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## Between Beauty and Duty: Ethics and Judgment in Camus and Kant

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BETWEEN BEAUTY AND DUTY: ETHICS AND JUDGMENT IN  
CAMUS AND KANT

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

in

The Department of Political Science

by  
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B.A., Columbus State University, 2013  
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“Recover the greatest strength, not to dominate but to give.”  
-Albert Camus, *Notebook VIII*

“Yet the highest authority has to be just *in itself* and yet also a *man*. This is therefore the most difficult of all tasks, and a perfect solution is impossible. Nothing straight can be constructed from such warped wood as humanity is made of. Nature only requires of us that we should approximate to this idea...man needs for it a correct conception of the nature of a possible constitution, great experience tested in many affairs of this world, and above all else a good will prepared to accept the findings of this experience.”  
-Immanuel Kant, “Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent, Sixth Proposition

“Zeus has led us on to know,  
the Helmsman lays it down as law  
that we must suffer, suffer into truth.  
We cannot sleep, and drop by drop at the heart  
the pain of pain remembered comes again,  
and we resist, but ripeness comes as well.  
From the gods enthroned on the awesome rowing-bench  
there comes a violent love.”  
-Aeschylus, *Oresteia*, I. 179

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Section I: Camus the Moralist .....	5
1.1: Camus and Neoplatonism: The Early Camus and North African Aesthetics and Metaphysics.....	9
Section II: Camus the Ethicist: Or, Ethics Amidst Plague .....	17
Section III: Camus the Critic .....	30
3.1: <i>The Fall</i> : Or, How Not to Judge .....	31
3.2: “The Renegade:” Or, How to Misuse Judgment.....	37
3.3: Conclusion by Way of a Transition .....	40
Section IV: Camus the Kantian – Kantian Reflections on Camusian Themes .....	42
4.1 Kant’s Absurd Politics .....	45
4.2: Kantian Aesthetics and Political Life .....	50
Section V: The Growing Stone, or How to Judge Properly .....	61
Works Cited .....	66
Vita.....	68

## **Abstract**

The ideas of Albert Camus and Immanuel Kant are not often thought of as sharing pronounced similarities. However, both thinkers are deeply concerned with role of aesthetics in moral, and subsequently, political life. According to each, taste is a faculty whereby one is able to develop the “moral insight” needed for the flourishing of a robust, thoughtful, ethical individual. Yet, both Camus and Kant utilize highly divergent methodologies in going about this. Camus prefers the artistic form and poetic language offered by the novel and Kant prefers the logical rigor of critical philosophical arguments.

This thesis hopes to reveal that this methodological chasm allows one thinker to express what the other cannot. Camus is able to artistically and beautifully express the absurdity of moral life in such a way that is ripe with personal resonance and meaning; while Kant is able to philosophically ground Camus’ concerns in a logically thorough manner. Utilizing the novels of Camus and the works of Kant, this thesis posits that Camus and Kant are complimentary thinkers, each in need of one another in order to express a more nuanced conception of politics in which judgment and aesthetic taste play a key role. Such a project also hopes to demonstrate the importance of aesthetics and artistic expression in the maintenance of a just political order.

## Introduction

Very seldom are Albert Camus and Immanuel Kant thought of as possessing similar ideas and themes in their work. This is primarily due to their widely divergent philosophical methodologies. Camus is arguably more famous for his fiction than his philosophical ideas and Kant offers overly analytic prose delivered in a dry, (sometimes frustratingly) verbose manner. In spite of this vast chasm in methodology and style, Kant and Camus share remarkably similar moral, aesthetic, and political concerns that deserve to be further elaborated upon. In doing so, I hope to show that Kant and Camus are thinkers in need of one other.

Kant, in order to motivate the type of moral understanding he would like to see practiced in the world, would do well to rely on artistic devices such as those offered by Camus. Kant's work is famously criticized for being obscure, overly verbose, and cold, lacking understanding of human nature and psychology. By reviving a focus on Kantian judgment, we can see that Kant possesses an understanding of human nature and polity not out of line with the most lucid musings of Camus' fiction. Camus, on the other hand, is often accused of lacking a clear philosophical grounding for his political views. Indeed, Camus' sole work of political theory, *The Rebel*, was considered by Jean-Paul Sartre to be an aimless, groundless apology for post-war French bourgeois society. In my estimation, Camus' ethics and aesthetics are indeed Kantian in nature, yet not in such a way that Camus' status as a philosophical "outsider" is jeopardized.

Such a project, I admit, is possessed of an ulterior motive. By understanding these two thinkers, we can understand, from a philosophical perspective, the importance of aesthetics in a political order. Too often in contemporary society are questions of

aesthetics dismissed with a mere wave of the hand. This rejection of aesthetics and beauty forms a massive obstacle to a thorough and complete understanding of political order and the place of human beings within it. Artistic expression is a fundamental human drive that allows humanity to plumb the depths of the soul in such a way that is intelligible and communicable to others. Through the creation of an image, other human beings are called to participate in the interpretation, transmutation, and completion of the image's purpose in human society. As a result, art provides images in the form of a tapestry or canon that gives human civilization meaning and direction towards an ideal. Philosophy provides humanity with a means of understanding the nature and limitations of this quest.

By extension, the ability to possess taste and interpret, reorient, and criticize the images and symbols society bases its future upon is a vital human ability. In a word, judgment matters – it is an indispensable faculty that allows us to go beyond the content of moral or logical systems and focus upon the moral meaning of interpersonal human relationships implied in these systems. In order to be truly sociable and live in a robust human polity, two things are needed: the ability to reason morally and the ability to judge. If this is the case, then Kant and Camus are perfect subjects in the study of human polity since, as we will see, both are fascinated to the point of obsession with such fundamental and forceful questions of the human experience.

This essay's focus on judgment as a faculty essential to the realization and articulation of moral reasoning additionally serves to highlight another key fact. What is considered "rigid" or "rationalistic" argumentation is a valid form of personal expression that serves to compliment other forms of expression considered more poetic. As Charles

Taylor writes, “we delude ourselves if we think that philosophical or critical language... is somehow more hard-edged and more free from personal index than that of poets or novelists. The subject does not permit languages which escapes personal resonance.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, philosophy as an argument-driven discourse is not free from expressionism that could be considered personal or even romantic. However, philosophy may often lack the proper images, metaphors, and language needed to make this more apparent.

For instance, Kant’s discussions on ethics in *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* seem excessively rationalistic to the point where it seems like an alien from a distant world is compiling them despite said discussion concerning something as intimately human as morality. On the other hand, Camus’ novels seem are deeply personal and even autobiographical – yet they are pregnant with philosophical content that would at first blush appear removed from the poeticism that permeates his fiction. However, as this essay hopes to demonstrate, despite these differences, both Camus and Kant express similar concerns regarding ethics, judgment, and politics. To this end, Kant and Camus should be read as complementary figures, each expressing with a different language something the other could not.

Therefore, this essay will be dedicated to parsing out the thought of Camus and interpreting it in light of Kant. This essay will begin by advancing Stephen Eric Bronner and Robert Zaretsky’s thesis that Camus is not an existentialist or (strictly) a phenomenologist, but a traditional French moralist in the vein of Michel de Montaigne or Voltaire.<sup>2</sup> Second, after establishing that Camus’ work possesses a duty-based ethic, I will explore the content of such an ethic with special attention on Camus’ novel *The*

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, Charles. 1989. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. p. 512

<sup>2</sup> Bronner, Stephen Eric. 2009. *Camus: Portrait of a Moralist*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p. 145



*Plague*. Then I will explore Camus' complicated thoughts on the importance of judgment through his two late works *The Fall* and *Exile and the Kingdom*. The essay will then proceed to offer Kantian clarifications to the thought of Camus' ethics and aesthetics using the ideas of Kant, Hannah Arendt, and Paul Crowther. Finally, I will bring this all together by analyzing the final story from Camus' collection *Exile and the Kingdom*, "The Growing Stone," in order to show that judgment, thought, and ethics in the work of Camus are not only similar to Kant's, but are vital expressions of humankind's most profound and innermost moral longings that deserve the attention of political theory as a discipline and society as a whole.

## Section I: Camus the Moralist

Camus, as stated in the preface of this work, appears as a highly enigmatic figure who is often hard to pin to a particular philosophical tradition. Typically, scholars classify Camus as some sort of atheistic existentialist or amoral nihilist. A cursory glance at some of Camus' most famous works indicates that Camus did not consider morality, or at least traditional morality, a particularly useful or noble concept. In June 1959, Camus writes in his personal notebook, "I have abandoned the moral point of view. Morals lead to abstraction and to injustice. They are the mother of fanaticism and blindness... One must flee morality, accept being judged and not judging...suffering agony."<sup>3</sup> Camus criticizes Søren Kierkegaard in the early work, *The Myth of Sisyphus* on this point; he writes, "The absurd, which is the metaphysical state of the conscious man does not lead to God."<sup>4</sup> That is, a desire for God in light of absurdity is a "frenzied wish"<sup>5</sup> which cannot be answered by the world. Thus, it appears there is no room for God or ethics in Camus' philosophical ideas.

In a word, Camus claims, "No code of ethics and no effort are justifiable *a priori* in the face of the cruel mathematics that command our condition."<sup>6</sup> This condition amounts to what Camus calls absurdity: the clash between the human need for meaning and values against a world which refuses to grant it. Camus describes absurdity as a condition "born of this confrontation between the human need [for meaning] and the unreasonable silence of the world."<sup>7</sup> Therefore, if this aspect of *The Myth of Sisyphus*

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<sup>3</sup> Camus, Albert. 2008. *Notebooks 1951 - 1959*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee. p. 248

<sup>4</sup> Camus, Albert. 2004c. "The Myth of Sisyphus." In *The Plague, The Fall, Exile and the Kingdom, and Selected Essays*, New York: Everyman's Library. p. 525

<sup>5</sup> Ibid p. 523

<sup>6</sup> Ibid p. 505

<sup>7</sup> Ibid p. 515

were to hold true throughout Camus' corpus, the aforementioned statements about Camus are true. Camus is, at first blush, a thinker with nothing to teach us; this irresolvable clash between human need and silence must be "clung to because the whole consequence of a life can depend on it."<sup>8</sup> The only certain regarding human consciousness is its meaninglessness and blindness. Moral and theological claims are a form of self-deception resulting in what Camus calls "philosophical suicide."<sup>9</sup>

Camus, however, develops his conception of the absurd in his fiction and non-fiction and implies that "the absurd has meaning only in so far as it is not agreed to."<sup>10</sup> What this amounts to is the existence of a natural dialectic between the silent/natural world and the human need for meaning, solidarity, and resistance.<sup>11</sup> While Camus argues the absurd must be fought against, it must also be accepted as an irreducible aspect of human reality; doing otherwise exemplifies the desire to "escape" or turn away from the intrinsic moral struggles of human existence.<sup>12</sup> To deny the absurd is to desire a false reality in which moral conundrums are always dissolved by an appeal to a purely metaphysical or rationalistic account of existence. As Stephen Eric Bronner writes, Camus' work is a "philosophical response to metaphysical idealism and materialism. Camus's [sic] work...gives primacy to the 'lived life' of the individual...[it] seeks to offer an authentic way of responding to the experiences of anxiety (angst), the absurd, and death..."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid p. 515

<sup>9</sup> Ibid p. 516

<sup>10</sup> Ibid p. 518

<sup>11</sup> Bronner, Stephen Eric. 2009. *Camus: Portrait of a Moralist*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p. 44

<sup>12</sup> Camus, Albert. 2004c. "The Myth of Sisyphus." p. 518

<sup>13</sup> Bronner, Stephen Eric. 2009. *Camus: Portrait of a Moralist* p. 47

Let us reconsider the quote from Camus' notebook cited on the previous page: "Morals lead to abstraction and to injustice. They are the mother of fanaticism and blindness...One must flee morality..."<sup>14</sup> Such a claim is not a denial of morality, but a criticism of false "morality" in favor of a true morality. Note that Camus says that one must flee "morality" because "morality" leads to injustice and "blindness;" concepts, paradoxically, linked inexorably with morality. This entry in Camus' notebook was made in 1959, after Camus' public dispute with Sartre over Camus' supposed support of the French bourgeois in his philosophical essay, *The Rebel*. Sartre claims that Camus "decided against history and rather than interpret its course, [Camus] preferred to see it only as one more absurdity."<sup>15</sup> As a result, here Camus could very well be attacking ideology, which parades itself as morality while imploring individuals to "cut off the heads"<sup>16</sup> of the innocents.

A famous argument Camus had with the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty elucidates Camus' anti-ideology stance. At a party, Camus "noticed Merleau-Ponty and walked right up to him. Without a pause, he attacked the philosopher for his claim that violence was inherent to politics and, as a result, the violence of communism was preferable to capitalism because at least it promised a better future."<sup>17</sup> Indeed, it is perhaps not what Camus says that seemed to incise his critics, it was what *was not* said.<sup>18</sup> Yet from Camus' actions and public statements, it seems that what Camus *is* concerned with is the notion of limits to political action. While sympathetic to independence

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<sup>14</sup> Camus, Albert. 2008. *Notebooks 1951 – 1959* p. 248

<sup>15</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul. Quoted in Zaretsky, Robert. 2013. *A Life Worth Living: Albert Camus and the Quest for Meaning*. 1st Edition. Cambridge, MA: Bellknap Press. p. 74

<sup>16</sup> Camus, Albert. 2008. *Notebooks 1951 – 1959* p. 248

<sup>17</sup> Zaretsky, Robert. 2010. *Camus: Elements of a Life*. 1st ed. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press. p. 103

<sup>18</sup> This silence would haunt Camus, especially when it came to his neutrality during the Algerian Civil War; See Zaretsky, Robert. 2013. *A Life Worth Living* p. 109

movements in Algeria, Camus always expressed skepticism of political violence and insurrectionism, going so far as to call political ideologies a form of “Messianism against man.”<sup>19</sup> The idea that political action requires moral limitations is at the heart of Camus’ corpus, informing works of non-fiction such as *The Rebel* and “Neither Victims nor Executioners.”

As a result, Camus conceives of absurdity not merely in metaphysical, but also in political terms. Fighting against the absurd “informs [man] of his limits. Assured of his temporally limited freedom, of his revolt devoid of future, and his mortal consciousness, he lives out his adventure within the span of his lifetime.”<sup>20</sup> Camus continues, “The absurd does not liberate; it binds. It does not authorize all actions. ‘Everything is permitted’ does not mean that nothing is forbidden.”<sup>21</sup> Absurdity, moreover, is an everyday occurrence: “Great works are often born on a street-corner or in a restaurant’s revolving door. So it is with absurdity.”<sup>22</sup> It is the struggle against death, symbolized in the image of the absurd that grants life meaning. This struggle, subsequently, is a moral struggle expressed through the faculty of human creativity and captured in the notion of “moral vision” against blindness or thoughtlessness.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, Camus is not an amoralist or an atheistic existentialist. He is, rather, a traditional French moralist in the vein of Voltaire and Montaigne, who, despite his lack of faith, remained throughout his life, deeply concerned with religious questions.<sup>24</sup> Camus was formally educated in French public schooling and was imbued with the French

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid p. 163

<sup>20</sup> Camus, Albert. 2004c. “The Myth of Sisyphus.” p. 546

<sup>21</sup> Ibid p. 547

<sup>22</sup> Ibid p. 502

<sup>23</sup> Zaretsky, Robert. 2013. *A Life Worth Living* p. 103

<sup>24</sup> Bronner, Stephen Eric. 2009. *Camus: Portrait of a Moralist* p. 12-3

republican values of the Revolution; such concerns regarding equality and mutual respect inform all aspects of Camus' work, particularly his fiction. Moreover, as an Algerian-born Frenchman or a *pied-noir*, Camus felt great pride in Algiers, which he preferred to Europe.

Consequently, Camus would remain fascinated by the Mediterranean, opting to study North African and Greek philosophy. Of particular interest are the representative philosophers of North Africa: Plotinus and Augustine of Hippo (whom Camus referred to as "the other North African.")<sup>25</sup> From Greece, Camus held a great affection for the tragedians Aeschylus and Sophocles.<sup>26</sup> Camus subsequently referred to his philosophical outlook as "Mediterranean," stressing the Classical Greek values of style and moderation as key aspects of moral life. Therefore, Camus' thought can be described as a synthesis of French moralism, Greek tragedy and virtue ethics, and North African Neoplatonism. One can glean a great understanding of Camus' thought from the oft-overlooked dissertation, *Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism*. However, Camus' mature political theory lies in his fiction, which will be considered in the later sections.

### **1.1: Camus and Neoplatonism: The Early Camus and North African Aesthetics and Metaphysics**

While Camus would eventually break with Plotinus and Augustine due to the former's obscurity of language and form and the latter's attempt to tie Plotinus to what Camus considered religious dogma,<sup>27</sup> his interpretation of these two thinkers in his dissertation, *Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism*, unveils certain themes, ideas, and attitudes that would envelop Camus' thought until his death in 1960. Camus begins this

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<sup>25</sup> Zaretsky, Robert. 2013. *A Life Worth Living* p. 60

<sup>26</sup> Ibid p. 160

<sup>27</sup> Bronner, Stephen Eric. 2009. *Camus: Portrait of a Moralist* p. 11-2

work by considering the connection between early Christianity and Greek thought.

According to Camus, Christianity represents a continuation of Greek thought, particularly the thought of Plotinus, into the modern world. He writes, “The role of Greece was to universalize Christianity by orienting it towards metaphysics.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, what Neoplatonism represents in relation to Christianity for Camus is a method whereby the search for God is aided by symbols expressed through artistic creation.<sup>29</sup>

According to Camus, the major longing of early Christianity is the salvation of the human soul and unity with God. This longing was expressed in the desire to partake in a spiritual kingdom that exists as the “goal of human effort.”<sup>30</sup> Such a desire entailed that the striving towards God was the primary focus of human life – all other concerns are subordinate to the desire for salvation.<sup>31</sup> Camus notes that this narrative implies both pessimism regarding the world and a sense of optimism regarding history as the fulfillment of human existence – that is, that Christ will deliver humankind from the world as is exemplified in His crucifixion and resurrection. As a result, incarnation, or the interplay between the concepts of flesh and spirit, represents the “defining feature” of Christianity for Camus.<sup>32</sup>

Here Camus notices an irony: the symbolization of the progression towards the Kingdom of God echoes the Platonic “divided line” between reality and untruth (*doxa*); namely, that the world represents a lower form of the true reality that is the Kingdom of God.<sup>33</sup> Camus notes that this notion of incarnation represents the meeting of the Greek

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<sup>28</sup> Camus, Albert. 2007. *Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press. p. 45

<sup>29</sup> Ibid p. 89

<sup>30</sup> Ibid p. 51-2

<sup>31</sup> Ibid p. 51

<sup>32</sup> Ibid p. 55

<sup>33</sup> Ibid p. 53

and Christian world on “philosophical grounds.”<sup>34</sup> As a result, Camus argues that the early Church fathers stressed the importance of faith as the completion of reason, and that the Gospel is a continuation of the search for truth described in Platonic thought.

In a word, Christianity represents a continuation of Greek thought for Camus – while the end of Christian thought is the otherworldly salvation of the soul, the path to this salvation would be represented by the symbols of Greek philosophy. Camus finds the thought of Plotinus of particular importance here. According to Camus, the way to God represents a “principle of conversion” that lies in the soul. The soul yearns for a lost homeland and strives towards God so that the soul may be unified in the presence of its Creator.<sup>35</sup> Such a conception of conversion is derived directly from Plotinus, who writes, “We are in search of unity; we are to come to know the principle of all, the God and First...Cleared of all evil in our intention towards the Good, we must ascend to the Principle within ourselves.”<sup>36</sup>

To Camus, the Church fathers and early Christians identified the Abrahamic God as the One or the Good described in Plotinus.<sup>37</sup> The path to the Good is identified as an inner descent, delving into one’s self in order to uncover the source, form, and content of this Good. The Good, subsequently, is intelligible because it is beautiful according to Plotinus who writes, “this Beauty which is also The Good, must be posed as The First: directly deriving from this First is the Intellectual-Principle which is preeminently the manifestation of Beauty.”<sup>38</sup> First principles are made known because they are intelligible by beauty. Beauty is perceived by an introspective reflection into the nature of the soul.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid p. 63

<sup>35</sup> Ibid p. 103-4

<sup>36</sup> Plotinus, *Ennead* 9.9 p. 538

<sup>37</sup> Camus, Albert. 2007. *Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism*. p. 98

<sup>38</sup> Plotinus. 1991. *The Enneads*. Abridged. ed. John Dillon. New York: Penguin Classics.1.6; p. 52



The interplay of the Soul, Beauty, and the Good is exemplified in Plotinus' famous metaphor of the "internal sculpture." Plotinus writes:

Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smooths there...So do you also: cut away all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast...and never cease chiseling your statue...until you shall see the perfect goodness surely established in the stainless shrine (Plotinus, *Ennead* 1. 6. 9. p. 54).

Particularly, one pursues unity by peering into the self and comparing their Soul with the beauty of the One unveiled by The Intellect. In turn, one attempts to rectify or "cleanse" themselves of their moral imperfections. This is accomplished through the faculty of "inner vision." Plotinus writes, "'Let us flee then to the beloved Fatherland...This is not a journey for the feet...you must close the eyes and call instead upon another vision which is to be waked within you, a vision, the birth-right of all, which few turn to use.'"<sup>39</sup>

The notion of inner or moral vision in conjunction with beauty is one that had a powerful impact upon the thought of Camus. Indeed, Camus would write in his later work *The Rebel* that, "Artistic creation is a demand for unity and a rejection of the world. But it rejects the world on account of something it lacks and in the name of what it sometimes is."<sup>40</sup> Succinctly, making art represents something beyond the desire for pleasant images. Rather, artistic creation, for Camus, expresses the human need for unity and clarity amidst earthly conditions of strife and opacity. Tied to this notion of artistic creation as rejection of the world is the notion of limits, a concept that Camus also elaborates on in the dissertation.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid p. 54

<sup>40</sup> Camus, Albert. 1991. *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*. First Vintage International. New York: Vintage. p. 253

As stated earlier, Camus described his thought as “Mediterranean” and was thus informed by Greek notions of moderation. As Bronner writes, “Camus refused to make a dogmatic choice between the two sides” of political extremes.<sup>41</sup> This tendency is apparent even in *Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism*. Camus argues that much of Plotinus’ thought is a response to Gnosticism, a mystic religious movement that sought salvation through human knowledge and rationality.<sup>42</sup> Central to the Gnostic project is the notion that temporal existence was evil, created by an evil God. In order to attain salvation, “One must scorn the goods of this world out of hatred for the creator. One must give as little influence as possible to his domination.”<sup>43</sup> As a result, Camus perceives the Gnostic ideal as one that seeks to abolish reality and refuse the acknowledgment of limits upon human action.

However, Camus argues that the Augustinian alternative to this ideal is also undesirable. According to Camus, Augustine’s thought represents the “dogmatization” or institutionalization of Neoplatonism. Camus writes that Augustine takes the Plotinian notion of the search for God and introduces the concept of grace into the process. For Augustine, salvation represents a radical conversion by grace, which prompts one to reevaluate the state of one’s soul and turn to God for salvation.<sup>44</sup> As a result, one comes to gain a greater understanding of God and nature through revelatory knowledge of God as Trinity.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, philosophy and reason are worthy endeavors, but they pale in light of the Divine Reason of God and only aid the process of salvation. By extension, earthly pleasures are distractions from one’s true pursuit of attaining salvation in the next

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<sup>41</sup> Bronner, Stephen Eric. 2009. *Camus: Portrait of a Moralist* p. 77

<sup>42</sup> Camus, Albert. 2007. *Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism*. p. 69

<sup>43</sup> Ibid p. 75

<sup>44</sup> Ibid p. 120

<sup>45</sup> Ibid p. 126

life. As Augustine writes in *On Christian Doctrine*, “We have wandered far from God; and if we wish to return to our Father's home, this world must be used, not enjoyed, that so the invisible things of God may be clearly seen... by means of what is material and temporary we may lay hold upon that which is spiritual and eternal.”<sup>46</sup>

Thus, a very important theme in Camus’s work arises: one must be comfortable with the search for truth and beauty *in this world*. Both Gnostic and Augustinian solutions to absurd conditions are attempts to flee the world and avoid moral problems. While the symbol of God remains important for Camus, it is not exhaustive of life in this world. Authentic responses to evil and injustice, for Camus, are not undergone so that one can gain an otherworldly reward. This response to evil must not, however, involve evil or nihilism. As Camus writes in *The Rebel*, “contrary to the postulates of modern thought, a human nature does exist... Why rebel if there is nothing permanent within oneself worth preserving?”<sup>47</sup> Hence, Camus sees two extremes emerge in antiquity that carry over into modernity: on one hand, religious dogma represents the attempt to flee the world in hope of a better, otherworldly realm. On the other, Gnosticism expresses a revolt against religious dogma and attempts to create an otherworldly realm on Earth. As a result, Camus not only avoids these two extremes as they are presented in *Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism*, but as they appear in his contemporary political milieu.

Like Eric Voegelin, Camus considers ideologies of his day such as fascism and communism to be modern equivalents of Gnosticism, which sought to provide a form of “messianism” to man regardless of how many lives it claimed.<sup>48</sup> However, unlike Voegelin, Camus does not believe the answer to this problem rests with the restoration of

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<sup>46</sup> Augustine. *On Christian Doctrine*. Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library. p. 6

<sup>47</sup> Camus, Albert. 1991. *The Rebel*: p. 16

<sup>48</sup> Zaretsky, Robert. 2013. *A Life Worth Living* p. 163

classical symbology,<sup>49</sup> but through the use and articulation of a new set of symbols, which borrows from the old, yet makes new use of them in a different context. Namely, Camus seeks to use the symbols of the Judeo-Christian tradition such as exile, judgment, kingdom, or Promised Land and apply them to modern political and moral issues and express them in the artistic form of the novel. In doing so, Camus is simultaneously using and breaking with Plotinus. Camus recognizes in Plotinus the necessity of symbolization for the realization of moral clarity or “inner vision.” However, Camus rejects Plotinus’ obscurity regarding the use of these symbols, opting instead to place these symbols in a narrative form that acknowledges the importance of religious devotion and imagery, but rejects the salvific goals of said religious devotion.

Traditional religion, subsequently, represents a desire to elude the problems of the world in favor of unacceptable neutrality to Camus. Such an attitude is exemplified in the character of Fr. Paneloux of Camus’ novel, *The Plague*. Paneloux is a Jesuit priest who, ironically, is an expert on the thought of Augustine.<sup>50</sup> Throughout the course of the novel, a child dies painfully of the plague in front of Paneloux and Rieux (the novel’s protagonist). Paneloux attempts to offer a theological explanation for the death of this child, to which Rieux responds, “What does it matter? What I hate is death and disease. And whether you wish it or not, we’re allies, facing them and fighting them together...God Himself can’t part us now.”<sup>51</sup>

According to Camus, religion provides symbology that illustrates the struggle of humankind against the absurd. However, religion becomes useless and even dangerous

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<sup>49</sup> Voegelin, Eric. 1990. *Anamnesis*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press. p. 90

<sup>50</sup> Camus, Albert. 2004d. “The Plague.” In *The Plague, The Fall, Exile and the Kingdom, and Selected Essays*, New York: Everyman’s Library. p.17-8

<sup>51</sup> Ibid p. 193

when it seeks to withdraw from this struggle into theological explanations or justification of the struggle itself. What Camus wants instead is for all aspects of human life – philosophy, art, beauty, religion, mythology, theatre, literature, history, etc.— to aid in the battle to paradoxically uphold and abolish the absurd. To preserve the tension between life and death (which Voegelin calls “the *metaxy*”<sup>52</sup>) is the major task of modern civilization for Camus. As Camus writes, “mightn’t it be better for God if we refuse to believe in Him, and struggle with all our might against death, without raising our eyes towards the heaven where He sits in silence?”<sup>53</sup>

Thus, Camus’ work is primarily concerned with a battle to the death with death – a “metaphysical rebellion”<sup>54</sup> against the absurd that is bound to fail. However, where is this battle to take place? Where are its boundaries? How does one go about fighting it? What is the point of fighting a losing battle if death is inevitable? In order to answer these questions, we will evaluate Camus’ ethics, which are presented in Camus’ novel *The Plague*. However, the last question: “what is the point of fighting a losing battle if death is inevitable?” may be given a cursory answer here. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus poses Sisyphus as the dramatic hero of this age. Having disobeyed the gods and fled the underworld to enjoy a day of earthly pleasures, Sisyphus is condemned to roll a boulder up a hill, only to see it roll down again for all eternity. Camus argues that Sisyphus cannot be bitter about his fate since it is the cost of his freedom and happiness. “The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy,”<sup>55</sup> Camus insists.

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<sup>52</sup> Voegelin, Eric. 1990. *Anamnesis*. p. 103

<sup>53</sup> Ibid p. 115

<sup>54</sup> Camus, Albert. 1991. *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*. p. 23

<sup>55</sup> Camus, Albert. 2004c. “The Myth of Sisyphus.” p. 593

## Section II: Camus the Ethicist: Or, Ethics Amidst Plague

In keeping with the theme of absurdity, Camus' ethics are devoid of teleology. No earthly or heavenly reward awaits the just man, as far as Camus is concerned. Moreover, the disclosure of ethics never occurs in a time of safety or normality. In keeping with the thought of Plotinus, Camus argues that human beings have an innate drive towards unity. To achieve this unity, humans turn to art to create impressions of unity, which the world lacks. As quoted in the last section, "Artistic creation is a demand for unity and a rejection of the world. But it rejects the world on account of something it lacks and in the name of what it sometimes is."<sup>56</sup> Of particular import to Camus is the novel. Not only does the novel present readers with unified worlds, but it allows the existence of a narrative that serves as a vehicle for important philosophical ideas. As Charles Taylor writes, "The philosopher or critic tinkers around and shapes images through which he or another *might* one day do so. The artist is like the race-car driver, and [philosophers] are the mechanics in the pit."<sup>57</sup> Camus responds accordingly, "If you want to be a philosopher, write novels."<sup>58</sup>

In other words, Camus sees the value of both philosophy and art and feels that the novel is the perfect fusion of the two. As Camus writes, "There are no frontiers between the disciplines that man sets himself for understanding and loving. They interlock, and the same anxiety merges them."<sup>59</sup> Therefore, it is important to take Camus' fiction seriously as both fine art and as a creative means of philosophic argumentation. In order

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<sup>56</sup> Camus, Albert. 1991. *The Rebel.*, p. 253

<sup>57</sup> Taylor, Charles. 1989. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. p. 512

<sup>58</sup> Camus, Albert. 1996. *Notebooks, 1935-1941.* New York: Marlowe & Co. p. 10

<sup>59</sup> Camus, Albert. 2004c. "The Myth of Sisyphus." p. 571

for a real exploration of human existence to begin for Camus, the mechanic and driver that Taylor speaks of must be the same person.

Camus' fiction wants to present visions of unified worlds in which individuals make key decisions about the nature of life and death and the absurdity that joins the two together. These moments do not, however, usually occur during normal circumstances.<sup>60</sup> An example of this pattern in Camus' early work occurs in *The Stranger*. Mersault, the novel's protagonist, lives his life without much introspection into the nature of things or his place in that nature. His mother dies, but he is more focused on the sweltering Algerian heat at her funeral than on grieving.<sup>61</sup> His girlfriend, Marie, asks him to marry her and he accepts out of convention.<sup>62</sup> Most remarkably, Mersault shoots and kills a nameless Arab during a fight and offers the consolation that "The light [of the sun] shot off the steel and it was like a long flashing blade cutting at my forehead... My eyes were blinded behind the curtain of tears and salt."<sup>63</sup> Yet, when Mersault is condemned to execution, he tells a Priest that is sent for him "not to waste his prayers on me."<sup>64</sup> Mersault continues that "I was sure about me, surer than he could ever be, sure of my life and sure of the death I had waiting for me. Yes, that was all I had. But at least I had as much of a hold on it as it had on me."<sup>65</sup>

At this realization, Mersault muses that "I felt ready to live it all again too. As if that blind rage had washed me clean, rid me of hope; for the first time, in that night alive

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<sup>60</sup> Camus does, however, include a number of stories in which absurdity confronts individuals in normal conditions in *Exile and the Kingdom*. However, Camus' novels all feature examples of absurdity on a grand scale, which upend the workings of mundane existence and depict how characters confront said absurdity.

<sup>61</sup> Camus, Albert. 1984. *The Stranger*. New York: Vintage., p. 16-7

<sup>62</sup> Ibid p. 42

<sup>63</sup> Ibid p. 59

<sup>64</sup> Ibid p. 120

<sup>65</sup> Ibid p. 120

with signs and stars, I opened myself to the gentle indifference of the world.”<sup>66</sup> Mersault ends his internal monologue with the wish that “there be a large crowd of spectators the day of my execution and they greet me with cries of hate.”<sup>67</sup> The upshot is that severe upheaval of ordinary life, such as the condemnation of a man to die, prompts serious questions of self-consciousness and meaning to emerge, according to Camus. It is when the apparent harmony of nature is disrupted or when the course of one’s life is upended by conflict that serious questions of self-consciousness arise and demand to be dealt with one way or another.

Such is the case of Camus’ philosophical novel *The Plague*. While sharing many similarities to *The Stranger*, *The Plague* is widely considered to be the more mature work, primarily due to the moral dilemmas and concerns it addresses. *The Stranger* exemplifies Camus’ assertion that “Consciousness is found only on the streets,”<sup>68</sup> meaning that only through dissonance can the silence of nature and custom be broken and serious questions of ethics, religion, and politics emerge. However, after Mersault’s awakening, *The Stranger* ends. *The Stranger* seems to give a bleak response to bleak conditions: Mersault asks, “What would it matter if he were accused of murder and then executed because he didn’t cry at his mother’s funeral?”<sup>69</sup> If anything, Mersault’s response to his impending execution seems incomplete and callous at best. This is intentional on Camus’ part – while Mersault has a great awakening of self-consciousness, it does not take place amongst others. Thus, a great upheaval or breakdown of everyday life occurs in *The Stranger*, but it concerns the life of one man. *The Plague* concerns the

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid p. 122

<sup>67</sup> Ibid p. 123

<sup>68</sup> Camus, Albert. 2001b “Helen’s Exile.” In *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, Penguin Classics. p.169

<sup>69</sup> Camus, Albert. 1984. *The Stranger*,, p. 121



problems of the breakdown of civil order in society due to upheaval and the attempts of what remains of that society to deal with these problems in a courageous and ethical way. *The Plague*, in other words, represents an attempt to “accept the dangers...but reject the bitterness”<sup>70</sup> that accompanies confrontation with the absurd.

*The Plague* begins with the arrival of a strange form of bubonic plague in a coastal town called Oran. This plague kills its victims very slowly and painfully, usually accompanied with symptoms of high fever and intense vomiting. The town’s initial attempts to contain the plague fail, with the systems of bureaucracy designed to handle such situations breaking down. Eventually, the town is quarantined and closed off from the outside world. The novel’s (initially) unnamed narrator remarks, “in this extremity of solitude none could count on any help from his neighbor; each had to bear the load of his troubles alone. If, by some chance, one of us tried to unburden himself or to say something about his feelings, the reply he got, whatever it might be, usually wounded him.”<sup>71</sup> Consequently, “in the very heart of the epidemic, they maintained a saving indifference, which one was tempted to take for composure. Their despair saved them from panic, thus their misfortune had a good side.”<sup>72</sup>

As a result, the novel presents itself as an account of how an isolated town deals with extreme, unexpected, and brutal calamity. As implied above, the townsfolk initially attempt to ignore plague by attempting to recreate a life that has been drastically altered by the presence of plague. As the narrator expounds, “Hitherto...each individual had gone about his business as usual, so far as this was possible. And no doubt, he would

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<sup>70</sup> Camus, Albert. 2000a. “The Artist and His Time.” In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Penguin Modern Classics, New York: Penguin. p. 191

<sup>71</sup> Camus, Albert. 2004d. “The Plague.” p. 68

<sup>72</sup> Ibid p. 69

have continued doing so. But once the town gates were shut, every one of us realized that all, the narrator included, were, so to speak, in the same boat.” He continues, “Thus, for example a feeling normally as individual as the ache of separation from those one loves became a feeling in which all shared alike.”<sup>73</sup>

Accordingly, the plague completely upends ordinary life in Camus’ novel. Plague presents an entirely real instance in which mortality is not only possible, but probable; and that this sense of impending mortality and exile is, in fact, the business of all involved in the town. However, not all townsfolk respond the same way. Some attempt to recreate ordinary life as much as possible. For example, a family in Oran continues their Sunday outings throughout the novel, going so far as to continue wearing their Sunday best even as plague ravages the town. Another response is to flee into religion. Father Paneloux, the town’s local Jesuit priest, gives two homilies regarding the nature of plague as the “flail of God” which will “thresh out His harvest until the wheat is separated from the chaff.”<sup>74</sup> Still others exploit the conditions of plague for financial advantage. Shop owners drastically increase prices to take advantage of scarcity and smugglers attempt to move goods (and people) out of the city at a premium.

In Camus’ estimation, none of these responses are legitimate answers to the absurd conditions humankind faces. Instead, Camus’ sympathy rests with a group of individuals who form a medical response unit in an attempt to combat the plague. Headed by Rieux, a local doctor, and Tarrou, an outsider who happens to be in town during the outbreak and quarantine, this response unit is designed to provide medical relief to those dying of plague and to attempt to create a cure as best they can.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid p. 60

<sup>74</sup> Ibid p. 86

Thematically, this unit is designed to combat death itself. As the narrator points out, “Rieux believed himself to be on the right road – in fighting creation as he found it.”<sup>75</sup> In other words, both abstractions and scholarly, metaphysical responses to terror are insufficient responses to terror, even if they do enlarge one’s understanding of it. Tarrou asks Rieux, “However, you think, like Paneloux, that the plague has its good side; it opens men’s eyes and forces them to take thought?” Rieux responds, “So does every ill that flesh is heir to. What’s true of all the evils of the world is true of plague as well. It helps men to rise above themselves. All the same, when you see the misery it brings, you’d need to be a madman or a coward...to give in tamely to the plague.”<sup>76</sup>

Nevertheless, while plague allows moral insight to emerge, the insight it catalyzes reveals the need to destroy plague and to fight against a violent and devastating nature. However, this moral insight does not exhaust the knowledge that this fight is rigged on the side of nature. As Tarrou argues, “your victories will never be lasting.” Rieux responds that “it’s no reason for giving up the struggle” even if it results in “never-ending defeat.”<sup>77</sup> Thus, two vital concepts emerge here. First, that the authentic response to absurdity is resistance or artistic, metaphysical rebellion (a theme Camus explores in his earlier works as well.) Second, that this struggle is informed and prompted by “My...code of morals” whose basis resides in “Comprehension.”<sup>78</sup> This sense of morality informed by comprehension or understanding provides limits on resistance to the absurd. This second point deserves further elaboration. As demonstrated earlier,

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid p. 114

<sup>76</sup> Ibid p. 113

<sup>77</sup> Ibid p. 115

<sup>78</sup> Ibid p. 117

Camus is a moralist. Yet, what content does his moralism provide us? *The Plague* provides an answer that is as life-affirming as it is devastating.

The primary concern of Camus' ethics is that of duty. Rieux expresses lucidly that no ethic is truly human or truly workable unless it is an ethic of duty grounded in will. He says, "What's natural is the microbe. All the rest – health, integrity, purity (if you like) – is a product of the human will, of a vigilance that must never falter."<sup>79</sup> The will is directed to avoid "join[ing] forces with the pestilences."<sup>80</sup> These pestilences include death, disease, ideology, excessiveness, and cruelty. This avoidance takes the form of an individual will informed by an understanding of limits. In other words, Camus does not wish to avoid the absurd or death, but to take up against it as long as one can – insofar as this avoidance does not compromise the innate moral integrity of humanity. As a result, political programs offering an escape from death or suffering are to be avoided entirely. After the death of Tarrou, Rieux asks if Tarrou's persistence against death constitutes saintliness. Rieux ponders, "Tarrou hardly thought so... 'we can only reach approximations of sainthood. In which case we must make shift with a mild, benevolent diabolism."<sup>81</sup>

Hence, life, as lived by human individuals, is the primary direction of duty in Camus' ethics. Tarrou poignantly claims, "Heroism and sanctity don't really appeal to me, I imagine. What interests me is – being a man."<sup>82</sup> Such a battle for life and the sanctity of the human individual is crystallized in the conflict between the values of Fr. Paneloux, Rieux, and Tarrou. According to Rieux, Paneloux's insistence that extreme

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid p. 224

<sup>80</sup> Ibid p. 224

<sup>81</sup> Ibid p. 242

<sup>82</sup> Ibid p. 226

human suffering is a part of God's plan for the town of Oran is unacceptable, as a God that allows a child to suffer for no apparent reason is a cruel god. Moreover, the God Paneloux preaches is one that "demands total self-surrender, disdain of our human personality."<sup>83</sup> Paneloux puts it another way as well, that "religion in a time of plague could not be the religion of every day... there may well have been periods of history when Purgatory could not be hoped for; periods when it was impossible to speak of venial sin. Every sin was deadly, and any indifference criminal. It was all or it was nothing."<sup>84</sup>

It is, however, not the form of Fr. Paneloux's religion that Rieux and Tarrou have issues with, but its absolutism. There is, frankly, no room for contemplation and criticism in Fr. Paneloux's moral world. If one takes one's eyes off the end of morality – communion with God – even for a moment, he has then shown an absolute denial of God, according to Fr. Paneloux. Tarrou ironically agrees, saying, "When an innocent youth can have his eyes destroyed, a Christian should either lose his faith or consent to having his eyes destroyed."<sup>85</sup> Indeed, the distance between Rieux, Tarrou, and Paneloux consists in the direction of moral vision. To Rieux and Tarrou (and Camus as well), focus of one's moral insight must be directed towards the concerns of others on Earth. A religious outlook may aid this attitude, but it must not attempt to justify the suffering of innocents, nor should it undermine the duty humanity possesses to other humans. Religion must seek to heal on Earth in addition to seeking peace in the next world in order to possess moral validity to Camus. Rieux says to Paneloux, "What I hate is death and disease...and

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid p. 201

<sup>84</sup> Ibid p. 198

<sup>85</sup> Ibid p. 202

whether you wish it or not, we're allies, facing them and fighting them together."<sup>86</sup> Thus, Camus alleges loyalty to humanism but not to humanistic ideologies.

What is key to Camus' moral outlook, moreover, is the development of moral insight. As Tarrou says to Rieux, "I've been ashamed, of having been, even with the best intentions, even at many removes, a murderer in my turn."<sup>87</sup> Thus, a murderer exists in the soul of each individual. The only way to remove the murderer is to develop a sense of inner moral sight, which is capable of judging, and a will that is capable of acting upon that judgment. Tarrou argues that the soul prior to cleansing is, in its own way, a plague.<sup>88</sup> The narrator forcefully makes this point: "The evil that is in the world always comes of ignorance, and good intentions may do as much harm as malevolence, if they lack understanding...The soul of the murderer is blind; and there can be no true goodness nor true love without the utmost clear-sightedness."<sup>89</sup> Therefore, ethics, for Camus, takes on a Platonic attitude – that the direction of one's attention towards the good is ultimately the first step in doing or being good. However, Camus breaks with Plato and Plotinus in a vital way: the shifting of one's attention towards the good is not a matter of otherworldly ascension to the Forms, nor an inner descent into one's soul for its own sake. Instead, Camus argues that one learns the content of the good through experience in the world. Like Camus' favored dramatist, Aeschylus, Camus thinks one must "suffer into truth"<sup>90</sup> in the world.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid p. 293

<sup>87</sup> Ibid p. 223

<sup>88</sup> Ibid p. 217

<sup>89</sup> Ibid p. 118

<sup>90</sup> Aeschylus. 1984. *The Oresteia: Agamemnon; The Libation Bearers; The Eumenides*. Reprint. ed. W.B. Stanford. New York: Penguin Classics. p. 109

Yet the task of a mature moral mind, to Camus, is to not abandon the problems of humanity because of this suffering. One must not try to justify this suffering intellectually, but live through it so as to learn how to act in a society of and for others. Such a denial of bitterness has the effect of learning to enjoy moments that serve no other purpose than the enjoyment of others in that moment. For example, when the plague begins to abate, Rieux and Tarroux escape their commitment to provide relief to the victims of plague by taking a swim. During the swim, “a strange happiness possessed [Rieux]. Turning to Tarrou, he caught a glimpse on his friend’s face of the same happiness, a happiness that forgot nothing, not even murder.”<sup>91</sup> Such a temporary escape from duty is not, however, an attempt to flee from one’s life, but to appreciate the reality of life in the midst of such inexplicable and unceasing evil. As Tarrou says, “Really it’s too damn silly living only in and for the plague. Of course a man should fight for the victims, but, if he ceases caring for anything outside that, what’s the use of his fighting?”<sup>92</sup> Such a diversion from duty is given meaning by the fact that “they must set their shoulders to the wheel again.”<sup>93</sup> Such a sentiment is expressed throughout the novel, but is perhaps said best by Rieux: “a loveless world is a dead world, and always there comes an hour when one is weary of prisons, of one’s work and devotion to duty, and all one craves for is a loved face, the warmth and wonder of a loving heart.”<sup>94</sup>

Another element of duty emerges in *The Plague* through the character Tarrou – that is, the suspension of teleology. The common denominator between all the characters in *The Plague* is the inevitability of death. Whether through plague or by a natural death

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<sup>91</sup> Camus, Albert. 2004d. “The Plague.” p. 227

<sup>92</sup> Ibid p. 226

<sup>93</sup> Ibid p. 228

<sup>94</sup> Ibid p. 231

50 or 60 years after the fact, each character in the novel must face the reality of mortality. Thus, Camus thinks it apropos to explain that death must be faced authentically and ethically, seeking redemption for one's past transgressions against the limits of resistance. In other words, ethics is a preparation for a good death. This theme is exemplified in the character of Tarrou, who argues that "For the plague-stricken their peace of mind is more important than human life...I learned that I had had an indirect hand in the deaths of thousands of people; and that I'd even brought about their deaths by approving of acts and principles which could only end that way."<sup>95</sup>

Tarrou is referring to his own experience as a participant in the Spanish Civil War. Tarrou, like the other characters in *The Plague*, is attempting to escape plague, but his plague is metaphorical and *moral* – it is the plague of guilt for having killed innocents in the name of "freedom" and "justice." Tarrou realizes the extreme injustice of his acts and attempts to find redemption in resistance against plague. Rather than the metaphysical redemption offered through the sacraments of the Church, Tarrou seeks to find that redemption and penitence in his lifetime. As Tarrou says, "I have realized that we all have plague, and I have lost my peace. And today I am still trying to find it; still trying to understand all those others and not to be the moral enemy of anyone. I only know that one must do what one can to cease being plague-stricken...or, failing that, a decent death."<sup>96</sup>

Tarrou's death is juxtaposed with Paneloux's, who is labeled a "doubtful case" at the time of his death.<sup>97</sup> Rather than Paneloux, whose death represents an attempt to cling to metaphysical explanations of suffering, Tarrou seeks to die, facing death head-on. On

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid p. 222

<sup>96</sup> Ibid p. 223

<sup>97</sup> Ibid p. 206



his deathbed, “Tarrou tried to shape a smile, but it could not force its way through the set jaws and lips welded by dry saliva. In the rigid face only the eyes lived still, glowing with courage.”<sup>98</sup> After Tarrou’s death, Rieux recalls that:

Tarrou had ‘lost the match’, as he put it. But what had he, Rieux, won? No more than the experience of having known plague and remembering it, of having known friendship and remembering it, of knowing affection and being destined one day to remember it. So all a man could win in the conflict between plague and life was knowledge and memories. But Tarrou, perhaps, would have called that winning the match (Ibid p. 256).

Camus continues the theme of *The Myth of Sisyphus* here: that there is no set teleological end for one’s moral acts – they are to be done for their own sake. Yet, *The Plague* presents possibilities for moral life that are far more hopeful than those given in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. The key possibility is that humanity can “Recover the greatest strength, not to dominate but to give.”<sup>99</sup> What one can do, even while facing death and hopelessness, is act in the name of moral duty that is given content through lived experience, and directed towards the other by will in opposition to death. One may attempt to flee moral problems in this life, but such an option is cowardly and inauthentic. To Camus’ heroes in *The Plague*, duty must always be directed towards the care of others, even if it results in death. In facing death, one must act so that “for the bane and the enlightening of men, it roused up its rats again and sent them forth to die in a happy city.”<sup>100</sup> As Camus writes in his notebook, “Happiness lies in the swiftness of feeling and thinking.”<sup>101</sup> There is thus, in the face of death, realization and lucidity of moral insight, according to Camus.

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid p. 253

<sup>99</sup> Camus, Albert. 2008. *Notebooks 1951 – 1959* p. 204

<sup>100</sup> Camus, Albert. 2004d. “The Plague.” p. 272

<sup>101</sup> Camus, Albert. 2008. *Notebooks 1951 – 1959* p. 201

Such a conception of ethics uses ancient philosophy while breaking with it. Camus' premium on moral insight is borrowed from Plotinus as is demonstrated in the previous section. However, it is joined with Judeo-Christian concerns and symbols. Notions like redemption, exile, "a land of promise,"<sup>102</sup> and judgment are each present in *The Plague*. Yet Camus uses these symbols in order to present the sensation of a unified, realistic world to the reader. Such a world is ripe with human drama and characters that must grapple with moral dilemmas in a life-or-death struggle against death itself. These characters, however, are bursting with human flaws – they fail constantly and even their successes and victories against death are short-lived, as is the case with Tarrou. Death and plague undoubtedly serve as antagonists in Camus' universe, with absurdity and struggle as the binding, unifying force between the characters within the text and, subsequently, the text with the reader. Upon this sensation of unity, Camus wishes readers to connect beauty, ethics, and duty in the same moral space. In *The Plague*, Camus wants to present characters that have lived their lives well, seeking meaning that is snatched from the jaws of death itself. In other words, certain characters in *The Plague* have *judged* well. Yet, judgment is not an obvious theme in *The Plague*. For Camus' thoughts on judgment, we must turn to his later fiction, primarily *The Fall*, in order to glean what bad or incorrect judgment is.

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<sup>102</sup> Camus, Albert. 2004d. "The Plague." p. 241

### Section III: Camus the Critic

Judgment is the major theme in Camus' later works, *The Fall* and *Exile and the Kingdom*. However, Camus hints at the importance of judgment in moral life in *The Plague*. In the last chapter of *The Plague*, the unnamed narrator reveals himself as Rieux, the novel's protagonist. Camus writes, "Summoned to give evidence regarding what was a sort of crime, he has exercised the restraint that behooves a conscientious witness... following the dictates of his heart, he has deliberately taken the victims' side and tried to share with his fellow-citizens the only certitudes they had in common – love, exile, and suffering."<sup>103</sup> Indeed, Rieux withholds his identity in his recounting of events, since "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 lovely this was an advantage. Thus, decidedly, it was up to him to speak for all."<sup>104</sup>

The suspension of Rieux's identity as narrator throughout *The Plague* underscores an aspect of Camus' thought that deserves our attention. One cannot be a critic without ethics and duty, nor can one be an actor without possessing a critical faculty. Camus' moral and political outlook is informed by the notion that ethics exist in pursuit of judgment, and judgment is in pursuit of action. These two concepts are intertwined and are expressed in fiction via the concept of the absurd. We have established in the last two sections that Camus argues that acting ethically is a function of moral vision and that the content of that ethical action is duty. However, what is the basis of that moral vision? How does one *become* a correct moral judge? Camus does think the novel is a vital instrument in expressing philosophical ideas, but understands that the reception of correct

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid p. 265

<sup>104</sup> Ibid p. 266

or authentic philosophical ideas is a matter of taste and judgment. Therefore, Camus' works that are primarily focused on judgment show *how to judge correctly* so that one may apply that judgment and *act correctly* out of duty informed by understanding.

However, Camus never comes outright and says, "This is how to judge" in any of his works. Camus' pedagogy is a negative one: by showing how *not* to judge, one is given a proper understanding of how to judge correctly. This technique places the interpretative onus upon the reader – it is not enough to be *told* how to judge by a work of fiction according to Camus. Instead, one must develop a sense of moral judgment with and against Camus' texts. As Camus writes in his notebooks, "The artist is like the god of Delphi: 'He does not show nor does he hide: he signifies.'"<sup>105</sup> What Camus is trying to signify is *how* to judge, not *what* to judge. The upshot is that judgment is a faculty required to possess a fuller, more nuanced conception of morality and that this faculty must be developed as a habit and skill in order to function morally.

### **3.1: *The Fall*: Or, How Not to Judge**

*The Fall* is Camus' most developed discourse on the faculty of judgment. Unique to *The Fall* is its lack of a cohesive narrative; it is less of a novel and more of a series of dramatic monologues delivered to an unnamed character by the self-proclaimed "judge-pentitent," Jean-Baptiste Clamence.<sup>106</sup> Clamence describes himself as a "cultured bourgeois"<sup>107</sup> who suffers from an "overflow; as soon as I open my mouth, sentences pour out."<sup>108</sup> Clamence talks at great ends about nearly everything: drinking, sexuality, moral and philosophical concepts, the weather, personal tastes, fashion, and religion all

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<sup>105</sup> Camus, Albert. 2008. *Notebooks 1951 – 1959* p. 205

<sup>106</sup> Camus, Albert. 2004a. "The Fall." In *The Plague, The Fall, Exile and the Kingdom, and Selected Essays*, New York: Everyman's Library., p. 280

<sup>107</sup> Ibid p. 280

<sup>108</sup> Ibid p. 282

appear in Clamence's lengthy monologues. It is subsequently useful to think of *The Fall* as an aesthetic exercise and not simply as a novel. Like Nabokov's Humbert Humbert, Camus' Clamence is attempting to convince the reader of the morality of his actions (or, perhaps, his inactions) with the most pretentious and garish uses of language imaginable. As Clamence says, "Indeed good manners provided me with great delights. If I had the luck, on certain mornings, to give up my seat on the bus...to someone who obviously deserved it...it was a red-letter day."<sup>109</sup> Clamence says, "I even took such pleasure in giving that I hated to be obliged to do so. Exactitude in my money matters bored me to death and conformed ungraciously. I had to be the master of my liberalities." "Consequently I was considered generous and so I was,"<sup>110</sup> says Clamence.

What we can glean so far is that Clamence is an aesthete, more concerned with aesthetics as a signifier of morality than as a vessel of moral content. Clamence does not view himself as an equal of those who are recipients (or, rather, the victims) of his "charity." "Life, its creatures and its gifts, offered themselves to me and I accepted such marks of homage with a kindly pride... I looked upon myself as something of a superman... I had of being more intelligent than everyone else."<sup>111</sup> Clamence goes so far as to defend slavery as a function of nature – "I am well aware that one can't get along without dominating or being served. Every man needs slaves as he needs fresh air. Commanding is breathing...power settles everything."<sup>112</sup> Clamence later states that "I was eager to get my revenge, to strike and conquer. As if my true desire were not to be

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid p. 287

<sup>110</sup> Ibid p. 287

<sup>111</sup> Ibid p. 291

<sup>112</sup> Ibid p. 299

the most intelligent or most generous creature on earth, but only to beat anyone I wanted... Discovered in myself sweet dreams of oppression.”<sup>113</sup>

It is clear that Clamence is, to say the least, morally confused. On one hand, he wants to give himself to all through charitable actions. On the other, he views the people that he serves as “human ants”<sup>114</sup> that he wishes to dominate. When it comes to the expression of art, Clamence argues that these “human ants” “need tragedy...their *aperitif*.”<sup>115</sup> Despite his lengthy and ostentatious speeches, Clamence does not see the value in art except as a means of gratification. He says, “I was always bursting with vanity. I, I, I is the refrain of my whole life and it could be heard in everything I said.”<sup>116</sup> Nature, art, sexuality, religion, and desire are all, for Clamence, a mere means to a selfish end. On the topic of sexuality, Clamence argues, “Sensuality is not repulsive. Let’s be indulged and use the word infirmity, a sort of congenital inability to see in love anything but the physical.”<sup>117</sup> Clamence indulges these facets of human life and activity merely for self-gratification, not to experience them for what they are or how they can affect him. Clamence instead argues, “the question is how to elude judgment...of avoiding being for ever judged without ever having a sentence pronounced.”<sup>118</sup>

In the act of avoiding judgment, “We are more inclined to flee...society...we don’t want to improve ourselves or be bettered, for we should first be bound to be judged in default. We merely wish to be pitied and encouraged in the course we have chosen...We lack the energy required for evil as well as that required for good.”<sup>119</sup> Thus

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid p. 305

<sup>114</sup> Ibid p. 288

<sup>115</sup> Ibid p. 294

<sup>116</sup> Ibid p. 301

<sup>117</sup> Ibid p. 307

<sup>118</sup> Ibid p. 317

<sup>119</sup> Ibid p. 321

in order to avoid judgment, the pitiable individual must not do anything with a deeper meaning in mind. All activities valued in human life become “aperitifs” or consumables and cures for bodily “infirmities.” Clamence says, “Alcohol and women provided me, I admit, with the only solace of which I was worthy...Then you’ll see that true debauchery is liberating because it creates no obligations. In it, you possess only yourself.”<sup>120</sup>

Ironically enough, Clamence contradicts this sentiment earlier in the novel. He says, “The act of love, for instance, is a confession. Selfishness screams aloud, vanity shows off, or else true generosity reveals itself. Ultimately in that regrettable story, even more than in my other affairs, I had been more outspoken than I thought; I had declared who I was and how I could live.”<sup>121</sup> Here, Clamence admits that in his boisterousness and pomposity, he has found moments of silence and intimacy in which his existence was directed towards others. Clamence’s aestheticism is an attempt to avoid others and, ultimately, to avoid obligations to others. However, Clamence’s monologues here may be an attempt at sincerity and inasmuch as they are an attempt to avoid intimacy they are a confession in its own right. Early in the novel, Clamence begs his unnamed interlocutor to “Nod your head to thank [the waiter], and above all, drink up with me, I need your understanding.”<sup>122</sup> Clamence very well knows that the escape from judgment is impossible, saying, “Since then, soap has been lacking, our faces are dirty and we wipe one another’s nose...Don’t wait for the Last Judgment. It takes place every day.”<sup>123</sup>

Vital to understanding *The Fall* is the lack of response from the interlocutor amid Clamence’s ramblings and pleas for help. Clamence admits that, “With all that I

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid p. 331

<sup>121</sup> Ibid p. 311

<sup>122</sup> Ibid p. 292

<sup>123</sup> Ibid p. 336

construct a portrait which is the image of all and of no one...When the portrait is finished...I show it with great sorrow: 'This, alas, is what I am!'"<sup>124</sup> Despite Clamence's indulgences, he is presenting a portrait of himself to his interlocutor, and thereby, to the reader. This resembles the Plotinian notion of living as of creating an inner sculpture – yet the materials used in Clamence's sculpture lack virtue and meaning. Clamence's interlocutor subsequently fails to notice or respond to Clamence's rants with any sort of emotion, neither positive nor negative. However, the interlocutor's silence is not only his or her own, but of the world in refusing to acknowledge the Clamences of the world, even as they ask for help, albeit in a vulgar and pompous way. In Plotinian terms, unity is denied and the sins of the other are not absolved or denied, they are left unresolved, as the bonds between individuals have broken down. As a result, Clamence hopes for death as the quintessential means of avoiding judgment. Clamence says, "When we are all guilty, that will be democracy...Death is solitary, whereas slavery is collective. The others get theirs too, and at the same time as we – and that's what counts. All together at last, but on our knees and heads bowed."<sup>125</sup>

Therefore, Camus argues that modern liberal democracy and ideology evoke a situation in which all judge, but no one condemns. Clamence judges others incessantly in order to avoid condemnation from others, yet he understands that avoiding scorn is impossible and harbors a secret hope that some individual will absolve him from his sins. Instead, his sins are left suspended in moral space. Clamence is a Tarrou in search of a Rieux to provide a sense of understanding to his actions. Abstractly, what is occurring in *The Fall* is judgment in search of ethical understanding. Without any sort of ethical

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid p. 352

<sup>125</sup> Ibid p. 350



grounding, judgment results in self-indulgence at its most benign and ideological violence at its most malicious. If political order is conceived only in terms of judgment, society is left at a stage in which, “We are making great progress and yet nothing is changing. It’s not navigation but dreaming.”<sup>126</sup>

While Camus understands intimately the importance of dreaming, art, and symbology for a political order, this order must be married to an understanding of ethics that is embodied in duty towards the other. This duty values the intrinsic moral worth and particularity of the human individual. As Camus writes in his “Letter to a German Friend:”

I...chose justice in order to remain faithful to the world. I continue to believe that this world has no ultimate meaning. But I know that something in it has a meaning and that is man, because he is the only creature to insist on having one. This world has at least the truth of man, and our task is to provide its justification against fate itself. And it has no justification but man; hence he must be saved if we want to save the idea we have of life (“Letter to a German Friend,” *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, p. 28).

As a result, Camus argues that it is not merely imagination at work in political theorizing; it is imagination expressed as the faculty of judgment in search of the ethical political order. At its worst, imagination represents a false hope in the salvific promises of modern ideologies or in the banal aestheticism of bourgeois liberalism. At best, imagination and judgment represent the engine of our ethical longings expressed in art. Action and thought, imagination and reason, moderation and abstraction are all essential components in the making of an ethical person and, subsequently, of an ethical society. If any notion here is lost, Camus argues that what arises is terror. For a prolonged description of what this terror resembles, let us turn to Camus short story from *Exile and the Kingdom*, “The Renegade.”

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid p. 328

### 3.2: “The Renegade:” Or, How to Misuse Judgment

“The Renegade” is the portrait of the ideological activist *par excellence*. It is an unflinching depiction of the brutality humans are capable of when guided by judgment alone. Truly, only the beauty of its message matches the horror depicted in the actions of “The Renegade’s” nameless subject. From the first line, “What a jumble! ... I must tidy up my mind. Since they cut out my tongue, another tongue, it seems, has been constantly wagging...”<sup>127</sup> The eponymous Renegade is a man with no name, no tongue, and no identifiable goals other than wanton destruction of a world he never attempts to engage. Thus, the Renegade is pure will and pure judgment, with no regard to philosophical contemplation, reflection, or nuanced appreciation of unity to check said will. His attempt to deal with absurd conditions is to destroy the conditions themselves. The Renegade “dreamed of absolute power, the kind that makes people kneel down, that forces the adversary to capitulate...the more he’s sure of himself, mired in his own conviction, the more his conquest establishes the royalty of whoever brought about his collapse.”

Briefly, the plot of the Renegade involves a young Catholic missionary (brought up in the Protestant region of his homeland),<sup>128</sup> who, upon hearing of the chance to convert potentially violent natives, journeys into the desert to convert them. Upon arriving, he is stripped, beaten, and taken to the House of Fetish, where his tongue is cut out and he finds himself “enslaved” by his “new masters.”<sup>129</sup> He escapes, steals the rifle from his home mission, and leaves in order to kill a fellow missionary in hopes of

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<sup>127</sup> Camus, Albert. 2004e. “The Renegade.” In *The Plague, The Fall, Exile and the Kingdom, and Selected Essays*, New York: Everyman’s Library. p. 380

<sup>128</sup> Ibid p. 381

<sup>129</sup> Ibid p. 383

causing his “new masters” to retaliate against the Catholic mission; thus causing a civil war in hopes that “the offence be multiplied, may hate rule pitilessly over a world of the damned, may the wicked for ever be masters...where in a single city of salt and iron black tyrants will enslave and possess without pity!”

The Renegade brutally kills the missionary. He does so with glee, saying, “How pleasant is the sound of a rifle butt on the face of goodness.”<sup>130</sup> However, the Renegade’s actions are not rewarded with a “reign of evil,”<sup>131</sup> but with the natives recapturing him and crucifying him – the story ends with an unceremonious, third-person description of his death: “A handful of salt fills the mouth of the garrulous slave.”<sup>132</sup>

Such a strange story, yet one that conveys much of Camus’s political philosophy. The title, of course, by both the account of the Renegade and the third-person speaker that ends the story, is ironic. The Renegade is anything but. He is, in fact, a slave. As the Renegade says of his captors, “Never had a god so possessed or enslaved me, my whole life day and night was devoted to him, and pain and the absence of pain, wasn’t that joy, were due to him...”<sup>133</sup>

The Renegade is a slave, but a *metaphysical slave*, who operates on pure will, with no reason or unity to check him. In fact, the Renegade seeks to impose a false unity in which the ensuing war he seeks to cause will ensure that “all is consummated, and everywhere in the desert, even hours away from here, jackals sniff the non-existent wind, then set out in a patent trot towards the feast of carrion awaiting them.”<sup>134</sup> In contrast to Camus’ symbol of the rebel, the renegade is a slave to his passions, seeking not moderate

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid p. 395

<sup>131</sup> Ibid p. 395

<sup>132</sup> Ibid p. 396

<sup>133</sup> Ibid p. 389

<sup>134</sup> Ibid p. 395

resistance, but unbounded revolutionary violence checked only by the material conditions of the world he so desperately despises.

The Renegade's new master is "strength and power, he could be destroyed but not converted."<sup>135</sup> Thus, in the absence of a convincing unity, either expressed through religion or art (or ideally, both), the ideologue (or "Renegade" in this case) will seek to impose his or her own idea of unity upon the world in a perverse way - even if that world ignores the one rebelling. It is worth noting that neither the native tribes nor the Catholic missionaries seem very interested in the Renegade (the natives going so far as to kill him). The Renegade is upset with the Protestant region that raised him, the Catholic mission he joined (where he was called "Bull-headed"),<sup>136</sup> and "my teachers who deceived me, with the whole of lousy Europe, everyone deceived me."<sup>137</sup>

In abandoning the Catholic mission he joins as a sign of rebellion to his upbringing, he "joins" a new one. However, it is worth noting that the Renegade rarely talks to the natives before deciding, "They are my masters, they are ignorant of pity and, like masters, they want to be alone, to progress alone, to rule alone."<sup>138</sup> In other words, the Renegade projects feelings of unchecked anger, frustration, and impotence upon the society that has captured him. Without knowing anything about their customs, norms, social, economic, religious, or political order, he assumes they feel exactly as he does. He, therefore, imposes a false unity upon these natives and attempts to bring about a war in order to "please" them. The Renegade says, "I did not die, a new feeling of hatred

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid p. 391

<sup>136</sup> Ibid p. 381

<sup>137</sup> Ibid p. 381

<sup>138</sup> Ibid p. 385

stood up one day...I hated my people...I believed in him and denied all I had believed up to then, Hail!”<sup>139</sup>

The Renegade does not desire to belong to a wider community, but merely wants “to be noticed.”<sup>140</sup> These desires the Renegade imposes upon the natives, that they “will then conquer the soldiers, they’ll conquer the word and love, they’ll spread over the deserts...fill the light of Europe with their black veils” are truly his own.<sup>141</sup> The desire the Renegade has in destroying Europe predates meeting the natives. Meeting them merely gave him the impetus to carry them out.

What proves interesting is that the attitudes that the Renegade affixes to the natives are not generated in a vacuum, but reflect the stereotypes and prejudices he was brought up with, both through his Protestant upbringing and his Catholic mission work. Even in attempting to destroy the society that spawned him, the Renegade is still, inexorably, a part of it.

Therefore, the Renegade’s actions are an impotent attempt to destroy reality for not conforming to his malign will. It is a substitution of absurdity for another variety of absurdity. Even at his most “radical,” the Renegade is still a reflection of the society that he feels abandoned him. This idea is consummated in his death by the natives in response for killing the missionary, thus, attempting to upset the natural harmony between the Catholic mission and the natives.

### **3.3: Conclusion by way of a Transition**

*The Fall* and “The Renegade” are significant pieces of Camus’ corpus that deserve consideration together. Both works depict what occurs when judgment is

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid p. 391

<sup>140</sup> Ibid p. 382

<sup>141</sup> Ibid p. 395

allowed to take precedence over the ethical concerns of individuals. In the case of *The Fall*, individuals are cut off from others, resulting in a pessimistic, nihilistic malaise commonly found in bourgeois society. On the other hand, “The Renegade” depicts a situation in which judgment takes on a more malicious, politically violent, and ideological form. Therefore, the logical conclusion of the overabundance of judgment for Camus is either bourgeois aestheticism and hyper-individualism or ideological terror, which seeks to upend social harmony for the sake of petty vulgarity. Obviously, both alternatives are undesirable. What Camus hopes for is a situation in which one can be a critic without being merely ‘judgmental’ – where one’s moral and artistic concerns result in a situation in which the whole is understood and the particular individual is given a place of honor within that whole.

As cited earlier, Camus believes that despite the aimlessness and meaninglessness of the world, the human individual may find meaning. Further, this ability to create meaning is what gives humanity its innate value for Camus. It is not the world or humanity alone that creates value for Camus. Rather, it is humanity’s place in the world that creates value in Camus. In humanity’s ability to creatively and ethically confront absurdity, humanity rises to a condition of intrinsic moral worth. Yet, the logical connection between these two is not readily clear. Why does the fight against the absurd entail innate moral worth in the individual for Camus? Why does creativity need to possess an ethical core? In answering this question, we need to look for foundations in the moral thought of Immanuel Kant, whose moral writings echo Camus’ pleas for humanity to act in accordance to duty, informed by moral insight or judgment.

## Section IV: Camus the Kantian – Kantian Reflections on Camusian Themes

As we have established in the previous sections, Camus is a thinker concerned with ethics and with judgment as a possible source and vehicle for said ethics. However, Camus' ethics do not possess a clear foundation, as is pointed out in the review of *The Rebel* published in *Les Temps Modernes*, Sartre's journal. According to Bronner, Francis Jeanson, the author of the review, "attacked Camus for his superficial interpretations of Hegel and Marx as well as his willingness to reject revolution without offering any positive or practical content for his vision of rebellion."<sup>142</sup> This criticism of Camus' political theory is not unfounded. Even in Camus' fiction, we do not see real content to the duty that Camus advocates in *The Plague*, nor do we get a sense of how to develop a correct sense of judgment in Camus' later works. Part of this lack of foundation emanates from Camus' refusal to attach himself to a philosophical system, offering instead to provide images that will lead to greater moral clarity. Bronner writes, "Camus is concerned with breaking the stranglehold of rationalist ethics in the name of morality and lived experience."<sup>143</sup>

Thus, it is odd to suggest that Camus' ethics could benefit from Kantian clarifications – after all, Kant's ethics are considered to be the rationalist ethic *par excellence*. Martha Nussbaum writes that our "natural response [to Kant's ethics] is that this is not how it *feels* to be in that situation. It does not feel like solving a puzzle, where all that is needed is a right answer."<sup>144</sup> Further, Camus' insistence that the novel serve as the primary device of philosophical expression seems to accord with Nussbaum's

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<sup>142</sup> Bronner, Stephen Eric. 2009. *Camus: Portrait of a Moralist* p. 95-6

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid* p. 44

<sup>144</sup> Nussbaum, Martha quoted in Zaretsky, Robert. 2013. *A Life Worth Living*, p. 112; Emphasis her's.

argument. Morality is a phenomenon to be lived with, not a puzzle to solve; any set of morality that attempts to deal with the most pressing moral situations with a series of passionless maxims or imperatives is a haphazard way of solving them.

However, Camus' concern with his novel is not merely a means of cataloging the feelings that accompany moral ambiguity and confrontation with the absurd, but also about creating a self that is morally mature and capable of facing the absurd with refined understanding and style. As Camus writes, "The philosopher, even if he is Kant, is a creator. He has his characters, his symbols, and his secret action...the lead taken by the novel of poetry and the essay merely represents...a greater intellectualization of the art."<sup>145</sup> At this juncture, Camus seems to understand that any true sense of morality involves moral development expressed in such a way that is communicable to others through moral reasoning and informed by a strong sense of judgment. To this end, Kant emerges as the clear complement to Camus' philosophic concerns. As Kant writes, "For as a rational being he necessarily wills that all his faculties should be developed, inasmuch as they are given him for all sorts of possible purposes."<sup>146</sup>

At first blush, Camus and Kant are in full agreement about the inherent dignity of the human individual and the duty of humanity to defend this dignity. Kant writes, "Persons are, therefore, not merely, subjective ends, whose existence as an effect of our actions has a value for us; but such things are objective ends, i.e., exist as ends in themselves."<sup>147</sup> The ground of this worth lies in humanity's rational nature, which provides the will with understanding needed to act morally in the world. Kant continues,

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<sup>145</sup> Camus, Albert. 2004c. "The Myth of Sisyphus." p. 573

<sup>146</sup> Kant, Immanuel. 1993. *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Third. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company. p. 31

<sup>147</sup> Ibid p. 36



“even...if the universal inclination to happiness did not determine his will, and if health, at least for him, did not figure as so necessary an element in his calculations; there still remains here...a law, viz., that he should promote his happiness not from inclination but from duty...”<sup>148</sup> Hence, we can see a direct parallel to Camus’ insistence in *The Plague* that “What’s natural is the microbe. All the rest – health, integrity, purity (if you like) – is a product of the human will, of a vigilance that must never falter.”<sup>149</sup> Moreover, like Camus, Kant asserts that the individual requires a just political order in order to “ground morals on their genuine principle and thereby to produce pure moral dispositions and engraft them on men’s minds for the promotion of the highest good in the world.”<sup>150</sup>

However, while there are parallels between the concerns of Camus and Kant, it is not yet apparent how Camus is need of Kant to clarify the philosophical import of these concerns. Kant tends to suggest that the only pure, genuine ethic is one that is governed by reason alone and not allowed to draw from feelings or experience. Kant writes, “a mixed moral philosophy, compounded both of incentives drawn from feelings and inclinations and at the same time of rational concepts, must make the mind waver between motives that cannot be brought under any principle and that can only by accident lead to the good but very often can also lead to the bad.”<sup>151</sup> However, Kant also alleges that, “Innocence is indeed a glorious thing; but, unfortunately, it does not keep very well and is easily led astray.”<sup>152</sup> Hence, Kant acknowledges that there exists a natural tension between inclination and duty. While duty acted upon from reason alone is indeed Kant’s moral ideal, he is aware of the impossibility of this occurring regularly in the world. He

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid p. 12

<sup>149</sup> Camus, Albert. 2004d. “The Plague.” p. 242

<sup>150</sup> Kant, Immanuel. 1993. *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*. p. 23

<sup>151</sup> Ibid p. 22

<sup>152</sup> Ibid p. 16

writes, “Hereby arises a natural dialectic, i.e., a propensity to quibble with those strict laws of duty, to cast doubt upon their validity, or at least upon their purity and strictness, and to make them, where possible, more compatible with our wishes and inclinations.”<sup>153</sup>

As a result, “ordinary human reason is forced to go outside its sphere and take a step into the field of practical philosophy...on practical grounds themselves.”<sup>154</sup> We are here confronted with a Kant that does not seek to make imperatives and leave them floating in moral space. Instead, Kant wishes for us to work out the most vital moral conundrums facing humanity in society through experience. It is not humanity or nature alone that creates moral meaning for Kant, but humanity in the face of particular material conditions, ideas, nature, and other individuals. In Camus’ language, it is not until one faces the absurd conditions in mortality and politics that one is able to resist these conditions in a thoughtful, creative, and ethical way. Unless humankind is aware of its “motivational opacity”<sup>155</sup> or tendency to deceive itself into thinking that it is acting upon duty for its own sake, then there is little hope for humanity in terms of ethically resisting the absurd.

#### **Section 4.1 Kant’s Absurd Politics**

In the previous section, I employed Robert Taylor’s notion of “motivational opacity” to describe aspects of Kant’s practical moral philosophy. According to Taylor, motivational opacity refers to the paradoxical condition of humanity whereby humanity is aware, by reason, of the moral law, yet is unable, by nature, to act upon it due to

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid p. 17

<sup>154</sup> Ibid p. 17

<sup>155</sup> Taylor, Robert. 2010. “Kant’s Political Religion: The Transparency of Perpetual Peace and the Highest Good.” *The Review of Politics* 74(1): 1–24. p. 15

humanity's self-deceiving nature.<sup>156</sup> Kant writes in the *Grounding* "There is absolutely no possibility by means of experience to make out with complete certainty a single case in which the maxim of the action that may in other respects conform to duty has rested solely on moral grounds and on the representation of one's duty."<sup>157</sup> Further, "we like to flatter ourselves with the false claim to a more noble motive, but in fact we can never...completely plumb the depths of the secret incentives of our actions."<sup>158</sup> Taylor adds that we "can never rectify our fundamental motivational opacity to ourselves and others, an opacity that prevents us from observing virtue and, therefore, the highest good."<sup>159</sup>

Ironically, this notion of moral opacity makes morality possible for Kant. Kant writes, "A perfectly good will ... could not be conceived as thereby necessitated to act in conformity with the law...Therefore no imperatives hold for the divine will, and in general for a holy will: the *ought* here is out of place because the *would* is already of itself necessarily in agreement with the law."<sup>160</sup> Succinctly put, humanity's inclination to deceive itself and to bestow false nobility on one's actions implies that humanity *needs* morality since it does not always act morally. Thus, in the world of internal moral motivation, we have already stumbled upon Camuisan absurdity in Kant. The world of morality for Kant, therefore, does not merely consist in "duty" to external or political authority. Alan Wood points out that if "duty" here means to act because one is compelled to act a certain way by political orders, "our first reaction is a burst of that

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid p. 15

<sup>157</sup> Ibid p. 19

<sup>158</sup> Ibid p. 19

<sup>159</sup> Taylor, Robert. 2010. "Kant's Political Religion." p. 15

<sup>160</sup> Kant, Immanuel. 1993. *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*. p. 24

mirthless laughter we reserve for sick jokes.”<sup>161</sup> Instead, duty, for Kant, refers to “the respect we owe to humanity in ourselves and others and to the various forms of moral self-constraint we must exercise, when necessary, in order to be rationally self-governing beings.”<sup>162</sup>

Therefore, Kant’s ethics must be interpreted dialectically. Internally, there is a dialogue with oneself regarding the purity and efficacy of one’s moral motivations. Am I acting in such a way that I am respecting others and myself? Am I dressing my inclinations in ideological verbiage to mask the ineptness and disarray of my will *a la* The Renegade? These are the questions the will is faced with according to Kant. Furthermore, such concerns crystallize when such concerns are applied to Kant’s politics, which are also guided by serious paradoxical thinking. Thus, it seems inappropriate to complain here that Kant is an overly rationalistic thinker. To wit, Glenn Tinder argues Kant is a thinker who wishes to “draw boundaries around reason” and engender a “humane uncertainty” regarding the efficacy and nobility of speculative or “pure” reason in daily existence.<sup>163</sup> This notion is evident in Kant’s political writings.

In “Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent,” Kant draws attention to the “sociable unsociable” character of humanity. He writes, “man has an inclination to *live in society*...but he also has a great tendency to *live as an individual*, to isolate himself, since he also encounters in himself the unsocial characteristic of wanting to direct everything in accordance with his own ideas.”<sup>164</sup> This inclination to live as an

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<sup>161</sup> Wood, Allen W. 2008. *Kantian Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., p. 159

<sup>162</sup> Ibid p. 159

<sup>163</sup> Tinder, Glenn. 2003. *Political Thinking: The Perennial Questions*. 6th ed. New York: Pearson. p. 241

<sup>164</sup> Kant, Immanuel. 1991. “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose.” In *Political Writings*, Cambridge University Press. p. 44

individual is matched by Kant's insistence that, "The highest task which nature has set for mankind ... establishing a perfectly *just civil constitution*"<sup>165</sup> which requires fellow humans' assistance in establishing. As a result, Kant cries, "Nothing straight can be constructed from such warped wood as that which man is made of."<sup>166</sup> Nature has simultaneously given humanity the knowledge of its highest political aim, but has also deprived humanity of the means to fulfill this aim. As a result, Kant argues that, "Nature only requires of us that we should approximate to this idea [of a higher humanity]."<sup>167</sup> From this depiction, Kant pursues a novel conception of nature and natural teleology. Kant writes, "For in the actual course of human affairs, a whole host of hardships awaits him. Yet nature does not seem to have been concerned with seeing that man should live agreeably, but with seeing that he should work his way onwards to make himself by his own conduct worthy of life and well-being."<sup>168</sup> Hence, politics for Kant is a means that humanity "discipline[s] itself, and thus, by enforced art, to develop completely the germs which nature implanted."<sup>169</sup>

Echoing Camus' insistence that "what is natural is the microbe,"<sup>170</sup> Kant suggests that knowledge of our conception of the right does not proceed from nature alone, as is the case in Aquinas or Aristotle. Rather, we are made to confront our human nature through interaction with nature itself. Put another way, Nature does indeed have something to teach humanity, but only after a disruption has prompted humankind to heed its call and obey its higher capabilities (namely, that of reason.) What produces

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid p. 45-6; emphasis Kant's

<sup>166</sup> Ibid p. 46

<sup>167</sup> Ibid p. 46

<sup>168</sup> Ibid p. 43-4

<sup>169</sup> Ibid p. 46

<sup>170</sup> Camus, Albert. 2004d. "The Plague." p. 242

meaning in the Kantian schema is how humanity, nature, and state interact in (hopefully) bringing about a greater form of justice.

Kant's notion of politics as a source of meaning that emerges only when one's desire for order is met against a disordered world (and a disordered self) is highly reminiscent of Camus' conception of absurdity. Camus argues the absurd consists of "the data of experience in that it is both infinitely simple and infinitely complicated... To destroy one of its terms is to destroy the whole. There can be no absurd outside the human mind."<sup>171</sup> As a result, "For me the sole datum is the absurd...the only condition of my inquiry is to preserve the very thing that crushes me, consequently to respect what I consider essential in it. I have just defined it as a confrontation and an unceasing struggle."<sup>172</sup> Here Kant and Camus agree that acknowledgment of struggle between peoples, ideas, and even the very faculties and modes of cognition itself are the source of all meaningful philosophical discourse.

The goal of philosophy for both Kant and Camus is to exposit how this discourse is to be conducted ethically. For Camus, as with Kant, this process of becoming ethical and of conducting ethical discourse is one of attention and moral insight. Camus argues, "The good man... is the man who has the fewest lapses of attention. And it needs tremendous will-power, a never-ending tension of the mind, to avoid such lapses."<sup>173</sup> Put another way, "The evil that is in the world always comes of ignorance, and good intentions may do as much harm as malevolence, if they lack understanding...The soul of the murderer is blind; and there can be no true goodness nor true love without the utmost

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<sup>171</sup> Camus, Albert. 2004c. "The Myth of Sisyphus." p. 517

<sup>172</sup> Ibid p. 517

<sup>173</sup> Camus, Albert. 2004d. "The Plague." p. 242

clear-sightedness.”<sup>174</sup> How is such moral clear-sightedness developed? For this, we must turn to Kant’s aesthetic writings in *The Critique of Judgment* for a discussion as to how dialectical morality and judgment coalesce into a notion of style as a means to confront moral blindness. Throughout this discussion, Camus’ reflections on the faculty of judgment in *The Fall* will be interspersed so as to demonstrate the complimentary nature of Kant and Camus’ philosophy.

#### **4.2: Kantian Aesthetics and Political Life**

According to Kant, aesthetics are a vehicle for moral ideas and the faculty of judgment is a possible source for the creation of a political order. Art, for Kant, is logically and functionally distinct from science or craft. Instead, art requires “the *spirit*, which in art must be *free* and which alone animates the work.”<sup>175</sup> Nevertheless, art in the Kantian schema is not something that exists for a solely human end, but is one that exists for its own sake and is reflected upon through the faculty of judgment. What humans primarily find important in art, according to Kant, is “harmony of nature with our cognitive power is presupposed a priori by judgment, as an aid in its reflection on nature in terms of empirical laws.”<sup>176</sup> Kant continues, “judgment also possesses an a priori principle for the possibility of nature, but one that holds only for the subject, a principle which judgment prescribes, not to nature...but to itself...a law for its reflection on nature.”<sup>177</sup> Thus, judgment is not merely evaluative in terms of *a priori* laws, but also provides a source of reflection regarding objects of the faculties – this includes empirical reality and our dealings with others, as well as moral phenomenon and intuitions.

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid p. 118

<sup>175</sup> Kant, Immanuel. 1987. *Critique of Judgment*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company. p. 171; Emphasis Kant’s

<sup>176</sup> Ibid p. 24

<sup>177</sup> Ibid p. 25

Moreover, aesthetics for Kant is a means of discovering what principles govern taste. Kant writes, “As regards the agreeable, everyone acknowledges that his judgment, which he bases on a private feeling and by which he says that he likes some object, is by the same token confined to his own person... It would be foolish if we disputed about such differences with the intention of censuring another’s judgment as incorrect if it differs from ours, as if the two were opposed logically.”<sup>178</sup> Yet, “The taste of reflection should nonetheless find itself able (as it actually does) to conceive of judgments that can demand such agreement, and that it does in fact require this agreement from everyone for each of its judgments.”<sup>179</sup> As a result, the proper goal of judgment as a faculty is to create principles that govern taste based on a comparison between one’s personal judgments and those of others through contemplative reflection regarding objects. Kant writes, “In their logical quantity all judgments of taste are *singular* judgments...On the other hand, once we have made a judgment of taste about an object, under the conditions characteristic for such judgments, we may then convert the singular presentation of the object into a concept by comparing it [with other presentations] and so arrive at a logically universal judgment.”<sup>180</sup>

In other words, judgment, the primary instrument by which aesthetics are evaluated for Kant is a cognitive, intersubjective, and social phenomenon. Kant writes, “the principle of purposiveness for our cognitive power [is]...in a way commensurate with the human understanding...of finding interconnection, under the unity of this principle with regard to what is different.”<sup>181</sup> Judgment is also not solely rational, but

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid p. 57

<sup>179</sup> Ibid p. 58

<sup>180</sup> Ibid p. 59

<sup>181</sup> Ibid p. 25



social and concerned with particulars. According to Kant, “A judgment of taste...is merely *contemplative*...it is a judgment that is indifferent to the existence of the object: it [considers] the character of the object only by holding it up to our feeling of pleasure and displeasure...hence it is neither *based* on concepts, nor directed to them as *purposes*.”<sup>182</sup> However, this pleasure is not a matter of utility, as is the case with Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, but is a form of logically disinterested pleasure. As Kant writes, “For as to the agreeable we allow everyone to be of a mind of his own...But in a judgment of taste about beauty we always require others to agree.”<sup>183</sup>

Subsequently, the ability to communicate taste and form a canon of great works unveils a great truth about humanity according to Kant: “It is *man*, alone among all objects in the world, who admits of an ideal of *beauty*, just as the humanity in his person...as an intelligence is the only [thing] in this world that admits of the ideal of *perfection*.”<sup>184</sup> As a result, intelligence and taste are two sides of the same coin for Kant. The identification of moral ends and artistic beauty are uniquely human and make human life fuller and worthier of living. Kant writes that, “Fine art...is a way of presenting that is purposive on its own and that furthers, even though without a purpose, the culture of our mental powers to [facilitate] social communication.”<sup>185</sup> The pleasure associated with fine art is reflective, not merely sensible. Kant writes, “Nature, we say, is beautiful if it also looks like art; and art can be called fine art only if we are conscious that it is art while it looks to us like nature...*beautiful is what we like in merely judging it*.”<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid p. 51; Emphasis Kant’s

<sup>183</sup> Ibid p. 57

<sup>184</sup> Ibid p. 81

<sup>185</sup> Ibid p. 173

<sup>186</sup> Ibid p. 174; Emphasis Kant’s

Due to the universal demands of aesthetics, aesthetics are essentially moral although not explicitly rational according to Kant. Moreover, Kant writes that fine art entails purposiveness without purpose – the ability to affect its audience without actually existing or existing for any particular reason other than to instill disinterested pleasure into an audience. Fine art is something that is intimately connected with pleasure by means of presenting ideas without its audience being conscious of its presentation. Criticism allows these audiences the ability to reflect upon what is presented and apply those concepts to the will. According to the aesthetic philosopher Paul Crowther, this process of applying judgment to the will is a matter of developing an individual sense of style that is presented to the community. Crowther writes that style “is the feature which links aesthetic structure and image, and is at the very core of art’s interpretive power.”<sup>187</sup> Style, according to Crowther, is developed *in* art through the choice of medium, subject matter, and composition, and *regarding* art through relation to other works.<sup>188</sup> Crowther writes:

The making of images is a learned competence. It involves initiation into ways in which others execute the relative practice, with a view to learning the possibilities which are available, and ways in which problems can be avoided. Characteristically this will involve negotiating norms and exemplars of achievement in the medium. This means, in effect, being initiated into its comparative historical context (Ibid, Loc 72).

This relation of style to oneself and to other works of art is a way of creating a canon of works that possesses what Crowther calls “*normative significance*.” Crowther writes, “the image does not simply reflect its subject matter, but rather interprets it and, in doing so, changes and characterizes it from the standpoint of the creator. Such transformation allows us to see the subject matter and the artist’s relation to it in new

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<sup>187</sup> Crowther, Paul. 2012. *Defining Art, Creating the Canon* loc. 54

<sup>188</sup> Ibid loc. 72

ways; and offers imaginative possibilities the audience can identify.”<sup>189</sup> Indeed, judgment is a social process which involves initiation into a canon as Crowther argues. However, this initiation is not merely linked to an institutional form, but is expressed in the act of judging itself. Through the act of judging, individuals are able to reflect upon the self as well as the world and see the possibilities for harmony contained within it. In Kantian language, judgment links analytic cognitive understanding and practical moral understanding. Kant writes, “the family of our higher cognitive powers also includes a mediating link between understanding and reason. This is *judgment*, about which we have cause to suppose, by analogy, that it too may contain...a principle of its own, perhaps a merely subjective one, by which to search for laws.”<sup>190</sup>

What is happening in the Kantian picture is a clash between practical and theoretical reason that is, in turn, mediated by reflection upon the image by judgment. It is only through the faculty of judgment that an understanding of humanity is complete in the Kantian scheme. But this mediation in no way entails a cessation of dialectic. Judgment facilitates the tension between will and inclination; of theory and practice; of the absurd within the individual. Judgment does this by providing the individual the means to evaluate images and forms that unified worlds to their audience. Subsequently, human individuals may also use the faculty of judgment to create and evaluate political orders.

It is worthy to note that Kant’s notion of political theorizing as an act of creative judgment ought to come with a warning label. Camus provides such a warning in *The Fall*. While artistic creation and criticism does serve as a way to create solidarity, it may

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid loc. 80

<sup>190</sup> Kant, Immanuel. 1987. *Critique of Judgment.*, p. 17; Emphasis Kant’s

also be used as a tool of self-aggrandizement and vulgarity. For instance, Clamence remarks that human beings “need tragedy, don’t you know; it’s their little transcendence, their *aperitif*.”<sup>191</sup> Indeed, there is a tendency when political order breaks down or when individualism becomes excessive to reduce the social and interpersonal process of criticism to a mere indulgence. Clamence recalls attending the funeral of a concierge he did not like, “Then I paid a visit to the concierge’s wife to receive her thanks which she expressed like a great tragedienne. Tell me, what was her reason for all that? None, except the *aperitif*.”<sup>192</sup> Clamence’s means of expressing judgment is so damaged that he views all public displays of grief or mourning mere digestibles, meant to make inner grief palpable and visible. Clamence sees no problem in indulging in this “*aperitif*” yet nevertheless criticizes others for indulging. What emerges is a sense in which judgment may serve as a shield for hypocrisy or as a form of escape from solidarity with others. For this reason, it must be remembered that ethics are inseparable from judgment and must serve as a compliment to judgment in order to express a valid vision for political order.

To this end, Hannah Arendt argues that the notion of publicity provides humans with the ability to “sniff out” insincerity for Kant. Arendt writes, “To think critically applies not only to doctrines and concepts one receives from others...it is precisely by applying critical standards to one’s own thought that one learns the art of critical thought.”<sup>193</sup> However, “This application one cannot learn without publicity, without the testing that arises from contact with other people’s thinking.”<sup>194</sup> The idea here is that by

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<sup>191</sup> Camus, Albert. 2004a. “The Fall.” p. 294

<sup>192</sup> Ibid p. 294

<sup>193</sup> Arendt, Hannah. 1989. *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* p. 42

<sup>194</sup> Ibid p. 42

communicating with others and encountering others' ideas in art, one may "enlarge their rationality" and think from the perspective of others, leading to a general acceptance of norms that govern behavior and provide meaning to those in society. When one's ill will or lack of good judgment is made public, it is the duty of others to criticize that person for the betterment of the social order. Such a sentiment is compatible with Camus' notion of solidarity in *The Plague*, wherein he argues that "Each of us has the plague within him; no one, no one on earth is free from it. And I know, too, that we must keep endless watch on ourselves lest in a careless moment we breathe in somebody's face and fasten the infection on him."<sup>195</sup>

Further, Arendt argues that Kant's aesthetics also provide a philosophical anthropology that reveals that beings occupy three separate but fundamentally overlapping domains. These are: 1.) humans as belonging to mankind, subject to history; 2.) humans as reasonable agents, autonomous as ends unto themselves; and 3.) "earthbound creatures, living in communities, endowed with common sense."<sup>196</sup> Indeed, the third sphere is where judgment matters most in relations to politics. According to Arendt, the political agent for Kant in terms of judgment is a "disinterested spectator" who judges on the basis of practical reason, understanding, and unity. The Kantian individual in politics is a critical thinker who "enters and interrupts the shouting match: 'Both of you, dogmatists and skeptics, seem to have the same concept of truth, namely, something which by definition excludes all other truths, so that all of them become mutually exclusive.'<sup>197</sup> At first blush, this suggests that Kant is a relativist, denying that

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<sup>195</sup> Camus, Albert. 2004d. "The Plague." p. 242

<sup>196</sup> Arendt, Hannah. 1989. *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. ed. Ronald Beiner. Chicago: Chicago University Press. p. 26-7

<sup>197</sup> Ibid p. 34

truth exists. Quite the contrary, Kant is suggesting that one enlarge their rationality by thinking from the perspective of others.<sup>198</sup> For Kant, truth is a thing that exists in the world and must be shared within a common political sphere; the goal of a political order is justice that upholds the dignity of human beings while allowing them to pursue their individual ends.

To this end, Arendt argues that Kant is neither a skeptic nor a rationalist, but is identifying a faculty whereby these positions can be left behind and can authentically pursue political order: judgment. Such an example of how Kant pursues politics is in his position regarding the French Revolution. According to Arendt, Kant awaited news of the French Revolution with great interest. From the perspective of judgment, Kant sees the French Revolution as a sublime event, which “finds in the hearts of all spectators... a wishful participation that borders closely on enthusiasm.”<sup>199</sup>

Still, Kant also argues that the rights that the revolutionists wished to bring about should “always remain ideas which can be fulfilled on condition that the *means* employed to do so are compatible with morality. This limiting condition must not be overstepped by the people, who may not therefore pursue their rights by revolution, which is at all times unjust.”<sup>200</sup> What this reveals is, according to Arendt, “the clash between the principles according to which you should act and the principles according to which you judge.”<sup>201</sup>

Kant’s discussion regarding the French Revolution viz. Arendt is conducive to Camus’ discussion on the importance of limits. Camus’ literary milieu after World War

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid p. 43

<sup>199</sup> Kant, quoted in Arendt, Hannah. 1989. *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*. p. 45

<sup>200</sup> Ibid p. 47; emphasis Kant’s.

<sup>201</sup> Arendt, Hannah. 1989. *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*. p. 48

It was that of polarization between the capitalist West and the Soviet East. As Bronner points out, “Camus was caught in the middle. He supported neither the Western imperialist exploitation of colonies ranging from Algeria to Vietnam nor the brutal policies in Eastern Europe practiced by the Soviet Union.”<sup>202</sup> Instead, Camus posited that “immediate political exigencies never justify divorcing means from ends, and no one has the right to choose for another.”<sup>203</sup> Yet, as we saw in the previous section regarding Camus and Judgment, the notion of free choice itself is something that can easily be taken out of hand. Clamence, indeed, fancies himself an individualist as he says, “I, I, I is the refrain of my whole life.”<sup>204</sup>

However, this excess of individualism results in Clamence’s proclamation that “I could live happily only on condition that all the individuals on earth, or the greatest possible number, were turned towards me... deprived of any separate existence and ready to answer my call at any moment.”<sup>205</sup> This sense of entitlement and excessive individualism destroys the very notion that individualism seeks to uphold: the dignity of individual humanity. Clamence says, “For me to live happily it was essential for the individuals I chose not to live at all. They must receive their life, sporadically, only at my bidding.”<sup>206</sup> As a result, we can see in Clamence the path towards *The Renegade*; that is, towards solipsistic destructiveness. Through a disordered view of human individualism, the very source of values can be perverted into its opposite. Camus clearly discusses here that what is good in humanity can be distorted through the improper use of

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<sup>202</sup> Bronner, Stephen Eric. 2009. *Camus: Portrait of a Moralist*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p. 77

<sup>203</sup> Ibid p. 79

<sup>204</sup> Camus, Albert. 2004a. “The Fall.” p. 301

<sup>205</sup> Ibid p. 312

<sup>206</sup> Ibid p. 312

judgment, leading towards tyranny or bourgeois nihilism. Therefore, even in a tolerably just political order (perhaps especially so), the vigilance of moral vision that Camus says must “never falter”<sup>207</sup> in *The Plague* must remain vigilant as the virtues of society may indeed become vices if they are not upheld.

Similarly, in reading Kant’s politics, what is always most vital is to consider the content given by one faculty with regard to another faculty. It is not merely the sense of morality unveiled by reason that gives events moral worth, nor does it reside solely faculty of the imagination. Instead, all of these ideas work together (and, paradoxically, against one another) in bringing about some moral clarity. The image posited by the “eyes of the mind”<sup>208</sup> brings about the image of an ideal political order that is evaluated from the auspices of reason. What emerges is a sense in which politics is a form of *image-making*. Political theorizing is, subsequently, a form of artistic creation.

As we have seen in Camus, artistic creation is indeed a form of resisting ideology insofar as artistic creation is bounded by reason and duty. However, artistic creation and the imagining of a political order can very easily result in the creation of ideologies, which seek to “liberate” humanity through political practice. These creations, according to Camus, would be perversions of the faculty of judgment. As Camus argues in *The Fall* and “The Renegade,” the attempt to use artistic expression to avoid judgment or to exact revenge upon the world is a violation of the individual’s fundamental dignity and capacity to cultivate virtue. Instead, artistic creation needs to provide the individual with a means of how to act within a society, facing the absurd. In other words, seeking unity with regards to society requires first, seeking unity with regards to the self.

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<sup>207</sup> Camus, Albert. 2004d. “The Plague, p. 224

<sup>208</sup> Arendt p. 68



The images presented in art must be evaluated in light of ethics and duty and ethics and duty must be evaluated through artistic unity. It is not enough to merely say that Rieux's actions are morally superior to Paneloux's; it must be shown through art. Likewise, merely portraying some action or concept as ethical or unethical through art is insufficient, the portrayal must be interpreted and the moral import must be fleshed out through interpretation and discourse. Judgment and ethics are intertwined as far as both Kant and Camus are concerned and this is made apparent when the dialectic nature of cognition, both within the self and between others is revealed through both art and philosophy.

## **Section V: The Growing Stone, or How to Judge Properly**

Thus far, we have considered Camus' position in the French moral tradition, his conception of ethics, judgment, and his relationship to the thought of Immanuel Kant. We have seen that for both Kant and Camus, moral reasoning and aesthetic judgment are two separate, but unmistakably connected modes of thought that need one another in order to provide an individual with a greater understanding of what political order is and what it can represent. Indeed, the fundamental idea to take away from this discussion thus far is the importance of limits in an intelligent and mature understanding of political order. Moderation is the vital means by which extremism and thoughtlessness can be combatted – and artistic expression is a vital way to do so, as the often obscure and confusing nuance of moral philosophy can be expressed for a mass audience in art. Moreover, artistic expression deserves a place of greater consideration in philosophical argumentation as the thematic simplicity of many works serves as a means to convey messages of vast moral importance. In other words, a thinker such as Camus deserves a place in the philosophical pantheon just as much as Kant does since, indeed, this work has hopefully shown that art can be of philosophical importance and philosophy may concern itself with artistic significance.

What I preliminarily conclude here is that Camus and Kant are thinkers intimately concerned with ethics, art, politics, and principles that reveal an unseen measure to humankind. Where Camus fails is in his argumentation – similarly, where Kant fails is in his presentation. In criticism, the worlds of presentation and argumentation are merged in the sense that art is judged in terms of its normative significance, not simply its form. In other words, through criticism every individual is given license to evaluate and

criticize ideas, as well as transfix and interpret them, leading to a situation in which the meaning of society is open for debate. However, it is the faculty of ethics as well as the content of art itself that conveys the limitations of this debate. Therefore, because ethics and judgment are so intimately connected, society and its future are participatory. Each individual is called to engage with the other with honesty and openness in hope of a better, more just tomorrow.

Nowhere in Camus' corpus is this more apparent than the short story "The Growing Stone." Briefly, "The Growing Stone" concerns D'Arrast, a French engineer called to rebuild a sea-wall in a small town in Iguape, Brazil. There, D'Arrast befriends a ship's cook, who, having survived a shipwreck the year prior, promises to carry a rock to a church in the center of town during the Feast of Good Jesus. The rock in question is kept in a grotto that "With the hammer you break, you break off pieces for blessed happiness. And then it keeps growing and you keep breaking. It's the miracle!"<sup>209</sup>

During the festival, the ship's cook makes good on his promise and carries the rock into town. However, the cook grows tired due to the sweltering heat and passes out. D'Arrast then picks up the stone and carries it for the cook. However, unlike the cook, D'Arrast takes the stone past the church, taking it instead to a series of huts, where he throws the stone into a fire in the middle of a group of people. After which, the cook's brother "turning toward D'Arrast but without looking at him, pointed to the empty place and said: 'Sit down with us.'"<sup>210</sup>

What "The Growing Stone" seeks to convey is that unity and togetherness comes from unexpected sources and the fulfillment of duty is not an academic exercise, but

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<sup>209</sup> Camus, Albert. 2004b. "The Growing Stone." In *The Plague, The Fall, Exile and the Kingdom, and Selected Essays*, New York: Everyman's Library. p. 468

<sup>210</sup> Ibid p. 488

something that is at once immediate and tangible as well as artistic and intellectual. Throughout the story, D'Arrast is constantly referred to as a noble and is seemingly envied. However, D'Arrast does not consider himself a part of any formal institution or national identity – a friend, Socrates, refers to D'Arrast as “A noble without a Church, without anything.” D'Arrast replies, “I never found by place. So I left.”<sup>211</sup> Indeed, what marks D'Arrast as a foreigner or outsider is his seeming refusal to partake in any society; consequently, he is usually referred to as the “noble” or the “engineer.” D'Arrast, at the outset of the story gives nothing and takes nothing. Like Mersault, he is a “stranger,” refusing to participate in his home society or a foreign one.

However, unlike Mersault, D'Arrast “would have liked to spew forth this whole country... This land was too vast, blood and seasons mingled here, and time liquefied. Life here was flush with the soil, and, to identify with it, one had to lie down and sleep for years on the muddy or dried-up ground itself.”<sup>212</sup> By contrast, “in Europe, there was shame and wrath. Here, exile or solitude, among these listless and convulsive madmen who danced to die.” Yet, “through the humid night...the wounded bird’s outlandish cry...still reached his ear.”<sup>213</sup> Indeed, while D'Arrast feels like a stranger, valued only by the town’s politicians and police for his occupational role, D'Arrast still feels and sees and hears an order that is both meaningful and chaotic. However, the recognition of other humans and the ethics implied therein still holds true. When the ship’s cook tells D'Arrast his plans of carrying the stone to the Church, D'Arrast does not condemn the practice as absurd or superstitious, instead D'Arrast says, “No, I’m not laughing. A man has to do what he has promised.”

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid p. 481

<sup>212</sup> Ibid p. 479

<sup>213</sup> Ibid p. 479-80

This respectful, yet indifferent attitude to institutions is exemplified in D'Arrast's refusal to move the stone to the church; D'Arrast instead walks past the church. He does not throw the stone through the window. D'Arrast fundamentally respects the order that is presented before him in all of its splendor and diversity. D'Arrast does not refuse the pagan animism of the ritual he observes with his friend, the ship's cook. Nor does he refuse the Catholic influences that also give the festival meaning. Instead, D'Arrast seeks to preserve the wide spectrum of historical and cultural notions and rituals that make the moment what it is. Denying nothing, D'Arrast seeks only to give – to participate. This notion is represented in D'Arrast laying the growing stone before the people. He seeks genuine contact and belonging, seeking not to condemn, but understand others, and, as a result, D'Arrast grows as a character, and indeed, a human being.

What “The Growing Stone” signifies is how to judge well. Camus is posing D'Arrast as a hero. Unlike Clamence, D'Arrast is capable of engaging with others and understanding the importance of duty and keeping one's promise. Unlike Rieux, D'Arrast is capable of engaging others without providing disengaged commentary upon it. In other words, D'Arrast is capable of both judging and willing in such a way that he does not see these poor foreigners as a means to his end. D'Arrast does not consider sitting down with the villagers as a form of mere gratification like Clamence. Instead, D'Arrast sees this moment as an opportunity to share his humanity with others and grow. D'Arrast sees the importance of fulfilling the promises of others, but in such a way that does not sacrifice the other. D'Arrast judges well, meaning passionately, openly and ethically.

Therefore, the twin faculties of ethics and judgment must continuously check one another. Without ethics, the world of image and imagination regresses into a boundless relativism. Without judgment, ethics is a passionless endeavor to follow the imperatives of one's reason with little regard to meaning or humanity. Instead, individuals in a political order must develop a style of character that allows them to follow the dictates of ethics with a greater sense of enthusiasm, irony, and joy. The idea is to love, think, and create with others. Failing this, the result is a nihilistic individualism or dangerous ideological terrorism. Balance, thoughtfulness, and joy ought to win the day, as the thoughts of Camus and Kant taken together illustrate.

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## **Vita**

Alex Donovan Cole is a political theorist at Louisiana State University who specializes in the connection between modern and ancient thought; distributive justice; and the importance of art and aesthetics in political theory. He hails from Atlanta, Georgia and studied Political Science at Columbus State University in Columbus, Georgia, where he received his BA in 2013. During his tenure at Columbus State, he spent a year as a visiting student at Regent's Park College, Oxford University from 2011-2012. He will begin work on his PhD immediately after receiving his Master's degree in Political Science.