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ALBERT CAMUS: EXISTENTIALIST AND HUMANIST

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A THESIS

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INTRODUCTION

During the two decades since World War II there has evolved a literary-philosophic movement which has been termed existentialism. Although the "ism" itself is new, its roots lie, admittedly, in the nineteenth century philosophies of Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, but even deeper origins may be seen in the seventeenth century figure, Blaise Pascal, and in the radical restructuring of society begun in the Renaissance. It is a mistake to think of the phenomenon of existentialism as merely a product of twentieth century history; on the contrary, it is a convergence of the many streams of thought which have centered on man and his human condition for the past several centuries. Existentialism is not a view of human existence which has emerged solely because of twentieth century historical events, but rather because, with this century, it has realized an identity with foundations in the past. It is a movement which has touched and probed into nearly every area of man's existence, viewing him both as a solitary creature and as a member of a vast society, but always holding the individual existence of man as its central point of reference. Joseph C. Mihalich has characterized existentialism in these words:
The term existentialism describes any philosophy that centers its analysis on the personal reality of the individual enmeshed in the vicissitudes of his own existence. Existentialism's frame of reference is the individual's own frame of reference in meeting reality—his own fears and hopes and encounters and crises. It is a philosophy of subjectivity, one that emphasizes the subject consciousness as opposed to the objective reality in which the subject finds itself. . . . Existentialism exalts the individual by concentrating on the profundity and potentialities of human actions. For the existentialist, truth and being are never vague transcendental notions to be predicated analogously of different things. They are always my truth and my being as I experience them and give them meaning.1

Because the very purpose of existentialism is an examination of the roots of the existence of contemporary man in the face of an impersonal, bureaucratized society, two world wars, and possible mass annihilation, it does not posit any closed set of beliefs concerning man, nor can it be placed in a closed system. Existentialism is, on the contrary, opposed to abstract, thoroughly systematic, philosophy, as well as to the empiricism of modern history and the mechanical civilization which it creates. Existentialism sees in abstract philosophy and the empirical method the loss of the

individual in his essential integrity as a human being. In its refusal of abstraction and system, it appears to be an extremely diffuse and seemingly endless series of statements and counter-statements encompassing both theism and atheism. Existentialism, further, because of its rejection of the traditional views of man and the world, is often characterized as a negatively oriented approach to man in his existence, with nothing to offer except ultimate nihilism. However, this is not a complete picture of existentialism, for it does offer a positive position. Although it exposes the negative facets of man and his life in the world, it also opens up a new dimension of man's view of himself, for it insists upon a whole interpretation of man in his relations to the world, to others, to himself.

Among those authors and philosophers who have come to the forefront during the last twenty-five years as spokesmen for this intellectual movement are two of its leading French exponents, both literary men: Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. It is Sartre who was first known to the American audience and gave, perhaps, the greatest impetus to the examination of existentialism in the United States. Camus and Sartre,
close comrades during the French Resistance, began from similar positions, sharing the same views on the meaninglessness of the universe and the absurdity of man's place in it. However, Sartre became enmeshed in the negative aspects of this view of man, believing that there is no unalterable structure of values prior to man's own existence. He found the meaning of existence to be only the liberty to say "No." Thus, for Sartre, man's freedom is essentially negative and, in reality, becomes freedom for nothing. Camus, on the contrary, moved away from Sartre's position, developing a different and distinctly more positive concept of man, absurdity, and freedom.

Though dead since 1960, Camus has increasingly been felt as a major influence both in Europe and the United States. A man of considerable moral strength, he began in complete acceptance of a sensual life. In a personal confrontation with the fact of inevitable death, in the form of tuberculosis when he was only twenty, this reliance on the sensual gave way to nihilism. From a thoroughly negative view of man in the world, Camus moved, primarily because of the effects on him of his work in the French Resistance during World War II, to a belief in human solidarity. Reject-
ing all _a priori_ values, he developed in a completely existential manner, relying on personal experience and involvement, to a position at the end of his life which included an awareness of the past and a wholeness of vision which permitted him to assert the positive value of a human community. The evolution of a new humanist is evident in the progression of his novels, plays, and literary-philosophic essays.

In order to grasp clearly the central problems of the existentialists and Camus' place in the movement, we propose to begin by looking back into the history of Western man at some of the developments in his relation to God and in his views of himself which have brought him to his present condition in the twentieth century. We will discuss, generally, modern existentialism, with especial concentration upon some of the immediate background and leading figures in this movement. Finally, we will show the place of Albert Camus in this general framework and, through a study of his works, attempt to show his significance for contemporary man.
CHAPTER I

DEVELOPING VIEWS OF MAN: BACKGROUNDS OF EXISTENTIALISM

The Middle Ages and the Renaissance

In the Middle Ages religion, society, and man himself were governed by a strict and unified hierarchy which first began to change with the rise of the Renaissance. For all aspects of life in the Middle Ages, the hierarchy began with God at the highest point, and it was His power and majesty that radiated outwards and shone down through a perfect structure, the universe. It was believed that there was an interrelationship between everything both spiritual and material. Since God revealed Himself through His word and His works, and because He maintained an active and intimate connection with His works, there was an unlimited network of correspondences which bound all things, physical and spiritual, earthly and human, closely together. This

resulted in a divine unity in all creation, in the macrocosm and the microcosm, and in a divine order in both the spiritual and physical worlds.

Medieval society was a rigid caste system which consisted of three groups each of whom was assigned a specific function in society and was judged according to how well this function was carried out. The first of these groups, the Lords Temporal, consisted of the nobility whose chief task was to govern and to preserve and defend the peace. The Lords Spiritual, the clergy, were responsible for the spiritual and religious welfare of the people, while to the Commoners, the largest group in society, fell the task of supporting the society. Within this class system there was virtually no mobility or individuality; one lived according to his class, not himself. However, in its strictness, this system became a point of earthly orientation. It was not until the development of towns and the growth of the middle class, in general the rise of capitalism, that this tightly structured view of society began to recede. The demise of feudalism as the sole type of life and development of towns provided for the wealth of the new

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and hopefully more affluent middle class. During the Renaissance this new class received further impetus from the Renaissance's greater emphasis on reason and the individual with a renewed belief in man's possibilities and his ability to rise above his initial station. As the strict class society had been a source of orientation, so was feudalism. But with the decline of feudalism man's identification with the land was lost, for where feudalism is concrete, capitalism is abstract.

The concept of hierarchy in the Middle Ages also dominated the view of man, for in man reason ruled the emotions which in turn ruled the body, and any change in this balance resulted in a state of "up-so-down."\(^4\) Since this life was viewed as a preparation for eternity, if the emotions or flesh were to become dominant, man is seen to have turned from the eternal to the temporal and is not, therefore, acting as he should. Although the concept of an all-pervasive order which reflects God was continued in the Renaissance in the form of the Great Chain of Being, there was a shift from the concentration on "other-worldliness" to a concentration

on, and a curiosity about, this world and man's possibilities in it.

The Church during the Middle Ages was undoubtedly the major force and influence in the lives of the people, for it was an institution, a way of life, a means of instruction, and a source of authority. All scholarship and science lay in the hands of the Church, and this knowledge was static until, with the curiosity of the Renaissance about this world, came the questioning of authority and an awakened belief in the faith of man to attain fresh truth. Under the stimulus of the rediscovered Greek manuscripts, the Renaissance thinkers, artists, and scientists left the medieval contemplation of the other world and began a fervent scrutiny of this one. With the new spirit of freedom came an unwillingness to accept the unsupported statements of ancient authorities. During the Middle Ages the Church had, of course, leaned in the direction of acceptance of authority: the Bible is the inspired word of God; the Church Fathers are guides to Christian life; the Church is infallible as a guide to salvation. But

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the Renaissance, in its awakened intellectual fervor, began to examine this authority and put a new emphasis on man's ability to reason and discover for himself.

Out of this newly established curiosity about the world, Humanism grew, turning from the scholasticism of the Middle Ages and looking at man in his position in this world rather than only as a candidate for immortality. The thesis of Humanism was that in this world man's correct role was action rather than contemplation. The Humanists wished to reform education to rid man of the binding nature of scholasticism and to realize his individual human capabilities. Wealth and power need not be evil and may, even, achieve good, since the world itself is not wholly a place of woe. Instead of renouncing all for the sake of salvation, it is necessary to use the mind and will, temporal goods, and the world itself, positively, to achieve good. The stress of the Humanists on the positive attributes of man and the world was again a retreat from the "other-worldliness" of the Middle Ages.

The curiosity about the world also provided the

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6 Ibid., pp. 53-54.
basis for scepticism which led natural reason to a questioning of supernatural faith. While the Christian philosophy of the Middle Ages united man, the world, and God, and reason and faith supplemented each other, the rebellious intellect of the Renaissance saw a discrepancy between reason and faith. In literature, Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus reflects the idea of the lawless individual and over-reacher who believes in the limitless possibilities of man.

With the emphasis on this world, the reason of man, and the questioning of authority, the Church came under close scrutiny, for, as an institution maintained by humans, it had allowed abuses to creep in, and reform became inevitable. Despite its unique foundation as both a temporal and spiritual power, it too became an object of scholarly and critical study. It was Martin Luther who first broke with the Church, declaring that through faith and faith alone lay the way to salvation. Private judgment, not the pronouncements and dogmas of the Church, became the authority for

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8Barrett, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-29.
belief; man must learn God's will and find the way to heaven through his own efforts. In religious matters Protestantism placed all the weight of its emphasis on the irrational data of faith as against the theological structure of the Church and in doing so first showed the division between faith and reason. Man was forced to come face to face with God and the severe demands of his faith, since all the mediating rites and dogmas of the Church had been stripped away. Whereas the Church in the Middle Ages had been a kind of psychic asylum for man, he was now forced to cope with an entirely personal and individualistic relationship with God. In this relationship, the demands of faith were such that the subservience of reason to faith was necessary in matters of religion.

**The Seventeenth Century**

Whereas the Renaissance had lessened the power and influence of the Church in its position as the uncontested center of man's existence, and the Reformation had placed the entire burden of religion on faith, it was the scientific method of the seventeenth century
which widened even further the breach between reason and faith. In the Renaissance all life was still founded on the concepts of uniformity, hierarchy, and relation through the analogical belief in order in the universe, in man, and in society, each corresponding to the other. But the development of modern science began to displace these concepts and offered instead a world view based on multiplicity.\(^9\) Such things as Galileo's confirmation of Copernicus' theory that not all planets revolve around the earth destroyed the symmetry of the universe and made possible a belief in a plurality of worlds. Throughout the seventeenth century, the idea of a morally imbued universe gradually disappeared, and God became a remote force increasingly disassociated from daily life. Although the new science allowed the scientist to understand the world better, this, like the rise of Protestantism, deprived the ordinary man of a structure or framework for his life. In England, Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes contributed to this growing dichotomy.\(^10\) Bacon, perhaps the major


\(^{10}\)Ibid., pp. 40-41.
founder of modern materialism, made a sharp differentiation between religious and scientific knowledge with his belief in empirical epistemology. Bacon declared that if the senses and the empirical method lead to real knowledge, religion falls into the category of the unreal. The "truth" is then something objective and impersonal and a man's private insights and feelings became secondary. The universe must conform to what man's experience and judgments seem to prove. Hobbes, rejecting the Christian conception of the universe, made the materialism and utilitarianism of Bacon into a mechanistic system begun by a remote first cause. His view of society, man, and matter was uniformly atomic: every process or object can be reduced to its component parts. He believed that the universe made rational sense and moved according to fixed scientific and mathematical laws. He further rejected the Christian concept of man as a free and responsible moral agent, believing that the baser elements in man will dominate him unless he is subject to authority in the form of the king. In doing this he laid the foundations for a natural religion.

However, it is Renée Descartes in France who provides the material for the final break with religion while
not suffering the loss of faith himself. Descartes wanted his philosophy to establish a basis for the then "new science" of mathematics, and, therefore, found the first step to be the establishment of the objectivity of the world of physical things. In his Discourse on Method, 1637, he created the Cartesian dualism, thus emphasizing the dichotomy of matter and spirit in the human person. However, neither dualism nor systematic doubt removed him from the Church because he left God outside the world and the soul inside man. In his systematic doubt, after the establishment of the Cogito, the "I think" becomes proof for the existence of God. And it is only this God who can resolve the breach between man's physical and spiritual nature.

Blaise Pascal, a contemporary countryman, saw the implications of the discoveries of science and the work of Descartes: the world had become desolate and desiccated. He saw the world as a place in which man was becoming homeless, and faith itself was becoming

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12 Ibid., pp. 111-16.
a more desperate gamble and daring leap. Although he realized that reason alone cannot provide proof for God or religion, he did not oppose reason to faith, but rather saw God as the synthesis of the contradictions in man. Whereas in the Middle Ages reason was a guide to faith, and faith took over where reason left off, Pascal saw that in his time the struggle between faith and reason was giving rise to a more profound psychological discord within man's being. Believing that man is a creature of contradictions such as pure logic could never grasp, he outlined a sphere of intuition over logic and set the limits to human reason, for reason cannot reach the heart of the religious experience.

Although he found no value in rational theology, two experiences in particular precipitated and set in motion his approach to God on a personal level. The first of these was a miraculous recovery from an illness which so impressed him that he dedicated his life to religion. He also underwent an equally powerful, but negative, experience. When driving along the Seine one day, he was nearly hurled from his carriage to his death. The very suddenness of this brought into relief another revelation: nothingness is a gulf into which
one may tumble at any time. The idea of nothingness as a void had not up to this time played a part in Western philosophy. Pascal's study of man in the world reflected his interior experiences, for he had, as T. S. Eliot said, "the mind to conceive, and the sensibility to feel, the disorder, and futility, the meaninglessness, the mystery of life and suffering."\(^{13}\)

In his examination of the human condition Pascal saw what Descartes did not: faith masquerading as reason cannot give a satisfactory account of the position of man in the universe. Pascal sums this up in his phrase, "The heart has its reasons which reason does not know."\(^{14}\)

Literature in the seventeenth century reflected some of these disburbing influences. John Donne was a mirror that showed the conflicts between divine and human rights, and tradition and the new science.\(^{15}\)

Though he welcomed the changes which were occurring,


he was deeply disturbed and felt a need for order which he sought in the metaphysical relationships of his art. The perplexity of his world is seen in these lines from *An Anatomie of the World: The First Anniversary*:

And the new Philosophy calls all in doubt,  
The Element of fire is quite put out;  
The Sun is lost, and th'earth, and no mans wit  
Can well direct him where to looke for it.  
And freely men confesse that this world's spent,  
When in the Planets, and the Firmament  
They seeke so many new; then see that this  
Is crumbled out againe to his Atomies.  
'Tis all in pieces, all cohaerence gone;  
All just supply, and all Relation:

In the poetry of Donne, the need for a readjustment of man's traditional relationship with God and the strain effected by the dichotomies resulting from science are felt rather than stated. George Herbert, in *The Collar*, also reveals the tensions wrought by the conflicts in science and religion of his time. He questions, doubts, and protests, although he eventually finds solace in God:

Shall I ever sigh and pine?  
My lines and life are free, free as the road,  
Loose as the wind, as large as store.  
Shall I be still in suit?  
Have I no harvest but a thorn

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To let me blood, and not restore
What I have lost with cordial fruit?

But as I raved and grew more fierce and wild
At every word,
Methought I heard one calling, "Child!"
And I replied, "My Lord."17

The Eighteenth Century

The consciousness of disorder in the seventeenth century, exemplified by Donne and Herbert, gradually grew into the early eighteenth century assurance of having found order through the belief in universal reason and a systematic universe, expanding upon the ideas of Hobbes and Bacon.18 In literature this new order is reflected in the style of Alexander Pope particularly. The literary principles which he utilized implied a sense of ordered finality and also a rational belief in both literary tradition and known facts of life and the world. Pope's closed couplets with their balanced and antithetical lines, provided a perfect form for either objective satire or the presentation of established truth, but not for any display of inward doubt or


struggle. Pope's language, too, reflects the central poetic principle of decorum which held that the material of poetry should be harmonious uniting of theme, matter, and manner of the universal aspects of life; thus his language is largely made of abstract terms which describe the typical rather than the particular. The prevalent reliance on reason and decorum is also evident in literature in the wit of William Congreve's play, *The Way of the World*. In this play there is nothing sentimental or romantic although it is an examination of different kinds of love. The love between Mirabell and Millament, although a sincere love, is treated in a cool, rational manner.

The belief in order and reason is also reflected in religion in the rise of Deism. Science, in turning from the medieval interest in the metaphysical question, Why? to its interest in How? felt that the entire universe was governed by natural law which it was the province of reason to discover. This concept, when formulated in the religion of Deism, made God an

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19 Ibid., p. 54.
impersonal "clockmaker" who had to conform to the laws which He had already established, and these laws could be found only through reason. Although Deism attempted to reconcile Christianity with rationalism, it alienated God from the lives of men and made Him a force to which men could not pray and from whom they could not expect forgiveness.

However, during this period of the exaltation of reason, came Immanuel Kant who, as the culmination of the Enlightenment, brought reason to its limits and there separated pure and practical reason, showing that the transcendant ideals of the traditionally Christian civilization could not be known by reason. He believed that existence cannot be represented in a concept; reason, to the extent that it attempted to be scientific, had to exclude all references to the ultimate guides by which men had lived ethically and spiritually. In experiencing a fateful, but for him necessary, split between reason and dogma, Kant pointed out that the traditional proofs for the existence of God really

rest on an unconscious faith. He believed that in his inner consciousness man touched a reality more absolute than anything in science.

In answer to Kant came George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, who, believing that Kant had totally separated man into two parts, sought to restore wholeness to man through the imperialism of reason based on Idealism. Hegel's Idealism was related to the Platonic beliefs of Essence and Idea and Platonic rationalism; for Hegel, reason became all-inclusive power, for it is the only power which grasps reality by concepts and intellectual ideas. He accepted as fundamental that reality is a complete systematic unity; his Idealism was not a search for unity, but an acknowledgment of it as an ultimate implication of thought. For Hegel, the ideal of reason must be inevitably a complete system, and this systematic Whole of thought was identified with reality: "The real is rational; the rational is the real." In Philosophy of History, Hegel

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21Ibid., p. 98.
22Ibid., pp. 158-59.
23Ibid., p. 74.
explains a part of his Idealism:

Reason . . . is Substance, as well as Infinite Power; its own Infinite Material underlying all the natural and spiritual life which it originates, as also the Infinite Form—that which sets this Material in motion. On the one hand, Reason is the substance of the Universe; viz., that by which and in which all reality has its being and subsistence. On the other hand, it is the Infinite Energy of the Universe; since Reason is not so powerless as to be incapable of producing anything but a mere ideal, a mere intention—having its place outside reality, nobody knows where; something separate and abstract, in the heads of certain human beings. It is the infinite complex of things, their entire Essence and Truth. . . . "Idea" or "Reason" is the True, the Eternal, the absolutely powerful essence;24

His "absolute idealism" holds that the universe is and always has been in a continuous process of evolving. Both mind and matter have always existed, but mind, interacting with matter, has evolved spirit, and this process will continue to evolve a better universe. But here essence absorbs existence, and Hegel ignores the concrete individual in the fearful finitude of his personal existence.

The Nineteenth Century

The importance of Hegel's thought is given even further impetus by the fact that his mind was looking, so to speak, two ways: his life spanned two great eras. The result was the famous Hegelian synthesis, or system, in which he attempted to restore an integrity to what he saw as a fragmentation of man. However, Soren Kierkegaard rejects Hegel on the basis of his belief that human existence cannot be totally enclosed in any abstract system.25 Whereas Hegel has a place for everything in his system and makes the Ideal or abstract concept of more value than concrete experience, Kierkegaard states that to exist as an individual is to change, develop, and stand open to the future, whereas a system by its very nature is closed, static, and complete. For Kierkegaard a system substituted abstract concepts for a living, concrete reality: one's own existence is not a matter of speculation but rather is a matter in which one is personally and passionately involved. Man, for Kierkegaard, comes to grips with Self not in the detachment of thought but in the involvement and pathos of choice, the either/or decision.26

26Ibid., p. 155.
Kierkegaard was primarily concerned not only with what it means to be an individual, but with what it means for an individual to be a Christian. The Christian must be a personal thinker because Christianity is not a doctrine to be studied but a life to be led. The truth of religion is one which must penetrate the whole man, the entire personal existence, and must be renewed, thought, struggled with, every day. This kind of truth is not intellectual, but of the whole man, since the central belief of Christianity, the God-Man, is paradoxical to reason.

From this dictum, Kierkegaard derives his belief in the "leap of faith." His belief in the individuality of existence is evident on the religious level of existence where in "fear and trembling" the individual is required to break the universal ethical norms if so called upon by his faith.²⁷ Kierkegaard agrees with Kant that each individual touches reality inwardly in moments of moral decision rather than in detached thought, but, unlike Kant, he believes that all values are rooted, not in the nature of man, but in historical Christianity, and that this religion is now on trial.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 166-68.
Friedrich Nietzsche, like Kierkegaard, attacks Kant on the basis that values cannot be kept alive by reflection on the postulates of practical reason, but unlike Kierkegaard, he denies Christianity and God as old prejudices. He says that the development of reason along the lines of science has brought man to the point where science rules out transcendent ideals and that Christianity should be disregarded. He believes that Christianity no longer rules the total life of man as it did in earlier ages of faith. Nietzsche proclaims the death of God; henceforth, man is God. He believed that abolishing the transcendent world which had previously been man's refuge would not solve problems, as the rationalists thought, but would throw a light on the desperate condition of man. When God is dead, man is left alone in a universe without purpose, and man must create his own values. Man is now fully and dreadfully responsible, to himself and for himself. The natural sciences can only be tools man uses in the service of his own values because as soon as he asks what he means, what the world means, and in seeking to create meaning for himself, he steps beyond

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28Ibid., pp. 203-04.
the world of natural objects. Nietzsche insisted that man is an evaluating animal and can only exist by reflecting moral values by which he lives.

Though the nineteenth century, except for the interlude of the Romantics, appeared to follow the thought patterns of the eighteenth century and continue the ideas expressed particularly by Hegel and Nietzsche, there was an undercurrent of doubt present. The Romantic movement which swept across Europe at the outset of the nineteenth century was an attempt to restore the value of the individual whether it took the form of protest against the universal laws of classicism; or against reason, emphasizing, rather, the value of feeling; or against the enroachments of an industrial society. William Blake may be seen as an early poet protesting the industrial revolution. His poems are filled with images of wheels, furnaces, and Satanic mills. Blake was against the developing industrialism

29 Ibid., p. 123.
30 Ibid., p. 124.
because of its material aspect, which was to him an external manifestation of the abstract and mechanical mind which is the denial of the fullness of man. His poem London is a condemnation of the man-made problems of the time:

In every cry of every man,
In every infant's cry of fear,
In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forged manacles I hear.31

Whereas Blake reflects the external problem which concerned the Romantics, S. T. Coleridge was experiencing internally the turmoil of the period. This is evident especially in Dejection: An Ode, where he laments the failing powers of his imagination and consequently his lack of poetic ability. Coleridge in this poem finds himself separated from nature and suffers, in a completely existential fashion, anxiety itself.32 In this completely individualistic anxiety, he reveals a key problem with German Idealism in its absorption of existence into essence, for although he had studied it in depth, it could tell him nothing about this experience and his melancholy anxiety.

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32Barrett, op. cit., p. 127.
Coleridge could not define or attach his feelings to any object or person:

A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,
A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,
Which finds no natural outlet, no relief,
In word, or sigh, or tear—33

Coleridge the poet saw and knew before Coleridge the philosopher.

However, the Romantics were not merely escaping from something, but rather to a future of human possibilities. The Romantic melancholy suffered by Blake and Coleridge was not simply a personal neurosis, but, as William Barrett describes it:

rather it was a revelation to modern man of the human condition into which he had fallen, a condition that is nothing less than the estrangement from Being itself. Once having lost contact with the natural world, however, man catches a dizzy and intoxicating glimpse of human possibilities, of what man might become, in comparison with which the old myths of the magician and the sorcerer seem pallid indeed.34

An attempt to reintegrate man may be seen in the Romantic metaphor of the tree which stresses the interdependence and interrelatedness of all men and objects. That the


34 Barrett, op. cit., p. 133.
Romantic poets looked to a future of human possibility is also evident in the hieratic notion of the poet and the belief in the need for, and possibility of, human perfection.

Opposed to the Romantic emphasis on the moral betterment and progress of man is Thomas Babington Macaulay, the Victorian spokesman for the industrial revolution and material progress. In *Southey's Colloquies* he demonstrates the general Victorian view of progress as an upwardly inclined plane for, following the rationalism of the eighteenth century, Macaulay believes that the intellect has a natural tendency toward truth and, therefore, man and society naturally improve. He further displays his alignment with eighteenth century attitudes and opposition to the Romantics in his essay on Milton, in which he emphasizes the value of the works of Bacon because of his influence on the doctrine of Utilitarianism.

With the belief in material progress which will bring man to the millenium, the continued development

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of science in the nineteenth century too appeared to further man's possibilities. However, in actuality, science stripped nature of its human forms and exposed it as a vast force, neutral at best, and often alien to man's purposes. 36 As a result of scientific discoveries and principles, science and religion became even more embattled. Alfred Lord Tennyson in In Memoriam expresses the scientific and religious questions which were overshadowed by the general optimistic view of progress and science. He was familiar with Lyell's Principles of Geology and Chambers' Vestiges of Creation, both of which destroyed the affinity between man and nature. 37 Both Lyell and Chambers viewed the world as a product of natural causation, a principle which Charles Darwin later extended to include animals and man, believing that nature was an aggregate of action and the product of many natural laws. 38 Tennyson was also familiar with the efforts of Christology to

36 Barrett, op. cit., p. 37.


38 Ibid., p. 367.
prove that Christ was not divine, and the work of the Higher Criticism which said that the Bible is not divinely inspired and should be examined as any other book. In *In Memoriam* Tennyson utilizes these ideas and their effects in dealing with the central problem of man, "Who am I?" "Where am I going?" and unites science and faith in an evolutionary process, with God at its term, leading to a "crowning race" where animality will be lost and intellectual qualities will be instinctive. His questioning becomes more explicit in sections LV and LVI where belief in a divine plan and human immortality meets the fact of nature's indifference to individual survival.  

Are God and Nature then at strife
That Nature lends such evil dreams?
So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life.

In the closing stanzas, Tennyson places man in the midst of continuing geological change in accordance with the evidence of his own conscience.

Matthew Arnold, too, examines the scientific-religious problems of his day, but he does not find any


answer as completely as Tennyson. *Dover Beach* reflects the conflicts of the period and is prophetic of the twentieth century:

... the world which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.  

In *Culture and Anarchy* Arnold offers a pertinent warning to "see that our light be not our darkness."  

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*The Twentieth Century*

With the advent of the twentieth century, the underlying doubts and uneasiness of the previous century exploded into a violent reality which has culminated in the existential crisis today. With the beginning of this century, the power of generally accepted values to evoke an instinctual
respect began to decline. The nineteenth century absolutes such as Progress, Liberty, and Science began increasingly to appear as over-simplified terms applied to extremely complex realities. There was a growth of awareness of the discrepancy between the theory of these ideals and their application in practice. A pivotal date in Western history is August, 1914, for it precipitated the events which were to further enfeeble the foundations of the optimistic human world. Prior to this date, from 1870 to 1914, there was a belief in the continuance of material progress and stability, for the principal countries of Europe had been unified, there was a feeling of prosperity, and bourgeois self-satisfaction. World War I revealed that the apparent stability, security, and material progress of society was not a permanent, invincible future. The social and political shelter of European man was destroyed, and man saw that his rational philosophy could no longer satisfactorily answer the question, "What is man?" The disillusionment produced by

\[^{43}\text{John Cruickshank, Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 5.}\]

\[^{44}\text{Barrett, op. cit., p. 34.}\]
World War I is reflected in Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms:*

I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometimes standing in the rain . . . and had read them, on proclamations . . . now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago. . . . There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of the places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.\(^4^5\)

Here is evidence of the destruction of meaning in traditional absolutes. Hemingway gives a concrete, dramatic expression of distrust of all values outside of those which the individual creates for his own survival.

In the period between the two World Wars the failure of the nineteenth century ethic became more intensified. Man found himself in a bureaucratized, impersonal mass society which required only that he perform

\(^{45\text{Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), pp. 184-85.}}\)
his own particular social function to the degree that he becomes identified with this function. This kind of alienation is exemplified by Zero in Elmer Rice's play, *The Adding Machine*. Zero's twenty-five years as a department store bookkeeper have destroyed his humanity, making him incapable of any deeply felt, freely expressed emotions. This kind of isolation is sometimes offered as the reason for man's inhumanity to man, the basis of social injustice. The result of this social alienation is self-alienation because the rest of man's being, allowed to subsist as best it could, usually falls below the level of consciousness and is forgotten. Man further found himself alienated from God, living in a world spiritually barren, as the impact of Nietzsche and nihilism was felt. Hemingway demonstrates this loss in one of his short stories, "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place":

Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name thy kingdom nada thy will be nada in nada as it is in nada. Give us this nada our daily nada and nada us our nada as we nada our nadas and nada us not into nada but deliver us from nada; pues nada. Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee."

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Into this period of time when modern man seems to have become a helpless victim before the creations of his own hands, overwhelmed by this realization, and thrown back upon himself, Albert Camus was born. Camus has placed himself historically in this century in this quotation from his Nobel Prize acceptance speech:

Those men born at the beginning of World War I who had reached the age of twenty just as Hitler was seizing power and the first revolutionary trials were taking place, who then had to complete their education by facing up to the war in Spain, World War II, and regime of concentration camps, a Europe of torture and prisons, must today bring their children and their works to maturity in a world threatened with nuclear destruction. No one, I suppose, can expect them to be optimistic.\(^{48}\)

This quotation points out that nihilism has been the great temptation of the age, but it also shows that only understanding nihilism can help to overcome it. Camus never ceased to struggle in his attempt at some solution. The direction this search took, and the resultant view which was developing, until the very moment of his death, we might term his "positive humanism."

Camus has always been associated with existentialism and with philosophy, although he has never ceased to deny that he was a philosopher and that he was not in total agreement with the basic tenents of existentialism. Existentialism, as previously stated, like Romanticism, cannot be sharply defined. It can at best be characterized as a body of attitudes and concerns which center about man as an individual. Existentialism is not a strict school because its attention is not focused on rational concepts which are to be systematically developed, but rather on the immediate personal experience reflecting a world greatly changed in the past three centuries. Whereas essentialism is philosophy dominated by intellectual devotion to abstraction or essences, existentialism has as its primary concentration existence, and considers philosophy to be man's attempt to discover the ultimate meaning and value of existence. The existential attitude combines a thorough concern for the individual with total honesty in a description of the individual, his universe, and the history which shapes him.

The first of two fundamental premises of existentialism, particularly as regards the atheistic emphasis, is that man exists without knowing why; the formula for this is existence without essence. The second of these is that because existence is without essence; both man and the universe share in a fundamental incoherence which prevents the formation or creation of any kind of broadly based ethic or value. Camus does not illustrate these tenets for the reason that he does not find existence to be without essence, which means that his thought rests on a certain conception of human nature. After his work in the Resistance, Camus came to believe that the essence of man is his bond with all other men: human solidarity. Since Camus comes to believe that there is a human nature and, therefore, a possibility of meaning and value in existence, these tenets are incompatible with his thought. However, the mere fact of a human nature does not dismiss the possibility that one's being may yet be uncertain and in question, although it does mean that this questioning is of a different kind.

While Camus' thought may appear to move in the same direction as Jean-Paul Sartre, at its base it reveals a

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50 Ibid., p. xv.
substantially different character. Camus' position can here be made clearer by comparing him to Jean-Paul Sartre, who is perhaps to most Americans the leading existential spokesman. Camus and Sartre came into open conflict in 1951 with the publication of The Rebel by Camus, a book in which he attempts to present his reasons for the position which he came to hold on the political ideologies of the present time, particularly communism. When The Rebel appeared, it was immediately attacked in Les Temps Modernes, a magazine edited by Sartre, and the famous discussion between Camus and Sartre followed. Although Camus had said that this book was intended as a study of the ideological aspects of revolution, the criticism of Les Temps Modernes was based upon the assumption that it was meant to be a political manifesto. The quarrel which resulted showed that the disagreement between Camus and Sartre was not, however, merely a question of different political parties, but also reflected subtle moral and philosophical issues.

Both men maintained an atheistic position, rejecting moral and metaphysical absolutes, finding value in

experience and confidence in the ability of man to fulfill himself without supernatural help. But they hold separate views of the two basic points of existentialism. Sartre does not posit the concept of a stable, unified human nature, or any permanent and universal values in the world. For Sartre man is the sum of his acts. But for Camus there is "oneness" in nature, for he finds the essence of man to be his bond with other men. Whereas Sartre asserts that values do not pre-exist but are invented by man as he acts and chooses in life, Camus does find values which exist independently of the individual. These values, of course, are not absolute in the traditional sense, but their pre-existence in some form is essential to Camus' conception of what it means to be a human being.

Camus deals also with many of the secondary traits of existential thought. He is, first of all, opposed to the rationalism of classical philosophy which seeks universal and lasting absolutes, believing that truth is found through the personal involvement with other men. He also maintains that the individual is always in a state of becoming and constantly involved in

52 Cruickshank, _op. cit._, p. 97.
choice, risk, and thus freedom. Further, he is deeply concerned with the significance of death, its inevitability and finality.

In turning to Camus' works, the major question which is found in all of them is "What meaning can be salvaged from the world?" However, there is always a positive quality to his answers. Camus himself has said:

We are at the extremities now. At the end of this tunnel of darkness, however, there is inevitably a light, which we already divine and for which we have only to fight to ensure its coming. All of us, among the ruins, are preparing a renaissance beyond the limits of nihilism."

In order to understand fully Camus' development, it is perhaps best to give a brief overview of the progress of his thought. In 1936-37 he wrote his first essays, The Other Side of the Coin and Nuptials, which express a sensual happiness tempered by a note of tragedy and awareness of discord between the world and man. In the midst of pagan delight, there is already a

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hint of anguish and absurdity in his work. *Caligula*, a play written in 1938, reflects the experience of personal tragedy for, suffering from tuberculosis, Camus had faced the reality and finality of death and the absurdity of the human condition. Here Caligula, a Roman emperor, sees death and discovers absurdity. Yet within the play there is a revolt against the absurd, although there is not a constructive answer to it. In *The Misunderstanding, The Stranger*, and *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus is primarily concerned with the crisis of the individual; as Bernard C. Murchland, C.S.C. says, "with man as a lonely exile struggling for happiness and meaningfulness beneath the immense and senseless burden of existence." In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, the first of his philosophic essays, he examines what he calls the "absurd walls" which surround human life. The elements of the absurd as Camus saw it at that time were, according to Murchland, "infirmity, ignorance, irrationality, nostalgia, the impossibility of distinguishing the true from the false, our radical inability to know ourselves or others, the implacable mystery of the world."

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54 Ibid., p. 310.
55 Ibid., p. 311.
However there is a positive note even here, for Camus states that, in the face of the absurd, it would be an act of cowardice to take one's own life. In *Letters to a German Friend*, written between 1942-44, Camus reaches a new level of development, for he comes to believe that the world must have, if not a superior meaning, at least some meaning. His vision now includes the suffering and unhappiness of all mankind. In *The Plague*, 1947, and *The Rebel*, 1951, this sense of universality continues to expand. In *The Plague* Camus introduces a moral dimension in the theme of moral evil, the evil that men inflict upon each other. He here realizes that the root of absurdity is within man; in other words, it is not the "objective world" that creates absurdity but rather man himself in his denial of others. *The Rebel*, his second philosophic essay, transcends absurdity through postulating a human nature that must be respected, a human brotherhood which must be defended. And further, Murchland says, "it creates a value rooted in the idea of moderation and the respect for limits." In *The Fall*, 1956, Camus again reaches a new level, for he here stresses the values of penance and expiation.

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56 Ibid., p. 312.
Camus' work as a whole represents the efforts of a creative soul confronting himself and his times to bring the actual human situation as much as is possible into expression and understanding. He has taken his own experience and tried to translate it into a statement of some universal pertinence. Camus set for himself the task of creating a climate of values which would provide a refuge from meaninglessness in his journey from absurdity to a high sense of purpose.
CHAPTER II

THE ABSURD: ITS THOUGHT AND EXPRESSION

Early Essays

The primary concern of Albert Camus, from his first literary efforts in Algeria, has been the relation between man and his world. Throughout his life he maintained a fidelity to the experience of modern man at grips with a universe and a history which he cannot fully understand. While he always continues to examine man's existence in the world and the significance of death, there are two distinct stages in his development, the second of which evolves directly from the first. These two periods may be distinguished by their area of concentration. In the years from 1936 to 1944, Camus was concerned with an exploration of the absurd; after 1944 he was devoted to developing a solution to the problems raised by the absurd. The absurd, as seen by Camus in his early development, involves a contradiction between reality itself and a given state of affairs, between intention and possibility.¹ The absurd is not a fact which can be clearly

¹Hanna, op. cit., p. 23.
defined but is rather a comparison between two things, the confrontation between human demands and the world as it exists which gives evidence of their divorce. The absurd to Camus is as John Cruickshank states, "the absence of correspondence or congruity between the mind's need for coherence and the incoherence of the world which the mind experiences."² In his writing Camus moves from a predominantly physical and emotional to a predominantly intellectual response to existence and the absurd. Beginning with a violent reaction to the absurd, in his later works he moves to the task of thinking the absurd situation through to its conclusions.

In Nuptials and The Other Side of the Coin, both pictures of the Mediterranean world, Camus first gives expression to his realization of death as the final and inescapable destiny of all men, and the divorce between nature and man. He gives this a lyrical, emotional description and solution, not a logical or systematic one.³ In Nuptials Camus writes of the

²Cruickshank, op. cit., p. 41.
³Ibid.
images and feelings evoked within him by the villages of Tipasa, Djémila, Algiers, and the cities of Northern Italy. In his description of Tipasa, Camus pictures a young man seeing the ruins of a once great empire which is covered and reabsorbed into the land. Here the images of stones, the works of man's hands, being reclaimed by the earth, becoming dust, are a symbol of the finiteness of man and the remorselessness of the world. At Djémila the young man is battered by a hot wind until he loses his individuality, becoming a part of the wind's roar. Here Camus is fascinated by the overpowering force of nature, the sound of the wind which is not friendly or familiar, but rather strange, inhuman, and conquering. The individual becomes aware of his own helplessness and mortality as a certainty which thwarts his hopes to endure and find a lasting security. But with the awareness of death there wells up a refusal, a revolt which does not allow despair of life. It rather refocuses the consciousness of the value of the present moment. It does, however, call into question all the values and virtues which make one

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4 Hanna, op. cit., p. 4.
5 Ibid.
live for the unknown world of the future. The discovery of death is simultaneous with the loss of hope and all the traditional values based on hope. In Algiers it is the people rather than the city which interests Camus, for these people are totally oriented to this life and this world. Because they are of this earth they hold death in horror, although, in their earthly naivety, they give death even more power. At Pisa and Florence in the art galleries and cloisters, the young man protests against the resignation with which death is accepted. His revolt is not only against death and the limitations of the world, but also against all human values which urge the acceptance of death and suffering as right and good. Because death is inevitable, it need not be welcomed. Although this revolt is futile, it is not without meaning, for it gives the most meaningful attitude one can have, a conscious way of existing in the world which is true. It reflects the essential character of both man and the world.

The linking theme through these four short pieces is that there is no afterlife; man's only kingdom is

6Ibid., p. 5.
7Ibid., p. 6.
this earth. There is no significance in life in terms of a personal God, for each man's life is an end in itself. Although there may be correspondence between man and nature which is momentarily, but wrongly, experienced as identification, one of the basic convictions found in Nuptials, is that the nature of the world is distinct from and foreign to the desires and understanding of man. However, it is his home, although man must remember the strictly physical reality of natural objects and his own presence in relation to them. The second basic conviction of Nuptials is that death is an inescapable end. Although this gives rise to a love of life, there is immediately a limitation placed on sensuous enjoyment, for the essence of love of life is its immediacy, which contrasts sharply with the continuing world: although the world may delight man, it will outlast him. In viewing this problem, Camus here insists that there is an insoluble conflict between the desire for life and the fact of death, between what he knows here and the hereafter of which he knows nothing.


9Hanna, op. cit., p. 6.
The fundamental convictions in *Nuptials* give rise to four other themes of Camus: the hopelessness of life, the need to refuse the world without renouncing it, purity of heart, and happiness. Camus says that the worst evil found in Pandora's box was hope, for it is equivalent to resignation. To live without hope, for Camus, is to accept the transience of life rather than reject it in favor of the supernatural, and this is to refuse resignation. Purity of heart, or innocence, a continuing and prominent concept in Camus' work, is the expression of that sincerity with which man sees himself as he is. Innocence and honesty with one's self and condition are the basis for the integrity of Camus' characters in his novels and plays. Man may attain innocence because guidance and justification come not from church or state, but from man himself. Through innocence, knowledge of self and the world, and the disavowal of hope, happiness is found, for happiness is harmony relating the individual to his existence. For Camus, Cruickshank points out, "happiness will follow from a relationship in which the individual accepts the eternal antagonism between his

10 Ibid., p. 7.
desire for life and the inevitability of his death.**" **11

However, this happiness, while neither sensual nor transcendant, does become essentially religious, for it is a happiness which is the affirmation of the unique value and dignity of man in a universe which does not call him its own.**12

Within a few years the ideas of the divorce of man and nature, and the finality of death are to be logically developed in *The Myth of Sisyphus,* and within ten years the first of these is to become less important while the significance of death is to be examined until the personal dimension is replaced by a social dimension. The point of departure for *The Myth of Sisyphus* arises from the question of hope: can one live without appeal to God through hope? This theme of refusal of the world without renunciation is developed later in the theory of revolt which becomes Camus' vindication of the dignity of man.

In *The Other Side of the Coin* Camus also expresses many of the same ideas found in *Nuptials,* again in a lyrical and imaginative style. And like *Nuptials,*

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it contains the embryo of his conclusions, while it is also rather vague and formless. Here Camus presents, according to Cruickshank,

a dualism in which the riches of the sun and sea emphasize human poverty; the joyful indulgence of the senses makes death more tragic and horrible; the flowering of tenderness and desire uncovers the fact of human loneliness.\textsuperscript{13}

Happiness and suffering in each instance intensify each other. The five sections of it are a mixture of autobiography and generalized meditation. The first part is a study of the contrast between youth and age, shown through a series of observations on religion, human loneliness, and death. The contrast between youth and age, life and death, pleasure and fear, displays the irony with which each life is eventually marked. The second part too refers to the ambivalence of human life in the desire for companionship and understanding and the bondage of solitude. In the third section, a young man sees the death of his grandmother and feels that he is detached from others and the world around him. The last two parts contain the reflections of Camus on his travels in Southern Europe. From his travels, Camus realizes that travel is not a diversion

\textsuperscript{13}Cruickshank, op. cit., p. 25.
but rather a confrontation with one's self, for it can induce a constant questioning of self and the outside world. Since it removes one from familiar places and habits, travel provides a revelation of loneliness and self-ignorance. Like Nuptials these last two sections show an awareness of the discrepancy between the desires of the individual and the reality of the natural world. The thematic link between these five parts is the essential futility and absurdity of human existence.

Both Nuptials and The Other Side of the Coin show a sense of the mystery of man's life, of its inexplicability, but this is examined with pity and admiration, rather than, as in the case of Jean-Paul Sartre, with "nausea" and rejection of the world. Camus found his initial conception of the incomprehensibility of human life, not in any book or theory, but rather in his own childhood and life. And with this origin comes, not an interest in philosophic systems, but rather a desire to write about man for each man.

Caligula

Camus' next form of expression was the drama, a genre in which he had been vitally interested for
several years. He himself has stated his idea of the theater:

After a rather long experience as director, actor, and dramatist, it seems to me that there is no true theater without language and style, nor any dramatic work which does not, like our classical drama and the Greek tragedians, involve human fate in all its simplicity and grandeur. Without claiming to equal them, these are at least the models to set oneself.  

This has been Camus' ideal in all of his writing, both dramatic and non-dramatic. Caligula, a play written in 1938, although not performed until 1945, gives dramatic expression to the absurd line of reasoning. It presents the extreme consequences of the nihilism which Camus had come to face in his early essays. Its central problem is suffering, suffering in a world which has no meaning. Based on the history by Suetonius of the third of the twelve Caesares, it gives the story of the enlightened monarch, Caligula, who, upon the death of his sister and lover, Drusilla, becomes a monster of cruelty and is assassinated.  

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15 Cruickshank, op. cit., p. 194.
Taking the absurd as a point of departure, Caligula has tasted death and discovered the truth of human existence:

a childishly simple, obvious almost silly truth but one that's hard to come by and heavy to endure... men die; and they are not happy. 16

He sees that death negates life, love and friendship, and human values, and delivers man to an arbitrary, impersonal fate. 17 Caligula reasons that all things are equally transient and unimportant because of the inescapability of death. Because all things are of equal value, or, rather, of no value, Caligula reasons that men have unlimited freedom. Since he is emperor, his liberty has no political or metaphysical limits, and he proceeds to destroy the existing order by transcending misery through creation of a kingdom where "the impossible is king." Believing that men must no longer be deceived by the unreal values of the present

16 Camus, Caligula, p. 8.
17 Breé, op. cit., p. 162.
order, Camus says:

he tries, through murder and the systematic perversion of all values, to practice a liberty that he will eventually discover is not the right one. He challenges friendship and love, common human solidarity, good and evil.  

Caligula, having become aware of death and the despair of man, both accepts its inevitability and rebels against it by intensifying its consequences for others while evading them himself. Caligula acts out the absurd while the arbitrary rules the life of the people, taking the wife of a Patrician under the man's eyes as easily as a glass of wine, confiscating possessions, creating an artificial famine, torturing and killing his subjects. He wants to enter the realm of the impossible, a desire symbolized by his wish to possess the moon. His hope is, says Camus, that finally:

when all is leveled out, when the impossible has come to earth and the moon is in my hands—then, perhaps, I shall be transfigured and the world renewed; then men will die no more and at last be happy.  

Caligula destroys the Patricians' unconscious assumption that if life is conducted according to certain rules, all will be well, thus plunging them into a

18 Camus, Preface, p. v.
19 Camus, Caligula, p. 17.
world so deadly that they cannot bear its existence. In the second act revolt begins to rise. Caligula's rebellion against the absurd has only intensified it, for while his motives and desire for lucidity have Camus' approval, his "error lies in negating what binds him to mankind. One cannot destroy everything without destroying oneself." 20 Throughout the play, emphasis is placed on the absolute logic of Caligula. Caligula, in becoming an apostle for the absurd, is merely stressing a forgotten truth, for there is no logical reason to be drawn from the nature of things which would indicate that Caligula should be restrained. Although logically the revolt of his subjects cannot be justified, it does happen, led by Cherea, whose only reason is an instinctive need to defend happiness. The opposition to this reign of absurdity is one which both understands the absurd and rejects it as a rule of life.

There are four different attitudes expressed in the play toward Caligula's actions. 21 For Helicon, Caligula's experiment is legitimate, for his attempt to give life a form, and therefore a meaning, is more


21 Cruickshank, *op. cit.*, pp. 197-98.
acceptable than any other attitude toward life. Caesonia does not understand Caligula, although she uneasily accepts his actions, and, therefore, seals her fate as a victim. Scipio, the seventeen year old poet, does understand Caligula's reaction to the absurd but accepts his abstract logic rather than practical reasonableness, because of his own despair. Cherea alone both understands and opposes the absurd. His response to the absurd is one which places it in human existence and yet finds a constructive basis for a hopeful and honest existence in such a universe. He tells Caligula why he cannot agree with him in this speech:

Because what I want is to live, and to be happy. Neither, to my mind, is possible if one pushes the absurd to its logical conclusions. As you see, I'm quite an ordinary sort of man. True, there are moments when, to feel free of them, I desire the death of those I love, or I hanker after women from whom the ties of family or friendship debar me. Were logic everything I'd kill or fornicate on such occasions. But I consider that these passing fancies have no great importance. If everyone set to gratifying them, the world would be impossible to live in, and happiness, too, would go by the board. And these, I repeat, are the things that count, for me.

... I believe that some actions are—shall I say?--more praiseworthy than others. 22

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22Camus, Caligula, pp. 51-52.
Cherea has accepted not only the meaning of death, but also the certainty of life. He has no need for the moon and challenges Caligula's attempt to bring thought and action into harmony. He sees as good the fact that Caligula has forced people to think by making them insecure and shattering their easy assumptions, but in his violence, he overstepped his limits. In opposing Caligula, Cherea does not draw his strength from any supernatural source but from a defense of needs which are felt native to human existence. It is not a high idea which makes him oppose Caligula but a belief that not all actions are equivalent and a judgment of them can be made without sanction of a source external to human experience. Cherea's revolt is not something which, according to Hanna, "transcends Caligula's philosophy of absurdity; it surpasses the absurdity of life," for in Caligula's excesses an essential dimension of human existence emerged, revolt. Caligula discovers in the last scene that he transgressed something he did not know existed, limits.

\[23^\text{Hanna, op. cit., p. 77.}\
\[24^\text{Ibid., p. 79.}\]
He sees that murder is no solution:

I have chosen a wrong path, a path that leads to nothing. My freedom isn't the right one. . . . Nothing, nothing yet. 25

As Camus has said of Caligula,

Unfaithful to mankind through fidelity to himself, Caligula accepts death because he has understood that no one can save himself all along, and that one cannot be free at the expense of others. 26

But yet he dies with the cry, "I am still alive," for the absurd and the awareness of suffering are an eternal part of the human condition. Caligula was both right and wrong. The world is meaningless, but he failed to see the meaningfulness of the existing individual.

When he looks into the mirror at the closing of the play, he sees only the individual he forgot. If there were only the world, then any freedom would be possible, but there are others who wish to live.

In a world without God, man is not delivered to absurdity and destruction. There is no hierarchy of values, nor absolute transcendence, but there are limits which man cannot transgress because of the value of individual life itself. And as soon as limits

25 Camus, Caligula, p. 73.
26 Camus, Preface, p. vi.
are recognized, man has something positive, something to be preserved.

The Misunderstanding

The Misunderstanding, a play written in 1943, is a portrait of several characters caught up in the absurdity of existence and the human separation and exile which are an integral part of the absurd. The story is that of a wealthy son who returns, after twenty years' absence, to his sister and mother who own a small inn. When he arrives at the inn, he does not disclose his identity and is not recognized. Since he is wealthy the mother and daughter murder him as they have many other solitary travelers. The next day the son's wife comes and reveals his identity. Both the mother and daughter kill themselves. The irony of the plot both re-enforces and gives evidence of the absurd as an inseparable part of life.

The misunderstanding begins to form when the daughter, Martha, says that she lives only for the time when she can leave the "shut-in valley" of the inn and live by the sea. Whereas the mother has accepted their deeds passively, up to the son's return, Martha, seeing that death by murder and death by fate
come to the same thing, feels that a liberating escape through one or the other is all that is important. With the inevitability of death awaiting her, she feels that the wretched condition of her present life warrants any action which can bring her to the land of sun and sea. In the murders she hopes to break the absurd walls which surround her. It is her awareness of the absurd which motivates her, and explains her acceptance of crime and lack of remorse.

The theme of loneliness is particularly obvious in Martha, and in Jan, the returning son. Martha faces solitude by destroying life; Jan tries to affirm life, thus leaving solitude behind, but he cannot find the correct formula for doing so. Martha's awareness of the absurd is what brings it into prominence in her life; it is Jan's unawareness of it which makes it manifest in him. Absurdity for Martha is an essential fact of life, and she bases all her actions on this: "life is crueler than we are." Jan takes the opposite point of view and seeks happiness through confidence in existence rather than revolt against it. Despite this confidence, his fundamental mistake is to indulge
in his desire to be spontaneously recognized, an irresponsible act in the face of the absurd which results in three deaths. He tells his wife, Maria:

Only--no one can be happy in exile or estrangement. One can't remain a stranger all one's life. It is quite true a man needs happiness, but he also needs to find his true place in the world.  

But his search for a universe in which to belong results in tragedy.

The power of the play as a drama of the absurd lies in Martha's reaction to murdering her brother. For the mother it is too much, and she drowns herself. While she knows that life is meaningless, the discovery that her son still loved her and returned to her, gave rebirth to a love she thought was dead. She gives in to the absurdity of the world and finds death a better choice. But this is not so with Martha. She clings to her vision of life's absurdity and refuses to alter what she feels is the essential rightness of her desire for freedom:

> All that life can give a man was given him. . . . But I stayed here . . . buried alive! No one has ever kissed my mouth

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and no one, not even you, has seen me naked. Mother, I swear to you, that must be paid for. . . . What has happened to him has no importance; he had nothing more to get from life. But for me it's different.  

Martha is sustained by her revolt against her mother and brother; her dream of the sea remains. After her mother deserts her, hatred wells up in Martha, now alone, for she can never find her dream. She is trapped, and she knows it. Her attempt to mold life to her purpose has failed.

No, it wasn't my duty to look after him. . . . He has now what he wanted, while I am left lonely, far from the sea I longed for. Oh, how I hate him! All my life was spent waiting for this great wave that was to lift me up and sweep me far away, and now I know it will never come again. . . . I am too far from all I love, and my exile is beyond remedy. . . . There is no love for me, so let her die. Let every door be shut against me; all I wish is to be left in peace with my anger, my very rightful anger.  

In her words to Maria, Martha expresses the reality of the absurd. The universe is a cruel place in which the frustration of love and desire is inevitable and in the natural order of things:

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28 Ibid., pp. 122-23.
29 Ibid., pp. 124-25.
We're cheated, I tell you. Cheated! What do they serve, those blind impulses that surge up in us, the yearnings that rock our souls? Why cry out for the sea, or for love? What futility!  

Maria is left in terrified loneliness and makes a passionate appeal to God to help her.

Oh, God, I cannot live in this desert! It is on You that I must call. . . . Have pity, turn toward me. Hear me and raise me from the dust, O Heavenly Father!  

The old servant pronounces the one word, "Non!" This reply, the final word of the play, reveals a metaphysical plane where divine indifference takes the forms of absence, silence, and refusal. However, Camus has said that the play's morality is not altogether negative, that despite the dismal images of human fate,

it (the play's morality) can be reconciled with a relative optimism as to man. For, after all, it amounts to saying that everything would have been different if the son had said: "It is I; here is my name." It amounts to saying that in an unjust or indifferent world man can save himself, and save others, by practicing the most basic sincerity and pronouncing the most appropriate word.  

30 ibid., pp. 132-33.
31 ibid., p. 133.
32 Camus, Preface, p. vii.
The Stranger

The first of Camus' novels, The Stranger, continues the ideas of the world of the absurd. As in Caligula and The Misunderstanding, he has moved from the lyrical expression of awareness of the absurd to a literary expression of the feeling of the absurd, but without the totally intellectual perception of it which comes with The Myth of Sisyphus. The novel, set in Algiers, begins with the death of Meursault's mother in a home for the aged, and Meursault goes there to attend the funeral. He and his mother had seen little of each other in the last years and had followed separate lives, for they "had nothing to say to each other." During the time he is at the home, Meursault passively does what is expected of him and then returns to Algiers. The next day he goes swimming, meets a girl, Marie, whom he knew slightly before, goes with her to a comic film, and takes her home with him for the night. After passing Sunday in boredom, the week-end passes, and Monday ordinary life begins again: "Really, nothing in my life had changed." Meursault continues to see Marie, and rather indifferently becomes involved in a friendship with Raymond, a resident of the same apartment building. Through this friendship, Meursault and
Marie are invited to the beach with some of Raymond's friends. While there, they discover that the brother of Raymond's former mistress, an Arab, is waiting for them and intends to avenge his sister. There is a fight which comes to nothing. Later, Raymond, carrying a gun, returns to the same place, and, handing the gun to Meursault, attempts another fight, but there is no incident. Meursault begins to walk along the beach, alone, in the searing heat and light, toward a rock where there is a little spring which goes to the sea. But the Arab is there, and as Meursault comes closer, the Arab draws a knife. Meursault holds the revolver in his pocket; the Arab's knife catches the reflections of the sun: "A shaft of light shot upward from the steel, and I felt as if a long, thin blade transfixed my forehead." Meursault fires five shots into the Arab.

He is arrested, held for murder, and comes to trial a year later. He is found guilty of the murder, not because he accidentally pulled a trigger, but because of his innocent and careless acts during and after his mother's funeral: he had sent her to a home, did not cry, did not want to see the body, had smoked during the wake, the next day had begun an illicit
romance. As the prosecutor gathers these facts together, he describes Meursault as a hardened, unfeeling criminal. When Meursault tried to explain that "it was because of the sun" that he killed the Arab, he could not express what he really wanted to say. As a monster whose death is necessary, he is found guilty and sentenced to death "in the name of the French people." The rest of the story involves Meursault's adjustment to death and his eventual revolt.

Although this is a résumé of the events leading to Meursault's sentence of death, the story of the "stranger" is much more involved. The summary tends to give coherence to the events, and it is the incoherence of Meursault's experiences that Camus is attempting to show. During these events Meursault never says more than he actually feels, and it is this honesty which makes him a stranger to society. The technique which Camus used to present the events supports the idea of incoherence. The Stranger is written in the first person, a narrative viewpoint which, being subjective, usually lends an immediacy and an urgency to the experiences, thus helping to enlighten the reader through

\[33\] Cruickshank, op. cit., pp. 151-52.
participation and fuller understanding of the story. However, in The Stranger Meursault does not appear to do any of this, for his intellectual and perceptive powers are not impressive, and he lacks an accepted ethical sense. In his display of moral indifference, he frequently refers to his own inadequacy and his failure to understand. The novel opens with a lack of moral concern and little emotional response:

Mother died today. Or, maybe, yesterday; I can't be sure. The telegram from the Home says: YOUR MOTHER PASSED AWAY. FUNERAL TOMORROW. DEEP SYMPATHY. Which leaves the matter doubtful; it could have been yesterday. 34

The device of first person narrative is used by Camus to show, as Cruickshank describes it, "a world of incoherence, a world where rational analysis has little scope and where moral purpose and responses are conspicuously absent."35 In doing so, he conveys a direct impression of how the absurd may be experienced. Thus, it is the very use of the "first person viewpoint" which cements the experience negatively. Unlike The Myth of Sisyphus, Camus is here concerned with conveying the experience of absurdity rather than expounding upon

35Cruickshank, op. cit., p. 152.
it rationally. Camus is here not using fiction as a means of justifying or explaining his ideas, but rather of presenting a sense of what the absurd is like without any intellectual justification. It is not until The Myth of Sisyphus that Camus approaches the absurd on an intellectual, philosophic basis.

It is Jean-Paul Sartre, in his explication of The Stranger who believes that The Myth provides "a precise commentary" upon the novel. He states that Meursault is "in more ways than one, constructed so as to furnish a concerted illustration of the theories expounded in The Myth." For Sartre, The Myth gives the idea of the absurd, while The Stranger gives the "feeling" of the experience. He further states that The Stranger gradually reveals its solid substructure in The Myth, and he praises it as a "classical work, an orderly work, composed about the absurd and against the absurd." While Sartre feels that these works were two expressions of the same ideas, it must be remembered that, although both were published in 1942,

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37 Ibid., p. 121.
The Stranger was completed in 1939 and The Myth in 1940. Although it is not these dates alone that provide the separation of these two works, it is not possible to force The Stranger into the framework of The Myth, since this framework did not exist at the time The Stranger was written.

Of course, the themes of the absurd are found in The Stranger: revolt, re-found freedom, and the significance of death. But though these themes are present, it must be remembered that the absurd can exist totally only in a state of full awareness of it. Although Meursault from the beginning shows the indifference of the absurd hero and lives a life in accordance with the absurd, he does not become aware or conscious of the absurd until the closing pages. This is not a novel with a thesis to expound. It does not tell of a man struck one day by the notion of the absurd and seeking desperately for an escape until he reaches the stage of conscious revolt. It shows, rather, a man living the absurd orthodoxy, although his very consciousness of it is not born until the last moments of his life.

It is Meursault's indifference that makes him a stranger to the world. This quality of indifference is revealed slowly throughout the first part of the novel. After the funeral, Meursault concludes that nothing is really changed in his life. When his employer offers him a promotion and transfer from Algiers to Paris, Meursault replies,

I told him I was quite prepared to go; but really I didn't care much one way or the other.
He asked then if a "change of life," as he called it, didn't appeal to me, and I answered that one never changed his way of life; one life was as good as another, and my present one suited me quite well.
I'd have preferred not to vex him, but I saw no reason for "changing my life." 39

When Marie asks Meursault to marry her, he replies that he "didn't mind; if she was keen on it, we'd get married." Marie asks him if he loves her and Meursault replies,

much as before, that question meant nothing or next to nothing--but I supposed I didn't. . . . I explained that it had no importance really, but, if it would give her pleasure, we could get married right away. 40

39Camus, The Stranger, p. 52.
40Ibid., pp. 52-53.
This attitude of indifference continues even after the murder. He is not interested in having a lawyer, nor in the trial itself. Meursault thinks to himself when the prosecutor is describing his lack of remorse over his crime,

Of course, I had to own that he was right; I didn't feel much regret for what I'd done. Still, to my mind he overdid it, and I'd like to have a chance of explaining to him, in a quite friendly, almost affectionate way, that I have never been able really to regret anything in all my life. I've always been far too much absorbed in the present moment, or the immediate future, to think back.41

In these times before his awareness of the absurd, Meursault acts as if he were in an absurd universe but is not conscious of it. Before the murder, he does not appear to be very different from other men. He is accepted by Marie and by his friends such as Celeste and Raymond; no one is disturbed by his conduct. John Hanna states, "on this level of ordinary, humdrum life Meursault is really no different from any man. . . . it could have been any man, not Meursault only, who was to be judged and condemned by society."42 However, it is this attitude of indifference...

41Ibid., pp. 126-27.
42Hanna, op. cit., p. 53.
ence and adherence to the present moment which carries him to an action which forces a judgment upon him. In his crime, he leaves the everyday world, and a clear, absolute judgment must be made of his life; Hanna says, "an absolute moral criterion must be introduced into his life and an unequivocal judgment passed." Once this necessity has occurred, the world of Meursault is thrown into contrast with that of the ethical absolutists. And it is only now that his indifference appears strange.

During the examination before the trial and during the trial itself, Meursault's continuing honest indifference convinces the magistrate that he is a hardened, ruthless criminal. While listening to the prosecutor during the trial, Meursault comes to the realization that he is a "stranger" to the world of absolute moral standards:

After asking the jury and my lawyer if they had any questions, the Judge heard the doorkeeper's evidence. . . . Replying to the questions, he said that I'd declined to see Mother's body, I'd smoked cigarettes and slept, and drunk café au lait. It was then I felt a sort of wave of indignation spreading through the courtroom, and for the first time I understood that I was guilty.44

43 Ibid.
44 Camus, The Stranger, p. 112.
The single and separately understandable events in Meursault's life are united as a result of his crime under a moral judgment. Meursault realizes that if his life is examined in such terms, this judgment means guilt.

The entire legal mechanism for this judgment is brought into operation because of the murder of the Arab. The act of murder provides for the absurd contrast between what Meursault is and what the court believes him to be. The central question of the trial is not whether the murder actually occurred, but rather whether Meursault's life demonstrates that he is of a "criminal" character. It is his life, not his one action on the beach, which proves him guilty. His life, when examined in the light of absolute moral standards, is guilty. The "sun" is the cause of the murder, but this is unacceptable in legal proceedings. Meursault encounters the Arab alone on the beach in the blazing heat and light of the noonday sun:

On seeing me, the Arab raised himself a little, and his hand went to his pocket. Naturally, I gripped Raymond's revolver in the pocket of my coat. . . . I was some distance off, at least ten yards, and most of the time I saw him as a blurred dark form wobbling in the heat haze. . . . The sound of the waves was even lazier, feebler, than at noon. But the light hadn't changed; it was pounding as fiercely as ever on the
long stretch of sand that ended at the rock.

The heat was beginning to scorch my cheeks; beads of sweat were gathering in my eyebrows. . . . And then the Arab drew his knife and held it up toward me, athwart the sunlight.

A shaft of light shot upward from the steel, and I felt as if a long, thin blade transfixed my forehead. At the same moment all the sweat that had accumulated in my eyebrows splashed down on my eyelids, covering them with a warm film of moisture. Beneath a veil of brine and tears my eyes were blinded; I was conscious only of the cymbals of the sun clashing on my skull, and, less distinctly of the keen blade of light flashing up from the knife, scarring my eyelashes, and gauging into my eyeballs.

Then everything began to reel before my eyes. . . . Every nerve in my body was a steel spring, and my grip closed on the revolver. The trigger gave. . . . And so, with that crisp, whipcrack sound, it all began.\(^4\)

With this sound begins all the machinery of morality which transforms an innocent, absurd life into a criminal one. The absurdity which crushes Meursault and which is pictured in *The Stranger*, is not that of a man faced with a senseless universe which is foreign to him as a human being. It is rather, as Hanna says,

\[\text{the attempt of society justly to apply absolute moral standards to the uncertain and chartless course of}\]

\[\text{Ibid., pp. 74-76.}\]
human life. It is not an absurd universe that destroys Meursault; it is a moral legalism which has injected fixed values into a sphere which has no fixed moral values: human life. 46

Meursault's movement into consciousness and revolt comes while he is awaiting death after he has been condemned. It is the prison chaplain who awakens revolt in him. Although the chaplain had tried to see Meursault several times, Meursault had always refused because he did not believe in God. Suddenly the chaplain appears in spite of Meursault's refusals and speaks to him of guilt and an afterlife. Meursault is jolted out of his apathy with the conscious realization that there is only life, his life as he knew it, an intense life that needs no redeeming, no regrets, no tears. 47 For his "crime" he will be destroyed, and for this destruction there is no explanation, excuse, or compensation. He discovers the truth about his life: he has been happy, he still is happy, and he is ready to relive everything. Defiant and lucid, yet happy, he will go to his death. He suddenly becomes "conscious" and pours out his thoughts:

46 Hanna, op. cit., p. 55.
47 Brée, Camus, p. 114.
Then, I don't know how it was, but something seemed to break inside me, and I started yelling at the top of my voice. . . . I poured out on him all the thoughts that had been simmering in my brain. He seemed so cocksure, you see. And yet none of his certainties was worth one strand of a woman's hair. . . . It might look as if my hands were empty. Actually, I was sure of myself, sure about everything, far surer than he; sure of my present life and of death that was coming. That, no doubt, was all I had; but at least that certainty was something I could get my teeth into—just as it had got its teeth in me. I'd been right, I was still right, I was always right. I'd passed my life in a certain way, and I might have passed it in a different way, if I'd felt like it. . . . And what did that mean? That, all the time, I'd been waiting for this present moment, for that dawn, tomorrow's or another day's which was to justify me. Nothing, nothing, had the least importance, and I knew quite well why. . . . What difference could they make to me, the deaths of others, or a Mother's love, or his God; or the way a man decides to live, the fate he thinks he chooses, since one and the same fate was bound to "choose" not only me, but thousands of millions of privileged people who, like him, called themselves my brothers. . . . All alike would be condemned to die one day; . . . it all came to the same thing in the end.48

In his belief that death equalizes all, Meursault brings to light the secret of his indifference, for it is death itself which is its foundation. No matter what man does, it has no final importance, and Meursault

revolts against the illusion of moral absolutism. He is not in revolt against the world, for he opens himself to "the \textit{benign} indifference of the universe" [Italics mine]. On the contrary, he revolts against the attitude that life can be governed and judged according to lasting absolutes which in reality only oppress man. Society condemns him because it wants a reassuring attitude, contrition, from him, and he does nothing but emphasize the final miserable fate of man. He is condemned because he is a living witness to the incompatibility of human existence with gods, eternal laws, hope, purpose, and afterlife. He is a stranger to society because he refuses to make any concessions to its codes and rituals; he sees no connection between his mother's death and the fact that he goes to see a comedy two days later.

Meursault dies unreconciled with his fellowmen, aware of their essential condition, but unwilling to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{49}Hanna, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 61.
\item \textsuperscript{50}Camus, \textit{The Stranger}, p. 154.
\item \textsuperscript{51}Hanna, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 224.
\item \textsuperscript{52}Brée, \textit{Camus}, p. 110.
\end{itemize}
consider that there could be any bond arising out of their common destiny. Meursault's conflict is private; his moral crisis solitary; no general morality is possible except one of personal revolt.

Camus' artistic technique in *The Stranger* both re-enforces, and is an extension of, Meursault's beliefs and position in the world. As was stated earlier, the first person narrative method of presentation as used by Camus emphasizes a world of incoherence where rational analysis has little scope, and moral purpose is absent. This narrative technique is particularly appropriate here because Meursault's attitude would be much less understandable if it were seen from the outside only. If the reader were to see Meursault only from the point of view of society which condemns him from lack of understanding, much of the impact of the novel would be lost. First person narrative is an ideal vehicle for conveying an experience which hinges on the failure to explain.

Much of the force of this novel is due to the combined effect of the first person narrative and the use of a restricted, concrete, non-analytic vocabulary. The severely restricted vocabulary conveys a strong impression of the void felt by one who experiences the
absurd. The limited vocabulary of Meursault also gives expression to his status as a metaphysical outsider in society in his continual rejection of the language of causality. Not only are events described with economy, but the entire vocabulary of interpretation and motivation is absent. The discontinuity of experience, a major element of the absurd, is demonstrated in the deliberately discontinuous style. By presenting events as a succession, not a sequence, Meursault's account of his experience is further heightened. Each sentence, like each instant, forms a whole universe attached to nothing that precedes it and nothing that follows it. Events are simply juxtaposed. No consciousness interposes to organize or translate events by orienting them into a unified whole. The narrator remains passive.

The handling of time, too, re-enforces the material in the novel. The novel is divided into two parts, equal in length, but with entirely different time spans. The first part covers eighteen days prior to the murder and shows an acute awareness of time. During this period Meursault finds his existence ultimately meaningless, but he responds totally to physical pleasure. However, once the murder is committed and the second half of the novel, lasting twelve months,
begins, time holds no significance. The transition from a sharp consciousness of time to an unawareness of its passing reflects Meursault's metamorphosis from a purely sentient being to a man who begins to reflect upon himself and the ultimate meaning of life and death.

In the developing concept of the absurd, *The Stranger* again deals with the themes of life and death, but this time it is on the level of a personal existence. Like *Nuptials* and *The Other Side of the Coin*, Camus is yet clinging to the beauty of the world, but there is an added awareness of the bond of death which is a "dark wind" that snatches all men from the world. In Meursault, Camus has represented his own expanding thought; like Meursault, Camus was just becoming fully conscious of the absurd and its implications. It is with total awareness that he examines the absurd from a rational point of view in *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

*The Myth of Sisyphus*

*The Myth of Sisyphus*, although written only a year later than *The Stranger*, in 1940, marks a sharp transition from the lyrical and literary expression of an attitude toward life to an intellectual investigation
of the same attitude. The assertions found in The Myth of Sisyphus are mainly the results of a rational analysis and formulation of an earlier emotional experience. It is the fruit of further reflection upon the content of Camus' previous works. In this essay Camus moves forward from a predominantly physical to a predominantly intellectual response to existence. The added intellectual quality brings new emphasis as well as new problems. In particular, the contrast between physical exaltation and the inevitability of death which, in Nuptials, The Other Side of the Coin, and The Stranger, expressed a dualism, becomes intensified in The Myth so as to be one of those insoluble paradoxes giving rise to the sense of the absurd. The Myth is an essay on the absurd, and by the absurd Camus means the absence of any correspondence or congruity between man's need for coherence in the universe and the incoherence of the world which the mind experiences. Camus himself, in a "Preface" written for the English translation of The Myth in 1955, has said:

The fundamental subject of "The Myth of Sisyphus" is this: it is legitimate and necessary to wonder whether life has a

\[53\] Cruickshank, op. cit., p. 43.
meaning; therefore it is legitimate to meet the problem of suicide face to face. The answer, underlying and appearing through the paradoxes which cover it, is this: even if one does not believe in God, suicide is not legitimate. . . . this book declares that even within the limits of nihilism it is possible to find the means to proceed beyond nihilism. . . . Although "The Myth of Sisyphus" poses mortal problems, it sums itself up for me as a lucid invitation to live and to create, in the very midst of the desert.54

The motivation and limitations of The Myth are further explained by Camus in the original introduction to the work:

But it is useful to note at the same time that the absurd, hitherto taken as a conclusion, is considered in this essay as a starting-point. In this sense it may be said that there is something provisional in my commentary: one cannot prejudge the position it entails. There will be found here merely the description, in the pure state, of an intellectual malady. No metaphysic, no belief is resolved in it for the moment. These are the limits and the only bias of this book.55

Camus approaches the absurd from an existential, though not existentialist, point of view.56 He comes to the subject from a practical and human angle, avoiding

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55Ibid., p. 2.

56Supra, p. 38.
abstraction and speaking more as an involved individual than an objective philosopher. In approaching the absurd, there seem to be two possible solutions: suicide or the leap of faith. Camus attempts to show that neither of these is right. He attempts to demonstrate that the only coherent position for man is to preserve the paradox, to live the tensions and conflicts which it involves, and to refuse alleged solutions that turn out to be nothing more than what to him are evasions. 57

The Myth opens with a discussion of suicide:

There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. 58

Camus notes that he has never seen anyone die for an ontological argument, but that many people die because they judge that life is not worth living. He asks what the feeling is that makes one opt for death, and answers that it is a "universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights," in which a man feels "an alien, a stranger. . . . This divorce between man and his life,

58Ibid., p. 3.
the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity. Camus' task is to examine the relationship between suicide and the feeling of absurdity and to determine the degree in which suicide is the solution to the problem of absurdity. In answer to the question, "Can one find life absurd and still go on living?" Camus says it is possible because a third element may be introduced between death and absurdity; for, later, after The Myth, we see him moving toward a kind of hope which can sustain life.

But to return to The Myth, let us see Camus on the absurd. The feeling of the absurd is simple and sudden. It may happen to any man when the habitual pattern of his daily life is broken by awareness:

It happens that the stage sets collapse. Rising, streetcar, four hours in the office or factory, meal, streetcar, 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 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 the consciousness and provokes what follows. What follows is the gradual return into the chain.

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59 Ibid., p. 5.
or it is the definitive awakening. At the end of the awakening comes, in time, the consequence: suicide or recovery.\textsuperscript{60}

This feeling of absurdity reveals to man that the world, stripped of human conventions, is foreign and that other men too are foreign and inhuman when their actions are deprived of meaning. An intellectual awareness of the absurd is the experience of one who has expected a rationally ordered universe, but who finds instead, on the basis of his own experience, a chaos impervious to reason. Camus states that man's knowledge is then limited to "this heart within me I can feel, and I judge that it exists. This world I can touch, and I likewise judge that it exists. There ends all my knowledge, and the rest is construction."\textsuperscript{61}

It is here necessary to emphasize that although ordinary linguistic usage requires Camus to use a noun and speak of \textit{L'absurde}, the absurd is not a thing-in-itself; although an existing object may make one aware of the absurd, the absurd is not an existing object. The absurd is rather the confrontation between two things other than itself: existence and an individual

\begin{footnotes}
\item[60]\textit{Ibid.}, p. 10.
\item[61]\textit{Ibid.}, p. 14.
\end{footnotes}
mind. When man stands face-to-face with the irrational world, Camus states,

He feels within him his longing for happiness and reason. The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world. This must not be forgotten. This must be clung to because the whole consequence of a life can depend on it. The irrational, the human nostalgia, and the absurd that is born of their encounter—these are the three characters in the drama that must necessarily end with all the logic of which an existence is capable.62

Camus says, "absurdity springs from a comparison." It does not come from the mere scrutiny of a fact or an impression but . . . bursts forth from the comparison between a bare fact and a certain reality. . . . The absurd is essentially a divorce. It lies in neither of the elements compared; it is born of their confrontation.63

From this one can say that the first distinguishing feature of the absurd is that it cannot be divided, for to destroy one of its terms is to destroy the whole. There can be "no absurd outside the human mind. Thus like everything else, the absurd ends with death."64

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62 Ibid., p. 21.
63 Ibid., pp. 22-23.
64 Ibid., p. 23.
Therefore, physical suicide is not a solution, for it removes one of the necessary elements of the absurd. The absurd becomes not only a confrontation, but also an unceasing struggle, for one must preserve the very thing which crushes one. Physical suicide cannot be an answer because it destroys the problem itself rather than providing a solution. To negate life escapes the problem, as does negating the irrational character of the world.

After examining and rejecting physical suicide, Camus looks to philosophical suicide which can be accomplished either through a leap of faith, or by negating the fact that human reason is limited, thus making reason an absolute. Limiting himself to the existential philosophies, Camus says, "I see that all of them without exception suggest escape." Of Karl Jaspers Camus says that, although recognizing the human impossibility of knowing the universe, Jaspers uses this as a basis for asserting that this reveals the existence, not the absence, of transcendence. Camus states:

65Ibid., p. 25.
Thus the absurd becomes god (in the broadest meaning of the word) and that inability to understand becomes the existence that illuminates everything. Nothing logically prepares this reasoning. I call it a leap.

Camus criticizes the Russian philosopher, Leo Chestov, because he, while recognizing the fundamental absurdity of human existence and the fact that reason is useless, finds something beyond reason. He drops one of the terms of the absurd, the desire for rationality, and absolutizes irrationality, calling it God. Kierkegaard, too, escapes the absurd through his affirmation of the transcendence of faith, while Husserl finds the answer in an "eternal Reason." Each of these men, whether through the negation of reason or the deifying of reason, found a way to overcome the absurd by denying the very thing, severely limited human reason, which made them aware of it in the first place. They discovered the limitations of reason only to reject these limitations by accepting faith or intuition as the means to absolute knowledge. Camus finds these procedures unacceptable, for he wants to deal with the absurd while still recognizing and retaining the means by which he became aware of it:

66 Ibid., p. 25.
My reasoning wants to be faithful to the evidence that aroused it. That evidence is the absurd. It is that divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints, my nostalgia for unity, this fragmented universe and the contradiction that binds them together. Kierkegaard suppresses my nostalgia and Husserl gathers together that universe. That is not what I was expecting. It was a matter of living and thinking with those dislocations, of knowing whether one had to accept or refuse. There can be no question of masking the evidence, of suppressing the absurd by denying one of the terms of its equation.67

Since man cannot elide the absurd, he must accept it.

And this leads to an important value: truth:

And these two certainties—my appetite for the absolute and for unity and the impossibility of reducing this world to rational and reasonable principles—I also know that I cannot reconcile them. What other truth can I admit without lying, without bringing in a hope I lack and which means nothing within the limits of my condition?68

It was the frustrated search for truth which first made Camus aware of the absurd, and it is this same desire for truth which demands that one should maintain and defend any truth one discovers: "What I believe to be true I must therefore preserve. What seems to me so obvious, even against me, I must support."69

67 Ibid., p. 37.
68 Ibid., p. 38.
69 Ibid.
to retain awareness of the absurd and thus preserve the truth it establishes, Camus believes that one must refuse all means of escape. In an inquiry which set out to discover how the absurd might be solved or destroyed, Camus comes to make this paradox the basis for positive action. He calls this attitude of refusal of any road of escape, revolt; "One of the only coherent philosophical positions is thus revolt. . . . That revolt gives life its value. Spread out over the whole length of a life, it restores majesty to that life."70

The two elements of revolt are lucidity and innocence. Just as lucidity or consciousness, first reveals the absurd, the absurd requires that lucidity be preserved as a constant attitude. Given this kind of lucidity as an integral part of the absurd, it follows that innocence, as Camus uses the term, is an integral part of lucidity. While lucidity denies that the mind is capable of positing universal, abstract truths, it reveals a world in which there is no transcendency for human beings, no set of absolute values or reference by which a man's behavior can be absolutely judged. It is this situation which Camus calls inno-

70 Ibid., p. 40.
cence. Although this innocence which results from the absence of any moral, or eternal absolutes, can result in a solely quantitative ethic and license, Camus does not advocate this. However, it is not until later that he specifically places limits and responsibilities within the context of the absurd.

From these elements of lucidity and innocence, Camus derives the morality of revolt, the rejection which is the contrary of renunciation, and sees it as the first consequence of the absurd. This revolt is the conscious rejection of all the avenues of escape from the absurd, a rejection which is firmly rooted in lucidity and innocence. It is only in revolt that the absurd is preserved.

Two further consequences may be drawn from the absurd: freedom and passion. The circumstances leading to revolt also cause Camus to claim that a certain freedom of action, united with a certain desire to live intensely, are two other characteristics of the absurd. The certainty of death and the conviction that absolute values do not exist cause the man who is aware of the absurd to reject the notion of metaphysical freedom. The absurd man is aware that it is only a limited freedom which results from conformity
to moral and social norms, but his consciousness of the absurd liberates him from such restrictions. Absurd freedom is in reality the only reasonable freedom because it is founded on the only certainties of man's condition: death and the absurd.

The third consequence of the absurd, passion, arises from the fact that in the absurd universe, man is clearly aware of his coming death, and, therefore, every present moment is of value. One can live only with the desire to exhaust the present moment, and, consequently, a quantitative ethic results.

Camus at this point has, to an extent, overcome the threat of nihilism and given a kind of positive form to his argument. The necessity of lucidity, the presence of innocence, the possibility of freedom, and the promise of intensity combine to form an ethic of revolt which is consistent with the absurd. The inquiry which began as an examination of the possibility of suicide, ends with an imperative to live life with a passion. Using a negative method, Camus comes to some positive affirmations. However, his concern is still totally individualistic. It is not until after World War II and his participation in the Resistance that the ethic derived from the absurd has limitations.
placed upon it and is expanded to include all of man.

Following "the absurd line of reasoning," Camus outlines four types of lives which can be lived in absurdity. These four lives are not recommendations, but are rather illustrations of lives lived in awareness of the absurd. The first of these lives is that of Don Juan who accepts the single reality of an erotic moment ever sought and ever renewed without meaning or higher purpose. He attempts to exhaust all the inexhaustible possibilities of human love, Germaine Brée states, "not through any mystic drive toward the absolute but through a passion for the infinite diversity of each unique and passing face."\(^{71}\)

The second type, the actor, satisfies his thirst for the present moment through reliving the lives of others. In assuming a variety of roles, lives, in rapid succession, he gives reality to the life of a person he has temporarily become.\(^{72}\) The conqueror, the third type, recognizes that history is never complete and savor's action in itself, even if it is

\(^{71}\)Brée, Camus, p. 200.

\(^{72}\)Ibid.
transient. He knows that action in itself is useless, but he throws himself against the futility of history and in favor of the lost cause of humanity. These three are not examples of hedonism, but rather of the conquest of life and self by a multiplication of self which is exhausted with death.

The most important of the four types is the last: the creator, the artist. The artist's task is to describe existence in the world. Since one of the chief features of the absurd outlook is its realization that intellectual explanations of the world are vain, the absurd artist is rooted in the world of immediate experience, and this must be the source of his art. The work of the artist is situated at a point where the desire for transcendence and the impossibility of it conflict, thus making art the imaginative confirmation of the absurd. The creator knows that a work of art is no more than a means by which, with a height-

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74 Brée, *Camus*, p. 201.
75 Cruickshank, *op. cit.*, p. 144.
ened consciousness, he re-enacts his life over and over again as a protestation, a revolt, against his human fate. But art is important because through the mimicry of art man can live not once but twice. While art has no more context than the actions of the actor or conqueror, there is one important difference: art has fixity. And through art, for the first time, personal awareness of the absurd is brought toward others and indicates the common human lot. The artist must attempt to create a world, but this creation must take place "without appeal" to escape which are beyond the absurd. The artist must not make a reply to the absurd, but only present it. The artist must recognize, living in the absurd, that in his works there is no real meaning, content, or duration. He must create art without finality.

In the last section of The Myth of Sisyphus, Camus interprets, in terms of the absurd, the story of Sisyphus. Sisyphus, the wisest and most prudent of mortals, was condemned by the gods to ceaselessly roll a rock to the top of a mountain whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. His was the most terrible

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76 Brée, Camus, p. 201.
of punishment: eternally futile and hopeless labor. In seeing Sisyphus as the absurd hero, Camus is interested in that instant when Sisyphus, having reached the summit, watches the stone roll down the mountain and must trail down himself to renew his task. That moment "like a breathing space which returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness. At each of those moments . . . he is superior to his fate." The tragedy lies in his consciousness, for if he nourished the hope that he would yet succeed, the labor would lose its torment.

Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition: it is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory.

It is in the full realization that he has seen his destiny for what it is that he becomes his own master, and "One must imagine Sisyphus happy."

The ideas and attitudes expressed by Camus in The Myth of Sisyphus are the culmination of those feelings first found in Nuptials and The Other Side.

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77 Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus . . . , p. 89.
78 Ibid., p. 90.
of the Coin. The ideas found both in The Myth and those works which precede it are born in solitude and are concerned with the solitary individual's confrontation with the absurd. Camus maintains at this time that from the point of view of immediate experience, this relation is characterized by absurdity. Man, the world, and the absurd are the concern of this early phase of Camus' thought. The total absurdity of the universe is not present in Nuptials, The Other Side of the Coin, and The Stranger. The awareness of death and the inhuman character of the world does not, in these works, negate the beauty and fascination which the world has for human experience. It is only in Caligula and The Misunderstanding that total absurdity is present, and here the elements of the other works are missing. Of these early works it is Caligula which provides the clue to Camus' further development, for it ends with the recognition of limits. The experience of the absurd does not mean for Camus the total absurdity of human existence. In his examination of the absurd, the issue of the solitary confrontation of man and the universe, Camus found that this solitary anguish, to the exclusions of man's social involvement, was insufficient for a moral
philosophy because of the exclusion of the social dimension. Consequently, Camus moves from a concentration on the individual and the absurd to a further study of revolt and discovers its collective implications.
CHAPTER III

CAMUS' ANSWER TO THE ABSURD: REVOLT

Letters to a German Friend

The movement of Camus away from a sole concern with the implications of the absurd for the solitary man first becomes evident in his writings during the Second World War. Camus left Algeria in 1941, went to Occupied France, and helped to found what was both an intelligence network and an underground newspaper. His anonymous editorials in the clandestine newspaper Combat were remarkable for their expression of the feelings of the majority of Frenchmen. Of his writings during the occupation, Letters to a German Friend provides a foreshadowing of the development which his thought would take, culminating in The Rebel. In The Rebel Camus posits a human essence in the fact of a bond which exists between all men and finds value in both man and human existence in the presence of human solidarity. He comes to believe in solidarity as a basic fact of existence much in the same manner as he discovered the absurd: analysis based on the examination of individual experience. Using the philosophy of
the absurd as a point of departure, he rejects nihilism and solitude and moves inductively to a position which forms a positive, twentieth-century humanism.

The first step in this phase of his evolving thought can be seen in Letters to a German Friend. The four letters, addressed to an anonymous German friend, indicate something of his dissatisfaction with the possible practical consequences of the absurdist position, for he questions the idea of a quantitative ethic: everything is of equal value; everything is allowed. It is the fourth letter which most clearly expresses the new direction of Camus' thought. In the earlier letters, he attributed the philosophy which produced Nazism to the putting of a Machiavellian nationalism into the moral void created by an acute awareness of the absurdity of existence. Nazism was a revolt against the absurd, but it took the form not of a reasoned path to something definite and positive, but rather of an escape from absurdity in the Realpolitik, a plunging into an adventure in power. Camus states that he, like the Nazis, began with a similar view of existence:

For a long time we both thought that this world had no ultimate meaning and that consequently we were cheated. I still think so in a way. But I came to different conclusions from the ones you used to talk
about, which for many years now, you have been trying to introduce into history.

I shall remember that you and we started out from the same solitude, that you and we, with all Europe, are caught in the same tragedy of intelligence.¹

Camus shared with those who became Nazis the disillusionment concerning moral absolutes, but unlike them he did not proceed to accept the law of force and violence in which man is held in little account. Camus says:

You never believed in the meaning of this world, and you therefore deduced the idea that everything was equivalent and that good and evil could be defined according to one's wishes. 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.²

If both Camus and the German friend began with the same position in what lay the difference of their development?

Simply that you readily accepted despair and I never yield to it. Simply that you saw

²Ibid., p. 21.
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 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.3

Camus is able to distinguish himself from the Nazis on the basis of the limits which he sees as a part of human nature itself. That there is a human nature is the thesis which he later develops in the philosophy of revolt. For Camus, man himself possesses value and meaning because he is the one creature whose desires for justice and happiness are always frustrated.

I continue to believe that this world has no ultimate meaning. But I know that something in it has a meaning and that is man, because he is the only creature to insist on having one. This world has at least the truth of man, and our task is to provide its justifications against fate itself.4

Camus always considered the philosophy of the absurd to be provisional, for he felt it to be a nega-

3Ibid.
4Ibid., p. 22.
tive attitude which could lead to positive recommendations. The historical events of World War II and circumstances of the Occupation emphasized the fact that the absurdist or quantitative ethic could not satisfy the demands of his humanity. Solidarity and justice, and love and respect for mankind, become the new point of view which will be stressed in his following works.

The Plague

Conceived before the war and largely written during the Occupation although not published until 1947, The Plague is a fuller development of the positive aspects of Camus' thought. It is this novel which is a literary expression of Camus' growing belief in the fact of human solidarity. The Plague is a chronicle of events in the Algerian city of Oran during the period when an epidemic of bubonic plague afflicted the people and closed the gates of the city to the outside world. Camus describes the particular event of the plague in the specific location of Oran, but he handles the material in such a way that its meaning is extended from the particular to the universal. He presents a picture of man's position

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5Cruickshank, op. cit., p. 166.
in the universe, faced by the necessity of suffering and by the problem of evil. The novel also contains a second level of symbolic meaning, although perhaps in a less total fashion, in a series of indirect references to the German Occupation of France. The levels of meaning in the novel are not as continuous and sustained as in an allegory, but the close integration of both the literal and metaphysical levels of the novel is readily recognized, but each may be enjoyed for its own sake.

In *The Plague* Camus has created a series of events which, through the combined literal and metaphysical levels, embody his developing metaphysic. The plague provides him with both the closed universe of the absurd in the city of Oran cut off from contact with the outside world and with the necessity of revolt in the efforts of the characters to combat the plague and reduce its lethal effects.

At the literal level *The Plague* has very little plot. The rather detached, matter-of-fact narration simply follows the progress of the plague from its beginning to its eventual disappearance. A large number of rats lying dead in the houses and streets first indicate the plague. Soon people begin to die, and when the death rate rises sharply the Government
admits the fact of the plague. Oran is closed off from the world. In spite of any medical work, the plague rages unabated; no effective solution is found. Eventually people begin to recover, the illness becomes less common, the death rate falls, and the plague disappears as arbitrarily as it came. During the period of the plague the attitudes of some individuals, but mainly the fear, indifference, or escapism of the population as a whole, are described. However, the core of the story concentrates on the attempts to overcome the plague by the principal characters: Dr. Rieux, Tarrou, Rambert, Grand, and Father Paneloux. It is Dr. Rieux who tells the story, although this is not revealed until near the end of the book.

The narrative technique of *The Plague* is largely the reverse of *The Stranger*. Although *The Plague*, too, is told through a first person narrator, Dr. Rieux does not, like Meursault, reveal himself directly to the reader in recounting events toward which he feels a complete outsider. Rather, Rieux conceals his identity while telling of events in which he is deeply involved. Rieux's personal story is presented imper-

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sonally, and through this method Camus universalizes the novel. At the end of the novel, Rieux's explanation of his anonymity includes this universalizing intention:

Whenever tempted to add his personal note to the myriad voices of the plague-stricken, he was deterred by the thought that not one of his sufferings but was common to all the others and that in a world where sorrow is so often lonely, this was an advantage. Thus, decidedly, it was up to him to speak for all.7

Through this detached narrative Camus moves beyond individual psychology to the general human condition. Although the chronicle method holds the characters at a distance and does not give them psychological density, all of the characters have marked moral features. In their reactions to the catastrophe they are clearly defined. And it is their responses and behavior in the face of the plague with which Camus is concerned. The primary aim of The Plague is to portray a collective reaction to a collective problem.

On the secondary figurative level in The Plague, that of the German Occupation, there are many obvious

analogy. Some of these are the rationing of food and gas, and the disappearance of most of the city's traffic; the restrictive measures announced by the press and increased police surveillance; the growth of resistance against the plague; the mass burials in open graves; and the growing hopes of liberation and final rejoicing at the plague's disappearance. However, there are flaws to be found on this level of interpretation, for the moral dilemmas of the Occupation are absent, and the plague is a weak symbol of man's inhumanity to man. The use of the plague as a symbol avoids the problem of evil that results from human actions, for the political evil is represented as existing outside the scope of human responsibility. There is never any question of right things being done for the wrong reason or of evil consequences coming from virtuous motives. While the plague provides circumstantial similarities to the Occupation, it does not convey a sense of human agency and moral ambiguity.

However, these flaws strengthen, rather than weaken, the metaphysical interpretation of the novel,

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8 Cruickshank, op. cit., p. 175.
for Camus is concerned primarily with the problem of evil in the sense of suffering, not wrong-doing. And for this purpose the symbol of the plague is a good vehicle because it is arbitrary; its appearance and disappearance are beyond the scope of human agency. The Plague, with its picture of the people of Oran cut off from the world, suffering and dying, is a picture of cosmic alienation, the absurdity of man's condition presented in The Myth of Sisyphus.

It is the narrator of the chronicle, Dr. Bernard Rieux, who is the spokesman for Camus. He is un homme revolte. Later, another man, Tarrou, links himself with Rieux as a rebel. He, too, is a spokesman for revolt, but unlike Rieux, is able to put this revolt not only in the form of action, but also in intellectual form. Father Paneloux, the third important character, provides a consistent Christian response to the plague. According to Paneloux, the plague is the city's punishment for its sins. The people are guilty sinners before the judgment of God, not innocent victims. In his first sermon on the plague, Paneloux says,

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 evil doer has good cause to tremble. For the plague is the
flail of God and the world His threshing-floor, and implacably He will thresh out His harvest until the wheat is separated from the chaff. . . . Yet this calamity was not willed by God. Too long this world of ours has connived at evil, too long has it counted on the divine mercy, on God's forgiveness. Repentence was enough men thought; nothing was forbidden. . . . For a long while God gazed down on this town with eyes of compassion; but He grew weary of waiting . . . and now He has turned His face away from us. And so, God's light withdrawn, we walk in darkness, in the thick darkness of this plague.9

In this sermon, which emphasizes the point that evil is a method of punishment, Camus presents a militant form of Christianity in the interpretation of the problem of evil that could still split Christianity into two groups. Those who heard Paneloux were divided into those who accepted his statements and those who were not convinced.

The reaction to this conception of the plague comes when a child Rieux had desperately hoped to save dies. Rieux, Tarrou, and Paneloux stand by the bed watching the child's struggles, hopeful that the new serum will be successful. But the child dies. As Rieux leaves the room, he has "such a strange look on

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9Camus, The Plague, pp. 87-88.
his face," that Paneloux puts out his arm to stop him; 
"Rieux swung round on him fiercely. 'Ah! That child, 
anyhow, was innocent, and you know it as well as I do!'"  
Rieux sits down on a bench outside, and Paneloux comes 
up to ask why he is angry. Rieux answers: 

"I'm sorry. But weariness is a kind of 
madness. And there are times when the only 
feeling I have is one of mad revolt."

"I understand. . . . That sort of thing 
is revolting because it passes our human 
understanding. But perhaps we should love 
what we cannot understand."

Rieux straightened up. . . . Then he 
shook his head.

"No, Father. I've a very different idea 
of love. And until my dying day I shall re­ 
fuse to love a scheme of things in which 
children are put to torture."

A shade of disquietude crossed the priest's 
face. "Ah, doctor," he said sadly, "I've 
just realized what is meant by grace."

Rieux had sunk back again on the bench. 
His lassitude had returned and from its 
depths he spoke, more gently:

"It's something I haven't got; that I 
know. But I'd rather not discuss that with 
you. We're working side by side for some­ 
thing that unites us--beyond blasphemy and 
prayers. And it's the only thing that mat­ 
ters."

Paneloux sat down beside Rieux. It was 
obvious that he was deeply moved. 
"Yes, yes," he said, "you, too, are work­ 
ing for man's salvation."  

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10Ibid., p. 196.

11Ibid., p. 197.
When Paneloux begins to leave he asks Rieux if he has not been convinced that Paneloux understands the plague. Rieux responds,

"What does it matter? What I hate is death and disease, as you well know. And whether you wish it or not, we're allies, facing them and fighting them together."

Rieux was still holding Paneloux's hand. "So you see"—but he refrained from meeting this priest's eyes—"God Himself can't part us now."\(^2\)

Rieux does not look to a higher theology but to the human condition. He sees in it an undeniable common ground for the unity of men. His revolt and fight against the plague have made him aware that men have a common solidarity against the oppression of their condition.

The effect of this conversation is evidenced in Paneloux's second sermon in which he mollifies his earlier severity. Rieux says of it,

He spoke in a gentler, more thoughtful tone than on the previous occasion, and several times was noticed to be stumbling over his words. A yet more noteworthy change was that instead of saying "you" he now said "we."\(^3\)

Paneloux said that as a rule it was easy to see the dif-

\(^2\)Ibid.

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 200.
ference between good and evil, but that the difficulty began when man looked into the nature of evil, including human suffering. There is apparently needful pain, such as casting Don Juan into hell, and apparently needless pain, such as a child's death. In the aspect of a child's death, God "put us, so to speak, with our backs to the wall. Indeed, we were all up against the wall that plague had built around us, and in its lethal shadow we must work out our salvation." Paneloux continued that he might have reassured the people that eternal bliss was awaiting the child,

But how could he give that assurance when, to tell the truth, he knew nothing about it? For who would dare to assert that eternal happiness can compensate for a single moment's human suffering? . . . While God might accept and even desire that the soul should take its ease and rejoice in happier times, in periods of extreme calamity He laid extreme demands on it. Thus today God had vouchsafed to His creatures an ordeal such that they must acquire and practice the greatest of all virtues: that of All or Nothing.  

Nothing can be fully guaranteed; one must have complete faith and faith alone, or be estranged from the eternal.

It is from Tarrou, Rieux's strange and tormented

114Ibid., p. 201.
friend, that the positive statement of the novel comes. For Tarrou the plague is all that oppresses and murders men, and it is, therefore, not merely the evil of the world, but also the evil of men, armies, and regimes. Although for years he had not realized that the plague existed or that he was a part of it, one day the realization came:

I knew that we, too, on occasion, passed sentences of death. But I was told that these few deaths were inevitable for the building up of a new world in which murder would cease to be. That also was true up to a point. . . . Whatever the explanation, I hesitated. But then I remembered that miserable owl in the dock and it enabled me to keep on. Until the day when I was present at an execution. . . a youngster made everything reel before my eyes. Have you ever seen a man shot by a firing-squad? . . . Do you know that the firing-squad stands only a yard and a half from the condemned man? . . . No, you didn't know all that; those are things that are never spoken of. For the plague-stricken their peace of mind is more important than a human life. . . . And thus I came to understand that I anyhow, had had plague through all those long years in which, paradoxically enough, I'd believed with all my soul that I was fighting it. I learned that I had had an indirect hand in the deaths of thousands of people; that I'd even brought about their deaths by approving of acts and principles which could only end that way.16

16Ibid., pp. 226-27.
It was this that Tarrou revolted against; he then enunciates the principles which emerged from the revolt:

I only know that one must do what one can to cease being plague-stricken, and that's the only way in which we can hope for some peace, . . . This, and only this, can bring relief to men and, if not save them, at least do them the least harm possible and even, sometimes, a little good. So that is why I resolved to have no truck with anything which, directly or indirectly, for good reason or for bad, brings death to anyone or justifies others' putting him to death.

That, too, is why this epidemic has taught me nothing new, except that I must fight it at your side. I know positively—yea, Rieux, I can say I know the world inside out, as you may see—that each of us has the plague within him: no one, no one on earth is free from it.17

For Tarrou the plague is not just physical; it is spiritual as well. But the spiritual plague, unlike its physical counterpart, can be fought off. While all men are heir to it, the best men are those who seldom lapse into it. For Tarrou, Hanna says,

The plague is evil and sin is giving into this evil. It is obvious that Tarrou . . . is speaking of sin, but that it is sin without God. This is to say that, in Tarrou's thought, evil is of this world, man is of this world, and sin is against a value

17Ibid., pp. 228-29.
which is of this world. God in no way figures in the problem. The struggle in which Tarrou and Rieux are engaged is defined by the plague which moves through the human condition; it is this struggle which is of ultimate importance, because it concerns the ultimate ends of man: his life and death.18

That Camus is proposing a kind of de-Christianized Christianity is also given emphasis when Tarrou says,

"It comes to this," Tarrou said almost casually; "what interests me is learning how to become a saint."

"But you don't believe in God."

"Exactly! Can one be a saint without God?--that's the problem, in fact the only problem, I'm up against today."19

This is in essence the same question proposed by Camus in The Myth: Can one live without appeal to sources beyond himself? Camus is able to advance one step in The Plague and propose the question of sainthood because he has found a value foundation which he did not have in The Myth: revolt and solidarity. Although he could say "yes" to the question of The Myth, here Tarrou's question goes unanswered. This is a significant point because, as Hanna says,

... a life of revolt would be contradictory to a life of peace and sainthood. It seems impossible that sainthood could be achieved through revolt; in Camus' terms, sainthood would mean the denial of reality in favor of the value of universal solidarity and by consequence could only lead to an acceptance of the real evil in the human condition and a betrayal of revolt. Tarrou's query is the nostalgia which burns through all of Camus' writings: if there be no eternal reward, then can we find peace in the heart of revolt's tension and anguish? 20

This question is left hanging, but whatever the answer, revolt remains the prime truth which cannot be forsaken.

Tarrou too dies of the plague, and Rieux is left with memories and contradictions, still engaged in his task of healing. At last the plague is lifted, but it is not defeated, for it leaves as mysteriously and as suddenly as it came. At the end of the struggle Rieux tries to understand what has happened and is continuing to happen to himself and his friends:

Cottard, Tarrou, the men and the women Rieux had loved and lost—all alike, dead or guilty, were forgotten. Yes, the old fellow had been right; these people were "just the same as ever." But this was at once their strength and their innocence, and it was on this level, beyond all grief, that Rieux could feel himself at one with them. 21

20Hanna, The Thought and Art ..., p. 203.
21Camus, The Plague, pp. 277-78.
It was the constancy of the people in their innocence that made the plague so unjust and meaningless. There is but one thing to be learned from the plague: "there are more things to admire in men than to despise."

None the less, he knew that the tale he had to tell could not be one of a final victory. It could be only the record of what had to be done, and what assuredly would have to be done again in the never ending fight against terror and its relentless onslaughts, despite their personal afflictions, by all who, while unable to be saints but refusing to bow down to pestilences strive their utmost to be healers.22

In the common struggle against the plague and its oppression, men discovered their solidarity and with this discovery learned compassion and sympathy. Since the plague is unrelenting, revolting against it is endless. For Rieux the plague is in its essence, the inner awareness of man's accidental and transitory presence in the world, an awareness which is the source of all metaphysical torment. In this novel, Camus changes emphasis: leaving the universe to itself, he turns to men. Although the plague means never-ending defeat for man, it binds men together, and beyond the ultimate disillusionment lies the possibility of a

22Ibid., p. 278.
faith cemented by suffering and sacrifice. While the nihilist may deny meaning and purpose in the universe, it is not possible to repudiate man and negate life. The Plague is a definition of humanism faithful to the dignity of man and, despite its lack of transcendentalism, in its widest bounds, it is a humanism open to sacred interpretations.

In The Plague each one is expected to reply to the question that is put to all, at the same time, and on the same terms, and each one is a man confronting the condition of mankind, not an individual contending with his personal problems. The Plague in its unifying solidarity is far distant from the uncommunicable solitude of The Stranger. The thought that emerges from The Plague marked the culmination of the theorizing on the absurd, extended to the certitude that man can create his own values. Although man lives in a universe which clashes with his desire for coherence and justice, his sense of dignity and human worth calls on him to revolt, and this revolt postulates the greatest solidarity with his fellowmen. Without appeal to outside forces, Camus establishes a new humanism based on the unity of men and the charity which comes from this bond.
State of Siege

In 1948, a year after The Plague, a play, State of Siege, appeared which uses the image of the plague again but in a much more concrete and specific way than in the novel, for the plague is here personified. However, this play was not well received when it opened. As Camus has said,

When State of Siege first opened in Paris, there was no dissenting voice among the critics. Truly, few plays have ever enjoyed such a unanimous slashing. This is the more deplorable since I have never given up thinking that State of Siege, with all its shortcomings, is, of all my writings, the one that most resembles me.23

In this play Camus created a modern myth which holds the essence of his analysis and criticism of contemporary society. Although the play has been called a failure, moving the spectator was not his motive. The object was rather to set minds thinking. Camus said of the play,

But . . . I must first challenge certain presumptions. For instance, it is better to know that:

(1) State of Siege is in no sense an adaptation of my novel The Plague. To be sure, I gave the symbolic name to one of

23 Camus, Preface to the Plays, p. viii.
my characters. But since he is a dictator, that appellation is correct.

(2) *State of Siege* is not a play of classical conception. It might better be compared with what were called "moralités" in the French Middle Ages . . . a sort of allegorical drama which staged subjects known to the whole audience in advance.  

The play, set in Cadiz, Spain, opens with a strange comet crossing the heavens, an evil omen which terrorizes the citizens. The Governor assures them that "nothing happened," and the people are convinced since they do not want change. Only Diego and the drunken Nada do not believe that all is in order. Their belief is confirmed when a man falls dead in the square, and the doctor pronounces him dead of plague. The terror which grows in the town now is quieted by the words of the priest who, like Father Paneloux, says the plague is God's punishment for sin. Suddenly, without warning, the Plague himself appears in the city and, deposing the Governor, announces his reign: the state of siege begins. It is through the power of death that the Plague and his secretary control the people. At the word of the Plague, the secretary crosses out a

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name on her master list, and someone dies. With death ruling the people, the city gates are closed, and the people are alone and facing death.

The goal of the new regime is to bring human destiny under control. The Plague requires citizens to carry "certificates of existence" which may be obtained after each has justified his existence. Those who can little justify their existence are placed at the top of the secretary's list of names. Whereas before, the people died in a haphazard manner, they will now die in an orderly and logical way. The Plague sums up his reign in these words, "I bring you order, silence, and total justice. I don't ask you to thank me for this; it's only natural what I am doing for you. Only I must insist on your collaboration." In the reign of the Plague Camus presents a picture of what happens when the need for justice is absolutized to the neglect of freedom, that is, what happens when revolt is betrayed. For modern totalitarian systems, the condemnation is clear.

It is Diego who leads the revolt which defeats the Plague. Diego says to the secretary:

But of course only the masses count with you; ... But a single man, that's another story; he can upset your applecart. He cries aloud his joys and griefs. ... Yes, I resist you, I resist you with all the energy that's in me. ... Yes, I've seen through your famous system. You have imposed on men the pangs of hunger and bereavement to keep their minds off any stirrings of revolt. You wear them down, you waste their time and strength so that they've neither the leisure nor the energy to vest their anger. ... Each of us is alone because of the cowardice of others. ... Don't laugh! Don't laugh, you fool! You're doomed, I tell you, you and your associates. Even when you are flushed with victory, defeat is knocking at the door. For there is in man ... an innate power that you will never vanquish, a gay madness born of mingled fear and courage, unreasoning yet victorious through all time. One day this power will surge up and you will learn that all your glory is but dust before the wind.26

Diego's speech gives full recognition to the finitude of man; but he can be cowed, exhausted, and manipulated only within limits. Diego further condemns the Plague in his condemnation of the theory that "to do away with murder we must kill, and to prevent injustice we must do violence." Although Diego is not blind to the cruelty and cowardice of men, he does not see this as a reason for men to be systematically oppressed. It is because of his recognition of the weakness of men that

26Ibid., p. 205-06.
he can say, "No man is good enough to be entrusted with absolute power."

State of Siege, in its portrayal of revolt and complicity among men, also shows a further advancement in Camus' thought, for it introduces the idea of "limits." Near the end of the play, when the Plague has been defeated by revolt and the city gates are about to be opened, the chorus states this new theme:

No, there is no justice—but there are limits. And those who stand for no rules at all, no less than those who want to impose a rule for everything, overstep the limit.27

In The Myth of Sisyphus Camus presents the idea of "tension" in reference to the absurd, for the absurd is a human condition which is upheld in the tension which prevents either nihilistic acceptance of the world or monastic rejection of the world. But a philosophy of limits could not arise out of this absurdist tension because this condition is devoid of the "we" and the belief that in the solidarity of men there can be creation of values. However, once this solidarity is discovered, Camus enters the area of human values and

27 Ibid., p. 231.
conflicts. In the movement from "man" to "men," the idea of tension and revolt emerges in a new form which allows the creative concept of revolt and limits to develop.

**The Just Assassins**

Camus' next play, *The Just Assassins*, 1949, is based on an incident which occurred in Moscow in 1905. In this play Camus points to a group of young Russian terrorists who are a unique example of fidelity to the values of revolt. In a period when the values of revolt were betrayed by the legitimization of terror and murder, when various forms of nihilism became the basis for action and claimed no value for justification, the young terrorists of this play stand out as an exception, for they are sustained by their common revolt against the oppression which weighed upon their countrymen. The central incident of the play is the assassination of the Grand Duke Serge by the young Yanek Kaliayev. In his first attempt to kill the Grand Duke, he does not throw the bomb into the carriage because there are two children with the Duke. Later, when the Grand Duke is alone, Kaliayev does kill him, is arrested, and hanged for the crime.
The group of which Kaliayev is a part is remarkable because the acts of these persons are not motivated solely by hatred for the oppressive monarch and blind love for the idea of revolution. Kaliayev, rather, finds his motives for revolt neither in hatred nor abstract principles, but in love of living. He explains his reasons in these words:

I'd have them know that I'm not the least bit flighty. I imagine I strike them as being impulsive, crackbrained very likely. Yet I believe in our ideal quite as firmly as they do. Like them I'm ready to give up my life for it. I, too, can be cunning, silent, resourceful, when it's called for. Only, I'm still convinced that life is a glorious thing, I'm in love with beauty, happiness. That's why I hate despotism. The trouble is to make them understand this. Revolution, by all means. But revolution for the sake of life—to give life a chance, if you see what I mean.28

However, Kaliayev must kill another man in order to fight against despotism. He also knows that he too will die for this murder, but, for him, his death will justify him:

28 Albert Camus, The Just Assassins, p. 245 (Cf. Sartre. This statement of Camus' points up one of the chief differences between the Sartrian and Camusian concepts of freedom. Sartrian freedom is freedom for nothing, but Camus reveals a positive vision of freedom).
Do you understand why I asked to throw the bomb? To die for an ideal—that’s the only way of proving oneself worthy of it. It’s our only justification. . . . Sometimes . . . I’m worried by the thought that they have forced us into being murderers. But then I remind myself that I’m going to die, too, and everything’s all right. 29

In contrast to Kaliayev’s views of revolt, Camus presents Stepan. When Kaliayev does not throw the bomb the first time because of the children, Stepan is disgusted and says, "Not until the day comes when we stop sentimentalizing about children will the revolution triumph, and we be masters of the world." Dora, another member of the group, answers him:

"When that day comes, the revolution will be loathed by the whole human race."

"What matter if we love it enough to force our revolution on it; to rescue humanity from itself and from its bondage?"

"And suppose mankind at large doesn’t want the revolution? Suppose the masses for whom you are fighting won’t stand for the killing of their children? What then? Would you strike at the masses, too?"

"Yes, if it were necessary, and I would go on striking at them until they understood . . . No, don’t misunderstand me; I, too, love the people." 30

There are two types of terrorism which emerge from

29 Ibid., p. 246.
30 Ibid., pp. 256-57.
revolt. The type which Stepan advocates is much more clear than the type of Kaliayev because it makes the goal a good in itself to be achieved at any cost. The revolt of Kaliayev is less certain because of its awareness of limits imposed on human actions. This is the central message of the play and is expressed by Dora:

Yanek's [Kaliayev] ready to kill the Grand Duke because his death may help to bring nearer the time when Russian children will no longer die of hunger. That in itself is none too easy for him. But the death of the Grand Duke's niece and nephew won't prevent any child from dying of hunger. Even in destruction there's a right way and a wrong way—and there are limits. 31

Dora says that hatred is not a sufficient motive for assassination; one must go beyond hatred to love.

After he is captured and in prison awaiting death, Kaliayev is visited by Skuratov, head of the police, who tells Kaliayev that he can receive a pardon if he publicly repents his crime. However, Kaliayev does not feel that he is a criminal; he has committed an act of justice and is ready to die for it. Later, he is visited by the Grand Duchess, who pleads with him to repent and embrace the Christian faith. But Kaliayev

31 Ibid., p. 258.
refuses, clinging to his conception of revolt. When
the Grand Duchess tells him that there is no love
apart from God, Kaliayev replies, "Yes, there is.
Love for His creatures."  

The night that Kaliayev is to be executed, the
terrorists gather to try to understand what has happened.
They realize the painful contradiction in which they
are living. They have learned that in giving them­
selves to the terrorist protest against the misery
which is the lot of the Russian people, they must
recognize that this revolt is governed by limits re­
siding in the positive value which they seek. 

Kaliayev and his fellow terrorists live in the state
of contradiction and overcome nihilism. These people
combine honor, nobility, and a high moral conscience
in a moving struggle to realize high human ideals.

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32 Ibid., p. 289 (This reveals what some of Camus' critics, notably Murchland, have implied concerning his closeness to Christianity: one will come, ultimately, inevitably, to God through a real love of His creatures—if not by "the other road").

The Rebel

Camus returned to the essay form in The Rebel, published in 1951, and, in a manner similar to that of The Myth of Sisyphus, approached intellectually the ideas of human solidarity and limits which had grown in his post-World War II plays and novel. The Rebel opens with a revised analysis of the moral implications of the absurd. With this revised view of the absurd as a basis, Camus examines the two most positive reactions to the absurd: metaphysical revolt and political revolution. He traces the history of metaphysical revolt as expressed in literature and then turns to the question of political revolution which has sometimes been associated with revolt. The essay ends by advocating revolt, not revolution, for revolution, no matter how idealistic its origins, seems ultimately to involve murder and terror. The revolt for which Camus asks places its emphasis on man and on the necessity of limits, establishing a new, resolute humanism. The general purpose of The Rebel is established in the opening pages: it is an attempt to understand those forms of contemporary violence and inhumanity which, having an ideological basis, pro-
claim, in contradiction to their deeds, that human well-being is their goal. Camus states that his purpose is to "once again face the reality of the present, which is logical crime, and to examine meticulously the arguments by which it is justified; it is an attempt to understand the times in which we live."[^1]

In this re-evaluation of the absurd, Camus sees that the concept of the absurd leads only to a contradiction as far as the problem of murder is concerned, for "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. . . . Evil and virtue are mere chance or caprice."[^2] This results in the choice not to act at all, which amounts to at least accepting the murder of others, or in the decision to embark on a course of action which, since there are no higher values, will have efficacy as its goal and will result in a world of masters and slaves. In adopting this view of the absurd, man must prepare himself to allow murder if not to commit it himself. But,

[^2]: Ibid., p. 5.
on an individual level, the absurd does not admit
suicide, for human life is the only necessary good,
"since it is precisely life that makes this encounter
[man with the absurd] possible and since, without life,
the absurdist wager would have no basis." Thus, therefore,
from the moment life is recognized as good, it becomes
good for all men:

Murder cannot be made coherent when suicide
is not considered coherent. . . . In terms
of the encounter between human inquiry and
the silence of the universe, murder and
suicide are one and the same thing, and
must be accepted or rejected together.

Because of this the absurd can serve only as point of
departure. It is necessary to go beyond the absurd to
revolt, and it is through revolt that the individual
moves out of his solitude and finds the value of human
complicity.

To become aware of the absurd is, in reality, to
have rebelled to the extent of saying "no" to some
state of affairs. But to do this is to say "yes" to
something which is not that state of affairs. Camus
uses the example of a slave who has taken orders all

36 Ibid., p. 6.
37 Ibid.
of his life, but suddenly decides that he cannot obey
some new command. In saying "no," he means that
"you are going too far"; in other words, his "no"
affirms the existence of a borderline, of limits.
This is the same concept that is found in the rebel's
feeling that some other person is exerting his authority
to the point of infringing on the rights of others.
In revolt a man feels that he is right and the oppressor
is wrong. In his act of saying "no," in his revolt,
a man affirms something irreducible within him: a
value. To say "no" is to impose limits and to imply
that within these limits values of some kind are being
safeguarded.

Up to the point of revolt, the slave, man, had
been willing to compromise; but with revolt he adopts
an attitude of All or Nothing. In this attitude,
Camus says,

The rebel himself wants to be "all"--to
identify himself completely with this
good of which he has suddenly become aware
and by which he wants to be personally
recognized and acknowledged--or "nothing":
in other words, to be completely destroyed
by the force that dominates him. As a
last resort, he is willing to accept the
final defeat, which is death, rather than
be deprived of the personal sacrament that
he calls, for example, freedom. Better to
die on one's feet than to live on one's knees.38

38Ibid., p. 15.
This value which emerges as a total demand, that the rebel will die for this value, means that the value is more general than any man's own individuality:

If the individual, in fact, accepts death and happens to die as a consequence of his act of rebellion, he demonstrates by doing so that he is willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of a common good which he considers more important than his own destiny. . . . Therefore he is acting in the name of certain values which are still indeterminate but which he feels are common to himself and to all men. We see that the affirmation implicit in every act of rebellion is extended to something that transcends the individual in so far as it withdraws him from his supposed solitude and provides him with a reason to act. 39

It is at this point that Camus explicitly separates himself from Sartrian existential thought, for in the transcendent power of the value established by revolt, he finds a human nature.

Analysis of rebellion leads at least to the suspicion that, contrary to the postulates of contemporary thought, a human nature does exist, as the Greeks believe. Why rebel if there is nothing permanent in oneself worth preserving? It is for the sake of everyone in the world that the slave asserts himself when he comes to the conclusion that a command has infringed on something within him which does not belong to him alone, but

39 Ibid., p. 15-16.
which is common ground where all are one—even the man who insults and oppresses him—have a natural community.\textsuperscript{40}

The attitude of revolt reveals three values.\textsuperscript{41} First of all, to revolt against the absurd is to rediscover oneself in the sense that it reveals a part of man which is held to be important and by which man identifies his essence as a human being. Hence, the first value is individual human worth. The second value, universal human nature, is found as man sees that it is his individual worth which identifies him as a member of the human race, and thus he transcends his personal destiny. This leads directly to the third value, human solidarity. Whereas atheistic existentialism denies the existence of a common human nature and any values derived from such a concept, Camus postulates both. In opposition to Sartre, who believes values do not pre-exist but are rather invented by man to form an image of how the individual ought to be, Camus makes his three values independent of the individual. He does not say that they are absolute or eternal in the traditional sense, but they do pre-exist and are essential to what being a man means.

\textsuperscript{40}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 16.

\textsuperscript{41}\textit{Cruickshank, op. cit.}, pp. 96-97.
To support this conviction, Camus offers two arguments. The first of these is that although an act of rebellion may have egoistic motives, it is not essentially an egoistic act. The rebel demands respect for himself, but only insofar as he identifies himself with a natural community. Secondly, Camus notes "that rebellion does not arise only, and necessarily, among the oppressed, but that it can also be caused by the mere spectacle of oppression of which someone else is the victim."\textsuperscript{2} In this case, the rebel has identified his destiny with that of the oppressed. Hence, revolt affirms the complicity of all men around a common value and against a common oppression. When a man rebels, he "identifies himself with other men, and so surpasses himself, and from this point of view human solidarity is metaphysical."\textsuperscript{3} Although rebellion may appear to be negative since it creates nothing, it is profoundly positive in that it reveals the part of man which must always be defended. To sum up the initial progress that rebellion provides in a mind that is first imbued

\textsuperscript{2}Camus, The Rebel, p. 16.

\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., p. 19.
with the absurdity and apparent sterility of the world, Camus says:

In the absurdist experience, suffering is individual. But from the moment when a movement of rebellion begins, suffering is seen as a collective experience. Therefore the first progressive step for a mind overwhelmed by the strangeness of things is to realize that this feeling of strangeness is shared with all men and that human reality, in its entirety, suffers from the distance which separates it from the rest of the universe. The malady experienced by a single man becomes a mass plague. In our daily trials rebellion plays the same role as does the "cogito" in the realm of thought: it is the first piece of evidence. But this evidence lures the individual from his solitude. It founds its first value on the whole human race. I rebel—therefore we exist. [Italics mine.]

Camus clearly distinguishes between revolt and revolution. Revolt, or metaphysical rebellion, is "the movement by which man protests against his condition and the whole of creation. It is metaphysical because it contests the ends of man and creation."

Revolution involves the translation of an idea into history. It attempts to bring into accord history and a theoretical plan of stability. A definitive revolu-

\[44\] Ibid., p. 22.
\[45\] Ibid., p. 23.
tion has not and never will take place because by the time a revolutionary idea has been executed in history, the historical situation has moved beyond the original point. In both revolt and revolution there is a demand for freedom and justice, but in the historical event of revolution, these two demands come into conflict and give rise to a new revolt and affirmation of man by himself. Revolution comes into conflict with the basic movements of revolt, for it negates the complicity and solidarity of men revealed by revolt in its attempts to establish either absolute justice or absolute freedom. Justice and freedom, as Camus sees them, can exist together only in a relative degree, for to absolutize one is to negate the other. Revolution cannot succeed because, in its desire for a stable society, it denies the absurd, the confrontation by which revolt was first discovered. Revolt is a way of existing which involves a dialectical consciousness of what the world is and what the individual is. It does not, like revolution, move toward a goal. It is rather its own goal, and as such must be constantly reaffirmed.

In his analysis of metaphysical rebellion, Camus states that, although in a real sense of the term, metaphysical rebellion did not begin until the end of
the eighteenth century ("when modern times began to
accompanied by the crash of falling ramparts"),
there were five ancient prototypes: Prometheus,
Achilles, Callicles, Lucretius, and Epicurus, all of
whom took the part of man in defiance of the gods.
But the fiercest kind of attack is that which is di-
rected against a personal God, for with a personal God
man becomes accountable for his actions in a direct
relationship with his God, and the notion of crime is
born. Because of this, Cain is more representative of
modern metaphysical revolt than the Greeks. The rift
between God and man was to be healed in Christ who in
taking on the condition of man and suffering would
eliminate the reason for revolt. But when the divinity
of Christ was denied, suffering once more became the
lot of man. Christ became simply another suffering man.

Modern metaphysical revolt then begins with the
Marquis de Sade. He cries out that God is a criminal
divinity who oppresses and denies mankind, and asks:
"Why should men be virtuous?" His revolt is one of
absolute negation: "Since God kills and repudiates
mankind, cannot each man do this to his fellowman?"
He demands a monstrous freedom and obeys no other law
than that of inexhaustible desire. Sade is of value
because he shows the extreme consequences of the logic of revolt when, through a pent-up and demented fury, its origins are forgotten. He did not revolt in the name of principles but on behalf of the instincts which led to a freedom which was license. With Sade, in emphasizing the negative aspect of revolt, are those romantics, whom Camus calls "dandies," who extol evil, and the individual, though not siding with mankind. They lament, but cannot move to positive action of any kind.

With Dostoeievsky rebellion moves a step further, for Ivan Karamazov sides with mankind and stresses human innocence. He does not deny the existence of God, but rather refuses Him in the name of a moral value, justice. For Ivan, if evil is essential to divine creation, the creation is unacceptable, for justice is higher than either man or God. Although God's love and immortality are offered as perhaps being possible, Ivan refuses them in the name of human justice. He assumes the "all or nothing" attitude of the rebel, demanding justice and salvation for all or for no one. But in his rejection of immortality, in his confirmation of all-pervasive innocence, he moves to the position that "everything is permitted." Of this Camus says,
"With this 'everything is permitted' the history of contemporary nihilism really begins." Although Ivan rebels against a murderous God, from the moment he begins to rationalize his rebellion he deduces the law of murder, and in his turning to negation, he goes mad.

In moving to Nietzsche, Camus states:

From the moment that man submits God to moral judgment, he kills Him in his own heart. And then what is the basis of morality? God is denied in the name of justice, but can the idea of justice be understood without the idea of God? At this point are we not in the realm of absurdity? Absurdity is the concept that Nietzsche meets face to face. In order to be able to dismiss it, he pushes it to extremes: morality is the ultimate aspect of God, which must be destroyed before reconstruction can begin. Then God no longer exists and is no longer responsible for our existence; man must resolve to act, in order to exist.\(^\text{46}\)

Nietzsche, accepting nihilism, asks if one could live without believing in anything. His reply is affirmative, provided one created a system out of the absence of faith and pushed nihilism to its limits. For Camus, Nietzsche's great discovery was that true freedom can only be founded upon law. It is in this discovery that the rebel emerges from nihilism. If nothing is true, says Nietzsche, rather than everything being

\(^{46}\text{Ibid., p. 62.}\)
permitted, nothing is permitted, for unless man knows what is possible and what is forbidden, he cannot act. If man dissolves the old law, he must create a new law before he will find freedom. Because of this, God's death solves nothing. Now man must create new laws and values within his discovery that the earth is his only home and the only place salvation will be found. Although Camus believes that Nietzsche, through a process similar to those of Chestov and Husserl described by him in The Myth, deifies the world, Camus sees his contribution to metaphysical rebellion to be that he moved from simple negation of the ideal to its secularization. Since salvation can no longer come from God, man must give himself to the eternal becoming of the world and there make his salvation.

Camus' longest comment on the increasing deviation of revolt towards nihilism is the section on Lautreamont, Rimbaud, and the Surrealists. He finds in Lautreamont and Rimbaud a banal conformity and conventionality in which, although not religious, they do their duty toward society. Camus states:

Conformity is one of the nihilistic temptations of rebellion which dominate a large part of our intellectual history. It demonstrates how the rebel who takes
to action is tempted to succumb, if he
forgets his origins, to the most absolute
conformity.47

Camus says of the surrealists that their message was
that violence was the only adequate method of expres-
sion and that non-signification and contradiction were
cultivated for their own sakes. Calling it the "gos-
pel of chaos," Camus believes that it felt impelled to
create an order but only dreamed of destruction. The
surrealists, while exalting human innocence, believed
they could also exalt murder and suicide, and there-
fore betrayed revolt.

In his examination of metaphysical revolt, Camus
attempts to show that the protest, defiance, and
destruction that have characterized man's rebellion
are, in reality, the result of man's desire for a
truer life. Although this revolt has sometimes ended
in destruction and murder, it remains true that man,
in revolt, has been driven by his need for order and
morality. If the rebel protests against death, it is
because he desires a meaning in a world where,

If nothing lasts, then nothing is justified;

47Ibid., p. 87.
everything that dies is deprived of meaning. To fight against death amounts to claiming that life has a meaning, to fighting for order and unity.

The rebel seeks an explanation for his happiness as well as for his misery. The rebel is seeking, without knowing it, a moral philosophy or religion. Rebellion, even though it is blind, is a form of asceticism. Therefore, if the rebel blasphemes, it is in the hope of finding a new god.

The rebel is attempting to regain the stability of outlook and relationship with the world that the Christian world view offered. His revolt is called "metaphysical" because it is essentially a religio-philosophic protest against the traditional ends of human existence held by the Christian world in favor of a new ethic which does not rely on forces outside of man and the world.

However, Camus sees that the metaphysical revolt of the last two centuries has become lethal to life and freedom because of its failure to maintain the tensions inherent in all metaphysical protest. Moral values can only exist while the tension is present;

\[48\text{Ibid., p. 101.}\]
\[49\text{Ibid.}\]
once the tension is dropped, violence and nihilism are inevitable. A further result is either the advocacy of suicide, the absolute refusal of the absurd; or the advocacy of murder, the absolute acceptance of the absurd. Of these two, it is the latter form of extremism which has become dominant and has betrayed the nature of metaphysical revolt.

In turning from metaphysical rebellion to political revolution, Camus says that they both spring from the same origins:

Actually, revolution is only the logical consequence of metaphysical rebellion, and we shall discover, in our analysis of the revolutionary movement, the same desperate and bloody effort to affirm the dignity of man in defiance of the things that deny its existence. The revolutionary spirit thus undertakes the defense of that part of man which refuses to submit. In other words, it tries to assure him his crown in the realm of time, and, rejecting God, it chooses history with an apparently inevitable logic.\(^{50}\)

Although both rebellion and revolution share the same beginnings, they are markedly different. Camus says:

Rebellion is, by nature, limited in scope. It is no more than an incoherent pronouncement. Revolution, on the contrary, originates in the realm of ideas. Specifically, it is the injection of ideas into histori-
cal experience, while rebellion is only the movement that leads from individual experience into the realm of ideas. While even the collective history of a movement of rebellion is always that of a fruitless struggle with facts, of an obscure protest which involves neither methods nor reasons, a revolution is an attempt to shape actions to ideas, to fit the world into a theoretic frame.51

In analyzing revolution, Camus divides it into several major sections: regicides and deicides, individual and state terrorism. Regicide occurred with the French Revolution, the starting point of modern times, because it was there that the principle of divine right was overthrown. It further marks the beginning of deicide because it introduced to the "historical scene the forces of negation and rebellion which had become the essence of intellectual discussion in the previous centuries."52 The "death of God" was followed by the deification of man, and vertical transcendence, or grace, was replaced by horizontal transcendence, or history.53 Political revolution became the result of

51Ibid., p. 106.
52Ibid., p. 112.
53Cruickshank, op. cit., pp. 102-03.
seeking temporal salvation, but it also became a mutation of the original metaphysical revolt by its deification of history. But in looking for salvation in time and in deifying history, man is encouraged to sacrifice the present to a hypothetical future, a fact which introduces the idea that efficacy is a sufficient justification of action. This is why revolution in the name of freedom has so quickly led to the guillotine and the purge. Although revolution may be initiated by the desire for freedom, at a certain stage, freedom is suspended indefinitely in behalf of efficacy, and the reign of terror begins. This is why Camus says that revolt, as an expression of human consciousness is innocent, while revolution, as an historical undertaking, is guilty. And it is the story of this guilt, from the French to the Russian revolutions, that he examines. His concern is not with the political and economic causes of revolution, but with the reliance of its theory on some of the major themes of metaphysical revolt.

Whereas the French Revolution resulted in regicide, it was Hegel who directly contributed the final severance of God from the earth. Although Camus admits that Hegel has often been misinterpreted, Hegel
is important here because it was an interpretation of his system, whether accurate or not, that led to the final degradation of the revolutionary idea. After Hegel, the view was held that man, rather than directing his own destiny, was carried along by the historical process. What man had previously thought to be a free action, was in reality part of the inevitable course of events. This deification of history meant that the conqueror was necessarily right and the conquered wrong. In making action and thought part of an inevitable process, truth, reason, and justice, were incarnated in the progress of the world, and these values ceased to be guides in order to become goals. It is in this that the real evil of historical revolution lies, for once these values had been placed in some hypothetical future, the instruments for judging the methods used to bring about the realization of truth, reason, and justice are lost. No moral judgment is possible when the avenues of moral evolution are closed through the establishment of these former guidelines as goals in themselves. Consequently, actions were to be judged only according to their success in moving toward the final goal, not in accordance with moral values. Morality as such became provisional and shifted
according to the political situation. To place moral values in the future was also to open the way for the assumption of general human guilt, for the world had become a place without principles. As Camus says,

Without innocence there are no human relations and no reason. Without reason, there is nothing but naked force, the master and slave waiting for reason one day to prevail. Between master and slave, even suffering is solitary, joy is without foundation, and both are undeserved. . . . The only escape is to create order with the use of weapons. 54

For Camus, Hegel's philosophy does not see human nature as yet realized, and thus man is called to action in order to bring about this final realization. And since the only rule of action is action itself, with Hegel begins the philosophies of efficacy whose consequences are widened in the rational and irrational states of terrorism of the twentieth century.

It was the revolutionaries of this century who were to make full use of the Hegelian system, which discredited the formal virtues of bourgeois life. And the revolutionary thought which Hegel's system produced politically is fundamentally nihilistic, at least as applied to here and now: it has no path

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54 Camus, The Rebel, p. 144.
to follow except action, and this action cannot be judged until the end of history.

The divinity of man is still on the march, and will be worthy of adoration only at the end of time. This apocalypse must be promoted and, despite the fact that there is no God, at least a church must be built. . . . The sky is empty, the earth delivered into the hands of power without principles. Those we have chosen to kill and those who have chosen to enslave will successively occupy the front of the stage, in the name of a form of rebellion which has been diverted from the path of truth.55

The translation of revolt into revolutionary action has largely resulted, according to Camus, in the betrayal of the original values of revolt through the legitimization of terror and murder. What was begun by the French Revolution and perfected by radical Hegelianism, culminated in fascism and Marxist-Stalinism. Camus views the histories of these revolutions as man's progressive deification of himself. However, in the midst of this general tendency of revolutionary nihilism, Camus points to the young Russians he wrote of in The Just Assassins as a unique example of fidelity to the values of revolt. But although these terrorists triumphed over nihilism, this triumph was short-lived,

55 Ibid., pp. 147-48.
for the revolutionaries in Russia moved toward political cynicism, and sterility set in: "The concept of provocation reinstates the 'Everything is permitted,' and again identified history and absolute values."\(^{56}\)

In the twentieth century the spirit of revolt gave rise to many revolutions which, according to Camus, have led to either a rational or an irrational glorification of the state and state terrorism. The regimes of Hitler and Mussolini are examples of irrational states, for they constructed a state on the concept that everything is meaningless and that history is written only in terms of the hazards of force. The opposite of this is the rational terror of Communism. As Camus describes it:

Russian Communism, . . . by its very origins, openly aspires to world empire. That is its strength, its deliberate significance, and its importance in our history. Despite appearances, the German revolution had no hope of a future. It was only a primitive impulse whose ravages have been greater than its real ambitions. Russian Communism, on the contrary, has appropriated the metaphysical ambition that this book describes, the erection, after the death of God, of a city of man finally deified. . . . For the first time in

\(^{56}\)Ibid., p. 173.
history, a doctrine and a movement based on an Empire in arms has as its purpose definitive revolution and the final unification of the world.57

It is the section of The Rebel which he devotes to Marxist thought and its historical impact for which Camus gained wide-spread acclaim both in France and abroad, and bitter attacks from the Marxist philosophers and Communist party journals. In analyzing Marxism, Camus criticizes prophetic Marxism, the dialectical contradictions of the idea of the end of history, and the notion of objective guilt. Making a sharp distinction between Marxist social criticism and Marxist Utopianism, Camus recognizes the contribution of the former, but is concerned with the latter because it was the Utopianism which was used by the Russian Communist state. Camus sees as revolutionary in Marxist prophecy the argument that history was not only dialectically, but economically, determined. He finds Marx's true greatness to be that he holds the dignity of labor as his central ethic. However, the revolution which is to establish this ethic is one without any transcendent or ethical basis for a working

57 Ibid., p. 186.
justice and dignity. Marx replaces all transcendent principles with the "future," the sole value and justification for present life; therefore, anything which aids this future is a value. Consequently, his Utopia can easily lead to opportunism and ruthlessness. In his criticism, Camus is trenchant in discussing the method of Communism to achieve temporal domination through the negation of history and its reformulation to accord with the patterns prescribed by the Marxist laws of change and development. For Camus, this practice of constant negation and revision is the result of the belief that there is no human nature, and that, consequently, man is infinitely plastic. Camus feels that the negation of human nature is a basic tenet in the functioning of Russian Marxism, for by it all things are rationally transformed with ease to accord with the system. Camus, of course, objects strongly to this because it directly challenges the basis of his philosophy of revolt: there is a human nature. Because of this the Marxist state is seen to be in contradiction to the spirit of revolt which was its original impetus.

In his critical study of revolt in history, Camus attempts to show that both the rational and irrational
states, in usurping God's functions, have ended in terror and slavery. The origins of revolution in both cases have been betrayed by seeking the shortest way to earthly immortality: nihilism and terror. Since revolt is the refusal to be reduced to history or treated as a "thing," and is at the same time a confirmation of a common human nature beyond the reach of history, when revolution attempts to force a total unanimity, it negates human nature and pits itself against revolt. Camus says:

When rebellion, in rage or intoxication, adopts the attitude of "all or nothing" and the negation of all existence and all human nature, it is at this point that it denies itself. Only total negation justifies the concept of a totality that must be conquered. But the affirmation of a limit, a dignity, and a beauty common to all men only entails the necessity of extending this value to embrace everything and everyone and by advancing toward unity without denying the origins of rebellion.  

Returning to the concept of rebellion, Camus emphasizes the value that revolt produces: an awareness of limits: "In assigning oppression a limit within which begins the dignity common to all men, rebellion defines a

58 Ibid., p. 251.
primary value."59 And with the recognition of limits comes the realization that rebellion is in no way a demand for total freedom. It rather attacks total freedom, for "the freedom he claims, he claims for all; the freedom he refuses, he forbids everyone to enjoy."50 When rebellion develops into destruction, it is illogical. In order to remain authentic, rebellion must be faithful to the "yes" that it contains as well as to the "no." Rebellion itself aspires only to the relative; its universe is the universe of relative values. For Camus, "absolute freedom mocks at justice. Absolute justice denies freedom. To be fruitful, the two ideas must find their limits in each other."61 Because neither freedom nor justice can be absolutized, because limits are necessary, value must be relative.

In revolt, the law of moderation must be followed. Camus describes moderation in these words:

Moderation is not the opposite of rebellion. Rebellion in itself is moderation, and it demands, defends, and re-creates it

59 Ibid., p. 231.
60 Ibid., p. 234.
61 Ibid., p. 291.
throughout history and its eternal disturbances. The very origin of this value guarantees us that it can only be partially destroyed. Moderation, born of rebellion, can only live by rebellion. It is a perpetual conflict, continually created and mastered by the intelligence. It does not triumph either in the impossible or in the abyss. It finds its equilibrium through them. Whatever we may do, excess will always keep its place in the heart of man, in the place where solitude is found. We all carry within us our places of exile, our crimes and our ravages. But our task is not to unleash them on the world; it is to fight them in ourselves and in others. Rebellion . . . is still today at the basis of the struggle. Origin of form, source of real life, it keeps us always erect in the savage, formless movement of history.

The philosophy of revolt, drawn from the philosophy of the absurd, emerges as one which finds a human nature common to all men, and from this derives the values of limits and moderation. In revolt man brings to the fore two terms: the power of regime which oppresses him, and value within him which he affirms. Holding to his only evidence, the given human condition, he becomes conscious of human solidarity. Aware of what he is and what the world is, the rebel realizes his complicity with all men who share this condition. The rebel moves beyond both nihilism and absolutized history in the

62 Ibid., p. 301.
recognition of limits. In this recognition, the rebel consents to the relative and remains faithful to the human condition. In his scrutiny of man and rebellion, Camus postulates his existential humanism.

**The Fall**

Camus' next major work did not appear until 1956, when *The Fall* was published. *The Fall*, like *The Stranger* and *The Plague*, is what might be termed an "artistic leap" into a philosophical position which Camus was unable to make clear at the time. *The Stranger* embodied the concepts found in *The Myth*, and *The Plague* introduced the idea of limits and solidarity, which were clarified in *The Rebel*. Camus appears to "feel" his way into philosophy, for his thought develops and takes on form through the manner of a growing art-work.\(^{63}\) His thought finds its first expression and validation in his art; he seems to think existentially before he thinks rationally, a fact which marks his artistic temperament. And it is this which gives perhaps the soundest reason for saying that, although he has a philosophy, he cannot be called a philosopher. The

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\(^{63}\) Hanna, *The Thought and Art* . . ., p. 214.
fact that his philosophy has grown out of his artistic integrity gives the philosophy added power and a personal immediacy and applicability. Into this pattern comes *The Fall*, a further extension and enrichment of Camus' thought.

*The Fall* is not a true novel from the point of view of form; it is rather a *récit*, a narrative or a literary monologue. But even more than this, it is a confession-narrative. The confessor here is Jean-Baptiste Clamence, a noted Paris lawyer who has achieved fame, a degree of fortune, and considerable happiness as a defender of the poor and oppressed. He is one for whom virtue is its own reward; he is by all standards happy and an exceedingly good man. However, suddenly, without apparent cause, he begins to change. Turning to various forms of debauchery and then quite deliberately leaving Paris, he becomes an exile. The reader first finds him in the Mexico City Bar in the slums of Amsterdam where he has taken refuge with the accused and rejected of the world. It is in this setting that he tells his story of what happened to him and why he has fallen from the happiness he once knew.

The crucial event of his life in Paris occurred, Clamence explains, one night when, while walking home
over the Pont Royal, he passes a girl who was leaning over the railing, staring into the river Seine. There is no one else around. After Clamence has passed, he hears a splash and then a series of cries as the girl is swept downstream. He stops, knowing he should do something, but aware that he would not, for the girl's cries do not quite penetrate through the lethargy of his lingering and sensuous enjoyment of the evening. He walks on. And this is the beginning of his fall, for in ignoring the cries and walking on, he gives the lie to his entire life of virtue. In a perfectly free and un compelled moment, he discovers that he loves only himself and that his life of service to others is a sham, a means of supporting his own sense of self-importance and superiority.

The other central event in his life is derived from this one. Two or three years later, while crossing the Seine, as he stands looking at the water, thinking of his own power and personal completion, he hears laughter behind him. He turns, but there is no one there. He hears the laughter again, this time as if from downstream. But there is no one anywhere. In this moment, he remembers the night of the girl on the bridge and first becomes fully conscious of his fall.
It is this second event which begins his immediate transformation into the man in the Amsterdam bar who calls himself a judge-penitent.

Clamence's new occupation is to buttonhole strangers in the bar and confess his moral failure. However, this is done in such a way as to also accuse them of a similar failure. The story of his life becomes a mirror held up to his listener's life. For this reason he is a judge-penitent. Through condemning his own life in the most general terms, he simultaneously condemns the life of his listener and provokes him into self-judgment. For Clamence, it is only by self-judgment that he can escape the judgment and mocking laughter of others and, at the same time, earn the right to judge others.

Now my words have a purpose. They have the purpose, obviously, of silencing the laughter, of avoiding judgment personally, though there is apparently no escape. Is not the great thing that stands in the way of our escaping it the fact that we are the first to condemn ourselves? Therefore it is essential to begin by extending the condemnation to all, without distinction, in order to think it out at the start.64

Only in proclaiming the guilt of all men can Clamence lighten the burden of judgment which weighs on him.

Hence I had to find another means of extending judgment to everybody in order to make it weigh less heavily on my own shoulders. I found the means. . . . My idea is both simple and fertile. . . . Inasmuch as one couldn't condemn others without immediately judging oneself, one had to overwhelm oneself to have the right to judge others. Inasmuch as every judge some day ends up as a penitent, one had to travel the road in the opposite direction and practice the profession of penitent to be able to end up as a judge. 65

In his role as judge-penitent, Clamence is examining man's freedom. He says that men are free, but that no man wants to bear the guilt which freedom entails. At the center of his fall lies fear of freedom: "On the bridges of Paris I, too, learned that I was afraid of freedom." Although he had freely chosen to ignore the cries of the girl, he could not endure the personal guilt which this choice entailed. He had no one--God, confessor, nor master--to whom he could give up his burden of freedom. For this modern John the Baptist the only possible solution was at least to proclaim the guilt of all men, thereby compromising

65 Ibid., pp. 137-38.
the freedom which he knew he could never escape. Before the incident at the bridge, Clamence was unconsciously whole; the man was indistinguishable from the virtue. But in the instant Clamence chose himself and not his virtue, he acted as a completely free man, and, in this act, he took upon himself the terrible responsibility for his act. Now his virtue could not justify his act; he alone could be his justification. Clamence moves, through this experience, from an unconscious state into one of consciousness and the agony of decision. He discovers the real burden of freedom and this is his "fall," his plunge into the world of guilt.

Although there are definite Christian parallels in The Fall, such as references to the Eden in which Clamence lived, his name, and his self-references as a prophet preaching in the desert of stone, these parallels do not embody Christian convictions, for the doctrine of redemption is explicitly rejected. For there to be

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66 For an analysis of the Christian elements of The Fall as compared to Dante's Inferno, as well as a commentary on The Fall as a satire on Jean-Paul Sartre see Adele King, "Structure and Meaning in Le Chute," PMLA, LXXVII (December, 1962), pp. 660-67.
redemption, there must be some sort of law or standard. But in *The Fall* this does not exist, and thus, the burden of guilt is rendered all the more acute because there is no standard of innocence. Clamence says that man's torment is to be judged without reference to laws.

In *The Fall* Camus' primary concern is with the individual as he faces himself. Whereas in *The Myth* he dealt with the problem of the individual facing a fragmented universe, and in *The Rebel* with the rebellious individual facing an oppressive metaphysical or political system, he is here looking at the reflective individual trying to bring into accord his understanding of the world and himself, and his personal history and destiny.\(^67\) This novel reveals Camus as a psychologist, for he here deals with the psychological make-up of contemporary men in their moral actions. For the most part, Clamence's narrative is composed of observations on the motivations and justifications which men may have for their actions. Until *The Fall*, Camus had insisted upon the innocence of man and the natural injustice of the world, and upon the fact that

\(^{67}\) Hanna, *The Thought and Art...*, pp. 226-27.
man caused evil and suffering only when he was misled by false ideas. However, in this work the moral climate is one of guilt. Unlike *The Stranger*, where unequivocal innocence was the source of alienation and the obstinate revolt of *The Plague*, *The Fall* questions the assumption of human innocence.

This presentation of guilt is in a sense a reversal of revolt, for in revolt man is called to proclaim his and all men's innocence. However, the question which must be faced with revolt is this: If in revolt man is innocent, how does one account for the origins of evil? Obviously all men cannot be innocent, for it is men who create the oppressive conditions against which the rebel revolts. The theme of innocence, then, becomes a one-sided theme which requires further examination. The answer to this problem is first touched upon, although briefly, in *The Plague*, for Tarrou is the one who suggests that the plague is not merely something outside of men but within as well, an evil against which they must struggle. It must be remembered that, in speaking of evil outside of men, in "others," to every other man "I" am an "other." Tarrou is aware that in relation to the plague outside he is innocent, but that, simultaneously, in relation to the plague
within him, he is guilty. This is the contradiction in which man is caught. It is in *The Fall* that Camus takes up the question of "I, the guilty other," rather than "I, the innocent rebel." In doing so he shows an awareness of a tension his work has never before known and of a yearning never before so anguished. Clamence becomes a mirror and an embodiment of his times. In him the social anguish of an historical moment becomes the personal anguish of an individual moment. He makes clear that this is an interim period in which the old laws have been broken; and, since no man can live in absolute freedom, the new law must be found. He clarifies the current problem, and, in doing so, he perhaps takes the first step toward the creation of a new law, or the discovery of something not known before, a new level, a new dimension. Hanna describes the world of Clamence in these words:

Clamence is a man who forsook his virtue and became free, but complete freedom is an unbearable condition. . . . In Clamence we do not see the "rebel" who has discovered his innate value by virtue of a threat which is external to him; rather we find a man who, not being involved in a social situation of

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68 Ibid., pp. 231-32.
external threat, discovers that no innate value is forthcoming; taken alone, without being in conflict with the world, Clamence's soul reveals only the unbearable emptiness of freedom. And this is why he longs for the innocence he once knew, while rejecting the virtue he once practiced. Clamence... hints that the life of rebellion is not all-sufficing, that it must finally create something out of itself which makes possible an ongoing civilization that can guarantee a certain innocence and peace without being ceaselessly revolted against. Clamence and his age seek an old innocence and a new law.

The fundamental question of *The Fall* seems to be that, given the inescapability of guilt and judgment, how may man go beyond guilt and judgment to attain innocence? This is strongly reminiscent of Tarrou's question, "How can one become a saint without God?" However, there is no answer given; the question must be viewed and the tension preserved until it can be answered. But this new awareness of guilt and the question which it brings to the fore was not be be further developed by Camus. With the introduction of the other side of innocence, his thought was halted, for, ironically enough, in a thoroughly absurdist fashion, he was killed in a car accident January 4, 1960.

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Ibid., pp. 233-34.
Camus has, in *The Fall*, truly come full circle to the individual again. We have seen Camus moving from individual innocence, bewilderment, and solitude to the recognition of brotherhood in innocence to the new dimension of the individual and guilt.
CONCLUSION

That the thought of Albert Camus was in a continuous state of evolution is clearly evident when his works are viewed as a whole. To wonder what direction and dimensions his thought might have taken, had he lived, is natural. But it is our more important task to attempt to understand as thoroughly as possible what this man had to say to the world, to assess its meaning for modern man, and to carry on the inquiry toward certain answers implicit in his very questioning. In his concern for man—his hopes, possibilities, and destiny—his thought is thoroughly oriented toward moral and religious problems. Although he adheres to personal experience and is a witness to an age marked by division, violence, and conflict, his dynamic view of man prevents him from falling into pessimism and nihilism. Even in positing the value of human solidarity, he does not see this value as a static one, but rather as one growing in depth and intensity. He is an essentially moral thinker because of his concern for and concentration upon the problem of ethical standards in contemporary society. And in coming to a position
of positive humanism, he further reveals himself as a religious thinker.

Camus is not anti-Christian, but rather non-Christian. Although he condemns Christianity for the moral effects of faith, he does not condemn its ultimate source, though not accepting it himself. The Plague, especially, reveals what Camus sees as harmful in Christianity, for Christianity believes in an order where innocent children suffer and die. But, whereas Camus personally sees the God of Christianity as an unjust one, he recognizes the all-or-nothing problem of faith. With Christianity he shares a common concern with evil and death. The problem of death had, of course, always been a major preoccupation. However, it is only with The Fall that he moved from a solid belief in the innocence of man to a recognition of evil and its consequence, guilt.

For Camus, the problem with Christianity, as with Marxism, is that it places values outside of history. Camus does not believe that either the Christian Kingdom of Heaven or the classless society of Marx is justified. Whereas Marxism dispenses with justice as a means and relegates it to the position of a goal, thereby allowing injustice to exist "temporarily,"
Christianity attempts to pacify the cries of the suffering by making "heavenly reward" the goal of man instead of earthly satisfaction. Camus saw in Christianity that a nullifying form of complacency is born of the insistence upon an ultimate reward or goal. For him, the major flaw in the aim of Christianity is the reliance or dependance on this "future" justification of earthly injustice, and for the suffering of the world, the only attitude can be one of endurance. In his demand for the destruction of absolutes, Camus refers specifically to those that postulate a "future goal," for Camus, in the total implications of his cry for human solidarity, asks that man love in a way which is, in point of fact (although he did not see this), truly Christian. Camus believed that it is only when values are not posited absolutely and transhistorically that injustice and suffering will be eliminated, for it is only when a man is absolutely certain of his position and the values he posits that he may forcefully attempt to make his values generic and permanent.

Consequently, values can be offered only relatively and within limits. However, the limits which men find within themselves are shared by all and thus reach a
universal proportion. And in this universal community of men, Camus sees social responsibility as a foundation for the reaffirmation of the individual dignity of man and, in a truly spiritual sense, a confirmation of the old principle that every man is his brother's keeper. In the face of an unknowable universe and the inevitability of death, Camus does not despair, nor does he make the "leap of faith" to religion or to belief in Marxian history. Instead, in a positive manner, he establishes the earth-bound religion of ethical responsibility. In The Fall Camus is saying what Christianity has always proclaimed: we are all members of one another and must all bear the guilt for the crimes of the collectivity. With his awareness of guilt and evil in men, combined with his ideas of innocence and solidarity, Camus establishes a mystical body of men.

All value and truth lie within men. In the confrontation of a threatening world, men become conscious of the value and salvation which lie within them. In his call to revolt, Camus is asking men to create, to transform what is inhuman into what is human, and to build the "city of man." It is in this
forward, positive action that his humanism and dynamic morality lie. And if the center of religious experience is love, then Camus, although an atheist, is fundamentally religious, and, in the absence of God, he seeks to discover universal values in the flux of existence. For, above all, Camus saw that (witness, also, his own evolution) mankind does develop, improve, move forward, and could do so even further and more efficaciously, if man also worked here and now. But what he did not yet see was that the fact that many Christians have looked for centuries to the promise of eternal bliss in the future, and have rested complacently in this world, ignoring the definitely practical precepts of its Founder, does not in any way invalidate Christianity itself, but only points up, and glaringly so, the errors and the abuses of individual men, and, consequently, the truth that G. K. Chesterton has expressed: Christianity has never been tried.¹

That Camus was moving in the direction of Christianity there is little doubt. That he was an honest and stirring spokesman for himself, his brothers, and

his times, is evident from all that is known of him. Surely he has pointed the way to take for many who were following him closely and who were beginning to find some glimmering of hope in his positive view of man and his confidence in his destiny.
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