

## ALBERT CAMUS AND THE ETHICS OF MODERATION

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### 1.

Albert Camus has long been neglected as a moral philosopher. This neglect stems from his initial engagement with Parisian existentialism and his troubled relationship with Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. They considered him both philosophically challenged and politically faulty and thought of his work as “merely another means of escaping history and the real problems.”<sup>1</sup> This negative view of his more philosophical works, *The Myth* and *The Rebel*, subsequently stalked his reputation. Conor Cruise O’Brien (1970) and Edward Said (1994) detected a colonialist prejudice in Camus. William McBride (2004) claims Camus rejects history and Ronald Aronson (2004) accuses Camus of ignoring the Holocaust. More particularly, Colin Davis (2007), Steven Eric Bronner (2009), and Richard Kamber (2002) contend Camus lacks moral direction in general. Summing this view, Colin Davis writes that Camus’s absurd leads to “an ethical and epistemological impasse.”<sup>2</sup>

Only recently with Michel Onfray’s *L’Ordre Libertaire: La Vie Philosophique d’Albert Camus* (2012) has some attention been given to Camus as a Nietzschean and neo-classical thinker. This essay develops and explores the notion of Camus as a moralist of the absurd. We shall begin this examination by first exploring Camus’ notion of the absurdity of the human condition and the possibility of suicide.

### 2. ABSURDITY OR *THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS*

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*<sup>3</sup> Camus contends that philosophy’s core concern is the question of suicide. The question of whether life is worth living must necessarily precede abstract inquiry. He writes: “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest—whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories—comes afterward. These are games” (11). This memorable

beginning, often dismissed as overly emotional and hyperbolic,<sup>4</sup> in fact contains an implicit claim that pertains to philosophy in-itself. First, Camus contends that philosophy must concern itself with its necessary condition, namely life. Second, in asking whether or not life is worth living, philosophy's traditional rational, objective, mode falls short. Camus thus identifies the question of life as both subversive and central to philosophical practice. Camus writes: "In a subject at once so humble and so heavy with emotion, the learned and classical dialectic must yield, one can see, to a more modest attitude of mind deriving at one and the same time from common sense and understanding" (12). We can see here, the general contours of Camus' project. He is concerned with philosophy's limits: What it tends to neglect. We can understand this "gap" as a clash between a subjective, emotional, consciousness, and a type of inquiry which moves beyond the subject's "life world" in order to analyse that world. This was Camus's general concern in *The Myth*, and it finds its particular expression in the notion of the absurd.

Camus' attention to suicide reveals the limits of abstract philosophy. He considers that the question of life or death arises from the fact that this feeling precedes conscious awareness of the question of suicide. This emerges from an awareness of one's mortality<sup>5</sup> and suddenly "it happens that the stage-sets collapse" (18). The inconsequential nature of those things which constitute a life are not just sharply observed, but seriously questioned. In response to the 'why?' is the realisation that there is no profound reason for living. This awareness is accompanied by a sense of exile, in which the world is devoid of familiarity and one is surrounded by those who refuse to question the "routine." Simply, we may understand this as a particular type of encounter the individual has with the world in which the basic habit of living is called into question. This is the feeling of absurdity, which Camus describes as a "divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting" (13) arising from a "confrontation between human need and the unreasonable silence of the world" (29). Now, it is important to look closely at what Camus means by this. Human need, in this case, is a desire for the world to make sense in a way which is meaningful. It is the longing for a holistic account of the world, but also for this explanation to operate with respect to human values or provide an intelligible story articulated in terms that human beings care about.

The world, however, is unintelligible and remains silent to this request. Camus here is not making any metaphysical claim about the nature of reality; the world is not essentially meaningless or absurd in-itself, and neither is the individual. It is not the case that either is defective in some way, for this would assume knowledge beyond the realm of experience and would indeed be positing a metaphysic of perfectibility. We can see that Camus' emphasis on the collapse of the "every-day routine" is not arbitrary—the absurd does not emerge from some longing for a "lost paradise." Simply, it is a feeling which arises from a divorce between the individual and the world in which she finds herself. If we desire to classify this relationship, we could say that the absurd is addressing an ontological need by instantiating an epistemological claim. In order to draw attention to how the world is silent to the individual's desire for *human meaning*, Camus argues that rationalist systems like atomic theory ultimately rely on poetry or metaphor.

But you tell me of an invisible planetary system in which electrons gravitate around a nucleus. You explain this world to me with an image. I realise then that you have been reduced to poetry: I shall never know. Have I the time to become indignant? You have already changed theories. So that science that was to teach me everything ends up in a hypothesis, that lucidity founders in metaphor, that uncertainty is resolved in a work of art. What need had I of so many efforts? (23)

Thus the universe is not meaningless; it is simply unable to satisfy the individual's longing for clarity.<sup>6</sup> The absurd is the clash between the individual and the world. The former cannot help but insist on familiarity and the latter cannot respond adequately; it remains unreasonable in this sense. The absurd then is an experience at the limits of human experience, accompanied by an "ontological exigency"<sup>7</sup> to rationalise the irrational world.

We can understand this further by examining the argument Camus makes here, concerning the scientific difference between objectivity and subjectivity. Science approaches the world through the lens of objectivity. This

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is appropriate for the analysis of natural phenomena. Yet, when such objectivity extends to existence—or the desire for human meaning—it is radically inappropriate, simply by virtue of the intrinsically subjective nature of human consciousness. Moreover, if we follow the scientific method to its logical conclusion, the most objective perspective is one infinitely removed from the world; that is, removed from space and time. Paradoxically, such an objective perspective claims to inform us clearly about the world, but necessarily obscures subjective experience—and importantly, human meaning—because it must step outside of the world.

However, Camus is less interested in a rigorous defence of the absurd than an analysis of the consequences of absurdity. If the absurd is born of the individual's refusal to be complacent with the world's irrationality, then this awareness demands some response. It is at this point that suicide arises, as a possible response to the absurd. In fact, *The Myth* is precisely an examination of responses to the absurd, and an argument for why we should not seek to escape or transcend it in any way. Yet, Camus rejects suicide, metaphysical hope, and despair, and instead carves out a positive, life-affirming, and creative response to this ontological state. In the next section I shall show how he arrives at this positive response to the world.

### 3. PRESERVING THE ABSURD

Identifying Jaspers, Chestov, Kierkegaard, and Husserl as thinkers who begin, albeit in different ways, with the absurd, Camus draws attention to what he conceives of as their efforts to negate or work around the unintelligibility of the world. Under the heading “philosophical suicide”, Camus labels the first three ‘existentialists’ and Husserl a “phenomenologist.” While the existentialists accept the unintelligibility of the world, they—in a Fideistic manner—use this irrationality to affirm faith in the eternal. Camus argues that this religious leap of faith is an escape from the absurd, in the sense that the equilibrium—the absurd balance of a desire for the rational in an irrational world—is destroyed. Camus writes: “To Chestov reason is useless but there is something beyond. To an absurd mind reason is useless and there is nothing beyond reason” (34). Kierkegaard likewise negates one of absurdity's terms, namely the rational; thus the irrational is “the only certainty he henceforth possesses” (36). This move shows us that “the entire effort of [Kierkegaard's] intelligence is to escape the antinomy of the human condition” (36). While reason's limits reveal the unintelligibility of the world and the absence of hope, these existentialists embrace hope at the expense of reason.

Husserl and the phenomenologists repeat the same act. However in this case, the term negated is the irrational world. For Camus, Husserl begins by describing, rather than explaining, actual existence. Consciousness focuses, it does not form, its object. In this sense there is no Truth, but numerous truths. At this point phenomenology remains consistent with the absurd as it does not make any objective claims beyond perception. However, Husserl's conflation of intentionality with essences and his impetus to reveal these as necessary truths of consciousness constitutes a “metaphysic of consolation” (42). Eidetic intuition gives way to a type of Platonism and Camus states that “after having denied the integrating power of human reason, [Husserl] leaps by this expedient to eternal Reason” (42).

Contrary to these approaches which “deify what crushes them”, Camus argues that the absurd must be maintained and both philosophical and physical suicide are not options (32). While we have seen how philosophical suicide escapes the absurd *qua* metaphysical hope, to commit physical suicide is to make an absolute value of despair. For Camus, the individual must engage in a constant struggle which “implies a total absence of hope (which has nothing to do with despair)” (31). This is revolt, and in Camus's *oeuvre* entails living fully in spite of the world's unintelligibility. Simultaneously, one must maintain an awareness of all pervasive meaninglessness. Revolt is condemned to fail as it is a rebellion against mortality, however it must be continually enacted as it is the only attitude which is honest and testifies to the existence of the absurd: “The absurd has meaning only in so far as it is not agreed to” (31).

Revolt is accompanied by two absurdist consequences; namely, freedom and passion. From the absurd individual's privation of hope and rebellion against death stems a freedom to live immersed fully in the present. This

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is a freedom from an objective future and pre-established goals which previously endowed life with meaning by, paradoxically, referring to something outside of life. Thus the absurd individual is free in her “disinterestedness with regard to everything except for the pure flame of life” (52). Contained in this freedom is a passion to exhaust everything that is given in the present moment. Camus distinguishes between the best living and the most living here, and argues that the absurd demands the latter. This affirmation of the “most” over the “best” living is a consequence of the absurd individual’s freedom from an objective future and objective rules that ascribe a value to action with reference to something outside the present.<sup>8</sup>

To present the freedom and passion that revolt entails, Camus puts forward four presentiments of the absurd individual: Don Juan, the actor, the conqueror, and the artist—which are not archetypes to be emulated but merely attitudes or styles which represent a particular idea.<sup>9</sup> Camus’ interest in Don Juan rests upon the fact that he loves each woman he seduces with the same passion and does not turn away from the world as a lover like Tristan does.<sup>10</sup> In this way he represents the ethic of quantity and replaces concepts with present sensations. His love is worldly and liberating: “It brings with it all the faces in the world and its tremor comes from the fact that it knows itself to be mortal” (62). In a similar fashion, the actor consciously lives a different life every time he portrays a character. While aware of the finiteness and meaninglessness of this activity, he nonetheless acts with equal intensity each time. The conqueror knows that action is in itself useless, but she continues to overcome herself in this life by affirming the present and remaining ceaselessly active. The artist, who is the most absurd of all, embodies the quantitative ethic by enlarging her life through creation. This creation is accompanied by a clairvoyance in which the work of art has no ultimate significance and does not function in a way which aims to resolve the tension in a life that is absurd. The conscious artist thus describes or presents the absurd; she does not explain or escape it, and in this way she exemplifies revolt.

The character who illustrates the finest embodiment of this combination of lucidity, scorn, and passion is to be found in the myth of Sisyphus. This absurd hero who passionately enjoyed an earthly, sensual, existence showed contempt and disdain for the gods and was banished to the underworld. After obtaining permission to briefly return to earth in order to punish his wife for “an obedience so contrary to human love”<sup>11</sup> Sisyphus rediscovered the intense joy of the sun and the sea, and refused to return to Hades. An act of such defiance resulted in the gods banishing Sisyphus back to the underworld, condemned to roll a boulder up a mountain in perpetuity. Each time Sisyphus reaches the summit, the boulder rolls back down of its own accord and the task proceeds *ad infinitum*. The moment that interests Camus in this myth is the point at which Sisyphus observes the boulder’s descent and becomes conscious of the futility of his labour. It is in the capacity of this realisation that he refuses hope and becomes his own master. For Camus, it is here that Sisyphus’s misery and torture is transformed into a type of victory and happiness. His obstinate lucidity and adamant display of dignity brings forth a worldly satisfaction and joy. Sisyphus accepts his condition and his revolt reveals the happiness which stems from complete honesty in the face of despair. The Sisyphian attitude proves to be the antithesis of physical or philosophical suicide and Camus answers ‘no’ to the question his essay asked: “Does the absurd dictate death?” (15).

Now, while Camus has re-affirmed life and preserved the absurd through revolt, there remain important questions. It is not at all clear how any value other than vivacity and frequency of joyous experiences can be instantiated under the absence of an external moral order. Moreover, while he explicitly states that the lover, actor, conqueror and artist, are not advisably emulable examples, there seem to be no solid grounds for rejecting them as models to follow.<sup>12</sup> In fact, they embody the only value Camus posits: “The absurd teaches that all experiences are unimportant, and [...] it urges toward the greatest quantity of experiences” (54). The second question which arises at this point regards the political and social. There is no indication of how Camus can move from Sisyphus’s radically solipsistic revolt to any notion of political or social action. While the gods are the conditional factor in Sisyphus’s exile, his revolt against them remains an essentially individualistic one. While his conscious awareness of the futility of his labour and his preservation of the absurd may be a political or social value in-itself, it remains a solipsistic one and undermines any idea of solidarity.<sup>13</sup> I will next argue that Camus builds a virtue ethics based on limits that offers solutions to these problems, without abandoning the absurd.

#### 4. THE QUALITATIVE DILEMMA AND THE POSSIBILITY OF IMMANENT UNITY: ABSURDITY AND A VIRTUE ETHICS

To provide an answer to these questions, it is useful to remind ourselves of the implications identified in Camus's opening statement in *The Myth*. In a note following the preface to *The Myth* Camus writes:

[...] the absurd, hitherto taken as a conclusion, is considered in this essay as a starting point ... There will be found here merely the description, in the pure state, of an intellectual malady. No metaphysic, no belief is involved in it for the moment.

In a 1951 interview, Camus said that "when I analysed the feeling of the absurd in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, I was looking for a method and not a doctrine. I was practising methodical doubt. I was trying to make a 'tabula rasa', on the basis of which it would be then possible to construct something."<sup>14</sup> We can understand this method as a criticism of the content of doctrines, namely metaphysical ones. However, Camus does not dismiss metaphysics entirely, and this remains an essential part of his method which is concerned with revealing immanent human experience.

This becomes clear when we locate the difference between Cartesian scepticism and Camus' methodical doubt. While Descartes begins with doubt, he transcends it through his meditations and reveals it as the means to a metaphysical end. Descartes abandons doubt when he finds the two certitudes, self and God.<sup>15</sup> In Camus methodical doubt is not discarded but certain. The consequences it brings about pertain to human existence, and are entirely in the realm of the absurd. Moreover, if we look again at Camus's account of the absurd, we find that he does not reject metaphysics *tout court*; rather it is a question of its function in our experience of the world. He rejects accounts of metaphysical hope. However, he keeps the human desire for metaphysical unity intact and in this way endows it with hermeneutical value. This metaphysical desire is an essential part of the absurd and constitutes the latter when paired with his rejection of metaphysical content. This fact leads us in the direction of a desire for unity in the immanent world. This is why Camus characterises the desire for clarity as essentially human. Thus Camus's method is one in which the limits of abstract philosophy are revealed in human experience.

This realm of experience that is absurd, discloses the orientation of Camus' preservation of a desire for unity in the immanent realm. This becomes clear when we look at the role reason plays in his work. The absurd individual becomes aware that the desire for unity in a transcendental realm is impossible, and simultaneously the desire for divine reason is revealed as futile. Reason is turned back toward the world, and the empirical realm becomes the space in which it functions. Significantly, reason's turn to the world is discovered in the limits of rationalism and the experience of the desire for transcendent unity. Again, while Camus rejects rationalism, he affirms the existence of the desire thereof. He writes: "Of whom and of what indeed can I say: 'I know that!' This heart within me I can feel, and I judge that it exists. This world I can touch, and I likewise judge that it exists." [...] "It is useless to negate the reason absolutely. It has its order in which it is efficacious. It is properly that of human experience" (22).

In his absurdism, Camus swings modally between two extremes. We have the external position which is brought forth by the desire for rationality with regard to the world, and then the "step back inside" where we accept the absurd and are left with a qualitative ethic. The step back inside is a return to the world once the absurd individual has 'externally' realised the futility of the attempt to acquire absolute, rational meaning. The qualitative ethic—the precedence of "most" over "best" living—is a consequence of the individual's freedom from an objective future and objective rules, realised by the external position's rejection of transcendent meaning. Hence, more is going on in this "step back inside" than first appears. If the absurd individual rejects the possibility of metaphysical hope or external values, she is indeed left with a qualitative ethic, but she is also left with the possibility of a type of *virtue* ethics. Very generally, virtue ethics—unlike Kantian deontology or Millian utilitarianism—does not require transcendental values but merely an agreement concerning what constitutes

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the human *telos*. Let us consider here again Camus's rejection of traditional abstract inquiry and his move to the desire for immanent, human, unity.<sup>16</sup> Camus promulgates a type of virtue ethics, not antithetical to his qualitative ethic but which rather tempers and mediates the latter in a quantitative fashion.<sup>17</sup> Thus Camus has some criterion to rule out the styles of life (lover, actor, artist and conqueror) he states 'do not propose moral codes and involve no judgments' and can reject more morally problematic absurd individuals such as "authentic torturers" (75). In order to clarify the virtue ethic that this step entails, I will turn to the possibility of worldly hope and his account of the human condition.

If we follow Camus's logic, it is clear that immanent impossibility is antithetical to the metaphysical hope he rejects. What guides this move back to the concrete in the absence of an external moral order are humans themselves. Camus hints at this when he makes particular moral quantifications while arguing against those who 'escape' from the absurd. Here it becomes clear that a rejection of metaphysical hope does not imply the rejection of worldly hope. Camus writes: "that struggle implies a total absence of hope (which has nothing to do with despair)" (31). "Everything is permitted" does not mean that nothing is forbidden. The absurd merely confers an equivalence on the consequences of those actions. It does not recommend crime, for this would be childish, but it restores to remorse its futility. Likewise, if all experiences are indifferent, that of duty is as legitimate as any other. One can be virtuous through a whim" (58).

There is more going on in these thin and seemingly paradoxical statements than a mere rejection of nihilism. First, we can understand how Camus's rejection of metaphysical hope but preservation of a type of immanent or worldly hope is reasonable by looking at a broader distinction that Joseph Margolis identifies in *Pragmatism Without Foundations: Reconciling Realism and Relativism*. Margolis locates a paradox between practically oriented theorists and first-order human capacities "that can insure universal, essential, foundational, or necessary findings regarding the structure of the actual world or of human inquiry about the world" (40). Margolis' solution to this paradox rests on the identification of an illegitimate conflation between foundations and foundationalism, universal conditions and universalism, and essentials and essentialism. Margolis then goes on to emphasise that we can have the former notions without the latter. Camus, in fact, prefigures Margolis' argument, and, at least in a general sense, the argument supports his 'step back inside'. This way of conceptualising the grounding of values—which holds that both groundlessness and absolute groundedness are unacceptable positions—comes to fruition in *The Rebel* where reflexive questioning, moderation, and awareness of limits constitute the essential modes with regard to grounding values and legitimating actions. In the absurd, Camus already supports this way of thinking in that he conceives of reason as neither all or nothing. For Camus reason must find its function in humans themselves, and human rationality must be conscious of its limit, defined by the bounds of experience.

This focus on human rationality and experience is evident in the above paradoxical statements, as the ethical qualitative quantifications made are representative of a pre-emptive response to the charge that the absurd necessarily leads to only a quantitative ethic. Here Camus is rejecting the fact that actions directed only by "the pure flame of life" imply recklessness and immorality in the same way Mill characterises the Epicureans as answering, when attacked, that it is not them "...but their accusers, who represent human nature in a degrading light, since the accusation supposes human beings to be capable of no pleasures except those of which swine are capable."<sup>18</sup> This is not to say that Camus is idealistic, or posits a naturalistic account of the human condition. Rather, he thinks we have the capacity to invoke virtues such as limit and moderation, and that this is the only adequate ethical stance to emerge from the absurd. We can understand this move by looking again at the absurd confrontation. Humans have the ability to create systems, doctrines and philosophies by virtue of their power, which implies the value of autonomy. However, they simultaneously have the capacity to extend these constructions in a way that ignores human limitations, thus undermining the autonomy that made this possible in the first place. This autonomy which Camus takes as a condition shared by us all exists alongside a capacity for dignity and limit. These two values are not inherent in human nature, but rather latent and necessary for human flourishing.

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Throughout *The Myth*, Camus repeatedly speaks of honesty, integrity, dignity and discipline, characterised as a “daily effort, self-mastery, a precise estimate of the limits of truth, measure, and strength” (115). Preserving the absurd requires we reject both fleeing the world and trying to capture or conquer it absolutely. We cannot assume absolute rationalisation or dismiss reason entirely. Thus, Camus’s position is a moderate one, concerned with approximate truths grounded in decency and human limitation. The absurd individual *qua* the move of a “step back inside” involves this type of virtue ethic which can temper the quantitative ethic flagged as problematic at the end of the first section.

However, two concerns still remain. The first pertains to the instantiation of virtues by society and the second, to Sisyphus’s radically solipsistic revolt and Camus’s preclusion of ideas of solidarity and political action. These are interrelated concerns and best approached dialectically, as the answer to the first opens up the possibility of an answer to the second.

We have, so far, an absurd individual who has integrity and adjusts her actions with reference to existential limits, rather than some greater morality with an external criterion. However, the question that remains is: where does this integrity come from? Or more specifically: how can Camus make this type of personal flourishing consistent with notions of right and wrong?

As Camus’s account of human nature is more phenomenological than ‘natural’ — in the sense of endowing individuals with innate characteristics — we might look to Aristotle’s account of the relationship between society and virtue.<sup>19</sup> Generally, Aristotle states that an understanding of the *telos* must be social and not individual. Here the individual can only fulfil their *telos* within a stable a community, and importantly, this community creates and maintains virtue in turn.<sup>20</sup> The problem for Camus is that such a well-constructed community has broken down. Alasdair MacIntyre has identified the “marginality of virtue concepts” and contended that the central question of moral philosophy has become: “how do we know *which* rules to follow?”<sup>21</sup> While we continue to use the term ‘good person’ we no longer have a notion of societal good which is the necessary condition to make sense of what ‘good person’ might mean. With the collapse of well-constructed communities that condition the human *telos*, we are left only with a society that is “[...] nothing more than an arena in which individuals seek to secure what is useful or agreeable to them.”<sup>22</sup> The consequence is that virtues are unintelligible in modernity. This type of societal collapse informs *The Myth*. Thus he begins: “The pages that follow deal with an absurd sensitivity that can be found widespread in the age” and later states that *The Myth* was written in an “age of negation”.

Yet, if we look at Camus’s early essays (1938) we find an articulation of simple, moral, truths and the sketch of a virtue ethics. His ideas, at this point, are not coloured by absurdity or the inexorable collapse of a well-constructed community.<sup>23</sup> By the time he wrote *The Myth*, however, Camus’s worldview had changed. We find in this early work an overwhelming passion for life that is simply posited, and not a consequence of the absurd as it is in *The Myth*. It might be useful to see this contrast as a metaphor for Camus’s problem in instantiating a virtue ethics in the midst of “a breakdown of the modern project.” Moreover, we might now understand further why Sisyphus (not to mention Meursault) is such a *solitary*, absurd rebel. Camus was aware of this problem, and he deals with it explicitly in *The Rebel*. However in *The Myth*, Camus seems to suggest that we shouldn’t give up hope and that even in the absence of the good polis; self-creating individuals who preserve the absurd would not let society determine their actions and ideas. Absurd individuals are sceptical with regard to abstract institutions “people are in haste to live, and if an art were to be born here it would obey that hatred of permanence” (120) and, as the quantitative ethic has shown, they privilege the present over the future:

This race, wholly cast into its present, lives without myths, without solace...*And yet, yes, one can find measure...* in the violent and keen face of this race, in this summer sky with nothing tender in it, before which all truths can be uttered and on which no deceptive divinity has traced the signs of hope or of redemption (120).

Thus the absurd individual can be sceptical of the “good polis”, but may also be moderate in this scepticism. Even with the collapse of a societally informed *telos*, the absurd individual can act in accordance with a virtue of decency, limit, and revolt. This suggests that moderation (or as he puts it in *The Rebel: La mesure*) is a master virtue, necessary for the existence of other virtues that can potentially recuperate the “good polis”. This becomes Camus’ position in *The Rebel*, which I shall now turn to.

## 5. THE REBEL: ARTICULATING LA MESURE

*The Rebel*<sup>24</sup> begins with a reassertion of absurd analysis in light of logical crime, which Camus states is the quotidian reality. He distinguishes between the age of negation and the age of ideology, which pertain to suicide and murder, respectively. Camus writes: “This essay proposes to follow, into the realm of murder and revolt, a mode of thinking that began with suicide and the idea of the absurd” (13). Camus briefly acknowledges that the absurd, on first glance, seems to treat murder as a matter of indifference. This possibility lies in the instantiation of efficiency as the only value to direct action. As *The Myth* showed, the first step in absurd analysis draws attention to the futility of the subject’s desire for rationality. However, the crucial “step back inside” endows human life with meaning whilst preserving the absurd. Camus, at the beginning of *The Rebel*, re-affirms this outcome in light of the question of murder, arguing that to revolt against suicide necessarily leads to a rejection of murder. He writes:

For the absurdist analysis, after having shown that killing is a matter of indifference, eventually, in its most important deduction, condemns killing ... it is plain that absurdist reasoning thereby recognises human life as the single necessary good, because it makes possible that confrontation, and because without life the absurdist wager could not go on ... The moment life is recognised as a necessary good, it becomes so for all men. One cannot find logical consistency in murder, if one denies it in suicide (13-14).

Here it is clear that the absurd rejects murder because a value of human life is a type of *a priori* principle that makes possible absurd consciousness in the first place. Moreover, human life *qua* the absurd is now seen, explicitly, as a type of human condition. The description of the absurd individual’s experience is extended to the character of all human experience. The value of human life is indubitable. Thus *The Rebel* asserts the value of human life that Camus alludes to in *The Myth* and moves toward solidarity as a value. Reflecting on his expansion of the absurd in revolt, Camus wrote that he moved “in the direction of solidarity and participation”, transitioning “from an attitude of solitary revolt to the recognition of a community whose struggle must be shared.”<sup>25</sup> I shall explore this move in detail.

After positing human life as an indubitable value, Camus explores how this datum also implies solidarity, in a symbiotic relationship with revolt. The one who revolts, the rebel, first and foremost says “no”. The rebel categorically refuses to submit to conditions she considers egregious, and in so doing “affirms the existence of a borderline” (19). In this way, revolt is born of the realisation certain *limits* and *rights* have been exceeded. The “no” that begins rebellion is thus a double gesture, as the negation of intolerable conditions implicitly asserts a value. The rebel must revolt in the name of something. For Camus, this “something” can be understood as equality and self-respect. In fact, the rebel “proceeds to put self-respect above everything else and proclaims that it is preferable to life itself” (20). This All or Nothing attitude springs from the fact that rebellion undermines a conception of the individual as a purely subjective entity. Now, what Camus means here is that when the slave rebels he does so for all humanity because that ‘thing inside him’ which has been trespassed upon is not something which he alone possesses. This is not an individual right but rather something which is common to all humanity possessed even by an oppressive master. We can understand the reasoning behind this as based on the fact that when an individual declares values for herself, her justification necessarily involves proclaiming a universal scope for that value. Moreover, Camus’s commitment to the *a priori* value of human life supports the value of basic individual respect and integrity. It is important to mention that the universal nature of value, here, should not be understood in a Platonic or Kantian sense. Camus does not use the preservation of

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integrity as a fundamental principle to guide moral action. Rather, he posits this value because it is necessary to acknowledge our “shared starting point” before we move to questions of character and context (which are antithetical to fixed, universal guiding principles). Thus, while the rebel slave affirms a limit to absolute freedom his master believes he is entitled, the slave herself is also subject to the limit she is aware of. In other words, the slave rejects both tyranny and servitude and repudiates the master not as master or as potential slave but as *human being*.<sup>26</sup> It is clear that rebellion, the assertion that a limit has been exceeded, both gives rise to solidarity and is justified by it. Camus explicitly extrapolates the question of the social, and emancipated the individual from solitude. The absurd individual realises that “this feeling of strangeness is shared with all men” and “suffering is seen as a collective experience” (28). Rebellion becomes the basis on which social values emerge. Thus Camus, declares, parodying Descartes, “I rebel – therefore we *exist*” (28).

We must address this move to solidarity in light of the questions raised so far concerning human *telos* and the social. In *The Myth*, Camus’ instantiation of a virtue ethic reaches its limits in the breakdown of the modern project. However, at this limit where society is unable to direct a moral *telos*, Camus suggests the self-creating individual must reject the nihilistic and relativistic. This is a bare type of virtue ethics, and perhaps the only possible position in the age of negation. In the age of ideology, Camus states that the problem has shifted to logical crime.<sup>27</sup> This is institutionalised political violence, driven by a compulsive logic, and is distinct from suicide. The former recognises the value of others, that is, one who negates their own life does not claim a right to the lives of others. The legitimisation of murder, however, is absolute negation achieved by an absolute destruction striving for a final end. Socio-political institutions illegitimately posit this when they assert an indubitable principle, and assume doctrine has the appearance of being both right and necessary. It is clear that this move shifts the breakdown of the modern project from a society unable to direct a moral *telos*, to one that overly rationalises ethical reasoning to the point of a non-negotiable syllogism.

We find Camus’ response to this ethico-political problem, in its negative form in the external position of absurdity, and its positive form in the notion of solidarity and revolt, made possible by the “step back inside.” First, the absurd in its mode that rejects absolutes and metaphysical hope, must necessarily reject socio-political systems which are totalising and absolute. We can see, here, the link between Camus’ rejection of religion and absolute reason in *The Myth*, and the political syllogism identified in *The Rebel*. In this sense, the absurd first acts like systematic doubt which Camus acknowledges can “leave us in a blind alley.” However, the preservation of the absurd can, “by returning upon itself, disclose a new field of investigation” (16). Here, the creative absurd hero acts reflexively, refusing metaphysical closure, and approaches socio-political arrangements in the spirit of limit and moderation. Second, the mutually generating notions of rebellion and solidarity contained in Camus’ cogito “I rebel – therefore we exist” — allows Camus to reconstruct an ethical world. This reconstruction is Camus’ direct reply to the problem of instantiating a virtue ethic in the midst of the breakdown of the modern project. It is based, again, on moderation, limit, and human finitude and is in a specific sense a type of Greek naturalism. Let us next examine the exact nature of this reconstruction.

In his section on metaphysical rebellion, Camus argues that the history of modern rebellion is unfaithful to the impulse that instigated it. Revolutionary action has, in the majority of cases, culminated in relinquishing the principles that originally motivated it. This phenomenon stems not from an opposition between revolution and rebellion, or from rebellion in-itself. Rather, such consequences occur to the extent that the relativity of revolt is forgotten and rebellion abandons itself to either absolute negation or complete submission. Let us consider again the slave who revolts and affirms a limit to the freedom his master has up to this point wielded, but is also subject, himself, to this limit and thus rejects both tyranny and servitude. Camus argues that modern revolt lacks the second move of the rebel slave. “Metaphysical insurrection in its primary stages offers us the same positive content as the slave’s rebellion” (31). However, when this protest against the human condition forgets the generous impulse that motivated it, it traverses its limit and blindly pursues alternative utopian ends that *prima facie* justify any means.

Importantly, Camus states that metaphysical rebellion “in the proper sense, does not appear in any coherent

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form in the history of ideas until the end of the eighteenth century: modern times begin with the crash of falling ramparts” (32). Camus locates this phenomenon historically because metaphysical rebellion is essentially an enlightenment inspired protest against *creation*, and begins with revolt against the Judaeo-Christian God- the figure responsible for all creation. Revolting against all creation leads necessarily to a refusal to instantiate a limit and thus preserve the solidarity that the slave rebel maintains.<sup>28</sup>

Camus evinces this by juxtaposing two rebel archetypes, Cain and Prometheus, the former nihilistically negates both God and Earth (all creation), and the latter rebels against Zeus in the name of human values.<sup>29</sup> Prometheus is the exemplary rebel: “The most perfect myth of intelligence in revolt” (17). Modern rebellion and Greek rebellion share a number of characteristics; the fight against death, messianism, and philanthropy. However, Camus contends that Greek rebellion is faithful to the idea of moderation. Accordingly, Prometheus does not revolt against all creation but against Zeus “who is never anything more than one god among many and who himself was mortal. Prometheus himself is a demigod” (17). For Greeks gods and humans were not diametrically opposed. There existed instead a continuum between the divine and the human. Consequently, to rebel against the gods is not to usurp the heavens. Rebellion becomes a matter of promotion, which entails existing *with* the gods, who are already there. Thus while modern rebellion is concerned with a universal struggle between good and evil, Greek rebellion “is a question of settling a particular account, of a dispute about what is good” (17). Camus notes that the Greeks were primarily concerned with nature, and that to rebel against nature was to rebel against oneself. We can see that the difference between modern rebellion and Greek rebellion, is primarily a difference between excess and moderation, between crime and mistakes. There is rebellion against all creation and rebellion against one of many gods in the name of human nature and values. Camus contends that modern rebellion’s negation of the impulse that motivated it and pursuit of ends that justify any means, can be understood as a product of the Old Testament.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, under the heading “Sons of Cain”, Camus examines three cases of modern metaphysical rebellion illustrated by the Marquis de Sade, Dostoyevsky’s Ivan Karamozov, and Nietzsche. Each of these figures begin by protesting against the human condition and creation and aim to “construct a purely terrestrial kingdom where their chosen principles will hold sway.” However, this original impulse is cast aside in all cases, and the tension rebellion implies is ultimately subsumed by either tyranny or servitude. These figures are nihilistic in different ways. Nevertheless, all betray rebellion’s original impulse “by having an intemperate recourse to absolutes” (73).

Camus then moves to historical revolt, the same protest played out on the stage of modern history, which he states is the “logical consequence of metaphysical rebellion” (76). Just as modern metaphysical rebellion begins with Sade “the first coherent offensive” (32): Camus compares modern historical rebellion with Sade’s contemporaries, the regicides<sup>31</sup>, “who attack the incarnation of divinity without yet daring to destroy the principle of eternity” (108). Camus marks 1789 as the year when revolutionary justice replaced the Priest-King with a reign of “holy humanity.” The sovereignty of the people replaced the divine sovereignty of the King and Saint-Just’s interpretation of Rousseau’s General Will became divine itself. Justice and virtue expressed through the General Will instantiates a reign of infallible and formal law, justifying Terror by the preservation of its principles. Saint-Just considered “nothing resembles virtue so much as a great crime” and declares what Camus calls “the major principle of twentieth century tyrannies”: “A patriot is he who supports the Republic in general; whoever opposes it in detail is a traitor” (96). While regicides attacked the incarnation of divinity and God’s law on earth, the Jacobins nevertheless preserved an abstract principle of eternity in their attempt to institute a religion of virtue.

Subsequently, Hegel denied universal and abstract reason by incorporating value and reason in the stream of historic events. This move destroyed all vertical transcendence and instantiated concrete universal reason, replacing God with the historical Absolute. The values the French Revolution consecrated could now only be attained when the process of history comes to completion. For Hegel, all values are placed in a state of “becoming” and can only exist if they are sanctioned by the historical process. Camus considered Hegel’s incarnation of values (truth, reason, justice) in the future of the world as a move that gave “reason an unreasonable shock by endowing it with a lack of moderation” (103). Consequently, humans are merely a part of an inevitable

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historical process: Morality shifts with the process of time and values become goals rather than guides. Here an individual who posits an alternative value to the one sanctioned by the historical moment, may be justly executed in the name of the future good. Camus's reading of Hegel is predominately a reading of Kojève's Hegel, which emphasises a Marxist interpretation of the Master-Slave dialectic of human history.<sup>32</sup> This style informed twentieth century revolutionary thought and preserved Hegel's vision of "a history without any kind of transcendence, dedicated to perpetual strife and to the struggle of will bent on seizing power" (105).

It is with Kojève's Hegel in mind that Camus moves to the state terrorism of the twentieth century. Marx and Stalin are proponents of what Camus terms "rational terror."<sup>33</sup> In light of Camus's focus on modern revolt against all creation, the Soviet regime constituted the only truly totalitarian regime with the ideological purpose of unifying the world. Camus thought that: "Russian Communism...has appropriated the metaphysical ambition...the erection, after the death of God, of a city of man finally deified" (155). What then was the ideological basis of Russian Communism, and the "rational terror" brought forth by the followers of Marx?

While Camus admired Marx's denunciation of bourgeois hypocrisy, his doctrine also assumed a "Utopian messianism of highly dubious value" (156). Marx's critical method which should have been prudential and adjusted to reality separated itself from facts in order to remain faithful to a prophecy. Camus identified Marxists as appropriating these apocalyptic and prophetic aspects of Marx's doctrine. When Marx's predictions failed to come true, the prophecies became the only hope for these successors. Camus highlights the similarity between Marx's historical determinism and Christian Messianism in order to show how he reinstated, in an even more destructive form, the Christian and bourgeois thought that he originally aimed to combat.

In contrast to the ancient Greek understanding, Christian and Marxist doctrines "consider human life and the course of events as a history which is unfolding from a fixed beginning towards a definitive end, in the course of which man gains his salvation or earns his punishment" (157). While the Greeks conceived history as cyclical and thought it better to obey nature, the Christians introduced an eschatological conception of history and required that nature be subdued and transformed. The Marxist doctrine continued this worldview, asserting that a classless communist society will succeed the era of bourgeois capitalism. However, twentieth century technology proved Marx's economic predictions false. A serious logical contradiction vitiated Marx's dialectical materialism. While Marx's revolution is directed toward the instantiation of communism, its dialectic involves only a pure movement which negates everything that is not itself. Consequently, the dialectic makes an end of something without a beginning. It contradicts the class struggle. Thus both the historical and logical failure of Marx's classless utopianism discloses the religious aspect of his thought. Moreover, like the bourgeois culture it rejected, Marxism believed in the progress of science and technology and relied upon it to assist man in his conquest of nature. Thus Marx substitutes God, and indeed all transcendental principles for a belief in a future Utopia and thereby "destroys, even more radically than Hegel, the transcendence of reason and hurls it into the stream of history" (167). The consequence of this is a radical degradation of man: "Suffering is never provisional for the man who does not believe in the future. But one hundred years of suffering are fleeting in the eyes of the man who prophesies, for the hundred and first year, the definitive city" (175).<sup>34</sup>

Camus' rebel, by contrast, says "No" to both the transcendent divine God and to a political regime that she takes as unjust. However, this negation is simultaneously an affirmation of a limit discovered through rebellion itself. This is a limit that preserves the value of human life and discloses human solidarity. The modern rebellion that Camus criticises destroys the double gesture contained in the rebel's "No" and, instead invokes a dehumanising revolution. This phenomenon exposes the paradox of modern rebellion where demands for justice and freedom conflict to the point where these two values appear incompatible. We have seen that metaphysical revolt against God, in the name of freedom and justice, leads to a revolution which instantiated a holy humanity that justified murder. The destruction of God and vertical transcendence exemplified by Kojève's Hegel subsumed freedom and justice to a historical end which Stalin, adapting Marx, turned into a utopian unification of the world where man is deified and can be murdered and degraded until this historical end is achieved.

However, Camus demonstrates that this apparent irreconcilability between justice and freedom only exists when we conceive of these values as absolute. A concern with absolute justice or absolute freedom produces only a destructive perversion of revolt and ends up negating one of the terms: "Absolute freedom is the right of the strongest to dominate. Therefore it prolongs the conflicts that profit by injustice. Absolute justice is achieved by the suppression of all contradiction: therefore it destroys freedom. The revolution to achieve justice, through freedom, ends up aligning them against each other" (251-2).

Authentic revolt can only be achieved by conceiving both freedom and justice as relative values. This rejection of absolutes exists in a mutually generating relationship with the preservation of life and solidarity Camus posits as an *a priori* value. It is a necessary outcome of the virtue of moderation. The rebel rejects injustice "not because it contradicts an eternal idea of justice, but because it perpetuates the silent hostility that separates the oppressor from the oppressed. It kills the small part of existence that can be realised on this earth through the mutual understanding of men" (247). Thus the true rebel aims for greater justice, greater freedom, and greater happiness, but not absolute justice, absolute freedom, or total happiness. Here the act of rebellion stays true to the initial impulse that motivates revolt by being "embodied in an active consent to the relative" (254). This involves rebellion being "uncompromising as to its means" while simultaneously accepting "an approximation as far as its ends are concerned" (254). This is Camus's philosophy of limits in action and it finds its clearest articulation in the neoclassical notion of measure or moderation. Camus observes:

Rebellion in itself is moderation, and it demands, defends, and re-creates it throughout history ... Whatever we may do, excess will always keep its place in the heart of man, in the place where solitude is found. We all carry within us our places of exile, our crimes, and our ravages. But our task is not to unleash them on the world; it is to fight them in ourselves and others (265).

What is interesting, and indeed untimely, is that he draws this dictum for present-day man from the Mediterranean tradition. Unlike post-Christian thought—most significantly German ideology—the Mediterranean spirit rejects the promise of a future Utopia and instead asserts the present life and its limits. In this way, the Mediterranean law of moderation calls for a return to a faith in a human rationality that is aware of its limit and makes possible a pragmatic ethics. Camus finds a contemporary example of authentic rebellion in French revolutionary trade unionism<sup>35</sup> which is "responsible for the enormously improved conditions of the workers from the sixteen-hour day to the forty-hour week" (261). The difference between syndicalism and "Caesarean socialism" is that while the latter is based on absolute doctrine, the former started "from a concrete basis [and] relies on reality to assist it in its perpetual struggle for truth" (261). Moreover, the Marxist revolution *qua* Russian Communism "cannot, by its very function, avoid terror and violence done to the real" while Trade Unionism is "the negation to the benefit of reality, of bureaucratic and abstract centralism" (261). This is a realism which is inherently moral, as the discovery of limits rests upon the preservation of life and human dignity. Camus writes that he has not intended to present a "formula for optimism" (267). Thus "the injustice and suffering of the world will remain" (267) and to believe this is not the case would be to engage in homicidal unadulterated virtue: "Rebellion, on the contrary, sets us on the path of calculated culpability...on the scale of average greatness that is our own" (258).

## CONCLUSION

Camus' reconstruction of the ethical world is a call for a return to naturalism and life, in the sense of acknowledging both human limitations and constraints placed on us by the world. Camus's *la mesure* compares with the Greek concept of *sophrosyne*. *Sophrosyne* is a many-sided term, usually translated as "temperance" or "moderation." Helen North draws attention to Plato's identification of *sophrosyne* as one of the four cardinal virtues in the *Republic* and relates to "the Greek tendency to interpret all kinds of experience—whether moral, political, aesthetic, physical, or metaphysical—in terms of harmony and proportion." (258). For Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Herodotus *sophrosyne* "implied good sense, moderation, self-knowledge, and that accurate observance of divine and human boundaries which protects man from dangerous extremes of every kind. In private life it is

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opposed to hybris, and in the life of the State to both anarchy and tyranny”.<sup>36</sup> Heraclitus was the first to relate *sophrosyne* to self-knowledge.<sup>37</sup> Significantly, he is one of Camus’s exemplary figures in *The Rebel*:

Heraclitus, the inventor of the notion of the constant change of things, nevertheless set a limit to this perpetual process. This limit was symbolized by Nemesis, the goddess of moderation and implacable enemy of the immoderate. A process of thought which wanted to take into account the contemporary contradictions of rebellion should seek its inspiration from this goddess. (260)

This is apparent, in the need to reject both fideist theology and absolute rationalism and take the “middle path” revealed by the futility of absolute human meaning. This realisation brings forth an ethic that is based on existential limits and moderation, constantly vigilant of partial truths and adjusts action accordingly. We can understand *la mesure* as a master virtue necessary for the emergence of substantive virtues such as freedom and justice. Thus *la mesure* is not grounded in some transcendent or external criterion, but in the limits of rationality and the decency and dignity latent in human nature.

Camus’s virtue ethic revealed as *la mesure*, thus provides an answer to the moral question posed by the breakdown of the modern project and the collapse of a socially informed *telos*, identified by MacIntyre. Just as he suggests that in the age of negation one must act in accordance with decency and limit, in the age of ideology Camus contends that moderation is the only reasonable—indeed the only moral—rule to live by. *La mesure* requires no social or individual *telos*, but is rather grounded in the preservation of dignity and life. It is only by invoking this virtue—and striving for relative justice and relative freedom—that substantive virtues can emerge and positive change occur. Thus Camus’s ethic rejects utilitarianism, deontology, and teleological Aristotelian metaphysics. Although he invokes an ancient, pre-Socratic dictum to live by, it is clear that *la mesure* is a concept that is both more extensive and urgent than the ethical theories he rejects. *La mesure* urges us to act moderately and morally whether we live in the age of negation or the age of ideology. In fact it demands to be invoked as long as we live in an age where there is life and dignity to be preserved. It is here that the profundity and continued relevance of Camus’ thought lies.

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## NOTES

1. Simone de Beauvoir *Force of Circumstance*. Trans. R. Howard Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968. 253.
2. Colin Davis, "The Cost of Being Ethical" *Common Knowledge* 2:9 (2003, 241-253). 250.
3. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. Trans. Justin O'Brien. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1955. Originally published in France as *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. Gallimard, 1942. Page references to this work appear parenthetically in sections 1 through 4.
4. For example, in *On Camus*, Richard Kamber characterises Camus's opening declaration as 'dramatic' and writes: "To be sure, judging whether life is worth living is a truly serious philosophical problem. But it is not the *only* truly serious philosophical problem, and it may not be the *first* problem that one ought to consider" (51). Emphasis Kamber's.
5. It may be of interest, here, to mention Camus's first attack of tuberculosis in 1930. In 1958 he spoke of this first experience of his own mortality "Yes, I feared that I might die. And after numerous treatments, I could read it on the faces of the doctors too", quoted in C.A., Viggiani, "Albert Camus's First Publications" *Modern Language Notes* 75 (1960, 589-596), 28.
6. As Camus writes: "Understanding the world for a man is reducing it to the human, stamping it with his seal...if man realised that the universe like him can love and suffer, he would be reconciled" (21).
7. This is the term Sprintzen uses throughout his book *Camus: A Critical Examination*. D. Sprintzen, *Camus: A Critical Examination*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998. First mentioned on page 46.
8. We can understand how this quantitative ethic follows from Camus's absurd reasoning by looking again at his method. Camus deals first with problematic reactions to the absurd: Metaphysical hope and absolute despair. These two options involve a quest for meaning—or a response to the absurd ontological exigency—that entails stepping outside of life. However, for Camus, all that this abstraction indicates is a clash between the rational subject and irrational world. It then follows that, in order to preserve this relationship between the subject and the world, we must "step back into life." However, when we re-enter life we are in possession of an awareness of the absurd—and the lesson it has taught us about rejecting absolutes—and it follows that 'life' can only be posited indeterminately as a value: "The present and the succession of presents before an ever conscious mind, this is the ideal of the absurd man" (55). While Camus's precedence of 'most' over 'best' living does follow from his absurd premise, it raises some questions regarding my claim that Camus has the space to instantiate an ethic in his absurd work. I will address this directly in the next section.
9. He writes: "I am choosing solely men who aim only to expend themselves or whom I see to be expending themselves. That has no further implications. For the moment I want to speak only of a world in which thoughts like lives are devoid of future" (59).
10. Here I am speaking particularly of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*.
11. In Camus's version of the Greek myth, when near to death, Sisyphus wanted to test his wife's love and ordered her to cast his unburied body into the middle of the public square. His wife followed this order, however, as Camus writes: "Sisyphus woke up in the underworld. And there, annoyed by an obedience so contrary to human love, he obtained from Pluto permission to return to earth in order to chastise his wife" (96).
12. It is interesting to note that in a number of critical works on Camus, these absurd archetypes are taken as examples of how we should act. For example, see Stephen Eric Bronner's *Camus: Portrait of a Moralizer*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009. 41; and A. J. Ayer's 1946 *Horizon* review of *The Myth*, in which he writes: "for a man who has become conscious of 'the absurd', in his sense, certain types of behaviour are peculiarly appropriate, and he devotes a large portion of his book to an attempt to indicate what these types of behaviour are' and 'his purpose is not so much to describe the way in which certain classes of people actually behave as to illustrate, and incidentally to recommend, a certain attitude to life" see A. J. Ayer, "Novelist Philosophers VIII – Albert Camus" *Horizon* 3 (1946, 155-168), 160, 163.
13. In his essay 'Rethinking the Absurd: *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*' David Carroll makes this point but with reference to what he terms Camus's "post-Marxism." In this reading, Sisyphus's task resembles the labour of the worker and thus his consciousness is a proletarian one. Carroll correctly identifies the solipsistic nature of Sisyphus's revolt and, importantly, the political consequences of this when he writes: "*Le Mythe* says nothing more as to where such a proletarian consciousness could lead in the case of the worker, however, especially if he were to join with others in active protest and then resistance. Sisyphus, however, is lucid and thus tragic at all times, but especially each time he walks back down the hill to begin his task anew. His resistance to the gods and his condition is thus more psychological than active, more a will to resistance than resistance itself. And in Camus's story his resistance is solidary, that of an (the) individual not a class or collectivity. It is only a starting point—a dialectical history of the class struggle and with an end that is unknown and unknowable." See David Carroll, 'Rethinking the Absurd: *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*' *The Cambridge Companion to Camus* Ed. Edward J. Hughes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 65.
14. Camus goes on to state that: "If we assume that nothing has any meaning, then we must conclude that the world is absurd. But does nothing have a meaning? I have never believed that we could remain at this point. Even as I was writing *The Myth of Sisyphus* I was thinking about the essay on revolt that I would write later on, in which I would attempt, after having described the different aspects of the feeling of the absurd, to describe the different attitudes of man in revolt. (This is the title of the

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book I am completing). And then there are new events that enrich or correct what has come to one through observation, the continual lessons life offers, which you have to reconcile with those of your earlier experiences. This is what I have tried to do[...] though, naturally, I still do not claim to be in possession of truth.” Here Camus is drawing attention to the continuity between the absurd and the revolt, rather than replacing the former with the latter. I will elucidate this argument in later sections, at the moment it is important to focus on the status of the absurd as a method rather than a doctrine. This interview is cited in *Albert Camus: Lyrical and Critical Essays*. Trans. Ellen Conroy Kennedy. New York: Vintage, 1970, 215.

15. See Rene Descartes’s *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Trans. Donald A. Cress. Canada: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993. Particularly Meditation III: Concerning God, That He Exists. 24-35.

16. Interestingly we can locate an inclination toward virtue ethics in Camus’s early work and moreover one that mirrors Camus’s rejection of abstract philosophies in *The Myth*. In a 1937 lecture Camus emphasised that Mediterranean culture must be attributed to Greek rather than Roman sources. For our present discussion, the importance of this lecture lies in Camus’s rejection of abstraction and emphasis on the concrete. He writes: “Even when they copied, the Romans lost the savour of the original. And it was not even the essential genius of Greece they imitated, but rather the fruits of its decadence and its mistakes. Not the strong, vigorous Greece of the great tragic and comic writers, but the prettiness and affected grace of the last centuries. It was not life that Rome took from Greece, but puerile, over-intellectualized abstractions. The Mediterranean lies elsewhere. It is the very denial of Rome and Latin genius. It is alive, and wants no truck with abstractions.” See ‘The New Mediterranean Culture’ in Albert Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays*. Ed. P. Thody, Trans. E.C. Kennedy. New York: Vintage, 1967. 193.

18. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001, 7-8.

19. See Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. Roger Crisp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

20. As Aristotle writes: “We become just by the practice of just actions, self-controlled by exercising self-control, and courageous by performing acts of courage... Lawgivers make the citizens good by inculcating [good] habits in them, and this is the aim of every lawgiver; if he does not succeed in doing that, his legislation is a failure. It is in this that a good constitution differs from a bad one” (1103a30).

21. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984. 236.

22. *Ibid.*, 237.

23. “In such abundance and profusion, life follows the curve of the great passions, sudden, demanding, generous. It is not meant to be built but to be burned up. So reflection or self-improvement are quite irrelevant...Not that these men lack principles. They have their code of morality, which is very well defined. You ‘don’t let your mother down.’ You see to it that your wife is respected in the street. You show consideration to pregnant women. You don’t attack an enemy two to one, because ‘that’s dirty’. If anyone fails to observe these elementary rules ‘He’s not a man’, and that’s all there is to it. This seems to me just and strong ... Shopkeeper morality is unknown” (‘Summer in Algiers’ in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* 118).

24. Albert Camus, *The Rebel*. Trans. A. Bower. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1962. It is important to note that this English translation – “The Rebel” – of the French title *L’Homme révolté* does not entirely capture the meaning Camus meant to convey. Ronald Aronson, in *Camus and Sartre: The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel that Ended It* identifies ‘Man in Revolt’ as both a more accurate translation of *L’Homme révolté* and a phrase which is more congruent with Camus’s philosophy. He writes: “A rebel is defined in relation to an existing and legitimate authority, against which he or she rises up. Had Camus wished to convey this meaning, with its further implication of frequent defeat, other French terms, such as *le rebelle*, were at hand. The expression he did select, *l’homme revolte*, can be rendered more closely as ‘man in revolt’. If a rebel cannot be thought of apart from the authority against which he or she rebels, and which often suppresses the rebel, the ‘man in revolt’ stands independent of authority, but without aiming at the victory desired by the ‘revolutionary’. Camus’s more ambiguous use of *l’homme revolte* conveyed his intention to distinguish the original impulse of revolt from the internally connected pair: the rebel, who sets up and continually contests a power against which he or she rebels, leading to the most horrible consequences; and the revolutionary, who in nihilistic frustration seeks to transform the world and successfully gains power to do so. Camus’s title also preserved the sense of a person who is revolted by the society established by revolution.” See Ronald Aronson, in *Camus and Sartre: The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel that Ended It*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.116. I agree with the inadequacy of “The Rebel” however, I will continue to use this English translation for reasons of simplicity and clarity, now that I have marked its shortcoming. Barring an exception discussed in fn. 29, all subsequent references to this text appear parenthetically.

25. Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, 339

26. Camus writes: “In order to exist, man must rebel, but rebellion must respect the limits that it discovers in itself – limits where minds meet and, in meeting, begin to exist” (27).

27. “But as soon as a man, through lack of character, takes refuge in a doctrine, as soon as he makes his crime reasonable, it multiplies like Reason herself and assumes all the figures of the syllogism. It was unique like a cry; now it is universal like science. Yesterday, it was put on trial; today it is the law” (11).

28. Camus writes: “When the throne of God is overthrown, the rebel realises that it is now his own responsibility to create the justice, order, and unity that he sought in vain within his own condition and, in this way, to justify the fall of God. Then

begins the desperate effort to create, at the price of crime and murder if necessary, the dominion of man" (31).

29. The section of *The Rebel* in which Camus discusses this is missing in the 1953 Anthony Bower translation published by Hamish Hamilton. This translation has been continually published (1962, 1965, 1967, 1969, 1971, 1973) and is used by Penguin Modern Classics. In 1956 Alfred A. Knopf published Bower's revised and complete translation, in which over 3000 words on Gnosticism, Cain, Prometheus, Epicurus and Lucretius, are added to the section titled 'The Sons of Cain'. Notably in his 2009 book *Camus: Portrait of Moralists* Bronner uses a 1954 edition of the 1953 translation. Ashley Woodward in his 2011 article 'Camus and Nihilism' likewise uses this incomplete translation, citing the Penguin 1971 print of Bower's 1953 translation. In this section of my paper, on metaphysical rebellion, I will refer to the revised and complete translation of *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt* Trans. Anthony Bower. New York: Vintage, 1991. My page numbers here refer to the pdf document page counter, of which there are 152 pages. All other page numbers pertain to the 1953 translation in *The Rebel*. Trans. Anthony Bower. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1962.

30. As he writes: "The history of rebellion, as we are experiencing it today, has far more to do with the children of Cain than with the disciples of Prometheus" (19).

31. It is interesting to note that while Camus's discussion of the age of ideology begins (in its historical form) with the French Revolution, he fails to mention that the term 'ideology' was coined during the French Revolution by Destutt de Tracy (in 1796). See Kenneth Minogue, *Alien Powers: The Pure Theory of Ideology* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985. 2.

32. Camus's critique of Hegel has received negative criticism to the extent that it is seen as evidence for the idea that Camus rejects history. In 'After a Lot More History Has Taken Place' William McBride claims Camus's account of Hegel is "abominable from a scholarly standpoint" and that "the formal reader can only shake his or her head." See W, McBride, "After a Lot More History Has Taken Place" *Sartre and Camus: A Historic Confrontation*. Eds and Trans. D. Sprintzen and A. Hoven. New York: Humanity, 2004, 225-249. 240. His basis for this claim is Camus's argument that Hegel and the Hegelians have tried to "destroy [...] all idea of transcendence and any nostalgia for transcendence" (106). McBride takes this statement to be grossly incorrect, and moreover, indicative of Camus's rejection of history. However, as he states explicitly in this section of *The Rebel*, Camus is primarily concerned with Kojève's Hegel (we can assume because of its influence on French Marxism of the time). Kojève presents an account of Hegel that entirely supports Camus's statement regarding Hegel's destruction of transcendence in his lectures on *The Phenomenology of Spirit* where he states that this text "ends with a radical denial of all transcendence. Revealed-infinite-eternal-Being—that is, the absolute Spirit—is the infinite or eternal being of this same Being that existed as universal History. This is to say that the Infinite in question is Man's infinite." See A. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Ed A. Bloom Trans. J.H. Nichols Jr. New York: Cornell University Press, 1980.167. While such a reading of Hegel is indeed debateable, McBride's condescending comments seem to ignore the fact Camus is concerned with Kojève's Hegel and in this way perpetuate what Michel Onfray in calls the "black legend" that follows Camus: That he was "a novelist in his philosophical works and a philosopher in his novels, in other words neither a philosopher or a novelist: Camus was an autodidact in philosophy, he effected some second hand readings, but never went to the primary philosophical sources; when he does look at those texts it's clear he does not understand them [...] this black legend has been promulgated without being interrogated." See M, Onfray, *L'ordre Libertaire : La vie philosophique d'Albert Camus*. Paris : Flammarion, 2012. 25.

33. It is worth noting Camus's analysis of the "irrational terror" of Hitler and Mussolini, which he briefly mentions before moving to "rational terror." Following the critique of Hegel, these fascist regimes destroy individual rights and history, rather than man, becomes the arbiter of moral values. However rather than deifying the reason, both Hitler and Mussolini deify the irrational and were "the first to construct a State on the concept that everything is meaningless and that history is only written in terms of the hazards of force" (147). Here the perpetual motion of conquest and the doctrinal dynamism that informs it discloses the only value that Hitler possessed: Success. Applied to civil life in general such efficaciousness produces one leader and one people which Camus writes "signifies one master and millions of slaves" (151). This fact reveals the shortcomings in Aronson's complaint that in *The Rebel* Camus does not "address the Holocaust" and that he "separated Communism from the other evils of the century and directed his animus at just this one" (122). Aronson writes that in *The Rebel* "Revolt, his original and provocative theme, had been harnessed as an alternative to Communism, which had become the archenemy" (122). While Camus does spend a limited amount of time discussing Fascism, his concern is with "rational" rather than "irrational" terror and as John Foley points out that "[...] whereas there were obviously no apologists for Nazi Germany in France in 1951, there were a significant number of French intellectuals (not only communist intellectuals) who were committed to defending the USSR." see J. Foley, *Albert Camus: From the Absurd to Revolt*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008. 68. A stronger criticism of Camus's discussion of fascism is found in Adele King's *Albert Camus* where she writes: "He sees the Fascist movement as purely irrational and nihilistic, glorifying nothing but efficacy for its own sake. Because Camus does not discuss the philosophy underlying the German identification of the self and the state, his analysis of Fascism as an ideological threat to Western civilisation is one of the weaker sections of his study." See A. King, *Albert Camus*. Edinburgh, Scotland: Oliver & Boyd, 1964. 36.

34. Like the criticism identified in his work on Hegel, Camus's critique of Marx (which focuses on the Marxist historical determinism) has produced a number of negative critiques. The most public criticism came from Sartre and de Beauvoir, the

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latter writing after the publication of *The Plague* that it was “merely another means of escaping history and the real problems” (See de Beauvoir *Force of Circumstance*, 253). Francis Jeanson’s review of *The Rebel* in the 1952 May edition of Sartre’s *Les Temps Modernes* attacks Camus for denying history and argues that he represents “that Manichaeism which situates evil within history and good outside of it” (F. Jeanson, “Albert Camus, or The Soul in Revolt”, in *Sartre and Camus: A Historic Confrontation*. Eds and Trans. D. Sprintzen and A. Hoven. New York: Humanity, 2004, 79-105. 97). However, it is clear that Camus does not deny history, only history conceived of as an Absolute. Jeanson’s attack is clearly unfounded and as Camus states in his reply to *Les Temps Modernes*: “[...] In fact, *The Rebel* seeks to demonstrate—nearly a hundred quotations could prove it, if necessary—that pure anti-historicism, at least in today’s world, is as harmful as pure historicism. It is written there, for those who wish to read, that he who believes only in history marches towards terror and that he who does not believe in it at all authorises terror [...] above all, it demonstrates that ‘the denial of history is equivalent to the denial of reality’ in the same way, neither more nor less, that ‘one separates oneself from reality by wanting to consider history as a self-sufficient totality.’” See Albert Camus, “A Letter to the Editor of *Les Temps Moderne*” *Sartre and Camus: A Historic Confrontation*. Ed. D. Sprintzen, Trans. A. Hoven. New York: Humanity, 2004, 107-129. 114-115.

35. This is evidence against Aronson’s unfounded claim that “Reading *Man in Revolt*, one has no hint that moderate and reformist Marxist traditions, or even democratic revolutionary ones, exist at all.” See Aronson, *Camus and Sartre*, 123.

36. Helen North, “A Period of Opposition to Sôphrosynê in Greek Thought.” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 78 (1947):1-17, 3.

37. *Ibid.*, 2.