel preached by totalitarian regimes in the form of a monologue dictated from the top of a lonely mountain. On the stage as in reality, the monologue precedes death. Every rebel, solely by the movement that sets him in opposition to the oppressor, therefore pleads for life, undertakes to struggle against

> servitude, falsehood, and terror, and affirms, in a flash, that these three afflictions are the cause of silence between men, that they obscure them from one another and prevent them from rediscovering themselves in the only value that can save them from nihilism—the long complicity of men at grips with their destiny.[1]

In alienation, the opinion that the past is gone and the future is uncertain makes man focus on the present. But then, the present may be "insufficient" as Schopenhauer says. According to Camus, feeling the insufficiency of the present may bring about various stances or attitudes such as strife to make the present worthwhile in *The Myth* and indifference to life in *The Stranger*.

The problem with Meursault is that, for a long time, he fails to realize that he is considered to be an outsider. He observes himself as an ordinary person. The way he speaks is devoid of emotions and things seem to happen to him by chance. He himself believes it, too, and, as a result, can go to the extreme of blaming the murder he has committed on the intense light and heat of the sun. He is indifferent to people's sorrows and pains. He makes no choices nor does he state an opinion when he is with other people. He simply answers questions and does things without judging their consequences. The only person in whose presence he feels at ease is the magistrate who functions as a link or a bridge between Meursault and the world. Meursault does not hesitate to tell him that he has no faith in God. In return, the magistrate spends efforts to give Meursault some religious feelings and tries to enable him to become aware of the actual world he shares 'physically' with other people and return to it to be a real part of it. However, Meursault prefers to remain in his cocoon of alienation. Yet, despite his indifference, he is aware of a major point, that death hovers above all men and it renders everyone equal. This awareness is a main reason for his alienation.[2] It rises on the surface of his consciousness when the chaplain comes to his cell to 'console' him.

---

[1] Camus, *The Rebel*, 283-284.

[2] Dolorès Lyotard, ed., *Albert Camus contemporain* (Villeneuve d'Ascq, France: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2009), 65. «Texte très explicite en somme: c'est la mort à venir dont le souffle égalise tout, les modes de vie, les conduites, les actes, qui rend tout indifférent, qui rend illusoire ce que l'on croit être le destin que l'on s'est choisi. La grande égalisatrice rend tout vain, ce qui explique le comportement étrangement détaché et indifférent de Meursault, y compris à l'égard de son meurtre.»

> Nothing, nothing had the least importance, and I knew quite well why. He, too, knew why. From the dark horizon of my future a sort of slow, persistent breeze had been blowing toward me, all my life long, from the years that were to come. … What difference could they make to me, the deaths of others, or a mother's love, or his God; or the way a man decides to live, the fate he thinks he chooses, since one and the same fate was bound to "choose" not only me but thousands of millions of privileged people who, like him, called themselves my brothers.[1]

In his disinterest in life, Meursault is a tragic hero. Indeed, his case is 'absurdly tragic'. In the first place, if tragic means rebelling against the causal flow of events, Meursault rebels against death and it is the manifestation of his freedom. A tragic hero has freedom in that he does not believe that he is ruled and directed by a superhuman power let alone by the preset rules dictated by the society. And this is how Meursault feels. Furthermore, his stance is a stance of revolt against life. With his indifference, he manifests that he refuses to fit into conventions, which is an attitude that makes him authentic. He is the Sisyphus of the twentieth century as he is an authentic man in a meaningless world. Secondly, he experiences a conflict of values. İonna Kuçuradi says that a case is considered tragic if a value cancels out another one.[2] In Meursault's case, the tragic lies in the conflict between how he wants to lead his life and what a conventional society expects from him. He is different from ordinary people with his novel or unusual stance and that's why he is isolated by the society. He does not question life in his sheer disinterestedness but simply lives without questions and comments. Consequently, he is overpowered by the force of the society and is doomed to die in an absurdly tragic manner. It is absurd as he is at a loss as to understanding what fault or mistake he has made—not to mention a 'sin'—so that he deserves to be sentenced to death. A similar case is seen in *A Happy Death*, in which, a short while after committing a murder, Meursault neither thinks of the murder any more nor considers himself to be a murderer. The reason seems to be that a rebel, or a tragic hero in this sense, is naturally innocent because he knows no God and, as a consequence, there can be no moral or ethical values in a world without God, nor anything to judge or condemn him. Yet, this does not mean that Camus promotes an immoral life style. Meursault's innocence is

[1] Camus, *The Stranger*, 152.

[2] İonna Kuçuradi, *Sanata Felsefeyle Bakmak* (Ankara: Ayraç Yayınevi, 1997), 12.

related to rebellion and freedom; that's how he copes with an absurd world, and that's why he does not feel guilty although he is responsible of his acts.

Although in general alienation refers to one's remaining in one's narrow and very personal space, at times it may incite an awakening in the alienated person concerning the presence of 'the others'. In *The Stranger*, Meursault experiences such a case when he goes to the mortuary upon his mother's death. He is so detached from life and people that he notices in the mortuary for the first time that there exists a group of 'others', external to him, who are there for a reason he cannot grasp properly. It is only later that he realizes they are there for the vigil; still, he does not feel that he belongs to this group of mourners in any way:

> On sitting down, they looked at me, and wagged their heads awkwardly, their lips sucked in between their toothless gums. I couldn't decide if they were greeting me and trying to say something, or if it was due to some infirmity of age. I inclined to think that they were greeting me, after their fashion, but it had a queer effect, seeing all those old fellows grouped round the keeper, solemnly eying me and dandling their heads from side to side. For a moment I had an absurd impression that they had come to sit in judgement on me.[1]

It is clear that their presence makes Meursault uneasy. A strong evidence of Camus's existentialism is felt in this scene. Meursault does not want to belong to any group but chooses to remain on his own. Because he normally does not look carefully at what goes on around him, he is astonished when he starts paying attention to the old people and he feels that he shares nothing with them; neither is he willing to.

The Meursault in *A Happy Death* undergoes an experience that is even more intense. At the seashore one evening, he grows conscious of himself as though he were one of "the others". He is alienated even from himself; still, he feels so deeply impressed by the beauty of nature that he becomes confused.

> At this hour, Meursault's life seemed so remote to him, he felt so solitary and indifferent to everything and to himself as well … He walked lightly,

[1] Camus, *The Stranger*, 11.

> and the sound of his own footsteps seemed alien to him, familiar too, no doubt, but familiar in the way the rustling of animals in the mastic-bushes was familiar, or the breaking waves, or the rhythm of the night itself in the sky overhead. And he could feel his own body too, but with the same external consciousness as the warm breath of this spring night and the smell of salt and decay that rose from the beach. His actions in the world, his thirst for happiness, Zagreus' terrible wound baring brain and bone, the sweet uncommitted hours in the House above the World, his wife, his hopes and his gods—all this lay before him, but no more than one story chosen among so many others without any valid reason, at once alien and secretly familiar, a favourite book which flatters and justifies the heart at its core, but a book someone else has written.[1]

He has been alienated since the beginning and he looks at his life like someone watching it from the outside. But every now and then his existentialist feelings become prominent and he feels that he would love to live every moment of his life and *feel* that he was doing so. He admits it while talking with Zagreus, "'And yet,' he said, … 'if I was strong enough and patient enough…' … 'I know what kind of life I'd have. I wouldn't make an experiment out of my life: I would *be* the experiment of my life.'"[2]

Alienation is seen in Camus's other works such as *The Fall* and *The First Man*, his last novel left incomplete with his death. In *The Fall*, Clamence is in a state of alienation mixed with a vain feeling of superiority and he comes out of this state with a laughter he hears coming from the Seine. Now his feeling of superiority staggers because his awareness of himself disturbs—on his side—the harmony he thought he had with his friends. He starts to see them in a different light:

> The circle of which I was the centre broke and they lined up in a row as on the judge's bench. The moment I grasped that there was something to judge me, I realized that, in fact, they had an irresistible vocation for judgement. Yes, they were there as before, but they were laughing. Or

[1] Camus, *A Happy Death*, 98.

[2] Ibid., 32-33.

> rather it seemed to me that every one of them that I met was looking at me with a hidden smile.[1]

In *The First Man*, the boy's mother and uncle, who are, in fact, Camus's real mother and uncle, appear to be alienated but still, they are aware of the absurd, in other words, that the future is unpredictable and that one is prone to disasters. The boy himself could be regarded as alienated, too since he feels that his past is incomplete because he has little information about his father, who died in the First World War when the boy was newly born.

> Neither his mother nor his uncle ever spoke of the departed relatives. Nor of the father whose traces he was seeking, nor of the others. They went on living in poverty, though they were no longer in need, but they were set in their ways, and they looked on life with a resigned suspicion; they loved it as animals do, but they knew from experience that it would regularly give birth to disaster without even showing any sign that it was carrying it. And then, the way these two were with him, silent and drawn in on themselves, empty of memories and only holding on to a few blurred images; they lived now in proximity to death—that is always in the present. Never would he learn from them who his father had been, and even though by their presence alone they reopened springs within him reaching back to his poor and happy childhood, he could not be sure whether these very rich memories gushing out of him were really faithful to the child he had been. It was far more certain, on the contrary, that he was left with two or three favourite pictures that joined him to them, made him one of them, that blotted out what he had tried to be for so many years and reduced him to the blind anonymous being that for so many years had survived through his family and that made him truly distinctive.[2]

Nevertheless, when the boy becomes a young man, he searches for and manages to find his father's grave for the sake of establishing a tangible connection with his father and with his own childhood.

---

[1] Camus, *The Fall*, 58.

[2] Albert Camus, *The First Man* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 133-134.

Camus sometimes displays conflicting feelings about alienation and the human condition. In the first place, he can't help being bothered by the impossibility of discovering the secrets of the world, or getting rid of the absurd.

> Sometimes, late in these nights of celebration, when alcohol, dance, and everyone's violent abandon led very quickly to a sort of happy lassitude, it seemed to me, at least for a second, at the edge of fatigue, that I finally understood the secret of beings and that I would one day be able to tell of it. But the fatigue disappeared, and with it, the secret.[1]

There are times when he sounds rather displeased and on the side of alienation but he quickly recovers himself:

> The tragedy is not that we are alone, but that we cannot be. At times I would give anything in the world to no longer be connected by anything to this universe of men. But I am a part of this universe, and the most courageous thing to do is to accept it and the tragedy at the same time.[2]

Yet, in almost all circumstances, he nurtures his optimism. When he quotes from Emerson, for example, that every wall is a door[3], he appears to be thinking that it is possible for man to find a way out of hopelessness and misery. Especially, if death is a wall, man needs to *and can* furnish himself with bumpers to soften up the shock or with equipment to spring over the wall with the least damage. He maintains the same positive existentialist attitude concerning the quotation he makes from Thoreau.

> As long as a man remains himself, everything is in agreement with him: governments, society, even the sun, the moon, and the stars.[4]

Camus seems to make a reference to the act of breaking one's armour of alienation and getting into positive contact with the world; remaining in harmony

[1] Camus, *Notebooks 1951-1959*, 52.

[2] Ibid., 47.

[3] Ibid., 22.

[4] Ibid., 27.

with the world and at the same time, being aware of one's existence and condition. He quotes Stendhal in his diary:

> What is the self? I know nothing of it. One day I am awakened on this Earth, I find myself tied to my body, to a character, to a fortune. Shall I vainly enjoy myself by trying to change these things, all the while forgetting to live?[1]

What Stendhal says complies with the view of existentialists. Man is thrown onto the world, and in his inauthenticity, he endeavours to make a well-rounded person out of his givens—his facticity as Sartre calls it—and his non-givens. Camus would agree with Stendhal up to this point. However, he would disagree that one might forget to live because Camus believes that one is expected to be always busy shaping and moulding one's life. For Camus, living means changing things. When one is striving to make changes, it means one is, in fact, cherishing life.

However, things may not work the same way when alienation is the case. The alienated man does not bother making changes in his life. So he attracts attention with his 'odd' attitude. Nietzsche says "They all talk about me. … But none *think* about me".[2] This is what happens to Meursault in *The Stranger* when he is tried and imprisoned. People talk about him and go watch his trial and he is condemned to death in the public opinion before being condemned by the court. What is ironic is that people see him as a threat to the society so nobody thinks of him or tries to feel empathy for him. In spite of all, Meursault develops in prison a consciousness towards life and, shaking off his alienation, becomes attached to the world. He proves to be his own spiritual saviour albeit the fact that he is given the capital punishment. There, Camus is in full accordance with Nietzsche: "Whoever has ever built a new heaven has found the necessary power for this endeavour *only at the bottom of his own hell*."[3]

---

[1] Ibid., 81.

[2] Ibid., 87.

[3] Ibid., 90.

This is also the victory man gains against the absurd. Indeed, In *The Stranger*, Camus aims at showing that there is a direct proportion between the notion of 'the absurd' and the concept of alienation. The problem arises from the fact that an alienated person fails to appreciate his situation. Consequently, Meursault does not know that he is an outsider. Neither is he aware that his value judgements—if any—conflict with those of the society. All he knows is that life is not worth worrying about. He has confined himself in his own world and, most of the time, he does not even take the trouble to explain people what he thinks, although, at times, it may be to his own detriment. For example, when reflecting on the conversation he has had with his lawyer, he thinks, "Once or twice I had a mind to assure him that I was just like everybody else; quite an ordinary person. But really that would have served no great purpose, and I let it go – out of laziness as much as anything else."[1]

Here Camus points out once again that life is absurd. Why should anyone strive to explain to others what he means by certain words or behaviour if life is futile, anyway? Everything is pointless and nothing will bring about any result that is worthwhile so it is wiser to let life flow on its own accord than try to make explanations or expect fruitful results. Camus also lets the reader see how alienation and absurdity are blended in the character of Meursault with the very ironic sentence "I was just like everybody else; quite an ordinary person."

When Meursault is examined in view of Camus's existentialist philosophy, it is observed that he wants to remain invisible to the society by blending well into his own world and not sticking out so that he will not have to exist in accordance with their norms. Eventually, he begins to think liberty might be found in death because his execution will bring him the freedom that he otherwise cannot achieve. Now he has begun to see some meaning in life but futility is still there as he is denied by the society the right to live. The novel ends with the sentence,

> For all to be accomplished, for me to feel less lonely, all that remained to hope was that on the day of my execution there should be a huge crowd of spectators and that they should greet me with howls of execration.[2]

[1] Camus, *The Stranger*, 81.

[2] Ibid., 154.

It seems to mean that those cries of hatred will prove that the society gets rid of an outsider who has disturbed them with his absurdity but, at the same time, that this alienated hero maintains his hidden revolt against the society by finding peace in his own world.

In existentialism, alienation happens to be a means to lead a life of seclusion but man has a greater chance of success if he manages to remove his armour and get into closer touch with life. But he should be ready, too, to face anxiety when he allows himself to be 'touched' by life. Anxiety is mainly caused by an awareness of the futility and the meaninglessness of life and believing that there is no God as all values of divinity have been invented by man. Whereas Heidegger thinks that anguish makes man 'authentic', Sartre goes a step further by claiming that anxiety, or anguish, is felt when man realizes that he is completely free in choosing his deeds, i.e. that he is 'forlorn' and hence, he himself bears the whole responsibility of his acts. For Sartre, man is "condemned to be free" and only he himself is supposed to decide how to handle life. According to Heidegger and Sartre, there are two aspects to the self. One is man's facticity, i.e. his thrownness onto the world, and the other is his transcendence, his ability to surpass his facticity through his aspirations. This view, however, does not necessarily suggest that man have two separate selves; it solely indicates two different modes of life. It is not possible for man to remain separate from the world he shares with 'the others' but he can be separate in his consciousness to construct his life. Camus does not agree with Sartre that responsibility has such a wide scope because, he believes, agreeing to this would leave no room for compassion towards man. He attaches anxiety a positive value for he is of the opinion that anxiety enables man to hold on to life faster and make it meaningful. Accordingly, once man realizes the truth about human existence, it would be wise for him to take steps to overcome this truth. It involves enjoying life as well as questioning it. Indeed, Camus is an optimist, and so are the characters he creates. They survive the moment of awareness despite the fact that it is shocking and painful. Awareness seems to be the impulse to keep them lively and involved and they all conclude that life is worth living and they cling to it as fast as they can.

In his stance towards life, Camus rejects nihilism since it is hard for a follower of nihilism to find meaning in life. "The eternal recurrence" that Nietzsche mentions

is a concept that Camus would definitely evade for the reason that it describes a kind of existence "without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without any finale of nothingness … This is the most extreme form of nihilism: the nothing (the "meaningless"), eternally!"[1] In other words, it is the case in which "the nothing", which seems to be equivalent to "the meaningless", is eternal.

On the other hand, Nietzsche learns from tragedy that life is sublime and that it should be enjoyed despite the cruelty it bears and the suffering it causes. This is the way of thinking Camus supports. He is primarily interested in the anthropological and psychological aspects of the absurd, i.e., "raisons de vivre". Therefore, as he handles the problematic of suicide in *The Myth*, he tries to find answers to questions such as if there is a reason to live and if there is one, what it is. He discredits the traditional answer that it is God that makes the world meaningful and thus, gives man a reason to live. In Camus's opinion, what gives life meaning is the creational acts of man, and by this he means rebellion in the first place and following it closely, the works of art created by artists. Also, again like Nietzsche, he relates the desire for knowledge with the pursuit for happiness. Nietzsche says in his preface to *Ecce Homo*, that dealing with philosophy means wandering in cold and unknown lands—"unknown" because they are forbidden by morality. He asserts, however, that such forbidden lands should be conquered as truth lies there.

> How much truth does a spirit *endure*, how much truth does it *dare*? More and more that became for me the real measure of value. Error (faith in the ideal) is not blindness, error is *cowardice*.
>
> Every attainment, every step forward in knowledge, *follows* from courage, from hardness against oneself, from cleanliness in relation to oneself.[2]

That means, in order to attain knowledge, man needs to step out of rules and conventions and dare into something new. This is a sign of a free spirit and freedom of will, which provides man with knowledge of himself and of the world. Consequently, he becomes independent and powerful. It could also be taken as

[1] Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 35-36.

[2] Walter Kaufmann, ed., *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (New York: The Modern Library, 1968), 674.

an attempt to break from God and morality—not necessarily to become immoral but very probably amoral.

Concerning Camus, understanding the world means reducing it to the human and stamping it with man's own seal; that is, freeing it from anything transcendental or metaphysical. But the difference between Nietzsche and Camus at this point is that Camus feels disillusioned as the universe does not reveal answers to man's questions to quench his thirst for knowledge so man meets the absurd and thus, unhappiness. The problem is that Camus finds the absurd dangerous because not only does it turn life meaningless but in the long run, it promotes murder, a detestable and unforgivable act for Camus. Being indifferent to the world due to the presence of the absurd, man also remains indifferent to murders and even he himself may commit a murder because in such a condition the murderer is neither right nor wrong. "Thus, whichever way we turn, in our abyss of negation and nihilism, murder has its privileged position."[1] Man holds life in his hands, however, to enjoy it. So he is supposed to love other men, disdain murder and fight the absurd. Life is ready to embrace him—if he can realise it. Camus enters in his diary, "Tolstoy: "One can live only so long as one is drunk with life" Confession (79). At the same time: "I am crazy about life … It's the summer, the delicious summer…""[2]

Camus has such faith in life that he argues that even in nihilism, one can find a meaning in life—by going beyond nihilism. In *The Myth*, he invites people not only to survive in a desert but also to create values there. He knows that social values shatter when one sees that they grow from shabby roots. Then they all begin to look meaningless. But Camus expects man to be the master of his own fate and this lies in creating a world of one's own, in growing aware of one's existence and feeling bliss on this 'discovery'. In *A Happy Death*, Meursault advises Catherine, his wife, when he is about to leave her, to find happiness in herself.

[1] Camus, *The Rebel*, 5.

[2] Camus, *Notebooks 1951-1959*, 80.

> Never give up, Catherine. You have so much inside you, and the noblest sense of happiness of all. Don't just wait for a man to come along. That's the mistake so many women make. Find your happiness in yourself.[1]

As for himself, he earns happiness by murdering a wealthy man and taking all his money. He never repents for his crime because, as an absurd hero, he conceives it simply as a means to take him to happiness. Meaning comes into his life through his consciousness of his existence and his carving out his own life.

> Like warm dough being squeezed and kneaded, all he wanted was to hold his life between his hands: the way he felt during those two long nights on the train when he would talk to himself, prepare himself to live. To lick his life like barley-sugar, to shape it, sharpen it, love it at last—that was his whole passion. This presence of himself to himself—henceforth his effort would be to maintain it in the face of everything in his life, even at the cost of a solitude he knew now was so difficult to endure.[2]

Camus does not believe in any religion but he still has a belief—it is his belief in man. He holds man 'sacred' because man is the only being that can make life worth living. Only man can render life sensible. Camus has a sound philosophy in which he points to a certain lucidity which is possible on man's side in his approach to life and which can result in harmony between man and the world. Despite the fact that he is considered to be a 'thinker' but not a philosopher by many, Camus's stance, ideas and works exhibit a philosopher who embraces life and man and who has a word to say to overcome the barriers in all paths of life.

---

[1] Camus, *A Happy Death*, 77.

[2] Ibid., 62.

CHAPTER 6

CAMUS AS A PHILOSOPHER

Camus is special for being both a philosopher and an author. Yet, he has usually been regarded as an author rather than a philosopher. A close scrutiny of his works, however, reveals that he is more on the side of philosophy albeit his prolific production in many different genres of literature from novels to letters as an author, and to articles as a journalist. To exhibit the philosopher in Camus, it is essential to determine in the first place the relationship between philosophy and literature. So taking Camus as the focal point, the two fields may be discussed briefly in terms of their relationship, whether they are two discordant disciplines or whether they come close at certain points and even overlap, and how a literary work should be read in order that it is viewed in a philosophical light and vice versa.

Despite the fact that philosophy and literature appear to be two separate fields, they happen to have quite a few common points. Their similarities and differences can be examined under three headings: their concerns, the styles they adopt and the language they employ.

To take the concerns first, and point to a difference, the main interest of a 'stark' philosopher is to express his views, theories and theses 'scientifically' or 'mathematically'. His purpose is to be clear and explicit and consequently, persuasive. Thus, a philosopher is demanding. An author, on the other hand, has a concern for aesthetics and is by no means demanding. He simply creates a work of art and passes it over to the reader to be appreciated and interpreted. Whereas a philosopher may often aim at explaining or even 'teaching' what he takes as 'facts', an author would hardly complain if there were numerous interpretations of his work.

> If we wish to go still further, we must bear in mind that the writer, like all other artists, aims at giving his reader a certain feeling that is customarily called aesthetic pleasure, and which I would very much rather call

> aesthetic joy, and that this feeling, when it appears, is a sign that the work is achieved.[1]

And this is what Camus accomplishes. In his works, "aesthetic pleasure" and "aesthetic joy" are so outstanding that it disguises his philosophy, causing it to be mistaken for literature. In other words, most of the time, his philosophy is not given straightforwardly but it lies in a novel or a theatre play, veiled behind a story, a plot or a feeling of suspense, expecting to be discovered.

Furthermore, what an author is primarily busy with is composing fiction so, in most cases, philosophy does not exist in it. Even in those cases where there *is* philosophy, it is not the main concern of the author. For example, in the works of Dostoevsky or Kafka, the writers are involved more in the plot, the flow of events and character analyses. That is, psychology is prevalent. Contrarily, a philosopher looks at the whole picture of the world. What matters is not so much the characters' stance towards one another but the philosopher's stance in relation to the world. Indeed, that is where Camus—together with Sartre—stands apart as a philosopher as well as being an author. For instance, he deals with the absurd because he is aware of the absurd existence and situation that man experiences in the world. He wants to discuss why man exists in the first place, if he is doomed to death. He thinks that man is "thrown" onto the world—though Camus does not use the term—and he gets very close to Sartre and Heidegger in the way he regards the individual in his loneliness and alienation caused by his absurd situation. But whereas Sartre and Heidegger do not let man remain thoroughly alienated by putting him with 'the others' and thus, letting him forget about his fate while he is with them, Camus leaves man in his loneliness obliging him to find his way out of the situation. He inspires man with the message that if life is absurd, the solution cannot be living in dismay and trying to endure the given conditions. Instead, man should take his revenge from life by laughing at it in the face. All these are indications of a philosophical approach on Camus' side, allowing him to be classified as a philosopher as well as a writer. And he is not alone. The works of Sartre, Nietzsche and Dostoevsky, to name a few, present the reader with successful combinations of the two fields, philosophy and literature.

[1] Sartre, *J. P. S.: Basic Writings*, 272.

Another point is that it is not a concern for literature in its 'pure' state, to deal with what the nature of things is, what truth means or whether truth can be discovered. Not only is literature entirely contented with its subject matter but it also criticises philosophy for its "I-know-all" attitude. Milan Kundera says,

> The novel's wisdom is different from that of philosophy. The novel is born not of theoretical spirit but of the spirit of humor… The art inspired by God's laughter does not by nature serve ideological certitudes, it contradicts them. Like Penelope, it undoes each night the tapestry that the theologians, philosophers and learned men have woven the day before.[1]

Sartre, on the other hand, reminds the reader that literature is not always detached from philosophy. According to him, by writing authentic, or free, literature, the author already deals with philosophy; so does the reader, by gaining awareness of his freedom. Thus, being engaged in literature means, in a way, being engaged in philosophy.

The second heading regarding philosophy and literature is style. One interpretation of philosophy states that "…there is a discipline—philosophy—which can study conditions of possibility rather than merely conditions of actuality."[2] Literature, on the other hand, is the dramatization of both possibility and actuality. Indeed, if philosophy insists on remaining as philosophy, it may prove impossible for it to express or describe certain experiences or phenomena—as is the case in existentialism. There are cases in which philosophy needs literature, which assists it in making itself explicit. For example, literature serves a philosopher to express his philosophy through the characters he creates as an author. *The Stranger* is an example of it. The concepts of alienation and the absurd, as it were, are personified in the character of Mersault. Moreover, some philosophical questions may be answered via literature. In *The Myth*, Camus attempts to answer through Sisyphus' tragedy the question how man should cope with his absurd situation on earth and how he should resist the lure of suicide. In *The Myth*, Don Juan, the actor, the creator and the conqueror express in their characters revolt, the absurd and the dread of death. Similarly, Sartre expresses

[1] Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger*, 73.

[2] Ibid., 59.

"bad faith" through the character Hugo in *Dirty Hands.* In short, literary style enables philosophy to reveal itself more explicitly.

It is also possible to regard the situation from the opposite end in which philosophy supports literature in its turn. In *The Devils*, which is a case in point, Dostoevsky studies the problems like suicide and the wish to become God and he uses philosophy where simple description or dramatization would not suffice. There philosophy brings in a fresh viewpoint or opens up a new window through which the characters look outside while the readers can look inside.

One issue that may make the stylistic combination of philosophy and literature difficult at times is that literature is descriptive and it uses narration whereas philosophy is based on discussion and its duty is to create theories. This presents a problem specifically for the existentialist philosopher-writers.

> Sartre draws a sharp distinction between literature and science: Literature is ambiguous but each sentence of science or philosophy has, or should have, one and only one meaning. Sentences of literature may have multiple meanings, or may express different propositions. This presents Sartre with a dilemma. To the extent to which the sentences making up his novels, stories and plays are ambiguous they do not serve as a vehicle for his philosophy. To the extent to which they are unambiguous, they are not literature, at least by his own criterion.[1]

The last category that may draw a borderline between philosophy and literature is language. Language plays an important part in what one writes. As it is a device employed by both a philosopher and an author—or a poet—the tool is common. What creates the difference is the manner in which the philosopher or the author approaches language. It is the choice of words and the construction of phrases and sentences that determine the reader's route to the realm of philosophy or to that of literature. If one starts asking questions and seeks answers for them, it means he is acting like a philosopher but if he remembers that it is possible to create poetry with the same tool, i.e. language, he 'becomes' a poet or a writer. Yet, it should be noted that the way one perceives a written work, too, is paramount to its classification. Rorty says there are three answers

[1]Stephen Priest, "Writing," in *J. P. S.: Basic Writings*, 258.

to the question of how our reaction to the Western philosophical tradition should be conceived. "They are the Husserlian (or 'scientistic') answer, the Heideggerian (or 'poetic') answer and the pragmatist (or 'political') answer."[1] Viz. if one has a scientific perception, a philosophical work is considered to be far from the concepts of art. But probably it also amounts to saying that if a "poetic" perception is adopted instead, then philosophy will move quite close to literature, as is the case with many of Nietzsche's works.

A similar case exists for Camus. Language is his tool to produce both philosophy and literature. Heidegger says "Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells." Therefore, if man is a Heideggerian Dasein, he lets beings be by means of language. That is, he attempts to describe what a being is by means of philosophy or literature. This is what Camus does in *The Stranger.* When Meursault speaks little in his alienated world, he is not aware of who he actually is or what the people around him mean to him. In the trial scene he fails to understand what is going on because of his unwillingness to take part in the events and to contribute. But when he speaks with the magistrate or the chaplain, that is, when he employs language, he by and by develops a comprehension of who he is and what he asks for from life. Language allows him to comprehend his own existence, his place in the world and the life around him in general.

In addition, contrary to the view that philosophy is clear and lucid, Camus thinks it is the function of art, not philosophy, to clarify what is not clear in the world and that if everything were clear, there would be no art. Similarly, for Nietzsche, the primary rule in order to 'be' is to have art. Besides, if philosophy could make things clear, there would not be so many conflicting or contrasting ideas coming up about the same problems. Literature as a form of art, on the other hand, usually dramatizes issues so they become clear to understand. But whenever literature makes use of intense philosophy, it makes the reader stop and think as it is the case with the works of Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Sartre and Camus.

To be brief, then, albeit their seemingly different characters, philosophy and literature stretch out into their mutual domains, never to the detriment of each other but providing joint support and lucidity. And such a 'togetherness' proves to

[1] Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger*, 9.

be an efficient device in the hands of existentialist philosophers such as Nietzsche, Sartre and Camus. In a realm of thought where the existence of man is declared to be more important than his essence, human situation is best expressed by a combination of philosophy and literature.

When Camus's style is brought into focus exclusively, it is seen that, contrary to German existentialists, who usually employ the monologue form, Camus—together with Sartre—is not on the side of preaching, but that he chooses 'dialogues'. It is as if he were speaking or even chatting with his readers. Camus prefers writing literature to writing deductive arguments because literature lends itself more to a form of expression that reveals the author's intentions better. Through literature, the reader gets the chance to identify with the characters and comprehend much more clearly the ideas and concepts that Camus wants to present.

Camus's style in his speeches, articles and letters is a successful blend of the artistic with the frank and the sincere. He uses a language that is clear and direct and he sounds both chivalrous and trustworthy. He uses anecdotes, examples and reminders. He is serious and influential but never lost in a worry of being unnecessarily literary or aesthetic, though his style lacks neither. He strengthens his ideas by putting in some rhetorical questions as well as some direct ones—like those he asks Gabriel Marcel in his reply to him in the article "Why Spain?" which is published in *Combat* in December 1948 and in which he actually accuses all totalitarian regimes.

> Once this has been stated clearly, why Spain? May I confess that I am somewhat ashamed to ask the question for you? Why Guernica, Gabriel Marcel? Why that event which for the first time, in the face of a world still sunk in its comfort and its wretched morality, gave Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco a chance to show even children the meaning of totalitarian technique? Yes, why that event, which concerned us too?[1]

His style in his articles may sometimes get very ironic. Concerning freedom, for example, he feels that there is no real freedom but only a pretension of it, a hoax. So he criticises the European society as a whole by making fun of it.

[1] Camus, *Resistance*, 78-79.

> Among us, for instance, in Western Europe, freedom is officially approved. But such freedom makes me think of the poor female cousin in certain middle-class families. She has become a widow; she has lost her natural protector. So she has been taken in, given a room in the top floor, and she is welcome in the kitchen. She is occasionally paraded publicly on Sunday, to prove that one is virtuous and not a dirty dog. But for everything else, and especially on state occasions, she is requested to keep her mouth shut.[1]

The same style can also be observed in his speeches, which he writes down prior to giving them.

Whether political articles or literary works, however, in all his writings his fundamental concern is the situation of the human being in the world, his fate and the injustice he faces before the absurdity of life. These topics are handled in a more abstract but also dense and detailed fashion in his literary works. In his novels, plays and essays, the topics gain a most philosophical context. In fact, Camus suggests a way of combining philosophy and literature. He makes a note of it in his diary:

> Philosophical work: absurdity
> Literary work: strength, love, and death under the sign of conquest.
> In both, mingle the two styles while respecting the particular tone of each.
> One day, write a book that will give the meaning.
> And show no emotion about this tension—despise comparisons.[2]

The principal objection that is brought against the argument that Camus is a philosopher is that he has not constructed a philosophical system but taken up and studied some concepts and notions he has derived from life and his personal experiences, and that intuition is more prominent in his works than dialectics. According to Serge Dubrovsky, however, the source is not of primary significance if one's ideas support one another and if they attempt to answer a set of

[1] Ibid., 88-89.

[2] Camus, *Notebooks 1935-1942*, 27.

questions—regarding man in Camus's case.[1] Camus's own comment bolsters Dubrovsky's view in the sense that Camus has a particular system of thought which focuses on a definite philosophical issue. "The greatest saving one can make in the order of thought is to accept the unintelligibility of the world—and to pay attention to man."[2]

Thinking about the condition of man and trying to formulate solutions for him to cope with the "unintelligible" world is what he does throughout his life. And, perhaps with a subconscious impulse to defend himself and mock some people who might be criticising him, he writes about ancient philosophers in his diary.

> The ancient philosophers (quite understandably) meditated more than they read. That is why they clung so closely to the concrete. Printing changed all that. We read more than we meditate. We have no philosophies but merely commentaries. This is what Gilson says, considering that the age of philosophers concerned with philosophy was followed by the age of professors of philosophy concerned with philosophers. Such an attitude shows both modesty and impotence. And a thinker who began his book with these words: "Let us take things from the beginning," would evoke smiles. It has come to the point where a book of philosophy appearing today without basing itself on any authority, quotation, or commentary would not be taken seriously. And yet…[3]

Camus always behaves modestly and does not call himself a philosopher. In an interview published in *Servir* in 1945, he declares that he is not a philosopher for he does not believe in reason (because reason is not sufficient to enable man to acquire knowledge about the world, and therefore, it is not a faculty to rely on) to believe in a system structured by its assistance. What interests him is how to manage oneself—and that exactly when one believes neither in God nor in reason.[4] In addition, according to Camus, set systems do not leave room for

---

[1] Bloom, ed., *BioCritics*, 96.

[2] Camus, *Notebooks 1942-1951*, 86.

[3] Ibid., 66-67.

[4] Corbic, *L'homme sans Dieu*, 17. «Je ne suis pas *un* [je souligne] philosophe. Je ne crois pas assez à la raison pour croire à un système. Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est de savoir comment il faut se conduire. Et plus précisément comment on peut se conduire quand on ne croit ni en Dieu ni en la raison.»

freedom or individual morality; and this is a drawback since morality, whose purpose is to establish rules for living, may not necessarily be a conventional kind based on the judgements of the society but another type of concept in its own right—such as one concerning disbelief in God. For example, in *The Myth*, he seems to analyse such a different concept of morality. Still, he is not willing to set up a system of his own.

Camus wants to define the ways for the art of living. According to him, man must be free but he must not take freedom to extremes but keep it within limits and measures. In other words, Camus denounces totalitarianism and aims at presenting man with the means of leading a meaningful life. Moreover, as Corbic argues, if someone takes the question whether it is worth living or not as the fundamental problematic of philosophy and spends an effort to answer it, then he is certainly a philosopher.[1]

That, however, is not the only point that makes Camus entitled to being called a philosopher. His stance before or against certain philosophical problematics and issues, his ideas and the way he discusses matters all reflect a world view that surpasses and goes well beyond those of ordinary people. Also, it is possible to encounter in his thought plenty of points that display parallelism with some other philosophers although these points are by no means the same. It is only natural that a philosopher be influenced by some of his predecessors or contemporaries and, very frequently, these inspirations pave his way to the creation of an individualistic standpoint and a novel perspective towards life and the world, which is the case with Camus.

The first of the philosophers that Camus shares ideas with is St. Augustine. In his doctoral dissertation, titled "Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism", Camus concentrates on St Augustine and his views on Christianity. And despite the fact that he criticises and rejects most of the Christian doctrines, he agrees with St. Augustine's contention that man is made for God, and therefore, he desires a God. Camus, too, argues that "human life is absurd; it lacks the kind of meaning it would have if God existed and immortality were available to man".[2] Both St

[1] Ibid., 19. «Mais, qu'il l'admette ou non, quand il considère que «la question fondamentale de la philosophie» est de «juger que la vie vaut ou ne vaut pas d'être vécue» et qu'il s'efforce de répondre à cette question, il fait bien ouvre de philosophe.»

[2] Joseph McBride, *Albert Camus Philosopher and Littérateur* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 30.

Augustine and Camus seek happiness. For the former, happiness is achieved through the knowledge of God. If man turns in on to himself, in his heart he first gets to know himself; next, he may attain knowledge about man and finally, by going beyond himself, about God. Such is his pursuit of happiness because the acquisition of the knowledge of God means the acquisition of wisdom, the knowledge of things divine; and it is wisdom that brings man happiness. Yet, St. Augustine is not sure whether such knowledge can be had, whether, in fact, *any* knowledge at all can be had and why happiness should depend on attaining the knowledge of God and nothing else. Camus's path that leads to happiness, on the other hand, is "*Doing something in order to be happy, and succeeding*"[1]. But concerning the possibility of gaining knowledge, he thinks in a similar manner to St. Augustine and claims that the world does not reveal itself to man. Another similarity they have is that St. Augustine writes a book titled *A Happy Life*, in which he talks about a natural bliss that arises from gaining a purely philosophical knowledge of God. Interestingly, the initial title that Camus wants to give his book *A Happy Death* is *A Happy Life* and in it he describes a kind of natural happiness that one gets from living in total harmony with life and, as it were, uniting with nature. Eventually, St. Augustine finds happiness in God and Camus in nature because they both feel that the world is not sufficient to render one completely happy.

Camus exhibits similarities of thought with Nietzsche, too. Nietzsche says,

> Whatever in me has feeling, suffers and is in prison; but my will always comes to me as my liberator and joy-bringer. Willing liberates: that is the true teaching of will and liberty—thus Zarathustra teaches it. … In knowledge too I feel only my will's joy in begetting and becoming; and if there is innocence in my knowledge, it is because the will to beget is in it. Away from God and gods this will has lured me; what could one create if gods existed?[2]

Zarathustra says that God loves man but that He is also a judge. In other words, He has a ruling power over man, limiting man's freedom and will. God is wrathful to his creations, as well. But "There is good taste in piety too; and it was this that

---

[1] Camus, *Notebooks 1935-1942*, 67.

[2] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 87.

said in the end, 'Away with *such* a god! Rather no god, rather make destiny on one's own, rather be a fool, rather be a god oneself!'"[1]

Camus's concepts of freedom, will, knowing, creating and God are similar to those of Nietzsche. If man does not want God, Camus argues, he must establish his own rules and laws in order not to limit himself but to live on his own accord. Man needs knowledge—the knowledge which is the answer to the question how man can live without God—and that's what all Camus's heroes endeavour to attain.

Both Camus and Nietzsche discuss the morality of a society in a similar line of thought despite using different terminology. For Nietzsche, morality is a system of evaluation which is closely related with the conditions man lives in. Nietzsche defines a society as a herd whose members feel that they must stick together as it is their sole means of resisting against those who, from the very beginning, may fall apart or refuse to be a part of the herd. Each member is supposed to obey the rules and laws of the herd even if they may have difficulty in complying with them; otherwise, they are expelled. The herd has a will to power and it exerts this will by treating the 'different' ones as undependable, harmful and even evil. This will to power is, in fact, the morality that supports and sustains them, while the 'different' ones happen to be tragic heroes who are not affected by the relative values that keep the herd together and, as a result, get either discarded or crushed down.

Camus, too, deals with tragic heroes. For him, like Nietzsche, a tragic hero is in a state of indifference towards the value judgements of the society because he has his own values that are necessarily different from those of the society. Consequently, he stands aloof and is not affected by what the society might think about him or how it may judge him. Particularly, Meursault in *The Stranger* is a case in point. He wants to live without consenting to the dicta of the society and therefore, gets disposed of.

Nietzsche believes in eternal recurrence, according to which, time is circular and eventually, a time comes for everything that has happened before to recur.[2]

---

[1] Ibid., 262.
[2] Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, 158.

Camus's philosophy is similar. Sisyphus knows that he will live through the same pain and spend the same vain effort to push the rock up the hill. Meursault sees that the same verdict will be repeated for the outsiders and that the society will keep eliminating them; he, nevertheless, accepts and enjoys life as it is. Still, neither Nietzsche nor Camus wants the concept of eternal recurrence to cause pessimism. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche writes the story of a shepherd through whose mouth glides in a snake while the former is asleep. The shepherd wakes up on the cries of Zarathustra, who tells him to bite off the snake's head. He does what he is told, spits away the head and becomes a fully healthy man. This incident represents a moment of awakening or awareness and means that if man wills, he can better his situation and even redeem himself. The same is true for Meursault and Clamence. They experience moments of awareness, after which they each develop their different means to promote their lives and 'rescue' themselves from the conditions they are in.

Lev Chestov is another philosopher who Camus shares views with. Chestov criticises reason because, he thinks, it cannot be pinned down and its existence cannot be proven. And the point that bothers him is that although man may doubt everything, he does not doubt the existence of reason. Chestov fails to understand this conflict and he concludes that man must be taking reason for granted because science, which is a creation of reason, is something that pays well. From 'facts', it leads to experience, which makes man the master of the world. To make his point clear, Chestov makes a quotation from Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* and agrees with the latter that "twice two is four" is a deadly comment. The reason for Chestov to agree with Dostoevsky seems to be that when man accepts the dominance of reason, he naturally becomes its slave. He loses his freedom to doubt, to search for things and to make inquiries, so the comment is deadly in a figurative sense. To avoid reason, Chestov separates it from practice and prefers practice to reason. Camus has a similar attitude in *The Myth*. Sisyphus employs no reason while pushing up his rock and watching it fall. His practice is what matters.

Camus bears similarities to Sartre as well, in the themes he chooses to discuss, such as freedom, the absurd or anguish. They both unite philosophy and literature and they focus on the meaningless of existence—something contrary to convention. The characters they create seem to be weak in personality but this is

solely to serve the philosophers' purpose and the characters are weak only on the surface. When Camus and Sartre write fiction, the primary objective for both is to manifest their philosophy via literature because they believe that the two disciplines extend into each other's domain.

> …; although literature is one thing and morality a quite different one, at the heart of the aesthetic imperative we discern the moral imperative. … For, the moment I feel that my freedom is indissolubly linked with that of all other men, it cannot be demanded of me that I use it to approve the enslavement of a part of these men. Thus, whether he is an essayist, a pamphleteer, a satirist or a novelist, whether he speaks only of individual passions or whether he attacks the social order, the writer, a free man addressing free men, has only one subject—freedom.[1]

This is true for both of them but Camus's viewpoint and manner are different from those of Sartre in many aspects. One example to this difference is that his philosophy is not synthesizing and he regards art and morality as separate topics. Moreover, and quite significantly, he may occasionally feel dizziness but never '*nausea*' concerning life. Even when he is discussing the most distressing topics like the meaninglessness of life or death, he, as it were, radiates light and optimism around him.

Differences in approach, however, do not stop Sartre from considering Camus a philosopher—and a praiseworthy one. On reading *The Myth*, Sartre comments that Camus

> …takes his place in the great tradition of those French moralists" regarded as Nietzsche's forerunners. "The turn of his reasoning, the clarity of his ideas, the cut of his expository style and a certain kind of solar, ceremonious and sad sombreness, all indicate a classic temperament.[2]

And in a lecture in which he discusses *The Plague*, Sartre expresses his approval and admiration for Camus's work, especially on how the latter combines literature with philosophy:

---

[1] Sartre, *J. P. S.: Basic Writings*, 275, 276.

[2] Aranson, *The Story of a Friendship*, 14.

> … a classic literature, without illusions, but full of confidence in the grandeur of humanity; hard, but without useless violence, passionate yet restrained, a literature which strives to paint the metaphysical condition of man while fully participating in the movements of society.[1]

Camus rejects being an existentialist philosopher. However, not only his works but also his life bears many existential traits. Camus himself is Don Juan. In *The Myth*, Don Juan chases women to revolt against his fate and to derive pleasure out of life. In *The Fall*, Clamence has simultaneous love affairs. And Camus has a private life similar to those of his heroes. It is all to avoid the anxiety and the absurdity life thrusts man into. Later in his life, almost a year before his death, Camus writes in his diary,

> For years I've tried to live according to everyone else's morality and I forced myself to live like everyone else and to resemble everyone else. I said what was needed to unite people, even when I myself felt estranged from them, and in the end, the catastrophe came. Now I wander amid the debris as an outlaw, drawn and quartered, alone and accepting to be so, resigned to my singularities and weaknesses. And I must reconstruct a truth after having lived a sort of lie all my life.[2]

Now he is like Meursault, fighting in his feelings of alienation and loneliness, to seize authenticity and give a meaning to his life. His life and his philosophy go hand in hand once again.

As a philosopher, Camus rejects historicity because, he thinks, like communism, historicity introduces determinism, which cannot be reconciled with the nature of individual freedom and will. For him historicity is the attitude of a certain group of 'slaves' who see in history their master; the same figure they see in God or the Divine Law.[3] He asserts that historicity brings terror and brutality in its wake and that's why it must be shunned. He repudiates the principle that the end justifies

[1] Ibid., 55.

[2] Todd, *A Life*, 403-404.

[3] Bernard-Henri Lévy, "Un Philosophe Artiste," *Le Monde, Hors-Série Camus*, n.d., 18. «Qu'est-ce que «l'historisme»? … c'est l'attitude de cette catégorie très particulière d'esclaves qui voient dans l'Histoire leur maitre, la figure même de l'Absolu et de la Loi.»

the means and cannot be reconciled with the idea that to have a better world in the future, today's people may be sacrificed. He emphasises the significance of the present in *The Myth*.

> The burden of Sisyphus, Camus had concluded, which requires devotion to the activity of the moment rather than to unachievable (putative) perfection is not a curse. It provides the basis in Camus's thought for the liberation of each person from the burden of being made to serve an interest abstracted from concern about actual individuals and their present experience.[1]

For Camus, the way out of historicity is revolting against the absurd, which, in this case, historicity per se. He rejects the Marxist view that history flows and people have to follow its course, because such a view enforces oppression and violence. It advocates sacrificing the present for an uncertain future. For the same reason, he opposes the Hegelian idea that any present act of cruelty or murder may be justified if it is going to bring a better future. Camus writes *The Rebel* as a reaction to all kinds of totalitarian regimes and historicity and studies there the fundamental problem of murder. His thesis in *The Rebel* is that although rebellion appears to be the rejection of all limits, it is, in fact, a demand for a limit and he advises that each man should revolt individually instead of revolting in crowds and losing decency.

Camus does not share Sartre's idea that man is a 'social' being. His reason for being against solely 'social' might be that if one is 'social', one has close bonds with history. That is, one has an engagement with both the past and the future. However, according to Camus, one may be totally 'individualistic' in one's approach and thus free oneself from historicity since the past is irreversible and the future does not guarantee anything positive for the human condition. For that reason, the Sartrean view that according to existentialism, man is always in a state of formation directed towards the future does not appeal to Camus and this serves as a reason for him to insist that he is not an existentialist. Also, for Sartre, being social means being under the threat of 'the other' and thus, it indicates the possibility of being taken down from the subject position to the object position. This idea has connotations with the ethnic oppressions that

[1] Bloom, ed., *BioCritics*, 37.

Camus is so much against. So he rejects Sartre's views on history and sociability. And he clearly declares his opposition in the speech he makes in Stockholm in 1957, when he receives the Nobel Prize. There he says that the role of a writer is not separable from difficult duties. Today it cannot be given to the service of those who make history but it is at the service of those who suffer from it.[1]

Camus attributes plenty of duties to the writer/artist and he treats the subject in a philosophical manner. Accordingly, the writer must be both involved in and detached from the events of his time. He needs this paradoxical stance, first, in order to share the feelings, thoughts and the viewpoints of people before events and dramas, and secondly, in order to examine every situation and judge or criticise it. By acting so, the writer will think of groups or crowds as well as of individuals and their place and destiny, or "thrownness". He believes that all values are bound to perish.

> And the only certainty left to us is that of naked suffering, common to all, intermingling its roots with those of a stubborn hope.[2]

So he holds that man should be what he is—with all his frailties and faults. *These*, and *not* the morality and the value judgements of a society, are what man should cling to so that he might maintain his dignity as well as appreciate others. Hence, as a writer/artist, he asserts that his duty is to produce works that emphasise the freedom and responsibility of man and that help man resist suffering and destruction.

According to Camus, the writer/artist needs to be simple and clear in his style while producing his works.

> He has only to translate the sufferings and happiness of all into the language of all and he will be universally understood. As a reward for being absolutely faithful to reality, he will achieve complete communication among men. This ideal of universal communication is

---

[1] Danièle Sallenave, "Faire le con ne suffit pas," *Marianne-Le Magazine Littéraire, Hors-Série*, Mars-Avril 2010, 31. «Le rôle de l'écrivain […] ne se sépare pas de devoirs difficiles. Par définition, il ne peut se mettre aujourd'hui au service de ceux qui font l'histoire: il est au service de ceux qui la subissent.»

[2] Camus, *Resistance*, 240.

> indeed the ideal of any great artist. Contrary to the current presumption, if there is any man who has no right to solitude, it is the artist. Art cannot be a monologue.[1]

Sartre, too, explains that he is for simplicity and clarity, especially when writing philosophy. In an interview made in 1975, he states that style has never been an ambition for him in philosophy; he has just tried to write clearly, and that's all. He has always wanted to write in the simplest possible way in French.[2]

Indeed, style need not be a concern in philosophy because what is of significance is the subject matter. Camus puts it explicitly.

> But in order to speak about all and to all, one has to speak of what all know and of the reality common to us all. The sea, rains, necessity, desire, the struggle against death—these are the things that unite us all. We resemble one another in what we see together, in what we suffer together. Dreams change from individual to individual, but the reality of the world is common to us all.[3]

Most of the time, Camus unfolds this reality in images. He supports the idea that to think is to create and thus, that all philosophers are creators. He also includes the philosophical novelists like Dostoevsky into the group because such novelists do not write theses, i.e., they do not use reasoned arguments but imagery in their novels. In this way, they find a means to express their philosophy. And Camus expresses his own philosophy by saying, "One thinks only in images. If you want to be a philosopher, write novels."[4] and " A novel is nothing but philosophy put in images."[5] The use of imagery enriches philosophy once it is allowed to enter into its domain.

---

[1] Ibid., 257.

[2] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Entretien avec Jean-Paul Sartre," interview by Michel Rybalka, Oreste Pucciani, Susan Gruenheck, *Marienne, Le Magazine Littéraire, Hors-Série,* Mars-Avril 2010, 35. «Je n'ai jamais eu d'ambition de style pour la philosophie. Jamais. J'ai essayé d'écrire clairement et c'est tout. … J'ai voulu écrire le plus simplement possible en français;»

[3] Camus, *Resistance*, 258.

[4] Corbic, *L'homme sans Dieu*, 21. «On ne pense que par image. Si tu veux être philosophe, écris des romans.»

[5] Isabelle Schmitz, "Voyage au bout de L'absurde," *Le Figaro, Hors-Série, Camus L'écriture, La révolte, La nostalgie*, n.d., 67. «Un roman n'est jamais qu'une philosophie mise en images.»

Camus maintains that thought and art are related as there needs to be thought for art to be created. Therefore, art—and specifically literature—and philosophy are similar despite the difference in their methods and objectives. The writer and the philosopher are similar, too because they are indulged fully in what they do and they "become" in their creation. In other words, they discover and interpret themselves in what they create. Besides, as Weyembergh puts it, according to Camus—and Arendt—thinking is an unending process; it is an eternal recurrence; still, it may render one happy—like it does Sisyphus.[1]

Camus is a renowned author but, without doubt, he is a philosopher, as well. He is a philosopher who derives his philosophy primarily from life itself and who reflects it through not one but many channels. In his articles in *Combat*, in his theatre plays, his diaries, letters and novels and essays, it is evident that he feels deep concern for the condition of man on earth and that he strives to better it. All the genres he writes in are tools for him to let people learn about his profoundly humanistic thoughts. He fights death and the absurd, questions the concept of God, pursues freedom and he denounces all regimes that may oppress people. He devotedly writes about them throughout his life and what is significant is that all his works are radiant with optimism but always realistic. Thus, Camus could be considered to be a philosopher who has taken on himself the task of making the world and life much more liveable for people.

[1] Corbic, *L'homme sans Dieu*, 22. «Ajoutons que Camus and Arendt pensaient qu'il y a, malgré l'éternel recommencement qui le caractérise, du bonheur à penser et qu'il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux.»

CHAPTER 7

CAMUS TODAY

Camus dies in a car accident on 4th January 1960, at the age of forty-six. On his death, numerous articles are written in his memory by prominent authors and philosophers from France as well as from abroad. They discuss different aspects of Camus but they have a common point, which is their admiration and appreciation of him. Three days after his death, Sartre declares in his article published in *France Observateur* that Camus represented in the 20th century, and in the face of history, the actual heritage of that long line of moralists, whose works were perhaps the most original in French literature. According to Sartre, Camus's humanism which was obstinate, precise and pure, as well as being austere and sensual, fought a tough battle with the tremendous and deformed events of the time. But with his stubborn denial, he reaffirmed in the heart of the epoch, and against the Machiavellians and the realists, the existence of moral facts.[1]

In the March 1960 issue of *La Nouvelle Revue française*, actor and theatre director Jean-Louis Barrault writes that Camus, being in love with justice, and being extremely scrupulous and truly respectable to man, had all the virtues of a monk; but that he was a 'secular monk'.[2]

In the same issue of the magazine, Jean Starobinski, a literary critic, talks about Camus's morality. In his view, in the heart of Camus's morality, there lies a sovereign sun which bathes morality in its rays. Pleasure, ecstasy and beauty are not peculiar to the just man. But justice alone is nothing if it ignores these. Starobinski adds that, Camus, in his desire not to evade or spare anything, finds

[1] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Un homme en marche," *Le Monde, Hors-Série, Camus, Une vie, une oeuvre*, n.d., 98. «Il représentait en ce siècle, et contre l'Histoire, l'héritier actuel de cette longue lignée de moralistes dont les oeuvres constituent peut-être ce qu'il y a de plus original dans les lettres françaises. Son humanisme tetu, étroit et pur, austère et sensuel, livrait un combat douteux contre les événements massifs et difformes de ce temps. Mais, inversement, par l'opiniâtreté de ses refus, il réaffirmait, au coeur de notre époque, contre les machiavéliens, contre le veau d'or du réalisme, l'existence du fait moral.

[2] Jean-Louis Barrault, "Le Frère," Ibid., 100. «Épris de justice, scrupuleux à l'extrême, respectueux véritable des êtres humains, Camus avait toutes les vertus d'un moine. Un moine laïque…»

it essential that morality search its measures in the light of this sun and in the face of an inhumane territory.[1]

Again, in the same issue of *La Nouvelle Revue française*, William Faulkner, the American Nobel laureate for literature in 1949 commemorates Camus. Faulkner says Camus died too young to finish off what he might have intended to but that the question is not *in how much time* or *in what amount* something has been done, but simply, *what* has been done. When Camus died, Faulkner thinks, he had already produced that which any writer hopes to produce as he carries along life the foreknowledge and the horror of death: *I was here.* Camus would continue. Perhaps he came to know in that striking moment that he had accomplished what he wanted. What more could he have asked for, interrogates Faulkner.[2]

The reason why each person takes Camus from a different point of view must be that he is a multifaceted man, a writer, a philosopher, a journalist, a theatre director, a rebel, and above all, a human being. And as a human being, he moves step-by step, from the tragic to the optimistic. Suffering from the absurd, he may, at first glimpse, appear as though he himself were tragic. However, he is not. Camus is a man who goes into raptures before the beauty of nature. He is after harmony, unity and the wellbeing of man. In fact, the absurd and the tragic, for him, serve as tools to show that the misunderstandings, contradictions and conflicts can be solved. This is possible through man's will, self-confidence and rebellion. So he proceeds towards being an optimist and asks his fellowmen to go after him. He declares that one might be a pessimist only concerning the human situation but is always an optimist regarding man himself.[3] Besides, the world is

---

[1] Jean Starobinski, "Dans le premier silence," Ibid., 104. «Au coeur de sa morale, il y a un soleil souverain qui foudroie toute morale: plaisir, extase, beauté ne sont pas les apanages de l'homme juste. Mais la justice n'est rien si elle les ignore. Dans son désir de ne rien éluder, de ne rien séparer, Camus oblige la morale humaine à chercher sa mesure en face d'une lumière et d'un espace inhumains.»

[2] William Faulkner, "L'âme qui s'interroge—Le rayonnement," Ibid., 105. «On dira qu'il était trop jeune, qu'il n'a pas eu le temps d'achever. Mais la question n'est pas *combien de temps*, ni *quelle quantité*, mais simplement *quoi.* Lorsque pour lui la porte s'est fermeé, il avait déjà écrit ce que tout artiste espère écrire lorsq'il porte à travers la vie la connaissance par avance et la haine de la mort: *J'étais là.* Il continuait. Peut-être a-t-il su, dans cette éclatante seconde, qu'il avait abouti. Que pouvait-il voulair de plus?»

[3] Camus, *Notebooks 1942-1951*, 123-124.

not a dreary place to live in so man should keep in close contact with life and the world.

> One must not cut oneself off from the world. No one who lives in the sunlight makes a failure of his life. My whole effort, whatever the situation, misfortune or disillusion, must be to make contact again. …
>
> Contacts with truth, with nature first of all, and then with the art of those who have understood and with my own art if I am capable of it. Otherwise, the sea, sunshine and delight, with the moist lips of desire, will simply lie there in front of me.[1]

To strengthen this view, and to suggest a way to make life become bearable, Camus adds the next entry: "Do not select a life, but make the one you have stretch out."[2]

This is a very optimistic and constructive approach to life, which would never become old-fashioned. What is more, it is not his sole view that does not lose its popularity and that still has the power to influence people. In an era almost without values, Camus points to values to cling to, such as human life, dignity, justice and freedom. These are universal values which are always worthwhile. He even finds a value in the absurd itself and portrays it in the character of Meursault, 'the stranger'. The absurd becomes a means to awaken Meursault's consciousness to the world and life that surround him despite the death penalty he has been given. Camus sets up the ethics of *being* as opposed to the ethics of action. And today, in a world of terror and violence, following Camus's dictum should help man grow conscious and shun suicide and murder, and thus, lead to the preservation of human life.

Camus's philosophy serves to enable man to reflect on who he is and to make a self-analysis. This is a universal need, especially when religious beliefs are questioned for the reason that the world and attitudes are getting more and more materialised, and in times when people either tend to turn to different religions or to being independent religiously or socially. The questions that Camus seeks

[1] Camus, *Notebooks 1935-1942*, 25.

[2] Ibid., 26.

answers for are valid at present all around the world. Indeed, the feeling of the absurd and the necessity to revolt maintain their validity. Today, people have well understood that living in servitude can no more be the right way to lead their lives despite the difficulty to revolt against oppressors and to find justice. In addition, the contradictions he tells about in his novels, between man and the society or man and the world are ever-prevalent.

In the face of all these, however, Camus's motto is 'never to surrender'. He says the purpose of *The Rebel* is to try to understand *once again* the times he lives in. This is supposed to set an example to today's man. It is again hard to understand the complex events of the present day and the reason why people tend to act in this or that particular manner personally, socially and politically. Still, man should try to understand himself and his time for the sake of maintaining compassion and justice. This is what Camus asks for. He is both leading and demanding. Writer and journalist Olivier Todd, who has written a substantial biography, *Albert Camus: A Life*, says to Agence France-Presse that Camus is "a dangerous writer" who "forces us to question many of our beliefs."[1]

Concerning his attitude towards art, Camus focuses a great deal on art and artistic creation and in quite a modern manner. He regards artistic creation to be of the highest value, but not because artworks last. He has a different reason, which is that artistic creation preserves and intensifies consciousness. "In this universe, the work [of art] is then the unique occasion of maintaining consciousness and of fixing its adventures. To create is to live twice."[2]

This consciousness is not only that of the artist, but that of the audience, the readers and the onlookers. He states in his Stockholm speech in 1957 that an artist should not live in an ivory tower, but should influence the greatest possible number of people by offering them an inner image of their common sufferings and joys.[3] In other words, Camus advises developing mutual understanding and compassion. While talking about art, Camus finds a chance to criticise tyranny.

---

[1] Olivier Todd, Agence France-Presse (AFP), 3 Jan., 2010, «Albert Camus est «un écrivain dangereux» qui «nous oblige à remettre en question beaucoup de nos convictions».»

[2] Camus, *The Myth*, 69-70.

[3] Pierre-Louis Rey, "Lire Camus aujourd'hui," *Le Magazine Littéraire*, *Hors-Série*, Janvier-Fevrier 2010, 21. «L'artiste ne doit pas s'isoler dans une tour d'ivorie, mais émouvoir le plus grand nombre d'hommes en leur offrant une image privilégiée des souffrances et des joies communes.»

Art renders people free, he says, and unlike tyranny, it bestows on them a feeling of unity.

> Liberty alone draws men from their isolation; but slavery dominates a crowd of solitudes. And art, by virtue of that free essence I have tried to define, unites whereas tyranny separates.[1]

Indeed, Camus's political views, particularly those regarding terror, prove to be still credible and they find their projection in today's world. He rejects terror as a concept in general but his primary concern is about the ongoing violence in Algeria and Russia. In his article published in *L'Express* in July 9, 1955, he takes Algeria and writes that the terrorist acts and repression there are two purely negative forces whose result is nothing but destruction and a doubling of rage and madness. For Camus, the terrorism in Algeria is a bloody mistake, both in itself and in its consequences. First, it is a mistake in itself because it tends to turn racist and flow over its instigators, drowning them, too. He worries that it will cease to be an instrument of political control, but become a weapon of ultimate hatred. He adds that terrorism is also a mistake as to its consequences. Its primary result will be shutting up the French Liberals' mouth in Algeria and, as a second consequence, empowering the party of repression.[2] Unfortunately, similar acts of terror and violence are still witnessed around the world for reasons similar to those that Camus mentions—and with similar consequences.

Concerning his thoughts on Russia, his daughter, Catherine Camus explains in an interview that what her father said then retains its validity today.

> … there are indications that today the intellectuals are coming back to Camus. History has given them reason to, with the fall of communism. In fact it was always the Communist problem which was responsible for the opposition to Camus. It was always and overall a political thing, a kind of misunderstanding. Camus has denounced the gulag and Stalin's trials.

---

[1] Camus, *Resistance*, 269.

[2] Camus, "Terrorism et Répression," *Le Monde, Hors-Série, Une vie, une Oeuvre*, n.d., 57. «Le terrorisme algérien est une erreur sanglante, à la fois en lui-même et dans ses conséquences. *Il l'est en lui-même et dans ses conséquences*. Il l'est en lui-même parce qu'il tend, par la force des choses, à devenir raciste à son tour et, débordant ses inspirateurs mêmes, à cesser d'être l'instrument contrôlé d'un politique pour devenir l'arme folle d'une haine élémentaire. … Le terrorisme est aussi une erreur quant à ses conséquences. Son premier résultat, en effet, est de fermer la bouche aux Français libéraux d'Algérie et, par conséquent, de renforcer le parti de la réaction et de la répression.»

> Today we can see that he was right. To say that there were concentration camps in the USSR at the time was blasphemous, something very serious indeed. Today we think about the USSR with the camps also in mind, but before it just wasn't allowed. Nobody was allowed to think that or say that if you were left-wing. Camus always insisted that historical criteria and historical reasoning were not the only things to take into account, and that they weren't all powerful. That history could always be wrong about man. Today, this is how we are starting to think.[1]

When Catherine Camus is asked if she thinks that her father's work is becoming vindicated after a time of intellectual isolation, she answers,

> It all depends on the period. Just after the war, the liberation of 1945, Camus was well known, well loved by Sartre and all the intellectuals of that generation. There is an interview given by Sartre in the USA where he is asked what the future of French literature is. And he replies that the next great writer of the future is Camus. And so time passes, and a much more political rather than literary reasoning intervenes, and from the day that Camus wrote *The Rebel*, in 1955, there comes the rupture, and all, nearly all of the left wing intellectuals become hostile to him. Since he was already unfavourably viewed by the right-wing, he found himself entirely alone.
>
> Then, during the 80's, those you would call the young philosophers of France, such as Bernard and Gluxman, pointed out that Camus had said things no one wanted to hear in the political arena. They said it was Camus who was right, not those who had slid under the influence of Sartre, that is to say an unconditional devotion to Communism as seen in the Soviet Union. And ever since then the evaluation of Camus has continued to modify up until today. Intellectuals of Camus' age who had previously disliked him now appreciate him. And at that point we come back to literature. And it's agreed that he was always a great writer.[2]

---

[1] Catherine Camus, "Albert Camus: SPIKE interviews Catherine Camus, daughter of Albert Camus: Solitaire et solidaire," interview by Russell Wilkinson (accessed March 15, 2010); available from http://www.spikemagazine.com/0397camuphp; Internet.

[2] Ibid.

Camus's ideas are still good because he is realistic in his approach to politics. He is conscious of the contradictions that, as it were, make it necessary for people to fight for their desire for peace. That's why he thinks that violence is at once necessary and unjustifiable whereas non-violence is desirable but utopia. Camus maintains his characteristic of being contemporary throughout time by his foresight and realism in politics. Politics, however, is not the only issue that makes him contemporary. In the present day, people find Camus's morality akin to themselves for the reason that it is based neither on dogmas nor on strict recorded rules but on life itself. Catherine Camus states that

> He was viewed by many as an austere moralist, but it was on the football pitch and in the theatre that he learned his 'morality'. It's something sensed, it won't pass uniquely through thought. It couldn't possibly. He started thinking through sensation. He could never think with artefacts or with cultural models because there were none. So it's true to say that his morality was extremely 'lived', made from very concrete things. It never passed by means of abstractions. It's his own experience, his way of thinking.[1]

People dealing with Camus and his works professionally consider him and his works to be not only contemporary but also universal. Luchino Visconti, who made *The Stranger* into a film in 1967 now argues that despite his denigrators, the youth love Camus and that the character of Meursault is exemplary for them. Meursault's boredom with life together with his pleasure for existing, his rebellion before a system that imprisons him, that profound disdain which does not even bother to provoke a revolt in the face of the absurdity of the state of human affairs, that is exactly the attitude of the twenty-year-old boys and girls today. They scorn a conditioned universe that is imposed on them, and refuse that universe.[2]

Dolorès Lyotard comments on people's reading of Camus at present. She says Camus's thought makes an echo in this era; thus, his works are reread. And

---

1 Ibid.

[2], Luchino Visconti, in "La couleur des mots," by Marie-Noëlle Tranchant, *Le Figaro, Hors-Série*, n.d., 108. «N'en déplaise à ses contempteurs, la jeunesse actuelle aime Camus. Le caractère de Meursault, en ce sens, est exemplaire. Son ennui de vivre et son plaisir d'exister, sa rébellion devant un système qui l'enferme, ce mépris si profond qu'il n'incite même pas à la révolte devant l'absurdité de la condition humaine, c'est exactement l'attitude des garçons et des filles qui ont vingt ans aujourd'hui. Un mépris de l'univers conditionné qui leur est imposé, un refus de cet univers.»

since our epoch, like the previous one, is characterised by "tremendous and deformed" events, it is possible that our rereading of Camus is deflected by these events.[1]

Jeanyves Guérin, a professor of French literature at Sorbonne who has directed the production of, as well as contributing as a writer to, *Dictionnaire Albert Camus* for Camus's fiftieth death anniversary, argues that there are plenty of reasons for Camus's being contemporary. To begin with, he thinks that *The Stranger* and *The Plague* have gained universality as they can be read with different intentions in different parts of the world. If *The Plague* is read in Iran today, it speaks of Islamism, and in Poland, at another time, it told people of Communism. The metaphors in these works can easily address everyone.[2]

Another reason rendering Camus contemporary, says Guérin, is that he carries different characteristics and he employs different genres to express his thoughts so he appeals to different tastes and thus, has a wide scope of audience. He is an essayist and a journalist; an author and an intellectual, all at once. And he is capable of renewing himself, too.[3] Besides, although French writers like Proust are studied abroad especially at universities, Camus is popular outside the departments of French, too. He is both classical and modern; modern in the sense that he uses the narrative techniques introduced by his predecessors Gide, Proust and the American novelists.[4]

---

[1] Lyotard, ed., *Albert Camus contemporain*, 2009, 16. «… la pensée de Camus résonne avec Notre époque. Et surtout, nous relisons les textes de Camus. Puisque notre époque, comme la précédente, est caractérisée par des événements «massifs et difformes», notre relecture de Camus ne peut pas ne pas être infléchie par ces événements.»

[2] Jeanyves Guérin, «À chacun son Camus, » *Le Monde, Hors-Série, Camus, Une vie, une oeuvre*, n.d., 65. «Son sujet et son écriture se prêtent particulièrement à une diffusion mondiale. *L'Etranger* est devenu une oeuvre universelle. Il en est de même pour *La Peste*. … c'est une oeuvre que l'on peut relire «*sur plusieurs portées*». Aujourd'hui, quand on lit ce roman en Iran, il parle de l'Islamisme comme, en d'autres temps, il parlait du communisme en Pologne. … La méthaphore de *La Peste* est aisement universalisable.»

[3] Ibid., 68. «Il a écrit *L'Etranger*, récit sobre et classique, parfois lyrique, *La Peste*, un récit plus ambitieux, *La Chute*, qui le rapproche du Nouveau Roman, *Le Premier Homme*, récit où il y a des phrases proustiennes. Camus montre qu'il est capable de se renouveler. … C'est aussi un essayiste et aussi un très Grand journaliste. Camus est à la fois un écrivain et un intellectuel.»

[4] Ibid., 65. «Marcel Proust est très lu à l'étranger, mais avant tout dans les universités. Camus est lu en dehors des départements de français. Il est à la fois classique et moderne. Il est moderne parce qu'il utilise des techniques narratives mises au point par ses grands prédécesseurs, Gide, Proust, les romanciers américains.»

As a result, his works are well-received all around the world, from Germany to Russia and from Romania to Japan, having been translated to more than sixty languages. And these works serve as guides to people. In Czechoslovakia in 1960s, he is an author well-known by the adversaries of the regime and *The Stranger*, *The Plague* and *The Fall* were used as references. And above all, *The Rebel* was circulated secretly in the entire communist world.

Guérin emphasises the philosopher in Camus by saying that if being a philosopher means constructing a system, then Camus is not one because he does not tie up his thoughts in a word ending with "-ism". Guérin explains that Camus's philosophy is given through a literary style and by metaphors. He does not produce new concepts. All the same, even though he does not provide answers, he poses some good questions, which *are* philosophical questions. Guérin's conclusion is that Camus is a writer-philosopher rather than a professional philosopher.[1]

Being a rebel as he is, Camus revolts against the world through his works. As a matter of fact, he contends that the rebellion of a writer-artist is manifested in his creations. Art and philosophy moulded together help create a world which is more unified, more beautiful and fair thus, more worthy of living. They protect the world against the oppressors and the evil. And in Camus's case, they bring forth a writer-philosopher.

Necessarily, philosophy and art are similar in that anyone dealing with these commits himself and becomes himself in his works. They both involve thought although it does not stand out as clearly in art as it does in philosophy. But they both help the world to be understood.

In a letter Camus writes to his wife-to-be, Francine, that philosophical thought only begins when people challenge the logic of clichés with rigour and honesty. And that is what he does in all his works when he points out the absurdity of life, of the society and of the human condition. By doing so, he attempts to break the

[1] Ibid., 69. «Si être philosophe, c'est construire un système, alors Camus ne l'est pas. Il ne rattache pas sa réflection à un mot en «isme». Sa philosophie passe par un style littéraire, par des figures, comme la métaphore. Il ne fabrique pas des concepts nouveaux. Cependant, s'il n'appore pas de réponses, il pose un certain nombre de questions qui sont des questions philosophiques… et de bonnes questions. Camus est un écrivain-philosophe plutôt qu'un philosophe professionel.»

clichés that people have got used to living with. This is a rebellion and he does it brilliantly.

When Camus's philosophy is studied in the circumstances and the conditions of the world at present, it proves to be still sound and credible. Naturally, many things have changed since the time span Camus lived in. Marxism, Communism and Fascism have been largely overthrown. The USSR has been split into multiple independent countries. Capital punishment, which Camus is extremely against, has been widely abolished. Man's social and personal life styles have gone through changes, too. Modern man is alienated, he is inclined to disbelieve in religion or turn towards an Eastern religion such as Buddhism. He asks for more personal and political freedom. 'Life coaches' are a novelty that have appeared to make life more liveable and meaningful and to direct individuals to picking and choosing what they want for their own lives, including the responsibility these may involve. All these are issues that Camus foresees and either supports or proposes solutions for. The values he discusses such as life, dignity and freedom are always crucial. Moreover, in the 21st century, due to globalisation and ever-increasing population worldwide, people have been faced with losing their identity and with being literally 'enumerated'. So, life today is even more absurd than the past and one can understand and appreciate one's situation even better by reading Camus's philosophy. And no doubt, in that sense, Camus is even further than simply being 'contemporary'. His ideas and suggestions are entirely humane and all-embracing and they have their foundation in his providence and universality. Hence, it would be wise not to place Camus's philosophy into the boundaries of 'contemporariness' but let it flow in its natural course from era to era and from century to century.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aranson, Ronald. 2004. *Camus and Sartre, The Story of a Friendship and a Quarrel That Ended It.* USA: The University of Chicago Press.

Barrault, Jean-Louis. n.d. "Le Frère." *Le Monde, Hors-Série, Une vie, une oeuvre*.100-101.

Bloom, Harold. ed. 2003. *Bloom's BioCritiques*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers.

Camus, Albert. 1973. *A Happy Death*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd.

_____ 1965. *Caligula*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd.

_____ 1994. *Le Premier Homme*. n.p.: Éditions Gallimard.

_____ 1991a. *Notebooks 1935-1942*. New York: Paragon House.

_____ 1991b. *Notebooks 1942-1951*. New York: Paragon House.

_____ 2008. *Notebooks 1951-1959*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.

_____ 1969. *Resistance, Rebellion and Death*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

_____ n.d. "Terrorism et Répression." *Le Monde, Hors-Série, Une vie, une oeuvre*. 53-58.

_____ 1976. *The Fall*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd.

_____ 1996. *The First Man*. New York: Vintage Books.

_____ 1955. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

_____ 1974a. *The Plague*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

_____ 1967. *The Rebel*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

_____ 1974b. *The Stranger*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Camus, Catherine. n.d. "Albert Camus: SPIKE interviews Catherine Camus, daughter of Albert Camus: Solitaire et solidaire." Accessed March 15, 2010. Interview by Russell Wilkinson. Available from http://www.spikemagazine.com/0397camuphp. Internet.

Corbic, Arnaud. 2007. *Camus et l'homme sans Dieu*. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf.

Dostoevski, Fyodor. 1992. *The Devils*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Faulkner, William n.d. "L'âme qui s'interroge—Le rayonnement." *Le Monde, Hors-Série, Une vie, une oeuvre*. 105.

Grenier, Jean. 1968. *Albert Camus (Souvenirs)*. n.p. Éditions Gallimard.

Guérin, Jeanyves. n.d. «À chacun son Camus.» *Le Monde, Hors-Série, Une vie, une oeuvre*. 65-69.

Hall, H. Gaston. 1960. "Aspects of the Absurd." *Yale French Studies* No. 25. [journal on-line]. n.p. Yale University Press. Accessed 22 October 2009. 26-32. Available from http://www.jstor.org/stable/2928897. Internet.

Hochberg, Herbert. January 1965. "Albert Camus and the Ethic of Absurdity." *Ethics* Vol. 75, No. 2. [journal on-line]. n.p. The University of Chicago Press. Accessed 22 October 2009. 87-102. Available from http://www.jstor.org/stable/2379406. Internet.

Hume, David. 1955. *Four Dissertations and Essays on Suicide and the Immortality of the Soul*. South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press.

Kaufmann, Walter. 1980. *Discovering the Mind* Vol. 2. USA: Mc Graw-Hill Book Company.

_____ 1957. *Existentialism from Dostoevski to Sartre*. New York: Meridian Books.

Kuçuradi, İonna. 1997. *Sanata Felsefeyle Bakmak*. Ankara: Ayraç Yayınevi.

_____ 1988. *Uludağ Konuşmaları*. Ankara : Türkiye Felsefe Kurumu

Lévy, Bernard-Henri. n.d. "Un Philosophe Artiste." *Le Monde, Hors-Série, Une vie, une oeuvre*. 7-20

Lyotard, Dolorès. ed. 2009. *Albert Camus Contemporain.* Villeneuve d'Ascq, France: Presses Universitaires de Septentrion.

Marcuse, Herbert. March 1948. "Remarks on Jean-Paul Sartre's L'Etre et le Neant." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol. 8. no. 3. [journal on-line]. n.p. International Phenomenological Society. Accessed 18 December 2009. 309-336. Available from http://www.jstor.org/stable/2103207. Internet.

Masters, Brian. 1975. *Camus:a study*. Totawa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield.

McBride, Joseph. 1992. *Albert Camus Philosopher and Littérateur*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. 2007. *Nietzsche and the Death of God*. trans. and ed. Peter Fritzsche. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.

_____ 2005. *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings*. ed. Ridley& Norman. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

_____ 1995. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. New York: The Modern Library.

_____ 1967. *Will to Power*. New York: Random House.

Parker, Emmmet. 1966. *The Artist in the Arena*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Plato. *Phaedo*. 62 B.

Rey, Pierre-Louis. 2010. "Lire Camus aujourd'hui." *Le Magazine Littéraire*, *Hors-Série*, Janvier-Fevrier. 19-21.

Rorty, Richard. 1991. *Essays on Heidegger and Others* Vol. 2. London: Cambridge University Press.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1984. *Being and Nothingness*. New York: Washington Square Press.

_____ 2010. "Entretien avec Jean-Paul Sartre." Interview by Rybalka, Michel, Oreste Pucciani, Susan Gruenheck, *Marienne, Le Magazine Littéraire, Hors-Série*, Mars-Avril. 33-39.

_____ 1987. *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, New York: Citadel Press Kensington Publishing Corp.

_____ 2007. *Existentialism is a Humanism*, New Haven, London: Yale University Press.

_____ 2001. *Jean-Paul Sartre: Basic Writings*, ed. Stephen Priest. London: Routledge.

_____ n.d. "Un homme en marche," *Le Monde, Hors-Série, Une vie, une oeuvre*. 98-99.

Sallenave, Danièle. 2010. "Faire le con ne suffit pas." *Marianne-Le Magazine Littéraire, Hors-Série*, Mars-Avril. 29-31.

Schmitz, Isabelle. n.d. "Voyage au bout de L'absurde." *Le Figaro, Hors-Série, Camus L'écriture, La révolte, La nostalgie*. 65-72.

Schopenhauer, Arthur. 1969. *The World as Will and Representation*. New York: Dover Publications Inc.

Sefler, George F. Spring 1974. "The Existential vs. the Absurd: The aesthetics of Nietzsche and Camus." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. Blackwell Publishing on behalf of The American Society for Aesthetics, Vol. 32, No. 3. [journal on-line]. Accessed 22 October 2009. 415-421.Available from http://www.jstor.org/stable/428426. Internet.

Starobinski, Jean. n.d. "Dans le premier silence." *Le Monde, Hors-Série, Camus, Une vie, une oeuvre*. 103-105.

Stern, Daniel. Winter 1998. "The Fellowship of Men That Die: The Legacy of Albert Camus." *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature.* Vol. 10, No. 2. [journal on-line]. Accessed 18 December 2009. 183-198. Available from http://www.jstor.org/stable/743426. Internet.

Todd, Olivier. 1999, *Camus-A Life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

_____ January 3, 2010. Agence France-Presse (AFP).

Weyembergh, Maurice. «Absurde,» in *Dictionnaire Albert Camus,* 2009 ed.

Worms, Frédéric. 2009. *La philosophie en France au xxe siècle*. n.p. Éditions Gallimard.

CURRICULUM VITAE

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Surname, Name: Başkaya (Başar), Dilek
Nationality: Turkish (TC)
Date and Place of Birth: 15 February 1955, Adana
Marital Status: Married
Phone: +90 312 210 39 41 / 21 60
Fax: +90 312 210 79 85
email: dilekbb@metu.edu.tr

EDUCATION

Degree	Institution	Year of Graduation
MA	St. John's College, Liberal Arts, Santa Fe, NM, USA	1986
MA	Ankara University, Faculty of Letters, Department of English Language and Literature	1979
BA	Ankara University, Faculty of Letters, Department of English Language and Literature	1977
High School	TED Ankara College, Ankara	1973

WORK EXPERIENCE

Year	Place	Enrollment
1983-Present	METU School of Foreign Languages, Department of Basic English	Instructor
1978	TED Ankara College	Teacher of English

FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Advanced English, Upper-Intermediate French

PUBLICATIONS

1. Başkaya D. "Bilinç Irmağında Bir Yolculuk: Yazında Bilinç Akışı", Felsefe Yazın, 10/11(11), 7-11 (2007)

2. Dummett M. "Araştırmalar Kısıtlamasız mı Olmalıdır?" Çev. Başkaya D., Felsefe Yazın, 4/5(12), 67-74 (2008)

3. Dworkin G. "Marx ve Mill: Bir Diyalog", Çev. Kundakçı D., Turan H., Başkaya D., Felsefe Yazın, 3/4(14), 67-72 (2009)

4. Başkaya D. "How Alenation and 'the Absurd' are Related in Camus's *The Stranger*: Is It One's Fate To Be Alienated?", Journal of the Albert Camus Society, n.d., 8-21 (2009)

PAPERS PRESENTED AT NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES

1. Başkaya D. "İngiliz ve Türk Yazınından Örneklerle Bilinç Akımı Yönteminin KısaTarihçesi", Turkish Congress of Aesthetics, Ankara, November 22-24, 2006

2. Başkaya D. "Déjà Vu: I, the Stranger, Know You Well, Mr. Prufrock", XVIIth International Congress of Aesthetics, Ankara, July 9-13, 2007

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Teacher of English (1978-Present)

Advisor to the Chairperson, METU School of Foreign Languages, Department of Basic English (2001 Fall-2003 Fall)

METU Proficiency Exam Committee Co-ordinator (2001 Fall-2003 Fall)

METU Proficiency Exam Committee Member (2000-present)

AWARDS

METU Performance Award 2001
METU Performance Award 2009

HOBBIES

Classical Turkish Music (Listening and Performing), Collecting Old Magazines, Keeping Pets

TURKISH SUMMARY

Varoluşculuk, felsefede geleneğe karşı çıkan yenilikçi hatta devrimci bir akımdır. Geleneksellik, tümevarım ve tümdengelim yöntemlerine, dolayısı ile, genellemelere bağlı olarak çalışırken, varoluşculuk bunlardan farklı olarak, bireysellik üzerine temellendirilmiştir. İnsanı merkezine alır ve insanı inceler.

Varoluşculuk, kavram ve fikirlerle değil, somut dünya ve insanla çalışmayı yeğler çünkü kavramlar soyuttur. Bu nedenle her zaman kolay anlaşılamayabilirler, hatta karmaşaya yol açabilirler. Varoluşculukta özne-nesne ikiliği yoktur. İnsan, yaşadığı dünyanın bir açılımıdır. Temel bilinç, öz farkındalığıdır ve insan karakterinin olasılıkları onun üzerine inşa edilir. İnsan ise, öz farkındalığını ya (Sartre ve Camus'nün dediği gibi) "öteki"nin varlığını fark edince, ya da (Heidegger'in savına uygun olarak) kendi kendine kalınca kazanır.

Sartre, "Varoluş özden önce gelir," der. Diğer bir deyişle, insan doğduğu andan itibaren, (bir 'hiçlik' olarak) 'vardır'. Ama yaşamını biçimlendirmeye başladıktan sonra 'öz'e kavuşur, yani bir birey olur. Yine Sartre, "Varoluşculuk insancıllıktır," der. Bu görüşe göre, dünyanın dayanak noktası, insan öznelliğidir. Camus için dünyayı anlamak, onu insana indirgemektir. Yani her şeye insanın bakış açısından ve onun anlayabileceği biçimde bakılır. İnsanın üzerinde bir yasa koyucu veya otorite yoktur. İnsan kendi kendisini biçimlendirip yönetirken kendisini geliştirir. Ayrıca, görüş olarak 'insan öznelliği'ni aşamaz, yani, kendisinden daha yüce bir makam kabul etmez. Dolayısı ile, varoluşculuk insana özgürlük sunar.

Varoluşculuk akımının ortaya attığı ve yanıt aradığı çeşitli sorular bulunmaktadır. Bunlardan bazıları, "Varolmak ne demektir?", "Varolmanın bir amacı var mıdır?", "İnsan özgür müdür?", "İnsan davranışlarından sorumlu mudur?", "Ölüme karşı nasıl bir tavır içinde olmalıdır?" sorularıdır. Bu sorular genellikle rahatsız edici bulunduğu için, varoluşculuk bazen karamsarlıkla ve mutluluk, huzur, birlik gibi duyguları bir yana itmekle itham edilir. Varoluşculuğa getirilen başka bir eleştiri de, bireysel bir temele oturduğu, fazla birey merkezci olduğudur. Bu eleştirilerde gerçek payı bulunmakla birlikte, şurası da gerçektir ki, varoluşculuk bireye olumlu yaklaşır. İnsana önem vererek, onu ön plana çıkarır. Madem insan kendisini idare etme ve hep daha iyiye gitme kapasitesine sahiptir, o halde, varoluşculuk hem iyimser ve olumlu bir akım, hem de, bu görüşe göre insan kendini yaratma

sürecinden geçtiği için, yaratıcı bir akımdır. Ancak, insan hiçbir zaman bir bütünlüğe erişemez. Örneğin, Sartre'ın insanı, "olduğu gibi olmayan ve olmadığı gibi olan" insandır. Dünya ondan hep bir şeyler saklar. İnsan asla tüm bilgilere sahip olamaz. Bu yetmezmiş gibi, gelişip tümlenme çabası ölümle son bulur.

Kierkegaard ilk varoluşcu filozof olarak düşünülebilir çünkü bireyi ön planda tutar. Onun bireye önem veren yaklaşımı, Camus'yü etkilemiştir. Kierkegaard Matematik ve aklı çok katı bularak, onlarla bireysel kararlara varılamayacağını düşünür ve onlara itibar etmez. İnsan kendi kararlarını almakta özgür olmalıdır. Kararlar ise, duygulara dayanarak alınmalıdır. Aklın varlığını onaylar fakat kararlar için duyguları gerekli görür. Kalabalık psikolojisinin bireysellik, ahlaki davranış ve özgürlüğün yerini almasından rahatsızlık duyar. Dini inancı güçlü olan Kierkegaard, Hıristiyan inancının duygular yoluyla kazanılacağına inanır. Kierkegaard'a göre, insan hem kişisel özgürlüğüne, hem de öteki dünyaya uygun seçimler yapmalıdır. Ama bu görüşün karışıklık ve zorluklara yol açtığının, seçim yapma durumunda kalan insanın içinden çıkılması güç ikilemlerle karşılaştığının da bilincindedir.

Camus'yü etkileyen bir başka varoluşcu filozof Nietzsche'dir. Nietzsche *Güç Istenci'*nde sonsuz yinelenmeden söz eder. Bu terim, amaçsız ve boşunalık duygusu içinde öylece varolma durumu ve bu durumun hep yinelenmesi ve yinelenecek olması anlamına gelir. Camus de, Sisifos'un kayasını sonsuza dek yokuş yukarı itişinde ve *Yabancı*'nın kahramanı Meursault'nun yaşama biçiminde sonsuz yinelenmeyi gösterir.

Nietzsche'ye göre, insan özgürlük istiyorsa, Tanrı olmalıdır. Fakat onun Tanrı'dan kasti, tüm diğer insanları boyunduruğu altına alan bir ezici güç değil, kendisini geliştirmiş, yazgıya boyun eğmeyen, sürü davranışı sergileyen topluma ve geleneksel ahlaka karşı çıkacak ve kendi yaşamını kuracak güce sahip bir "üst insan"dır.

Camus'nün kahramanlarının konumu da bu çizgidedir. Camus'nün yapıtları etikten soyunmuştur çünkü kahramanları etik kurallara tabi olamayan 'saçma' kahramanlardır. Saçma oluşlarından ötürü, kendilerinde anlamsız dünyaya başkaldırma cesareti bulurlar.

Camus'ye göre, anlamlı olan tek şey insandır çünkü insan anlam kazanma çabası içindedir. İnsana ek olarak, onur ve özgürlük de anlamlıdır çünkü ikisi de şimdiki zamanda yaşanılabilir. Şimdiki zamanın önemi ise, Camus'nün varoluşcu yaklaşımında yatmaktadır. Geçmiş, arkada kalmıştır; diğer yandan, insanın geleceğe ulaşması yalnızca bir olasılıktır. O nedenle Camus şimdiye ait değerler bulma ve onları yaşamına sindirme peşindedir.

Camus için, yaşamı bir amaç olarak görebilmek önemlidir. Bu temayı özellikle *Mutlu Ölüm* ve *Düşüş*'te işler. Fakat *Düşüş*'teki Clamence yaşamını kurarken zorluk çeker çünkü özgürlüğün verdiği gerilime dayanmakta zorlanır. Bu bakımdan zaman zaman Sartre'ın "kötü inanca kaçış"ına benzer biçimde davranır. Zaten Camus'nün Clamence karakterini çizerken Sartre'ı kastettiği de, görüş olarak ortaya atılmıştır.

Sartre'dan farklı olarak, Camus "Öz ve varoluş yan yana gider," der. Yani insanın değer atfedilen bir özü vardır ama bu öz onun varoluşcu konumundan ortaya çıkar ve iki kavram birbirinden ayrılamaz, çünkü harmanlanmış durumdadırlar.

Yoksayıcılık, ya da nihilizm, Camus'nün yaşadığı dönemden önce başlayan fakat onun zamanında da yaygınlığını koruyan bir akımdır. Nietzsche yoksayıcılığı destekler, Camus ise, değerleri ortadan kaldırdığı gerekçesiyle karşı çıkar. Nietzsche yoksayıcılığın Tanrı'yı öğretmek isteyen Hıristiyanlıktan çıktığını, ancak tanrısallık kavramını aslında insanların yarattığını savlar. Üstelik bilim alanındaki gelişmeler, eski değer ve inançları yıkmış, kesin olan hiçbir şey kalmamıştır. Dünya birlik, gerçek ve amaçtan yoksundur. Nietzsche, bu ortamda yoksayıcılığın doğal olarak ortaya çıktığını düşünür. Zaten Nietzsche için "inançlar hapishanedir." Yani insanı ve onun özgürlüğünü kısıtlarlar. İnsan, özleyip kavuşmak istediği özgürlüğü yoksayıcılıkta bulabilir.

Meursault da toplumu, önce yoksayıcılığı nedeniyle, daha sonra da kendisine düşman olduğunu anladığı için reddeder. Camus'nün yoksayıcılığa yapıtlarında yer vermesinin nedeni, bu akıma olan ilgisi veya inancı değil, insanlara değerlerden vazgeçmemelerini hatırlatmak istemesidir.

Kuşkuculuk da Camus'nün yakından ilgilendiği bir akımdır. Kuşkuculuğa göre, yeni bulgular eski değerleri ve inanışları yok eder. İnsan, kendisini de, diğerlerini de tam olarak anlamanın mümkün olmadığının ayrımına varır. Camus'nün

deyişiyle, kendisi ile yüreği arasında hiçbir zaman kapanmayan bir boşluk vardır. Bu da kuşkuculuğu doğurur. Özellikle *Yabancı, Düşüş* ve *Veba*'da kendisini duyumsatan kuşkuculuk, aslında değer diye bir kavram olup olmadığını, değerler varsa, onları belirleme işinin toplum mu, din mi, yoksa birey tarafından mı yapılmasının doğru olduğunu sorgularlar.

Yabancı'da Camus toplum değerlerini Meursault'nun tavır ve yaklaşımları açısından ele alır ve toplumun Meursault'dan beklediği ahlaki davranışların, aslında hiçbir somut temele dayanmadığı savını öne sürer. Belki de 'doğru' davranışlar, Meursault'nun annesi öldüğü zaman veya hapishane hücresinde rahiple karşılaştığı zaman sergilediği davranışlardır. Farklı bir söyleyişle, ahlaki değerler kişiden kişiye, kültürden kültüre ve devirden devire değişebilir ve sonuçta sorgulanabilir hale gelir. Durum böyle olunca da, insanların olaylar karşısındaki duruş ve davranışları eleştirilemez ve yargılanamaz.

Camus yapıtlarına çeşitli varoluşculuk temalarını ele alır. Bunların en önemlilerinden biri 'saçma'dır. Saçmanın ortaya çıkışı, 19. yüzyılda Kierkegaard ile olmuştur. Kierkegaard saçma sözünü kullanmamakla birlikte, Tanrı'nın İsa'da vücut bulmasının bir paradoks olduğunu söyler çünkü bu inanç sonlu ile sonsuzu birleştirir. Fakat bu durum aynı zamanda saçmadır. Diğer bir deyişle, iki uyumsuz veya zıt kavramı birleştirmeğe çalışmaktadır.

Camus yapıtlarında saçmaya geniş yer ayırır ve onu kapsamlı biçimde işler. Camus de Kierkegaard gibi, saçmanın zıt kavram ve durumların bir araya gelmesiyle ortaya çıktığını düşünür; ancak saçmaya başkaldıracak yerde çareyi ondan kaçmakta bulanları eleştirir. İlk sırada eleştirdikleri de, aralarında Kierkegaard'ın da bulunduğu varoluşcu düşünürlerdir. Camus'nün ne insan aklının anlamaya yetmediği bir dünya hakkında açıklamalar yapan, ne de dünyanın anlaşılmazlığından rahatsızlık duymayan veya dünyayı Tanrı ile özdeşleştiren filozoflara tahammülü yoktur. Camus, Kierkegaard ve Chestov'u bu tür filozoflar arasında görür ve Chestov'u eleştirir çünkü Chestov saçmaya "saçma" değil, "Tanrı" der. Chestov paradoksal bir biçimde Tanrı'ya sığınarak, Tanrı'da bulunduğunu düşündüğü anlamsızlıktan kaçmaya çalışır. Kısacası, saçmanın ne olduğunu anlayamayınca onun Tanrı olduğu sonucuna varır. Buna karşılık Camus, insanın saçma ile Tanrı fikirlerini harmanlaması sonucunda saçmada bulunan zıtlık ve ayrılık gibi özelliklerin kaybolacağını savunur. Diğer bir deyişle, Chestov saçmayı Tanrı'ya ne kadar yaklaştırırsa, saçma o kadar dayanılır hale gelir.

Camus için bu tavır bir tür hamle, bir kaçıştır. Oysa Camus'ye gore saçma insan böyle bir hamle yapmaz çünkü kaçmayı reddeder.

Zaten Camus saçmadan tümüyle kaçmanın mümkün olmadığını söyler. Nedeni de, saçmanın insanı ölümle sınırlamış olmasıdır. Sonuç olarak, saçma kısıtlayıcı bir duygudur ve Camus bu duyguyu *Yabancı*'da hapishane, *Veba*'da kent surları biçiminde simgeler. Oysa bu duvarların yıkılması gerekir ve bu olanaklıdır. Camus'nün Emerson'dan alıntıladığı gibi, "Her duvar bir kapıdır." O durumda yapılacak en iyi iş, saçmaya başkaldırmak, umutsuzluğa düşmeden ona karşı mücadele ederek özgürleşmek, geçit vermez gibi görünen duvarları açilan kapılar haline getirmektir. Başka türlü söylenirse, saçma ve özgürlük ilintilidir.

Görüldüğü gibi, Camus'nün felsefesinde saçma yalnızca anlaşılmaya çalışılan bir kavram değil, kahramanlarının özelliğidir. Bu kahramanlar insan durumuna dair farkındalık kazanmış, bunun sonucu olarak, gelecek umudu taşımayan, ama hallerinden de yakınmayan insanlardır. Hepsi de Tanrı öldükten sonra mutluluğu bulmaya çalışırlar. Ve herbiri kendisine içinde bulunduğu zamanın tadını en çok çıkarabilecek bir yol arayıp bulur; intiharı reddeder. Onlar için intihar ahlaki değil, bireysel bir konudur.

Camus, insanın kendisini ancak bir çıkmazda veye uç noktada bulduğu zaman saçma durumunun ayrımına vardığını düşünür. Günlük yaşamda ya da toplumsal düzende bir değişiklik yoksa, insan kendi kendini sorgulamaz. Ama bir çıkmaza girdiğinde, kendisini çevreleyen boşunalık duygusuyla ve onu izleyen saçmayla yüzyüze gelir.

Burada güzel olan, saçmayla savaşan insanın kimseyi öldürememesi ve kendisinden başlayarak, herkesin özgürlüğü için çaba harcamasıdır. Sonuçta, ortaya ahlak sahibi insan çıkar. Kısacası, saçmadan ahlak ve özgürlük doğar. Ayrıca, Camus'ye göre umut aldatıcıdır çünkü ölümden sonra başka bir dünya vaat eder. Oysa saçma böyle bir şey yapmaması nedeniyle, dürüsttür. Böylece Camus başlangıçta gayet olumsuz görünen bir kavramın olumlu yönlerini belirtmiştir. Saçmanın iyi yönleri bu kadarla da kalmaz. Camus saçmanın son değil, başlangıç olduğunu savunur. Hatta saçma, insanları hayata bağladığı için, yararlı bile olabilir. Camus saçmadan üç sonuç çıkarır: başkaldırı, özgürlük ve tutku. Onlar sayesinde intihardan uzak durmayı başarır. Ve bilir ki, üçüyle

yoğurduğu yaşam birincil değerdir; O halde, saçmayla yüz yüze kalan insan onu hiçe saymalı ve yaşamını en iyi biçimde yapılandırma yolunu seçmelidir.

Sisifos Söyleni'ndeki dört karakter olan Don Juan, oyuncu, fatih ve sanatçı da tıpkı böyle yaparlar ve saçma yaşam konusunda dört örnek oluştururlar. Aslına bakılırsa, Camus'nün yapıtlarında çizdiği karakterler ideal ahlak ilkeleriyle uyum içinde olmak gereğini duymazlar. Saçmayı aşmak amacıyla yaptıkları şeyler, idealist anlamda kabul görmeleri için yeterli olmayabilir. Her biri dünyanın zevkine varmak amacıyla farklı yollar izler. Don Juan anlık tutkular peşinde koşar; oyuncu sahne üzerindeki mesleğine yüzlerce tutkulu yaşamı sığdırır; fatih, ya da asi, enerjisine siyasal kavgalar içinde kendisine bir geçit bulur ve dördüncüleri olan sanatçı, dünyalar yaratır.

Camus'nün en önemli felsefi sorun olarak nitelediği intihar, varoluşcu bir kavram olarak yapıtlarında ön plandadır. İntihar filozofları her zaman ilgilendirmiş, bu konuda farklı filozoflarca farklı görüşler belirtilmiştir. Örneğin Kant intihara tümüyle karşı çıkar. Çünkü bu Tanrı'yı yadsımaktır. Üstelik intihar eden insan kendisini insanlıktan "şeyliğe" indirgemiş, küçültmüş olur. Nietzsche intiharı onaylar. İyileşemeyecek hastaların intihar etmeleri gerektiğini çünkü toplum içinde parazite dönüştüklerini ve saygınlıklarını yitirdiklerini söyler. Sartre ise tarafsız durur. İntiharın nedeninin, Tanrı'sız bir dünyada insanın niçin var olduğunu anlamaya çalışmak olduğu düşüncesindedir. Belki de insan, "Tek yönetici benim. Davranış özgürlüğüme dayanarak istersem kendimi öldürebilirim," demektedir. Sartre'a göre, insan ölümden korktuğu ölçüde, ölüme doğru bir çekim gücüne de kapılır ki, bu da bir paradokstur.

Camus öncelikle metafizik intihara, yani dinsel inanca sığınarak saçmadan kaçmaya çalışmaya şiddetle karşı çıkar. Diğer yandan, Sartre'ın paradoksuna da katılır. Ona göre de, insan bir yandan yaşamak isterken, diğer yandan hem kendisini, hem de 'öteki'leri ortadan kaldırmak arzusundadır. Ama ne olursa olsun, insan kendini öldürmemelidir. İntihar, ölümden kaçarken, kendini ölümün kucağına atmak anlamına gelmektedir.

İntihar, en temel felsefi sorun olarak *Sisifos Söyleni*'nin konusunu oluşturur. Camus bu yapıtında insanın saçma durumunu inceler ve saçma ile karşılaşıldıktıktan sonra intiharı uzakta tutabilmek için neler yapılması gerektiği konusunda önerilerde bulunur. Aslında bu kaçma arzusu, 'varoluşcu suç'tan

kaçma arzusuyla ilintilidir. Buna gore, insan niçin varolduğunu bilmek ister ama yanıtını bulamaz. Tek bildiği, dünyaya atılmış olduğu ve kendi yaşamını yönlendirecek tek güç kaynağının yine kendisi olduğudur. Hem saçma durumunun farkındadır, hem de çevresinde olup biten herşeyle ilgilenmekten kendisini alıkoyamaz; o yüzden, sorumluluk duygusunun ağırlığı gittikçe artar. Buna karşın, intihara sırt çevirmesi gerekir.

Camus intiharın toplumsal bir olgu gibi algılanmasına karşı çıkar. Bireyleri ve onların kişisel durumlarını ilgilendirdiği gerekçesiyle, intiharın bireysel düzlemde ele alınması gerektiğine inanır. İnsanların niçin aydınlıktan karanlığa kaçmak istediklerinin araştırılması gerekliliğini savunur.

Camus intihar sorununu enine boyuna incelediği *Sisifos Söyleni*'nde, Dostoyevski'nin *Ecinniler* romanındaki Kirillov'a bir alt bölüm ayırır. Kirillov bir saçma kahraman olmakla birlikte, intihar etmesi nedeniyle, istisnai bir konumdadır. Tanrı'nın insanlara acı verip özgürlük vermediği görüşündedir. Aslında Camus'nün de, Kirillov'un da kavuşmak istediği, özgürlüktür ama biri bunu başkaldırarak, diğeri ise intihar ederek elde etme yolunu seçer. Camus ölümden sonra bir sonsuz yaşam olduğuna inanmazken, Kirillov mutluluk ve sonsuzluğun duyumsandığı bir anın olduğu görüşündedir ki, Hıristiyanlık inancı gayet güçlü olan Dostoyevski'nin kahramanı oluşunun bunda katkısı çoktur.

Düşüş'de ise Camus intiharın iki farklı olumsuzluğunu sergiler: İntihar eden insan hem yaşamını yitirir, hem de arkasından yapılan bayağı veya aptalca yorumlara maruz kalır. Bunları göze almamalı, kendini öldürmemelidir.

İntihardan uzaklaşıp yaşama sarılma, başkaldırı ile gerçekleşir. Bu varoluşcu tema yaşama anlam katar. Başkaldırı kendi içinde bir amaçtır: Başkaldırmak. Başkaldırı ayrıca bir sevinç kaynağı da yaratır çünkü insanın durumuna, saçmaya ve ölüme karşı direniştir.

Camus'nün adaletsizlik ve baskıya karşı duyduğu başkaldırı hissi, genç yaşta geçirdiği verem, bu hastalık nedeniyle öğretmen olmasına izin verilmemesi ve Fransa'nın işgali gibi, yaşamı boyunca karşısına çıkan olay ve durumlardan kaynaklanır. İlk olarak *Sisifos Söyleni*'nde insanın bireysel durumuna odaklanmış olan başkaldırı duygusu, sonraları odağını değiştirerek, insanların birbirlerine uyguladıkları zulüm üzerinde durur ve böylece yavaş yavaş toplumsal bir düzleme

geçmiş olur. Camus insancıl endişelerini ayrıntılı bir biçimde dile getirdiği *Başkaldıran İnsan*'da, ilk görüşünden hiç vazgeçmemekle birlikte, her türlü baskıcı rejime—insanlara kötü davranılması nedeniyle—cephe alır. Ancak, Camus'nün başkaldırı tartışmaları bu iki yapıtla sınırlı kalmaz. Fransa'nın işgali sırasında, hem bir haber alma ağı, hem de yeraltı gazetesi olarak çalışan *Combat*'nın kurulmasına yardımcı olur. Yazdığı toplumsal ve siyasal içerikli pek çok makale ve deneme *Combat*'da yayımlanır.

Ahlakçı bir varoluşcu olan Camus, değerlerin korunabilmesi için başkaldırmanın gerekli olduğunu savunur. Başkaldırı bireysel alanda başlar. İnsan önce kendi özgürlüğü için başkaldırır. Ama iyi ahlaklı insana kendi özgürlüğü yetmez. Başkalarının da özgürlük kazanabilmesi için mücadele verir. İşte o zaman Camus'nün "Başkaldırıyorum, o halde varız," söylemi gerçek olur.

Başkaldırabilmek o kadar da kolay bir eylem değildir. Bunu ancak hem kendisinin, hem de dünyanın bilincine ve ayrımına varmış bir insan yapabilir. O insan Tanrıları yadsıyarak kendi yazgısını kendisi belirler. Camus insanı ve dünyayı sorgularken, Tanrı'nın olmadığı bir dünyada insanın nasıl davranması gerektiğini de açıklar. Buna göre, eğer Sisifos, ya da insan, kendi yaşamını yalnız kendisinin biçimlendirebileceğini anlar, yaşamın boş ve saçma bir mücadeleden başka bir şey olmadığını bilmekten doğan acıya ve azaba dayanabilirse, 'mutluluğa' da kavuşabilir. Böylesi bir mutluluk, insanın intiharı reddederek vakarını ve gururunu korumasını ve saçmayı olduğu gibi kabul etmesini de sağlar.

Camus intihara karşı çiktığı gibi, ölüm cezasına da karşı çıkar çünkü bu konuda çeşitli endişeleri vardır. Bunların en önemlisi, ölüme mahkûm edilen bir kişinin aslında suçsuz olması ama uygulanan cezanın geri dönüşünün olmamasıdır. O nedenle, yaşamı boyunca ölüm cezasının kalkması için uğraşmıştır. İnsanın ölümden doğal olarak korktuğunu, idama mahkûm edilmenin ise daha korkunç olduğunu, çünkü mahkûmun öleceği zamanı ve ölümün acılı olacağını bildiğini belirtir. O bakımdan idam, cinayetten daha kötü bir edimdir.

İdam cezasının rahatsızlık verme nedenleri bununla bitmez. Camus, kimsenin kusursuz olmadığını, dolayısı ile, kimsenin kimseyi yargılayıp ölümle cezalandırmaya hakkı olmadığı görüşündedir. Ölüm cezası insanın saygınlığını ve insanlığını elinden alır çünkü bir idam mahkûmu tümüyle başkalarının kontrolu altına girer. Oysa varoluşculuk insanın sonuna dek kendi kendisini idare etmesini,

kendi istemini kullanmasını ve kendi seçimlerini yapmasını bekler. Camus'nün rahatsızlık duyduğu başka bir konu da, idamdan önceki bekleme süresinin çok korkunç oluşu ve bu yüzden mahkûmun—umulduğu gibi—dine sarılarak tövbe etmek yerine inancını yitirme noktasına gelebilmesidir.

Varoluşculuk temalarından bir diğeri olan özgürlük, Camus'nün dünyada bulduğu değerlerin başlıcalarındandır. Camus, insanın kendisinden başka yaslanacak temeli ya da kökü olmadığını ifade eder. O durumda insan elinde olmadan, içinden yükselen özgürlük duygusuna döner. Sonsuz yaşam vermeyen hiçbir özgürlük, Camus için aslında özgürlük sayılmaz; yine de özgürlükten vazgeçilemez çünkü özgürlükten yoksun kalmak, bir otoriteye baş eğmek ve saygınlığını yitirmek anlamı taşır.

Camus özgürlük konusunda, Sartre ile bazı fikirleri paylaşır. İki düşünür için de özgürlük yalnızca bir insan niteliği değil, insanın ta kendisidir. İnsanın özgürlük kavramına karşı yüreğinde taşıdığı içgüdü, kendi varlığına eşittir. Sartre, özgürlüğün aslında insanın yüreğindeki bir boşluk olduğunu, bu boşluğun insanı 'sadece varolma'nın ötesine geçmesi, kendisini yoğurup yaratması için zorladığını düşünür. Camus de aynı görüştedir. O da Sartre gibi, insanın seçimlerine dayalı edimleri aracılığıyla kendi kendisini oluşturduğuna inanır. Kısacası, edimler seçimleri belirler.

"Özgür değiliz," demek, bir Tanrı'nın olduğunu ve kötülüklerden de onun sorumlu olduğunu iddia etmek anlamına gelirken, "Özgürüz", demek, Tanrı yoktur ve kendimizden biz sorumluyuz anlamını taşır. Fakat bu noktada Camus'nün vurguladığı bir nokta vardır. Özgürlüğün bir sınırı olmalıdır. Sınırsız özgürlük karmaşa, karmaşa da yeniden esaret getirir çünkü sınırsız özgürlük içinde zorbalar ortaya çıkar ve herkesin onlara karşı koyma gücü eşit olmayabilir. Üstelik özgürlük sınırsız olunca, insanlar kendi yaptıklarından yalnızca kendileri sorumludur. Sonuçta, "Kendi düşen ağlamaz," durumu ortaya çıkar ve Camus'nün çok değer verdiği acıma duygusu yok olur.

Camus'ye göre, özgürlüğe kavuşmak iki nedenden ötürü güçtür. Bu nedenlerin ilki Tanrı inancı, ikincisi ise başkaldırmaya karşı duyulan korkudur. Çünkü toplum başkaldıran insanı dışlama, hatta ezme eğilimi gösterebilir. Ama başkaldırmaya cesaret edip, "Tanrı öldü," diyebilen insan özgürlüğe kavuşur.

Varoluşcu felsefede çok yer tutan "Tanrı öldü," söylemi Nietzsche ile başlar. Nietzsche bunu söylemenin aslında kolay olmadığını düşünür. Çünkü o takdirde diğer insanlar bunu söyleyene cephe alırlar. Ancak, tek zorluk bu değildir. İnsan bir yandan düşmanlarıyla başa çıkmaya çalışırken, bir yandan da kendisiyle mücadele ederek, kendi içinden bir Tanrı yaratma çabasındadır. Eğer başarılı olamazsa, bu onun mahvına neden olabilir. Ama eğer özgürlüğünü ilan edip bir 'yaratıcı' haline gelebilirse, o zaman, Nietzsche'nin deyişiyle, "üst insan" olur.

Nietzsche "Tanrı öldü," demekle, Tanrı'nın elinde olduğuna inanılan gücü talep etmektedir. Nietzsche'ye göre, insan bu gücü başkalarını ezmek amacıyla değil, kendi özgürlüğünü ilan edebilmek için istemektedir. Esas olarak, benliğin bir halktan doğduğunu, halkın üzerinde anlaşmaya vardığı 'iyi' ve 'kötü'den bireysel güç istencine sahip benliğin ortaya çıktığını savunur. İşte o zaman benlik, Tanrı'yı seven ve ona itaat eden halkların değerlerini ortadan kaldırarak yaratıcı konumuna gelir.

Nietzsche, "Tarı insanların zihninde yaratılmıştır," der. Farklı bir söyleyişle, insan Tanrı hakkında tahminlerde bulunabilir fakat düşünme yetisi sınırlıdır. O halde, sınırlı yetileri dolayısıyla Tanrı'nın özünü kavrayamıyorsa, O'nun hakkında fikir yürütmekten de geri durmalıdır. Yapacağı şey, "Tanrı öldü," demek ve sonra kendi kendisini bir "üst insan" haline getirmektir.

Camus'nün fikirleri, Dostoyevski'nin fikirleriyle de hem benzerlikler, hem farklılıklar gösterir. O da Dostoyevski gibi, aklın insanın saçma durumuna açıklık getirmeye yetmediğini, bu yüzden insana pek yararı dokunmadığını ve sonuçta saçma yaşamı anlamlı kılmak için doğru bir araç olmadığını iddia ader. Fakat Dostoyevski'den—veya Kierkegaard'dan—farklı olarak, "inanca doğru hamle yapmak" istemez. Nietzsche gibi "Tanrı öldü," demeyi yeğler.

Sartre *Varoluşculuk İnsancıllıktır*'da "İnsan, amacı Tanrı olmak olan varlıktır," diyerek görüşünü dile getirir. Varoluşculuğun en önemli sorusu olan "İnsan niçin vardır?"ın yanıtı belki de bu sözde yatmaktadır. Fakat sorun şudur ki, insan asla Tanrı olamaz çünkü 'bütünlüğe' ancak ölüm ile ulaşır. Öztanım yapması ölüm ile son bulur ve artık daha öte bir şey yapamaz.

Camus, Tanrı'nın ölümü fikrinin Fransız Devrimi ile ortaya çıkmış, 1917 ihtilali ile tamamlanmış olduğu düşüncesindedir**.** Onu yoksayıcılık akımı izlemiştir. Camus

insanın kutsal bir varlık gibi görülmesini, tanrısal varsayılmasını istemez çünkü kutsal sayılan insan, diğerleri üzerinde egemen olup, baskı kurmak hırsına kapılabilir. Oysa Camus'nün isteği, herkesin belli özgürlük sınırları içinde, birbirini gözetip, birbirine saygı duyarak yaşamasıdır.

Sartre gibi, Camus'nün de dinsel inancı yoktur. Hayatın 'alışılagelmiş' tanrısal güç ya da güçlerce yönetilmeden de yaşanabileceği konusunda ise, inancı tamdır. Ölümden sonra yaşama inanmaz. Ölümün yeni bir yaşamın kapısını açamayacağını çünkü onun aslında *kapalı* bir kapı olduğunu savunur. Ama sorun şudur: İnsanlar bir Tanrı tarafından sürekli korundukları fikrine öylesine alışmışlardır ki, rehberlik eden bir güç olmayınca, yaşamlarını nasıl sürdüreceklerini bilemez, ortada kalırlar. Din adamları, sığınmak, korunmak ve güven duymak için hep bir tanrısal güç gerektiğine inanırlar. Bu durumun ayrımında olan Camus, insanın, Tanrı'ya inanmasa bile, hala nasıl yaratıcı, mutlu ve ruhen sağlam kalabileceğini göstermek çabasındadır.

Camus Tanrı'yı yadsımak için çeşitli nedenler ileri sürer. Öncelikle, insan Tanrı'yı anlayamaz. Anlayabildiği tek şey insan ve bu dünyaya ait kavramlardır. O halde, anlamadığı kavrama değil, dünya ve insana değer atfeder. Camus'nün ikinci nedeni, Tanrı'nın Hıristiyanlık öğretisindeki gibi iyiliksever ve affedici olmadığını düşünmesidir. Tanrı insana mutluluğu değil, tasayı, ölümü ve saçmayı vermiştir. Bunların yanı sıra, insandan daha yüksekte bulunan saltık bir kavram insan özgürlüğünü kısıtlar ki, Camus özgürlüğün tehlikeye girmesi fikrine dayanamaz.

Tanrı kavramı Camus'nün felsefesinde tanrısızlık biçiminde olduğu kadar, Tanrı olma isteği ile de kendisini gösterir. *Veba*'da, veba salgınına çare bulan, dinsel inanç değil, Dr. Rieux'nün çabalarıdır. Üstelik çarpıcı veya ironik olarak nitelenebilecek bir durum, Rieux Tanrı'ya inanmamasıdır. Ancak, Tanrı olmak isteği Rieux'nün aklına bile gelmez. Diğer taraftan, *Düşüş*'ün kahramanı Clamence'in amacı budur. "Ne kadar yüksekte olursanız, o kadar çok insan sizi görüp selama durur," der. Her zaman herkese mecaz anlamda olduğu kadar, gerçek anlamda da tepeden bakabileceği, onlara emirler yağdırabileceği yüksek yer ve konumlarda bulunmak ister.

Clamence egemenliğini başkalarına kabul ettirecek yollar da bulmuştur. Papayı affecek konumda olduğunu söyler, masumiyet ile adaletin birbirinden ayrıldığına inanır. Üstelik bunda kendi payı da vardır. İsa, yani masumiyet, çarmıha

gerilmiştir. Kendisi de *Son Yargıçlar* panosunu—adaleti—dolabında kontrol altında, kilitli tutmaktadır. Bir de kendisini "suçlu-yargıç" ilan edince, kişisel zaaf ve suçlarını herkese pay edip, insanları serbestçe yargılamak için önünde engel kalmaz.

Yabancılaşma temasına gelince, o Camus ile özdeşleşmiş gibidir. Yabancılaşma, insanın dünyanın anlamsızlığının ayrımına vararak kendi kabuğuna çekilmesi, kendi yarattığı değerlerin ardından giderek toplum değer ve inançlarına kulak asmaması, hatta toplumla yaşadığı çelişkiyi hiç fark etmemesidir. O kadar ki, *Mutlu Ölüm*'de Meursault doğada bir gece kendi kendisine bile yabancılık duyar. Kendisine dışarıdan bakıyor gibidir. Clamence, duyduğu kahkahadan sonra, arkadaşlarının kendisine gizliden gizliye güldüklerini düşündüğünde yabancılık duygusuna kapılır. 'Yabancı' Meursault ise, yabancılaşmış olduğunun farkında bile değildir; kendisini sıradan görerek ironiye neden olur.

Yabancılaşma teması, Camus'nün üzerinde çok durduğu bir temadır. Yapıtlarının merkezinde, insanın niteliğinin ve dünyadaki konumunun ne olduğu yatar. Yanıtları bulanık ve belirsiz bulur; bu belirsizlik ise yabancılaşma durumunun temelini oluşturur. Camus *Yabancı*'da, bir toplum içinde yabancı olarak yaşamayı seçen insanın başına neler gelebileceğini sergileyerek toplum eleştirisi yapar. Ne dünyanın ne de toplumun neyin doğru, neyin yanlış olduğu hakkında bir ölçüt sunamamasına ve ortak bir 'ahlak' tanımının yapılamamasına karşın, insanın 'ahlaklı' davranmasının beklendiğini vurgular. Dünyada ahlakın değil, yalnızca saçmanın işler durumda olduğunu iddia eder. İşte bu nedenle Meursault'nun hayata yaklaşımı 'a-moral', yani ahlaktan soyunmuş biçimdedir. Ve bunun sonucunda Meursault herhangi bir konuda—sadık bir evlat olmayışı, annesinin cenazesinde ağlamayışı veya birisini öldürmüş olması gibi—nasıl ve niçin suçlu olduğunu bir türlü kavrayamaz. Demek ki, yabancılaşma değerler kaybına, onun sonucunda da tüm dünyaya karşı yoksayıcı bir tutum içine girmeye neden olmaktadır. Meursault hiçbir değer algılayamaz ve kimseyle bir duygu paylaşımına gidemez durumdadır. Ancak idam hükmü giydikten sonradır ki, kendisini ait hissetmese de, temelde toplumun ve insanlığın bir bireyi olduğunu duyumsamaya başlar. Kendisi ile diğer insanlar arasındaki tek bağ, herkesin paylaşmak zorunda olduğu insanlık durumu, yani saçma ile kuşatılmış bulunmaktır.

Son olarak, varoluşcu akımın kahramanı olan trajik kahramandan söz etmek gerekir. Trajik kahraman olayların nedensellik içindeki akışına karşı çıkar.

Özgürdür; kendisini toplumsal veya dinsel ahlak kuralları ile bağlanmış, kısıtlanmış hissetmez. İntihar etmeyi düşünmez. *Yabancı*'da Meursault'nun trajik oluşunun nedeni, kendi istediği yaşam biçimiyle toplumun beklentisi arasında bulunan uyumsuzluk, hatta çatışmadır. İki zıt değer yargısı birbirini ezip yok etmeğe çalışmaktadır. Aynı zamanda, trajik kahraman olarak Meursault masumdur, çünkü dünyaya karşı yansızdır. Ne izleyeceği, ne de karşı çıkıp sonucunda suçluluk duyacağı bir inanç bulunmaktadır.

Camus'nün diğer bir trajik kahramanı Caligula'dır. Caligula'nın trajikliğine neden olan durum, saçmaya karşı olan savaşım biçimidir. Ayı elde etmeyi, yani "olanaksızı olanaklı kılmayı", ölümsüzlüğe kavuşmayı istemektedir. Fakat ne yazık ki Caligula'nın kendisi, teb'asının gözünde, saçmanın simgesi durumundadır. O nedenle, öldürüldüğü zaman, saçma, saçmanın kurbanı olur.

FELSEFE VE EDEBİYAT

Felsefe ve edebiyat ilk bakışta iki ayrı alan gibi görünür. Bununla birlikte, ikisini bazı yönlerden karşılaştırmak olanaklıdır. Bunlar ilgi alanları ile, kullanılan biçemler ve dildir.

Genellikle felsefe ve edebiyat değişik ilgi alanlarında dolaşırlar. Klasik anlamda, sadece felsefeyle uğraşan filozoflar, olgu ve durumlarla ilgilenirler. Varlıkların doğasının, bilginin ve gerçeğin ne olduğunu bulmaya yönelirler. Yazarlar ise estetik zevk ve duygulara seslenirler. Yukarıdaki konulara ilgi göstermezler. Oysa, Sartre'ın belirttiği gibi, felsefe ve edebiyat sık sık örtüşür. İnsan biriyle ilgilenirken, diğeriyle de ilgileniyor olabilir.

Camus'de de durum böyledir. Camus'nün felsefesi, estetik duygular altında gizlidir. Zaten Camus, filozof ve sanatçı özelliklerini kendisinde adeta harmanlamıştır. Ona göre, sanatçı bir yaratıcıdır. Her ortamda, açık ve cömert olmak ve yaşama istencini korumak gibi sorumluluklar altındadır. Ölüme bile, onu bu dünyaya ait yaparak, yeni anlamlar kazandırabilir ve ona meydan okuyabilir. Bunları da en iyi biçimde, felsefeyi edebiyatla örerek gerçekleştirir.

Biçem konusunda Sartre, felsefenin öncelikle olabilirlik koşullarını ele aldığını ama edebiyatın olabilirlik ve gerçeklik koşullarının bileşimi olduğunu belirtir. Asıl olarak, felsefe tartışma üzerine, edebiyatsa betimleme üzerine kurulmuştur.

Ancak, temelde iki alanın da birbirine gereksinimi vardır. Özellikle felsefe, daha iyi anlaşılır olmak istediğinde edebiyata başvurur. Edebiyat da, kendi başına yeterli olamayacaksa, felsefeden yardım alır—tıpkı *Yabancı*'da, *Düşüş*'te, *Ecinniler*'de olduğu gibi.

Camus'nün kullandığı biçem özellikle incelenirse, sıklıkla monolog tarzını seçen ve vaaz verme edasıyla yazan Alman varoluşcularının aksine, onun—Sartre ile birlikte—diyalogları seçtiği dikkati çeker. Okuyucularıyla konuşur, hatta adeta söyleşir gibidir. Camus öğretici savlardansa, edebiyat yazmayı yeğler çünkü edebiyat yazarın niyetini ve mesajlarını daha iyi anlatmasına elveren bir araçtır. Edebiyat aracılığıyla, okuyucu kahramanlarla özdeşleşme ve Camus'nün sunmak istediği fikir ve kavramları çok daha iyi anlama şansını elde eder.

Felsefe ve edebiyatın karşılaştırılabilir olan üçüncü etmeni dildir. Dil iki alan için ortak araçtır. Kullanılış biçimi alanı da belirler. Eğer bir insan sorular sorup onlara yanıtlar arıyorsa, bu bir filozof davranışıdır. Ama aynı insan aynı araçla, yani dili kullanarak, şiir de yazabileceğini hatırlarsa, şair veya yazar davranışını benimsemiş olur. Camus ve Sartre basit ve kolay anlaşılır bir dille yazmaya özen gösterirler çünkü onların bakış açısından, felsefenin ana amacı söylenilenin karşı tarafça anlaşılmasıdır. Düşler bireysel olsa da dünya gerçekleri ortaktır. Camus'nün Nietzsche ile de ortak bir görüşü vardır. İkisi de açık olmayanı açık hale getirme görevinin felsefeye değil, sanata/edebiyata düştüğü fikrindedirler. Görevi felsefeye vermeyişlerinin nedeni, felsefenin kendi içinde yeterince açık olmamasıdır. İşte bu yüzden, felsefede aynı konu üzerine pek çok farklı görüş ve tartışma vardır. Ama sonuç olarak, tüm bir iş ortaya koyabilmek için felsefe ve edebiyat birbirlerine gereksinim duyarlar.

FİLOZOF CAMUS

Camus bir felsefi sistem kurmamıştır çünkü akla inanmaz. Akıl insanın kendisi ve dünya ile ilgili olarak merak ettiklerine yanıt bulmada yetersizdir. Ayrıca, kurulu bir sistemin, insanın özgürlüğüne ve geliştirebileceği bireysel ahlaka yer bırakmamak gibi sakıncaları olduğuna inanır.

Buna karşın, bir filozofta aranılan özellikler Camus'de de vardır. Camus hayatın yaşamaya değer olup olmadığını, yaşam içinde intihara yer bulunup bulunmadığını felsefenin temel sorunu olarak ele alır ve yanıtlamak ister. İşlediği

bazı konu ve sorunlar, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche ve Sartre gibi filozoflarla ortaktır fakat Camus bu konulara kendi duruşu ve özgün bakış açısı ile yaklaşır. Dahası, felsefi konulardaki görüş alanı geniş ve sıradan insanlarınkinin çok ötesindedir.

Camus felsefesini imgeler aracılığı ile dile getirir. "İnsan yalnızca imgelerle düşünür. Eğer filozof olmak istiyorsanız, roman yazınız," ve "Roman, imgeler içine yerleştirilmiş felsefeden başka bir şey değildir," sözleri, onun felsefenin içinde ne denli yoğrulmuş ve edebiyatı kendisine ne denli araç edinmiş olduğunun kanıtlarıdır.

Camus yaşama sanatının yollarını tanımlamak arzusundadır. Ona gore insan özgür olmalı fakat özgürlüğünü aşırılıklara kaçmadan, ölçü ve sınırlar içinde yaşamalıdır. Diğer bir deyişle, Camus aşırılıkların kaynağı olarak gördüğü totaliter rejimleri şiddetle kınar ve insanlara yaşamı özgür ve anlamlı kılacak bir düşünce kılavuzu sunmak ister. Zaten bir insan hayatın yaşamaya değer olup olmadığını felsefenin temel sorunsalı olarak ele alıp işliyor, buna yanıt bulmaya çalışıyorsa, o insan bir filozoftur. Ve bu durum Camus için de geçerlidir.

Camus, hayatı insanlar için yaşanır kılma görevini üstlenmiş bir filozoftur. Bunun için sanatı kullanır. Dolayısı ile Camus için sanat bir monolog olamaz. Bir sanatçı, zamanının olaylarının hem içinde olmalı, hem de onlara mesafeli durmalıdır. Camus'nün felsefesi çeşitli düşünürlerinkilerle karşılaştırıldığında, varoluşcu düşüncedeki benzerlikler kendini gösterir. Bunu görebilmek için aşağıdaki örneklere bakılabilir.

Camus ve Aziz Augustine: İkisi de bilgi peşindedir; Camus dünyevi, Aziz Augustine ise tanrısal bilgiyi arar. İkisi de aradıkları bilgilerin var olup olmadığından emin olamaz. Onların kavuşmak istediği mutluluk, yalnızca bilgi kazanmak yoluyla elde edilebilecek bir mutluluktur.

Camus ve Nietzsche: Özgürlük, istenç, sanatçı yaratıcılığı, Tanrı ve Tanrı'nın ölümü kavramlarında benzerlikler bulunur. İkisi de toplum—sürü—ahlakını eleştirir. İkisine göre de sürü içinde göze batan insan, trajik kahramandır; güç istenci ve değerleri toplumunkilerden farklıdır.

Camus ve Chestov: Aklı reddederler. Chestov, aklın varlığı kanıtlanamadığı halde insanların ona sorgusuzca inanmasını eleştirir. Bu durumu (aklın üzerine

kurulmuş olan) bilimin iyi getirisi olmasına bağlar. Chestov, Dostoyevski'nin *Yeraltından Notlar*'da söylediği "İki kere iki dört eder," önermesini 'ölümcül' bulur çünkü insanlar bir kez değişmeyen, sabit kavramları kabul ederlerse, artık bir şeyleri sorgulamaktan vazgeçerler. Bu durum Camus için de önemlidir çünkü insanı yine sınırlılık, kısıtlılık ile karşı karşıya bırakacaktır. Camus ve Chestov akıl ile uygulamayı birbirinden ayırır. Onlara göre, önemli olan uygulamadır.

Camus ve Sartre: Saçma, özgürlük, tasa, yabancılaşma gibi konularda ortak olduğu kadar farklı görüşleri de bulunur. İkisi de felsefelerini ifade etmek için edebiyattan yararlanırlar. Varolmanın anlamsızlığı üzerinde dururlar. Fakat Camus daha iyimserdir. Hayat onun midesini bulandırmaz. Sartre zaman zaman başa çıkılamaz durumlardan "kötü inanca" kaçarken, Camus kalıp mücadele etmeği yeğler. Sartre Camus'yü filozof olarak takdir eder. Mantığını sağlam, fikirlerini açık ve net, tarzını klasik Fransız filozoflarınınkine yakın bulur ve *Veba*'ya hayran olduğunu belirtir.

TARİHSELLİK

Camus tarihselliği, belirlenimcilik (determinizm) getirmesi nedeniyle yadsır. Tarihselliği savunanların, onda Tanrı'da gördüklerine benzer bir 'efendi' gördüklerini iddia eder.

Camus, "amaç aracı haklı kılar" düşüncesine de karşıdır. Çünkü bu görüşe göre davranıldığında, hiçbir güvencesi bulunmayan bir gelecek uğruna bugünün insanları feda edilir. O halde, tarihsellik ancak terör ve barbarlık getirir. Yukarıdaki görüşü savunan Hegel ve Sartre'ı kınar. Tarih akar, insanlar da onun peşinden gitmek zorundadırlar düşüncesinde olan Marx'a da katılmaz çünkü o zaman bu akış içinde bir sınırlama olamaz. Oysa Camus başkaldırıyı destekleyip önerdiği halde, sınırların aşılmasını, ölçüsüzlüğün kargaşa yaratmasını istemez.

Camus'nün tarihselliği reddetmesinin başka bir nedeni de, Sartre'ın söylediği, insanın hep geleceğe doğru bir oluşum sürecinde olduğu savıdır. Camus böyle bir durumun insanı geleceğe, yani tarihe bağladığını düşünür. Aynı nedenden ötürü, varoluşcu sayılmak istemez.

GÜNÜMÜZDEKİ CAMUS

Ölümünden sonra, Camus'nün ahlak anlayışı ve insancıllığı pek çok önde gelen yazar ve düşünürce övülmüştür. Kısa yaşamında çok şey yaptığı konusunda herkes fikir birliği içindedir.

Camus yirmibirinci yüzyılda hala çağdaştır ve böyle kalması için pek çok neden vardır. Öncelikle, yaşama, her zaman genel geçer olan bir yaklaşımla, olumlu ve yapıcı bir bakış açısıyla yaklaşır. Savaş ve yoksayıcılığın egemen olduğu bir dönemde, insan hayatı, özgürlük, adalet, vakar ve acıma gibi değerleri savunur ki, günümüzün dünyası ve koşullarında da buna çok gereksinim duyulmaktadır.

Camus dogmatik olmayan, modern bir yaklaşımla, insanların inançlarını sorgulamalarını sağlar. Bu bağlamda, insan, din, saçma gibi konularda sorduğu sorular şimdi de geçerlidir çünkü bunlar insanlıkla birlikte varolan kavramlardır.

Camus teröre karşıdır ve bu tüm zamanlar için geçerli bir tavırdır. Üstelik komünizme karşı çıkarak, tarihin yanılabileceğini iddia etmiştir. Gerçekten de, bugün komünizm pek çok ülkede yıkılmış, Camus haklı çıkmıştır. Onun gibi düşünen insan sayısı her gün artmaktadır. Günümüz insanı, tıpkı Camus'nün savunduğu gibi, baskıcı rejimler altında yaşayamayacağını anlamıştır.

Camus'nün ahlak anlayışı, dogmalar ve kısıtlamalar değil, yaşam üzerine kurulmuş olduğu için giderek taraftar kazanmaktadır. Camus, insanın diğer insanları anlamaya çalışmasını ve acıma duygusunu elden bırakmamasını sağlar.

Sanatsal yaratıcılığa çağdaş bir bakış getirmiştir. Diğer bir deyişle, sanatçının ve seyircinin bilincini arttırır ve korur. Sanatın insanları özgür kıldığına ve bütünleşme duygusu verdiğine dikkat çeker. Zorbalığın ise, tam tersine, insanları ayırdığını söyler.

Gençler günümüzde de Meursault ile, onun tepki ve tepkisizlikleri, yaşama karşı olan tavrı ve varoluş sevgisiyle özdeşleşmektedirler. Ve Camus'nün yapıtları, okundukları ülkelere ve zamanlara göre değişen çağrışımlar yaparak popülerliklerini, dolayısı ile, geçerliliklerini korumaktadırlar. Camus pek çok çağdaş, evrensel ve insancıl fikir ve görüşleri felsefesinde toplamış bir düşünür olarak, bugün ve her zaman güncel ve kalıcı olacaktır.