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ALBERT CAMUS & THE POST-MODERN GENERATION

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ALBERT CAMUS & THE POST-MODERN GENERATION

A Thesis Submitted to
The Graduate School of
John Carroll University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Masters of Arts

by
Lisa Ann Tekancic

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

In the preparation and writing of this thesis, I raised questions regarding pronoun use. Since there is no singular pronoun in our language that represents both man and woman, to use he/she, his/her, himself/herself, becomes redundant in both writing and reading. Therefore, after careful consideration, and to be consistent with the writings of Albert Camus, I decided to use the “male” pronoun, but with the understanding that the male pronoun would reference both man and woman equally.
“Every authentic work of art is a gift offered to the future.”

Albert Camus
INTRODUCTION

On January 4, 1960 on the road from Sens to Paris, Albert Camus, Michel Gallimard, Janine Gallimard and her daughter Anne, were in a devastating automobile accident. Camus was killed instantly—the others survived. There are many biographies and critical reviews of Albert Camus that begin with the end of his life. The accident that took away forever the voice of a young man, artist, writer, even philosopher, that was being heard internationally, confirmed the absurdity of life that Camus illustrated in his novels and plays that asked the question what is it all for? What is the meaning of human life? We are born, we live, we die. We all share the same beginning, the same ending. Death itself does not make life absurd, it is the knowledge of death—that we know we are going to one day die—that is the absurdity. In his writings, Camus was concerned with how man lives and how man lives in an hostile and indifferent world, but a world that is also beautiful and sensual.

Camus is known as the advocate of the Absurd man and perhaps with the image of Sisyphus, the mythical Greek king of Corinth, condemned by Zeus, who for eternity must push a large rock up a hill, and just before reaching the top, watch it roll back down only to push it back up again, the same mundane task done over and over and over. Because of the connection of the Sisyphus myth in terms of man’s fate, Camus’ writings are sometimes read as dark and ominous, offering little or no hope for the human condition. But this is a rather one-dimensional interpretation of Camus and his works, simply because he had such an intense passion for life. His observations of the absurdity of life, that placed man in social, economic, and political extremes, were neither dark nor ominous, but rather amazing in that even in extreme conditions and even though man is aware of his own death he
continues; continues to reproduce, work, learn, discover, rediscover, and suffer. Through his observations of the human condition, Camus believed that life has value, meaning, and goodness and that man himself declares this in his actions—which in essence is man’s rebellion against death. Camus is a man who lived life and personally experienced the social, economic, and political extremities as well as the beauty and pleasures of the world.

Camus’ novels, plays, essays and editorial writings are thematically categorized under works of the “Absurd” or works of the “Revolt,” which Camus himself outlined. In the 1970s, the posthumous publications of his notebooks and youthful writings gave critics, scholars, and students a better understanding of Camus’ thought and the sequence of development he planned for his work. But his contribution as an artist and his popularity as an intellectual began to wane and his works were relegated to his time. Camus’ writings apparently did not warrant further readings to discover new interpretations and posed no new challenges or solutions. However, in 1994, with the publication in France of *Le Premier Homme (The First Man)*, the unfinished manuscript found with him at the time of his death, sparked a new wave of interest in Camus. This semi-autobiography of young Camus, narrated in the first person, about his life growing up in Algiers, fatherless and poor; discovering the simple joys of life on the Mediterranean, as well as life’s hardships, and overcoming the many obstacles set before him; recaptured the attention of critics, scholars, and students. In 1996, Olivier Todd wrote an extensive biography on Camus titled *Une vie* that was well received in Paris and in 1997, Herbert Lottman republished an updated version

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1 Cf. “Interpreting *La Peste,*” by Collin Davis.
of his 1978 biography on Camus.

Yet even with the revival of interest in Camus’ life and new scholarly publications of his works, critics of Camus continue to point out the ambiguities and paradoxes in his writing. The point that his critics miss is that Camus never regarded himself as a philosopher, existentialist, or even a political theorist. He was not attempting to write philosophical or political theories. He considered himself an artist, a writer, which gave him in a sense a creative or artistic license in wrestling with human issues. Camus was probably aware of some inconsistencies in his thought. But his thought, like his art, developed, changed, and matured over time, influenced by the social and historical events that he experienced and witnessed. To try to categorize Camus in order to qualify his thought expressed in his art is a useless endeavor. Political scholars perhaps find it to be an impossible task to associate him with a particular political party, because Camus can be liberal, conservative, and at the same time, middle of the road. This might be because Camus understood that there are no absolutely perfect philosophical or political theories, and is probably one reason why he never aligned himself completely with a particular political party or philosophy. Camus once said in regard to the unrest in Algeria that there is a side in not taking sides.

Nonetheless, Camus’ questioning and analysis of the human condition remain timeless and warrant continual readings and study of his works. It is his ability to make the reader participate in his novels that makes his art timeless. For instance, in reading *L’Etranger (The Stranger)* at different ages and/or stages in one’s life, the reader discovers in himself and in regard to the novel, new emotions, new ideas, and new interpretations of
his society, the world, and his connection to both.

There is a large number of works published on Albert Camus that include biographies, critical examinations of his works, his connection to the Absurd and the nature of revolt. There are also philosophical and political essays that microscopically inspect his every phrase, his every word, to defend or even dismiss his work and significance as a twentieth-century writer. Because Camus’ life ended so abruptly and without warning at age 46, we lost not only a truly good man of this century but the voice of a man who spoke to everyone and for everyone regardless of their social, economic or political status. In September, 1959, during a conversation with Jean de Maisonseul, Camus in discussing “his novel in progress (Le Premier Homme), said that ‘at the age of twenty, he had drawn up a program of work of which he had accomplished only a quarter, and that his true work remained to be done.’"2 Unfortunately we will never know what Camus was planning to give to us and the world by way of his art. Yet, what he did leave us continues to communicate, enlighten, and provoke our thoughts.

This thesis is not a critical examination of Camus’ writings, nor is it a defense of his thought. The intent of this thesis is to provide an analysis of Camus’ development of an ethics that is crucial for the post-modern generation. It will also compare Camus’ generation with the post-modern generation and demonstrate that his insight into the human condition continues to be relevant. Hannah Arendt wrote in The Human Condition, (1958), “...the modern age is not the same as the modern world. Scientifically, the modern age which began

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in the seventeenth century came to an end at the beginning of the twentieth century; politically, the modern world, in which we live today, was born with the first atomic explosion."\(^3\) For the purpose of this thesis, post-modern/post-modern generation represents the American culture, its society, and youth from approximately 1960 through the 1990s. This generation felt the after-effects of the nuclear weapons race, political assignations, the Vietnam War, the tremendous achievements in science and technology, the abandonment of religion, the sexual revolution at its heights, the legalization of abortion, recreational drug use, and the desertion of causes such as the Equal Rights Amendment. At some point from the mid 1970s through the 1980s, there was a shift in thought in American society from one that had been guided by a combination of religion, philosophy, and science for explanations of our world and the meaning, purpose, and value of human life, to science as the eternal redeemer. At the same time, began the rise in individualism and a decline in humanism. The most notable example of this is the change in the American healthcare system. At one time healthcare was an honorable, humanistic profession that has turned into a big business, where the intrinsic value of human life, compassion, and care has been replaced with profits, profits, and more profits, and with that perhaps the power to determine that a particular human life is more valuable over another. As part of the international community, with the end of the Cold War with Russia, and a decline in Communism, Americans are no longer threatened by political annihilation or totalitarianism, yet we remain in a state of nihilism. With the development of Camus’ thought and consciousness

there emerges an ethics of moderation, a quality of life, that may serve as a moral guide for another generation consumed by nihilism.

The thesis is divided into two parts. Part One begins with Camus’ life and times; followed by a discussion of the significance of his Mediterranean youth and the development of his thought and consciousness.

Part Two begins with a discussion of ethics, specifically Aristotle and virtue ethics in relation to the development of Camus’ thought and the ethics of moderation that emerges from his writings; followed by an analysis of authenticity and the “Absurd,” drawing parallels between Camus’ thought and that of Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre, that concludes with a discussion of suicide. The end of Part Two consists of an analysis of freedom and revolt that includes the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche’s writings on Camus and closes with a discussion of capital punishment.

The conclusion compares Camus’ generation, who were forced to live and witness the atrocities of human life during the Second World War, the first to feel the threat of total annihilation of all living creatures by nuclear weapons, with the post-modern generation that has not had to endure nor witness the destruction of humanity by a world war, who no longer live in fear of a catastrophic nuclear war. But what they do find in their post-modern society is materialism, lack of virtue, morals and ethics abandoned to the legal system, and faith placed in technological advancement along with their own inability to make moral decisions. The post-modern generation needs to ask if we can continue in this stagnant, complacent, and nihilistic state. Can we continue to accept corruption, lack of values and moral judgement, and live in a society where everything is permitted and tolerated? Is it a
phenomenon of human nature that a tragedy, such as a war or some catastrophe, has to happen before we unite in order to re-create our society? The post-modern generation desperately needs a moral consciousness—a moral guide. Camus truly believed that man himself has the ability and the nature to rise above nihilism. Thus, this thesis will contend that although Camus was the voice for his generation, his writings and ethics can also serve as a voice and a moral guide for the post-modern generation.
PART I

CAMUS' LIFE AND TIMES

"I was placed halfway between misery and the sun."

Albert Camus

The generation in which Albert Camus was born, placed him in a time that Europe, the United States, Russia, and Japan, experienced perhaps the most violent, unjust, and darkest age of all world history. Because of his place in history, and his own personal circumstances, Camus emerged in the years following the Second World War as one of the leading French intellectuals, who sought to reconcile the human condition in a hostile, violent, and indifferent world. His distinctive voice, expressed in an artistic blend of "grass-roots" philosophy and lyrical prose derives, in part, from his Mediterranean youth.

Albert Camus was born on November 7, 1913, in the little Algerian village of Mondovi, "on the shores of a happy sea." At the time of Camus' birth, Algeria was a French colonial territory that consisted of Arabs, Berbers (desert tribesmen of the Sahara), French and a minority of other Europeans. The languages and religions of Algeria represented the blend of its inhabitants. Spoken languages included Arabic, French and a range of Berber dialects, with equal diversity in religious practices including, Moslem, Roman Catholicism, and Judaism. Algeria, and its capital Algiers, was controlled by the Arabs from the 7th century and by the Turks from 1518-1830. It became the base for

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Barbary pirates until France conquered the coastal region in 1830. From 1835 to 1847, after a prolonged struggle with Abd el-Kader, France began to colonize Algeria which was declared a French territory in 1848. The French heavily explored the vast Sahara, which passed into French control in 1852, and its administration was separated from that of Algeria in 1902.

Camus' father, Lucien Auguste Camus, (Alsatian) was an agricultural worker on a vineyard. His mother, Catherine Sintès, was of Spanish origin. Camus had one older brother, Lucien, who was born on January 20, 1910. Neither of his parents were formally educated. His father however, served in the French military, assigned to the 1st Regiment of the Zouaves. "These Zouaves were a particularly colorful arm of the French infantry, outfitted with baggy trousers and looser berets in the evocation of North African dress." After his first tour of military service, Lucien Auguste, would return to duty in the initial phase of the First World War. In the summer of 1914, Germany declared war on France and Russia, and the Germans began to invade northern France and Belgium. In August, 1914, Lucien Auguste returned to the 1st Regiment and was sent to mainland France shortly thereafter. The Marne, a river 325 miles long, that rises in Champagne and flows into the Seine just above Paris, was the site of two major battles during the First World War. In the First Battle of the Marne, September 5-10, 1914, where the allies were successful in halting the German drive toward Paris, Lucien Auguste, was struck by shell fragments, and died at a make-shift military hospital on October 11, 1914. Albert was not even a year old. The shock of her

\[5\] Lottman, p. 15.

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husband's death caused Catherine Camus to withdraw inward, in complete solitude, becoming both silent and complacent. Her silence would haunt Albert all his life.

Catherine Camus, widowed at the age of twenty-five, moved her family to Belcourt. They lived in a small three-room apartment that had no electricity or indoor plumbing. They shared this confined living space with her mother and her brother. "Belcourt was a peaceful and cheerful working-class place, full of activity and color, intoxicated with itself."6 "Belcourt was the poorest section in Algiers. The small flat they lived in with an overbearing grandmother, sickly uncle, and silent mother had to be claustrophobic for young Albert. Outside life was not much more cheerful. Camus recalls having seen children in rags fighting over food in dustbins with dogs joining in in the scramble."7

His mother found meager employment as a housekeeper and for reasons of her own, paid little attention to the raising of her two young sons and left the disciplining of them to her mother, who was domineering and borderline abusive. "At that time (1919-1924) the lower strata in Algiers had a strong prejudice against education. You were poor, and you had to work with your hands, and the descendants of the pioneers were mistrustful of intellectuals. Camus said to a friend he had to learn everything in secret—his uncle threatened to shoot anyone who should think of putting Latin in his head."8 Fortunately for Camus, M. Louis Germain, his primary school teacher, recognized Albert's potential and


8Lebesque, p. 15.
kept him after school for additional lessons. It was through M. Germain’s efforts, that Mme. Camus allowed her son to take the entrance exam for the lycée. “Secondary schools were reserved for boys of paying middle-class families. Camus received a scholarship which today equals public assistance. He had to work harder than the other boys since ‘other people’ were paying for him.” During the summer recesses, Camus worked at various odd jobs to help contribute to his family. As a young man, Camus led a dual life—living in the poor section of Belcourt by night—and by day, participating as a student in a wealthy influential boys’ school. Camus did not fully belong to either of these worlds, he seemed to be stuck somewhere in between. The indifferent, silent, and dark home he returned to every night must have quieted his spirit a bit, as he, like his mother, withdrew from time to time, into silence and solitude.

From age ten to seventeen, Camus discovered the joy of sports. He spent as much time as he could get away with, swimming with his friends, in the public beaches, along the Algerian coastline. Albert excelled at football (soccer) and it was on the playing field that he would later say “After many years during which I saw many things, what I know most surely about morality and the duty of man I owe to sport, and learned it in the RUA.”

Albert was a goalie for the Association Sportive Montpensier (ASM), and began to play with the junior team of Racing Universitarie Algérois (RUA) in 1928. The team practiced on Thursdays and held matches every Sunday. Unfortunately, in 1930, at the age of seventeen, Camus contracted tuberculosis which permanently ended his participation on the RUA team.

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9Lebesque, p. 15.
10Lottman, p. 41.
and disrupted his studies, for almost two years. Camus endured what must have been a painful treatment for tuberculosis at that time— "artificial pneumothorax (collapse therapy)—consisting of the injection of air into the pleural cavity between the lung and chest wall to collapse the lung, immobilizing the affected area and allowing it to heal. The first injection would be followed by further pneumothorax injections every 12-14 days for an indefinite period." It was during this time that Camus experienced the uncertainties and frailty of life, and his own will to live.

Camus had already begun a new school term when he became ill. His new philosophy professor, Jean Grenier, saw Camus’ potential immediately and in time would become his mentor as well as a close friend. During his time spent recovering, Camus read feverishly and began writing. Coming so close to death at such a young age and to see everything he worked so hard for disappearing before his eyes, he felt the absurdity of life. Camus resumed his studies in 1932, at the Faculté des Lettres d’Alger. To pay for his university expenses, Camus worked as a clerk for the Préfecture, stamping drivers licences; he recorded barometric pressures for the Meteorological Institute; he sold automobile parts and also worked for a ship broker. Although Camus did not always have much pocket money, he became known by his friends as somewhat of a dandy. Albert was always impeccably dressed in a white shirt, light grey suit (he owed only one), white socks, yellow shoes and a Borsalion felt hat. Camus had a small circle of friends who met at cafés to discuss philosophy, literature, politics, and women. In 1933, Camus met Simone Hié. Her

11Lottman, pp. 45-46.
mother, Dr. Marthe Sogler, approved of Albert and often helped him financially. Albert and Simone were married in June, 1934. Unfortunately, Simone was addicted to morphine and her condition progressively worsened. Albert, hoping to rescue her, sent her to various retreats and clinics for drug addiction treatment, but his efforts were in vain. In 1935, the couple separated. “From now on Albert Camus would wear the stigma of his burnt marriage, face the full impact of his essential solitude.”

The years between 1935 and 1939 were ridden with success and turmoil. He completed his licence de philosophie (BA) in June, 1935.

An idealist and Socialist, Camus joined the Communist Party some time in 1934-35, and was entrusted with the task of spreading propaganda among the Muslim population. The following year the Franco-Russian alliance which Laval and Stalin signed in Moscow, led to a change in Communist policy in Algeria. Camus was told to preach a different gospel. This exercise in political cynicism disgusted him, and he abruptly left the party. He was never to join another political party of any color or persuasion. From that day, his politics remained resolutely independent.

Out of the Franco-Russian alliance, the Front Populaire represented “...all center and left movements fused into one front against domestic and foreign Fascism.” During this time, the Spanish Civil War began led by Franco, and aided by German and Italian intervention, against the Spanish republic. The war was fought at a cost of a million lives and economic devastation. Franco’s victory in 1939, led to the establishment of a dictatorship in Spain. Throughout his life, Camus remained loyal to his origins—North Africa and his mother’s country—Spain. “He felt passionately involved in the Spanish Civil

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12 Lottman, p. 127.
13 Masters, p. 6.
14 Lottman, p. 83.
War, and long after it in 1952, he resigned from UNESCO as a protest against the admission of Franco’s dictatorship."\(^{15}\)

"In the idealism that was to characterize much of the activity of the *Front Populaire*, but also in the strategy of Communist officials who had learned now to channel idealism toward goals consistent with their political line, one of the most efficient organs for propaganda among thinking persons was the *Masion de la Culture*."\(^{16}\) Camus formed a theatrical company in 1935, in conjunction with the Algerian *Masion de le Culture*, for young working-class people called the *Théâtre du Travail*. He wrote his first play "*Révolté dans les Asturies,*" based on the 1934 worker’s uprising in Spain. Camus also began research on Plotinus for his *diplôme d’études supérieures* (MA by thesis). His thesis committee included René Poirier and Jean Grenier, philosophy; and Dean Louis Gernat, a historian of Greek law. Camus’ relationship with Grenier began to mature during this time. In an essay that later became the preface for the 1959 edition of Jean Grenier’s *Les Iles*, Camus wrote that:

...it was Grenier who showed me that the light and the splendor of bodies were beautiful, but they would perish and that we must therefore love them with the urgency of despair. Perhaps this was the only way of guiding a young man brought up outside traditional religions towards a deeper way of thinking...I needed to be reminded of mysterious and sacred things, of the finite nature of man, of a love that I might one day return to my natural gods with less arrogance. Thus I owe Grenier a great debt that will never end.\(^{17}\)


\(^{16}\)Lottman, p. 135.

In May, 1936, Camus successfully completed his thesis on *Néo-Platonisme et pensée Chrétienne.* "...this was the first time Camus had examined Christianity in depth, and he seems already to feel a preference for the more human appeal of the Greeks; he remains however, scrupulously objective in his thesis, despite a leaning which we are able to detect."18 "Poirier scribbled on the dissertation ‘more a writer than a philosopher.’ He took note of the errors, the misspellings of Latin, but he also knew that you didn’t argue philosophy with an artist."19 There are various accounts as to why Camus did not or was unable to continue his studies to pursue a university teaching position. Of course, his health was always a factor since there was no cure for tuberculosis at that time, and he would at times, go through lengthy periods of convalescence. In his *Carnets Mai 1935-fevrier 1942,* he wrote virtually nothing relating to his personal life, but in an entry dated October 4, 1937 he tries to reconcile his reasons for turning down a teaching post at the college Sidi-bel-Abbès:

I lived until the last few days with the idea that I had to do something in life, and more exactly that, because I was poor, I had to earn a living, get a job, settle down. I must accept the fact that the roots of this idea, which I still dare not call prejudice, were very deep, since it lived on in spite of all my irony and ‘last words on the subject.’ And then, once appointed at Bel-Abbès, as I was faced with all the permanence that being established there implied, everything suddenly melted away. I rejected it, doubtless because I saw security as unimportant compared to my opportunities for real life.20

Yet, in time, his writings would be a teacher for all humanity. In 1957, Charles Rolo wrote

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18 Masters, p. 7.

19 Lottman, p. 116.

that while Camus was living in Paris, being inaccessible to celebrity hunters and busybodies, he welcomed visitors from Algeria and always kept his door open to students.

Upon the completion of this thesis, Camus traveled, in the style of any poor college graduate, around Europe. He visited Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Italy. His first novel, *Une Mort heureuse*, (posthumously published in 1972), was based on these travels, as well as a collection of essays *Noces*, that explored man’s relationship with nature.

In 1937, Camus left the *Maison de la Culture*, in Algiers. In doing so, he replaced the *Théâtre du Travail* with the *Théâtre de l’Equipe*. The mission of the second théâtre group broke away from politics and political propaganda and instead promoted itself as having no political or religious connections whatsoever. Camus published a second collection of essays in Algiers, *L’Envers et l’endroit* in which the young author attempts to make sense of the beauty and wretchedness of life. Camus also wrote one of his most famous plays, *Caligula*. Caligula, a “mad” emperor, decides that since life is irrational we must live according to that irrationality. The play’s first performance was in Paris in 1945. The *Théâtre de l’Equipe* had several successful performances, but when the company took a brief holiday, the interest in continuing faded and Camus, although he truly enjoyed acting, directing, and writing stage adaptations, felt it was time for a real job in order to support his writing.

From entries in his *Carnets* dated between 1937-38, Camus had begun writing passages for *L’Etranger* and began taking notes on the “Absurd” which would later be incorporated into *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. Camus worked part-time for Edmond Charlot, a bookseller/publisher. He read manuscripts sent to Charlot for possible publication. It was
Charlot who published Camus' earlier essays and Camus was instrumental in having the works of his friends published by Charlot including, Grenier, Fouchet, and Freminville. During this time, a new left-wing daily paper was being organized by Jean-Pierre Faure, a French-Algerian businessman. Pascal Pia, a veteran newspaperman from France and close friend of André Malraux, was chosen by Faure to oversee its production. Camus was recommended to Pia as a reporter for the new daily. Camus began working for *Alger-Républicain* in the autumn of 1938. He was assigned city news, which afforded him the opportunity to attend criminal trials, and witness first hand the political unrest in Northern Africa. (Although not required, Camus also wrote the literary reviews for the publication.) In a series of articles, Camus reported on the poverty of Kabylia, a region in the mountainous area between Algiers and Constantine, that had been devastated by famine. In these articles Camus illustrated the suffering he witnessed and criticized colonial policies in the area and made a strong appeal for reform. He also aided in the release of Michel Hodent, a government grain agent who was accused of fraud and El Okbi, a Moslem spokesman, who had been accused of murder. Camus' investigations and exposés that appeared in the *Alger-Républicain* of the Hodent and El Okbi cases, found both men to be falsely accused and the accusations against them were politically motivated. Subsequently, both men were released.

During this time Camus met Francine Faure, a gifted pianist and mathematics teacher from Oran. Francine's father was also a Zouave and he too was killed in the First World War. Perhaps Francine saw in Albert what his teachers and professors saw in him. Early in their courtship Francine announced to her mother and her sister, "that she wanted to marry a young man whom she had been seeing in Algiers. He was tubercular and had no serious
breadwinning occupation. Furthermore, he was not yet divorced from a previous marriage and believed in the kind of marriage in which a husband and wife would each keep their freedom.’’21 Their initial response was less than supportive, but their feelings would change in time. By 1939, Camus was on his way; with a steady job, time to pursue his own writing endeavors, and Francine, his life was coming together. But history would change all that.

September, 1939. WAR.
War has broken out. But where is it? Where does this absurd event show itself, except in the news bulletins we have to believe and the notices we have to read? It’s not in the blue sky over the blue sea, in the chirping of the grasshoppers in the cypress trees on the hills. It isn’t in the way the light leaps youthfully in the streets of Algiers. We want to believe in it. We look for its face, and it hides itself away. The world alone is king with the magnificent countenance it shows us. We have lived hating the beast. Now it stands before us and we can’t recognize it. So few things have changed. Later on, certainly, there will be mud and blood and an immense feeling of nausea. But today we find that the beginning of a war is like the first days of peace: neither the world nor our hearts know they are there.22

At the onset of the Second World War, Camus went to enlist for military duty, but he was turned down for active service because of his medical condition. In a brief entry in his Carnets from September, 1937, he notes ‘‘But this little boy is very ill,’ said the lieutenant. ‘We can’t take him.’ ‘I’m twenty-six, I have my life, and I know what I want.’’23 He told Jean Grenier that he wanted to enlist ‘‘not because he accepted the war, but so as not to use illness as a shield, and also to express solidarity with those who were being called up to fight.’’24

21Lottman, p. 195.
23Ibid, p. 146.
24Lottman, p. 222.
Camus and Pia continued to publish the *Alger-Républicain*, but every written word was now up to the approval of the government/military censors. Camus was made editor of the evening edition *Le Soir-Républicain*, in which he signed editorial with the name Jean Meursault. On September 17, 1939, Camus wrote in *Le Soir-Républicain*, “Never perhaps have left-wing militants had so many reasons to despair. Many beliefs have collapsed along with this war and amid all the contradictions that the world founders in, forced to see things clearly, we are then led to deny everything.”

By February, 1940, both papers ceased to exist due to an exhausted paper supply and a military ban. Because of Camus’ political connections, he found it difficult to secure work in Algiers. With the closing of the newspapers, Pascal Pia returned to Paris and recommended Camus to the Parisian paper, *Paris-Soir*. Camus worked for *Paris-Soir* as a typesetter, but he would not stay in Paris for long. After the fall of Paris to the Germans in 1940, *Paris-Soir*, moved to Lyons and Camus followed, but shortly thereafter he was released, and he returned to Algiers.

Remarkably, Camus was able to to complete *L’Etranger*. In December, 1940 Albert Camus and Francine Faure were married. The Camus’ stayed in Oran, through the summer of 1942, where they both secured teaching posts in private schools and Albert completed his writings on the “Absurd” with *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. But the war was never far from home nor out of his thoughts. Camus’ journal entries during this time reflect the war’s intensity that so profoundly affected him. “Not until Camus experienced the German Occupation did

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he truly live and breath the nihilism of his time.\textsuperscript{26}

The fall of Paris to the Germans divided the country. The Germans controlled parts of northern France while the Vichy-regime controlled parts of southern France. The publishing house of Gallimard and \textit{La Nouvelle Revue Francaise (NRF)}, the leading literary journal produced by Gallimard, directed by Jean Paulhan, now came under German control and censorship. Fortunately, the Gallimards were able to continue publishing, but only because the Germans made the avowed Fascist, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, director of the \textit{NRF} along with Paulhan. Meanwhile in Oran, Camus sent his manuscript, \textit{L'Étranger}, to Pascal Pia, then working in the French Resistance movement, Combat, near Lyons, who in turn sent it to André Malraux, then a writer and reader for the house of Gallimard. \textit{L'Étranger} was published by Gallimard in 1942. The novel about a young man, living in Algiers, Patrice Meursault, is indifferent and emotionally unresponsive to those around him and the world itself. Meursault is executed for killing an Arab in self-defense. But what was he being executed for?— the killing of an Arab in self-defense or because of his lack of sensitivity and consciousness? \textit{L'Étranger} was a huge success in France, considering the German censorship and the paper shortage, that limited the number of copies to be distributed. Shortly thereafter, Camus sent his manuscript, \textit{Le Mythe de Sisyphe}, via the same route. But his chapter on Franz Kafka would be omitted by the censors because the Germans banned any publication by or about the Jews. According to entries in his \textit{Carnets}, Camus had begun working on his next novel involving an epidemic/plague.

In the spring of 1942, Camus was confronted with another attack of tuberculosis. Following his physician’s advice, Albert and Francine sailed for southern France in July, for him to convalesce in the clean, mountain air. They stayed with relatives of Francine’s in a farm-house near the town of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, not far from Lyons. In October, Francine returned to Algiers to look for teaching positions for herself and Albert. Camus, hoping to return before the holidays, was suddenly trapped. The Allies landed in North Africa in November, 1942. The Germans then proceeded through southern France, taking over the Vichy controlled areas. France was now under complete control by the Germans and separated from liberated North Africa. Thus Camus found himself on opposite sides of the war from his homeland and was isolated from his family and friends in Algeria. In a journal entry he simply states, “Caught like rats!” A three-word sentence that has been interpreted to mean the German movement into southern France, and/or an animal caught in a trap. The state of being “trapped” or “cut-off” from the outside world, family, and friends, appears in his novel in progress, *La Peste*, and illustrates the mental torture of losing one’s freedom when it is imposed on them. To lose one’s freedom when its is imposed on them means the loss of *freedom* due to external circumstances not caused by the consequences of one’s own actions but by the events of a war (e.g. Camus could not leave France and return to Algeria) or a change in how a government governs, or a natural disaster, which prohibits movement, without *mutual consent*.

And one must not forget those for whom...the sadness of separation was amplified by the fact that, travels surprised by the plague and retained in the city, they found

themselves removed at once from the person they could not rejoin and from their country....In the general exile, they were the most exiled, for if time created in them as in everyone the anguish appropriate to it, they were also attached to a space, and there themselves without cease against the walls which separated their contaminated refuge from their lost country.28

With no visible means of support and not being able to return to his family in Algeria, Camus was indeed concerned about his immediate future, but his health was improving. Pia wrote to Malraux and told him of Camus’ dire straits and asked if the Gallimard’s could give him a stipend of some kind or perhaps an advance on Le Mythe? In December, 1942 Camus was on the payroll at Gallimard as a reader.29 And so Camus left the mountains of Le Chambon for Occupied Paris.

Unlike his first stay in Paris, as a typesetter for Paris-Soir, Camus was now well received as a new, major French writer. But his post at Gallimard as a reader was not unlike his school-boy days in Algiers. Camus was not completely accepted by the reading committee of Gallimard who were all educated in the prestigious schools and universities of Paris, and were far from being raised in the poverty of Northern Africa. Yet, Camus held his own. During this time, he met Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvior. Camus, and the Sartre-de Beauvior couple met frequently at the Café de Flore.

Meanwhile, Pascal Pia’s involvement in the French Resistance movement, Combat, sent him to Paris in the summer of 1943, at the request of Henri Frenay, one of Combat’s founders, to have Pia organize and oversee its clandestine newspaper Combat. Pia had

28Camus, Albert. Les Exilés dans la peste. (an early version of Chapter 1, Part II of La Peste), Lottman, p. 285.
29Lottman, p. 286.
Camus join him in a secret meeting regarding the newspaper. Because of his other activities in the Resistance, Pia left the editorship of Combat to Camus. It should be noted that the activities of Combat and its underground newspaper were illegal and dangerous. Pia himself was being sought by the Gestapo and others involved in the Resistance had been tortured and/or executed by the Germans. Prior to joining Combat, Camus had written Lettres à un ami allemand, in which he employed a literary technique consisting of a series of four letters written to a fictional German friend, as a way to describe the difference between the French and German interpretation and action born of the Absurd. Camus’ interpretation is that both the French and German interpretations recognize the despair of the Absurd, but according to Camus, the French action as a result of the Absurd is to revolt against man’s common fate and in solidarity, men rebel against the chaos of the world, of the universe. The Germans however, see it as a means to power, to divide and conquer, versus all men united against the universe. In the fourth lettre Camus explains:

...You supposed that in the absence of any human or divine code the only values were those of the animal world—in other words, violence and cunning. Hence you concluded that man was negligible and that his soul could be killed, that in the maddest of histories the only pursuit for the individual was the adventure of power and his only morality, the realism of conquests. ...Where lay the difference? Simply that you readily accepted despair and I never yielded to it. Simply that you saw the injustice of our condition to the point of being willing to add to it, whereas it seemed to me that man must exalt justice in order to fight against eternal injustice, create happiness in order to protest against the universe of unhappiness. Because you turned your despair into intoxication, because you freed yourself from it by making a principle of it, you were willing to destroy man’s works and to fight him in order to add to his basic misery. Meanwhile, refusing to accept that despair and that tortured world, I merely wanted men to rediscover their solidarity in order to wage war against their revolting fate.30

After the liberation of Paris by the Allies in 1944, Combat would appear as an “above-ground” newspaper. In an editorial, dated September 19, 1944, Camus wrote:

Revolution is not revolt. What carried the Resistance for four years was revolt—the complete, obstinate, and at first nearly blind refusal to accept an order that would bring men to their knees. Revolt begins first in the human heart. But there comes a time when revolt spreads from heart to spirit, when a feeling becomes an idea, when impulse leads to concerted action. This is the moment of revolution.31

Camus had already begun working on his pivotal book L’Homme révolté, which the above editorial excerpt illustrates the complexity of distinguishing revolution and revolt. Camus continued to write editorials for Combat until 1947, but in time he would contribute less frequently, as he resumed his position with Gallimard.

The war had separated the Camus’ for two years. In October, 1944, Francine Camus arrived in Paris. The following September, Francine gave birth to twins, Catherine and Jean.

The end of the Second World War that had taken thirty-six million lives left millions homeless, in which Nazi-Germany attempted ethnic extermination of the Jews, of whom six million died, and practiced atrocities in its concentration camps on a vast scale, culminated with the use of the atomic bomb, by the United States on Japan. After the war there emerged a new balance of power between the U.S.S.R., whose influence spread through eastern Europe, and the United States. The beginning of the Cold War.

Camus returned to Algeria briefly in 1945, only to discover his homeland torn in-half. "Nationalist fever reached new heights, as May Day demonstrations proved. Then on May 8, a day of celebration of the victory over Nazi-Germany, there were bloody riots in two Algerian towns, Sétif and Guelman, followed by uprising in rural areas. The repression was

31 Camus, Between Hell and Reason, p. 22.
severe: some hundred European dead were avenged by thousands of Moslem dead.\textsuperscript{32} During the Second World War, from 1943 to 1944, Algeria became the headquarters for the French Committee of National Liberation. In 1954, Algerian nationalists began using guerilla warfare in order to obtain independence under the National Liberation Front (FLN). In 1961, after seven years of fighting, a referendum, composed by Charles DeGaulle, for France and Algeria, approved the principle of self-determination for Algeria. Algeria, including the two Saharan departments, became independent of France in July, 1962. Camus would never align himself with either side of the French/Algerian conflict, although he tried to mediate when he could. The French/Algerian conflict troubled him deeply for many years.

In the years following the war, Camus divided his time between family, Gallimard, devoted more time to his novels, and was emerging as a moralist for his generation. He was often seen with Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir at the cafés and brasseries around Saint-Germain des Prés. Because of his friendship with Sartre, Camus became known as an existentialist, a label that he did not like and often refuted.

In 1946, Camus was selected by the Cultural Relations Section of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs to give a series of lectures at universities in the United States, notably Columbia University in New York. A second cultural tour took him to South America in 1948. Upon his return to Paris from his U.S. tour, Camus completed his novel \textit{La Peste}, that dramatized men in solidarity rising above and against oppression. \textit{La Peste}

\textsuperscript{32}Lottman, p. 374.
was a huge success for Camus both professionally and financially and now he committed himself to complete his essay on revolt.

Nine years from inception to completion, *L'Homme révolté*, examined “in-depth and in history the theories and forms of revolt, in an attempt to discover why ideas are perverted—revolt becoming murder—and then to attempt to lay true paths to a necessary revolt against our common fate from which crime—even legitimated, state sponsored crime would be rigorously excluded.”

*L'Homme révolté* was published by Gallimard in October, 1951. The reviews on *L'Homme révolté* were extremely mixed, but the harshest review and the one which Camus felt personally came from his friend, Jean-Paul Sartre. In his literary journal *Les Temps Modernes*, May, 1952, Sartre had one of his reviewers, Francis Jeanson, write a review of the book. In twenty-one pages, Jeanson basically attacked *L'Homme révolté* from every angle, including its critical praise, imagery, style and anti-Marxism, all of which Sartre endorsed. “Camus was incensed: Sartre, Camus felt, and to a certain extent was right to feel, had betrayed the tacit code of friendship by delegating the hatchet job to an accomplice..." Camus hesitated a bit before sending a seventeen page reply to Sartre on Jeanson’s review. Sartre was now on the receiving end, but he printed Camus’ letter along with his reply to Camus, in the August, 1952 edition of *Les Temps Modernes*. The confrontation over the review between Camus and Sartre became a public issue, and the intellectual and literary circles were taking sides between Camus and Sartre. The review not

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33Lottman, p. 508.
only divided the two men intellectually, but also destroyed their friendship forever.

Camus’ next novel *La Chute*, was originally to be a short story in *L’Exil et le royaume*. There are no journal entries in his *Carnets* as in the past that indicates how or when the idea for story came to be. When *La Chute*, was published in 1956, it was seen as an autobiographical work. Those closest to Camus at that time, thought that the judge-penitent character, Jean-Baptist Clamence, was actually Camus, because of the similarities in personalities and experiences, and that Camus himself was having personal difficulties. It was also seen as a delayed reaction to the dispute with Sartre over *L’Homme révolté*. Camus’ intent with the novel was to demonstrate the prevailing attitude of the post-war era. Perhaps the writer himself summarizes it best:

> Europeans are no longer believers; they are agnostics or atheists. (I have nothing against that. I am more or less a pagan.) But they have retained their sense of sin. They can’t unburden themselves by going to confession. So they feel the need to act. They start passing judgments, putting people in concentration camps, killing. My ‘hero’ is the exact illustration of a guilty conscience. He has the European resignation to a feeling of sin.35

In 1957, at age forty-four, Camus was nominated and selected by the Swedish Academy as the recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature. The Academy honored Camus for his important literary production and for illuminating the problems of the human conscience in our time.36 His acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize, *Discours de Suède*, was dedicated to his primary school teacher, M. Louis Germain. The opening lines of his speech, resonate the sensitivity of an artist to his time.

35Rolo, p. 32.

36Ibid, p. 28.
...How could a man still almost young, possessed only of his doubts and of a work still in progress, accustomed to living in the isolation of work or the seclusion of friendship—how could he have failed to feel a sort of panic upon learning of a choice that suddenly focused a harsh spotlight on him alone and reduced him to himself? An in what spirit could he receive that honor at a moment when other European writers, often the greatest among them, are reduced to silence and at a time when his native land is experiencing prolonged suffering?  

With the money he received for the Nobel Prize, Camus bought a house in Lourmarin, a quaint, peaceful village 470 miles south of Paris, where he could work without interruption. He was also active again in theatrical productions, and was working with Pierre Cardinal, a producer for the television show *Gros Plan*, to tape a ninety-minute film of *La Chute*. Camus had also begun working on his next major novel, *Le Premiere Homme*. In November, 1959, Camus purchased a round-trip railway ticket from Paris to Lourmarin, and left Paris in early November, planning to return to the city after the holidays.

In the six weeks Camus was alone in Lourmarin, he had difficulty in concentrating and writing his work in progress. Nonetheless, he managed to write 145 pages. Francine and their children arrived for the holidays and the Michel Gallimards, on their way back from the Riviera, met the Camus’ in Lourmarin. Whatever the reason, Camus decided to return to Paris by car with the Gallimards, instead of using his railway ticket. Francine and their children left on January 2, 1960 by train. Camus and the Gallimards left the day after.

On Monday, the 4th of January, 1960, at five minutes to two in the afternoon, on the road from Sens to Paris, at a place called Villeblevin, a Facel-Vega speed past a peasant on a motorcycle. He heard a terrible noise and looked up to see, about an hundred yards ahead of him, that same car swerve, hit a tree, and then smash into another tree. In the field beside the car, two women and the driver, Michel Gallimard, lay unconscious. A fourth passenger remained in the wreckage, already

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dead. An unused railway ticket was found in his pocket (he had decided to return from Lourmarin to Paris by car instead) and an identification card: Albert Camus, Writer, born November 7, 1913, in Mondovi, Department of Constantine, Algeria. A quiet funeral was held in the village where the accident had occurred, and he was buried in Lourmarin. The entire world mourned his death, an untimely, unjust, most absurd death.38

The following day, in a special edition, Combat’s headline, spread across its six-columns, read: “ALBERT CAMUS EST MORT” followed by the sub-headline: “*Une conscience contre le chaos.*”

Albert Camus was and is, without a doubt, the conscience against the chaos. His life was taken much too soon, he still had so much more he wanted to give, to share with us, to say for the world to hear. But what he did leave behind as a writer, philosopher, and artist, remains a gift, a gift to not only his generation, but all generations and especially those that must live in and endure the chaos of their time.

38Lebesque, *i*. 29
Camus had a deep concern for man and the meaning of life, but he did not think of himself as a philosopher or an existentialist. Camus described himself as an "artist," and never attempted to force any philosophy or particular political theories. As an artist, he merely wanted his readers to think about what it was he was saying. To Camus his philosophy was simply his own awareness—his own consciousness. "I recognize that my role is not to transform the world or man; I have neither the virtue nor the understanding for that. But it is perhaps to contribute my own part in serving those few values without which even a transformed world is not worth living in, without which even a new man will not deserve respect."39

Camus' youth spent in North Africa, was a time for discovery and meditation. "Camus linked the words mer and mere to mean quiet, deep, unseizable, and silent."40 Throughout his life Camus was plagued by periods of silence, however, this was never more apparent than in his youth. In his youthful writings, Camus demonstrates the realities of life born out of silence—loneliness, despair, love, and joy. Thus silence takes on a dualistic quality in Camus' youth. It is out of these periods of deafening and rapturous silence that


40 Lebesque, p. 16.
Camus—the writer/philosopher/artist—developed his distinctive consciousness.

It is hard to imagine being born into a world of poverty, brutality, illness, insensitivity; and because of this, a pre-determined and limited future. Even harder to imagine is all of this plus the loss of one’s father, an abusive grandmother, and a passive, silent mother. Yet, out of all this wretchedness, it is the silence between Camus and his mother that never eluded him and always spoke to him, which is pivotal in his development.

The child’s mother sat in silence. Occasionally someone would ask “What are you thinking about?” “Nothing,” she answered. And it was quite true. Sometimes...returning from an exhausting day...she found the house empty...she sank onto a chair and, eyes vague became lost in pursuit of a crack on the floor. Night thickened around her and her muteness was immediately desolate. If the child came in at that moment, he would distinguish the thin silhouette with the bony shoulders, and stop: he was afraid. He was hardly as yet conscious of his own existence. But if he suffered to the verge of tears when confronted by that animal silence, it makes him want to cry with pain. He feels sorry for her; is this the same as loving her?...Feeling separate from her, he becomes conscious of her suffering.41

As a young boy, Camus’ ability to read becomes an inward dimension of silence that allows him to discover, imagine, and escape.

...devouring everything indiscriminately, the two gluttons swallowed the best at the same time as the worst, not caring in any event whether they remember anything, and in fact retaining just about nothing, except a strange and powerful emotion that, over the weeks months and years, would give birth to and nurture a whole universe of images and memories that never yielded to the reality of their daily lives, and that surely was no less immediate to these eager children who lived their dreams as intensely as they did their lives.42

But, this period of his youth also represents a form of rebellion against his mother. The intense feeling that Camus felt from his mother’s silence, she too felt his.


Catherine Cormery leaned over his shoulder. She looked at the double rectangle under the light, the regular rows of lines; she would inhale the odor and sometimes would run her swollen fingers...across the page, as if she was trying to understand what a book was, to come a little bit closer to these mysterious signs, incomprehensible to her, but where her son so often and for hours on end found a life unknown to her and from which he would return with such an expression looking at her as if she were a stranger.\textsuperscript{43}

An equally important aspect of Camus’ youth that not only contributes to the development of his consciousness but saved him from the harsh realities of his environment at home was the Mediterranean. Herein lies a dualistic quality of silence. The silence that Camus finds in the sea and sun of the Algerian coastline is filled with rapture, sensuality, joy and happiness. It is this highly emotional and physical connection to the natural world that frees him from life’s pain and loves him unconditionally. “The sea was gentle and warm, the sun fell lightly on their soaked heads, and the glory of the light filled their young bodies with a joy that made them cry out incessantly. They reigned over life and over the sea, and, like nobles certain that their riches were limitless, they heedlessly consumed the most gorgeous of this worlds offerings.”\textsuperscript{44} “It was a dimension of experience that enriched his awareness of the value of being alive, physically alive in and to the world. ...the silence of his mother; the silence of the earth, those things to which he obscurely acquiesced.”\textsuperscript{45}

Camus experienced another form of silence that was a turning-point in his awareness of himself, and of himself in relation to the world. At the age of seventeen, Camus was diagnosed with tuberculosis. The illness that was devouring his lungs also began to devour

\textsuperscript{43}Camus, \textit{The First Man}, p. 250.
\textsuperscript{44}Ibid. p. 51.
\textsuperscript{45}Brée, Germaine. \textit{Camus and Sartre: Crisis and Commitment}, p. 67.
everything he worked for; everything he enjoyed in life. He could no longer experience the physical pleasures from swimming in the sea and playing soccer, and his studies were interrupted indefinitely. Yet he persisted, alone in silence. It was during this tragic year that young Camus experienced the uncertainties that life has in store for all of us; its frailty to disease and impoverishment; and his own will to live. “The world had melted away, taking with it the illusion that life begins again each morning. Nothing was left, his studies, ambitions, things he might choose in a restaurant, favorite colors. Nothing but the sickness and death he felt surrounded by…and yet, at the very moment that the world was crumbling, he was alive.”

Out of this painful silence, rebellion takes on a new meaning. “Les hommes meurent et ils ne sont pas heureux,” exalts the emperor Caligula. Although Camus wrote the line for an unscrupulous character, it became necessary for him to show us that men could die happy. As a young journalist in Algiers, Camus rebels against the man-made conditions of poverty, illness, brutality, and oppression that confines man from knowing his own consciousness. Camus’ awareness of the limitations, conditions, and injustice of life that he experienced shifts from a self consciousness to a reflective consciousness. He now sees himself in the view of others and in view of the world. Now, the self represents everyman, and the responsibility of everyman to himself, to others, and to the world. “I rebel, therefore

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we exist."^{48}

As a young writer, Camus lyrically expressed his powerful emotions, struggles, and bewilderment toward an indifferent world. The experiences of his youth would always be present in his art and thought, as he consistently reflected on it and drew from it. Which according to Sartre, is one aspect of existential ontology—facticity. “Facticity is...the sum total of facts about us and the situation we have been ‘thrown.’ One’s facticity, is in particular, one’s past, those deeds and events that are over and done with, but whose consequences largely determine the present circumstances and constitute a significant part of who or what we are.”^{49}

Camus’ essays, written between 1931 and 1938, demonstrate his need to understand and reconcile the miseries and pleasures of life. It is in these essays that Camus blends his experiences of his childhood with lyric contemplation that, over time, he refines and explores on a higher philosophical level.

In a collection of essays titled *Youthful Writings*, written between 1932 and 1934, the familiar voice of the Absurd is heard. In these essays, Camus tries to reconcile the silent despair of poverty with the silent richness of the Mediterranean.

The Poor Man walks along sifting and resifting his misery, ruminating on his affliction. Obscure desires, sullen feelings of rebellion are growling within him. What he is thinking about, the secret of the heart that beats beneath sordid tatters, no one knows. And yet what regrets, what aspirations are roused in him by the sight of other peoples happiness! The Poor Man whom everyone speaks of, The

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Poor Man whom everyone pities, one of the repulsive Poor from whom 'charitable' souls keep their distance, he has still said nothing.\textsuperscript{50}

The condition of poverty, that certainly no man would choose for himself, is aggravated further by its limitations imposed on an individual who is deprived of knowing happiness; knowing his own consciousness.

...I am weary horribly weary of searching for truth and happiness; weary of setting a rule of conduct from myself that I do not observe; weary of everything, incapable of seeking and acting, feeding on my lassitude. My need for the infinite is wasting away by dint of living. I am one of those who say that they are made neither to obey nor to give orders. I am one of those who obey, grumbling as I do so.\textsuperscript{51}

Through the dolor of poverty, Camus discovers a human solidarity that reconciles himself to others and all individuals to each other.

Some people were passing by without haste. I felt myself filled with love for them. I loved them because I know in a certain way that their indifference concealed a whole world of expectations and disappointments. I was not different from other men. I realized that the common lot was not so banal. And I told myself that, consumed with useless efforts and torn by a thousand hesitations, my life was beautiful because of these hesitations since they are so many sufferings.\textsuperscript{52}

In a lyrical poem, Camus illustrates that although a life is filled with suffering, one can also experience joy and pleasure by its relationship with nature. This relationship also reconciles all individuals to one another.

Unconcerned, the inaccessible rapture of light appears.
But to its sons, this earth opens its arms
and makes it flesh of their flesh,
And satiated, they gorge themselves on the
    secret savor of the transformation—
slowly savoring it as slowly as they discovery it...


\textsuperscript{51}Camus, "Intuitions." \textit{Youthful Writings}, p. 164.

\textsuperscript{52}Ibid, p. 171.
Oh antiquity impelling us!
Mediterranean, oh! Mediterranean Sea!
Naked, alone, without secrets, your sons await death.
Death will return them to you, pure at last, pure.53

The contrast between misery and despair; joy and pleasure are continued in a collection of essays titled L’Envers et l’endroit and Noces. Camus illustrates that these two opposing aspects of life are needed to intensify each other.

In the first group of essays, L’Envers et l’endroit, Camus revisits the theme of loneliness, silence, and the limitations of poverty. These essays are contrasted with the second group of essays Noces, that unites man with nature. Camus describes a momentary union with nature that is filled with sensual pleasure. “Surrounded by lush vegetation, intoxicated by the perfumes of exotic flowers, drenched by the sun, and enchanted by the silver and white of the sea and the flaxen-blue of the sky, he feels the ecstasy of life and his own harmony with the earth.”54 Camus says, “Leaving the tumult of scents and sunlight, in the cool evening air, the mind would grow calm and the body relaxed, savoring the inner silence born of a satisfied love.”55

Camus then asks, “What is happiness except the simple harmony between a man and the life he leads?”56 In the concluding essay of Noces, Camus is concerned with an aspect of happiness that quantifies life in an indifferent world. “And what more legitimate harmony can unite man with life than the dual consciousness of his longing to endure and his

53Camus, “Mediterranean.” Youthful Writings, pp. 197-199.
awareness of death? At least he learns to count on nothing and to see the present as the only truth given to us ‘as a bonus.’”

Camus’ first novel Une Mort heureuse, written in 1938, is the culmination of his earlier essays. It is both a revolt against the limitations of poverty and how to die a happy death.

In Part One, Camus introduces the character Patrice Mersault, (mer [sea], soliel [sun]), a young man confined by his station in life who is aware of his mediocrity and determined to discover happiness so that he may one day die happy. He murders a crippled, older man and steals his money. “Today in the face of abjection and solitude, his heart said: ‘No.’ And in the great distress that washed over him, Mersault realized that his rebellion was the only authentic thing in him, and that everything else was misery and submission.” In a sense, the murder is symbolic, in that it is the destruction of the barriers and oppression of poverty.

In Part Two, Mersault, who has now attained his financial independence and the leisure time that goes along with it, seeks to find happiness. But before his journey begins, he falls ill with fever. As his journey progresses, so does his illness. By the end of his travels, which takes him to Prague, Italy and back to Algiers, he is alone, in silence, awaiting death. “He had destroyed the obstacle...what did it matter if he existed for two or twenty

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years? Happiness was the fact that he had existed.”

Camus’ Mediterranean youth that was comprised of many hardships, contrasted against the natural splendor of North Africa, would always remain a constant force in his life, and is essential to the evolution of his thought and consciousness in his latter works. “The lyrical expression of an attitude toward life later evolves into an intellectual investigation of the same attitude, but the lyrical aspect is never totally absent from Camus’ writings.” There is also an Arab influence present in Camus’ ethic of living. “The Arabs held a different notion of time compared to the Europeans. Life was not to be rushed, but slowly savored. Accomplishment, success, progress, were not ideas to which they would have subscribed. Man forgets his birth and suffers in death. He must not neglect the life in between.”

Camus’ impoverished youth and his experiences as a young journalist in Algiers ignited his ideas of the Absurd and rebellion. These ideas are developed further as he witnessed the destruction and degradation of humanity during the Second World War. “When Camus came of age, the European Zeitgeist was steeped in despair, and in the years that followed he ‘lived, nihilism, contradiction, violence and dizzying destruction,’ he shared the prevailing sense that man is in spiritual exile in a hostile world. Thus he found it necessary to create from scratch his own logical foundation for an ethic, which was so to speak, somewhere in his blood.”

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60 Camus, *A Happy Death*, p. 149.
61 Rhein, p. 20.
63 Rolo, p. 28.
PART II

ARISTOTLE AND VIRTUE ETHICS

“A spectacular virtue that leads to denying one’s passion.
A higher virtue that leads to balancing them.”

Albert Camus

Camus’ life and the historical context in which he was born and lived may be seen in terms of excess and deficiency. The ethic of moderation and quality of life that emerges from his writings is based on the social, economic, and political extremities that he experienced and witnessed. Essentially what Camus illustrates is how man behaves and the choices he makes when he is placed in certain conditions. Although Camus applies his ethic of moderation to a nihilistic twentieth-century society, the theory has its origins in ancient Greek philosophy.

Virtue ethics, as a modern ethical theory is based on Aristotle’s (384-322 B.C.) Nicomachean Ethics. A virtue is a quality considered to be of great moral value; moral is concerned with right and wrong and the distinctions between them; and ethics relate to the morality of behavior. Thus, virtue ethics is based on being, the character of a person, his conduct/behavior as well as his emotions, disposition, and motivations.

For Aristotle, there are two types of virtues, intellectual and moral. Intellectual

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64 Camus uses the Nietzschean-Dostoevskian definition of nihilism—since there is no God, everything is permitted.

virtues are taught and include skill in mathematics and an understanding of philosophy and science. Moral virtues are not taught but rather are developed over time becoming habits. Moral virtues include Courage, Justice, Prudence and Temperance. Thus, Aristotle contends that one courageous act does not make one brave or virtuous, but the development of consistent behavior over time and the demonstration of the right amount of Courage, Justice, Prudence, Temperance, will lead to a virtuous life. A virtuous moral life is achieved by living in moderation—moderate meaning between the extremes in quality and degree; avoiding excessive behavior; being reasonable without being severe or violent. Possessing too much courage results in foolhardiness; too little courage results in cowardice. Thus, the moral virtues, according to Aristotle, are found at the mean, mid-way between excess and deficiency. "The exercise of virtue is, of course, for Aristotle not an end in itself. Virtues are dispositions which issue in the types of action which manifest in human excellence."66

In exercising the virtues, Aristotle includes the goal to attain Happiness and the relationship between pleasure and pain. First, the goal toward Happiness for Aristotle, although Happiness is individually defined, is universal in that acts are directed toward Happiness. Happiness is the ultimate good because it is sought for its own sake and not for the sake of anything else. Second, pleasure and pain also factor into the equation of excess and deficiency. Pleasure and pain each possess a dual quality of good and bad. Pleasure is generally seen as a good thing, but too much pleasure can become a bad thing resulting in pain. Pain is generally seen as a bad thing, yet sometimes a good thing may result from

something painful.

It would seem, then, that if leading a virtuous life simply means living in moderation between excess and deficiency and maintaining a proper balance between pleasure and pain, in accordance with our own definition of Happiness, everyone should be able to attain it at least within degrees of the mean. Not true, according to Aristotle.

...Hence also it is no easy task to be good. For in everything it is no easy task to find the middle, e.g. to find the middle of the circle is not for everyone, but for him who knows; so, too, anyone can get angry—that is easy—or give or spend money; but to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way, this is not for everyone nor is it easy; wherefore goodness is both rare and laudable and noble. ...For of the extremes one is more erroneous, one less so; therefore, since to hit the mean is hard in the extreme, we must as a second best, as people say, take the least of the evils. ...67

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is a part of his books on *Politics*. Aristotle believed that since man is made to live within a community, within a political environment, and since the same men comprise its political institutions, its institutions must also demonstrate the same standard of conduct as that among good men.

Unlike Camus, Aristotle was an elitist. According to Aristotle, not only are most men not able to achieve a virtuous life, one has to be well-educated, wealthy, and have unlimited leisure time. Women and slaves, therefore, would never be able to even seek a morally virtuous life, let alone attain one. Yet, Camus and theorists of virtue ethics recognize that the virtues are indifferent to our wealth, our gender, our religion, our race. If, as Aristotle contends, virtues are attained by habit, and are not necessarily a component of human nature, then anyone can choose to live in moderation. Yet this doesn’t contradict Aristotle’s

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awareness that it is no easy task to be good. Camus also recognizes that it is not easy to maintain the balance required for a virtuous life; and equally important in seeking a virtuous life is the individual's responsibility to others as well as in the context of his society. But is it possible to seek a virtuous life in an unvirtuous, corrupt society?

Like everyone I've done my best to improve my nature by means of ethics. Alas, the price has been high. With energy, something I've got a good deal of, one sometimes manages to behave morally, but never to be moral. To long for morality when one is a man of passion is to yield to injustice at the very moment one speaks of justice. Man sometimes seems to me a walking injustice: I am thinking of myself. ...Surely I've never claimed to be a just man. I've only said that we should try to be just, and also that such an ambition involves suffering and unhappiness. But is this distinction so important? And can the man who does not even manage to make justice prevail in his own life preach its virtues to other people? If only we could live according to honor—that virtue of the unjust! But our society finds the word obscene...

Camus illuminates Aristotle's moral virtues, with a hint of Christianity, in a nihilistic society that is filled with despair, in his novel La Chute and through his character Jean-Baptiste Clamence. Clamence is a modern Everyman, but he also represents the post-war twentieth-century society itself in which both man and society are seen as the epitome of hypocrisy.

Clamence is a successful Parisian lawyer, highly respected by his colleagues. He is a kind, warm man, filled with generosity, and he makes a habit of offering his professional services free of charge to those in need. Clamence considers himself to be modest and unselfish, and enjoys only the simple pleasures in life. But Clamence, although he appears to have it all—wealth, balance, and the right motivations, emotions, disposition—fails to intervene while a woman commits suicide by jumping off a bridge into the Seine River. It

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is in this moment of cowardice, that Clamence becomes conscious not only of his own deception and hypocrisy, but also the deception and hypocrisy found in all men and society itself.69

Burdened with guilt and shame, Clamence sentences himself to the canals of Amsterdam. He must confess his revelation and guilt to other men. In confessing his hypocrisy he believes he has the right to judge all men.

I adapt my words to my listener and lead him to go me one better. I mingle what concerns me and what concerns others. I choose the features we have in common, the experience we have endured together, the failings we share good form in other words, the man of the hour as he is rife in me and in others. With all that I construct a portrait which is the image of all and of no one. A mask, in short rather like those carnival masks which are both lifelike and stylized, so that they make people say: Why surely, I’ve met him! When the portrait is finished, as it is this evening, I show it with great sorrow: This, alas, is what I am! The prosecutor’s charge is finished. But at the same time the portrait I hold out to my contemporaries becomes a mirror.70

Clamence continues, “...the more I accuse myself, the more I have a right to judge you. Even better, I provoke you into judging yourself, and this relieves me of much of the burden. ...”71

It is difficult to read La Chute without being drawn into self-introspection. Camus blatantly shakes us out of the secure cocoons we’ve woven around our lives and the reality stings, “...Fundamentally, nothing mattered. War, suicide, love, poverty got my attention, of course, when circumstances forced me, but a courteous superficial attention. At times, I would pretend to get excited about some cause foreign to my daily life. But basically I didn’t


70 Ibid, pp. 139-140.

71 Ibid, p. 140.
really take part in it except, of course, when my freedom was thwarted.” Because our actions, like Clamence’s, are only a part of being virtuous, when we take into account our motivations, disposition, and emotions, and are free to choose between self and virtue, we become conscious of our own hypocrisy. This awareness is disturbing and admitting it is a moment of personal despair.

His virtue gave direction to his being, sufficed for all, protected him from shock, reflection or doubt. Clamence was indistinguishable from his habitual virtues until that crucial moment when the plaint of a drowning woman inserted itself between Clamence and his virtue. In that instant Clamence chose himself and not his virtue, he suddenly acted as a completely free individual and in this very act, took upon himself the enormous, inescapable responsibility for his act. He was no longer safe or unconscious; he was in trouble. His virtue could not justify his action.73

“In Clamence, we find ourselves distilled and essentially disclosed. We live in dark times whose darkness may be traced to our own misdeeds. We are, it seems, to be known best by our failings.”74

Although La Chute, like other works by Camus, appears to be dark, ominous, and without hope, it is actually quite the contrary. If we are to discover anything from La Chute, it would be that Camus is showing us, however unmercifully, what our lives and our society really are, and bringing this out into the open, making us aware of the condition we are in, is the first step toward change.

There is another dimension to Camus’ ethic of moderation and that is the importance

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72Camus, The Fall, p. 49.


of enjoying one's life; to be actively *engagé* in life. For Aristotle, this means Happiness.

“For Camus, the most instructive of the ancient deities, Nemesis, is the goddess not of vengeance but of moderation. ‘There can be no attitude so free from error that men should give it their total allegiance. I’ve had enough of people who die for an idea. What interests me is to live and die because of what one loves.”’75 Aristotle agrees: “Most noble is that which is justest, and best is health; But pleasantest is to win what we love.”76 The same advice is given again by Camus in his analysis of Sisyphus. Although Sisyphus is consciously aware of his eternal absurdity, it is in the moments in which he is completely engaged in his task, when—“his rock is his thing,”77—that the monotony of his task is forgotten even just for a moment. It is precisely at this time, Camus contends, that we are happy. In relation to Aristotle, Alasdair MacIntyre, using a different analogy, makes the same determination. “To enjoy playing a game is simply to play well and to not be distracted, to be, as we say, thoroughly involved in the game.”78

What then does Camus mean by an ethic of moderation? The ethic of moderation that emerges from Camus' writings, from his earlier essays and *La Chute*, is a way to reconcile opposing extremes, the dualistic nature of man, and ultimately between the *horreur de mourir* and *jalousie de vivre*. Camus states that Greek thought always defined itself by

75Rolo, p. 27.
76McKeon, p. 321.
78MacIntyre, p. 82.
reference to opposing limits and thus provided clear awareness of contrasting extremes with an ideal of moderation that could include them both and reduce if not remove the conflict between them.79

Camus was not trying to create a philosophical theory, he knew that there are no theories free from error. But what Camus does suggest via his novels and essays is a way to live in which individuals can be engaged in their lives and life, to do what they love and love, and adopt a method to live moderately. He is completely aware that this is not easy and recognizes that it is impossible for anyone, including himself, to be absolutely virtuous since every life has its frail moments, but that doesn’t mean we can give in by resigning ourselves to nothing. “If we believe in nothing, if nothing has any meaning and if we can affirm no values whatsoever, then everything is possible and nothing has any importance.”80 Thus, “Camus also refused to draw the nihilist conclusion that because the world is irrational, the irrational is the only logical principle of conduct.”81 Camus absolutely believed that man has the power, nature, and intelligence to rise above the chaos of his time, even the obstacles in his own life perhaps, to overcome the hopelessness of a nihilistic society in order to create a new way living.


80 Camus, The Rebel, p. 5.

81 Rolo, p. 30.
AUTHENTICITY AND THE ABSURD

"Man is the only creature who refuses to be what he is."

Albert Camus

Authenticity and the Absurd are the heart of Camus’ novels and his philosophical essays that explore these dimensions in relation to human existence. The question raised in the previous chapter, “Aristotle and Virtue Ethics”—is it possible to seek a virtuous life in an unvirtuous corrupt society?—will now be asked in terms of Authenticity and the Absurd: is it possible to seek authenticity within a nihilistic society? In defining authenticity (the state of being authentic, its literal meaning, original; true; genuine; not a copy, as in an authentic work of art) is a part of what the existentialist philosophers, Søren Kiekegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre, sought to define and illustrate. For them, authenticity as a dimension of human existence, means man’s relationship to himself that is, becoming an original, who he truly is, as opposed to a copy, outside of, despite, or even in spite of, what societal norms and its ethos dictate to him. In other words, in the development of an individual’s life, he eventually conforms to what his society tells him he should be, which makes him inauthentic. Even though according to Heidegger, because man has a tendency toward mediocrity and averageness, “most people strive against it [authenticity]; their fundamental tendency is to refuse to recognize themselves ‘for what they are.’”82 This is because it is easier to be like everyone else, which also lessens or

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eliminates an individual’s responsibility in respect to who he is and what he becomes. Heidegger’s *das Man* “is the paradigm of inauthenticity; none of his actions are his own, not even his conception of himself is his own. He does, of course, have a conception of himself as *das Man*...but this conception is not one which he has created in accordance with his *Existenz* and understanding—the capability of projecting possibilities of his own and choosing them.”83 The most common form of inauthenticity according to Heidegger “is the blind acceptance of public conceptions and standards, and the failure or refusal to consider this acceptance as a choice of one among a number of alternative modes of existence.”84 For Sartre, inauthenticity is described as *bad faith*. “Bad faith is a willful refusal to recognize oneself as both facticity and transcendence, as a man with a past and a future yet to be determined...Bad faith is flight from anguish in the face of freedom...”85

Camus, however, is not an existentialist philosopher, nor did he write implicit philosophical theories on authenticity like Heidegger and Sartre. Yet the notion of authenticity defined by these existentialist philosophers does emerge as a theme in Camus’ writings and coincides with Camus’ ethic of moderation. Camus depicts a version of an authentic life that appears as Heidegger’s *das Man* in his novel *L’Etranger* through his character Patrice Meursault. Meursault by his own description of himself is rather robotic in his daily routines; his lack of emotion and sensitivity goes against the societal norm and his only devotion is in fulfilling his physical desires. In the preface to the American edition,

83 Solomon, *From Rationalism to Existentialism*, p. 219.
85 Ibid, p. 293.
Camus explains that Meursault is a hero condemned “because he does not play the game. In this respect, he is foreign to the society in which he lives; he wanders, on the fringe, in the suburbs of a private, solitary, sensual life.” Camus suggests that upon a closer examination if one were to ask just how Meursault does not play the game, the answer is simple: he will not lie.

To lie is not only to say what isn’t true. It is above all to say “more” than is true, and as far as the human heart is concerned, to express more than one feels. This is what we do everyday to simplify life. He says what he is, he refuses to hide his feelings and immediately society feels threatened. He is asked, for example, to say that he regrets his crime, in the approved manner. He replies that what he feels is annoyance rather than real regret. And this shade of meaning condemns him.

Even though Meursault appears to exemplify Heidegger’s das Man, he is actually closer to achieving an authentic life. He understands who he is and he does not reject who he is even with the turn of events that eventually lead to his execution, events that he could have changed if he denied who and what he is not only to society, but to himself as well. Unlike Meursault, most people are accepting of the norms and standards of their society. Aristotle contends that man is made to live within the political and social structure of his community, his society. But in Réflexions sur la peine capitale, Camus states:

Unlike many of my well-known contemporaries, I do not think that man is by nature a social animal. To tell the truth, I think it is just the reverse. But I believe, and this is quite different, that he cannot live henceforth outside of society, whose laws are necessary for his physical survival. Hence the responsibilities must be established by society itself according to a reasonable and workable scale. But the law’s final justification is in the good it does or fails to do to the society of a given place in time.

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87 Ibid.

In any case, what becomes crucial is whether or not an individual within a community, a society can seek an authentic life.

The notion of authenticity and the search for an authentic life rises from perhaps the awakening and need for meaning of one’s life in a nihilistic society. Camus stresses that even though in a nihilistic society, by a Nietzschean-Dostoevskian definition—since there is no God and everything is permitted—this does not mean that nothing is forbidden. Authenticity does not eliminate our responsibility for ourselves, our actions, nor does it eliminate our responsibilities toward others. In this respect authenticity should not be confused with *individualism* that prevails in American society. Although Camus does not use the term authenticity explicitly, the notion of authenticity is one possible result from the Absurd.

Absurdism is a philosophy that views the world as irrational and meaningless and holds that humanity is in conflict with the world as such. Thus, humanity is in a constant search for order. But the ultimate irrationality and meaninglessness derives from the fact that man dies and that man is consciously aware of his death. “If I were a tree among trees, a cat among animals, this life would have meaning, or rather this problem would not arise, for I should belong to this world...And what constitutes the basis of that conflict, of that break between the world and my mind, but the awareness of it?”

It is from Camus’ analysis of the Absurd, through his novels and essays, that critics paint a pessimistic and dark picture of Camus’ thought in relation to man and life. But this

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is far from being an accurate description of him. "His originality lay firstly in finding the world’s absurdity not a cause for despair, but paradoxically a spur to happiness. In his eyes mortality and senseless suffering—perhaps his most common preoccupation—actually enhance the value of life: they invite men to live it more intensely." Rolo’s description of Camus’ thought is reminiscent of Camus’ Mediterranean youth and the Arabic notion of not neglecting the life in between birth and death. Camus’ pre-occupation with mortality and senseless suffering often puts him in conflict with Christianity: "...one of the things most deeply alien to him in Christian thought was its glorification of gratuitous suffering inflicted on a human being by other human beings, exemplified in the tortured figure of a man hanging on a cross."

At some point in one’s life, an individual may ask himself, his God, his society, even the universe perhaps, Why? Why am I here only to one day perish? All the struggles, suffering, confusion, disappointments, may lead an individual to ask what’s it all for? This conscious slip out of the everydayness, the habitual mechanical routines, the small tear in the secure cocoon tightly woven around one’s life, can be a moment of personal despair or a moment of personal epiphany. One may seek refuge and return to his everyday routines, hiding blindly behind the veil of hope for salvation in another life, which gives this life meaning. He may seek to define an original meaning of his life outside of his society or religious dogma. He could also conclude that nothing in his life has meaning and it never will, forming a deep and overwhelming despair that he cannot overcome. Thus, for Camus,

90Rolo, p. 30.

91Brée, Camus and Sartre: Crisis and Commitment, p. 67.
the most important philosophical question is whether or not there is a legitimacy to suicide.

It happens that the stage sets collapse. Rising, street-car, four hours in the office or factory, meal, street-car, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm—this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the “why” arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with an amazement. “Begins”—this is important. Weariness comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness. It awakens consciousness and provokes what follows. What follows is the gradual return into the chain or it is the definitive awakening. At the end of the awakening comes in time, the consequence: suicide or recovery...  

Suicide is a phenomenon of life that for most of us is hard to imagine and understand. From a social stand-point, suicide is usually hidden within the closet of family secrets and is very rarely discussed openly. For the survivors of a suicide victim, it is a highly emotional and deeply personal experience laden with anger, guilt, and despair that may never be reconciled, justified or accepted. And worst of all, they may never truly know why. Accordingly Tom Beauchamp, a philosophy professor at Georgetown University, states that “Our attitudes have led to a social situation in which motivations toward suicide are not well understood, and even the serious dimensions of the social problem are seldom confronted or discussed. But suicide is a fact of everyday life. It is the second-ranking cause of death among college students...” Beauchamp continues by noting that, according to the World Health Organization, it is estimated that 1,000 people commit suicide everyday, and that the suicide rate of physicians is two to three times that of the general public, and the suicide rate among psychiatrists is two to three times the physician rate. There are a few circumstances


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in which the termination of one’s life that for the most part, as tragic as the circumstances are, can be sympathized with, such as an individual with an incurable illness or in the extreme cases of prisoners of war. Although Camus does not necessarily dismiss types of suicides in his essay. He personally felt the despair of his own debilitating fight with tuberculosis, and during the periods of convalescence which later in his life were lengthy, ending it all certainly occurred to him. He also lost friends to suicide as a result of the Second World War and though he may have understood the circumstances in which prisoners find themselves, suicide still could not be a legitimate option.

In the preface to Le Mythe de Sisyphe, Camus states, “...it is legitimate and necessary to wonder whether life has a meaning: Therefore it is legitimate to meet the problem of suicide face to face. The answer...is this: even if one does not believe in God, suicide is not legitimate. Written...amid the French and European disaster, this book declares that even within the limits of nihilism it is possible to find some means to proceed beyond nihilism.”

What Camus dares to do in his essay is, first, to say that this life is all there is. There is no hope in a theological sense. There is no other dimension to human life other than this one, there will be no divine intervention. Accepting absurdity shatters all of man’s illusions, and as a result man will discover passion from a life that is engaged. Even though man is living in a world that is indifferent, in a world in which even science cannot definitely explain, he will also discover that life itself is the meaning. And with the acceptance of one’s own mortality, there will be the recognition of the inevitability of death for all men,

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through which love, compassion, and solidarity replace despair. In this sense, man himself is responsible for creating his own life, yet he is also connected and responsible to all men. Suicide then could never be legitimate because life is meant to be lived; we rebel against death since death ends this life and in death we are no longer free. "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."95

But there is a question that remains. Couldn't suicide be considered a freedom, a right or an expression of freedom? Camus answers, "To commit suicide is to prove that one is free. And there is a simple solution to the problem of liberty. Men have the illusion that they are free. But when they are sentenced to death they lose the illusion. The whole problem lies in whether or not it is real in the first place."96 Though it may appear that Camus understands that suicide could be viewed as an act of freedom, the problem is that in death freedom is destroyed and no longer exists. Freedom is a state of being in the context of a living man’s consciousness. Camus sees the darkness and despair that arises from the Absurd yet, "it sums itself up for me as a lucid invitation to live and create in the very midst of the desert."97

But there also remains the horrifying statistics that hundreds of thousands of people every year will take their own lives and we may never truly know why—why life becomes

95 Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 47.
96 Camus, Notebooks 1935-1942, p. 116.
97 Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, preface, n. pag.
so unbearable for some with or without divine hope. Critics of Camus suggest that Camus places the burden of living on man’s shoulders. Ironically, Camus would never think of life in terms of it being a burden. If this were true, he would have had a completely opposite view of suicide. What Camus does do is take us to the extreme point of meaninglessness and nothingness and contend that even in the darkest depths of this despair, life is to be experienced—“There will never be any substitute for twenty years of experience.”98 and life is not to be rushed, but slowly savored.99 Camus offers to all men an invitation to live life intensely, yet man has to ultimately choose for himself, between recovery or suicide.

Since suicide cannot be a legitimate choice in response to the Absurd, man is left with recovery, and the choices of recovery then become the search for authenticity or the retreat to inauthenticity. According to Heidegger, most men will choose to take the easier path of averageness and mediocrity—inauthenticity, but Heidegger doesn’t acknowledge the obstacles and challenges involved with authenticity. To rise above the crowd, so to speak, and define one’s life on his own terms is an enormous undertaking. It would mean stripping away all the layers built around one’s life from the moment of birth, for there is not only what society tells man who he should be, but also his family, his faith, his friends and so on. Seeking an authentic life would be an on-going fight, because those who do not understand authenticity as a conscious choice will be opposed to it. Traditions, roles, and values would have to be discarded. For example, in American society we still have a double-standard in terms of the traditional roles of men and women. Some women have been fighting for years

98Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 47.

to at least be able to choose the role that is appropriate for them. The woman who dares to define her life on her own terms, recognizing who she is and what she can become, will certainly meet with strong opposition along the way, from every aspect of her life.

...the impact of this search for authenticity is itself significant, despite the ontological or ethical difficulties involved. The search may not authenticate us, but it does make us human...The very wish to live genuinely, the very attempt to become authentic expresses courageous determination not to despair or to yield to the powerful processes of leveling, objectification and depersonalization...While it is impossible to attain public authenticity within the prevailing social ethic, with its instrumental personal and economic relations, it is feasible to attempt to do so—to take responsibility for one's actions and to foster true concern for others.100

Perhaps Heidegger is right to a point. Since none of the philosophers mentioned can give us an actual example of an authentic life, past or present, other than in fictional characters, it is plausible then that most people may find themselves somewhere in between authenticity and inauthenticity.

The first step in the search for an authentic life is an awakening to the Absurd and a conscious choice to rebel against the existing, norms, standards, and values. Since death becomes the ultimate paradox of the Absurd, a fact of life that cannot be changed, Camus shifts his thought to revolt. We cannot change the inevitability of death, but what we can change is the social and/or political oppression that confines man and chains him to a Sisyphus'—like existence.

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FREEDOM AND REVOLT

"I merely wanted men to rediscover their solidarity in order to wage war against their revolting fate."

Albert Camus

In *Lettres à un ami allemand*, Camus identifies two contrasting actions as a result of the Absurd. The French interpretation is a revolt against man’s common fate and in solidarity men rebel against the chaos of the world. The German interpretation is an invitation to power over men by violent political oppression. Camus takes his initial interpretation a step-back and defines the solidarity of men in (non-violent) revolt against any form of man-made oppression which enslaves, objectifies, and depersonalizes human beings. Jacob Golomb states in response to the search for authenticity that the powerful process of ...objectification and depersonalization...of one’s society makes authenticity extremely difficult.101 But what is meant by objectification and depersonalization? A definition of *objectification* states: “To objectify a person is to act towards the person without regard for his or her own desires or well-being, as a thing to be valued according to externally imposed standards and to control the person rather than to engage him or her in a mutually respectful relationship.”102 This definition is in essence Immanuel Kant’s formula of the End-in-Itself, in which he states: “Act in such a way that you always treat humanity,

101 Golomb, p. 204.

whether in your own person or in the person of another, never simply as means but always at the same time as an end.”103 Yet, “We would all agree that it is morally repugnant to use human beings as mere instruments of our deliberate ends. Or would we? The very words ‘employment’ and ‘employee’ are descriptions of an objectified relationship in which human beings are things to be valued according to externally imposed standards. None of us escapes the objectification of humans that arises in economic life.”104 An objection to this response to objectification is that employment is an agreement or contract between two or more consenting parties. Even Kant recognizes that if both or all parties involved consent, there is no moral or ethical dilemma, but if there is no mutual consent, no choice, no freedom, objectification is immoral. Kant’s End-in-Itself formula further states: “To use someone as a mere means, however, is to involve them in a scheme of action to which they could not in principle give consent.”105

For Camus objectification is a method of political, social, economic or even scientific oppression. The following examples of objectification could apply to Camus’ thought. First, it could be argued that the Germans did not inform the Jews in their “scheme of action” which led millions of Jews (unprotested) to their deaths. A second example is found in the arguments against human cloning, and the possibility of manufacturing humans for the sole purpose of organ harvesting and transplantation. Two rather severe examples yet both demonstrate that the freedom needed for mutual consent to be used as a means to an end

104Lewontin, “The Confusion Over Cloning,” p. 21

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has been eliminated.

*Depersonalization* is a process in which individuals lose their uniqueness as a person, and conforms them to a *robotic* existence, such as, claimed by some, in the traditional roles of women as wives, mothers, and homemakers, in which the *self* is lost. This form of depersonalization is depicted explicitly by Marilyn French in her novel *The Women's Room*, (1977) in which she also illustrates the painful process of overcoming depersonalization and rediscovery of the self lost.

There is another method of oppression that man will consent to and that is religion. Friedrich Nietzsche viewed religion as an “‘opiate’ for the masses. Men accept it through fear, hope, laziness, because they cannot bear existence without it or most important of all through ‘resentment.’”  

Nietzsche’s concept of resentment is explained in detail in his *Beyond Good and Evil*, and *A Genealogy of Morals*. According to Joseph McBride, resentment for Nietzsche means that “The weak found it necessary to take revenge upon the strong, because they could not endure their subservience. To avenge themselves against their masters they brought about a transvaluation of values, out of ‘resentment.’”  

As early as 1865 Nietzsche wrote: “Is it then a matter of arriving at a concept of God, world and atonement which will give us a feeling of the greatest smugness? When exploring are we looking for rest, peace, happiness? No, only truth, even if it were most repelling and ugly. It is here that the paths of men part. Should you long for peace of the soul and happiness

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107McBride, p. 23.
then by all means believe. Should you want to become a disciple of truth, then search.”

Nietzsche separates the weak from the strong, the slave from the master, through his interpretation of Christian morality. For Nietzsche, Christian morality is a slave morality which gives those who obey a sense of power over other men; yet in their state of obedience, it prevents and disables them from ever rising above resentment. “The religious man, of course, contends that his values are not easily realized but are in truth the highest to which man can aspire...the Christian would have us adopt an ‘ideal which...appeals to all the cowardices and vanities of worried souls’: We must recognize that conventional morality appeals to what is the lowest in us and that it marks the parting of the ways for the weak and strong.”

Nietzsche’s view of the relationship between religious faith and morality is according to McBride, that “...moral values are accepted out of fear of eternal damnation or hope of eternal reward...which amounts to accepting a pseudomorality out of hope for or fear of what is illusory. The only reality to which man ought to aspire and the only thing of which he need fear the loss, is that of his ‘finer nature,’ which only a life beyond good and evil can realize.”

Camus dramatizes men in solidarity and in revolt against social, political, and religious oppression in one of his best known novels, *La Peste*. *La Peste* is an individual’s account of the events that brings the Algerian town of Oran to its knees, besieged by a fatal pestilence. The account begins when one day a small number of rats appear in the city

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110McBride, p. 21.
streets that seem harmless and non-threatening. But as each day passes, more and more rats appear. Although some of the rats die, the number of them continues to increase, and the silent killer brought in with them in the form of the plague spreads among Oran’s poverty stricken population. But soon, like most diseases, the plague does not discriminate among its victims. As the death toll rises, a state of emergency is declared. The city is shut-down, prohibiting, by force if necessary, anyone to leave or enter. The people of Oran are completely cut-off from the world outside, and within the city walls they are at war with a faceless and terrorizing killer.

*La Peste* is rich in symbolism. The progressive restrictions and rationing, the lack of communications and the quarantined areas, easily bring to mind the political oppression of the Second World War. Yet, Camus uses the plague as a universal symbol that represents any form of oppression, and revolt becomes a reason for solidarity and participation against oppression—*resistance*.

...in the case of oppression which man faces at the hand of murderous regimes and ideologies, Camus condemns these things, because they are the creations of men who have betrayed the ‘is’ of the human condition, its limits its needs. And this condemnation is possible because in human history there is a basis for judgement, a value which is implicit in human nature. Camus contends that when this value is betrayed it manifests itself in human revolt, a revolt which is of men and against that which threatens all men.111

Camus also uses the plague to represent needless human suffering and, influenced by Nietzsche, wrestles with the Christian dogma of good and evil with ironic humor.112 One

111Hanna, p. 241.

of the three main characters in *La Peste*, Father Paneloux, a Jesuit priest, is an authority on ancient inscriptions. With the initial panic of the plague, "...the ecclesiastical authorities in our town resolved to do battle against the plague with the weapons appropriate to them, and organized a Week of Prayer." Camus conveys the severity of Christian dogma in a sermon given by Fr. Paneloux. On the Sunday following the Week of Prayer, Fr. Paneloux, in an authoritarian and accusatory tone, delivers a sermon to his congregation that instills fear of the wrath of God in almost everyone. Fr. Paneloux begins: "Calamity has come on you my brethren, my brethren, and my brethren, you deserved it." He continues his sermon by quoting a text from Exodus relating to the plague of Egypt in the same accusatory manner: "The first time this scourge appears in history it was wielded to strike down 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." The narrator notes that some of the worshipers slipped forward from their seats and on to their knees. Fr. Paneloux, takes a deep breath and with fury lashes out at the congregation:

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. For the plague is the flail of God...Too long this world of ours has connived at evil, too long has it counted on the divine mercy, on God's forgiveness.


114 Ibid, p. 94.

115 Ibid, p. 95.
Repentance was enough, men thought; nothing was forbidden...And so...we walk in darkness, in the thick darkness of the plague.  

In the early 1980s with the discovery of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), a similar religious viewpoint was prevalent. The idea was that this painful, debilitating, and fatal disease, inflicted initially upon a group of individuals because of their lifestyle, was somehow deserved and justified. But the problem with this way of thinking is that although evildoers may be inflicted, as Fr. Paneloux later discovers, the plague does not discriminate among its victims, selecting only the evildoers to punish. For Camus, innocent suffering is an injustice. Camus is explaining his rejection of institutional Christianity through Fr. Paneloux. “It is a system that makes innocent suffering a part of the divine harmony and thus becomes a betrayal of the innocent,” which also betrays the limits of the human condition.

Camus’ ethic of moderation in the context of freedom, revolt, and justice is the idea of limits—la mésure. “It is precisely this idea of limit, of a border-line beyond which a man of honour does not trespass.” In Camus’ play L’Etat de siège, written at the same time as La Peste (1948), Camus personifies the symbol of the plague as a political/social oppressor. In the last act, the Plague being defeated and the city gates about to re-open, the idea of limits emerges: “No there is no justice, but there are limits. And those who claim to regulate nothing, like those who intend to regulate everything, equally go beyond the limits. Open

116 Camus, The Plague, pp. 95-96


118 Scott, p. 79.
the gates that the wind and salt may come scour this town.”

The theme of limits is explored further by Camus in his play Les Justes. Les Justes is based on an account of Socialist terrorism in Moscow in 1905. The terrorist group plots to assassinate the Grand Duke. On the day of the assassination Kaliayev is supposed to throw a bomb into the Grand Duke’s carriage as the Duke drove to the theatre. But the assassination was foiled because the Duke was accompanied by the Grand Duchess, his niece and nephew. Reporting back to the group, Kaliayev met with opposition from one member. But most agreed that he did the right thing by not assassinating innocent children. Dora explains: “Even in destruction there is a right way and a wrong way, there is an order, there are limits.”

Stephen objects violently: “There are no limits!” Kaliayev with equal passion replies: “Killing innocent children is a crime against a man’s honour, well, I’m through with the revolution. If you decide I must do it, well and good; I will go to the theatre but when they are due to come out—I’ll fling myself under the horses’ feet.”

The second plot to assassinate the Grand Duke was successful. Kaliayev was arrested for the assassination and refused to acknowledge his fellow conspirators in order to be freed. He also insisted that he should pay with his own life for the life he had taken even though he justified the assassination as a protest against the tyranny and oppression of the Russian establishment. In “L’Homme révolté, Camus tells us he “...had the highest admiration for

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121 Ibid.
122 Ibid, p. 65.
‘the men of 1905,’ for nowhere else in the history of modern terrorism could he find assassins in whom the moral imagination conducted so sensitive an inquiry into the question as to whether murder, in any circumstances could be justified as a technique of the revolt.”

Camus further states:

...such a degree of self-abnegation, accompanied by such profound consideration for the lives of others, allows the supposition that these fastidious assassins lived out the rebel destiny in its most contradictory form. It is possible to believe that they too, while recognizing the inevitability of violence, nevertheless admitted to themselves that it is unjustifiable. Necessary and inexcusable—that is how murder appeared to them.124

It is an odd notion that murder would appear to anyone as necessary and at the same time inexcusable. In L’Homme révolté, Camus questions the legitimacy of murder in a metaphysical, historical, political and revolutionary sense. “The logic of true rebellion, as Camus understood it, forbids any principle or doctrine that promises to legitimize murder even as a temporary expedient, and this is so, he says, because ‘rebellion, in principle, is a protest against death.’”125

In Réflexions sur la peine capitale, Camus argues against the state’s right to inflict the death penalty; a penalty that betrays the limits of the human condition. Camus believes that capital punishment is legalized murder because it is premeditated. Camus’ essay on capital punishment is often criticized. One criticism is that Camus interchanges the words kill and murder giving them the same weight or quality of meaning, and second, he defines

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123Scott, p. 75.
124Camus, The Rebel, p. 169.
125Scott, p. 68.
capital punishment as pre-meditated murder, which at the time he wrote Réflexions sur la peine capitale, he was in opposition to some secular philosophers as well as theologians and Roman Catholic canon law.

In every language there are words that carry the same or similar meaning. In the vernacular English language, the words, kill, slay, murder, assassinate, and execute have one shared meaning— all deprive or cease life. *Kill* means death caused by an agency in any manner; *slay* is a literary term implying deliberateness and violence but not necessarily motive; *murder* specifically implies stealthy, motive, and premeditation and therefore full moral responsibility; *assassinate* is a deliberate killing openly or secretly often for political motives; and *execute* means to put to death as a legal penalty. In the vernacular French language, the words, *tuere, meurtrir, assassin, et executer*, all have the same meaning as the English equivalents. In consulting a Catholic dictionary, which does not provide a definition of *kill* but does define *murder* as: “the direct and wilful killing of an innocent person, contrary to the divine command, ‘The innocent and just person thou shalt not put to death’” (Exod. xxiii,7). When death follows indirectly and according to the principle of double-effect, it is no murder, e.g. in defending oneself against an aggressor. Killing in a just war is indirect killing and justified as self-defense against an unjust aggressor.”126 The same Catholic dictionary also provides a definition of execution under *capital punishment* and the Church’s position on capital punishment under canon law.

Canonists and theologians are divided on the question whether the Church has the power of the sword, *i.e.*, the right to inflict the death penalty. History gives many

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instances of popes using this power as the secular rulers of the Papal States, many again of the Church handing over to the secular arm (i.e. the state) criminals whom she has convicted of heresy etc., for execution according to the current civil law; but no instance is known of the Church as a religious society wielding the sword. Her canon law has always forbidden clerics to shed human blood.\(^\text{127}\)

But the Church will allow and justifies the state’s role as a \textit{right} to inflict the death penalty.

punishment, capital: is the right of the state to inflict the punishment of death as the penalty for grave crimes against society is necessary to its well-being and not only as a vindictive punishment but also as a salutary deterrent...According to St. Thomas this penalty is lawful not only because the criminal has by his crime become a destroyer of the common good but also because, \textit{by choosing to fall from the order of reason, he partakes in some measure of the state of slavery of the lower animals which are ordered only for the use of others}.\(^\text{128}\) So the punishment of death, by giving him an opportunity to restore the order of reason in himself by an act of conversion to his last end, enables him to recover his dignity as a human being.\(^\text{129}\)

Remarkably, Immanuel Kant and G.F.W. Hegel share St. Thomas’ view that the death penalty allows the criminal to restore his dignity. Both Kant and Hegel “…insisted that when deserved, execution far from degrading the executed convict, affirms his humanity by affirming his rationality and his responsibility for his actions. They thought that execution, when deserved is required for the sake of the convicts dignity.”\(^\text{130}\)

There is a difference between the English/French vernacular definition of murder and the Catholic definition of murder. Murder in the vernacular involves motive, premeditation, and moral responsibility; murder by the Catholic definition is the direct and wilful killing of an innocent person. By the Catholic definition then, a criminal is perhaps not an \textit{innocent}

\(^{127}\) Attwater, p. 412.

\(^{128}\) My emphasis.

\(^{129}\) Attwater, p. 413.

person and could even be seen as an aggressor against his society, in which case killing him is justified and is not murder.\textsuperscript{131} But Camus defines capital punishment as premeditated murder.

It is murder, to be sure, and one that arithmetically pays for the murder committed. But it adds to death a rule, a public premeditation known to the future victim, an organization, in short, which is in itself a source of moral sufferings more terrible than death. Hence there is no equivalence. 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 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.\textsuperscript{132}

Camus also finds it difficult to accept that a society has the right to pronounce an absolute judgement, since society itself is not absolutely good. Society also has to bear the full moral responsibility for the crime it commits.

Society decrees a sacred punishment and at the same time divests it both of excuse and usefulness. Society proceeds sovereignly to eliminate the evil ones from her midst as if she were virtue itself. Like an honorable man killing his wayward son and remarking: “Really I didn’t know what to do with him.” She assumes the right to select as if she were nature herself and to add great sufferings to the eliminator as if she were a redeeming god...A natural and human society exercising her right of repression has given way to a dominate ideology that requires human

\textsuperscript{131}In “The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia,” June, 1994, the Catholic definition of capital punishment has changed. “Whatever reasons can be advanced in support of capital punishment, many theologians and religious people today doubt that it can often be justified. Although the state does have a right to protect its citizens and to punish criminals, this does not mean capital punishment is warranted.” p. 125. Further points stated that first, studies have shown that the threat of execution does not deter criminals; second, capital punishment can be unevenly and inequitably applied; third, the need for retribution can be satisfied in other ways; and fourth, capital punishment is a gruesome practice that can harden and desensitize society, thus undermining respect and reverence for human life. Capital punishment also goes against the central Christian conviction that human life is sacred and ought to be protected and fostered from conception to death and is in opposition to the ministry of Jesus.

\textsuperscript{132}Camus, “Reflections on the Guillotine.” Resistance, Rebellion and Death, p. 199.
sacrifices...a man’s life ceases to be sacred when it is thought useful to kill him.\textsuperscript{133}

Camus constantly opposed \textit{legalized murder} disguised as capital punishment. He found it to be repulsive, disgusting, and inefficient because it does not deter.\textsuperscript{134} Camus, however, was not a bleeding “liberal” either. On the contrary, Camus, “instead of distinguishing between ‘right’ and ‘left,’ distinguished between ‘brutes’ and ‘victims,’ and found evidence of each in both camps. His severe moral honesty prompted him to point the finger at thugs whatever their political persuasion...He maintained a resolute impartiality which made him enemies on both sides.”\textsuperscript{135} In “Return to Tipasa,” Camus wrote, “but after all, nothing is true that compels me to make it exclusive. Isolated beauty ends in grimaces, solitary justice in oppression. Anyone who seeks to serve the one to the exclusion of the other serves no one not even himself, and in the end is doubly the servant of injustice.”\textsuperscript{136}

Camus spoke out against many forms of oppression which testifies to his impartiality. In 1947, he spoke out against the repression of a revolt in Madagascar by the colonial French forces. In 1948, he defended Greek communists who had been sentenced to death. In 1956 he spoke out against the repressor of a Hungarian uprising by the colonial Russian forces. Also in 1956, Camus made a well-publicized appeal in Algiers, for a truce; he asked that the FLN (Algerian nationalists) and the French army should both declare that they would not


\textsuperscript{134}On October, 11, 1997 in Strasbourg, France, the 40 nation Council of Europe that included French President Jacques Chirac and French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, called for the universal abolition of the death penalty and bans on human cloning. \textit{Source: The Plain Dealer, Cleveland, October 12, 1997.}

\textsuperscript{135}Masters, p. 113.

\textsuperscript{136}Camus, “Return to Tipasa.” \textit{Lyrical and Critical Essays}, p. 165.
violate the rights of freedom and safety of the civilian population. It was an appeal for moderation, to both his homelands; an appeal that was rejected by both sides. In a short summation of Camus’ works on the revolt, Thomas Hanna wrote, “...man may never defeat the tendency toward injustice and murder that all men carry in their hearts, but this is not to say that men may not, in revolt, destroy an oppressive regime and replace it with a moderate regime which respects the limits of the human condition.”

Within the social and political framework of a given society, Camus contends that there are limits that must be respected. The same is true in terms of freedom and revolt. In *L’Homme révolté*, Camus concludes that:

> Rebellion is in no way the demand for total freedom. On the contrary, rebellion puts total freedom up for trial. It specifically attacks the unlimited power that authorizes a superior to violate the forbidden frontier. Far from demanding general independence, the rebel wants it to be recognized that freedom has its limits everywhere that a human being is to be found—the limit being precisely that human being’s power to rebel...The rebel undoubtedly demands a certain degree of freedom for himself; but in no case, if he is consistent, does he demand the right to destroy the existence and freedom of others.

Sartre, as well as other existentialist philosophers recognized, that individual freedom also has limits. Individuals are not, in a sense, *absolutely* free. There is a responsibility to oneself, one’s choices and the responsibility of the consequences that result from one’s actions. This means that there is a responsibility to other individuals as well as oneself.

> “Everything a man does,” according to Sartre, “even where we may sometimes say ‘he had

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137 Masters, pp. 113-116.


140 Cf. Camus’ *The Fall.*
no choice,' is his responsibility." Likewise as Camus has pointed out, the social and political dimensions of one's society also have limits and responsibilities.

Thus Camus' ethic of moderation not only applies to an individual's quest to live well and to understand what it means to be human against and in the chaos of his time, but also to the institutions—societies and governments—created by man to protect and serve all individuals.

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141 Solomon, From Rationalism to Existentialism, p. 316.
ALBERT CAMUS AND THE POST-MODERN GENERATION

"Every authentic work of art is a gift offered to the future."

Albert Camus

Out of all the novels, plays, and essays written by Albert Camus, 
La Chute, a controversial novel in its own time, now forty years later, reflects the American society of the 1980s and 1990s. These two decades are steeped in the same despair, where values are questionable, and a moral breakdown both personally and publicly is steadily increasing. But can and will we ever bring ourselves to do something about it? We are in a sense, stuck, like Clamence, in the canals of Amsterdam, in a state of limbo. The American Zeitgeist at the close of this century, is not unlike the European Zeitgeist following the Second World War. Yet the American post-modern generation has nothing in common with Camus’ generation. Growing up as Camus did, losing his father that he never knew to the First World War, only to come of age himself to face the atrocities of the Second World War, was a tragedy that the American post-modern generation has never had to endure. The war made people do without and to think beyond their own wants, their own desires. It made people feel, to rebel, and to protest. The war ignited a passion, a passion of creativity, of thought, of action. If anything, the American post-modern generation is somewhat like a spoiled child that demands immediate self-gratification at any expense and needs their decisions made for them. We have not had to live through or endure the hardships or destruction of humanity by a world war, yet happiness seems scarce. We have had the luxury of growing up in a time of peace and have done little with it except to create a rise of materialism and individualism. But we are facing a turning point in our history in terms of scientific advancement and
prevailing social issues that demand our attention, our thought, and our action.

Is it a phenomenon of human nature that a tragedy such as a war that threatens to destroy everyone and everything is the only time we will unite? Is it simply because Camus' generation had no choice?—were they simply the victims of a time in history? Does a state of peace equate to complacency? Are we in a state of peace? Doesn’t what is happening in our society inspire any reactions other than “whatever?”

Kay Haugaard, a creative writing instructor at Pasadena City College, wrote in her article, “A Result of Too Much Tolerance?” that her students could not bring themselves to say they were against human sacrifice. The students were asked to read and reflect on Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery.” The story depicts the residents of a small American village in which the ritual of an annual human sacrifice (death by stoning) is done as an offering to ensure good crops. A mother of two young children is chosen through the lottery and is stoned to death; her own family the first to throw stones. Jackson, according to Haugaard, intended to show “...the danger of just ‘going along’ with something habitually, without examining its rationale or value. The power of public pressure was illustrated chillingly, in the ease with which the conversation about other villages’ dropping the practice had been squelched.”

After an exhausting and frustrating discussion, Haugaard gave up. “No one in the whole class of more than 20 ostensibly intelligent individuals would go out on a limb and take a stand against human sacrifice.” She concluded the discussion by telling her

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143 Haugaard, p. B5.
students, “Frankly, I feel its clear that the author was pointing out the dangers of being totally accepting followers, too cowardly to rebel against obvious cruelties and injustices.”

Haugaard’s article is followed by the article “The Paralysis of ‘Absolutophobia’,” by Robert L. Simon, a professor of philosophy at Hamilton College. In the opening paragraph Simon quotes one of his students, “‘Of course I dislike the Nazis, but who is to say they are morally wrong?’ Other students in my classes on moral and political philosophy have made similar remarks about apartheid, slavery, and ethnic cleansing. They make the assertion as though it were self-evident; no one, they say, has the right, even to criticize the moral views of an another group or culture...” Simon raises an important question, “Does a decent respect for other cultures and practices really require us to refrain from condemning even the worst crimes in human history? Does it make moral judgement impossible?” Camus, like Simon, would maintain that it does not. In Camus’ fourth lettre of Lettres à un ami allemand, he writes: “I am fighting you because your logic is as criminal as your heart. And in the horror you have lavished upon us for four years, your reason plays as large a part as your instinct...I can tell you that at the very moment when we are going to destroy you without pity, we still feel no hatred for you....we want to destroy you in your power without mutilating you in your soul.” Camus was a master at impartiality and he pointed the finger

144Haugaard, p. B5.


146Ibid.

at thugs whatever their political persuasion, culture or race—which does not mean he was intolerant or a racist. The importance of Simon’s question however, is an underlying interpretation. What needs to be recognized and understood is that not all Germans are Nazis and not all Nazis agreed with Hitler’s plan of ethnic extermination. By condemning the practice of ethnic extermination one does not condemn or is it in any way disrespectful of Germans, nor does it imply that all Germans are contemptible, Nazis or anti-Semitic; it is the injustice, cruelty, and atrocity of ethnic extermination that is immoral and that is the difference, as Camus has shown us through his writings. “For Camus, the murderous systems of Stalinism and Nazism are both rooted in a kind of cowardice typical of the ideological mentality.”148 In the introduction of L’Homme révolté Camus states, “As soon as man, through lack of character, takes refuge in a doctrine, as soon as crime reasons about itself, it multiplies like reason itself and assumes all the aspects of the syllogism...Ideology today is concerned only with the denial of other human beings...It is then that we kill.”149

Far from being driven by petty greed or even profound animosity, totalitarian murder is fueled by a grand vision of a future world in which even the most barbarous cruelties will be redeemed. In this vision cruelty is not really cruelty at all, nor is murder really murder. Rather, they are necessary and virtuous deeds hastening the arrival of a world where there will no longer be any need for them. This is the cowardice of the ideology—that it offers comfort and consolation, rationalizing criminality and effacing any reliable boundary between innocence and guilt.150

“Anyone who seeks to serve the one to the exclusion of the other serves no one not even


149 Camus, The Rebel, pp. 3-5.

150 Issac, p. 56.
himself and is doubly the servant of injustice.” Ignorant prejudice is being replaced perhaps, as Haugaard suggests with too much tolerance. But why are our college students afraid to take a stand with the issues of our time, our history and make intellectual and moral decisions? What are they afraid of?

Mark Edmundson, a professor at the University of Virginia, described the general attitude and mentally of today’s college students (1997) in, “On the Uses of Liberal Education: I. As Lite Entertainment for Bored College Students.” In it he describes his students as, “very self-contained, with little fire, little passion to be found...How did my students reach this particular state in which all passions seems to be spent? I think that many of them have imbibed their sense of self from consumer culture in a general and from the tube in particular.” He continues to note that:

Most of my students seem desperate to blend in, to look right, to not make a spectacle of themselves...The Socratic method seems too jagged for current sensibilities. Students are intimidated in class; the thought of being embarrassed in front of the group fills them with dread...Students will not indicted the exigencies of Capitalism. For the pervading view is the cool consumer perspective, where passion and strong admiration are forbidden.”

Likewise, Maxine Greene, a noted educational theorist, in terms of a broader community sense writes: “There is a general withdrawal from what ought to be public concerns...But there is because of withdrawal, a wide spread speechlessness, a silence where

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there might be—where there out to be—an impassioned and significant dialogue.”

Because of our general withdrawal, the lack of thoughtfulness or thought and a society based on individualism, there is a deafening silence, that everyday grows louder and louder and is becoming an American tragedy. “There is almost no serious talk of reconstituting a civic order, a community. There are no clearly proposed proposals for creating what John Dewey called an ‘articulate public.’”

“Conscious thinking always involves a risk, ‘a venture into the unknown’; and it occurs against a background of funded or sedimented meanings that must themselves be tapped and articulated, so that the mind can continue dealing consciously and solicitously with lived situations, those situations (as Dewey put it) ‘in which we find ourselves.’” Martin Heidegger would perhaps agree. “The most thought provoking thing in our thought provoking age is that we are still not thinking.”

There are numerous social and political issues that collectively, as a society, a community, we need to address. Remarkably Hannah Arendt’s The Human Condition, written in 1958, is as relevant today, if not more as it was then. In the introduction she writes:

The earth is the very quintessence of the human condition, and earthly nature, for all we know, may be unique in the universe in providing human beings with a habitat in which they can move and breathe without effort and without artifice. The human artifice of the world separates human existence from all mere animal environment, but life itself is outside this artificial world, and through life man remains related to all other living organisms. For some time now, a great many


155Ibid.

156Ibid, p. 125.

157Solomon, From Rationalism to Existentialism, p. 191.
scientific endeavors have been directed toward making life also “artificial,” toward cutting the last tie through which even man belongs among the children of nature. It is the same desire to escape from imprisonment to the earth that is manifest in the attempt to create life in the test tube, in the desire to mix “frozen germ plasm from people of demonstrated ability under the microscope to produce superior human beings” and to alter [their] size, shape and function”; and the wish to escape the human condition, I suspect, also underlies the hope to extend man’s life-span far beyond the hundred-year limit.

This future man, whom the scientists tell us they will produce in no more than a hundred years, seems to be possessed by a rebellion against human existence as it has been given, a free gift from nowhere (secularly speaking), which he wishes to exchange, as it were, for something he has made himself. There is no reason to doubt our abilities to accomplish such an exchange, just as there is no reason to doubt our present ability to destroy all organic life on earth. The question is only whether we wish to use our new scientific and technical knowledge in this direction, and this question cannot be decided by scientific means; it is a political question of the first order and therefore can hardly be left to the decision of professional scientists or professional politicians.158

We are much closer today to reaching the dark decisions that Hannah Arendt described forty years ago. In June, 1997, The National Bioethics Advisory Committee recommended to President Clinton to continue the ban on federally funded cloning research. Yet a federal law banning federally funded research certainly does not prevent research from taking place, and it should not stop the ethical and legal questions that every individual should be asking. As Arendt wrote, the question is whether we wish to use our new scientific and technical knowledge in this direction, and as she states, this question we must answer, not the scientists, not the politicians. “Whatever” will not suffice here as a thoughtful, critical, and moral examination of the issue. Just how far are we willing to go in the name of science and technology? Why do we fear drawing a line and saying that’s enough—that research in human cloning is going well beyond the limits and is simply wrong? What does this mean in terms of our society, our culture? Are we becoming so desensitized and tolerant to what

158Arendt, pp. 2-3.
is going on in our society that we are willing to dehumanize ourselves completely to science?

Another social issue that also warrants our attention is the possible legalization of physician-assisted suicide. Any type of suicide according to Camus, could never be legitimate since death is never the desired end; we “revolt” against death, and this concept of physician-assisted suicide gives physicians in a sense the right to kill, which certainly goes well beyond the limits and ethics of the medical profession.

Both human cloning and physician-assisted suicide will ultimately give the scientific, medical, and political communities the “supreme” right to decide whose life and what kind of life has more value and relevance over others. This is a terrifying prospect of our very near future, because for all the good that may possibly result from these issues, there will also be abuse, atrocities, and the devastating forms of objectification and depersonalization that go well beyond the limits and are the ultimate betrayals of the human condition.

We live in a highly competitive, fast-paced, technological, consumer driven culture and society that lacks authentic thought and creativity. We are becoming a society not divided by race or religion, but simply in an economic sense, The Haves and The Have Nots. The young adults today do not have some sort of base in which to draw from in order to make moral decisions about our history, the prevailing social, political, and scientific issues, not to mention their own personal lives; there is little desire for an authentic life. We have replaced “laborers” with “high-tech workers” who are not critical thinkers. We claim to be tolerant, yet there is an increasing amount of anger, impatience, and hostility that is directed against each other. We are as a nation in a state of peace, so why is there so much hostility? We may have become use to secluding ourselves, but we are still connected to one another,
we are still responsible for each other. We still need each other. We don’t live in a artificial environment yet. We cannot, as Camus has told us, resign ourselves to nothing.

What all the noted professors, philosophers and writers have in common is a shared awareness that the post-modern generation, and perhaps even the post-modern American society, is in dire need of a moral guide, a moral consciousness. But what was not discussed is a way for the post-modern generation to change their unwillingness to make moral decisions, a way for them to pursue an authentic life and to use their voices to make a difference in our society, our communities and in doing so replace the “silence” and “withdrawal” with thought, creativity, involvement, and action.

Undoubtedly, Albert Camus would not mind being used as a means in respect to educating and enlightening a new generation. In fact, it is probably the ultimate goal of any artist to have his work continuously rediscovered and renewed. As Camus himself said, “Every authentic work of art is a gift offered to the future.” In a recent book review of Olivier Todd’s biography on Camus, *Une vie*, John Wrightman notes that “…for some years after his death [Camus] it remained fashionable to treat him and his works rather dismissively. The tide has now turned…”159 Camus’ life itself is a testimony of what one can accomplish in life. Camus is a man who had no advantages whatsoever, other than his own determination. Against his social and economic status as well the chaos and destruction of the Second World War, Camus made a remarkable life for himself—a life and a philosophy about life that was never compromised by greed and success. And what he did have he gave

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back not only to his generation, but to all generations.

Albert Camus’ art and insight into the human condition is perhaps needed more today than ever before. As an individual his deep integrity, impartiality, and moral honesty are a moral guide and consciousness for us all. Camus spoke to everyone and for everyone. His analysis of the human condition, though not providing concrete, absolute solutions, does provide understanding, comfort, and the courage to revolt; to stand together in solidarity against our common fate and fight against any form of oppression. Camus recognized the value of all human life and believed that not one human life ought to be sacrificed or compromised by any means. The ethic of moderation and limits that emerge from his writings is a guide for our post-modern generation that can be used personally, as well as within the social, political, and economic framework of our post-modern society. Camus has shown us that we have the power and the ability to rise above nothingness and nihilism and create a society that respects the limits of the human condition.

Without a reliable ideological guide whom they can trust, the public appears to have been stranded to find their way through a new world in which consciousness itself has become fragmented, ambiguous, and indeterminate...Perhaps below the surface of today’s political upheavals, realignments and often superficial emotions, may lie a potential political-literary force, a new liberal intelligentsia that is just starting to be tapped.  

Camus’ writings should continue to provoke our thoughts. His voice remains to be the voice of this century and well into the next. “In the coming century, Camus’ clear and passionate voice, a mixture of an intellectual and social vision to change a stagnant community in an

unjust world will surely be heard again.”\textsuperscript{161} Thus, Camus’ spirit and art will continue to speak to us—our “perpetual contemporary.” André Malraux wrote, “The author dead, the work continues; it lives. It cannot progress, but it can be enriched. It could not be modified, but through its relation to new minds it can be renewed...”\textsuperscript{162}

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\item \textsuperscript{161} Brody, p. 132.
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