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Albert Camus

An analysis of his thought

Translated by
Robert Dole

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The following abbreviations have been adopted for the quotations from Camus's works. Except for *La Mort heureuse* and the *Carnets*, all the quotations are taken from the editions of the *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade*.

I. – Albert Camus, *Théâtre, récits, nouvelles*. Paris, Gallimard, 1952. Texts established and annotated by Roger Quilliot.

II. – Albert Camus, *Essais*. Paris, Gallimard, 1965. Texts established and annotated by R. Quilliot and L. Faucon.

<i>A I</i>	= <i>Actuelles I, II</i> .
<i>A II</i>	= <i>Actuelles II, II</i> .
<i>A II</i>	= <i>Actuelles III (Chroniques Algériennes)</i> , II.
<i>AR</i>	= Article du journal Alger <i>Républicain</i> , II.
<i>CI</i>	= <i>Carnets</i> (mai 1935-février 1942). Paris, Gallimard, 1962.
<i>C II</i>	= <i>Carnets</i> (janvier 1942-mars 1951). Paris, Gallimard, 1964.
<i>Cal</i>	= <i>Caligula</i> , I.
<i>Ch</i>	= <i>La Chute</i> , I.
<i>Ci</i>	= <i>Un cas intéressant</i> , I.
<i>Co</i>	= Article du journal <i>Combat</i> , II.
<i>Dc</i>	= <i>La Dévotion à la croix</i> , I
<i>DHR</i>	= <i>La Défense de l'Homme révolté</i> , II.
<i>DS</i>	= <i>Discours de Suède</i> , II.
<i>E</i>	= <i>L'Été</i> , II.
<i>EE</i>	= <i>L'Envers et l'endroit</i> , II.
<i>ER</i>	= <i>L'Exil et le royaume</i> , I.
<i>ES</i>	= <i>L'État de siège</i> , I.
<i>Esp</i>	= <i>Les Esprits</i> , I.
<i>Etr</i>	= <i>L'Étranger</i> , I.
<i>HR</i>	= <i>L'Homme révolté</i> , II.
<i>Int.</i>	= <i>Interview</i> , I ou II.
<i>J</i>	= <i>Les justes</i> , I.
<i>LAA</i>	= <i>Lettres à un ami allemand</i> , II.
<i>Mal</i>	= <i>Le Malentendu</i> , I.
<i>MH</i>	= <i>La Mort heureuse</i> , Cahiers Albert Camus I. Paris, Gallimard, 1971.
<i>MS</i>	= <i>Le Mythe de Sisyphe</i> , II.
<i>N</i>	= <i>Noces</i> , II.

<i>NvNb</i>	= <i>Ni victimes ni bourreaux.</i>
<i>Ol</i>	= <i>Le Chevalier d'Olmedo, I.</i>
<i>P</i>	= <i>La Peste, I.</i>
<i>PA</i>	= <i>Entre Plotin et saint Augustin (Diplôme d'Études supérieures, II.</i>
<i>Pos</i>	= <i>Les Possédés, I.</i>
<i>RA</i>	= <i>Révolte dans les Asturies, I.</i>
<i>RG</i>	= <i>Réflexions sur la guillotine, II.</i>
<i>RN</i>	= <i>Requiem pour une nonne, I.</i>
<i>RR</i>	= <i>Remarque sur la révolte, II</i>

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Introduction

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There already exists a large selection of publications about Albert Camus. More than 1300 titles of volumes, review articles and reports can be counted in the French language alone. Most of them deal with Camus as a man of letters, a man of the theatre, or a philosopher.

It seems that an analysis of his philosophical thought is in order, and that it should be made from the point of view of his metaphysical position relating to God. I believe, indeed, that this position explains Albert Camus's philosophy to a large extent. Is not the absurd, for example, a definition of a world without an Author ? Does not the human condition, as it is described by Camus, present the situation of man without God ? Does not his ethics of revolt propose a behaviour for men deprived of God ? Without wanting to reduce Camus's thought to a system (Camus always refused to let it be reduced to a system), I shall try to analyze it from the point of view of his metaphysical position regarding God.

The perspective of this study will not be that of a man of letters, of a Christian or of a theologian, but rather that of a philosopher. However, considering the influence of Christian thought on Camus, we should take account of certain theological principles conveyed by the religious vocabulary of sin, grace, salvation and holiness.

An observation about the evolution of Camus's thought is called for. Certain themes, such as that of the always-denied immortality, remained constants in his works, from his youth through his adult years. Others, however, underwent an evolution, either as a rupture or as a deepening ; thus the ethics of quantity in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* was replaced by the ethics of quality in *L'Homme révolté* ; the absurd, without being renounced, gave way to revolt. In the case of God, certain questions cannot be avoided : is the position taken in *L'Étranger* the same as the one adopted in *La Chute* ? Is there really a question, in all of Camus's work, of a categorical negation of the existence of God ? Or a statement of his impotence in the world ? Has he really made a distinction between the God of the philosophers and the God of the Christians ? Has he really settled on a conclusion ? These are the questions that I shall try to answer.

[p. 2] There are two basic difficulties, namely the absence of synthesis and the plurality of literary genres. Camus has not constructed his thought in the manner of the philosophical treatise, where the meaning of the terms is always the same and the

language always technical. The words "absurd" and "world", among others, vary according to the context. The literary genres differ : the novel, the theatre, the essay, journalism. The analyst should be aware that one of his novels can change the thought he expressed in an earlier essay. Or the same thought may be conveyed by different means. This is precisely what we must reveal and analyze.

Moreover, it is impossible to deal with one theme in only one place. The theme of death, for example, is met within the theme of the absurd, while also being found in the metaphysical condition (God is the author of death), in the historical condition (men kill), and in ethics (the attitude towards death). The perspectives are different.

Finally, I have decided to quote frequently from the texts. If reading this study thus becomes more demanding, it is in order to be more precise. However, this work does not claim to be either definitive or exhaustive ; it could, moreover, constitute a work tool for later researchers.

I have adopted the following plan : the first part deals with the absurd, which could be considered the state of the world without God, where three solutions are possible : physical suicide, philosophical suicide, and maintaining the absurd. The second part presents the human condition, or the situation of man without God : it is at once metaphysical and historical. The third part discusses the revolt against the metaphysical and historical condition. The fourth and last part treats the ethics of revolt, by which man proposes to save others in accordance with principles based on human nature.

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Chapter I

The Absurd :

the State of the World without God

Introduction

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Two fundamental notions underlie Albert Camus's thought : absurdity and revolt. It is essential to note that the idea of absurdity gives way more and more to the idea of revolt. However, since the former is the point of departure for his thought, we must analyze it within the cycle of the works terminating with *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*.¹ There he affirms : "I consider that the notion of absurdity is essential and that it can figure as the first of my truths... The only admitted fact for me is that of the absurd."² Ten years later he would have been able to say the same thing about revolt.

Absurdity plays the role of Camus's initial metaphysical position. What is this absurdity? It is the state of contradiction that exists between man and the world: there is a disproportion, a divorce between the two that constitutes a sort of "sin," but without God. "Absurdity, which is the metaphysical state of conscientious man, does not lead to God. Perhaps this notion will become clear if I risk saying: absurdity is sin without God."³

We must examine Camus's approach before defining it. This approach distinguishes between the feeling of absurdity and the notion of absurdity.⁴ In reality, there is no fundamental difference between the two. If there is one, we must look for it on the level of awareness. In the first case, one's sensitivity perceives a widespread malaise facing the world. In the second case, one's reason drives one to recognize the absurdity of the world. Thereby intelligence tries to deepen and analyze what was originally a feeling.⁵

¹ Camus said about this volume : "It is the only book of ideas that I have ever written" (*Lettre to the Director of La Nef*, January 1946, I, 1746).

² MS 121.

³ MS 128.

⁴ This distinction is also made by Jean-Paul Sartre: "Camus distinguishes between the feeling of absurdity and the notion of absurdity" (*Explications de L'Étranger, Situations I*, Paris, Gallimard, 1947, p. 102).

⁵ Cf. C II, 81.

I. The Feeling of the Absurd

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Man is not only intelligence, he is also sensitivity. First, sensitivity is aroused by the world. But it experiences a state of contradiction between itself and the world. It has the impression that the world is absurd.

[p. 4] 1. The Arousal of Absurdity

"The feeling of absurdity can strike any man at any street corner.¹ Life is generally lulled to sleep by daily habits and chores : but then, one day some apparently trivial fact wakes up one's consciousness from the lethargy of habit. It can be a trip,² a landscape,³ a person,⁴ or any kind of occurrence.⁵ These events can suddenly shake the lives of even those people whose consciousness seems the most asleep.⁶ They might be humble, or even ridiculous, beginnings, but their results can be immense : they can start a new vision of the world.⁷ We can quote the famous text from *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* : "it may happen that life's settings fall apart. Getting up, streetcar, meals, sleeping and Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday and Saturday in the same rhythm. This road is followed most of the time. Only one day the 'why' arises, and everything starts over in a weariness coloured by surprise. 'Beginning' is important. Lassitude comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life, but at the same time it sets consciousness in motion. It wakes it up and is responsible for what follows, whether it be an unconscious return or a definitive awakening".

2. Description of the Feeling of Absurdity

The consciousness has just been awakened. It has been invaded by a strange malaise that at first can only be described ;⁸ it belongs to the realm of feeling rather than to the realm of reason. Camus talks about an irrational feeling-irrational, not in the sense that it is contrary to reason (which will only confirm it and analyze it), but in the sense that it temporarily eludes reason.⁹ It is likewise irrational in the way it confusedly sets the mind before the irrationality of the world. The first approach explains the world's absurd nature : "The atmosphere of absurdity is at the beginning.

¹ MS 105.

² Cf. EE 42.

³ Cf. EE 48.

⁴ Cf. MS 108.

⁵ Cf. MS 108.

⁶ Cf. *Sur la Nausée de Sartre*, AR, II, 1418.

⁷ Here we find the existentialist theme of philosophical awakening.

⁸ Cf. MS 105.

⁹ Cf. MS 105.

At the end there is the absurd universe and the mental attitude that illuminates the world with its own light." ¹

3. The Nature of this Feeling

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Stated more precisely, "this limitless feeling that deprives the mind of the sleep necessary for life," ² is the same thing as the impression of being a stranger in a world where nothing is clear or explained : "A world that cannot even be explained with bad reasons is a familiar world. On the other hand, in a world that is suddenly deprived of illusion and light, man feels like a stranger. This exile is of no-return since it has no memory of a lost homeland or a hope of a promised land. ³ There we are : this feeling that overcomes a conscientious man is the feeling of strangeness. "The divorce between a man and [p. 5] his life, or between an actor and his stage, is really the feeling of absurdity." ⁴

4. The Discoveries of the Absurd

The man who has become lucid discovers certain realities that explain this initial feeling of absurdity, realities related to his sensitivity as well as to his intelligence.

a) The Way of Sensitivity

— First of all there is time. In *L'Été*, Camus states the principle that "Whatever is perishable wants to endure." ⁵ But only man, "any man devoured by the frantic desire to endure," ⁶ is aware of it. Here is the absurd contradiction : "this insatiable need to endure" ⁷ is confronted by "this mortal and limited world," ⁸ where we are "bound to time," ⁹ where everything is given only to be taken back again, ¹⁰ and where ruins deny man's ideals. ¹¹ Love does not last either, ¹² nor does work, ¹³ and even life has

¹ MS 106.

² MS 101.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ E 826.

⁶ HR 665.

⁷ HR 664.

⁸ HR 662.

⁹ MS 170.

¹⁰ N 72.

¹¹ N 65.

¹² Cf. HR 664.

¹³ Cf. MS 147.

an end.¹ Time usually carries us along ; but the day comes when a man thirty years old looks at himself and "recognizes that he is at a certain place on a curve that he has to travel. He belongs to time and he recognizes his worst enemy in this horror that seizes him... This revolt in his flesh is precisely the absurd."² Moreover, Camus shows us here the Greek theme of time being a repetition.³ Thus "absurdity is formulated by the opposition between that which endures and that which does not."⁴

— The hostility of nature is another discovery of the absurd. "To glimpse how strange a stone is, how unyielding it is, or to notice the intensity with which nature or land can repudiate us... This denseness and strangeness of the world show the absurd."⁵ Camus is a poet of nature, but he finds it ambivalent, at once friendly and hostile ; since it is hostile it is part of the absurd. Thus, at certain hours, "the world is only an unknown landscape where my heart can find no rest. To know what it means to be a stranger !" ⁶

— Men's inhumanity is another part of the absurd. The mechanical aspect of their acts and gestures, their senseless pantomime makes everything surrounding them seem stupid : "this malaise in the face of man's inhumanity, this immense sense of ruin before the picture of what we are, this 'nausea' as a contemporary author calls it, are other aspects of the absurd."⁷ With *L'Homme révolté*, Camus adds a whole series of acts of deliberate maliciousness (murders, wars, and violence of all types) increased by an unwilling mankind, as described in earlier works of his.⁸ Not only other men, but also we ourselves, produce the absurd : this "stranger who comes to meet us for a few seconds in the mirror, this familiar yet worrying brother that we find [p. 6] in photographs of ourselves, are further examples of the absurd."⁹ — Death is one of the first discoveries of the absurd. By the very fact that man is alive, he is condemned to die : ¹⁰ "the soul has disappeared from this inert body that no longer stirs. Uselessness becomes evident with the deadly illumination of this destiny. No zeal or effort are justifiable *a priori* before the outrageous mathematics that orders our condition."¹¹ There is nothing sacred in death ; it only arouses fear.¹²

When we analyze Camus's conception of man's metaphysical condition, we shall come back to these three points. Man will be seen as an exile in his own universe, as a stranger among his fellows, and as someone condemned to death.¹³

¹ Cf. *HR* 665.

² *MS* 107.

³ Cf. *EE* 19.

⁴ *C* II, 75.

⁵ *MS* 107.

⁶ *C* I, 201.

⁷ *MS* 108.

⁸ Cf. *C* I, 156.

⁹ *MS* 108.

¹⁰ Cf. *Étr* 1206.

¹¹ *MS* 109.

¹² *N* 74.

¹³ Cf. Chapter II, Introduction.

b) The Way of Intelligence

"Intelligence also tells me... in its own way, that the world is absurd." ¹ Even more than sensitivity, it discovers "the unintelligibility of the world." ²

— Intelligence first realizes that it is a stranger to truth : "in psychology, as in logic, there are truths but there is no truth." ³ Although intelligence is assumed to understand everything, in reality it grasps only a few fleeting verities. This is another contradiction that forms part of the absurd : "It is absurd when simple reason recognizes its own limits." ⁴ The processes of intelligence share in this contradiction, ⁵ and thus man is armed only with a thought that denies itself whenever it affirms itself. ⁶ This is why Camus writes in his *Carnets* : "The misery and grandeur of this world is that instead of offering bits of truth it offers bits of love. Absurdity reigns and loves saves." ⁷

— Another discovery of intelligence is that man is a stranger to unity. "The profound desire of the mind, even in its most involved processes, joins man's unconscious feeling before his universe : there is the need for familiarity, the yearning for clarity... This longing for unity and this hunger for the absolute illustrate the essential movement of the human drama." ⁸ It is the drama of the mind torn by the disproportion between its theoretical knowledge and its practical accomplishments. The world seems to be unified, but as soon as intelligence starts to try to understand it, "this world cracks and collapses : one becomes aware of an infinite number of dazzling flashes. One must despair of ever rebuilding the familiar, quiet surface that would set our minds at peace." ⁹ The natural needs of the mind remain unsatisfied : "with the exception of professional rationalists, nobody today has any hope of obtaining true knowledge." ¹⁰

Until now, it was the feeling of absurdity that overcame man. With "the notion of the absurd, Camus deepens his analysis and tries to define the absurd itself.

¹ MS 112.

² C II, 113.

³ MS 111.

⁴ MS 134.

⁵ Cf. MS 109.

⁶ MS 112.

⁷ C I, 116.

⁸ MS 110.

⁹ MS 111.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

[p. 7] II. The Notion of the Absurd

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What is the relation between the feeling of the absurd aroused by the sights of the world ¹ and the notion of the absurd ? The former is the foundation of the latter. ²

1. The Three Terms for the Absurd

There are three terms presented for the absurd. In Camus's words, they constitute "the three characters of the drama," ³ "the particular trinity." ⁴ First of all, there is man himself, who owes his greatness to his intelligence yearning for clarity and unity. Secondly, there is the closed, divided, "unreasonable," ⁵ world "filled with irrational things." ⁶ It is an "inexpressible universe, where contradiction, antimony, anxiety and impotence reign." ⁷ Thirdly, there is the confrontation between man and his world, a confrontation which is a "tearing," ⁸ a "divorce," ⁹ a "fracturing," ¹⁰ and a "restless struggle." ¹¹ It creates "the essential passion of man torn between his appeal to unity and the perceptive vision that he can have of the walls that surround him." ¹²

But where is the absurd located ? In the world, or in man ? Neither ; rather in the confrontation between the two.

2. The Confrontation of the Absurd

"Man stands face to face with the irrational. He feels within himself a desire for happiness and reason. The absurd originates from the confrontation between this human longing and the unreasonable silence of the world." ¹³ Thus the absurd is not to be found, strictly speaking, in the world or in the human mind, but in their presence together. ¹⁴ "I said that the world is absurd, but I went too fast. All that can be said is that the world itself is not reasonable. But the absurd consists in the clash of the

¹ MS 113.

² Cf. MS 119.

³ MS 118.

⁴ MS 120.

⁵ MS 134.

⁶ MS 117.

⁷ MS 114.

⁸ MS 124.

⁹ MS 120, 124.

¹⁰ MS 136.

¹¹ MS 121.

¹² MS 114.

¹³ MS 117.

¹⁴ Cf. MS 120.

irrational with this frantic desire for clarity which springs from man's deepest nature." ¹

3. Examples of the Absurd

In order to illustrate the cleft existing between these two realities, Camus offers four examples of the absurd in *Le Mythe* : ² the monstrous accusation of an innocent person, a machine-gun attack against a man armed with a knife, and a verdict that does not correspond to the crime committed ; a demonstration can also be said to be "absurd" if it claims to prove a statement by its opposite. Camus concludes thus : "For each of them, absurdity originates in a comparison. I am therefore justified in saying that the feeling of absurdity does not come from simply examining a fact or an impression, but [p. 8] rather that it arises from the comparison between an actual state and a certain reality, or between an action and the world that transgresses it. The absurd is essentially a divorce. It is found in neither of the elements compared, but originates from their confrontation." ³

4. The Definition of the Absurd

From what has been determined so far, we are able to define the absurd as the relation of metaphysical inadequacy between man and his world. The relation : the absurd is a connection established between two things that are compared ; it is thus a confrontation or a comparison. The relation of inadequacy : it is actually not a matter of the quality between two terms, but rather of a disproportion, a disagreement, a contradiction or a "divorce." This inadequacy is metaphysical but not logical. The mind does not project it onto reality, but it is rather found on the same level of the very thing whose elements are compared. Between man and the world : these are the two terms that confront each other in the absurd ; on the one hand there is man as mind, and on the other hand there is the world in the universal sense of "the order of things," which can have a multitude of concrete applications.

However, by going over the various uses of the word "absurd" in Camus's works, one soon becomes aware of the diversity of its applications. In one series of expressions, he talks about "absurd man," ⁴ "absurd characters," ⁵ "absurd logic," ⁶ "absurd proceedings," ⁷ "absurd mind," ⁸ "absurd... life," ⁹ "an absurd statement," ¹⁰ "absurd subjects," ¹¹ and an "absurd novelist," ¹ etc., in order to designate what is

¹ MS 113.

² MS 119-120.

³ MS 120.

⁴ Cf. MS 147-170.

⁵ C I, 184.

⁶ MS 121.

⁷ MS 130.

⁸ C II, 62.

⁹ C I, 142.

¹⁰ MS 149.

¹¹ MS 185.

related to the absurd as an application or an illustration. There is not any irrational element or contradiction here. On the other hand, other expressions deliberately designate the contents of contradiction: "justice and its absurd function," ² "the absurdity of our international society," ³ "absurd content" to poverty, ⁴ "the absurd event" of war, ⁵ and absurd gestures." ⁶

In general, these applications of the word "absurd" derive more or less from the first definition. The common denominator of these various applications would be that which is disproportionate or contrary to reason and its requisites, or that which is incomprehensible or irrational. It would therefore be a matter of an analogous definition. A concept that is applied to realities that are partly similar and partly different is indeed an analogy, but always in terms of the first point of reference. In the present case, this first point of reference would be the irrational disproportion existing between man and the world.

[p. 9] Jean-Paul Sartre observes correctly that "the absurd" can be understood objectively or subjectively, ⁷ and in a relative way or in an absolute way. ⁸

5. The Properties of the Absurd

a) The absurd has an objective property: the three terms (man, world, confrontation) are indivisible. The absurd only exists to the extent that they are present: "We know that it is only valid in a balance, and that it is primarily in the comparison and certainly not in the terms of this comparison." ⁹ When existentialist philosophers make a leap of faith in God, they destroy the absurd because they take away the irreducibility of man and the world. ¹⁰ Therefore these three terms must be preserved in order to remain true to the absurd. ¹¹ This is why Camus speaks about a "special trinity" of the absurd, and states that "its first characteristic in this respect is that it cannot be divided. To destroy one of the terms is to destroy the whole. There can be no absurdity outside the human mind. Thus the absurd ends, like all things, with death. But there cannot be any absurdity outside this world either." ¹²

b) The absurd also has a subjective property. It is the indissolubility of the tie created between the absurd and the intelligence that is aware of it. "There is an evident fact that seems altogether moral, and it is that a man is always the prey of his own truths. Once they have been recognized, he is unable to separate himself from

¹ MS 187.

² C II, 14.

³ *Réponse à l'incrédule*, Co, December 1948, II, 1593.

⁴ MH 69.

⁵ C I, 165.

⁶ C I, 156.

⁷ Cf. *Situations I*, op. cit., p. 93.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁹ MS 124.

¹⁰ Cf. MS 138.

¹¹ MS 121.

¹² MS 120.

them. This is the price that must be paid : a man who is aware of the absurd is tied to it forever." ¹

It would be best to emphasize the role of reason in the absurd. Without it, the absurd would not exist. Reason wakes up an individual from the sleep of his daily life, observes the divorce between man and the world, demands that everything be explained, but finds only contradictions and irrationality in the world. ²

The absurd is the passion that tears all other passions apart ; the man who is aware of it is bound to it forever, according to Camus. But he must find a solution to it : should he escape from it through physical or philosophical suicide ? Or should he rather keep it in full consciousness ? This is the problem that Camus deals with now.

III. The Solutions to the Absurd

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After having observed the absurdity of the world, one can make a choice of three possible solutions. One can commit suicide either physically or philosophically, or one can maintain the absurd. Camus rejects the first two solutions and advocates the third one : "I want to repeat that what interests me the most are not the discoveries [p. 10] of the absurd, but their consequences. If one is assured of these facts, what must one conclude in order to avoid escaping anything ? Is it necessary to die voluntarily or to keep on hoping in spite of everything ?" ³ It is necessary to find a solution : "To accept the absurdity of everything that surrounds us is only a step, or a necessary experience, but it should not create an impasse." ⁴

1. Physical Suicide

Suicide holds a central position in the perspective of the absurd, according to Camus : "There is only one true philosophical problem, and that is suicide. To judge whether or not life is worth living is to answer the fundamental philosophical question. Everything else, the question of whether the world has three dimensions, of if the mind has nine or twelve categories, comes later. These are only games ; first we must answer the question of suicide." ⁵

¹ MS 121.

² Cf. MS 117.

³ MS 109.

⁴ Cf. Chapter 1, Conclusion.

⁵ MS 99.

a) The Relationship of Suicide to the Absurd

It is most important to emphasize that the type of suicide that Camus envisages is not the kind that is the result of an emotional disillusionment or of some sort of difficult situation. It does not belong to the affective or sociological order, but rather to the philosophical order : "The subject of this essay [*Le Mythe de Sisyphe*] is exactly the relationship between the absurd and suicide, the real degree to which suicide is a solution to the absurd." ¹

Indeed, for anyone who wants to be coherent, there must be a logical connection between his thoughts and his actions. ² Once one has become conscious of the nonsense of existence and the absurdity of the world, "this chaos, this rule of luck," ³ should one die in order to release oneself from the disturbances that they imply ? ⁴ "Since all sane men have thought about their own suicide, we can recognize, without looking for further explanations, that there is a direct connection between this feeling (of the absurd] and the longing for nothingness." ⁵

b) The Causes of Suicide

— The Immediate Causes

Camus observes that the apparent reasons for suicide are often not the most important ones. Most often, they are of an affective nature : "One rarely commits suicide on reflection (however, this hypothesis should not be excluded). What starts the crisis going is almost always uncontrollable." ⁶ A complex story precedes the moment when one shoots oneself or jumps off, ⁷ and any insignificant detail can be the straw that breaks the camel's back. ⁸

[p. 11] — The Mediate Causes

The remote cause of suicide is the consciousness of existence and the world : "The consequence comes, with time, at the end of the awakening : suicide or recovery... Everything begins with consciousness and nothing is worth anything except through consciousness." ⁹ Camus remarks elsewhere : "To begin to think is to begin to be undermined. Society has little to do with these beginnings. The worm is in man's heart. That is where you must look for it. It is necessary to follow and to understand

¹ MS 101.

² Cf. MS 101.

³ MS 136.

⁴ MS 101.

⁵ MS 101.

⁶ MS 100.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Cf. MS 100.

⁹ MS 107.

this mortal game that leads from the consciousness of existence to escaping from the illumination." ¹ Thus it is reflection that remotely prepares a gesture like suicide.

The inexistence of God can also be a cause for logical suicide. This was the case with Kirilov, as it is told by Camus. Convinced that existence is a total absurdity for anyone who does not believe in immortality, he condemns nature to be destroyed along with himself. ² He commits suicide because he is metaphysically annoyed : "He feels that God is necessary and that He must exist. But he knows that He does not exist and that He cannot exist. 'Why can't you understand,' he cries, 'that is a good enough reason for killing yourself ?' " ³. In *L'Homme révolté*, Camus goes on to say that one can "deny oneself by committing suicide. God is a cheat and everybody, including myself, is a cheat too. Therefore I will kill myself." ⁴

c) The Complex Alternatives

If the question of the absurdity of life is asked clearly, the answer is ambiguous : "There seem to be only two philosophical solutions : yes or no. This would be too beautiful to be true." ⁵ The majority of people are always wondering what the answer is without concluding one way or the other. And then there are those who answer "no" while acting as if they thought "yes," ⁶ like Schopenhauer, who praised suicide while feasting. Is this a contradiction ? Yes, but only from the logical point of view. ⁷ It is not, if one is aware of human complexity : "There is something stronger in the attachment that a man has to his own life than in all the miseries of the world. The verdict of the body is as valid as the mind's, and the body always rebels against annihilation. We get used to living before we get used to thinking." ⁸

d) The Refusal to Commit Suicide

Whatever might be the reasons leading to suicide, Camus rejects suicide as a solution to the absurd. Let us look at the way he qualifies suicide, as well as the reasons he has to justify his position.

¹ MS 100.

² Cf. MS 182.

³ MS 183.

⁴ HR 414.

⁵ MS 101.

⁶ Cf. MS 102.

⁷ Cf. MS 103.

⁸ MS 102.

[p. 12] — The Qualifications

For Camus, suicide is an "escape," ¹ an "insult to existence," ² an "evasion," ³ a "plunge," ⁴ a "mistake," ⁵ a negation of oneself, ⁶ and a "black exaltation." ⁷ Kirilov is right : to commit suicide means to prove one's liberty. But the liberty here is not the right one. ⁸ On the contrary, one should keep on living in order to come to terms with the absurd.

— The Reasons

In many philosophies and religions, and not just the Christian religion, since God was the Author of life, man could not arrogate to himself the right to withdraw voluntarily from existence. With Camus, however, one is not responsible to God and has the right to do away with one's own life. But one should not.

The first reason is not lacking in grandeur. One must stay alive in order to maintain the absurdity that is crushing against us : "if one kills oneself, absurdity is denied," ⁹ since one of the three elements of the absurd, namely consciousness, has disappeared. The most eloquent text comes from *L'Homme révolté* : "The last conclusion of absurd reasoning is, indeed, the rejection of suicide and the maintaining of this desperate confrontation between man's questioning and the world's silence. Suicide would signify the end of this confrontation, and absurd reasoning considers that it could only subscribe to suicide by denying its own premises. Such a conclusion would be an escape or a deliverance." ¹⁰ Therefore suicide solves the absurd, in its own way, by giving it over to death." ¹¹ On the other hand, to live in a state of revolt against absurdity would be to pay the full price for life. ¹² To live in lucidity would restore grandeur to existence : "Only by the game of my consciousness can I transform what had been an invitation to death into a rule of life — and thus I refuse to commit suicide." ¹³

A second reason induces Camus to reject suicide. It is life itself, which justifies continued living. ¹⁴ We already know the love of life and the passion for living that inspire Camus. ¹⁵ Consequently he can be expected to consider life a value opposed to suicide : "If one's final decision is to reject suicide in order to maintain this

¹ HR 416.

² MS 103.

³ MS 100.

⁴ MS 138.

⁵ MS 139.

⁶ HR 414.

⁷ HR 417.

⁸ C I, 141.

⁹ C II, 109.

¹⁰ HR 415-416

¹¹ MS 138.

¹² Cf. MS 139.

¹³ MS 145-146.

¹⁴ Cf. *L'Homme révolté*, II, 1610.

¹⁵ Cf. N 58.

confrontation, what permits this confrontation is an implicit recognition of life as an actual value." ¹ Life is not only an actual, but also an absolute value that compels one to reject murder : "To be obedient to this absolute value, whoever rejects suicide must equally reject murder," ² for "suicide and murder are here two different faces of the same entity, that of an unhappy intelligence that prefers the black exaltation where the earth and the sky disappear, over the suffering of a limited condition. In the same way, if one rejects one's [p. 13] reasons for suicide, it is not possible for one to use them for murder. There is no such thing as a half-nihilist. The reasoning of the absurd cannot preserve the life of him who speaks and at the same time accept the sacrifice of others." ³

A third reason, and a completely Stoic one, is not given directly by Camus, yet is found implicitly in his work. It is the courage to face life and its adversities. We shall see it in the section on the ethics of revolt, dealing with Camusian "virtues". ⁴

— One exception : superior suicide. In the works dealing with the absurd which now concern us, the problem of values does not hold the place it will have starting with the works dealing with revolt. These latter works will raise the question of "superior suicide." ⁵ Superior suicide consists in voluntarily sacrificing one's life in order to bear witness to certain values, as, for example, the protest suicide of Russian convicts whose comrades were whipped, ⁶ or, even better, the "delicate murderers" ⁷ presented in *L'Homme révolté* and *Les Justes*, where the murderer of the oppressor gives his life in exchange. "Incapable of justifying what they found necessary, they imagined they could give their lives in justification and thereby answer the question that they raised by their personal sacrifice. For them, as well as for all the rebels before them, murder was identified with sacrifice. One life is paid for by another, and from these two holocausts arises the promise of a certain value." ⁸ However Camus corrects these "delicate murderers" : their reasoning, he says, is respectable but false ; ⁹ for all of these, "the limit of the reasoning of revolt is assenting to kill oneself in order to avoid complicity with murder in general." ¹⁰

Besides physical suicide, Camus recognizes another type of suicide, that of the mind which, when faced with absurdity, decides on the existence of God : an irrational leap. He takes more time to refute this "philosophical suicide" ¹¹ than he took for the preceding one.

¹ C II, 190.

² *Ibid.*

³ HR 417.

⁴ Cf. Chapter IV, V, 4.

⁵ *Cal*, Preface to the American edition, I, 1730.

⁶ HR 426.

⁷ HR 571 ss.

⁸ HR 575.

⁹ Cf. J 1822.

¹⁰ C II, 260. HR 537.

¹¹ MS 119-128.

2. Philosophical Suicide

What, then, is philosophical suicide ? "I take the liberty of calling philosophical suicide the existential attitude. But this does not imply a judgement. It is an easy way of designating the movement by which a thought denies itself and tends to surpass itself in what negates it. The negation for the existentialists is their God. Speaking exactly, this God sustains himself only by the negation of human reason. But as with suicides, the gods change with men. There are many ways to leap, the main thing being to leap. These redeeming negations, these final contradictions that deny the obstacle that one has not leaped over yet, can originate from religious inspiration (this is the paradox toward which this reasoning is directed) as well as from the [p. 14] rational order. They always avow the eternal, and only by doing so make the leap." ¹

In contrast with physical suicide, which is considered at various places in Camus's work, philosophical suicide is treated only in *Le Mythe*. It is depicted as a "balking," ² an "evasion," ³ "a blind act." ⁴ Whether religious or rational, it always involves a leap to God. Let us look at these two points.

a) The Leap to God

Camus addresses a reproach to existential philosophers and indirectly to Christians. "Limiting myself to existential philosophies, I see that all of them, without exception, propose evasion. By a peculiar reasoning, leaving behind the absurd on the rubbish pile of reason, in a closed universe limited to humans, they deify what crushes them and find a reason for hope in what plunders them. This forced hope is essentially religious with all of them." ⁵ Camus accepts their point of departure, which he shares : the absurd ; but he rejects their conclusion.

a) Jaspers is struck by the universe shaken by failure. He considers human intelligence incapable of explaining it. However, without justification, "he affirms all at once the transcendent, the reality of experience, and the superhuman sense of life in writing : 'Does not failure show, beyond any explanation and any possible interpretation, the *existence of* transcendence rather than its nonexistence ?' He defines this transcendence which, suddenly and by a blind act of human confidence, explains everything, as 'the inconceivable unity of the general and of the particular.' Thus the absurd becomes god (in the largest sense of the word) and this inability to understand becomes the being that illuminates everything. Nothing leads this reasoning to a logical conclusion. I can call it a leap." ⁶

¹ MS 128.

² MS 124.

³ MS 122.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ MS 122.

⁶ *Ibid.*

b) Chestov, likewise, speaks of the absurd only in order to dispose of it. "The only true way out, he says, is precisely where there is no way out for human judgement. Otherwise, would we need God ? One turns to God only to obtain the impossible. As for the possible, men are enough."¹ At the end of his analyses, Chestov does not say, "here is the absurd," but rather "here is God." It is suitable to rely on him, even if he does not correspond to any of our rational categories.

c) Kafka also makes the leap. Camus dedicates an entire chapter to this writer in *Mythe*.² He discovers the same leap in him, after having left the closed world : "In this universe without progress, Kafka introduces hope in a peculiar form."³ He looks for the eternal in what does not permit it. "The ultimate tentative of the land-surveyor is to refind God behind what denies him, to recognize him, [p. 15] not according to our categories of goodness and beauty, but rather behind the empty and hideous faces of our indifference."⁴

d) For Camus, Kierkegaard represents the most striking example of the religious leap. The frightening Christianity of his childhood returns with a most severe appearance. Kierkegaard also starts with the irrationality of the world ; but antinomy and paradox become the criteria of the religious person. He sacrifices his intelligence to God.⁵ He deifies the irrational and replaces his cry of revolt by a frantic approval : "with a tortured subterfuge he gives to the irrational the face of the unjust, inconsistent and incomprehensible absurd, and to his God he gives its attributes."⁶ For him, death leads to hope, and he reconciles himself with it ; but for Camus, "reconciliation by scandal is also reconciliation."⁷

b) The Leap into Abstraction

According to Camus, Husserl and the phenomenologists rejoin the thought of the absurd in their point of departure.⁸ They aim at enumerating whatever cannot transcend itself. But, Camus continues, when Husserl speaks about extratemporal essences that are created by intention, one believes oneself to be hearing Plato, "one does not explain all things by one only, but rather by all of them. I do not see any difference there... Kierkegaard sunk himself in his God, and Permenides pushed his thought into the One. But here, thought is thrown into an abstract polytheism."⁹ At an abrupt turning, thought re-introduces into the world a sort of fragmentary immanence that restores all its profoundness to the universe. And Camus concludes : this geometric place where divine reason ratifies my own will always be

¹ MS 123.

² Cf. MS 199-211.

³ MS 205.

⁴ MS 207.

⁵ Cf. MS 126.

⁶ MS 127.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Cf. MS 129.

⁹ MS 131

incomprehensible for me. Here again, I reveal a leap."¹ He says this because, after having denied the power of human reason, Husserl leaps into eternal Reason.

To what extent has Camus understood these thinkers, Husserl especially ? This is not a question that enters into the perspective of the present work.² Camus only gives his own position : the world is absurd and should be maintained as such.

3. Maintaining the Absurd

One should not try to escape from the absurd with physical or philosophical suicide, but rather one should try to live with it : "Making it live is above all looking at it."³ This is so even if it is not without rupture.⁴ And how should one maintain the absurd ? By dedicating to it one's revolt, liberty and passion.⁵ Revolt and liberty are treated more profoundly in the works on revolt.⁶ Camus's thought on them evolved and, especially, set limits to them. For the moment, we shall mention the logical place that they fill in the absurd.

[p. 16] a) Revolt

— Its nature. It is "protest,"⁷ "defiance,"⁸ "obstination,"⁹ "refusal,"¹⁰ "confrontation."¹¹ In the face of the absurd, "one of the only coherent philosophical positions is thus revolt. It is a perpetual confrontation between man and his own obscurity. It is the demand for an impossible transparency. At every second it puts the world in question... It is this constant presence of man before himself. It is not an aspiration ; it is without hope. This revolt is only the assurance of a crushing destiny, without the resignation that should accompany it."¹² It is what gives value to life and assures it of its greatness.¹³

— Its demands. Revolt first of all demands lucidity. One must keep one's clearheadedness and knowledge of the surrounding walls ;¹⁴ there is perhaps no happiness without comprehension,¹⁵ but "tenacity and clearheadedness are the

¹ MS 132.

² Camus rather criticizes them from the outside, without wanting to enter the internal logic of their thought.

³ MS 138.

⁴ Cf. MS 139.

⁵ Cf. MS 145-146

⁶ Cf. Chapter III, Introduction I, 1.

⁷ HR 419.

⁸ MS 139.

⁹ MS 137.

¹⁰ HR 420.

¹¹ MS 138.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Cf. MS 139.

¹⁴ MS 117, 114.

¹⁵ MS 113.

privileged spectators of this inhuman game where the absurd, hope and death exchange their replies." ¹ A constant asceticism is also necessary in order to maintain oneself in the absurd, once the absurd is recognized : "thus one will have the absurd thinker and his perpetual malaise," ² as well as his solitary effort. ³ In the absurd there is a lack of an urgent demand, of which *L'Homme révolté* gives evidence : values.

b) Liberty

In the absurd, "all that I wait and hope for is this ingenious, free life." ⁴ What characterizes it ? It knows no Master, extends to all of life on this side of death, and recognizes certain limits.

— Its birth. True liberty begins with the discovery of the absurd. Before, everyday man lived with his goals, counted on the future ; he acted as though he were free. But after the discovery of the absurd, everything changes : "the absurd man understands that, until now, he was tied to this postulate of liberty, the illusion of which kept him alive. In a certain sense, this fettered him. To the extent that he imagined a goal for his life, he conformed to the demands of a goal to be attained and became a slave of his liberty." ⁵

— Outside God. "I cannot understand what would be a liberty given to me by a superior being. I have lost the sense of hierarchy." ⁶ Liberty in relation to God would signify enslavement for the absurd man : "To become god only means to be free on this earth, not to serve an immortal being. Above all, of course, it means to draw all the consequences of this sad independence. If God exists, everything depends on him and we can do nothing against his will. If he does not exist, everything depends on us." ⁷ Caligula understood it. ⁸ Camus is not interested in the problem of metaphysical liberty, because it is connected, more or less, with the problem of God. ⁹ On the contrary, [p. 17] he says, "the only liberty that I know is the liberty of the mind and action." ¹⁰ With *L'Homme révolté*, Camus introduces another dimension to liberty in society, which is unknown in *Le Mythe*. ¹¹

— In time. Since liberty can have no function in eternal life, its field of action remains the present life, on this side of death. Man will enjoy the divine availability of one condemned to death : "In terms of this incredible lack of interest in everything, except for the pure flame of life, death and the absurd are the principles, as one knows very

¹ C II, 82.

² C II, 82.

³ MS 139.

⁴ C I, 201.

⁵ MS 141.

⁶ MS 140.

⁷ MS 184.

⁸ *Cal* 46.

⁹ Cf. MS 139.

¹⁰ MS 140.

¹¹ Cf. Chapter IV, 111, 2, a.

well, of the only reasonable liberty : that which a human heart can test and live." ¹
 "My liberty only makes sense in relation to its limited destiny." ²

— Some limits. In *Le Mythe*, Camus only gives a few sentences on the limits of liberty. In *L'Homme révolté*, History teaches him that an unlimited liberty leads to murder ; he makes a morality of limits out of the morality of revolt." ³ In the meantime, we find the beginning of this ethics in *Le Mythe* : "The absurd does not deliver ; it ties. It does not authorize all acts. That all is permitted does not signify that nothing is forbidden. To the consequences of these acts the absurd only gives their equivalence. He does not recommend crime, as this would be puerile, but rather he restores to remorse its uselessness." ⁴

c) Passion

To live passionately in the absurd world is the third consequence that Camus draws from his philosophy of the absurd. When he speaks about "passion", it is not a matter of moral passions, but of the eagerness for life : "What does life mean in such a universe ? Nothing else for the moment than the indifference to the future and the passion to use up all that is given." ⁵ And again : "Torn between the world that is not enough and God that it does not have, the absurd mind chooses the world with passion... Shared between the relative and the absolute, he jumps eagerly for the relative." ⁶ But living in the relative implies two things : living without appeal, and living the most instead of the best.

— Living without appeal to God. "Living without appeal" is a frequent expression in *Le Mythe*. ⁷ It refers first of all to the existential attitude which made an appeal to God by making a leap for him. The absurd man, on the contrary, should live what is verifiable, without letting anything as uncertain as the eternal interfere. ⁸ Diverted from the eternal, the absurd man jumps into time : "What actually is the absurd man ? He who, without denying it, does nothing for the eternal. Not that nostalgia is strange to him. But he prefers his courage and reason. The former teaches him to live without appeal and to be self-sufficient, and the latter shows him his limits." ⁹ And [p. 18] thus, "the ideal for the absurd man is the present and the succession of different moments of the present (of presents) before a soul incessantly aware." ¹⁰ What will he discover there ? The warm faces of the world, sung about in *Noces*. Men "bound to time and exile... also know how to live in keeping with a universe without future and without weakness. This absurd world without God is then peopled by men who think

¹ MS 142.

² MS 143.

³ Cf. Chapter IV, 1, 2, d.

⁴ MS 149.

⁵ MS 142.

⁶ C II, 62.

⁷ MS 137, 143, 149, 179.

⁸ Cf. MS 137.

⁹ MS 149.

¹⁰ MS 145.

clearly and no longer hope," ¹ because "to be deprived of hope does not mean to despair. The flames of the earth are certainly worth heavenly perfumes." ² Life will be lived all the better when it has no more transcendent sense. ³

— Living quantitatively. The ethics of the absurd is an ethics of quantity and not one of quality : "Belief in the absurd comes to replace the quality of experience by quantity. If I persuade myself that this life has no other aspect than that of the absurd, if I prove that all its balance keeps this perpetual opposition between my conscious revolt and the obscurity in which it labours, if I admit that my liberty has meaning only in relation to its limited destiny, then I should say that what matters is not living the best but living the most." ⁴ Camus comes back to this position in the section on the ethics of revolt. ⁵

Value judgments are set aside in favour of judgments of fact. "A man's morals and his chain of values only have meaning in terms of the quantity and variety of experiences that he has managed to accumulate... The proper character of community morals resides less in the ideal importance of the principles that inspire it than in the norm of the experience, which is possible to measure." ⁶

Until now, the principles of the absurd have been presented. How could they be lived in reality ? Examples of men illustrate it in *Le Mythe*. These men are "sane" without the God of the absurd, although different from "the saints without the God" of revolt, ⁷ of whom Rieux or Kaliayev could be the best examples.

IV. Absurd Men

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Camus does not define the nature of man according to the absurd, as one would expect from the title "L'Homme absurde," of a chapter of *Mythe de Sisyphe*. ⁸ He only presents three portraits illustrating the consequences of the discovery of the absurd. ⁹ His aim is not pedagogical : "These images do not propose morals and they do not engage in judgments : they are drawings. They only represent a style of life. The lover, the actor or the adventurer play the absurd." ¹⁰ To these must be joined the

¹ MS 170.

² MS 169.

³ MS 138.

⁴ MS 143.

⁵ . Cf. Chapter IV, I, 1.

⁶ MS 143.

⁷ Cf. Chapter IV, VI.

⁸ MS 147.

⁹ Cf. MS 150.

¹⁰ MS 169.

other characters of the cycle of works on the absurd : the Mersault of *La Mort heureuse*, the Meursault of *L'Étranger*, Caligula and Sisyphus.

[p. 19] As characteristics they have lived without God, in time, in quantity and in lucidity.

1. Without God

All these men refuse the eternal in all its forms : God, immortality and hope. Don Juan has "this crazy laugh of a sane man provoking a god that does not exist" ; ¹ his sadness was to hope ; ² he defies hell ³ and finally hides away in a convent, "face to face with the god he does not worship." ⁴ The actor prefers "to hold against God the part of his profound passion" ⁵ condemned by the Church, according to which, to enter his profession is to choose hell. ⁶ As for the conqueror, he says : "Between history and the eternal, I chose history because I like certitudes ;" ⁷ he opts for the sword against the cross, knowing that death ends everything and that if man wants to be something, it must be in this life. ⁸

Mersault, in *La Mort heureuse* ⁹ is not worried about the existence of God, it is a settled matter ; during his trips, he becomes bored in the churches that he visits, ¹⁰ and states that "the god they worshipped here was one to be feared and honoured, not one who laughs with man before the warm games of the sea and the sun." ¹¹ For the Meursault of *Étranger*, the position is similar ; to the almoner who appeared : "I answered that I did not believe in God. He wanted to know if I was quite sure about it, and I said that I did not have to wonder about it ; it seemed to me a question without importance." ¹² He knows that he will die entirely ; ¹³ he does not want to waste on God the time that remains to him before his execution." ¹⁴

Caligula tries to be the equal of the gods that he denies : "The rivalry of the gods has something annoying for a man who loves power. I suppressed that. I proved to these illusory gods that a man, if he had the will, could exercise, without learning, their ridiculous profession." ¹⁵ Sisyphus, condemned by the gods, prefers the blessing

¹ MS 156.

² MS 152.

³ Cf. MS 153.

⁴ MS 157.

⁵ MS 162.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ MS 165.

⁸ MS 166.

⁹ *La Mort heureuse* served as an outline for *L'Étranger*.

¹⁰ Cf. *MH* 117.

¹¹ *MH* 105.

¹² *Étr* 1207.

¹³ *Étr* 1208.

¹⁴ *Étr* 1210.

¹⁵ *Cal* 67.

of water to heavenly lightening ; ¹ therefore "Sisyphus is a hero of the absurd... His scorn for the gods, his hatred of death and his passion for life have made him worthy of this inexpressible torture." ² From this world he hunts a god who entered here with dissatisfaction and the taste for useless pains. ³

2. In Time and the Ephemeral

For the absurd man, diverted from God and the eternal, all that remains is the realm of time and the ephemeral. Don Juan only lives on this side of death : "Time goes with him. The absurd man is he who does not separate himself from time." ⁴ Also the actor "composes and enumerates his characters in time. It is in time that [p. 20] he learns to master them ;" ⁵ he establishes his kingdom in the perishable. ⁶ The conqueror exclaims like the others : "Deprived of the eternal, I want to ally myself with time," ⁷ in order to display an action there, useless in itself by the fact of death. ⁸

Sisyphus struggles with a useless work, "inexpressible torture where the entire being is used to achieve nothing." ⁹ The earth and its fleeting joys constitute his domain. ¹⁰ Caligula limits his power to this world where he destroys men, failing to destroy the stupid gods. ¹¹ Meursault leaps into the here-and-now : "Every minute regained its miraculous value... In his hours of lucidity, he felt that time was his and that, in this short instant that goes from the red sea to the green sea, something eternal was represented for him in each second. He did not glimpse eternity outside the sweep of days any more than in superhuman happiness. Happiness was human and eternity daily." ¹² The other Meursault lives in the present like the preceding one, completely given over to the joys of the sea and the sun until the moment when he commits the murder.

3. In Quantity and Innocence

Another characteristic common to absurd men : life in the quantity of experiences. And so with Don Juan : "What Don Juan actualizes is an ethics of quantity, unlike the saint who tends towards quality." ¹³ He uses up a number of women, and, with them,

¹ MS 195.

² MS 196.

³ MS 197.

⁴ MS 154.

⁵ MS 162.

⁶ MS 158.

⁷ MS 165.

⁸ MS 168.

⁹ MS 196.

¹⁰ Cf. MS 197.

¹¹ Cf. *Cal* 69.

¹² *MH* 168-169.

¹³ MS 154.

his chances for life.¹ The same thing is true for the actor : "if the morals of quantity could ever find sustenance, it is within this peculiar scene,"² where he can cover centuries to use up an incalculable number of lives. The conqueror goes through his victories and his failures. Caligula also has this preoccupation of quantity in crime.

They all begin with the principle of man's innocence : like Don Juan, they cannot be guilty ; they only live out their destiny.³ Meursault commits a crime that is due to the blinding sun ;⁴ therefore he is surprised when they speak about sin.⁵ Caligula declares himself to be pure without evil : "You are pure within the good," he tells Scipio, "as I am pure within evil."⁶ And Camus concludes : "All morals are founded on the idea that an act has consequences that justify it or obliterate it. A mind penetrated with absurdity only judges that its results should be considered with serenity. It is ready to pay. In other words, if, for it, there is nobody responsible, then there is nobody guilty. Even more, it will consent to use past experience as a basis for future acts."⁷

4. In Lucidity

These absurd men also come together in their lucidity.⁸ For the lover, it is a matter of seeing clearly :⁹ "he is an ordinary seducer with [p. 21] the slight difference that he is conscious and therefore absurd"¹⁰ Sisyphus is never so great as at the moment of lucidity, when he goes back down again : "If this myth is tragic, it is because its hero is conscious ;"¹¹ with this consciousness he surpasses his destiny and obtains his victory.¹² Meursault puts all his lucidity in his search for happiness ;¹³ he wants to be careful not to fall asleep in comfort.¹⁴ Caligula also clearly sees the unreasonable-state of the world,¹⁵ and Scipio admits : "I also suffer from what he suffers. My unhappiness is to understand everything."¹⁶

Intelligence bestows all their greatness to these men who live in the absurd,¹⁷ and "this absurd world without god is then peopled with men who think clearly and no

¹ *Ibid.*

² *MS* 159.

³ *MS* 155.

⁴ *Étr* 1198.

⁵ *Étr* 1208.

⁶ *Cal* 58.

⁷ *MS* 150.

⁸ Cf. Chapter IV, V, 3, a.

⁹ *MS* 155.

¹⁰ *MS* 154.

¹¹ *MS* 196.

¹² Cf. *MS* 196.

¹³ Cf. *MH* 115.

¹⁴ Cf. *MH* 115.

¹⁵ *Cal* 15.

¹⁶ *Cal* 83.

¹⁷ Cf. *MS* 169.

longer hope." ¹ They are the wise men of the absurd : "If the word 'wise' is applied to the man who lives with what he has and does not speculate about what he does not have, then these men are wise men." ²

Before coming to the general conclusion on the absurd, it is necessary to examine the work on the absurd. Camus is an artist. This examination is therefore an obligatory complement to his thought.

V. Absurd Creation

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By "absurd creation," Camus does not understand the physical universe, but rather artistic work, and more especially the novel, which, according to him, is the place for expression of the absurd par excellence. It is situated at the end of the discovery of the absurd ³ and is the truest joy. ⁴ This absurd work is possible, but in order to have it, "the most absurd character, who is the creator," ⁵ must respect certain "commandments of the absurd," ⁶ without which there would be treason. *Le Parti pris* by Francis Ponge would be an example of this absurd work. ⁷

Let us look at these Camusian laws on absurd creation, and an example of an absurd creator, Dostoevsky. ⁸

1. Its Commandments

— To incarnate the absurd. Everything that has been discovered in the absurd should be represented in the work, and nothing else ; it should be a simple mirror : "I ask from absurd creation that I would demand from thought, revolt, liberty and diversity. Afterwards it will show its profound uselessness." ⁹ The contents of the absurd should be found there, including, among other elements, the absence of eternal hope : "If the commandments of the absurd are not respected, if absurd creation does not illustrate divorce and revolt, if it sacrifices illusions and arouses hope, it is no longer a favour... My life can find a certain significance in this, that makes me laugh. Absurd creation is no longer that exercise in detachment and passion that consum-[p. 22] mates the splendour and uselessness of a man's life." ¹⁰ Therefore the truest work is to be found

¹ MS 170.

² MS 169.

³ Cf. MS 175.

⁴ Cf. MS 173.

⁵ MS 170.

⁶ MS 179.

⁷ Cf. Letter on the subject of *Parti pris* by Francis Ponge, II, 1663.

⁸ The next two sections discuss two particular applications of Camus's philosophy of the absurd.

⁹ MS 192.

¹⁰ MS 179.

where "the creator knew how to repeat the image of his own condition, and to make the sterile secret he possesses ring out." ¹

— To describe without explaining. Reason should be present in the absurd work, not to find profound explanations, but to describe reality, unlike the thesis writer who tries to prove something. ² Wanting to look for reasons in the universe would be a temptation : "the temptation to explain the greatest one," ³ but it is necessary to resist it. Thought, as part of the meaninglessness of the world, should continue, and, for want of superior reasons, should confine itself to describing. ⁴ The most eloquent text on absurd creation is the following : "Thought in its most lucid form must be included. But it is necessary at the same time that it only appears as the intelligence that rules. This paradox is explained according to the absurd. A work of art takes birth when the intelligence gives up on reasoning about the concrete. The work of art marks the triumph of the senses. Lucid thought brings it into being, but even while doing so renounces itself. The work of art will not yield to the temptation to add to descriptions a profound meaning it knows is unwarranted. The work of art incarnates a drama of intelligence, but indicates this only indirectly. The absurd work demands an artist aware of these limits and an art where the concrete signifies nothing more than itself." ⁵ Therefore it is only a cut piece in experience, where the intelligence only brings appearances into play, and covers whatever is without reason with pictures. ⁶

— Creating in diversity. The creator does not attempt *a priori* to tie all his successive works together with one uniform thought. Since the unity of the world does not exist, thought should try to reflect its absence : "Any thought that renounces unity exalts diversity. And diversity is the condition for art." ⁷ Thought will therefore combine the multiplicity of experiences in the author's life. ⁸ His works are juxtaposed, and draw their unity from the whole. Diligence is necessary for such a creation : "It would never come about without discipline. Creation is the most efficacious of all the schools of patience and lucidity... It requires a daily effort... measure and force. It amounts to asceticism. All that 'for nothing', in order to repeat and mark time." ⁹

¹ MS 190.

² Cf. MS 178.

³ MS 177.

⁴ *Lettre*, II, 1663.

⁵ MS 176.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ MS 191.

⁸ Cf. MS 190.

⁹ *Ibid.*

2. An Absurd Creator : Dostoevsky

Camus recognized his close relationship to Dostoevsky. "Without doubt, no one has given the absurd world such intimate and torturing prestige as did Dostoevsky."¹ All his heroes ask themselves about [p. 23] the meaning of life.² Dostoevsky himself asks the question with such intensity that one can only contemplate extreme solutions : "Either existence is a liar, or it is eternal."³ Dostoevsky confronts man with the world, and asks the question of God and evil. But meanwhile he is unfaithful to his characters and to the absurd, for, like the existentialists, he also makes the leap.⁴ He affirms the resurrection with Aliocha ; thus "Dostoevsky's response is humiliation... An absurd work, on the contrary, furnishes no response — there is the whole difference. What contradicts the absurd in this work is not its Christian character, but its announcement of a future life. One can be Christian and absurd. There are examples of Christians who do not believe in the future life."⁵ The question Dostoevsky raised about existence is thus seen to be given the following answer : "existence is a liar and it is eternal."⁶

It is now necessary to conclude with the absurd, before undertaking the analysis of the human condition.

Conclusion

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At the end of this analysis of the absurd, certain questions can be raised. The first concerns the absurd itself : what is its place in the whole of Camus's thought ? Could Camus remain with the philosophy expressed in the cycle of absurd works ending with *Le Mythe* ? The second question deals with God : does the absurd categorically deny the existence of God ? And finally, does the absurd take away all meaning from the world and human existence ? These are the principal questions which we would like to try to answer.

¹ MS 186.

² MS 182.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Cf. MS 186.

⁵ MS 187.

⁶ MS 188.

1. The Absurd : a Point of Departure

— Camus is formal on this point : he does not come to the absurd at the end of his thought, but begins with it to establish his philosophy of revolt. He remarked on this in the introduction to *Le Mythe* : "The absurd, taken as a conclusion up till, now, is considered in this essay as a point of departure."¹ He returns to this in the introduction to *L'Homme révolté* : "The absurd.... its true character, which is to be a lived experience, a point of departure, the equivalent, in existence, of Descartes's methodical doubt."² And, in an interview given ten years after *Mythe*, he says he is bothered by this word "absurd". Therefore it is only a "zero point."³ He already affirmed in *Le Mythe* : "For me the only admitted fact is the absurd. The problem is to know how to get out of it,"⁴ because "to state the absurdity of life cannot be an end, but only a beginning. It is a truth from which almost all great minds started. This discovery is not interesting, but rather the consequences and rules of action that one [p. 24] draws from it."⁵ This absurdity will accompany the later steps of thought, but only as memory or emotion.⁶ Compelled by the events and lessons of life, it was necessary to come back to a former position.⁷ — What are the reasons that oblige one to go beyond the philosophy of the absurd ? We can discover three. The first one is from the logical ; point of view, the second from the point of view of action in general, and the third from the truly ethical point of view.

From the logical point of view, the absurd is contradictory : "Any philosophy of meaninglessness lives on the contradiction of the very fact that it can express itself. By that it gives a minimum of coherence to incoherence, and introduces consistency to that which, supposedly, should have no consistency... The only coherent attitude based on meaninglessness would be silence, if silence, in turn, had no meaning. The perfect absurdity tries to be quiet."⁸

One should also leave the absurd behind because it does not lead to action as revolt does. It resigns people to complacency : "This complacency, this consideration of oneself, well marks the deep equivocation of the absurd position. In a certain way, the absurdity which claims to express man in his solitude actually makes him live in front of a mirror. Then the original disturbance threatens to become comfortable. The wound that one scratches with so much solicitude ends up by giving pleasure."⁹ The absurd leaves one in impotence, as Sartre's characters demonstrate,¹⁰ and man is

¹ MS 97.

² HR 417.

³ Cf. *Lettre à Pierre Bonnel*, Match 1943, II, 1422.

⁴ MS 121.

⁵ *La Nausée* de Jean-Paul Sartre, AR, October 1938, II, 1419.

⁶ Cf. E 864.

⁷ Int., *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, May 1951, II, 1343.

⁸ HR 418.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 1420.

enclosed in a sterile freedom¹ and given over to anxiety.² Revolt, and the action which it commands, makes him leave it ; man will be able to make himself work in the narrow circle of his own condition.³

But it is from the specifically ethical point of view that the absurd should be surpassed. It excludes choices,⁴ implies a certain nihilism,⁵ and offers neither reasons for denying murder⁶ nor any rule of action.⁷ Above all, it excludes value judgments : "the effort of absurd (and gratuitous) thought means the expulsion of all value judgments for the sake of factual judgments. But you and I know that there are inevitable value judgments. Even beyond good and bad, there are some acts that appear good or bad, and there are especially some spectacles that appear beautiful or ugly to us... The absurd apparently leads us to live without value judgments, and living always means, in a more or less elementary way, judging."⁸

Camus's conclusion is the following : "The absurd is really without any logic. That is why one cannot really live with it."⁹

2. The Absurd and God

Let us now focus our attention on the subject of the existence of God in the absurd, as we shall later focus it on the nature of God in [p. 25] revolt. Is it a matter of the categorical negation of his existence ? or of the incertitude of his existence, considering the state of the world ? or of the nostalgia for a missing Author ?

a) A Triple Series of Explicit Affirmations

— First of all it is a matter of the clear negation of his existence. As we have already stated, the world is in a state of divorce in relation to what it should be, and it is in a state of sin, but without God,¹⁰ since "everything is chaos,"¹¹ "king chance,"¹² given over to unintelligibility¹³ and division. Therefore this absurd world cannot lead to God.¹⁴ Absurd man is also without God.¹⁵ The explicit position is therefore clear : in such a world, as in nature itself, "no deceptive divinity traced the signs of hope or

¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 1421.

² Cf. "*La Nausée*" de Jean-Paul Sartre, AR, October 1938, II, 1418.

³ Cf. RR 1696.

⁴ Cf. C II, 280.

⁵ Cf. HR 419.

⁶ Cf. C II, 280.

⁷ Cf. HR 420.

⁸ Cf. RR 1696-1697.

⁹ C II, 109.

¹⁰ MS 128.

¹¹ MS 117.

¹² MS 136.

¹³ C II, 113.

¹⁴ MS 128.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

redemption," ¹ "in these gospels of stone, sky and water, it is said that nothing resuscitates," ² "the absurd clears me up on this point : there is no tomorrow." ³ In philosophical language, God is neither efficient Cause nor final Cause, nor, within the world, Providence, in the Stoic sense, for example.

— Afterwards there are other explicit, but ambivalent, affirmations implying a negation of God and the need for his existence. Thus, agreeing with the Italian painters, Camus states "the lucid protestation of a man thrown onto an earth whose splendour and light talk to him without respite of a God who does not exist," ⁴ and, like the Kirilov of Dostoevsky : "he feels that God is necessary and that he certainly must exist. But he knows that he does not exist and that he cannot exist." ⁵ The absurd man chooses the world with passion, even though it is shared between the absolute and the relative, ⁶ but he keeps his taste for the absolute. However, he refuses to make the leap to God like the existentialists, because that would mean sacrificing his intelligence. ⁷ Can God leave the obscurity of the world ? Meursault denies it. ⁸

— Finally, other affirmations lead to the possibility of the existence of God. Before the publication of *Mythe* : "The secret of my universe : imagining God without human immortality." ⁹ And, at the moment of elaborating *La Peste*, the book which makes the transition between the works of the absurd and those of revolt : "I do not refuse to go towards Being, but I do not want a way that deviates from beings. Knowing if one can find God at the end of one's passions." ¹⁰ Camus answers the interviewer asking him about his agnosticism : "It's true that I don't believe in God. But I am still not an atheist. I would even agree with Benjamin Constant's finding something vulgar with irreligion... indeed something hackneyed." ¹¹

[p. 26] **b) Implicit Nostalgia for God ?**

Nostalgia as such is present everywhere with Camus. It is above all in the absurd. It designates the state of man "separated from" something : unity, truth, etc. It is synonymous with "need of," "appetite for." Moreover, it is metaphysical : wherever there is man, there is nostalgia. It is at the very heart of the absurd : "The absurd makes no sense without nostalgia." ¹² It is one of the three essential characters in the

¹ N 74.

² N 85.

³ MS 141.

⁴ N 80.

⁵ MS 183.

⁶ C II, 62

⁷ MS 126.

⁸ Cf. *Étr* 1209.

⁹ C II, 21.

¹⁰ Cf. C II, 97.

¹¹ *Int.*, *Le Monde*, August 1956, I, 1881.

¹² Cf. *Lettre à Pierre Bonnel*, March 1943, II, 1423-1424.

drama of the absurd ; ¹ the nostalgia for unity, ² the nostalgia for intellectual clarity, ³ the nostalgia for permanence and eternity, ⁴ the nostalgia for the absolute ⁵ which become more accentuated in the works on revolt. ⁶ This "revolted nostalgia for the absurd" ⁷ is generalized by Camus : "a man's thought is above all his nostalgia," ⁸ it seeks a place of understanding for all these nostalgias, ⁹ and an author's works are only their story.) ¹⁰ In brief, "nostalgia is the sign of the human." ¹¹

There is therefore a metaphysical need expressed by nostalgia. The need for the first Cause of everything ? Without any doubt. But, as we saw in the previous quotation, Camus refuses to believe that, in the metaphysical order, the need for a principle necessitates the existence of this principle. ¹² However, he recognizes metaphysics : "Everything, whenever you go into it thoroughly, leads to a metaphysical problem.... It is therefore ridiculous to say : 'Is metaphysics possible ?' Metaphysics is." ¹³ He feels the need for a unifying word for the universe : "There is... in every being that expresses itself the nostalgia for the profound unity of the universe, the nostalgia for the word that would summarize everything (something like 'Um', the sacred syllable of the Hindus), of the verb that finally illuminates everything. Thus I believe that, in reality, the problem of language is first of all a metaphysical problem, and that as such it is doomed to failure." ¹⁴

The failure of metaphysics itself ? No. It is, rather, due to Camus's very method, which only tries to remain with concrete experience "The absurd work," he affirmed, "illustrates the renunciation of thought to its prestige and its resignation to only being the intelligence that brings appearances into play and covers everything unreasonable with images." ¹⁵ But the existence of God, apart from being a question of ethics, is first of all a question of metaphysics in philosophy. Therefore it would be relatively logical, if one does not only stay with the concrete, not to be able to attain the Being that would be the premise for other beings. Thus, caught between the nostalgia for an ultimate explanation on the one hand, and the impossibility of obtaining this explanation on the other hand, man remains torn, ¹⁶ unappeased. ¹⁷ Sometimes he will

¹ Cf. *MS* 110.

² Cf. *MS* 136.

³ Cf. *MS* 113.

⁴ One of the discoveries of lucid intelligence in the absurd was the need for duration (cf. Chapter I, I, 4).

⁵ In philosophy, the word "absolute" designates that which is opposed to the relative.

⁶ Cf. *HR* 668.

⁷ *MS* 126.

⁸ *MS* 134.

⁹ *MS* 177.

¹⁰ *E* 864.

¹¹ *MS* 210.

¹² Cf. Chapter I, Conclusion, 2, b.

¹³ *C* II, 96.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *MS* 177.

¹⁶ Cf. *C* II, 334.

¹⁷ Cf. *MS* 110.

look to nihilism [p. 27] for what he cannot find in God : "An intelligence without a god that puts an end to him looks for a god in that which denies it." ¹ But is it a contradiction to remain facing one's nostalgia ? For the absurd man, it is a matter of living with his contradictions : ² "I believe that it makes no difference to me to be in contradiction. I have no desire to be a philosophical genius. I don't even have any desire to be a genius at all." ³ This poses the problem of Camus's arguments.

c) Camusian Arguments

As for the absurd, and taking account of the nuances made above, God does not exist, neither as the origin nor as the end nor as the providence of the world. Camus neither presents systematic "proofs" nor rejects the usual "proofs for the existence of God." Nor does he try to prove that chance rules the world (with the exception of a few allusions to the world as chaos). The arguments used against the existence of God are contained in the discoveries made by absurd man : the absence of unity, of clarity, men's inhumanity, the divorce between man and the universe. In other words, it is the problem of evil, in all its forms, which must be attributed to God if he existed. Camus deals with this problem more explicitly when he discusses revolt.

However, to the attentive observer, it appears that Camus does not try to prove the inexistence of God. He affirms it more than he proves it. It seems that this inexistence of God is a postulate that Camus tries to justify later. Likewise, how can one definitively explain the minimum of intelligence that exists in the world ? There is evil, but how can one take account of the good ? Camus does not answer these questions. A philosopher remains unsatisfied with his thought. But it must be remembered that Camus thinks as an artist more than as a philosopher ; one cannot demand from an artist what one would expect of a philosopher. Whatever it may be, the absurd does not conclude categorically about God, either in the sense of YES or in the sense of NO. What will remain of it at the end of the analysis of revolt ? We shall deal with this in the general conclusion.

3. The Sense of the World and of Existence

With Camus, the word "sense" oscillates between "significance" and "orientation". In the first case, it is a matter of the logical order, by which the world would have an intelligibility by itself or in relation to something else ; in the second case, it is a matter of the finality of the world and of existence, like the flight of a bird headed towards a destination. ⁴ In general, the first is a function of the second. Moreover, the two senses can be taken objectively inde-[p. 28] pendently of human intention) or subjectively (the sense that one gives by oneself to the world and existence). Just like the problem of God in the absurd, the problem of sense is ambiguous with Camus,

¹ N 85.

² MS 139, C II, 82.

³ C II, 172.

⁴ C II, 98.

and it undergoes an evolution in the sense of a deepening, and sometimes of a rupture.

a) The Sense of the World

The texts distinguish between a transcendent sense, the one that would be given by God and that Camus calls the "superior sense" of the world,¹ and the immanent sense, the one which man would give it.

— The transcendent sense. At first, this sense is denied : "There is God or time, this cross or this sword. This world has a higher sense that surpasses its agitations, or nothing is true but these agitations."² *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* generally chose the second alternative ; it rejected the leap to God of the religious existentialists who had started with a philosophy of the meaninglessness of the world.³ The absurd work should not give in to the temptation to superadd a deeper sense, that it knows to be illegitimate, to what is described⁴. There is the same affirmation in the *Lettre d'un Ami allemand* : "I continue to believe that this world has no superior sense."⁵ But already in *Le Mythe*, it was less a matter of a categorical negation of this transcendent sense than of the impossibility of seizing it. It was the same for liberty : "I cannot understand what a liberty given to me by a superior being would be."⁶ And the motive : "What I do not understand is without reason,"⁷ "I cannot lose myself in the exaltation or the simple definition of a notion which escapes me and loses its sense whenever it exceeds the context of my individual experience,"⁸ "I do not understand the unique significance"⁹ of this world. The last word on the absurd, as such, is found in *L'Été*. It is no longer a question of a categorical absence of superior sense, but it is rather a matter of an enigma of the world. The Camusian universe becomes like Aeschylus's, of which Camus says : "We do not find mere nonsense at the centre of his universe, but rather an enigma, in other words : a sense that one makes out badly because it dazzles."¹⁰ This enigma was already expected in *Le Mythe*, in which it was called the "unreasonable silence of the world,"¹¹ of "this undecipherable universe."¹²

— The Immanent Sense. The rupture is clearer in what concerns the immanent sense of the world. "Where is the absurdity of the world ? Is it this splendour or the memory of its absence ? With so much sun in my memory, how could I have bet on

¹ LAA 241.

² MS 165.

³ MS 133.

⁴ MS 176.

⁵ LAA 241.

⁶ MS 140.

⁷ MS 117.

⁸ MS 140.

⁹ MS II, 7.

¹⁰ E 865.

¹¹ MS 117-118.

¹² MS 113.

nonsense ? Around me, people are astonished ; I am also sometimes astonished." ¹ "If one supposes [p. 29] that nothing has meaning, then one must conclude on the absurdity of the world. But has nothing any meaning ? I have never thought that one could remain with this position." ² If God does not exist, "if this world has no superior sense, if man only has man as a guarantor," ³ there remain at least two significant things in a world without a master : nature and man.

Man, first of all. Let us lengthen a previous quotation, taken from the *Lettre à un Ami allemand* : "I continue to believe that this world has no superior sense. But I know that something within it has some sense, and that is man, because he is the only being that demands having some." ⁴ And Camus adds that taking away all sense from the world would lead to the equating of good and evil, ⁵ and thus to a heroism without any direction. ⁶ The totalitarians can level man : "if this world has no sense, they are right, I do not accept their being right." ⁷ The world also draws sense from nature, even if it has no transcendent sense : the burning faces of the earth ⁸ and its splendours ⁹ give a reason for being to the universe. Thus one should despair of neither man, ¹⁰ nor the earth, ¹¹ because without them all sense would disappear.

b) The Sense of Existence

Human existence does not have a superior or transcendent sense, just like the world. "There is no superior destiny, at least there is only one, that he (Sisyphus) judges fatal and contemptible," but there is a personal fate. ¹² Camus began in *L'Étranger* with "Everybody knows that life does not deserve to be lived ;" ¹³ he questions himself and restores things in *Le Mythe* : "Before it was a matter of knowing if life should have a sense of order to be lived. Here it seems, on the contrary, that the better it is lived, the less sense it has." ¹⁴ It is a question here of a superior sense, given by God. Camus goes further by posing the necessity of justifying his life ; ¹⁵ besides, recognizing that all in vain would already give a sense. ¹⁶ In the *Lettre à un désespéré* : "One can despair of the sense of life in general, but not of its particular forms, of existence, since one has no control over it, but not of

¹ E 861.

² Int., *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, May 1951, II, 1343.

³ HR 685.

⁴ LAA 241.

⁵ LAA 240.

⁶ LAA 242.

⁷ C II, 127.

⁸ MS 167.

⁹ Cf. C I, 116.

¹⁰ Cf. *Lettre à Pierre Bonnel*, II, 1423.

¹¹ C I, 116.

¹² MS 198.

¹³ *Étr* 1206.

¹⁴ MS 138.

¹⁵ Cf. MH 69.

¹⁶ Cf. E 844.

the events which the individual can affect." ¹ Life, in itself, comes, anyhow, before its sense : "With the sense of life suppressed, there still remains life." ² An author's works can give a meaning to his life. ³ Above all, revolt gives a relative meaning to existence, although always threatened, ⁴ and it finds a direction adapted to the meaninglessness of the world. ⁵ Finally, nature will provide a sense : the "attachment to these few perishable and essential goods that give a meaning to our life : the sea, the sun, and women in the light." ⁶

[p. 30] It is therefore possible to live in an absurd world, even if everything is restricted to the human and the contingent. But the existence of God, if affirmed, is badly assured. Revolt speaks rather of God's silence, the inefficiency of his action and his injustice.

But what is the Camusian conception of the human condition ?

¹ C II 181.

² HR 467.

³ MS 208.

⁴ Int., *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, II, 1427.

⁵ HR, Comm., II, 1616.

⁶ *Rivages*, December 1938, II, 1330.

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Chapter II

The Human Condition : The Situation of Man without God

Introduction

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In general, a condition is the antecedent of a reality, without which the latter would not exist. With the expression "human condition," contemporary philosophy designates the contents of the "human nature" of Greek philosophy, but the accent is changed. Man is no longer "the reasonable human animal" (without this being denied, however), but man is an existential situation, a situation seen as tragic. What characterizes man is "the condition that is made for him as man."¹

Camus presents us his definition of the human condition in relation with his conception of the absurd ; "One could have an idea of an obvious absolute that would be neither in man's irreducibility nor in the situation against which he is struggling, but rather in the relation that the one and the other maintain between each other, and which is actually what is meant by the human condition."² "Human situation" and "human condition" are synonyms : "Metaphysical revolt means nothing more than that against which man revolts, and, basically, this is the human situation."³

It is essential to emphasize that, for Camus, the human condition has a dual character, consisting of the metaphysical condition (man's state in the world such as received by the nature of things) and the historic condition (which is made for man by man).

Let us take up the first one.

¹ HR 435.

² RR, *L'Existence*, 1945, II, 1696.

³ *Ibid.*, 1695.

A. The Metaphysical Condition

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That which defines man in the world such as received by the nature of things is his condition of exile, his condition of being condemned to death, his condition as a man at odds with multifarious evil. This metaphysical condition is characterized by absurdity, duality, pessimism, and injustice.

[p. 32] I. General Characteristics

1. The Duality of the Human Condition

"There is in the human condition (something common to all literatures) a fundamental absurdity together with an inherent greatness. The two coincide, as is natural. Both figure... in the ridiculous divorce that separates our excesses of the soul and the perishable joys of the body."¹ This is a duality which unites the splendour and the inutility of a man's life² in an "unbearable human condition."³

a) The inherent greatness resides first of all in man himself, whose dignity demands that he be treated other than as an "instrument,"⁴ a "thing,"⁵ or an "object."⁶ He derives his dignity not only from his mind,⁷ but also from "his flesh,"⁸ from his "body"⁹ which must be safeguarded as the price for the struggle.¹⁰ Revolt will exert itself to save this dignity : "The eternal motivating force of the insurgent : the love of men."¹¹ Everyone shares the same destiny in a common solidarity.¹²

b) This implacable greatness resides moreover in the world, but in the world considered as physical nature : the sun, sea, and countryside. "The world is beautiful, and, outside it, there is no salvation ;"¹³ "this splendour of the world is like the justification of these men."¹⁴ Camus was always infatuated with the natural world : "This agreement of the hand and the flowers, this loving understanding between the earth and the man freed from the human, ah, I would convert myself to this if it were

¹ MS 203.

² MS 179.

³ Discussion in *La Maison des Lettres*, June 1945, II, 1612.

⁴ HR 569.

⁵ HR 651.

⁶ HR 454.

⁷ *Allocution Défense de l'intelligence*, March 1945, II, 313.

⁸ *Allocution Le témoin de la liberté*, November 1948, II, 406.

⁹ *Sauver les corps*, NvNb, II, 335.

¹⁰ *Allocution Le témoin de la liberté*, II, 406.

¹¹ HR 492.

¹² HR 708.

¹³ N 87.

¹⁴ C I, 75.

not already my religion." ¹ At the end of *L'Homme révolté*, he opts for "Ithaca, the faithful earth... In the light, the world remains our first and last love." ²

2. The Absurdity of the Human Condition

The human condition is absurd : There is a divorce between man and the world, and divorce among men themselves (as will be shown in the analysis of revolt). If the world has its Place (*Endroit*), it also has its Opposite Side (*Envers*) : it is at the same time an Exile (*Exil*) and a Kingdom (*Royaume*), as symbolized by the titles of works by Camus. The tribulations that follow were already noted in the nature of man himself. ³ He goes on with relations with the world and relations of men with each other in history. With this taken into account, Camus has these terms for the human condition : "absurd condition," ⁴ "cruel and limited condition," ⁵ "condition without a future," ⁶ "vain condition." ⁷ Man finds himself on an "earth beyond measure," ⁸ a "sorrowful earth," ⁹ in "the universe of unhappiness" ¹⁰, and in "the sadness of the world." ¹¹ From the metaphysical point of view as well as the historical, "the condition that is thus made for us [p. 33] is hard, humiliating, sometimes unbearable." ¹² Then one understands Caligula's cry" ¹³ or Martha's. ¹⁴ Man is in disagreement with the universe, and, "since it is man's essential character 'to be in the world', the absurd finally becomes one with the human condition." ¹⁵ However, despite that, "man is gripped with passion, hopeful or disconsolate, for his condition." ¹⁶

3. Pessimism towards the Human Condition

Camus is pessimistic towards the human condition ; he recognized it himself. ¹⁷ However, he preserves an innate optimism for man and his actions : "I have always thought that if a man who had hope in the human condition was a fool, then he who despaired was a coward," ¹⁸ "I have never had any pessimism about man. I have had it

¹ *Ibid.*

² *HR* 708.

³ Cf. *MS* 203.

⁴ *RR* 1694.

⁵ *HR* 562.

⁶ *C* II, 75.

⁷ *RR* 1694.

⁸ *C* II, 280.

⁹ *HR* 708.

¹⁰ *LAA* 240.

¹¹ *La Maison du Peuple*, II, 1114.

¹² *Franc-Tireur*, December 1948, II, 1586.

¹³ Cf. *Cal* 15.

¹⁴ "This world is not reasonable" (*Mal* 168).

¹⁵ J.-P. Sartre, *Situations*, I, p. 95.

¹⁶ *C* II, 144.

¹⁷ Cf. Lettre à Pierre Bonnet, II, 1423.

¹⁸ *NvNb* 352.

about his condition.¹ Camus gives his position on Marxism and Christianity : "If Christianity is pessimistic about man, it is optimistic about human destiny. Marxism, pessimistic about destiny, pessimistic about human nature, is optimistic about the course of history (its contradiction !). I will say that I, while being pessimistic about the human condition, am optimistic about man."² But this is a matter of a "relative optimism," as stated in the preface to the American edition of *Le Malentendu*.³ And Camus recognizes that he shares this pessimism with all of the Christian heritage since Augustine.⁴

The causes of this pessimism ? They are, first, the impossibility of man's remaking the order of the world, and, second, from the ethical point of view, man's radical powerlessness to do always what is good. As for optimism, its reasons are found in man's action which can, nevertheless, limit metaphysical or moral evil to a certain extent. We shall come back to this point in the analysis of the ethics of revolt.

4. The Injustice of the Human Condition

The word "injustice," when used by Camus to describe the human condition, contains two meanings. In its objective sense, it indicates the lack of metaphysical agreement between man and the world : a man does not come into the universe as a man justly treated ; there is an absence of justice ; evil envelops nearly everything. This state of things is therefore properly called absence of justice : man's rights to unity and clarity are not respected. Who is the author of this moral injustice ? The metaphysical rebels would say : God, and thence they would set out to proclaim his fall. Therefore, "the unjust absurd, at once inconsistent and incomprehensible,"⁵ is to be found in this "unjust and incomprehensible condition"⁶ of man in the world.

Illogical and contradictory forces meet : the living must die, evil confronts good, and misfortune often supersedes happiness. "Before [p. 34] this evil, before death, from the depths of his soul, man cries out for justice... Injustice accompanies all suffering, even the suffering that seems the most deserved in men's eyes."⁷ "What do I have to repulse in this world," Diego cries, "if not the injustice done to us ;"⁸ Prometheus answers : "Ah, see the injustice that I endure ;"⁹ "life is more cruel than we," Martha repeats twice,¹⁰ and her mother declares before committing suicide : "... this suffering is not right either. But this world itself is not right, and I have the right to say so, since I have tasted everything from creation to destruction."¹¹ Rieux

¹ *Note manuscrite* for an interview, II, 1613.

² C II, 160.

³ Cf. RR 1692.

⁴ Cf. L'Incroyant et les chrétiens, II 373-374.

⁵ MS 127.

⁶ HR 419.

⁷ HR 706.

⁸ ES 263.

⁹ HR 438.

¹⁰ Mal 119.

¹¹ Mal 167.

decides to write the chronicle of *La Peste* "in order to bear witness in favour of these plague-stricken people, to leave at least a memory of the injustice and violence that have been done to them." ¹ The rebels' reasoning follows Ivan Karamazov's, as reported by Camus : "If evil is necessary for the divine creation, then this creation is unacceptable. Ivan does not rely on this mysterious God any more, but rather on a higher principle, which is justice." ²

To this metaphysical injustice men add the second meaning, the injustice of the historical condition. "The rebel's logic is to want to serve justice in order not to add to the injustice of this condition, to strive to use clear language so as not to enlarge the universal lie, and to gamble on happiness, while face to face with sorrow." ³ Camus, in an article in *Combat*, precisely defines the human task in this unjust condition : "It is simply a matter of not adding to the profound misery of our condition an injustice that would be purely human." ⁴ He reminds his German friend of this : "You admitted the injustice of our condition sufficiently to resolve to add to it... Because you have intoxicated yourself with your despair, because you have freed yourself from it by laying it down as a principle, you have consented to destroy man's works and to struggle against him in order to complete his essential misery." ⁵ In History, people kill, are violent, and lie : it is against this that Kaliyev and all the rebels rise up : "I consider my death," says Kaliyev, "as a supreme protest against a world of tears and blood." ⁶ "In the rebel's universe, death exalts injustice. It is the supreme abuse." ⁷ Also "we have to re sew what is torn, to make justice imaginable in a world so obviously unjust, and make happiness meaningful for people poisoned by the century's unhappiness." ⁸

What is the cause of the injustice of the human condition ? The rebels attribute it to God ; they want to "replace the kingdom of grace with the kingdom of justice," ⁹ and they turn to human forces alone : "God can do nothing ; justice is our business." ¹⁰ God is indirectly responsible for the injustice of the human condition, since he made man capable of evil, and since he is unable to impede men from their [p. 35] work of injustice. We shall come back to this in the chapter about God.

Having set forth the general characteristics of the human condition, we must now analyse what exactly makes up man's metaphysical condition.

¹ P 1473.

² HR 465.

³ HR 688.

⁴ Co, October 1944, II, 1528.

⁵ LAA 240.

⁶ *Les meurtriers délicats, La Table ronde*, 1948, I, 1833.

⁷ MS 168.

⁸ E 836.

⁹ HR 465.

¹⁰ J 361.

II. The Condition of Being Exiled

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In their proper sense, the words "*étranger*" (foreigner) and "*exilé*" (exile) mean the state of one who is outside one's country of origin. This meaning can be found in Camus's works.¹ But Camus mainly uses these words in a transposed philosophical sense : they define the state of a man in a world which is not his own, and which does not respond to the needs of his rational nature. "In a universe suddenly deprived of illusions and lights, man feels like a foreigner. This exile is without recourse since it is deprived of the memories of a lost place or hope of a promised land."²

It appears that one of Camus's personal experiences pertained to the origin of this conception of the relationship between man and the world, which is defined in terms of foreignness and exile. He travelled in many foreign countries, and this experience made him understand that "I am not from here or from elsewhere. And the world is only an unknown landscape where my heart no longer finds support. 'Foreigner' — who can know what this word means ?"³ The war caused him to meet a large number of deportees, foreigners and exiles⁴ outside their natural environment. In them he saw the image of the entire human condition. Thus, speaking of the Second World War, he says : "... The atmosphere of threat and exile in which we lived. At the same time I would like to extend this interpretation to the notion of existence in general."⁵

For Camus, man's exile is metaphysical, psychological and social. As a consequence it involves solitude and abandonment.

1. Metaphysical Exile

Man is essentially a being-in-the-world. In his right situation he would be able to maintain fitting relations with the world, according to the needs of human nature. In a universe natural to him, familiar associations and kith and kin should play a part. Man would thus be at home and would find his happiness there. In Camusian terms, the actor would fit in with his decor, and there would be no question of divorce between man and the world. But this is not the case. The real situation contradicts the right situation. "I ask for that which brings about the condition which I recognize as my own ; I understand [p. 36] that this implies darkness and ignorance."⁶ Men are "strange citizens of the world, exiled in their own country."⁷ The world is anti-natural : "the earth would be a splendid cage for animals who were not the least bit human."⁸ Man is "a blind creature, wandering in the darkness of a cruel and limited

¹ Cf. *Mal* 172.

² *MS* 101.

³ *C I*, 201.

⁴ *C II*, 107.

⁵ *C II*, 72.

⁶ *MS* 128.

⁷ *HR* 664.

⁸ *C II* 134.

condition."¹ There is misunderstanding everywhere.² Man is in quarantine, as in *La Peste* ; he is at grips with evil, like the inhabitants of Oran who smother their moans in the closed world of the city.³ Exile is the theme of *Le Malentendu*,⁴ of *La Peste*,⁵ of *L'Exil et le Royaume*,⁶ and partly of *L'Été*.⁷ Men are presented there as strangers to happiness ; they declare themselves "frustrated by creation,"⁸ shown as a "broken world."⁹ With his troubles, man pays for a condition that is not his own. Camus proposed defining "an inexistential philosophy which does not imply a negation, but only claims to take account of 'the state of man deprived of...'" Inexistential philosophy will be the philosophy of exile."¹⁰ The discoveries of the absurd already would show man exiled from truth and permanence; nature itself gave rise to the inhuman.¹¹

2. Psychological Exile

Not only is man an exile in the universe, but he is also a stranger to himself. He is body and soul, but the body is a stranger to the soul, and the soul to the body ; thus we have "the ridiculous divorce that separates the soul's excesses from our body's perishable joys. The absurd is that the soul of this body goes so inordinately beyond the body."¹² The paralyzed ill person perceives the parts of his body as strangers to each other.¹³ If you slap a cadaver, the body does not make the soul react.¹⁴

Our personal identity escapes us ; there is always "this tender and inhuman something that lives inside me."¹⁵ We cannot define ourselves totally : "it is probably true that a man remains unknown to us forever and that there is always something irreducible in him that escapes us."¹⁶ The gap gets bigger when it concerns ourselves : "If I try to catch hold of my own identity, that I have made sure of, if I try to define it and sum it up, it is no longer anything but water that flows through my fingers. I can draw one by one all the faces it can assume, and all those that others have given it — this education, this origin, this passion or these silences, this greatness and this baseness. But one does not add up faces. Even my own heart will always remain undefinable for me. The gap between the certain knowledge that I have of my existence and the basis that I try to provide for this assurance, will never be filled. I

¹ HR 562.

² Cf. *Mal* 175.

³ *P* 1304.

⁴ Cf. *C* II, 63, 59.

⁵ Cf. *Le Domaine français*, I, 1959.

⁶ Cf. *Prière d'insérer*, 1957, I, 2039.

⁷ Cf. *E* 867.

⁸ HR 435.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *C* II, 106.

¹¹ Cf. Chapter I, I, 4.

¹² *MS* 203.

¹³ Cf. *EE* 15.

¹⁴ *MS* 109.

¹⁵ *EE* 23.

¹⁶ *MS* 105.

shall be a stranger to myself forever." ¹ [p. 37] We believe we know ourselves, yet one day discover how much we have been strangers to our lives. ²

Time also can alienate us ; it makes us discover "the stranger who, at certain moments, comes to meet us in the mirror, the familiar and yet worrying brother we find in photographs of ourselves..." ³ Space can also cooperate to make us strangers to ourselves ; for example, while on a trip : "A sheet of paper printed in our own language, or a place where we try to rub shoulders with other men in the evening, allows us to mimic, with a familiar gesture, the man we used to be back home who, from a distance, seems so strange to us." ⁴

3. Social Exile

Besides being exiles in the universe and strangers to ourselves, we are also strangers and exiles in society.

We cannot impress other people deeply : "beings always escape each other, and we escape them too ; they are without solid outline." ⁵ They often assign a character to us other than our own : "a man, if I were to believe one of my friends, always has two characters, his own and the one his wife gives him. If we replace 'wife' by 'society', we shall understand that a formula... can be isolated by the commentary that one makes about it." ⁶ If we cut the emotional ties that make us close with certain people, they become strangers again : "There are certain days when... one finds that the woman one had loved has become a stranger." ⁷ The separated characters in *La Peste*, like Rambert, "found themselves removed from both the being they could not rejoin and the country that was theirs. In the context of exile in general, they were the most exiled of anyone." ⁸ Time exiled them within themselves. ⁹ Martha, rejected by her mother, knows how exile feels. ¹⁰ Clamence, despite his contacts with the Amsterdam people, is an exile in a foreign city. It is the same with the characters of *L'Exil et le Royaume*. Camus himself experienced this social exile. ¹¹

But it is mostly history that exiles men : "we who are exiled together in hatred and despair..." ¹² Our country is beauty, and history expels it ; then we suffer from exile. ¹³ The habits, conventions and standards of societies also exile the man who does not conform, such as Meursault : "The Stranger that he (Camus) wants to depict,"

¹ MS 111.

² Cf. C I, 61.

³ MS 108.

⁴ EE 42.

⁵ HR 665.

⁶ E 861-862.

⁷ MS 108.

⁸ P 1278.

⁹ P 1276.

¹⁰ Cf. *Mal* 170.

¹¹ Cf. E 880.

¹² *Lettre* to an Algerian militant, October 1955, II, 966.

¹³ *Preface* to the German edition of *Poesies* by René Char, II, 1166.

explains Sartre, "is precisely one of those terrible innocents who are scandalized by society because they do not accept the rules of its game. He lives among strangers, but for them, too, he is a stranger."¹ And he will be condemned for not having followed social conventions : "accused of murder, he was executed for not having cried at his mother's burial."²

[p. 38] Big modern cities also are a place of exile *par excellence*. It was this that gave origin to the short stories of *L'Exil et le Royaume*.³ The city is hard on man,⁴ and it can become a desert⁵ where nothing is actually familiar any more in human contacts. Thus it is with Djémila, the absurd city that leads nowhere,⁶ or Prague with its smells of cucumber and vinegar,⁷ but mostly New York : "In New York, some days, lost at the bottom of those wells of stone and steel where millions of men wander about, I ran from one to the other, without seeing the end, exhausted, until I was only held up by the human mass that was searching for its exit. I was smothered then, and I was going to shout from panic."⁸ It is Amsterdam or Oran again.⁹ Or it is Paris too.¹⁰

Inappropriate and inhumane work contributes toward the feeling of exile : "Humanity, today, only needs and cares for techniques. Men revolt in their machines, they hold art and what it implies to be an obstacle and a sign of servitude."¹¹ "Day and night, an antlike people swarms over the smoking carcass of the mountain. Hung along the same rope against the flank of the cliff, dozens of men..."¹² The servitude of reputation exiles the writer or the artist, like Jonas in *L'Exil et le Royaume*, Camus's double.¹³

This multiform exile and agonizing strangeness are the lot of the human condition : "The first step ahead of a mind preoccupied by strangeness is to recognize that it shares this strangeness with all men and that human reality, in its totality, suffers from this distance between itself and the world. The evil that until then the solitary man felt becomes a collective plague."¹⁴

¹ *Situations I*, 96.

² *E* 1211.

³ Cf. *ER*, I, 2038.

⁴ *C I*, 212.

⁵ *C I*, 205.

⁶ *N* 61.

⁷ Cf. *EE* 39.

⁸ *E* 879.

⁹ Cf. *E* 814.

¹⁰ Cf. *E* 813.

¹¹ *E* 841.

¹² *E* 827.

¹³ *ER* 1625-1654.

¹⁴ *RR* 1685.

4. The Consequences of Exile

Because of his metaphysical exile, man is in a state of abandonment in the world ; the result of his psychological and social exile is solitude. Abandonment and solitude pervade Camus's works, where one meets such expressions as : "feeling of being abandoned and alone," ¹ and "unbearable loneliness which I can neither believe nor resign myself to." ² This is the anguish of a world without an Author and the anxiety of a society without humanity.

— Abandonment and solitude in the world. "Prisoner of the cave, I am here facing the shadow of the world." ³ Solitude and abandonment are two themes of the existentialist philosophy derived from Kierkegaard and his concept of anguish. ⁴ Anguish is not a dominant theme with Camus. On the other hand, the theme of solitude is important. The solitude that he knows is psychological, but mostly metaphysical ; in other words it is the state of man as man in an absurd universe where "the unreasonable silence of the world" ⁵ is matched [p. 39] by the unreasonable silence of God. ⁶ Man is abandoned to his own powers before the inhumanity of the world and of history, without waiting for help from a superior power, whether this be inexistent or simply ineffective. It is up to men to develop solidarity in their exile in order to form another realm (we shall come back to this in our analysis of man's behaviour in History). Camus even wonders if "language does not express, finally, man's definitive solitude in a mute world." ⁷ He experiences this solitude facing the wrong side (*Envers*) of nature ; in the Mediterranean, for example, it is an anguished fullness that rises up from the silent water when night falls. ⁸ He feels it while facing death : "One dies alone. Everybody is going to die alone." ⁹ He experiences it again during a trip, ¹⁰ which in fact is only an opportunity to become aware of the other metaphysical solitude, the one experienced in the world. Solitude is again felt in foreign cities. ¹¹ And yet man is "horrified by his solitude," ¹² "this bitter taste of solitude." ¹³

— Solitude facing men. Men secrete inhumanity, as we have seen in the section on the absurd. History shows that the brother becomes a stranger and even an enemy : "as soon as it soars up to totality, it receives its share of the most desperate

¹ C I, 19.

² C II, 189.

³ C I, 21.

⁴ Camus refused to consider himself a part of the existentialist movement (*Int.*, II, 1424).

⁵ *MS* 117-118.

⁶ Cf. C II, 45.

⁷ *Sur une philosophie de l'expression*, II, 1673.

⁸ *E* 853.

⁹ C I, 168.

¹⁰ C I, 26.

¹¹ *EE* 33.

¹² *EE* 17.

¹³ C I, 67.

solitude." ¹ If solitude in the world does not depend on man, ² solitude in History is a human responsibility ; an examination of revolutions would permit us to affirm that "man's solitude is never anything but the work of men," ³ and that "never has the individual been more alone before the machine that fabricates ties." ⁴ Whenever one withdraws from human brotherhood, one adds to the abandonment and solitude of the world : "This feeling of solitude that one experiences authentically comes perhaps from one's neglecting men and turning to that which cannot answer, whether it be oneself or some unknown power. One is always alone when one deserts man." ⁵

5. Exile and God

This "unknown power" that has just been mentioned cannot answer. Is this because it does not exist, or because it keeps quiet ? It seems that it exists, but that it keeps quiet, leaving man condemned to exile and evil. This is Martha's position in *Le Malentendu*, which was originally going to be entitled : "Budejovice (or God does not answer) ;" ⁶ while exiled, Martha rejects this speechless God : "I shall not raise up my eyes to implore heaven... Oh ! I hate this world where we are reduced to God. But as for me, who have suffered injustice, they have not done right by me ; I shall not kneel down. And deprived of my place on this earth, rejected by my mother, alone in the middle of my crimes, I shall leave this world without being reconciled." ⁷ [p. 40] The religious vocabulary of *La Peste* and *L'État de Siège* and of all the exiles speaks of "collective punishment" ⁸ and "divine curse." ⁹ The curate of Cadix affirms that God punishes mortal sin, ¹⁰ and P. Paneloux in *La Peste* has the same position. ¹¹ These explanations are unacceptable for Camus. He refutes them with the mouth of the Choir : "We are alone, with just the Plague and ourselves ! ... Brothers, this distress is greater than our offence, we have not deserved this prison ! Our hearts were not innocent, but we loved the world and its summers : this should have saved us ! The winds have failed and the sky is empty." ¹²

But if Camus rejects the religious explanation, his philosophical thought is nevertheless influenced by it. Would God be the unjust author of our exiled condition ? Because there is more to the concept of exile than there is to that of stranger. An exile is, in the true sense, he who is condemned to live outside his country for an important offence ; in transposed philosophical language, the metaphysical exile is condemned to live in a world which is not originally his. In the

¹ HR 684.

² ES 227.

³ RR 1693.

⁴ C I, 168.

⁵ *Lettre à Guy Dumur*, II, 1670.

⁶ C II, 45.

⁷ *Mal* 171.

⁸ P 1321.

⁹ *L'Incroyant et les chrétiens*, II, 373.

¹⁰ Cf. ES 207.

¹¹ Cf. P 1296.

¹² ES 227.

case of man, who would be the cause of his exile in the world ? Camus does not explicitly affirm that it is God, but some texts imply this sense ; some metaphysical rebels would attribute to God the injustice of condemnation to evil and death.

If the Camusian man is an orphan, one who has been abandoned and, more than this, condemned, the solution remains for him to ally himself with other men in order to diminish his destiny in the universe : "I am not an orphan on the earth as long as this man exists." ¹ ; God cannot fill this solitude : "God was not any good for her, except to take her away from men and make her lonely." ²

The Camusian man is a person condemned to death. We must now concentrate on this second characteristic of the human metaphysical condition.

III. The Condition of the Man Condemned to Death

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By his very nature, or in consequence of some unknown sentence, man in condemned to death. A possible title for an essay on Camus would be "The World of the Condemned." ³ Camus's personal life was dominated by death, which illness made him aware of very early : "the sensation of death, which was already familiar to me... Having a presentiment about death simply by seeing a handkerchief with blood on it." ⁴ His taste for life was stimulated by death : "All my horror of dying keeps up my eagerness for living." ⁵ His artistic work is filled with it : "In the world of being condemned to death, which is ours, artists bear witness to that which, in man, refuses to die." ⁶ And he affirms that the truly tragic work of art "is entirely inspired by [p. 41] death." ⁷ His writings revolve around death in all its forms : suicide, murder, and capital punishment, and everything that leads up to it : wars, acts of violence, dictatorships, and injustice.

1. The Order of the World : Death

That "the order of the world is determined by death" ⁸ is a reality which is reflected in *La Peste* and *L'État de siège*, the former being a symbol of man's metaphysical condition and the latter of his historical condition. The world is the place where one witnesses "being put to death, which is universal," ⁹ it is said there.

¹ C II, 288.

² EE 17.

³ Rachel Bepaloff, *Esprit*, January 1970.

⁴ C II, 89.

⁵ N 64.

⁶ Allocution *Le Témoin de la liberté*, November 1948, II, 406.

⁷ C I, 120.

⁸ P 1323.

⁹ ES 196.

L'Homme révolté also defines the human situation : "The general death penalty defines man's condition;" ¹ and again : "this condition is determined by the general death penalty ;" ² and also : we are in the "world of those condemned to death. " ³ Caligula has only one long cry of indignation against this congenital misery of which he has become aware by the disappearance of his sister. ⁴

2. The Anguish of Death

Men are pursued by the "fear of death." ⁵ Camus or his characters have the following expressions for death : it is "the supreme abuse," ⁶ "the final disaster," ⁷ "the last decline," ⁸ "an accident," ⁹ "a horrible wrench," ¹⁰ "a horrible and dirty adventure," ¹¹ and "the last failure." ¹² This is why men are afraid of it. Refuting the arguments in favour of the legalized death penalty, in *Réflexions sur la guillotine*, Camus observes that the instinct for life is the most profound : "Being deprived of life is certainly the supreme penalty and should arouse in them (criminals) a decisive dread. The fear of death, rising up from the darkest depths of his being, devastates him ; the instinct for life, when it is threatened, goes crazy and struggles in the worst anguish... (It is) one of the most mysterious and powerful incentives in human nature. ¹³ Camus's texts on the anguish of death are numerous. ¹⁴ *L'Étranger* develops the idea that death is inherent to human life. ¹⁵ One cannot escape from it, since it arrives irremediably : "There is a unique fatality which is death, apart from which there is no other fatality." ¹⁶ And everybody dies alone — which increases the drama : "one of the atrocious prerogatives of the human condition is to die alone." ¹⁷ One is "without defence against death," ¹⁸ and it terminates life without the possibility of return. ¹⁹

¹ HR 436.

² HR 508.

³ HR 509.

⁴ Cf. *Cal* 16.

⁵ C II, 128.

⁶ MS 168.

⁷ C II, 293.

⁸ HR 425.

⁹ C II, 146.

¹⁰ *Mal* 160.

¹¹ *N* 63.

¹² C II, 50.

¹³ RG 1032.

¹⁴ C I, 92 ; C I, 156 ; C II, 128, 259, 243.

¹⁵ Cf. *Étr* 1206.

¹⁶ C I, 171.

¹⁷ Cf. *EE* 35.

¹⁸ *N* 74.

¹⁹ RG 1035.

3. The Absurdity of Death

Death was one of the discoveries of lucid man that made him deduce the general absurdity of the world. It is in contradiction with [p. 42] his natural desire to live : "This idea that 'I am,' my way of acting as if everything had meaning, ... all this is denied in a dizzying manner by the absurdity of a possible death." ¹ It withdraws from life, which is the only value, and "the more life is exalting, the more absurd is the idea of losing it." ² Don Juan's love only comes to an end in the ultimate contradiction which is death. ³ One runs towards death, as love does ; ⁴ even men's works are doomed : "Nothing of the conqueror remains, not even his opinions. At the end, despite everything, there is death ;" ⁵ it is just as irreparable for the comedian, ⁶ and for any creator in general : "The creator's death... closes his experience and delivers him from his genius." ⁷

Death is also absurd because it does not distinguish between good and evil ; it is fatality *par excellence*. ⁸ It is also absurd because it does not lead to anything. Camus is always consistent on this point : no immortality ; even when he imagines God it is without human immortality. ⁹ This is the certainty of a "death without hope." ¹⁰ "The absurd clarifies this point for me : there is no tomorrow," ¹¹ "nothing else is vanity... except the hope for another life." ¹² *L'Étranger* sometimes wishes for another life, but he admits that this is just as much a matter of indifference to him as wishing to have a better built nose. ¹³ Death is useless and without a future ; ¹⁴ it is a "sleep without dreams... a long sleeping." ¹⁵ Above all, Camus affirms this certainty of the non-existence of immortality, and he always maintains it : "I do not like to think that death leads to another life. For me, it is a closed door. I do not say that it is a step that has to be taken, but that it is a horrible and dirty adventure." ¹⁶ In the face of death, even believers can lose faith, ¹⁷ or call themselves Christians without believing in an after-life. ¹⁸ Besides, believing in another life would be a sin : "If there is a sin against life,

¹ MS 140.

² MS 140.

³ MS 154.

⁴ C II, 325.

⁵ MS 167.

⁶ MS 162.

⁷ MS 190.

⁸ HR 458.

⁹ C II, 21.

¹⁰ C II, 50.

¹¹ MS 141.

¹² MS 153.

¹³ *Étr* 1209.

¹⁴ C II, 68.

¹⁵ *Mal* 160.

¹⁶ *N* 63.

¹⁷ C I, 53, 213.

¹⁸ *Ms* 188.

then it is perhaps not so much in despairing of this life as in hoping for another one." ¹

Also absurd is the death of Camus himself, as Sartre points out. ² "The last end, waited for but never hoped for — the last end is contemptible." ³

4. Death and God

The texts by the rebels that Camus cites and the affirmations made by Camus himself are explicit : God is the author of death. There is a turning-around here : God is no longer inexistent, but he exists and is the cause of this injustice, and he remains silent in the face of death. Here it is no longer a matter of God's inexistence, but of his silence and injustice : "Since the order of the world is determined by death, perhaps it is better for God that people do not believe in him but struggle with all their strength against death, without raising [p. 43] their eyes to heaven, where he remains silent." ⁴ Caligula remarked that everyone is condemned to death ; he tries to create a contrary order, but, not succeeding, he would like to imitate the authors of this condition of death : "There is only one way to become the equal of the gods : it is enough to be as cruel as they are, ⁵ and he sets out to kill in turn : "I have taken on the stupid and incomprehensible face of the gods. ⁶ God is like Zeus : if a dove falls onto a rock, he creates another so that the number will be complete. ⁷ All the rebels that Camus tells about accuse God of this maliciousness or indifference, and conclude he is unjust or non-existent. Can one speak, then, of God's "grace" ? Camus states his position in his *Carnets* : "Grace ? We should serve justice because our condition is unjust, as we should add to happiness and joy because this universe is unhappy. Likewise, we should not condemn others to death since others have condemned us to death. The physician, as an enemy of God, struggles against death." ⁸ It is not necessary to cite all the rebels of History whose revolt Camus shares. We shall mention them again in the section about revolt against God. ⁹ Let us recall the Romantics' argument in the face of death : "Death is (with sin) Satan's child... Fatality excludes value judgments. It replaces them with a 'That's the way it is,' which excuses everything, except the Creator, since he is uniquely responsible for this scandalous state of affairs." ¹⁰ Since God has no usefulness, men must take over for him. But will they succeed better with their nihilism ? They try to "commit evil, out of nostalgia for an impossible good," ¹¹ like Caligula ; "this black spirit of evil that irritates innocence thus gives rise to a

¹ N 76.

² Cf. J.-P. Sartre, *Les Critiques de notre temps et Camus*, Garnier, 1970, pp. 171-172

³ MS 157.

⁴ P 1323.

⁵ Cal 67.

⁶ Cal 69.

⁷ C II, 22.

⁸ C II, 129.

⁹ Cf. Chapter III, II, 3.

¹⁰ HR 458.

¹¹ HR 459.

human injustice parallel to divine injustice. Since violence is at the root of creation, deliberate violence will answer it." ¹

We have dealt with the problem of death in a special section, because of its importance to Camus. However, it is a part of the problem of evil in general, which we shall take up as the last characteristic of Camus's account of man's metaphysical condition.

IV. The Condition of Man Delivered to Evil

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Evil is the central problem for Camus, posing the problem of the existence of God. It is not dealt with directly in the works on the absurd, ² but is included in the works on revolt. Less intent on finding a metaphysical explanation for evil, Camus seeks rather the way to behave when faced with evil. We shall follow the distinction established in his *Diplôme d'études supérieures*, ³ which is found again in the contents of his more mature works: "Again it is necessary to distinguish... natural evil (the misery of our condition and the tragedy of human fate) and moral evil, i.e. sin." ⁴ This distinction is also present [p. 44] in the works of Augustine, whom Camus admired. ⁵ Therefore this is a distinction between metaphysical evil, which is independent of our will, and moral evil, but only as the latter is necessarily present at the very source of human will.

1. Metaphysical Evil

Metaphysical evil exists throughout the world and in man. For Camus, it means above all the absence of unity and understanding, even before being physical or psychological evil.

a) The Absence of Unity

Good and evil are defined in terms of unity and division. ⁶ We have "learned to say that there is good and evil, that good is unity and evil is dismemberment, that we are only going towards this good without being sure of reaching it, and that, in appreciating man's limitations, we should be compassionate and bear witness to our ignorance." ⁷

¹ *Ibid.*

² Cf. *MS* 140.

³ *PA*, II, 1224-1313.

⁴ *PA* 1297.

⁵ Cf. *CI*, 179.

⁶ This shows the influence of Plotin, one of the philosophers that Camus studied.

⁷ *HR*, manuscript, *Notes et variantes*, II, 1660.

— Camus's personal life suffers from this absence of unity : "I am far away from the good, and I am thirsty for unity. This is irredeemable ;" ¹ "There is anarchy and a frightful disorder in me ;" ² "I can deny everything of that part of me that lives on uncertain nostalgia, except this desire for unity." ³ One can understand that this can lead to death : "There are certain hours when I do not believe that I can bear contradiction any longer. When the sky is cold and nothing in nature keeps us alive... Ah ! perhaps it is better to die." ⁴

— The world is under the sign of division. "Inside it and outside it, man can discern from the very beginning only disorder and the absence of unity," ⁵ "the fundamental concern is the need for unity," ⁶ and "insurrection against evil remains, above everything else, a demand for unity." ⁷ We are in a world where dispersion is the rule ; ⁸ we can refute everything in the world except chaos and anarchy. ⁹ Nostalgia for unity was the drama of the absurd, ¹⁰ and reason is incapable of restoring the unity between itself and the world. ¹¹ When men want to remake the world, it will be under the sign of unity : "It is... right to say that man has the idea of a better world, But 'better' does not mean 'different,' it means 'unified.' This fever which lifts the heart above a shattered world, from which, however, it cannot detach itself, is the fever for unity. It does not lead to a mediocre evasion, but rather to the most obstinate demand." ¹² In the name of this need for unity, men want "the final unification of the world," ¹³ as with Communism, for example, even if it is at the price of the destruction of life and liberty. We shall see it in the historical condition of man : "The need for unity, deceived by Creation, must be satisfied by all means within a microcosm. The law of power never has the [p. 45] patience to reach the empire of the world. It is necessary to mark its boundaries, without delay, even if it must be surrounded by barbed wire and observation posts." ¹⁴ Even art would like to create a unified world. ¹⁵

— Man is also divided psychologically, morally and ontologically. We have seen that this is a discovery which makes man lucid and makes him conclude on the absurd. ¹⁶ Man is incapable of unifying his knowledge, the world and himself. His

¹ C II, 74.

² C II, 303.

³ MS 136.

⁴ C II, 183.

⁵ *Int., Revue du Caire*, 1948, II, 381.

⁶ C II, 57.

⁷ HR 509.

⁸ C II, 19.

⁹ MS 136.

¹⁰ MS 110.

¹¹ Cf. MS 136.

¹² HR 666.

¹³ HR 592

¹⁴ HR 452-451.

¹⁵ HR 659.

¹⁶ Cf. Chapter I, I, 4, b.

psychological life is divided, and his acts follow one another without his being able to make a synthesis. "No man can say what he is," ¹ nor can he make an account of what he is worth : "When a man is thirty years old, he should know what his place in life is, realize exactly what his faults and qualities are, recognize his limitations, and foresee his shortcomings — or simply be himself." ² There is nobody who does not do everything he can to "find the formulas or attitudes that would give his existence the unity that it lacks." ³ And then there is this "nauseating disgust for disunity in other people." ⁴ These are also divided : "Noticing these existences from outside, one lends them a coherence and a unity they could not have in reality, but which seem evident to the observer. He only sees the summit lines of these lives, without taking into consideration the details that corrode them. Thus we turn these existences into a work of art." ⁵ Arriving at the absurd, a man sees that "The true problem, even without God, is the problem of psychological unity... and interior peace. He also sees that the latter is not possible without a discipline that is difficult to reconcile with the world." ⁶

b) The Absence of Explanation

In view of his intelligence, man has a natural right to expect explanations. Want of explanation is therefore the worst evil to befall the intelligence. "In the eyes of the rebel, what is lacking in both the world's sadness and its moments of happiness is the principle of explanation." ⁷ The suffering of innocents is a scandal : "if it is right to strike down a libertine, one cannot understand children's suffering ;" ⁸ "A child's suffering is not in itself revolting, but rather the fact that this suffering is not justified. After all, sadness, exile and confinement are acceptable when medicine or good sense convinces us they are." ⁹ Following Dostoevsky, Camus takes up this problem of the suffering of innocents. In *La Peste*, he gives a poignant description of young Othon's death. ¹⁰

One of the discoveries of the absurd was that we are strangers to truth. On the one hand, intelligence develops man's dignity and differentiates him from other beings : "It is intelligence that makes [p. 46] me different from the rest of creation." ¹¹ But, on the other hand, as soon as intelligence faces reality, there is a divorce : "I want everything to be explained to me, or nothing. And reason is impotent before this heartfelt cry. The mind that is aroused by this need searches and finds only contradictions and foolishness. What I do not understand is without reason. The world

¹ E 861.

² C II, 138.

³ HR 665.

⁴ C II, 135.

⁵ HR 664.

⁶ VII, 19.

⁷ HR 509.

⁸ P 1402.

⁹ HR 509.

¹⁰ P 1392.

¹¹ MS 136.

is peopled by irrational men. Only to the person whose unique significance I do not understand is the world immensely irrational. If I could say only once, 'that is clear' everything would be saved."¹ But no, it is in vain, and we must contend with this "absurd sorrow of living without understanding."² For Camus, the meaning of the universe is not given, as was seen in his conclusion on the absurd. Does meaning exist, or does it not? It does not make any difference if one cannot know it. "I do not know if this world has a meaning that goes beyond it. But I do know that I do not know this meaning, and that it is impossible at this moment for me to know it. What does a meaning beyond my condition mean for me? I can only understand in human terms."³ The same goes for the meaning of existence, "the most urgent question."⁴ For Camus, therefore, the mind suffers in not being able to find the ultimate cause of everything: "The mind that tries to understand reality can consider itself satisfied only if it brings reality within the limits of thought... One could speak of spiritual happiness if thought discovered, in the ever-changing mirrors of phenomena, relationships that could unify them and sum them up in a single principle."⁵ But there is nothing of the sort.

2. Moral Evil

Experience teaches that every man is torn between good and bad, and that he is incapable of always doing the good. This presence of evil at the heart of the human will, and preceding free action, is inexplicable. Camus takes up the Pauline formula and applies it to the rebel: "Therefore the rebel can find no rest. He knows what is good, and despite this he does evil."⁶ Camus thought of writing an essay on this subject.⁷ Every man is a Jekyll and Hyde, (for example Clamence): "After long studies on myself, I brought man's profound duplicity to light. I understood then, by dint of delving into my memory, that modesty helped me to shine, humility to conquer, and virtue to oppress."⁸ Practical behaviour does not necessarily follow ethical understanding: "I have seen people act badly with a lot of morals."⁹

By nature man is also capable of good, and Camus relies on him to set right the world and History since God is incapable of this. Camus even puzzles over how one can be "a saint without God."¹⁰ 5 [p. 47] But this does not prevent him from remarking that "everyone carries the plague within himself, because absolutely nobody in the world is immune... Germs are natural."¹¹ This explains why "a lot of honest people

¹ MS 117.

² *Dédicace à René Char*, II, 1825.

³ MS 136.

⁴ MS 99.

⁵ MS 110.

⁶ HR 689.

⁷ Cf. C II, 305.

⁸ Ch 1518.

⁹ MS 149.

¹⁰ P 1427.

¹¹ P 1425-1426.

are criminals without knowing it." ¹ It is only a question of opportunities presenting themselves for the beast to be aroused : "If the power were given you.... you would see this monster or this angel that you carry within you unloose itself." ² Man can willingly do evil and we only have to look at "all men and their dirty wickedness, their untiring hatreds, and their insane lust for blood." ³ This spectacle will be treated in the section on man's historical condition. What is even more sorrowful is to do evil not meaning to : "the anguish of having increased injustice while believing that one was serving justice." ⁴ Such is the case with Tarrou : "I learnt that I had indirectly contributed to the death of thousands of men, and that I had even provoked this death by approving the actions and principles that fatally occasioned it." ⁵ Clamence even says that Christ unconsciously did evil by provoking the massacre of the Holy Innocents, and he speaks of his "innocent crime." ⁶ In order to arrive at justice and the good, it even seems that the rebel must use injustice as a means. ⁷ — If, therefore, one carries within oneself the root of evil, if "every man is a criminal without being aware of it," ⁸ where can the cause be found ?

3. Evil and God

Camus finds no answer : "We are faced with evil. As for me, it is true that I feel a little like the pre-Christian Augustine, who said : 'I looked for the den of evil and I did not leave it'." ⁹ "It seems to me that the unsurmountable obstacle is the problem of evil." ¹⁰ Hence Camus abides by his disturbing remark : "You must pay for abject human suffering and dirty yourself with it. The dirty, repugnant and viscous universe of sadness." ¹¹

a) Metaphysical Evil

Confronting metaphysical evil (absence of unity and explanation, presence of suffering and death), Camus postulates human innocence and, along with the rebels, he attributes the cause to God, "father of death and the supreme scandal." ¹² This is apparently a contradiction, since it hesitates between affirming and the denying the existence of God.

— Man's Innocence. "There is, without doubt, an evil which men engender in their frantic desire for unity. But another evil is at the bottom of this unruly movement.

¹ RG 1029.

² C I, 43.

³ ER 1615.

⁴ C II, 250.

⁵ P 1424.

⁶ Ch 1533.

⁷ Cf. Chapter III, III, 2.

⁸ HR 645.

⁹ *L'Incroyant et les chrétiens*, 1948, II, 374.

¹⁰ *Int., La Revue du Caire*, 1948, II, 380.

¹¹ C I, 231.

¹² HR 436.

Before this evil and before death, man cries for justice from deep within himself." ¹ All Camus's [p. 48] characters, and Camus himself, declare that they have not merited this exile's condition in a world subjected to death and suffering. They maintain this even though they are treated as guilty : "The evil that you did to me is too great, and too great is the evil that I did to you for either to be voluntary. In order for a man not to hate himself, he would have to declare himself innocent, and this requires boldness impossible for one man alone ; what prevents it is that he knows himself. One can at least declare all are innocent, although treated as guilty. God, then, is the criminal," ² like Caligula, who wants to imitate him and declares that all the citizens are guilty simply because they are his subjects. ³ But they protest, along with Diego : "We are innocent," ⁴ "He (God) was never right, because rightfulness... is on the side of those who suffer." ⁵

— Rejection of "Collective Guilt." While comparing Hellenism and Christianity in his *Diplôme*, Camus met up with the religious notion of "original sin" of Christian theology. According to this, an initial error at the beginning of the human race brought about discord between man and the universe and between man and his fellow men and led to imbalance even within man. In Camusian terms, this discord is called "divorce." But, in this *Diplôme*, Camus rejects this concept of "original error" as well as the necessity for grace to restore harmony : "Here divine grace is absolutely arbitrary : man should simply have confidence in God." ⁶

However, it is undeniable that this religious concept influenced his thought and that it is found underlying the philosophy of the absurd, according to which the world is in a state of sin, but without God, in Camusian terms. ⁷ The same for History : "the revolutionary spirit denies original sin. Having done so, it sinks into it. The Greek mind does not think about it and thus escapes." ⁸ "(Father Paneloux's) sermon made the idea reasonable to some people who had been unclear about it before, that they were condemned for an unknown crime to an extraordinary imprisonment." ⁹ But Rieux protests : "I have lived too long in hospitals to like the idea of collective punishment." ¹⁰

With or without God, the suffering of the innocent injustice and suffering will remain, and, "However limited might be, they will not cease to be a scandal" ¹¹ for human intelligence. This is true above all for the suffering of children, like young Othon's : "The pain inflicted on these innocents never stopped seeming to them to be

¹ HR 706.

² HR 492.

³ Cal 46.

⁴ ES 249.

⁵ ES 255-256.

⁶ PA 1298.

⁷ MS 128.

⁸ C II, 339.

⁹ P 1301.

¹⁰ P 1321.

¹¹ HR 706.

what it was in reality : namely, a scandal." ¹ Theology itself does not subtract anything away from the problem ; Christ was crushed unjustly : "Jesus is frustrated by being only one more of the innocents that the representatives of the God of Abraham tortured spectacularly." ²

[p. 49] b) Moral Evil

Although man is innocent with respect to metaphysical evil, he is both innocent and guilty with respect to moral evil ; regarding the presence of evil at the heart of his will, he is innocent, while he is guilty regarding the evil unleashed by liberty.

— Man's Innocence. It is twofold. First there is the innocence of the contrariness of his will. Why is man able to do evil ? Even as early as in his *Diplôme*, Camus was interested in Augustine and original sin as the cause of this evil : "We have already lost the freedom of '*posse non peccare*'. We depend on divine grace." ³ But he rejects this theological position, preferring that of the Pelagians ⁴ or the Greeks : "Since God is only a higher science, the supernatural does not exist : the whole universe is centered around man and his effort. If, therefore, moral evil is ignorance or error, how can the notions of Redemption and Sin correspond with this attitude ?" ⁵ Confronting deliberate evil, *Le Mythe* maintains this position of innocence by speaking more about ignorance than about error. "We would like to make him (absurd man) recognize his guilt. He feels innocent. To tell the truth, he only feels that, his irreparable innocence. That is what permits everything." ⁶ But Camus also announces here the limits of the works on revolt : "I begin here with the principle of his innocence. This innocence is formidable... Everything being permitted does not mean that nothing is forbidden." ⁷ And he linked the problem of liberty in the face of evil to the problem of God : "Before God, there is less a problem of freedom than a problem of evil. We know the alternative : either we are not free and God omnipotent is responsible for evil, or we are free and responsible but God is not omnipotent. All the subtleties of the schools have not added or subtracted anything from this double-edged paradox." ⁸ This is the position of *Le Mythe*. But *L'Homme révolté* progresses from the position of *Le Mythe* : man is responsible for the evil that he deliberately unleashes, and his acts are not just errors, but rather his fault.

— Man's guilt. "I lived my whole youth with the idea of my innocence, in other words : with no idea at all. Today...." ⁹ "Without having any pretension to an impossible innocence, revolt can discover the principle of a reasonable guilt." ¹⁰ No

¹ P 1394.

² HR 446

³ PA 1301.

⁴ Cf. PA 1300.

⁵ PA 1226.

⁶ MA 137.

⁷ MS 149.

⁸ MS 140.

⁹ C II, 154.

¹⁰ HR 420.

one is absolutely guilty¹ or absolutely innocent.² This is the lesson of History : "Man... is not entirely guilty, since he did not begin history ; nor altogether innocent, since he is continuing it."³ Is man fundamentally good or bad ? Camus's texts go in both directions. But by and large, he says, "men are rather more good than bad,"⁴ even if "men are bad and need to be condemned."⁵ *Le Mythe* and *L'Étranger* assume a natural [p. 50] goodness : Meursault, despite the murder, is fundamentally good, and his mistake is due to the blinding sun ;⁶ absurd man is innocent, and he consents to use the consequences of his bad acts only as lessons of experience.⁷ But *L'Homme révolté* and *La Chute* bring about a transition : the former in terms of social evil, and the latter in terms of personal evil. "The enlightened centuries, as they are called, wanted to abolish the death penalty under the pretext that man was fundamentally good. Of course he is not (he is better or worse). After twenty years of our superb history, we know it very well."⁸ Camus speaks about "illusions as to the natural goodness of the creature,"⁹ and recognizes that "all told, the Gospel is realistic, although people think that it is impossible to practise it. It knows that man cannot be pure."¹⁰ For Camus, man does not become bad by contact with History, since he was bad earlier. On this point Camus is not following Rousseau. However, man is not radically bad either. Camus has so much confidence in man that he entrusts him with the task of relieving unjust God in order to restore justice in the world. The truth is that the human being is split : "This is honesty. He does evil while thinking he does good."¹¹ Therefore there is an evolution in Camus, but not to the point of being fundamentally pessimistic as to man : "I say that although I am pessimistic about the human condition, I am optimistic about man."¹²

The metaphysical condition was placed under the sign of God's injustice when he condemned man to exile, death and evil. Will man's historical condition, which we are about to analyse, be better than the metaphysical ? No. Then it will be necessary to revolt against unjust God and History ; with the rebels, decree the death and impotence of God ; and affirm values for human action based on human nature, which will play a transcendent role in a society without God. But will this be enough ?

¹ Cf. C II, 221.

² Cf. C II, 275.

³ HR 700.

⁴ P 1326.

⁵ P 1991

⁶ *Étr* 1168.

⁷ MS 150.

⁸ RG 1055.

⁹ RG 1062.

¹⁰ C II, 270.

¹¹ C II, 340.

¹² C II, 160.

B. The Historical Condition

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Man's condition throughout History is placed under the same signs of absurdity, pessimism and injustice as those of his metaphysical condition. Evil dominates here as well, generally in the form of unjust violence and murder : "I grew up, along with all the other men of my age, to the sound of the drums of the First World War, and out history ever since has not ceased to be murder, injustice and violence." ¹ It must be noted that Camus analyzes man's historical condition from the point of view of contemporary history, which has only added to metaphysical unhappiness. "Today's events do not... put a certain national existence or individual destiny in question, but rather the entire human condition." ² This epoch is "crazy [p. 51] history," ³ and "convulsion." ⁴ Camus leads off his *Homme révolté* with the metaphysical rebels against God ; Nietzsche had decreed the death of God, but "with God dead, all that remains is history and power." ⁵ The present century is an illustration of this. ⁶ What is needed is more than History.

Let us look at the nature of History, and the role that ideologies play, as well as its contents.

¹ E 865.

² *Int.*, II, 381.

³ *DS*, II, 381.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ E 855.

⁶ Cf. *Int.*, *Le Progrès de Lyon*, 1951, II, 726.

I. "History"

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The condition made by man to man takes the name of History, with Camus. Except for a few minor meanings,¹ this word is always pejorative with him : "always the same disappointment with history,"² because it is associated with men's unhappiness. The terms used by Camus denounce it : "the circus of history,"³ "the prison of history,"⁴ the "infernal world,"⁵ "a world dried up by hatred,"⁶ "the world of murder,"⁷ "the weight of history,"⁸ its "knot,"⁹ and its "thickness."¹⁰

The tragic aspect of today's historical situation is nothing new, but has become worse.¹¹ History is tragic first of all because it disturbs the relations between man and nature : "One cannot enjoy the birds singing in the evening's coolness, in this world as it is. Because it is now covered by a thick layer of history which its language must cross before it can reach us. It is deformed. Nothing of it is felt for its own sake because at every moment in the world a whole series of images of death and despair becomes attached to it. There are no longer any mornings without agony, evenings without prisons, or noons without frightful slaughters."¹² Without going as far as destructive wars, "the feeling for history has gradually covered up the feeling for nature in men's hearts... One can envisage the day when the silent natural creation will be completely replaced by the hideous, flashy human creation.... noisy with factories and trains."¹³ But the saddest thing about History is that it disturbs man himself and his behaviour : if "History is only the desperate effort of men to embody the most clear-sighted of their dreams,"¹⁴ it degenerates into "crimes of reason taking over the control of men."¹⁵ "History is made up of police power and money power opposed to the peoples' interest and man's truth."¹⁶ Man finds himself "marching through an infinity of murders to the control of the world,"¹⁷ so that "we are in a

¹ Cf. C II, 175.

² C II, 305.

³ *Conf.*, December 1957, II, 1079.

⁴ *HR* 489.

⁵ *NvNb* 334.

⁶ *Allocution*, November 1948, II, 400.

⁷ *NvNb* 351.

⁸ *Allocution*, II, 401.

⁹ *Réponses à D'Astier*, II, 363.

¹⁰ *Allocution*, II, 405.

¹¹ *Int.*, II, 381.

¹² C II, 118.

¹³ C II, 193.

¹⁴ *NvNb* 346.

¹⁵ *HR* 511.

¹⁶ *Int.*, II, 386.

¹⁷ *HR* 511.

world where you must choose to be either a victim or an executioner, and nothing else." ¹

II. Ideologies

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For Camus, the root of modern evil is to be found in reason, with its ambition to dominate the world and its justifying everything that [p. 52] leads to this : "It is a shame that we live in a time of ideologies, and of totalitarian ideologies in particular, that is to say those sure enough of themselves and their imbecilic reasoning and short-lived truth, to assume that the salvation of the world depends on their own supremacy." ² The consequence of this is that men must adopt their thinking, through force, and become "silhouettes... treated like anonymous abstractions." ³

1. False Reason

Camus distrusts philosophers and their influence on History, ⁴ including Marx and Hegel, as well as their successors who strive for "unity through the violence of despair and the furies of abstract reason." ⁵ Intelligence gives man his dignity ; but it gives him a power which, when it departs from the normal, leads to the enslavement of man to theory. "Intelligence has stooped to being the servant of hatred and oppression." ⁶ Experience shows that "every wrong idea ends in bloodshed, but it is always others' blood." ⁷ In this way, "Caligula does not say the one reasonable sentence in the play that he could have said : when one person does the thinking, everything is ravaged." ⁸ This is confirmed in the case of war, for example : "war came, and then defeat. Vichy taught us that intelligence bore the responsibility." ⁹ But Camus says more precisely : "Like everybody else, I recognize excesses of intelligence... But this is a matter of intelligence that is not good." ¹⁰ When reason errs, that means the night of dictatorships. ¹¹

2. Historical Logic

Ideology in History possesses its logic : "The logic of history, as soon as it is wholly accepted, leads history little by little, and against its highest intention, to mutilate man more and more, and to transform itself into objective crime." ¹² "Great

¹ C II, 141.

² *Allocution*, II, 401.

³ *Ibid.*, 402.

⁴ Cf. *Entretien sur la révolte*, February 1952, II, 739.

⁵ *HR, Notes et variantes*, II, 1660.

⁶ *DS* 1073.

⁷ *Réponses à D'Astier*, II, 362.

⁸ *C I*, 130.

⁹ *Défense de l'intelligence*, II, 315.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 316.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *HR* 648.

ideas and insights on history will be in the morgue within ten years," ¹ because "when one wants to unify the entire world for the sake of theory, there is no other way but to make the world as scrawny, blind and deaf as the theory itself. There is no other way than to cut the roots that attach man to life and nature." ² But Camus repeats : "What I refute is not logic, but rather an ideology that substitutes a logical succession of reasonings for a living reality." ³ An example of this type of reasoning is provided by writers who used their intelligence to justify the executioners. ⁴ The logic of History also means to want to be right at any price, even if it involves walking over corpses : "Those who claim to know everything and arrange everything end up killing everything. The day comes when they have no other law than murder." ⁵ They are [p. 53] opposite to those artists who prefer to be wrong without killing to "being right amidst silence and morgues." ⁶

3. Legitimizing Intelligence

It is inevitable that there should be violence. But it is inconceivable that violence should be legitimized rationally in the name of an ideology. Camus speaks of "the murderous vocation of intelligence," ⁷ which ends up justifying the means used for a desired end : "In the perspective of Marxism, a hundred thousand deaths are indeed nothing when this is the price that must be paid for the happiness of hundreds of millions of people." ⁸ But, however lofty the end might be, it cannot permit "slave camps under the banner of liberty or massacres justified by love of man, or predilection for being super-human." ⁹ Contemporary history offers us these illegitimate justifications : "Our era is one of private and public techniques of annihilation," ¹⁰ when "action is no more than a calculation based on results, but not of principles," ¹¹ and when "the winner is always right." ¹²

4. A Typical Ideology

Hitlerian racialism is an exemplary case of an ideology legitimized by intelligence. Any nation can claim to be superior to others, but this is "what is most contemptible and crazy in men's hearts." ¹³ Hitlerian racialism exceeded all limits and became "this stupid and criminal illness." ¹⁴ History affords no other example of a

¹ C II, 195.

² *Le témoin de la liberté*, II, 402.

³ *Entretien sur la révolte*, February 1952, II, 741.

⁴ *Réponses à D'Astier*, II, 352.

⁵ *Réponses à D'Astier*, II, 363.

⁶ *Allocution*, II, 406.

⁷ *Réponses d D'Astier*, II, 362.

⁸ *NvNb* 343.

⁹ *HR* 413.

¹⁰ *HR* 649.

¹¹ *HR* 542.

¹² *HR* 544.

¹³ *Co*, May 10, 1947, II, 323.

¹⁴ *Co*, *Ibid.*, 321.

doctrine of such total destruction that was ever able to take control of a civilized nation.¹ Its totally amoral mystique brought about a reign of efficiency and sheer success. Its principle, "only one leader, only one people meant only one master and millions of slaves."² Hitler left nothing to his credit after the collective suicide which he provoked : "For himself, for his people and for the world he meant only suicide and death. Seven million Jews assassinated, seven million other Europeans deported or killed, ten million war victims"³ were the results of his destructiveness. Camus claims to have been one of the first to repudiate such a regime, "where human dignity meant nothing and where liberty became a mockery."⁴ In short, "Hitler was history in the raw."⁵

III. The Contents of History

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"Servitude, injustice and lying are calamities... Today these calamities form the very substance of history."⁶ Men have been violated and killed ever since Cain, but our period is marked more than any other by the working of the death instinct.⁷

[p. 54] **1. Murder**

Camus begins *L'Homme révolté* thus : "There are crimes of passion and crimes of logic."⁸ Killing for passion is reprehensible but excusable ; the lover who kills can use love as his excuse : "That presupposes the power of love, and also character. Since the power of love is rare, this type of murder is exceptional and keeps the appearance of a burglary,"⁹ because the murderer finds excuse in the passions of his nature.¹⁰ What Camus protests against is rational murder : we live in "a world where murder is legitimized and human life is rated as futile,"¹¹ he says in *Ni Victimes ni bourreaux*. In *L'Homme révolté* he continues : "We live in a period of premeditation and perfect crime. Our criminals are no longer those disarmed children who plead the excuse of love. On the contrary they are adults, and their alibi is irrefutable :

¹ HR 590.

² HR 587.

³ HR 591.

⁴ SR, November 1939, II, 1380.

⁵ HR 585.

⁶ *NvNb* 350.

⁷ DS 1073.

⁸ HR 413.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ C II, 213.

¹¹ *NvNb* 333.

philosophy can be used for anything, even changing murderers into judges.¹ It is even possible to justify the murder of a child as a man's sacrifice.² Spanish bishops bless political executions,³ while politicians sitting in their easy chairs arrange them.⁴ In all these cases murder is legitimized by an idea.

For the most part revolutions find their form and their originality in a murder, and "some have, in addition, committed regicide and deicide ;"⁵ when an oppressed man rises up against his oppressor, the result is the murder of a man. Thus the revolution betrays its revolutionary origins, when "the man who hated death and the god of death"⁶ inflicts death in his turn. As long as one group does not dominate the world, it will be necessary to kill in order to dominate the world, or at least kill in order to obtain justice and freedom. Every revolution has been murderous. In certain cases, as with Netchaïev, murder has been elevated into a principle.⁷

Revolt brings a difficult problem. The rebel revolts against injustice and death. But to make them disappear, it seems that he in turn is obliged to kill. In terms of the absurd, murder cannot be rejected, whereas in terms of revolt, it is heart wrenching, because it is a matter of deciding if it is possible to kill someone, whoever he might be, whose resemblance we have just recognized and whose identity⁸ in human nature we have just confirmed. Therefore one sees that "the only truly serious moral problem is murder. Everything else follows. But what must be learnt is to know if I can kill this other man in front of me, or consent to his being killed, to know that I know nothing before I know if I can give death to someone."⁹

2. The Death Penalty

The death penalty is another type of murder, even if it is legalized. Since men are already condemned to death just by their very nature, [p. 55] other men arrogate to themselves the right to condemn people to death, thus adding historical evil to metaphysical evil. We know how much Camus abhorred capital punishment, which he combatted mostly in *Réflexions sur la guillotine*.¹⁰ Underneath the excuses of giving an example to impede the growth of the crime rate, and giving justice as satisfaction for the person who was killed, there is real murder hiding. Camus calls capital punishment a "cancer" in political life,¹¹ a social stain,¹² "administrative

¹ HR 413.

² *Int.*, II, 387.

³ *Exposé*, II, 373.

⁴ *Allocution*, November 1948, II, 401.

⁵ HR 518.

⁶ HR 649.

⁷ HR 568.

⁸ HR 685.

⁹ C II 172.

¹⁰ RG 1018-1064.

¹¹ RG 1022.

¹² RG 1024.

assassination,"¹ premeditated murder,² legalized murder,³ and "a disgusting butchery."⁴ People do not hesitate to agree on the death penalty as a regrettable necessity, which justifies killing.⁵ But, "today, I completely share Koestler's conviction : that the death penalty dirties our society, and its supporters cannot justify it."⁶ Killing in a paroxysm of passion is understandable but "what is not understandable is having another person killed after calm consideration and under the pretext of duty," as de Sade already admitted.⁷ Moreover, History admits it.

3. Lying

"Our society is built on lying. But the tragedy of our generation is to have seen, with the false colours of hope, a new lie replace the old -one ;" ⁸ people call a tyrant saviour and they say that in order for justice to be done it must involve the suppression of liberty. What characterizes our period of history is that "the dialogue, or relation between people, has been replaced by propaganda and polemics."⁹ We camouflage the true nature of things or we call them other than what they are in reality ; from this point of view, "The situation in which Socrates found himself was not without analogy to our own. There was evil in people's souls because there was contradiction in their speech, because the most common words, given several meanings, were deformed and deflected from the simple usage they were supposed to have."¹⁰ This is the curse of contemporary history, both on the level of individuals ¹¹ and on the level of society.¹² Politics justifies what is unjustifiable, and doctrines camouflage the practical consequences of their theory : "The less people understand, the better they obey."¹³ "Thousands of voices, day and night, each carrying on its own turbulent monologue, pour on the people a torrent of mystifying words, attacks, defences, and incitements."¹⁴ The metaphysical condition created a dark world, to which men add confusion. Having been a journalist, ¹⁵ Camus could certainly talk about communication media being filled with propaganda and mystification ; they convey lies and a hatred which is itself a lie : "It is instinctively silent about a whole

¹ RG 1031.

² RG 1039.

³ RG 1057.

⁴ RG 1063.

⁵ RG 1022.

⁶ RG 1024.

⁷ HR 451.

⁸ *Int.*, 11, 386.

⁹ HR 642.

¹⁰ *Sur une philosophie de l'expression*, II, 1675-1676.

¹¹ Cf. C II, 203.

¹² Cf. *A propos de l'Étranger, Commentaires*, II, 1611.

¹³ ES 222.

¹⁴ *NvNb* 401.

¹⁵ Cf. *Int.*, *Servitude de la haine*, 1951, II, 725.

aspect of man. It denies whatever deserves compassion in any man. Therefore it essentially lies about the order of things." ¹

[p. 56] **4. Violence**

The subject matter of History still is violence in all its forms. "We live in a time of wailing," ² because violence is imposed by the state and by individuals. It is institutionalized, as Camus learned during the Resistance, when, he says, "I detested violence less than the institutions of violence." ³ Under the title of "violence," we shall deal with legitimized violence and its two principal forms : dictatorship and war.

a) Legitimized Violence

It is inevitable that violence exists, just as murder exists. But it is inconceivable that violence should be justified. Whether a trial, a denunciation, an imprisonment or terror, it oppresses man, who is already sufficiently oppressed by his metaphysical condition. Once again, it is ideology that justifies it. Netchaïev was the first to make a principle of it. ⁴ One type of legitimized violence is "concentration camps and using the forced labour of political deportees. In Germany, the camps were part of the state apparatus. You cannot deny that they are part of the state apparatus in the Soviet Union. In the latter case, they are justified, it appears, by historical necessity." ⁵ They become the means of governing. Another application of violence is repression. A seizure of power is followed by bringing to bear the repressive apparatus of a government with all the might of tanks and airplanes. ⁶ An example of this is the repression in Algeria, where "methods of collective repression were used a year ago ;" ⁷ likewise Greek repression, or the Roman repression against Spartacus : "For one crucified citizen, Crassus sacrificed thousands of slaves." ⁸ Violence begets violence.

b) Dictatorship

Contemporary tyranny goes back to Nietzsche : "Nietzscheism, the theory of individual will to power, was fated to connote will to total power. It was nothing without the control of the world." ⁹ Other men, such as Hitler, took inspiration from Nietzsche's ideology, "whether this led to economic oppression or police oppression." ¹⁰ Thus it was Saint-just who proclaimed "the great principle of the

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Réponses à D'Astier*, II, 357.

³ *Ibid.*, 356.

⁴ Cf. *HR* 568.

⁵ *Réponses à D'Astier*, II, 365.

⁶ *NvNb* 339.

⁷ *Co*, May 1947, II, 322.

⁸ *HR* 520.

⁹ *HR* 487.

¹⁰ *Int.*, II, 382.

tyrannies of the twentieth century : 'A patriot is he who supports the republic *en masse* ; whoever fights against it alone is a traitor'. Anyone who criticizes is a traitor, and whoever does not openly support the republic is suspect."¹ *L'État de siège* by Camus is a play about dictatorship ; although it takes place in Spain "the condemnation that is borne there is directed at all totalitarian societies."² [p. 57] Fear and terror are the means used to keep men within the system. They characterize our period more than others : "Our twentieth century is the century of fear."³ Its technique was put into practice by Kravtchiski.⁴

Why do we live in fear ? Camus gives the reasons in *Ni Victimes ni bourreaux* : "We live in terror because persuasion is no longer possible ; because man has been handed over to history in his entirety and can no more turn toward that part of himself as true as the historical part where he finds the beauty of the world and human faces ; and because we live in a world of abstraction, of offices and machines, and of absolute ideas and messianism without nuances. We suffocate among people who believe that they are absolutely right, either because of their machines or because of their ideas."⁵ We also live in fear of war and murderous ideologies ;⁶ traditional human relations have been transformed : "Abstraction, which belongs to the world of force and calculation, has replaced the true passions, which belong to the realm of the sensual and the irrational. The ticket substituted for bread, love and friendship complying to doctrine, destiny to plan, punishment called the norm, and production substituted for living creation — these describe well this emaciated Europe, peopled with ghosts who are either victorious or enslaved to power."⁷ Our history knows no more than intimidation,⁸ which maintains the climate of fear favourable to dictatorship.

c) War

War is the ultimate in violence. Camus calls it an "absurd event,"⁹ absurd unhappiness,"¹⁰ "inexcusable slaughter,"¹¹ and "frightful hardship"¹² leading to "the reign of the beasts."¹³ It is "universal foolishness."¹⁴

Its absurdity comes from the fact that it contradicts man's most fundamental aspirations : "It generalizes the most essential absurdity of life. It makes it more

¹ HR 534.

² *Pourquoi l'Espagne*, Co, December 1948, II, 395.

³ *Le siècle de la peur*, Co, November 1946, II, 331.

⁴ HR 571.

⁵ *NvNb* 332.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ HR 642-643.

⁸ *Allocution*, II, 402.

⁹ C I, 165.

¹⁰ C I, 172.

¹¹ C I, 167.

¹² C I, 168.

¹³ C I, 170.

¹⁴ C I, 178.

immediate and more pertinent." ¹ It is perhaps a means for making History advance, but its price is too high : "War is trickery and... bloodshed, if it sometimes advances history, it leads up even more barbarousness and misery." ² Dumpcarts of blood do not justify this advance, and it is "criminal naïveté to believe still that bloodshed can solve human problems." ³ War appeals to national hatreds, ⁴ and adds to human solitude. ⁵ It "teaches one to lose everything and to become what one was not before." ⁶

What are its causes ? Perhaps the death instinct latent in man, ⁷ but mostly ideologies and power politics ; Camus denounces "the mystification that would make us believe that the politics of power, whatever it might be, can lead us to a better society where social [p. 58] liberation will finally be realized. Power politics means preparation for war," ⁸ then leads to war itself.

War has many faces. Obviously there is military warfare, also economic and ideological warfare : "The notion of revolution is replaced today by the notion of ideological war. To be more precise, international revolution cannot happen today without extreme risk of war." ⁹ Whether local or international, wars lose nothing of their tragic reality. Above all a foreseeable third world war would have consequences impossible to imagine : "Tomorrow's war would leave humanity so mutilated and impoverished that the very idea of order would become outdated." ¹⁰ Camus continues elsewhere : "it will happen that survivors of this experience will not even have the strength to be witnesses of their own agony." ¹¹ In view of this, to talk of human emancipation seems provoking. ¹²

Thus the human historical condition is no better than the metaphysical condition. Men are no better than God in History. This is why it is necessary to rebel against God and against History to assure a better fate for man. The revolt will furnish values which, based on human nature, will perhaps assure a better condition.

¹ C I, 166.

² *Lettre à un militant algérien*, October 1955, II, 964.

³ C I, 178.

⁴ C I, 172.

⁵ C I, 168.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *HR* 645.

⁸ *Réponses à D'Astier*, II, 360.

⁹ *NvNb* 340.

¹⁰ *NvNb* 342-343.

¹¹ *NvNb* 351.

¹² Cf. *Réponses à D'Astier*, II, 359.

[p. 59]

Chapter III

Revolt against the Metaphysical and Historical Condition

Introduction

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We encountered revolt in our analysis of the absurd. Along with freedom and passion revolt appeared the only valid solution to the absurd. This was explained mainly in *Le Mythe*. But we should give it the notice that it logically deserves here. After analyzing man's metaphysical and historical condition, which is characterized by injustice and absurdity, we can have only one reaction and that is revolt. Revolt creates values capable of assuring justice. "Revolt originates at the sight of unreasonableness and before an unjust and incomprehensible condition. But its blind force demands order in the midst of chaos and unity at the very heart of what flees and disappears. It cries out, it makes claims, and it wants the scandal to end." ¹ Only revolt can assure action that goes beyond the sterility and anguish created by the absurd: "To the extent that it makes an individual take part in the community struggle, and assures a condition that makes action possible, revolt goes beyond anguish... There is another side of anguish beyond eternity, and this is revolt. Instead of turning inward on itself, the mind moves forward thanks to revolt, but always within the limited circle of man's condition." ²

First of all we shall look at the nature of the Camusian revolt, then see how it applies to the metaphysical condition (revolt against God), and then to the historical condition (revolt against History).

I. Revolt

Camus offers no systematic treatise on revolt, nor on anything else for that matter. It is necessary to group the texts and synthesize them around three themes: the nature of revolt, its negative and positive elements, and revolt and revolution.

¹ HR 419.

² RR 1696.

1. Definition

In the etymological sense, Camus defines revolt as the turn-about of an oppressed person confronting his oppressor, whether man or circumstance : "The rebel, makes an about-face in the etymological sense of the term. He walked under his master's whip. Now he resists." ¹ What he seeks is equality with the oppressor, from whom he now demands a reckoning : "He even goes beyond the limit that he set for his enemy and now demands to be treated as an equal." ² The revolt of Spartacus illustrates this. ³ Actually, revolt not only means a refusal to accept a given state of affairs, but also a claim to another condition that would meet the requirements of human nature. "What is a man in revolt ? A man who says no. But if he refuses, he does not renounce : he is a man who says, 'yes', as soon as his first movement ;" ⁴ "In man, revolt is refusal to be treated as a thing and cut down to a simple story. Revolt is the affirmation of a common nature shared by all men." ⁵ Here the real contents of revolt must be explained. But before this, let us give a few synonyms for revolt : "protest," ⁶ "insurrection," "claim," ⁷ "questioning," ⁸ "insubordination," ⁹ and "resistance." ¹⁰

2. Contents

The negative and positive components of revolt are complementary and are worth nothing unless they are balanced ; otherwise it would be nihilism in either case. The negative contents refer to what denies man, and the positive contents call for affirmation of the human being.

a) Negatively : the NO

There is no abuse by the other person respecting the rights of the oppressed : "What does this 'no' consist of ? It means, for example : 'things have gone on too long', 'up to this point, yes, beyond this point, no'... In short, this no affirms the existence of a boundary." ¹¹ The other is an intolerable intrusion. "He (the rebel) poses against the order that oppresses him his right not to be oppressed beyond what he can bear." ¹²

¹ HR 424.

² *Ibid.*

³ HR 519.

⁴ HR 423. RR 1682.

⁵ HR 651.

⁶ HR 508.

⁷ HR 431, 435.

⁸ RR 1694.

⁹ HR 519.

¹⁰ C II, 178.

¹¹ HR 423.

¹² *Ibid.*

Whatever concrete forms it might take, revolt always rises up against treating man as an instrument. Man is not "capital which one can spend," ¹ nor a thing that can be used for a revolution. This is what Netchaïev wanted : "Until now no revolution put at the head of its tables of law that a man could be an instrument... Netchaïev decides that indecisive people can be terrorized or blackmailed and that trusting people can be deceived." ² Also for de Sade, pleasure [p. 61] objects should not look like people : "If man is 'a type of absolutely material plant', he can only be treated as an object, and an object of experience. In de Sade's barbed-wire republic, there are only mechanics and machinists." ³ He even went so far as to put conquered freedom in numbers. Hitler offers another example of using man against men's rights : "If a man belongs to the party, he is nothing more than a tool at the service of the Führer, a cog in the apparatus, or, if he is an enemy of the Führer, he is a product for consummation (death) by the apparatus. The irrational fervour born from revolt proposes no more than reducing whatever turns man into not being a cog, in other words, revolt itself. The romantic individualism of the German revolution finally sates itself in the world of things." ⁴ Here it is a matter of historical examples, but it is also true of the condition that God made for men, where rights are not respected : "rights... are on the side of those that suffer," ⁵ and God does not respect their right to explanation, unity and happiness. Metaphysical revolt is aimed against him, with an "idea of resistance in the metaphysical sense." ⁶

Nihilism, however, results when this protesting no is absolute ; then *no* leads to the destruction of man and the world. The long analyses of *L'Homme révolté* show it : "The nihilist is not someone who believes in nothing, but someone who does not believe in what is ;" ⁷ "Nihilism is not only despair and negation, but above all the desire to despair and to deny." ⁸ If the rebel says no, he must also affirm a yes. De Sade keeps the *no*, but only the absolute *no* of revolt." ⁹ His sweeping rejection, in the name of free expression of the sexual instinct, of everything that restricts this freedom leads him, enraged, to deny man and even nature : "De Sade ponders an attack on creation" ¹⁰ while wanting to upset its plans and crush it, just as Caligula does. Certain romantics are also driven to nihilism : "By emphasizing the power of its defiance and refusal, revolt, at this stage, forgets its positive contents... The hatred of death and injustice thus leads at least to an apology for evil and murder, if not to their practice." ¹¹ Camus concludes his analyses by asserting that "when revolt is

¹ HR 568.

² HR 569.

³ HR 453.

⁴ HR 589.

⁵ ES 256.

⁶ C II, 178.

⁷ HR 479.

⁸ HR 467.

⁹ HR 447.

¹⁰ HR 455.

¹¹ HR 458.

immoderate, it oscillates between the annihilation of others and the destruction of oneself." ¹ This is why he states the principle that revolt should also be a yes.

b) Positively : the YES

If revolt refuses whatever denies man, it also wants to "affirm man in the face of that which denies him." ² It asserts one value : "Just as there is repulsion for the intruder, there is at the same time in any revolt a man's entire, instinctive attachment for a certain [p. 62] element of himself." ³ He puts his element above everything else and proclaims it superior to life itself ; "it becomes... the supreme good." ⁴ What, then, is this value for which an individual can sacrifice his life when the occasion arises, which he feels, if only vaguely, to be common to all men ? ⁵ It is human nature and its rights. We shall analyze this more explicitly in the section on the ethics of revolt, because there it plays the role of the moral standard. Here we mention its affirmation and discovery in connection with revolt. It is discovery because the absurd was limited to the concrete individual, without reference to a nature shared by all men. "The analysis of revolt leads at least to the suspicion that there is a human nature, as the Greeks thought, contrary to the postulates of contemporary philosophy. Why revolt if there is nothing of permanent value to preserve ? The slave rises up for the sake of all men alive when he judges that, in the existing order, something is denied him that not only belongs to him but which provides common ground where all men, even the man who insults and oppresses him, experience community." ⁶ If men cannot relate to this common value recognized by all, then men will always be incomprehensible one to another ⁷ and able to treat one another like dogs. ⁸

In a way, the movement of revolt can have an egotistical dimension, but this is not of its essence, since the rebel will give his life on occasion : "He doubtless demands respect for himself, but only to the extent that he identifies himself with a natural community." ⁹ This is the case with Bielski : "To accept the world and its sufferings seemed to him, at one moment, the choice of greatness because he imagined this only meant bearing his own sufferings and contradictions. But if it also means saying yes to the sufferings of others, all at once, then his heart is not in it." ¹⁰ In this case there is an identification with the other person. The community of interest that binds one to the other people is not all that is taken into consideration in revolt ; the injustice imposed on one's adversaries can also lead one to revolt. ¹¹ Therefore it is fraternal destiny that unites men in the YES of their revolt : "In revolt, a man goes beyond

¹ HR 537.

² HR 515.

³ HR 423.

⁴ HR 424.

⁵ HR 425.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Cf. HR 435.

⁸ Cf. *Exposé*, II, 373.

⁹ HR 426.

¹⁰ HR 559.

¹¹ HR 426.

himself with other people, and, from this point of view, human solidarity is metaphysical." ¹

Nihilism can also arise from an absolute yes to man, just as if it was able to arise from the absolute NO of revolt.

— Affirming the personal self in an unconditional way amounts to rejecting other people and their right to be treated as people too. Stirner disengages himself from the God that alienates him and from the society that bullies him, ² but he ends up claiming all rights for himself and rejecting everything that stands in opposition. Yet whatever serves an individual can permit him anything, including [p. 63] crime : "Revolt still leads to a justification of crime... One must accept killing in order to be unique." ³

— Affirming a particular collectivity amounts to considering other human groupings as a way to learn more about it : "Serving humanity is not better than serving God ;" ⁴ Nazism and Communism share this principle : "Since man's salvation is not to be found in God, it must be found on earth. Since the world has no direction, as soon as man accepts this he must give it one that would lead to superior humanity," ⁵ whether this involves race or a classless society. In relation to them, Nietzsche's principle is valid : "When the ends are great, ... humanity uses another yardstick and no longer thinks of crime as criminal no matter how horrible the means employed." ⁶ Hitlerian racism and the Marxist prophetic mission agree on this.

Thus, "Saying yes to everything presupposes saying yes to murder. Besides, there are two ways of consenting to murder. If the slave says yes to everything, he also says yes to his master's existence and his own suffering. Jesus teaches non-resistance. If the master says yes to everything, he also says yes to slavery and others' suffering ; here we have the tyrant and the glorification of murder." ⁷ This is why there must be an equilibrium ; otherwise it would be murder in both cases. ⁸

c) The Equilibrium between the YES and the NO

Starting with the first pages of *L'Homme révolté*, Camus discovers the universality of murder, violence and injustice. Are these due to revolt ? "These consequences are certainly not due to revolt itself, or, at least, they do not arise except to the extent that revolt forgets its origins, grows tired of the hard tension between yes and no and finally gives way to the negation of everything or total submission." ⁹ At the end of *L'Homme révolté*, Camus makes the same observation : "Their (the rebels')

¹ *Ibid.*

² Cf. HR 473.

³ HR 474.

⁴ HR 473.

⁵ HR 487.

⁶ HR 486.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Cf. HR 50.

⁹ HR 437.

conclusions were pernicious or destructive of liberty only when they rejected the burden of revolt, fled the tension that it involved and chose the comfort of tyranny or servitude." ¹ And, in the general conclusion to *L'Homme révolté*, he says : "Art and society, creation and revolution should... rediscover the source of revolt in which refusal and consent, singularity and universality, and the individual and history are balanced in tightest tension." ²

3. The Essential Dimension

For Camus, human revolt is not relative to epochs and civilizations, even if it can be incorporated in them. But it is one of man's essential dimensions. Where there is man, there is revolt. It is given as a part of human nature. "Certainly man cannot be summarized by revolt. [p. 64] But the history of today forces us to say, because of its conflicts, that revolt is one of man's essential dimensions." ³ The reasons for which people revolt, whether the first Christians, Russian intellectuals or contemporary workers, vary according to epoch and country. ⁴ But this is of capital importance for Camus : "Revolt is the achievement of the well-informed man conscious of his rights... the always greater consciousness that the human species has had of itself throughout its experience." ⁵ In the religious realm, no problematic question or revolt is possible : all the answers are given, and myth replaces metaphysics. ⁶ But as soon as man leaves the sacred, "he is all interrogation and revolt." ⁷ Revolt and lucidity go together.

Before applying revolt to the metaphysical condition (God) and the historical condition (men and their ideologies), it is necessary to distinguish between revolt and revolution. The former is always healthy, according to Camus, whereas the latter is open to criticism when it does not respect the injunctions of the revolt from which it arose.

4. Revolution

Revolution is only the historical incarnation of metaphysical revolt. From the beginning of *L'Homme révolté*, Camus asserts that "revolution is only the logical result of metaphysical revolt, and we shall follow, in our analysis of the revolutionary movement, the desperate bloody effort to affirm man in the face of that which denies him." ⁸ In an article in *Combat*, he differentiates between revolt and revolution, where

¹ HR 508.

² HR 676.

³ HR 431.

⁴ HR 429.

⁵ HR 430.

⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁷ HR 430.

⁸ HR 515.

thought evolves into action.¹ Let us see what revolution consists of and what its different types are.

a) Nature

On the negative side, a revolution is not a reform : Changing the property system without changing the government is not revolution but reform.² Nor is revolution a simple movement of revolt which suddenly changes yet remains "an incoherent witness."³ One gives a jump and is repressed, and that is all there is to it. Nothing follows. On the positive side, "Revolution... starts with an idea. To be more precise, it is the insertion of the idea in the historical experience, while revolt is only the movement which leads from the individual experience to the idea. Whereas the history, even the collective history, of a movement of revolt is always one of an engagement without factual results and of a vague protest that involves neither systems nor reasons, a revolution is an attempt to model the act upon an idea and to shape the world within a theoretical frame. This is why revolt kills men while revolution destroys both men and principles at the [p. 65] same time."⁴ In *Ni victimes ni bourreaux*, Camus gives a more precise definition : "Ideally, revolution means a change in political and economic institutions that can bring about more freedom and justice. Practically, revolution means the combination of historical events, often unhappy, that leads to this happy change."⁵

b) Types

Revolutions can be national or international, temporary or definitive.

In a series of articles grouped together under the title of *Actuelles I*,⁶ Camus speaks about international revolution. In our time, in order to establish a new international order,⁷ first there must be a "worldwide taking-over of power :"⁸ "The revolution will come about on an international scale, or not come about at all."⁹ It would be accomplished by "the creation of an international order that (would) finally bring the lasting structural reforms by which the revolution is defined."¹⁰ Camus proposed practical suggestions such as an international democracy, collectivisms, and an international code of justice.

The definitive revolution is impossible to bring about. However, only this could finally change the institutions capable of making justice reign in the world : "If there

¹ Cf. *Co*, September 1944, II, 1526.

² *HR* 515.

³ *HR* 516.

⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵ *HR* 338.

⁶ "*Ni victimes ni bourreaux*", II, 331-352.

⁷ *NvNb* 342.

⁸ *NvNb* 340.

⁹ *NvNb* 339.

¹⁰ *NvNb* 347.

were a revolution only once, there would indeed be no more history," ¹ because "the definitive revolution... would stabilize everything in heaven and on earth." ² "While waiting for this accomplishment, if it should ever happen, men's history is, in one sense, the sum total of their successive revolts." ³ Governments are replaced by turns and become subject to revolution, because of the innate imperfection of man and his political institutions. Revolution, as such, by striving for unity and justice in the world, would fulfill history ; while waiting, it always remains unachieved. Camus's goal in *L'Homme révolté* is precisely to "rediscover, in a few revolutionary facts, the logical order, illustrations and perennial themes of revolt," ⁴ and not to rewrite the historical description of the revolutionary phenomenon or its concrete expressions. His objective is more philosophical than historical.

Let us look at the application of these basic principles on revolt to man's historical and metaphysical condition.

II. Revolt against the Metaphysical Condition

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All rebels have contested their condition in the universe, at least those great metaphysical rebels Camus analyzes in *L'Homme révolté* : "One hundred and fifty years of metaphysical revolt and nihilism have witnessed the stubborn reappearance, in different masks, of the [p. 66] same ravaged face of human protest. All of them, directed against this condition and its creator, have affirmed the creature's solitude." ⁵ What are the nature, the demands and the object of this metaphysical revolt ?

1. Definition

"Metaphysical revolt is the movement by which a man rises up against his condition and the whole of creation. It is metaphysical because it questions the ends of man and creation. The slave protests against the condition that is made for him within his state ; the metaphysical rebel protests against the condition that is made for him as a man... Metaphysical revolt considers itself frustrated by the nature of creation." ⁶ As opposed to historical revolt, it is not the individual movement of a certain man suffering under certain conditions at a certain period, but rather belongs to man as man. "Metaphysical revolt affirms nothing other than that against which man revolts, and that is essentially the human situation." ⁷ With Camus, the word

¹ HR 517.

² *Ibid.*

³ HR 516.

⁴ HR 517-518.

⁵ HR 508.

⁶ HR 435.

⁷ RR 1695

"metaphysical" designates either the rebelling subject (man as man) or the object of the revolt (the world's order or God). "Metaphysical" is opposed to "historical." The latter refers to revolt to the extent that it is directed at the condition made for man in the course of time.

2. Demands

What does metaphysical revolt want? What it does not find in the human condition: order, justice, unity and comprehension. What is noble is not revolt itself but rather what it demands.¹ What does it demand? "Revolt originates at the sight of unreasonableness, in view of an unjust and incomprehensible condition. But its blind force lays claims to order in the midst of chaos and to unity at the very heart of that which flees and disappears. It cries out, it makes demands, and it wants the scandal to stop and whatever was previously written relentlessly on the sea to be settled. What it cares about most is change."² There is therefore a double dimension: "At the same time, one rejects the human situation and one aspires for happiness."³

— The Demand of justice. The metaphysical condition was unjust for man in subjecting him to death and all other types of evil. The metaphysical rebel "contrasts the principle of justice in himself with the principle of injustice that he sees at work in the world. Therefore he wants nothing other, at first, than to resolve this contradiction and, if he can, to bring about a united reign of justice, or, if he is pushed too far, of injustice. While waiting, he denounces the contradiction."⁴ "Initially, metaphysical revolt was only a protest against [p. 67] the lie and crime of existence."⁵ Despairing of divine justice, man chose to serve human justice: "We have chosen to take the responsibility for human justice along with its terrible imperfections, only caring to correct it by a desperately maintained honesty... This is the language of a generation of men raised in the spectacle of injustice, unacquainted with God, and loving man and resolved to serve him, at odds with an often unreasonable destiny."⁶ In the name of this justice "man can denounce the total injustice of the world and then claim a total justice that he alone will create."⁷

— The Demand for Unity. In his analyses, Camus notes that the metaphysical rebel's primary demand is for unity. "The movement of revolt appears... as a claim for clarity and unity. The most elementary kind of rebellion expresses, paradoxically, a yearning for order."⁸ This metaphysical rebel "rises up against a broken world in order to make a claim for unity... Protesting against a condition left unfinished by death and broken up by evil, metaphysical revolt reflects the desire for a happy unity

¹ HR 509.

² HR 419.

³ RR 1695.

⁴ HR 435.

⁵ HR 486.

⁶ Co, October 1944, II, 1536-1537.

⁷ HR 661.

⁸ HR 435.

in opposition to the suffering of living and dying." ¹ In the conclusion of his research on metaphysical revolt, Camus finds that "in all the cases that we have met, the protest is aimed every time at whatever, in creation, is dissonance or unintelligibility or disruption of continuity.

Essentially it is an endless claim for unity. Rejection of death and desire for permanence and clarity are the incentives for all these follies, sublime or puerile," ² which were able to inspire the rebels in their search for unity.

Revolutionaries, by their actions or ideas, strive for this unity, even at the price of crime. For de Sade, the demand for unity, though tricked by the nature of creation, will be satisfied in the microcosm of his castles. ³ For Dandies, "the unity of the world that is not made with God will try in the future to turn itself against God." ⁴ For Nietzsche, "the world moves aimlessly, lacking a final cause. Therefore God is useless, since he wants nothing... Deprived of divine will, the world is equally deprived of unity and finality." ⁵ In their frantic desire for unity, people will even eliminate all limits on human action. ⁶ Without going to this extreme, the point of departure is justified: "Struggling against death amounts to claiming a meaning for life and to fighting for rules and unity... The war against evil remains, above all else, a demand for unity." ⁷

Artists and their artistic work also provide a moving witness to man's only dignity, the revolt against the human condition. ⁸ The art of revolt, to which Camus devotes about thirty pages in *L'Homme révolté*, ⁹ has no objective other than this same demand for unity: "In any revolt there can be discovered the metaphysical demand for unity, the impossibility of achieving it, and the fabrication of a [p. 68] substitute universe. Revolt, from this point of view, is the fabricator of the universe." ¹⁰ The novel, especially, aims at correction of the world, and "this correction aims first at unity and hence expresses a metaphysical need. On this plane the novel is primarily an exercise of intelligence that gratifies a nostalgic or rebellious sensibility." ¹¹ All of Camus's work is in line with this principle. Sculpture tries to bring the disorder of gesture into the unity of a great style. ¹² The same is true for painting.

¹ HR 435-436.

² HR 509.

³ HR 452.

⁴ HR 471.

⁵ HR 476.

⁶ Cf. HR 470.

⁷ HR 509.

⁸ MS 190.

⁹ HR 655-680.

¹⁰ HR 659.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² HR 660.

Therefore, "political action and creativeness are two faces of the same revolt against the disorders of the world. In both cases, one tries to give unity to the world." ¹ It is up to man to put order in a condition that has none. ²

3. Its Object : God

Metaphysical revolt first aims at the condition of man given over to evil and death, ³ but through it directly addresses its Author. "At the same time that he rejects his mortal condition, the rebel refuses to recognize the power that makes him live in this condition. ⁴

Certain questions must be asked concerning the God of revolt, just as about the God of the absurd. Does he exist for the rebel ? What is his nature ? Why is he rejected ? If the Author of evil is rejected, what behaviour should man, left alone to face evil, adopt ?

a) The Existence of God

The absurd man denied God from the very beginning. What about the rebel ? Two considerations obtain, the history of metaphysical revolt and metaphysical revolt itself.

— Camus analyzes the history of metaphysical revolt in *L'Homme révolté*. One can note three points. First, the rebel explicitly concedes God's existence while only questioning his ability to act. Then, reflecting on God's impotence, he concludes that God does not exist. Finally, however, nostalgia for God induces him to seek God even while denying him. Let us look at the texts.

"A revolution is always directed against the gods — beginning with Prometheus's. It is really an uprising against destiny — for which tyrants and bourgeois puppets are only pretexts." ⁵ But, "at the same time that he rejects his mortal condition, the rebel refuses to recognize the power that makes him live in this condition. The metaphysical rebel therefore is surely not an atheist, as one could believe, but perforce a blasphemer. He simply blasphemes at first in the name of order, in denouncing God as the father of death and the supreme scandal... The history of metaphysical revolt therefore cannot be confused with the history of atheism. But from a certain point of [p. 69] view, it can be confused with the contemporary history of religious feeling. The rebel defies more than he denies." ⁶ What he wants is not to suppress God, but rather to speak to him, on equal terms, in a dialogue that is not the least bit courteous, in order to demand justice in his metaphysical condition. ⁷ But the rebel goes further : "His uprising against his condition takes form in a preposterous

¹ *Allocution*, II, 404.

² *Int.*, 381.

³ Cf. *HR* 508.

⁴ *HR* 436.

⁵ *C I*, 106.

⁶ *HR* 436.

⁷ *HR* 437.

expedition against heaven to bring back a king-prisoner whose dethronement will first be decreed, then his condemnation to death. Human rebellion ends up in metaphysical revolution." ¹ Then men will seek to establish justice with their own strength, ² and unity without God, ³ even if that cannot be brought about without dreadful aberrations because, as we have seen in the section on the absurd, "an intelligence without God, which has put an end to him, looks for a god in that which denies intelligence." ⁴ They would like to be rivals of God ⁵ and his imitators in murder. ⁶

— As for metaphysical revolt itself, the situation is different. "Revolt affirms... that all superior existence, on its own level, is at least contradictory." ⁷ In *Remarque sur la révolte*, Camus declared that this was so. ⁸ Why ? Because to suppose a superior existence while simultaneously contesting it would be to involve this superior being in the same humiliating adventure as man, it would be to affirm his vain power as being equivalent to our vain condition, and it would be to take him from "his timeless refuge in order to engage him in history, very far from the eternal stability he could find only in the unanimous consent of all men," ⁹ which they would refuse to give him. Thus God would be "also integrated in an absurd condition in relation to us. Throughout revolt, which is considered as a first truth, the experience of God is contradictory." ¹⁰ What puts God in doubt within metaphysical revolt is not that man can deny him, but rather man can suppose something other than God, that is, not just the limit that man could impose on him, but also what is inside this limit : man himself. ¹¹ What are the motives that lead metaphysical rebels to affirm either the ineffectiveness of divine action or the inexistence of God himself ?

b) The Injustice of God

God is recognized as being responsible for the universal injustice of the human condition, which has been subjected to evil of all kinds. The argument used by the rebels is the metaphysical argument of evil, presented under the ethical form of injustice : "As soon as man submits God to a moral judgment, he kills him within himself... One rejects God in the name of justice." ¹² Camus is very sensitive to this idea of justice ; he groups the claims of the rebels that he [p. 70] analyzes around it. But while observing these analyses, one notices that the way they are presented reminds one of Dostoevsky, who is so dear to Camus : "Even if God existed, Ivan would not surrender himself to him, because of the injustice done to man. But a

¹ *Ibid.*

² *HR* 465.

³ *C* II, 57. *HR* 471, 592.

⁴ *N* 85.

⁵ *HR* 463.

⁶ *HR* 468.

⁷ *HR* 436.

⁸ *RR* 1694.

⁹ *HR* 436. *RR* 1694.

¹⁰ *RR* 1694.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *HR* 472.

longer consideration of this injustice and a more bitter flame transformed the 'even if you exist' into 'you do not deserve to exist', and then 'you do not exist'.¹ If evil is necessary to the divine creation, then the creation and its author are unacceptable : "Ivan does not come back to this mysterious God, but rather to a higher principle, which is justice. He begins the essential enterprise of revolt which is to substitute the realm of justice for the realm of grace. At the same time, he begins an attack against Christianity."² The other rebels can be more explicit, but they rejoin this position."³ However, they keep the same nostalgia for Dostoevsky as Kirilov : "He feels that God is necessary and that he has to exist. But he knows that he does not exist and that he cannot exist."⁴ But what is the nature of God for the rebels whose concept Camus adopts ?

c) The Nature of God

It is of major importance to emphasize that the God of the metaphysical rebels is neither first nor last the god of the philosophers, but rather the God of the Christians ; all the rebels analyzed by Camus, including Camus himself, are Westerners living since the eighteenth century,⁵ and they are Europeans who have felt the influence of Christianity.

— He is not a mythical god, as with the primitive Greeks,⁶ nor the metaphysical god of Aristotle, the first cause and the unmoved over, nor the pantheistic *spiritus mundi*.⁷ According to Camus, "What appeared strange to them was the idea of innocence as opposed to guilt and the vision of all history reduced to the struggle between good and evil. In their universe, there are more mistakes than crimes, the only definitive crime being immoderation."⁸ The ancients believed in nature, and Greek destiny was a blind power to which one submitted, as one submits to a natural force : "Revolting against nature amounts to revolting against oneself. It is like beating one's head against a wall. The only coherent revolt, then, is suicide."⁹

— The rebels address a personal god. "Revolt, after all, can only be imagined as being against someone. Only the notion of a personal god, as the creator and therefore responsible for everything, gives meaning to human protest."¹⁰ Epicurus and Lucretius come to this understanding :¹¹ "A god who neither rewards nor punishes, a deaf god, is the rebels' only religious idea."¹² Lucretius trembles before the injustice

¹ HR 510.

² HR 465-466.

³ Cf. HR 448, 476, 468, 708, 493, 458.

⁴ MS 183.

⁵ Cf. HR 438.

⁶ Cf. HR 438, 439.

⁷ Cf. PA 1279.

⁸ HR 440.

⁹ HR 439.

¹⁰ HR 440.

¹¹ HR 440-441.

¹² HR 441.

dealt to man, rejects unworthy and criminal gods, and [p. 71] opens the first attacks against divinity in the name of human suffering : "Revolt can personally demand an accounting from the personal god. As soon as he reigns, revolt begins, with the fiercest determination, and pronounces the definitive no." ¹

— But the modern rebels' attacks are mostly directed at the God of the Bible, and more precisely the Christian God, who claims to be a good Father. "The Old Testament God has known an unexpected fortune. Blasphemizers paradoxically bring back to life the jealous God that Christianity wanted to drive out of history forever. One of their most daring audacities was precisely to make Christ himself join their camp, by stopping his story at the top of the cross with the bitter cry that precedes his agony. Thus the unappeasable face of a god of hatred was maintained, just as the rebels conceived it. Even up to Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, revolt was only directed against a cruel and capricious divinity... Dostoevsky, by his imagination and Nietzsche, by the facts of his life, inordinately extend the field of revolted thought and ask for a reckoning from the god of love himself." ²

Camus participates in the tradition that he describes. For *La Peste* he collects a series of quotations from the Old Testament, ³ describing God as a judge and jealous revenger who sends famines, wars and plagues to punish men. ⁴ *L'État de Siège* shows the same "great, terrible God" ⁵ whose face is frightful, ⁶ and the personified plague indiscriminately strikes the good and the evil and reveals "the decorated God, destroyer of everything, who is decidedly devoted to dissipating the old delights of a too delightful world." ⁷ Caligula represents the god's stupid and criminal face. ⁸ What God is reproached for is his lack of discernment : "a god without recompense or punishment," ⁹ and "children's deaths... mean divine arbitrariness," ¹⁰ an arbitrariness which prefers, without any convincing motivation, Abel's sacrifice to Cain's. ¹¹ God is indifferent to the German victories. ¹² The God of death is especially blamed ¹³ at the same time as the God who is deaf to men's cries of distress. Man is in exile and God does not answer, ¹⁴ God gives him the deaf happiness of stones, ¹⁵ he remains silent at

¹ HR 443.

² HR 445.

³ Cf. C II, 66.

⁴ The representative of this God is P. Paneloux, at least in the first phase.

⁵ ES 191, 192, 211, 225.

⁶ ES 300.

⁷ ES 247.

⁸ Cal 67.

⁹ HR 441.

¹⁰ Int., II, 380.

¹¹ HR 445.

¹² Cf. LAA 243.

¹³ Cf. C II, 129.

¹⁴ Mal, Comm., I, 1789.

¹⁵ Mal 179.

the time of the plague,¹ and man remains alone to face an unknown power that cannot answer.²

d) Christ

Only Christ has the sympathy of the rebels and of Camus himself. He tried to solve the rebels' two principal problems, evil and death, by taking them upon himself: "Neither evil nor death is attributable to him any more, because he is torn and he dies."³ But as soon as he is subjected to the criticism of reason, his divinity is denied. Suffering [p. 72] again becomes men's lot: "Jesus, frustrated, is only one more innocent person... The abyss that separates the master from the slaves opens up again and revolt still cries before the walled-up face of a jealous God."⁴ Camus, who does not share the Christians' faith in their lord, only keeps the human aspect of his life and teaching. Christ embodied the human drama in its absurd condition to the highest degree.⁵ His adventure was useless and he died as a victim of God. Camus presents contemporary replies concerning this in his works.⁶ He said in an interview the day before he received the Nobel Prize: "I do not know why I should not confess the emotion that I feel for Christ and his teaching."⁷ He retains the human content of his Gospel with respect to his vision of human nature,⁸ and he sees in it a morality of greatness.⁹ "If this God is capable of touching you, it is because of his human face. The unique limitation of the human condition makes it impossible for him to leave behind his human aspect."¹⁰ But Camus does not believe in his resurrection,¹¹ cuts short his life with his cry of abandonment on the cross,¹² and doubts his promise of a future life,¹³ nor does he admit the universality of his redemption, since he died only for his believers: "There are some of us in this tormented world who have the feeling that if Christ died for certain people, he did not die for us."¹⁴ Camus's only reproach to Christ is that he did not look after the damned.¹⁵ The business of looking after people without grace in a world that is no longer Christian belongs to men of good will who can be found everywhere, and whose most excellent model will be presented by Camus in the saint without God.

¹ Cf. *P* 1323, 1467.

² *Lettre à G. Dumur*, March 1944, II, 1670.

³ *HR* 444.

⁴ *HR* 446.

⁵ Cf. *MS* 184.

⁶ Cf. *MS* 174.

⁷ *Le Figaro littéraire*, December 1957, *HR*, *Comm.*, 1615.

⁸ Cf. *C* II, 270.

⁹ Cf. *C* I, 206.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Interview de Stockholm*, II, 1615.

¹² Cf. *C* I, 206.

¹³ *Réponses à Jean-Claude Brisville*, II, 1923.

¹⁴ *Co*, January 1947, II, 287.

¹⁵ Cf. *C* II, 110.

Interview de Stockholm, II, 1615. After having seen Camus's position with regard to God and Christ, we are able to analyze his position on Christianity and Christians.

e) Christianity and Christians

This position is qualified. He distinguishes between the original content of Christianity and the content of historical Christianity, whose institutionalized and politicized Church seems to have broken with its origins. Camus rather stops with the latter. When he speaks about religion, it is always in pejorative terms ; with certain exceptions, his conception of historical Christianity, the Church, religion and Christians is generally pessimistic.

— To begin with, he has an undisguised admiration for what is superior in Christianity, that is, Christ and his saints.¹ In Christ, Christianity offers a model of a magnificent man and a set of moral principles of extraordinary grandeur ;² it teaches us to become God ;³ it is not an easy doctrine : "Each person's instinctive desire is to have paganism for himself and Christianity for others."⁴ Camus also [p. 73] says, "I shall never depart from the idea that Christian truth is illusory ;"⁵ he recognizes that it is necessary to set off the Gospel from the excesses of the Church.⁶ In regard to Christians, Camus also makes distinctions. First of all there are examples like Leynaud,⁷ the Dominican Brückberger,⁸ and Simone Weil ;⁹ but there are also examples like Father Foucault,¹⁰ the chaplain of *L'Étranger*,¹¹ the murderous chaplain,¹² and the curé of *L'État de Siège*,¹³ who, however, do not make one forget other instances of Christians tortured in their faith by the problem of evil.¹⁴ This is why Camus has a character in *La Peste*, following a sermon by Paneloux, make this reflection : "Christians sometimes talk like this, without ever really thinking it. They are better than they seem."¹⁵ After all, one must not judge Christianity on the basis of Christians : "If one were to judge democracy on the basis of democrats or liberty on the basis of those that defend it... But, finally, there were also Franco's bishops."¹⁶ The obstacle here is that Christians turn away people from Christianity. Like so many

¹ C II, 31.

² C I, 206.

³ Cf. C II, 127.

⁴ C II, 318.

⁵ *Exposé*, II, 371.

⁶ Cf. C I, 29.

⁷ Introduction aux *Poésies posthumes*, 1947, II, 1472.

⁸ Cf. C II, 102.

⁹ Cf. C II, 246.

¹⁰ Cf. C II, 246.

¹¹ Cf. *Étr* 1207.

¹² Cf. *LAA* 230.

¹³ Cf. *ES* 226.

¹⁴ Cf. C I, 123.

¹⁵ *P* 1321.

¹⁶ *DHR*, II, 1703.

other thinkers, Camus aims his criticism at "the Christianity that numerous Christians have discouraged us from loving." ¹

— In regard to Christian religious practice, Camus always remembered, for his literary work, the example provided by Christians in his early youth : a religion of the old and infirm, burdened with ridiculous habits. ² "Man is a religious animal... This religion as old as man" ³ turns away from life ; Camus repeats this often : "It relieves of the weight of his own life." ⁴ An immortality is proposed, to the neglect of the present life, but an eternity of joy does not compensate for human suffering, even if religion holds a reassuring prophecy. ⁵ Nowhere in Camus can one find a young or healthy man devoted to religion. It only causes weakness : "I send the priest to him every day in order to weaken him." ⁶

— As for historical Christianity, Camus finds that it humiliates man : "It is easier to help a person by providing a favourable self-image than by always presenting his faults. Normally everybody tries to live up to his best self-image, and this can be paralleled in the fields of education, history, philosophy and politics. For example, we are the product of twenty centuries of Christian imagery. For two thousand years, man has been presented a humiliating image of himself. Here is the result. Who can say what we would be if these twenty centuries had preserved the ancient ideal with its beautiful human face ?" ⁷ For Camus, Christianity is basically pessimistic about man, as we have seen. ⁸ It teaches that desires should be mortified : "Christianity also wants to suspend desire. But, which is more natural, it sees a mortification there." ⁹ Christianity has slandered Greek values for two thousand years ¹⁰ by cutting off man from the [p. 74] world and from his own body : "Modern madness originated with Christianity turning man away from the world. It reduced him to himself and to his history... At the end of two thousand years of Christianity, the body has rebelled. Two thousand years were needed before people could expose themselves naked on the beach." ¹¹ What Camus most reproaches in Christianity is the introduction of its conception of history ; he sees a strange relationship between Communism and Christianity : "For Christians, Revelation comes at the beginning of history. For Marxists, it comes at the end. Just two religions." ¹² All churches, divine or political,

¹ *Rencontres avec A. Gide*, November 1951, II, 1120.

² *EE* 16, 17.

³ *C II*, 254.

⁴ *MS* 210. *N* 63.

⁵ *P* 1402.

⁶ *C I*, 25.

⁷ *C II*, 16.

⁸ Cf. Chapter II, A, I, 3.

⁹ *N* 69. *C I*, 54.

¹⁰ Cf. *C II*, 336.

¹¹ *C II*, 164.

¹² *C II*, 240.

claim the eternal for themselves,¹ and often revolutionaries are only devotees of a theory who enter a political party in order to turn it into a church.²

— As for the Christians themselves, starting with the Pope, who should speak an everyday language in his encyclicals and clearly denounce ideologies,³ or with the Spanish bishops who bless public executions,⁴ they should all begin to follow Christ's principles,⁵ practice charity,⁶ and take care of the tormented souls that do not share their faith.⁷ Along with them, Christ agonizes in palaces and sits enthroned at bank windows.⁸ "Oh ! cry, Jesus, for your 'bank of love is bankrupt'." ⁹ This has turned Christianity into an agent of evil : "What I protest in Christianity is that it is a doctrine of injustice." ¹⁰ "Historical Christianity answered this protest against evil only by announcing the Kingdom, and then eternal life, which demand faith. But suffering uses hope and faith ; then it remains alone, and without an explanation. The crowds at work, tired of suffering and dying, are crowds without God. Our place is to be at their side, far from doctors, be they old or new. Historical Christianity puts off, until after history, the curing of evil and murder, which, however, are suffered within history." ¹¹ "If, in order to go beyond nihilism, it is necessary to come back to Christianity, it is possible to continue the movement and go beyond Christianity with Hellenism" ¹² in order to recover man's dignity. Camus uses *Les Justes* to recreate a community of justice and love within a common solidarity in the face of evil. What, then, is the conduct of the man of good will when he confronts evil ?

4. The Conduct of Revolt in the Face of Evil

Since God can do nothing against metaphysical evil, it is up to men without God to substitute for him. Because of the fact that some contemporary societies have taken their distance from the sacred, people have embarked on "the incredible business of simultaneously rethinking the world and recreating man... The man of revolt is a man ejected from the sacred and committed to demanding a human [p. 75] order where all the answers will be human." ¹³ When one confronts evil, one must do as Rieux does with illness : struggle against it. ¹⁴ Let us look at the conduct of one who confronts metaphysical and moral evil.

¹ MS 167.

² C II, 277.

³ *Exposé aux Dominicains*, II, 372.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 373.

⁵ Cf. C II, 133.

⁶ Cf. C II, 231.

⁷ Cf. C II, 129-130.

⁸ C II, 294 ; *DHR*, II, 1703.

⁹ *Jehan Rictus*, May 1932, II, 1198.

¹⁰ C II, 112.

¹¹ *HR* 706.

¹² C II, 233.

¹³ *RR* 1688.

¹⁴ *P* 1327.

a) Facing Metaphysical Evil

Man is incapable of changing the order of things ; "There is only one useful action, the one that would remake man and the earth. I shall never remake men." ¹ But one must act as if. ² "Perhaps we cannot prevent this creation from being one in which children are tortured ;" ³ evil is like the plague, encountering it one is "beaten from the beginning," ⁴ it is always "an interminable defeat ;" ⁵ Paneloux also states that "no earthly power and not even... men's vain science can make you avoid it." ⁶ However, measures are still possible in terms of thought and activity.

— In terms of thought, the dignity of man — "the only animal who refuses to be what he is" ⁷ — forces man to maintain a state of scandal before his conscience and to "protest against the universe of unhappiness." ⁸ In the face of evil, "man's only watchword is revolt. ⁹ He must retain his power to scorn death and to draw human grandeur from it, ¹⁰ to protest ferociously till the end, ¹¹ and die unreconciled. ¹²

— In terms of activity, metaphysical evil is irreparable, but Camus proposes to diminish the effects of evil : "Revolt ceaselessly clashes against evil, from which it gathers new strength. Man can master within himself everything that might be evil. He must repair everything in creation that can be evil. After this, children will still die unjustly, even in a perfect society. With his greatest effort, man can only propose to diminish the world's suffering arithmetically. But injustice and pain will remain, and however limited they might be, they will still be scandalous." ¹³ Man meets disorder and the absence of unity within himself and outside himself. "It is up to him to put as much order as possible into a condition that has none." ¹⁴ Rieux's position is exemplary : "comforting men and, if not saving them, doing them as little harm as possible and even sometimes some good." ¹⁵ Camus takes this position again for himself : "I, along with some others, know what must be done, if not to diminish evil, at least not to add to it... We can reduce the number of tortured children," ¹⁶ even if we cannot bring it to pass that child will not die. Human solidarity should strengthen

¹ MS 166.

² Cf. E 827.

³ *Exposé aux Dominicains*, II, 374.

⁴ P 1392.

⁵ P 1324.

⁶ P 1297.

⁷ C II, 259.

⁸ LAA 240.

⁹ C II, 69.

¹⁰ C I, 168.

¹¹ C I, 71.

¹² MS 139.

¹³ HR 705-706.

¹⁴ *Int.*, II, 381.

¹⁵ P 1425.

¹⁶ *Exposé aux Dominicains*, II, 374.

in this struggle : "as you know, what I hate is death and evil. And whether you like it or not, we are here together to endure them and fight them." ¹

[p. 76] b) Facing Moral Evil

When we face moral evil, rooted in the will, we have the same feeling of impotence as when we face the evil of the universe. "Whatever we do, immoderation will always hold its place in the heart," ² we shall always carry within ourselves our crimes and our punishments, ³ we shall do evil thinking we are doing good. ⁴ However, we do have power over the evil done freely. In a negative sense, "We all carry within ourselves our crimes, our punishments and our devastations. But our task is not to release them throughout the world, but rather to fight them within ourselves and others. Revolt.... is part of the principle of this fight." ⁵ In a general way, we should "not add to the profound misery of our condition an injustice that may be purely human. ⁶ In a positive sense, our task is to assure "the conditions that make it possible for each man to be the only person responsible for his own happiness and destiny." ⁷ Likewise it is "to add to the sum total of our actions a little good that will partly compensate for the evil that we have cast into the world." ⁸ Man is a prey to passions, and "his only virtue will be, when he has plunged into the darkness, not to yield to its dizzying effect, or, when he has been chained to evil, to drag himself obstinately towards the good." ⁹ He must hold in check his possibilities for evil ¹⁰ and "refuse to be a part of the scourge," ¹¹ and this is true for the time in which we live and the men who surround us. ¹² Every man of good will should be able to say : "I shall have pleaded, as I ought, in the name of my work and in the name of my family, that men's atrocious suffering be diminished from this very moment." ¹³

We have just considered the revolt against God and the metaphysical condition. We should consider the revolt against the historical condition before taking up ethics as such, which is based on this revolt.

¹ P 1398.

² HR 704.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ HR 689. C II, 340.

⁵ HR 704.

⁶ *Co*, October 1944, II, 1528.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ RG 1055.

⁹ HR 689.

¹⁰ *Int.*, *Le Progrès de Lyon*, II, 727.

¹¹ P 1426.

¹² HR 414.

¹³ *Réponses à D'Astier*, II, 363.

III. Revolt against the Historical Condition

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With God's throne overturned, men want to win, by means of their own capabilities, the unity and justice they did not find in God.¹ "Since man's salvation is not made in God, it must be made on earth."² All the rebels have sought to construct a purely earthly kingdom where the government of their choice would reign. "Rivals of the Creator, they were logically driven to remake the creation on their own account. Those who refused, for the world they had just created, any other ruling force than desire and power, tended to suicide or madness and sang about the apocalypse."³ The kingdom of grace is not replaced by the kingdom of justice,⁴ but it is "the reign of history that begins and, identifying himself with his only [p. 77] history, man, unfaithful to his true revolt, dedicates himself to nihilist revolutions... which, while rejecting all morality, desperately search for the unity of the human race through an exhausting accumulation of crimes and wars... Whatever was God's, in the future will be rendered to Caesar."⁵ A new injustice is added to divine injustice, and "man's crime will continue to correspond to divine crime."⁶ This is why man must revolt anew against history and its components, in the name of the values that are faithful to true revolt.

1. Revolt against History

To reject History means to assume certain principles in whose name we refute history. Revolt, history and revolution cannot be taken as absolute values. They are only means to make man progress, not instruments of enslavement.

a) History and Values

"My good (*L'Homme révolté*) does not deny history (a negation that would be devoid of meaning), but only criticizes the attitude that tries to make an absolute of history."⁷ Certain values are needed to direct it: "History without any value to transform it, is ruled by the law of efficiency. Historical materialism, determinism, violence, the negation of any liberty that does not conform with efficiency, and the world of courage and silence are the legitimate consequences of a pure philosophy of history."⁸ The logic of History, when totally accepted, leads to "mutilating man more

¹ HR 437.

² HR 487.

³ HR 508.

⁴ HR 510.

⁵ HR 540.

⁶ HR 448.

⁷ *Lettre*, June 1952, II, 762.

⁸ HR 690.

and more and to transforming itself into objective crime."¹ What is the role of History ? "History, necessary, insufficient, is... only an occasional cause. It is not the absence of value, nor value itself, nor even the material of value. It is the opportunity, among others, with which man can experience the still confused existence of a value which can help him judge history. Revolt itself promises it to us."² There are some values superior to History : "There is history and there is something else, simple happiness, the passion of human beings, and natural beauty. These are the roots that history ignores,"³ — as well as art : "Art, at least, teaches us that man cannot be summarized only by history and that man also finds reason for being in the order of nature... Rebels who want to ignore nature and beauty are condemned to relegating the dignity of working and being from the history that they want to make."⁴ But mostly there is Man, who is the only transcendent value of History. We shall see this in the section on ethics.

[p. 78] b) Revolution and Values

Camus distinguished between revolt and revolution. The latter often has a pejorative meaning for him, because it is historically inclined to forget values and lead to nihilism. Its objective is to insert, in time and place, values which exceed it and in whose name it originates. It cannot, any longer, become an absolute : "If revolution is the only value, it demands censure all the same ;"⁵ "when revolution is the only value, there are no longer any rights, indeed there are only duties. But by an abrupt overturn [of government] and in the name of these duties, one takes all the rights."⁶ When revolution is left to itself, its principles are nihilism and History in its pure state. "In order for revolution to be creative it cannot waive a moral or metaphysical rule which would balance the historical frenzy. It doubtlessly has only a justified disdain for the formal and mystifying morality that it finds in bourgeois society. But its madness had consisted in extending this disdain to every moral claim. At its very origins and in its deepest forces there is found a rule which is not formal and yet can serve it as a guide."⁷ This rule is human nature.

¹ HR 648.

² HR 651.

³ *Réponses à D'Astier*, II, 368.

⁴ HR 679.

⁵ HR 568.

⁶ HR 569.

⁷ HR 653.

2. Rejection of the Contents of History

We have analyzed the contents of History : murder, the death penalty, violence, lying, and war. Now we must see the reasons that make one reject them.

a) Rejection of Legitimized Murder

Camus does not become disillusioned. It would be completely utopian to wish that nobody should kill anybody any more ; it would be utopian in a lesser degree to wish that murder should not be legitimized by ideologies any more. ¹ We must denounce the philosophies of history that proclaim that "the end justifies the means, therefore murder is legitimate." ² Murder creates a disturbance within authentic revolt, which is focussed on life for the sake of life : "logically, one could conclude that murder and revolt are contradictory." ³ But if the rebel cannot keep from killing tyrants, for example, Camus recommends two ethical principles. First, "If he cannot always refrain from killing, directly or indirectly, then he should use his fever and his passion to reduce the probability of murder around him." ⁴ After that, he should make murder keep its character of breaking the principles of revolt. In order to do that, there is no other way than to give his own life : "He who kills should pay with his life, ⁵ since, "when principles weaken, men have only one way to save them, and to save their faith, and that is to die for them." ⁶ "In terms of history, as in terms of the individual's life, [p. 79] murder is thus either a desperate exception or it is nothing. The shattering of the social order that it commits is without a future ; it is abnormal and therefore cannot be used ; nor is it systematic, as the purely historical attitude requires. It is the limit which one can reach only once, after which one must die. The rebel has only one way to reconcile himself with his murderous act, if he lets himself be carried that far, and that is to accept his own death and sacrifice. He kills and dies so that it will be clear that murder is impossible. He shows then that in reality he prefers the *We are* to the *We shall be*." ⁷ Camus sees how this applied to the Russian terrorists of 1905, with Kaliayev as their principal representative. ⁸ "The great purity of Kaliayev's style of terrorism is that, for him, murder coincides with suicide... One life is paid for by another life. The reasoning is false but respectable. (A life violated is not equal to a life given.)" ⁹

¹ *NvNb* 335.

² *NvNb* 338.

³ Cf. *HR* 685.

⁴ *HR* 689.

⁵ *.HR* 451.

⁶ *.HR* 537.

⁷ *HR* 685-686.

⁸ *HR* 518, 552, 556.

⁹ *C* II, 199.

b) Rejection of the Death Penalty

In his long *Réflexions sur la guillotine*, Camus gives two major reasons for rejecting capital punishment, which is murder legalized by society.

— First, it is necessary to denounce the death penalty because "it is the image of the human condition ;" ¹ it continues the metaphysical condition of being condemned to death, while aggravating it. "If murder is in man's nature, laws are not made to imitate or reproduce this nature. They are made to correct it." ² If the order of the world is determined by death, our role is not to continue it : "We should not condemn others to death, as we have been condemned to death." ³ Capital punishment spoils solidarity : "Capital punishment breaks the only indisputable human solidarity, the solidarity against death," ⁴ "society... pronounces in reality a simple means of elimination and breaks the human community united against death." ⁵

— Second, capital punishment must be rejected above all for the sake of the human person : "The death penalty, as enforced, and however rarely it might be, is... an outrage inflicted against man's person and body." ⁶ This is why, "in principles and established practice.... the human person is above the state." ⁷ A man is morally never absolutely guilty, and this is why one cannot claim the right to "punish guilt that is always relative by punishment that is definitive and irreparable." ⁸ Doing this takes away from the murderer any possibility of reparation for the evil he caused : "Pronouncing a definitive judgment before death and declaring the accounts closed with the creditor still alive is not any man's right." ⁹

— Camus then refutes the traditional reasons adduced for the death penalty. Using the punishment as an example to others is not effect-[p. 80] tive : "There is no connection between the abolition of the death penalty and criminality. The latter neither increases nor decreases... Murder has been punished by capital punishment for centuries, yet Cain's race has not disappeared." ¹⁰ Statistics show it. As for satisfying justice, there is no proportion between the crime committed and the murder imposed by society : "It (capital punishment) is, without doubt, murder that pays arithmetically for the murder committed. But it adds to death a regulation, a public premeditation known to the future victim, a set-up in a word, which is itself a source of moral suffering more terrible than death. There is therefore no equivalence." ¹¹ History also demonstrates

¹ HR 471.

² RG 1038.

³ C II, 129.

⁴ RG 1056.

⁵ RG 1058.

⁶ RG 1063.

⁷ RG 1061.

⁸ RG 1047.

⁹ RG 1055.

¹⁰ RG 1034.

¹¹ RG 1039.

that judgmental errors are always possible (not to mention the political intrusions and personal aversions which would condemn the innocent). But what makes this possibility so absurd is that "once the innocent person is dead, no one can do any more for him."¹

c) Rejection of Lying

Lying must be rejected in order not to extend the condition of darkness into which we were thrown by nature, to preserve the truth of the human person, and to assure authentic personal and social relations.

— "The rebel's logic is... to force himself to use clear language so that he will not aggravate universal lying."² To call an object something other than what it is adds to the world's unhappiness, because lying is really the great human misery ; this is why the corresponding human task is not to serve falsehood.³ "It is possible to live without despairing in an absurd world — it is not possible to do so in a world of falsehood."⁴ Nor is it possible to remove falsehood from the human heart, like murder or any other form of evil ; at least "the only consolation of a pure heart is to refuse privileges from it."⁵

— Man needs the truth, even if it is mysterious, elusive and always to be mastered.⁶ "If our language makes no sense, nothing makes sense. If the sophists are right, the world is mad."⁷ If the world is absurd, there is only one way for man to clarify it, the truth : "In a world of such seemingly infinite absurdity, men have to achieve greater comprehension of each other and greater sincerity. They must achieve this or perish. For this to happen, certain conditions are necessary : men must be frank (lies obscure things).⁸ Lying is always foolish,⁹ and freedom consists first in not lying, either morally or socially.¹⁰ Truth should be preferred to everything else,¹¹ since it is a sort of justice.¹² No greatness can be based on falsehood, and he who uses it betrays God (if he is a Christian) as well as his fellow men.¹³ Men need to be truthful among themselves and within their [p. 81] society, "If the words 'justice,' 'goodness,' and 'beauty' have no meaning, men can destroy themselves."¹⁴ Camus, impassioned by truth as much as by justice, knows "the only possible dialogue is between people who

¹ RG 1049.

² HR 688.

³ *Sur une philosophie de l'expression*, II, 1979.

⁴ RR 1691.

⁵ *Projet de préface à Simone Weil*, II, 1701.

⁶ DS 1074.

⁷ C II, 35.

⁸ *Int.*, *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, 1945, II, 1425.

⁹ ES 195.

¹⁰ C II, 131.

¹¹ C II, 312.

¹² C II, 312.

¹³ Cf. *Int.*, II, 1674.

¹⁴ *Sur une philosophie de l'expression*, 11, 1674.

stay in character and speak the truth." ¹ Wherever falsehood proliferates, tyranny appears and perpetuates itself ; ² it inhibits communication among individuals and among nations ; ³ "the lie, even when meant well, separates men and reduces them to futile loneliness." ⁴ "Servitude, injustice and falsehood are the scourges that spoil communication and prevent dialogue. That is why we should reject them." ⁵

d) Rejection of Legitimized Violence

Camus assumes the same principles for violence as for murder : by itself, violence is inevitable, but it is unacceptable if it becomes legitimized. It must be limited to certain cases. Non-violence should not be absolute.

— Violence is inevitable. It is inevitable first for a metaphysical reason, because it is inherent in man, independently of his free will, ⁶ and then for a historical reason, because it constitutes a necessity in certain cases : "Violence can only be an extreme limit that is opposed to other violence, for example in the case of an insurrection. If the excess of injustice makes it impossible to avoid the latter, the rebel from the beginning rejects violence serving a doctrine or a motive of the state." ⁷ However, it causes a disturbance in the rebel's conscience, so that he at first he objects to it, only later to be forced to use it. ⁸ Camus proposes a principle of reciprocal limitation of violence and nonviolence. If he disapproves of systematic non-violence, ⁹ he also disapproves of violence set up as a principle : "Systematic violence definitely destroys the living community and the being, or life, that we get from it (revolt). In order to be fruitful, these two notions should have their limits set." ¹⁰ "I believe that violence is inevitable... Therefore I do not say that all violence must be suppressed, which would be desirable but, in effect, utopian." ¹¹

— Violence which has been legitimized by an ideology is nevertheless condemnable. "I only say that any legitimization of violence must be rejected, whether this legitimization is grounded on an absolute reason of State or on a totalitarian philosophy. Violence is at once inevitable and unjustifiable. I believe that it should keep its exceptional character and be restricted to whatever limits are possible." ¹² Such is the position of principle to which he constantly reverts : keep "its character of

¹ *Exposé aux Dominicains*, II, 372.

² *Int.*, II, 726.

³ *Exposé aux Dominicains*, II, 372.

⁴ *Co*, October 1944, II, 1529.

⁵ *NvNb* 350.

⁶ Cf. Chapter II, A, IV, 2.

⁷ *HR* 695.

⁸ Cf. *HR* 690.

⁹ Cf. *HR* 696.

¹⁰ *HR* 695.

¹¹ *Réponses à D'Astier*, II, 355.

¹² *Ibid.*

rupture and crime," ¹ "its provisional character of law breaking," ² and he wants people to reflect about this before undertaking any action in today's world. ³

[p. 82] — Action is possible in the face of violence. On the level of ideas, one must denounce "the excesses of intelligence and the intellectual defects" ⁴ that legitimize them. In principle, one should recognize that in the end the sabre always conquers the sword. ⁵ On the personal level, "What can we do is not to yield to hatred, not to give in to violence, and not allow our passions to blind us." ⁶ What must be done in regard to society is to "give international approval to a code that would set precise limitations to violence: suppression of the death penalty and denunciation of indeterminate sentences, retroactive laws and the concentration camp system," ⁷ and join peace movements and world for world unity. ⁸ "The authentic action of revolt agrees to take up arms only for institutions that limit violence, not for those that codify it." ⁹

e) Rejection of Terror and War

Terror and war are two types of violence. Therefore, the same principles hold. Yet it is necessary to explain the reasons why Camus rejects them, since he attaches so much importance to them.

— Terror transforms men into things, and this is repugnant to the dignity of the human person. "It proposes the destruction, not only of the person, but also of the person's universal possibilities, reflection, solidarity and the appeal to absolute love. Propaganda and torture are direct means of disintegration." ¹⁰ Camus wrote a play to illustrate the pernicious effects of terror: *L'État de Siège*, which takes place in Spain and in which "the condemnation it contains is directed at all totalitarian societies. ¹¹ Terror is a system installed by dictators who want unity as people resign themselves to the totality that is no longer the "harmony of contrasts," but rather the "crushing of differences." ¹² But revolt teaches this involves an abuse of the principle of unit that was at the beginning a positive claim. ¹³ It is necessary to resolve the crisis on an international scale, ¹⁴ revise principles for a new *Social Contract*, ¹⁵ and "combat the

¹ C II, 214.

² HR 695.

³ Cf. NvNb 333.

⁴ *Allocution*, March 15, 1945, II, 315.

⁵ E 835.

⁶ *Allocution*, II, 315.

⁷ *Défense de l'Homme*, July 1949, II, 385.

⁸ NvNb 348.

⁹ HR 695.

¹⁰ HR 589.

¹¹ Co, December 1948, II, 395.

¹² *Allocution*, November 1948, II, 404.

¹³ HR 653.

¹⁴ NvNb 347.

¹⁵ NvNb 346.

confusion of terror with clear language ... and at the same time define the values required for a peaceful world." ¹

— War must be condemned with indignation ² and scorn ³ because it destroys men. ⁴ "Reasons must be found to survive and struggle against murder, within ourselves and others." ⁵ An opportunity must be taken to grow, ⁶ to share death with others if necessary. ⁷ Above all, solidarity must not be lost : "It is always vain to want to give up solidarity, on account of the stupidity or cruelty of others. One cannot say, 'I do not know'. One collaborates or one fights against them. Nothing is more inexcusable than war and the appeal to national hatreds. But once war has started, it is vain and cowardly [p. 83] to escape from it under the pretext that one was not responsible for it." ⁸ The best way to reject war is not found in defeatism or blind obstinacy, but rather in the struggle for an international organization ⁹ that would prevent conflicts among nations. "People too easily consent to believe that, after all, only bloodshed makes history advance and that the stronger man progresses thanks to the other's weakness. Perhaps this is inevitable. But men's task is neither to accept it nor submit to its laws." ¹⁰

Before the conclusion on revolt in general, one last point should be mentioned that is of capital importance for Camus : action within History.

3. Action within History

Even if History offers us the perceptions we have just seen, History nevertheless is one of man's dimensions, and men must become actively involved in it in order to transform it. Camus appeals both to those who believe in God and to those who believe in man : "The task of men of culture and faith is not, in any case, either to desert historical struggles or to serve whatever is cruel or inhuman about them. Their task rather is to remain firm, to help men against whatever oppresses them, and to favour freedom against the malign circumstances that surround it. This is the prerequisite by which history truly advances, innovates, and, in a word, creates." ¹¹ just as one had to remain strong in the face of the world's absurdity, so it is with the absurdity of History. "Ignoring history amounts to denying reality," ¹² and we cannot escape from it since we are up to our neck in it. ¹³ "The rebel does not deny the

¹ *NvNb* 348.

² *DHR* 1703.

³ *C I* 172, 168.

⁴ *Co*, December 1948, II, 1592.

⁵ *DHR* 1705.

⁶ *C I*, 175.

⁷ *C I*, 170.

⁸ *C I*, 172.

⁹ *Réponses à D'Astier*, II, 366.

¹⁰ *Conférence à Alger*, January 1956, II, 998-999.

¹¹ *Conférence à Alger*, January 1956, II, 998-999.

¹² *HR* 692.

¹³ *NvNb* 351.

history that surrounds him, but rather tries to assert himself within it. But he confronts it just as the artist confronts reality : he resists it without escaping from it." ¹ The rebel must struggle with history without losing solidarity, even if he has "some reasonable illusions about the outcome of the fight." ² There are always reasons for hoping and struggling. ³ But Camus is concrete and realistic : everybody should take up this struggle wherever and however he can : "The world around us is unhappy, and we are asked to do something to change it." ⁴ Everyone, whether artist or man of political action, should work to create values that elude History in order to improve it.

Conclusion

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When he leaves his revolt against God and man's History, Camus is not moved by despair, but by hope. It is not a hope in God, which he would always reject, but a hope in man, in whom he believes despite everything. One cannot help, however, noticing a certain [p. 84] disappointment that he conveys in his *Carnets* : "Who can imagine the distress of the man who sided with the creature against the creator and, while losing the idea of his own innocence and other people's, judged the creature and himself to be as criminal as the creator." ⁵ Men are not worth more than God, yet they are the only hope we can count on.

Thus Camus remains optimistic — with a relative optimism : "Man's fate is still in man's hands. He does not believe in absolute and infallible doctrines, but rather in an obstinate, chaotic yet unflagging improvement in the human condition." ⁶ This text dates from 1944, just as the following does : "What is involved is, indeed, man's salvation, not by placing oneself outside the world, but within history itself. It is a matter of serving man's dignity with the means that are still worthy of dignity in the midst of a history that is not. We measure the difficulty and the paradox of such an enterprise. We know, indeed, that man's salvation is perhaps impossible, but we say that this is not a reason to stop trying, and we say, above all, that it is not permitted to say that it is impossible before having done for once whatever was necessary to show that it was not impossible... There is only one thing left to try, and that is the moderate and simple way of honesty without illusions, of wise loyalty and of the obstinate determination to strengthen human dignity. We believe that idealism is in vain. But our idea, finally, is that when men want to use the same stubbornness and untiring energy for the service of the good that other men use for the service of evil,

¹ *HR* 693.

² *Exposé aux Dominicains*, II, 374.

³ *Int.*, July 1949, II, 383.

⁴ *Allocution*, II, 400.

⁵ *C* II, 281.

⁶ *Co*, November 14, 1944, II, 282.

the forces of good will triumph — perhaps for a very short time, but for a certain time nevertheless, and this conquest will be beyond measure." ¹

Can man save himself alone ? Yes. Camus sees that this is a work that requires patience, but recognizes it is constantly threatened. Since God will not intervene, it is up to men to improve their condition by their own powers alone. "The death of God accomplishes nothing and can happen only on the condition of preparing a resurrection" ² — the resurrection of values that Camus proposes in his Ethics.

¹ Co, November 4, 1944, II, 279-280.

² HR 481.

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Chapter IV

The Ethics of Revolt, Conduct without God

Introduction

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"I am not a philosopher. I do not believe in reason enough to believe in a system. What I am interested in is knowing how to behave and, more precisely, how to behave when one does not believe either in God or in reason." ¹

This quotation is of capital importance. At first Camus refuses to consider himself a philosopher in the sense of a speculative thinker who builds a system ; and then he assigns to reason the task that belongs to it : to orient conduct by ethics ; and finally he stipulates that this ethics should be outside the dictates of God and abstract reason. (Except for what is said about God, one would think one was reading Kierkegaard on the subjective thinker, as opposed to systematic thinker.) Rare indeed is the thinker who can "legitimately bear the title of philosopher. Despite his encyclopedic knowledge, he does not believe, as our official thinkers do, that philosophy consists in teaching the history of philosophy, but he apparently knows that it consists in using one's thought to seek the secrets of the world at the same time as the rules for behaviour, and in trying to live, as it were, what one thinks, at the same time that one tries to think out one's life and one's time correctly. ² Camus insists elsewhere : "The important thing is not... to go back to the root of things, but, the world being what it is, to know how to behave in it." ³ But the world is absurd, and without God. Can one think of an ethics without God ? Yes : "If today one could neither live nor act without God, perhaps a large number of Western men would be condemned to sterility. Youth knows it very well." ⁴

Camus attempts an ethics of revolt. He bases it on human nature and fundamental rights. He offers the virtues of courage, lucidity and hope that culminate in the heroism of the godless Saint, consisting in doing one's daily occupation well. In

¹ *Interview a Servir*, December 1945, II, 1427.

² *Hommage à Salvador de Madariaga, Le Parti de la liberté*, October 1956, II, 1803.

³ *HR* 414.

⁴ *Int.*, *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, November 1945, II, 1428.

contrast with the discord of the absurd, happiness will be considered in terms of accord with the world, with others, and with oneself. The ethics leads to a sort of wisdom without God.

[p. 85] **I. The Nature of Camusian Ethics**

1. Opportunity : Revolt

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Camus quickly discovered that the absurd leads to an impasse : it is contradictory from a logical point of view, but, above all, it offers no rule for action. This is what led Camus to consider it only as a point of departure.¹ Thus it was not the absurd that brought about the discovery of ethics by Camus, but rather revolt. Because of its importance, we must return to this point.

a) The Absurd and the Ethics of Quantity

The absurd presented an ethics of quantity and not of quality : what mattered was not living the best, but living the most.² All acts were held equivalent,³ and judgments and the scale of values were abolished for the sake of records of experiences.⁴ Freedom was certainly claimed, but the notion of limit to individual freedom in relation to others was not addressed.⁵ Freedom was turned in on itself in the enjoyment of the present,⁶ and left to be dispersed. The only concern of the absurd was the individual "I," not the communal "we." The fundamental question of the absurd was suicide,⁷ not murder. For the absurd man, there could never be a question of discourse on morality, since his simple honesty needed no rules.⁸ The absurd men given as examples were not heroes to be imitated but illustrations to look at. The absurd could not direct a man's life towards values.

b) Revolt and the Ethics of Values

Revolt makes one discover the necessity for changing one's attitude. "The absurd, considered as a rule for life, is therefore contradictory. What is surprising is that it does not furnish us with values which would decide for us the legitimacy of murder."⁹ "The absurd is contradictory in existence. It excludes value judgments in

¹ Cf. the Conclusion of Chapter I

² MS 143.

³ MS 131, 136, 143.

⁴ MS 142, 143.

⁵ Cf. MS 149.

⁶ MS 145.

⁷ MS 149.

⁸ MS 149.

⁹ HR 418.

fact, yet value judgments exist. They exist because they are tied to the very fact of existence. Therefore the reasoning of the absurd must be displaced by its equivalent in existence which is revolt." ¹ Even if the memory of the absurd remains in the later steps, ² it is no longer dominant. With revolt, "the mind, instead of turning in on itself, stirs into action, thanks to revolt, but within the narrow circle of its condition." ³

History needs values, without which it would be nihilism : "History, without the values that would transform it, is ruled by the law of efficiency. Historical materialism, determinism, violence, the negation of any freedom that does not promote efficiency, and the world of [p. 87] courage and silence are the legitimate consequences of a pure philosophy of history ;" ⁴ "if we have no values, we are, and I am simply stating a fact, in nihilism." ⁵ Nor can revolutions do without values, because then there would be no more rights, but only duties. ⁶ Revolt itself needs rules : "the claim for justice leads to injustice if it is not first founded on an ethical justification of justice." ⁷ Politics cannot do without morality : "We do not want politics without morality, because we know that only morality can justify politics." ⁸ Finally, Camus felt the need for morality in his personal experience ; ⁹ he was conscious of the effort it required. ¹⁰ "When, as an old person, one reaches a certain wisdom or morality, it is troubling to regret everything that one had done contrary to this wisdom or morality." ¹¹ In a discussion with Koestler, Sartre, Malraux and Sperber, Camus proposes that "we should say publicly that we were wrong and that there are moral values and that in the future we shall do all that we can to formulate and illustrate them." ¹² It is normal to evolve. ¹³ "In my youthful innocence, I did not realize that morality existed. I knew it in time, and I was not able to live up to it." ¹⁴ Thus morality exists, ¹⁵ and reaches into all areas of life : "if one believes in moral values, then one believes in all morality, including sexual morality. The reform is total." ¹⁶ Camus defines this morality negatively and positively.

¹ RR 1696.

² E 864.

³ RR 1696.

⁴ HR 690.

⁵ HR, *Comm.* 1620.

⁶ HR 569.

⁷ HR 614.

⁸ *Résistance ouvrière*, December 1944, II, 1545.

⁹ Cf. C I, 41.

¹⁰ Cf. Pref. *EE*, II.

¹¹ C II, 113

¹² C II, 18 *Co*, October 1945, II, 312.6.

¹³ Cf. *Int.*, *cit.*, II, 1343.

¹⁴ E 871.

¹⁵ C II, 125.

¹⁶ C III, 187.

2. The Nature of Morality

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The rebel "without knowing it, looks for morality and something sacred. Revolt is ascetic, although blind." ¹ In *L'Homme révolté* Camus does not propose a dogmatic morality, but rather the possibility and price of this morality. ² What, then, is this "morality that we need" against nihilism? ³ It is neither a formal nor transcendent morality, since God is excluded from it, but a real and altogether human morality, a morality of limitations.

a) Morality without Transcendence

The "Can one live without appeal?" to God of the absurd ⁴ still goes with the "Can one, far from the sacred and from absolute values, find the rule for behaviour? This is the question that revolt poses." ⁵ Camus often asks: "Can man alone create his own values? This is the whole problem;" ⁶ "what matters for us is knowing if man, without help from the eternal or from rationalist thought, can create his own values by himself." ⁷ In *L'Homme révolté*, the answer is affirmative: "Can one, without recourse to absolute principles, escape from a logic of destruction and recover the promise of fruitfulness and pride for humiliated man? Ten years after the discovery about [p. 88] which I have spoken (revolt), I feel that I have the right to answer: yes." ⁸ In a godless world, morality can only be directed to men: "Restoring morality by the Thou. I do not believe that there is another world where we should give 'an account of ourselves'. But we already have our accounts which must be given in this world — to all those that we love." ⁹ If man's fundamental care is unity and if God or the world is not enough to offer it, it is up to man himself to create a unity within the world: "thus a morality and an asceticism, which remain to be specified, are restored," ¹⁰ Camus added at the end of his works on the absurd. Therefore he looks beyond God for the rules and grounds of man's conduct in the world and History. Here he distinguishes the meaning of his work: "The meaning of my work: so many men are deprived of grace. How can one live without grace?" ¹¹ The works on revolt give the answer: "The rebel is a man thrown out of the sacred and dedicated to

¹ HR 509.

² Cf. DHR, 1713.

³ Co, October 1945, II, 312.

⁴ MS 143.

⁵ HR 431.

⁶ C II, 123.

⁷ Co, October 1945, II, 312.

⁸ DHR 1705.

⁹ C II, 95.

¹⁰ C II, 57.

¹¹ C II, 129.

demanding a human order in which all the answers will be human." ¹ He can formulate an ethics without appealing to rules dictated by a superior Being. Indeed, "it is not a question of traditional religious values as opposed to the values that are current in the world today," ² because we can always "find the values that we need within ourselves, at the heart of our experience or in other words : within the thinking of revolt," ³ and everybody can put his faith in human and individual values. ⁴

But Camus's morality is not without transcendence. It has a relative transcendence, in the sense that it is valid for man as man and that it is situated above History : Camus explains this in *Remarque sur la révolte* : "It is of course a question... of a transcendence which could be called horizontal in opposition to the vertical transcendence in God or in the Platonic essences." ⁵ Human nature plays this role of transcendence.

b) Informal Morality

By this term Camus means the abstract rationalist moralities which, like divine morality, are unfaithful to man ; this is the conclusion of *L'Homme révolté*, which offers us the "definition of a morality that contrasts with intellectual rationalism and divine irrationalism." ⁶ What is this formal morality ? It is an ethics which is the fruit of principles arrived at abstractly by reason or by History, which ends in denying existent man. Saint-Just's morality, for example, consumes ⁷ when it becomes a religion of virtue. ⁸ The madness of the absolute or of purity can be identified with the madness of destruction in the personal sphere ⁹ as well as in the collective sphere. ¹⁰ Marxist morality abstractly established the end of History and, in the meantime, offers power, force and efficiency. ¹¹ To the contrary, revolt [p. 89] defines against his nihilism "a rule for conduct that does not need to wait for the end of history in order to enlighten action, yet is informal. Unlike Jacobin morality, it took the part of the person who escaped from rules and the law. It opened the way for a morality which, far from conforming with abstract principles, only discovers them in the heat of insurrection and incessant movement of dispute. Nothing permits one to say that these principles have existed forever, and it does no good to declare they will last. But they do exist at the very time in which we live. Along with us, and throughout history, they reject servitude, lying and terror." ¹²

¹ RR 1688.

² .HR, *Comm*, 1620.

³ *Lettre*, May 1952, II, 751.

⁴ *Profession de foi*, II, 1387.

⁵ RR 1683.

⁶ C II, 125.

⁷ HR 532.

⁸ HR 530.

⁹ Cf. *Intr. à Chamfort*, 1944, II, 1108.

¹⁰ Hitlerism, Marxism, or any ideology.

¹¹ DHR 1703.

¹² DHR 1703.

c) Real Morality : Man

Real morality describes the positive aspect of informal morality. Properly speaking, there is no distinction. This real morality applies to two dimensions of man : actual or "concrete" man and present man. The former bespeaks opposition to the abstract morality of the Saint-Just type, and the latter bespeaks opposition to the historical vision of Marxism, which is oriented towards the man of the future. In the former case : "Virtue cannot be separated from the real without becoming a principle of evil. Nor can it be absolutely identified with the real without denying itself. Indeed, the moral value that originated in revolt is no more above life and history than history and life are above it. The truth is that it only takes on reality in history when a man gives his life for it or devotes himself to it. Jacobin and bourgeois civilization presumes that values are above history, and its formal virtue is then based on a repugnant mystification... Moderation, in the face of this irregularity, teaches us that a certain amount of realism is necessary for any morality — wholly pure virtue is murderous, and that a certain amount of morality is necessary for any realism — cynicism is murderous." ¹ In the latter case, "A value that has yet to come is... a contradiction in terms, since it can neither elucidate any action nor furnish any principle of choice as long as it has not taken form." ² And Camus turns to the Greeks : "For the Greeks, values were pre-existent to any action whose limits the values precisely defined. Modern philosophy puts these values at the end of the action. They are not, but they become, and we can know them in their entirety only at the fulfillment of history." ³ Camus looks to the Greeks in his search for a real morality of limits, the only one valid for our time.

d) The Morality of Limits

In his analyses of revolt, Camus wanted to show that action had limits within itself, and that any good and just action should [p. 90] recognize these limits exactly. ⁴ This theme of limit, proportion, equilibrium, measure, rule and relation constantly recurs with Camus. "If revolt could found a philosophy... it would be a philosophy of limits, calculated ignorance and risk." ⁵ Many factors led Camus to this underlying idea of his ethics : sports, ⁶ art, ⁷ his reflection on himself, ⁸ and History. ⁹ But it was mostly the closeness of his thought with the Greek heritage : "That this notion of limit ... rejoins a traditional value of Greek and Mediterranean thought ... hardly seems questionable to me today." ¹⁰

¹ HR 699.

² HR 572.

³ E 855.

⁴ *J. Pres.*, I, 1835.

⁵ HR 693.

⁶ Cf. *C I*, 90.

⁷ Cf. *HR* 665.

⁸ Cf. *Préf. EE*, 10.

⁹ Cf. *Conf.*, 1955, I, 1707.

¹⁰ *DHR* 1710.

Three major points about the notion of limit must be noted with Camus : its nature, its discovery on the occasion of revolt, its universal aspect, but mostly its role in the morality of revolt.

aa) The Nature of Limit

First it implies reason : "Whereas the Greeks gave the limits of reason to will, we have ended up putting the force of will at the heart of reason, which has become murderous." ¹ It is reason guided by caution : "The chorus in ancient tragedies principally gave the advice to be cautious. This is because it knows that everyone is right to a certain limit, and anyone who is unaware of this limit, through blindness or passion, is headed towards a catastrophe in order to bring the triumph of some right he believes to be his alone. The constant theme of ancient tragedy is thus the limit that must not be passed." ² The limit is an equilibrium between two extremes : "I preferred the right word which was 'moderation' in the rather classical sense as the Greeks understood it... For a mind at grips with reality, the only rule then is to stay at the place where the contraries confront each other, so as not to evade anything and to recognize the way that leads ahead. Moderation is therefore not the casual resolution of contraries. It is nothing other than the affirmation of contradiction and the firm decision to hold steady in order to survive. What I call immoderation is the movement of the soul that blindly passes the boundary where the contraries are balanced to settle finally in a drunkenness of consent, of which cowardly and cruel examples abound before our eyes." ³ Negatively, the limit is not the middle course of mediocrity : "Moderation... true moderation... has nothing to do with a certain 'comfortable moderation'." ⁴ Limit and moderation, these two notions can be associated with the idea of comfort only on the condition of playing childishly on words, and above all of withdrawing their authority from living experience." ⁵ On the contrary, "Moderation... is a constant conflict, always aroused and controlled by intelligence. It overcomes neither the impossible nor the abyss. It is balanced between the two." ⁶

[p. 91] bb) Limit and Revolt

Camus became aware of the moral importance of the limit in *L'Homme révolté* : "The central theses that one finds in this work : the definition of a limit originating with the very movement of revolt." ⁷ The same occurs in the *Défense de L'Homme révolté* : "The analysis of revolt only led me to discover the affirmation of a limit by revolt itself and, within the movement of rebellion, a passing point beyond which revolt denoted itself. This analysis... concludes that revolt, far from being a negation

¹ E 855.

² *Conf., cit.*, I, 1705.

³ DHR 1710.

⁴ *Int.*, May 1951, II, 1341.

⁵ DHR 1709.

⁶ HR 704.

⁷ *Lettre*, June 1952, II, 759.

without limits, is defined precisely by the affirmation of this limit."¹ Moderation, born of revolt, can only live by it, because "revolt is moderation, that which orders it, defends it and recreates it throughout history and its turmoils."² In studying revolt, we saw that revolt implied a *yes* and a *no* and that revolt was faithful to its origins only in the balance between this *yes* and this *no*, without which it was nihilism in both cases.³

cc) The Universality of the Limit

There is a measure of things and of man⁴ which takes on a transcendent character for Camus. He discovers this limit in metaphysics, in which being and becoming are balanced ;⁵ in physics, in which material forces make their own measure arise in their blind march ;⁶ and in science in general.⁷ He finds it again in the sphere of thought, in which the irrational limits the rational and gives it its measure ;⁸ and in the sphere of art, in which one must evolve within certain boundaries and not go beyond them.⁹ A limit also exists technology, where the necessity can be seen for establishing a limit without which we would end up in universal destruction.¹⁰ But it is mostly in morality that Camus sees the necessity for a limit.

dd) Morality and Limit

Since for Camus there is no divine Reason dictating limits to human actions, it is up to human reason to supply them, either from a personal point of view or from a collective one. "All revolt completes itself and extends itself in the affirmation of the human limit — and of a community of all men, whoever they are, this side of the limit."¹¹ This notion of limit will be applied to justice and freedom, the two principal objectives of revolt.

Values limit action and measure it. Contrary to existentialist philosophy, which places values at the end of action, Camus joins the Greeks who placed them at the beginning. Camus denies that "history by itself can furnish values which are not those of force [p. 92] alone.... that one can behave in history without appeal to any value."¹² Man needs values, and "there is not any struggle today which would not spread indefinitely if it were not braked by these same values ; messianisms confront

¹ DHR 1709.

² HR 704.

³ Cf. Chapter III, 1, 2, c.

⁴ HR 697.

⁵ Cf. HR 699.

⁶ HR 698.

⁷ HR 697.

⁸ HR 698-699.

⁹ MS 152.

¹⁰ HR 698.

¹¹ C II, 185.

¹² *Lettre*, June 1952, II, 762.

each other today and their noises melt together in the shock of empires. Immoderation is a fire, according to Heraclitus." ¹

Values, in turn, are measured by human nature. Revolt demands the fulfillment of man's desires : unity, life, freedom and justice. But these desires should be regulated : beyond them are found other people's desires, which one should not tread on. This is a recognition of revolt : "in its purest movement it never affirmed anything but precisely the existence of a limit and the divided being that we are." ² "At the same time that it suggests a common nature for all men, revolt makes known moderation and limit, which form the principle of this nature... This limit which seems inseparable from human nature." ³

Revolt should be the limit of History and revolution, while affirming human nature and its rights : "man, in turn, sets a limit to history." ⁴ History cannot be an absolute in which progress must be paid for at the expense of destroyed or injured human lives : "My true thesis : the one that says serving history for its own sake leads to nihilism." ⁵ Revolution, by engaging revolt in history, should be measured in terms of revolt : "Revolt alone has the means to ask the only question that can be made about revolution, just as revolution alone is qualified to question revolt. The one is the limit of the other." ⁶

But what, then, is this human nature on which revolt and all ethics are based, according to Camus ?

II. The Foundation of Ethics : Human Nature

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For Camus, it is not revolt that is the basis of morality ; revolt only provides the opportunity to affirm human nature which, itself, is that basis. Indeed, the oppressed person discovers, in his movement of revolt before metaphysical and historical injustices, that "he is part of the man superior to the condition made for him." ⁷ He shares this part with everybody, oppressors and oppressed : "In the movement of his revolt man becomes aware of a value with which he believes he is able to sum it all up... The affirmation of revolt spreads to something that transcends the individual." ⁸

¹ E 855.

² HR 652.

³ HR 697.

⁴ HR 652.

⁵ *Lettre*, cit., II, 762.

⁶ HR 704.

⁷ RR 1686.

⁸ RR 1683.

1. "Human Nature"

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Camus offers no explicit definition of "human nature." He asserts it and describes it as though it were "the proudest there is in man," ¹ [p. 93] "that aspect of man that will not bend," ² "man's irreducible part," ³ and "what is unique to man." ⁴ But the whole of his thought is grafted onto the Greek notion which he affirms while specifying his position in relation to German and existentialist thought : "The whole effort of German thought has been to substitute the notion of the human situation for that of human nature, and thus history for God and the modern tragedy for the ancient equilibrium. Modern existentialism pushes this effort even further and introduces in the idea of the human situation the same incertitude as in that of human nature. There remains nothing other than a movement. But, like the Greeks, I believe in human nature." ⁵

He defines human nature as the opposite of things, objects and instruments : "One can subjugate a living man and reduce him to the historical state of a thing. But if he dies in refusing this he reaffirms human nature which rejects the order of things." ⁶ If this nature is not recognized, "man is only a game for forces which one can ponder rationally." ⁷ With its empires, History presents a negation and a certitude : "the certitude of man's infinite pliability and the negation of human nature. The techniques of propaganda are useful for measuring this pliability and attempt to make reflection and conditioned reflex coincide... If there is no human nature, man's pliability is infinite indeed." ⁸ More precisely, what does human nature mean for Camus ? Man as a person and as a body.

2. Man as a Person

"We do not have the taste for murder. And the human person represents all that we respect in the world." ⁹ Camus wishes that all men would finally embody this notion of man that is the basis of morality. ¹⁰ Man is first of all his spiritual aspect : "We must... proclaim in our principles and institutions that the human person is above the state." ¹¹ All politics should respect him, and we must "support, in all circumstances, and without any reserve, the cause of social liberation considered as a

¹ HR 498.

² HR 515.

³ RR 1692.

⁴ *Allocution, cit.*, II, 405.

⁵ C II, 174. E 855.

⁶ HR 641.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ HR 640.

⁹ Co, October 1914, II, 1536.

¹⁰ *Résistance ouvrière*, December 1944, II, 1546.

¹¹ RG 1061.

means and that of the human person considered as an end." ¹ If man has so much value, it is because of his spiritual possibilities : "When one knows what man is capable of, in the worst and the best, one knows very well that it is not the human person per se that must be protected, but rather the possibilities that he embodies, and that means, ultimately, his freedom." ² Injustice in all its forms, just like terror, proposes "the destruction, not only of the person, but of universal possibilities of the person, reflection, solidarity and appeal to absolute love." ³

[p. 94] **3. Man as Body**

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The body has always had a particular value in itself, according to Camus. ⁴ Therefore human nature implies for him not only the spiritual but also the physical. Thus capital punishment is against nature, because it is "an outrage inflicted on man's person and body." ⁵ It is necessary to defend "man's carnal truth," ⁶ "save bodies," ⁷ and "save the children of this man in their bodies." ⁸ Even if the soul inordinately surpasses the body, this was an application of the divorce of the absurd, and its intellectual power will nevertheless die with it. ⁹ Artists as well as politicians should not stop "struggling to affirm, against the abstractions of history, that which transcends all history, and which is flesh, whether suffering or pleased." ¹⁰

Camus shares a double heritage as far as man's nature goes : the Greek heritage of man as body and soul, and the Christian heritage of man as flesh and spirit. The body and flesh always have a positive sense for Camus : "man should live in the circle of flesh" ¹¹ as well as in that of the spirit. He reproached Christianity for having neglected the body since the time of the Greeks.

4. Transcendence of Human Nature

Human nature is the ultimate norm for Camusian morality. Whatever action serves man is good, whatever hurts him is bad. It is the value of action, intrinsic to the action when it conforms to its norm, and for the action, destined to be embodied in the acting that will be validated or not by its participation. It is at the beginning and end of human acting. One cannot go any higher, to God, for example. This human

¹ Camus's protest about Truman's speech, September 1947, II, 1578.

² *Allocution*, December 1957, II, 1813.

³ *FIR* 589.

⁴ Cf. *N* 68-69, 74, 80.

⁵ *RG* 1063.

⁶ *RG* 1082.

⁷ *NvNb*, 333.

⁸ *E* 843.

⁹ *MS* 167.

¹⁰ *Allocution*, November 1948, II, 406.

¹¹ *C* II, 135.

nature is located above History, and this is one of Camus's fundamental affirmations : "Until now human nature has never been able to live by history alone and has always escaped from it at some point." ¹ All men participate in this nature, and from this they derive a metaphysical solidarity or oneness. ² "It is true that men do not (completely) resemble each other, and I very well know what depth of traditions separates me from an African or a Moslem. But I know just as well what unites me with them, and I know that there is something in each of them that I cannot scorn without disparaging myself." ³ Even the tyrant is related to the oppressed by this nature ; all that one can do, when confronting the Hitlerites, is, as Camus tells his German friend : "to destroy yourself in your power to avoid mutilating yourself in your soul." ⁴ All men receive their right to happiness, justice and freedom from their common human nature. The indignation of revolt is roused for "the mutual recognition of a common destiny and the communication of men among them-[p. 95] selves." ⁵ What are the rights that any man or any rebel can claim in the name of this human nature ?

III. Man's Rights

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For Camus, three fundamental rights derive from human nature. He defends them not only in his works on revolt, but also in those on the absurd : the rights to life, liberty and justice.

1. The Right to Life

It has a sacred character : "When the subject is a human life, for me it is the entire world and all of history." ⁶ Regardless of an individual's moral value, "this right to live... is the natural right of every man, even the worst." ⁷ This makes capital punishment unnatural. ⁸ Even if life is guilt-ridden or miserable, ⁹ it is still man's only natural possession. ¹⁰ Camus wants to make it respected ; he previously denounced ideologies that lead to murder ; ¹¹ he wants revolt to remain a force for life, not death ; ¹² there lies true realism : "Revolt... takes the side of true realism. If it wants a

¹ HR 640.

² Cf. HR 426.

³ Co, May 1947, II, 323.

⁴ LAA 243.

⁵ HR 686.

⁶ C II, 164.

⁷ RG 1055.

⁸ Cf. C II, 27-28.

⁹ C I, 135.

¹⁰ Cf. C I, 96.

¹¹ Cf. Chapter II, B. I, 1.

¹² C 11, 190. HR 707.

revolution, it wants it to favour life and not oppose it." ¹ Men's task is "only to be attached to the essential thing which is to save lives." ² Revolt created the disturbing problem of killing the oppressor for the sake of the greatest number of the oppressed. Camus accepted the position of the Russian terrorists of 1905 who gave their own lives as witness to their violating the principles of revolt : "They rate no idea higher than human life, although they kill for the idea. They actually live up to the idea. They end in justifying it by embodying it to the point of death." ³ Any rebel pleads for the life ⁴ that is the pride of the human condition. ⁵ The rejection of suicide and murder was made in the name of life as "the only actual value... the absolute value," ⁶ and "life as the only necessary blessing." ⁷

2. The Right to Liberty

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We have encountered liberty as a consequence of the absurd. ⁸ Here we see it as a requirement of historical revolt ; the requirement of the metaphysical revolt against God was justice. ⁹ In the absurd, man was concerned only with his individual liberty with respect to communal rules. ¹⁰ But in revolt a collective dimension is recognized : The most slandered value today is certainly the value of liberty." ¹¹ It is the principle of great revolutionary movements. ¹² It is a driving force for men : "... Liberty is the only imperishable value of history. Only for liberty have men sacrificed their lives." ¹³ While talking to French students, Camus pointed to the young Hungarian fighters : [p. 96] "These men did not lie to you when they proclaimed to you that the free mind and free work, in a free nation and within a free Europe, are the only goods on this earth and in our history that are worth struggling and dying for." ¹⁴ What is his concept of liberty in historical revolt ?

¹ HR 701.

² NvNb 349.

³ HR 576.

⁴ HR 707.

⁵ N 58.

⁶ C II, 190.

⁷ HR 416.

⁸ Cf. Chapter I, III, 3, b.

⁹ Cf. Chapter III, II, 2.

¹⁰ Cf. MS 142.

¹¹ Conf., December 1957, II, 1082.

¹² Cf. HR 515.

¹³ HR 694

¹⁴ *Message en faveur de la Hongrie*, November 1956, II, 1782.

a) The Nature of Liberty

A distinction is usually made between interior and exterior liberty.¹ The question of interior liberty is absent from Camus's work ; there is no discussion about "free will," or freedom as such ; and *Le Mythe* refuses to take up the problem.² But all of Camus's attention is drawn to men's exterior liberty within the collectivity : social liberty. "I can only have the prisoner's concept of liberty, or that of the modern individual within the state. The only liberty that I know is the liberty of the mind and action."³ Camus is interested in restoring the freedom that has been diminished in contemporary society : ... the great event of the twentieth century has been the abandonment of the values of liberty by the revolutionary movement and the progressive withdrawal of free socialism before imperialist and military socialism. Since that moment a certain hope has disappeared from the world, and a solitude has begun for every free man."⁴ "Like everybody else, I want freedom and social justice."⁵ The aspects of this freedom are : freedom of expression within society and freedom of action within civil politics.

aa) Political Freedom

"By freedom we mean a political climate in which the human being is respected for what he is as well as for what he expresses."⁶ It is a sophism to think that maintaining the morality of a nation could necessitate the disappearance of its freedoms ; this sophism must be rejected.⁷ Neither progress nor any other ideology can justify dictating conduct to men. "Everything is good that demonstrates the murder of freedom, whether the nation, the people or the greatness of the state,"⁸ but one must rise up against such an abuse : "Never agree, never, that any man however great or any party however strong should think for you or dictate your conduct."⁹ There has been progress in the growth of human knowledge, but actual freedom has not increased in proportion to the knowledge men have of it. But the economy is linked to politics ; one cannot speak of freedom for a people or for individuals so long as they are dependent on foreign powers that exert pressures on them : "For over a hundred years, mercantile society has made an exclusive and unilateral use of

¹ The first is the possibility of self-determination of the will. The second is the possibility of acting without exterior constraint.

² Cf. *MS* 140.

³ *MS* 140.

⁴ *Allocution à la Bourse du Travail*, May 1963, II, 794.

⁵ *Franc-Tireur*, December 1948, II, 1586.

⁶ *Co*, October 1944, II, 1527-1528.

⁷ *SR*, November 1939, II, 1378.

⁸ *Allocution "Hommage d'un exilé"*, December 1957, II, 1811.

⁹ *Message en faveur de la Hongrie*, *cit.*, II, 1782.

freedom, has looked on it as a right rather than as a duty, and has not been [p. 97] afraid of making freedom-in-principle subservient to actual oppression." ¹

bb) The Freedom of Expression

Camus was a writer and a journalist. Freedom of expression in society is of capital importance : "I have a very strong taste for freedom. And for any intellectual, freedom ends in merging with freedom of expression." ² When people can speak, they are saved : "If you want happiness for people, give them the chance to speak and they will tell you which happiness they want and which one they do not want." ³ Freedom of expression is necessary, because with it, "people are not sure of advancing towards justice and peace. But, without it, they are certain of not advancing. Justice is done to people only when their rights are recognized, and there is no right without the expression of this right... Therefore it is necessary to be intransigent on the principle of this freedom." ⁴ In a long lecture, Camus dealt with the freedom of the press : "The freedom of the press is perhaps the one that has suffered the most from the slow degradation of the idea of freedom. The press has its upholders as it has its police. Its upholders dishonour it, and the police subjugate it, and each uses the other as a pretext for his own infringements." ⁵ Tyrants know the power of this freedom when they condemn men to death or to prison. ⁶

b) The Asceticism of Freedom

"Freedom is not brought about without effort. "Freedom is precarious, as hard to keep alive as it is exciting." ⁷ This is especially true of political freedom : "People who want to live do not wait for freedom to be extended to them ; they seize it." ⁸ Freedom is defeated in the effort. "Freedom is a cry followed by a time of pain ; it is neither a comfort nor an alibi." ⁹ Men are more lazy than cowardly, and often prefer peace and servitude to freedom ; for freedom is "a perpetual risk and an exhausting adventure... that is why people flee from... the demands of freedom to rush towards all kinds of servitude to obtain at least comfort for the soul." ¹⁰ The best example of the price of freedom that Camus gives is those "workers marching arm in arm before the tanks to demand bread and freedom." ¹¹ Freedom must be "paid for," ¹² and Camus often speaks of "the blood of freedom." ¹³ To a lesser degree there is found the

¹ *Conférence*, December 1957, II, 1082.

² *C II*, 141-142.

³ *Allocution*, II, 1812.

⁴ *Ibid.* 1813.

⁵ *Ibid.* 1812.

⁶ *. Co*, August 1944, II, 264.

⁷ *DS* 1074.

⁸ *Co*, August 1944, II, 1522.

⁹ *L'Express*, October 1955, II, 1749.

¹⁰ *Conf.*, December 1957, II, 1093.

¹¹ *Poznan*, July 1956, II, 1776-1777.

¹² *HR* 637.

¹³ *Co*, August 1944, II, 255.

asceticism for the freedom of the mind, which "is not a comfort, but rather a greatness that one wants and that one obtains... by an exhausting struggle." ¹

[p. 98] c) **Limits to Freedom**

A clear evolution is evident in Camus's thinking about freedom. Here again revolt is separated from the absurd. There must be some limits to freedom, and these limits are the rights of others and the laws.

aa) The Rights of Others

"Freedom is not enough for everything, and it has some boundaries. Each person's freedom finds its limits in the freedom of others ; nobody has a right to absolute freedom." ² One cannot be free opposed to others. ³ Absolute freedom recognizes no limit ; a typical example of this is the gesture of the surrealist shooting haphazardly into a crowd : "The theory of the gratuitous act tops the claim of absolute freedom." ⁴ It is the right of the strongest man to dominate, ⁵ to bring about "the reduction of man to an object of experience." ⁶ This was proclaimed by de Sade, whose theory led to the recent concentration camps and terrorism. But this concerns "the frenetic freedom which revolt really does not demand." ⁷ In the extreme, absolute freedom permits murder : "total freedom, particularly the freedom of crime, presumes the destruction of human boundaries." ⁸

The ethics of revolt, on the contrary, rejects absolute freedom and postulates certain boundaries : "The most extreme freedom, the freedom to kill, is not compatible with the grounds for revolt. Revolt is not at all a claim for total freedom. On the contrary, revolt puts total freedom on trial. It rightly opposes unlimited power that permits a person in a superior position to violate a forbidden boundary. Far from favouring absolute independence, revolt wants it to be recognized that freedom has limits anywhere that a human being is found... Revolt doubtlessly demands a certain freedom for itself ; but in no case, if it is consistent, does it demand the right to destroy another person's existence and freedom... Whatever freedom it demands is for everybody ; whatever it rejects is forbidden for everybody... Every human freedom, at bottom, is relative." ⁹ Freedom of the press itself cannot be unlimited. ¹⁰

¹ HR 480.

² *Allocution*, II, 1812.

³ *Cal.* 108.

⁴ HR 502.

⁵ HR 691.

⁶ HR 457.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ HR 493.

⁹ HR 687, 688.

¹⁰ Cf. C II, 131, 244.

bb) The Law

The law puts limits on freedom when the law is just and corresponds with human nature. "Every revolt raises the question of whether a world without law is a free world." ¹ Camus answers negatively : "The limit where freedom begins and ends and where its rights and duties are set is called the law, and the state itself must be subject to the law. If it defaults and deprives citizens of the benefits of law, [p. 99] there is a breach of honour." ² The eternal law promulgated by God, from which natural law springs, does not exist for Camus. Only natural law, based on man and reason, can assure order in the human community. The earth is the only truth to which one must be faithful ; but "to live on a lawless earth is impossible because living actually implies a law." ³ If man proclaims the abolition of God and his laws, "if the eternal law is not freedom, the absence of law is still less so... chaos also is a servitude. There is freedom only in a world where that which is possible is defined at the same time as that which is not. Without law, there is no freedom at all." ⁴ We are far from the position of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*.

In addition to life and freedom, Camus recognizes another natural right for man, the right to justice.

3. The Right to justice

Justice is the fundamental value for Camus. In the name of justice he rejected God, as did the metaphysical rebels. He rejected History in the name of this same virtue. And now in his ethics he proposes : "Man's greatness... is in his decision to be stronger than his condition. And if his condition is unjust, there is only one way to surmount it, which is to be just oneself." ⁵ "The fever for justice" ⁶ pervades Camus's thought. What does he understand by justice ?

a) Social justice

Camusian justice is social justice. Every man has certain rights by virtue of human nature and civil laws. God or the state that does not respect them is unjust. "There is no justice in society without the natural or civil right on which it is based. There is no right without the enjoyment of this right. If the right is experienced without waiting, it is probable that, sooner or later, the justice, or law, that is based on it will come into the world... Suppressing the right until justice has been established means suppressing it for good since it will have no place to speak if justice reigns forever. Once again justice is confided to those strong people who alone have the chance to speak. For

¹ HR 565.

² *Allocution*, II, 812.

³ HR 481.

⁴ HR 480.

⁵ *Co*, August 1944, II, 258.

⁶ *Co*, November 1944, II, 281.

centuries, the justice and existence handed out by the powerful have been known as despotism." ¹ And known to God as "grace." Justice does not consist in closing some prisons in order to open others ; "it consists first of all in not considering as a minimum subsistence what would hardly be enough to keep a family of dogs alive, nor considering as emancipation of the proletariat the radical suppression of all the advantages won by the working class during the past hundred years." ² In an article in *Combat*, Camus specifies : "We shall call... justice a social state in which every individual [p. 100] receives all the opportunities from the start and the majority of the people are not kept in an unworthy condition by a privileged minority." ³ Men should not "add a purely human injustice to the profound miseries of our condition." ⁴ It is necessary for a collective economy and liberal politics to make the good of all accord with respect for each. ⁵ Freedom means claiming this justice. ⁶

Camus's justice considers, besides the relations between state and individual, the relations of individuals with each other, but always within the human community, whether or not isolated or grouped together, in order to defend them against the encroachments of the economy, of politics or ideologies. Such are the claims made by Camus for the workers of Poznan, ⁷ for the Hungarian rebels, ⁸ or for persecuted individuals. ⁹ Therefore "social justice" includes each man's rights within society, by virtue of human nature or the laws that spring from it. One must not follow the example of the gods in this area. Camus says to his German friend : "You chose injustice and took the side of the gods... I on the contrary, chose justice in order to remain faithful to the earth... What does it mean to save man ? I tell you from deep within me that it means not mutilating him but giving him the opportunities for justice that he alone conceives." ¹⁰

b) Relative justice

Camus speaks of "total" or "absolute" justice in two senses. The first meaning refers to an idealistic justice that tries to be perfect ; it is true realism to note the disturbance caused by the observation of imperfect justice and "the recognition that total justice does not exist." ¹¹ However, it is necessary to choose "to assume human justice with all its terrible imperfections, while only striving to correct it with a desperately maintained honesty." ¹² In this sense, absolute justice is just as impossible

¹ HR 694.

² *Int., Le Progrès de Lyon*, II, 726.

³ *Co*, October 1944, II, 1527.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1528.

⁵ *Co.*, November 1944, II, 1538.

⁶ *L'Express*, October 1955, II, 1749

⁷ *Poznan*, July, 1956, II, 1775.

⁸ *Message en faveur de la Hongrie*, II, 1780.

⁹ *Hommage à un exilé*, II, 1809.

¹⁰ LAA 241.

¹¹ C II, 250.

¹² *Co*, October 1944, II, 1536.

as eternal hatred and love.¹ In order to be realistic and effective, one must apply it promptly, within the time period,² without waiting for the end of history along with the Marxists : "For the sake of distant justice, it justifies injustice for the duration of history... It makes injustice, crime and lying accepted with the promise of a miracle."³

In a second sense, absolute justice means justice understood by itself, which would like to be installed without taking any account of real men or other values. The passion for justice can then become injustice : "Justice is at once an idea and a spiritual excitation. We should know how to appreciate it for what is human about it, without transforming it into that terrible abstract passion that has mutilated so many men."⁴ It should recognize limits in its concrete [p. 101] application, and, in this sense, "there is no justice, but there are only limits."⁵ It should take lucidity⁶ and love⁷ into account. This is the Camusian equivalent of the Greek equity : "The Greeks, who wondered for centuries about what is just could not understand anything of our idea of justice. Equity, for them, supposed a limit, whereas our entire continent is being torn apart looking for total justice."⁸

c) Justice and Freedom

Another ethical principle that Camus draws from his reflections on History is that justice cannot dispense with freedom, and inversely. The two are inseparable.⁹ "The revolution of the twentieth century has arbitrarily separated these two inseparable notions for the inordinate ends of conquest. Absolute freedom mocks at justice. Absolute justice denies freedom. In order to be fruitful the two notions should each find its limits. No man considers his condition free if it is not just at the same time, nor just if it is not free."¹⁰ One cannot choose the one without the other : "if someone takes your bread away from you, at the same time he ends your freedom. But if someone destroys your freedom, you can be assured that your bread is threatened... Misery grows at the rate that freedom is withdrawn from the world, and inversely."¹¹ justice and freedom are the two requirements that are found in the principle of revolt and the revolutionary impetus ; but "the history of revolutions shows, however, that they almost always come into conflict as though their mutual requirements were irreconcilable. Absolute freedom is the right of the strongest to dominate. It therefore carries on conflicts that produce injustice. Absolute justice prevails by the

¹ *Co*, May 1947, II, 324.

² *Co*, October 1944, II, 1537.

³ *HR* 636.

⁴ *Co*, November 1944, II, 268.

⁵ *C* II, 236.

⁶ *E* 843.

⁷ *E* 873-874.

⁸ *E* 853.

⁹ *RR* 1690.

¹⁰ *HR* 694.

¹¹ *Le pain et la liberté*, May 1953, II, 797.

suppression of all contradiction : it destroys freedom." ¹ Bringing the two into accord is the last hope of the West. ² But if one had to choose between them, one should choose freedom : "I choose freedom because even if justice is not achieved, freedom preserves the power of protest against injustice and saves communication." ³

d) The Asceticism of justice

Justice, like freedom, calls for struggle : "justice should be bought with men's blood." ⁴ "Obstinacy in injustice can only be worsted by obstinacy in justice." ⁵ "Justice dies as soon as it becomes a comfort, or ceases to burn, or becomes an effort in itself." ⁶ Even if the result is uncertain, the struggle should be undertaken : "Against such a desperate condition, the hard and marvellous task of this century is to build justice in the most unjust of worlds... If we fail, men will return to darkness. But, at least, it will have been tried. Finally, this [p. 102] effort requires clear-sightedness and ready vigilance." ⁷ A thousand rifles aimed at a man searching for justice should not prevent his speaking out for it. ⁸ Justice is a duty ; and this is not easy to realize. ⁹

e) The justice of Means

If *L'Homme révolté* proposes a morality of limits, it could equally illustrate a morality of the justice of the means used in History. "The end justifies the means," — such is the axiom of this History. "For centuries such means as trickery, violence and the blind sacrifice of men have been in evidence. This evidence is bitter." ¹⁰ Confronting this ethical problem of the end and the means, Camus offers the following principles :

— The end should be relative. The great ideologies of History generally have a good end : "what actually counts is realizing man's salvation ;" ¹¹ "let us have no doubt that we all bring a disinterested passion to men's impossible happiness." ¹² But this end should not be absolute, on the contrary it should be relative to men : "When the end is absolute, that is, speaking historically, when one believes it to be certain, one can go as far as sacrificing others." ¹³

¹ HR 691.

² C II, 142.

³ C II, 136.

⁴ Co, August 1944, II, 255.

⁵ SR, November 1939, II, 1379.

⁶ Lettre, 1950, II, 721.

⁷ Lettre, 1950, II, 721.

⁸ Co, August 1944, II, 259.

⁹ C II, 109.

¹⁰ Co, November 1944, II, 280.

¹¹ Co, November 1944, II, 279.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ HR 695.

— The means should be just. Not all means are justified, even when the end is good. "When the ends are great, Nietzsche wrote for the sake of his unhappiness, humanity uses another measurement and no longer judges crime as such, even if it should use the most frightful means." ¹ One cannot use everything for men's salvation, "we know how quickly means are taken for ends, and we do not want just any sort of justice." ² Marxism, for example, assumes that one hundred thousand deaths are nothing compared to the happiness of millions of men of the future : "the means, here, would blow up the ends. Whatever the desired end, however high or necessary it might be, whether or not it is dedicated to men's happiness, whether it is dedicated to justice or to freedom, the means used to arrive at the end represent such a definite risk... that we objectively refuse to run it," ³ especially if it necessitates a third world war. Just means make the end just : "Does the end justify the means ? ... But what will justify the end ? Revolt answers this question, which historical thought has left hanging : the means will." ⁴ If one must use injustice to achieve salvation for mankind, this end becomes unjust, not in itself, but in relation to the means.

— The means should be in proportion to the end. "The plague cannot be cured with the means used for head colds." ⁵ "The end justifies the means only if the reciprocal order of magnitude is reasonable. For example, I can send Saint Exupéry on a mortal mission to save a regiment. But I cannot deport millions of people [p. 103] and suppress all freedom for an equivalent quantitative result and calculate for three or four generations sacrificed previously." ⁶

— The means of breaking in. The means of breaking in should, in principle, remain exceptional and limited, even if they are actually used. "One must set a limit to violence, confine it to certain sectors when it is inevitable, and moderate its terrifying effects by preventing it from releasing all its fury." ⁷ For the rebel, it should always retain "its temporary character of a break-in, and it should always be connected, if it cannot be avoided, to a personal responsibility and an immediate risk." ⁸ The temporary should not smother a man's life. ⁹ If the excess of injustice makes violence impossible to avoid in order to thwart it, "the rebel at first rejects violence in the service of a doctrine or a state cause." ¹⁰ The same is true of the inevitable murder of a tyrant, as has been seen : "The example of Kalieyev and his comrades led me to the conclusion that one could kill only on the condition of dying oneself, and that no one had the right to make an attempt on another person's life without immediately

¹ HR 486.

² Co, November 1944, II, 279.

³ NvNb 343.

⁴ HR 696.

⁵ NvNb 347.

⁶ C II, 183.

⁷ NvNb 355-356.

⁸ HR 695.

⁹ Int., II, 387.

¹⁰ HR 695.

accepting his own demise." ¹ In the case of a defensive war, one must strive to limit its effects when one cannot suppress the war itself. ²

Revolt led Camus to assume the existence of human nature and men's natural rights that spring from it. If men respect them, life is possible. Man can live without God when this is within the limits that are dictated by reason. Camus rationally rediscovers the Christians' ethical principles. An unconscious influence ? Possibly. But perhaps even more because the two are based on human reason and arrive at the same universal basic principles. It seems to be a consequence of Camusian ethics that man does not need Revelation to discover human brotherhood.

Until now, it has been a question of general ethical positions. With the "passions" and "virtues," we enter the life of the individual, but still in relation with social life. The man that Camus presents as "the Godless saint" is not turned in on himself with an egocentric enjoyment of his virtue. He opens himself to others and perfects himself by seeking others' salvation.

IV. Camusian "Passions"

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Camus does not offer a systematic treatise on passions and virtues. However, he insists on certain points from them. For him, passions are as necessary in the personal sphere as in the collective sphere. Without them, nothing of value can be accomplished. But they go beyond the limits dictated by reason (here we find another application of the morality of limits), and they bring about all the [p. 104] irregularities that we can observe in the History of individuals and collectivities.

1. Nature

Camusian passion is an energy consistent with man's profound desire. It implies ardour : "Growing old means going from passion to compassion ;" ³ "Do you love ideas with passion and blood ? Do you get insomnia over this idea ? ;" ⁴ man must choose the world with passion, ⁵ and the artist must feel such a desire that he cannot help creating. ⁶ Passions are necessary : "Our world does not need lukewarm souls. It needs burning hearts that know how to give moderation its proper place." ⁷ Our epoch

¹ *Lettre*, June 1952, II, 747.

² *Conférence*, January 1956, II, 993.

³ *C II*, 323.

⁴ *C II*, 59.

⁵ *C II*, 62.

⁶ *C II*, 272.

⁷ *Co*, November 1944, II, 284.

shows that "there are times when, since character has no energy, vices only produce corruption and not crimes. If there were no passion, there would be no virtue, hence this century has achieved the greatest misery of being without either passion or virtue ; it does the good and the bad, and is just as passive as matter."¹ Like the people as a whole, the individual should "live with his passions."² Are passions good or bad ? For Camus, they are basically positive ; only the absence of limits makes them bad. He made passion the third consequence of the absurd, after revolt and freedom. The absence of restraint leads to "the screams and the terrible house of passion,"³ which then becomes violence and scorn for man.⁴

2. Species

Camus distinguishes between collective and individual passions. The former arise from men's common desires and the latter from individual desires. *L'Homme révolté* put the accent on the former, whereas *Le Mythe* emphasizes the latter, as do the *Carnets* and the plays. "Collective passions are a step ahead of individual passions. Men do not know how to love. What interests them today is the human condition, not individual destinies."⁵ Politics comes first, so that "collective passion devours... The chances of death are greater with it ;"⁶ the innate desire for freedom ends up being dominated by "the strongest passion of the twentieth century : servitude."⁷ An individual passion can be physical, and one can know the unrestrained impulse of "a brutal physical desire."⁸ The writings on the absurd put ahead physical desires, with their positive contents. But the passions of a superior order held Camus's attention in the works on revolt. The passion for beauty : "The most precious good in most men's eyes and what they desire most passionately from the bottom of their hearts is the inaccessible and transient radiance of beauty."⁹ There is also, as with Merseault, "a passion that is profound because [p. 105] it is tenacious... the passion for the absolute and for the truth."¹⁰ Deep down in the historical or metaphysical rebel are found the passions for unity, justice and freedom. With the "Godless saint" of Camusian ethics, one could add another : the passion for moral perfection.

3. The Limits to Passions

Immoderation lies within man's heart. Even the highest passions can become destructive : "Today the great passions for unity and freedom are tearing apart the world. Yesterday, love was paid for with the death of the individual. Today,

¹ C II, 137.

² C II, 57.

³ C II, 327.

⁴ C II, 329.

⁵ C II, 151.

⁶ C II 144.

⁷ C II, 334.

⁸ C II, 62.

⁹ C II, 258.

¹⁰ *Étr*, Preface to the American edition, I, 1928.

collective passions make us run the risk of universal destruction." ¹ Thus, if there are passions, they must be controlled : "To live with one's passions requires one to have mastered them." ² Camus felt this personal need of control. ³ Absurd man advocated passion and quantity, but, in *Carnets*, Camus specifies : "The exaltation of the diverse of quantity, and in particular of the life of the senses and abandonment to deep movements is legitimate only if one proves one's total disinterestedness about the object. There is also the leap into the matter — and many men who exalt the senses do so only because they are their slaves." ⁴ The same is true of passions in general : "An extreme virtue consists in killing one's passions. An even deeper virtue consists in balancing them ;" ⁵ "So long as man has not mastered desire, he has not mastered anything. And he almost never masters it." ⁶ Camus has such an experience. ⁷ Any passion, however noble it might be, becomes murderous if it is not limited by other passions and made relative : "C. and P.G. : passion for the truth. Around them the whole world is crucified." ⁸ History demonstrates it also.

V. Camusian "Virtues"

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Camus is scornful about a certain type of "virtue" that hides mediocrity. But he recognizes the need for authentic virtue. It must be stated, however, that Camusian passions are mostly collective, whereas his virtues are rather individual. They are almost Stoic virtues of courage, lucidity and hope, culminating in the heroism of the Godless saint. These virtues are for different times and for the man who can only count on his own resources, since God is absent from the world and from History.

1. "Virtue" and Virtue

a) On the one hand, Camus is distrustful of "virtue" : "Everything that I have ever thought or written is related to this distrust (it is the [p. 106] subject of *L'Étranger*)."⁹ He knows very well that one can be virtuous through necessity, by a natural leaning,¹⁰ or even by disguising one's true inclinations, as Clamence does.¹¹ There

¹ *Int.*, October 1957, II, 1898.

² *C II*, 104.

³ Cf. *EE* 12.

⁴ *C I*, 193.

⁵ *C II*, 238.

⁶ *C II*, 266.

⁷ *C II*, 261.

⁸ *C II*, 135.

⁹ *C II*, 202.

¹⁰ "A man who is officially compensated for a virtue that he practised by instinct until then. From that moment, he practises it consciously, and this is a catastrophe".

¹¹ Cf. *Ch* 1518.

can also be a formal virtue, just as there was a formal morality, such as "the virtuous madness that is shaking this century."¹ A completely pure virtue strives to be intransigent and unlimited in the application of principles. In this sense, Camus can say : "Practically, and for the moment, I prefer a bum who does not kill anyone to a puritan who kills everybody."² Ideologists, for example, have "chosen to call a virtue whatever advances the arrival of the society that they desire."³ Therefore nobody can be called "virtuous" outright, without nuances, at least not by someone who has some experience of men and of himself : "I know myself too well to believe in pure virtue."⁴

b) On the other hand, Camus recognizes the necessity of authentic virtue. Control over one's actions is necessary in order to advance towards the good, and such control is always found in great men : "Great souls interest me — but only they do."⁵ "In other people I have known what is virtuous, dignified, natural and noble. It was an admirable spectacle, but sorrowful."⁶ It was sorrowful because one was unable to attain one's full height. This virtue is acquired in struggle : "Virtue is not learnt so quickly as handling a tommy gun. The fight is uneven."⁷ It assumes strength of character : "Today virtue is commendable. Great sacrifices are not borne. Martyrs are forgotten."⁸

2. Justice

Justice is the principal virtue that sums up Camus and his concerns, in man's historical condition as well as his metaphysical condition. We believe, however, that this has been dealt with enough already so that it should not be given a special section. Therefore we shall stop to analyze the three virtues representative of Camus : lucidity, courage and hope.

3. Lucidity

Lucidity is present everywhere in Camus's works, whether they are those on the absurd or those on revolt. Its synonyms are "alert," "clear-sightedness" "conscience," and "presence." According to Camus, neither the absurd, nor revolt, nor action is valid without lucidity. Moreover, it demands a constant asceticism.

¹ C II, 250.

² C II, 212.

³ C II, 202.

⁴ C II, 203.

⁵ C II, 267.

⁶ C II, 251.

⁷ C II, 265.

⁸ C II, 291.

a) Its Nature

Lucidity is that disposition of the mind that makes one alert in thought and clear-sighted in action, and it extricates one from [p. 107] the slumber induced by daily automatisms. One could say that it defines the Camusian man. All men come together in it : "A supernumerary of the post office is equal to a conqueror if his lucidity is the same."¹ Without lucidity, no happiness is possible, or, if it is, it must be the happiness of stones ;² besides, Camus says, "I do not wish to be happy... but only lucid."³ There is an absurd sadness in living without understanding,⁴ and the reason for despair comes precisely from not understanding.⁵ The men of our time at least have the privilege of being informed,⁶ and, if they have not overcome their condition, at least they are more conscious of it.⁷ If there is an evil, it is ignorance.⁸ The immobilizing of consciousness in daily slumber, as in Algeria, is the tragedy of a life or a country.

b) Its Importance

The absurd and revolt do not exist without lucidity. The latter is a *sine qua non*. It marks the point of departure of awakening to the absurd : when the daily decor falls apart, then the "why" is asked⁹ and the world becomes peopled with men who think clearly,¹⁰ become conscious of the cleavage existing between the world and the spirit,¹¹ and put lucidity in the middle of that which denies them.¹² If Sisyphus is great during his descent, it is because "this moment is a moment of lucidity,"¹³ and if "This myth is tragic, it is because its hero is lucid."¹⁴ Following his example, "The ideal for the absurd man is an ever-lucid soul ;"¹⁵ and all the absurd men presented by Camus exemplify this.¹⁶ His other characters are also marked by lucidity¹⁷ In order for the absurd work to be possible, "it is necessary for the most lucid kind of thought to be included."¹⁸ The rebel also had lucidity as a beginning point : "A realization

¹ MS 150

² N 85. *Mal* 179.

³ C I, 23. *EE* 49.

⁴ *Preface to L'Exil d'Hélène*, II, 1825.

⁵ C I, 179.

⁶ Cf. *Int.*, October 1957, II, 1903.

⁷ *E* 835.

⁸ *P* 1326. *PA* 1226.

⁹ MS 107.

¹⁰ MS 170.

¹¹ MS 136.

¹² MS 166.

¹³ MS 196.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ MS 145.

¹⁶ Don Juan (MS 154), the actor (MS 158), the conqueror (MS 166).

¹⁷ Cf. C I, 41.

¹⁸ MS 176.

springs from the movement of revolt," ¹ that of the rights of human nature. "Revolt is the deed of an informed man who realizes his rights." ²

Action needs not only will but also intelligent direction : "You only need to want, not blindly, but with a firm and well-thought-out desire." ³ "What counts is the will for happiness, a kind of enormous sense always present." ⁴ The true man of action is he who possesses this disposition essential for the rightness of his acts : "We call virile those men who are lucid, and we do not want mere strength unaccompanied by clear-sightedness." ⁵ Courage by itself is not enough, it is only a blind force, as the Nazis proved ; on the contrary, "What really takes courage... is keeping your eyes open." ⁶ War, just like any other event that crushes man, should be "thought-out and conducted lucidly" ⁷ once it has started. Genius by itself is blind, and Camus prefers intelligence to it. ⁸

[p. 108] c) Its Asceticism

Asceticism is necessary for lucidity. It requires a constant effort : "Lucidity is the most difficult thing in the world to maintain. The circumstances are almost always opposed to it. What matters is living with lucidity in a world characterized by dissipation." ⁹ Camus says in *Lettre à un ami allemand* : "Intelligence takes its revenge. You have not paid the price that it demands or granted its heavy tribute to lucidity. In the depth of defeat, I can tell you that this is what ruined you." ¹⁰ Lucidity is arid, ¹¹ and it can even create disarray. ¹² But it should be present even in daily life : "being lucid even during office hours." ¹³ It is necessary "for a man to be fully 'present,' even in the most humble or disturbing experience — and to bear this, helped by all his lucidity, without yielding." ¹⁴ This cannot be done without effort, because it requires grasping lucidity on the fly : " 'grasping' is the right word, because lucidity either goes fast or withdraws. It must be grasped on the fly, at the imperceptible moment when it casts a fleeting look at itself. Everyday man hardly likes to wait. On the contrary, everything makes him hurry." ¹⁵

¹ HR 424.

² HR 430.

³ *Conf.*, January 1956, II, 998.

⁴ *MH* (C I, 104).

⁵ *MS* 168. C I, 157.

⁶ *EE* 49. C I, 41.

⁷ *SR*, November 1939, II, 1379.

⁸ *MS* 167.

⁹ C II, 19.

¹⁰ *LAA* 229.

¹¹ *N* 63.

¹² C II, 26.

¹³ C I, 92.

¹⁴ C I, 172.

¹⁵ C I, 172.

4. Courage

For Camus, lucidity comes before courage. But without the latter, there can be no effective human action in the metaphysical and historical condition. It is especially necessary in our time when so many dangers threaten man in a world without God and without humane limits: "The most legitimate consequences of a Godless philosophy are historical materialism, absolute determinism, the negation of all freedom and this frightful world of courage and silence," Camus remarks in his *Carnets*.¹ Values, including courage, are scoffed at: "This world is disgusting, just as are the universal increase of cowardice, derision of courage, counterfeiting of greatness and decay of honour."² This is why our world has no need for lukewarm souls.³ "Rebirth today depends on our courage and our desire for clear-sightedness."⁴ Camus, following the Stoics' example, proposes "to forge an art of living for times of catastrophe, to be born a second time, and then to struggle openly against the death instinct that has been at work within our history."⁵

Considering the importance of courage in Camus's works, it is necessary to deal with its nature, with its object that bears upon foreseeable evils: death, illness, poverty, and judgment. Suicide is the abnegation of courage, while heroism in day-to-day life is its acme.

[p. 109] a) Its Nature

Courage is the energy that manifests its resolve before "the nearness... of a danger whose name we do not know."⁶ For Camus, it is at once a "brilliant, moderate force, and a careful, keen intelligence."⁷ He can meet fear, "that which grips every man as he faces the unknown," but this is something he adapts to.⁸

— It implies a negative attitude on the one hand: "not to lose one's hold,"⁹ and not to flee before a foreseeable evil. He who has succeeded in "overcoming his desire to flee... has very little left to learn."¹⁰ Nothing justifies feeling, though: "There is always a philosophy for the lack of courage."¹¹ "Has one the right to refuse pain with the pretext that one does not like it?"¹² There is perhaps this dull stupidity or stupor

¹ C II, 155.

² C I, 170.

³ *Co*, December 1944, II, 284.

⁴ *Conference*, December 1957, II, 1903.

⁵ *DS* II, 1073.

⁶ *E* 886.

⁷ C II, 315.

⁸ *LAA* 229.

⁹ C I, 106.

¹⁰ C II, 57.

¹¹ C II, 25.

¹² C I, 89.

that benumbs us when accidents overwhelm us.¹ Perhaps we are tempted to cowardice,² but "there is nothing that courage and love cannot put an end to,"³ and if danger seems to overtake us, "man's only greatness is to struggle against that which overtakes him."⁴

— On the other hand, courage implies a positive attitude : to face up to something and win. If adversities test men, "there is one response inside man... his effort to assert himself against his condition... And basically, what does that mean, other than there is nothing worthwhile where there is nothing worth beating,"⁵ This implies an effort : "the deep breath in which the mind collects itself and courage is weighed."⁶ It is patient effort : "Man's only dignity... is perseverance in some effort considered futile."⁷ It is obstinate effort, a primary virtue."⁸ And one can achieve heroism : "in certain cases, continuing, simply continuing is superhuman."⁹

b) Its Object

Courage is the attitude of firmness adopted by a man when he faces whatever evil threatens his total wholeness (that is, death) or his partial wholeness (sickness, for example), or even fetters his physical or spiritual activities. Since many-sided evil affects the totality of the human condition, it follows that courage has a bearing on the metaphysical and historical condition.

aa) The Human Condition

The metaphysical condition is the place for courage, according to Camus. There the objective order is found : man is in a situation of exile in the world, and appears as one condemned to death, handed over to evil and to the absence of unity, explanation and justice. We [p. 110] have already seen it.¹⁰ But, in the face of these facts over which one has no control, the subjective, courageous attitude consists, first of all, in being lucid ; one has to agree with Caligula's remark : "I cannot change the order of things... I have no effect on the order of this world,"¹¹ because here man is "in a campaign in which he is defeated from the beginning."¹² Courage, however, consists in contesting this destiny : "strength of heart, intelligence and courage are enough to foil destiny."¹³ One should contest, but also act and recreate another

¹ Cf. *C* II, 95.

² Cf. *C* II, 118.

³ *Co*, December 1944, II, 300.

⁴ *SR*, January 1940, II, 1384.

⁵ *Lettre*, II, 1669.

⁶ *E* 813.

⁷ *MS* 191.

⁸ *Co*, March 1945, II, 1554.

⁹ *Ch* 1534.

¹⁰ Cf. Chapter II, A.

¹¹ *Cal* 27

¹² *MS* 173.

¹³ *Conference*, January 1956, II, 998.

personal destiny within the destiny allotted us : "To be happy means to take over the destiny of all, not with the desire for renunciation, but with the desire for happiness." ¹ This is the nature of Camusian wisdom which will be discussed at the end. Man's fate is always in his own hands, and it is defined in terms of courage : "What is man ?... He is that force which always ends up balancing tyrants and gods." ² He still has to face the struggle that will make Sisyphus happy. ³

Man's historical condition is also a place for courage. If murder, terror, and enslavement threaten him and immerse him in an atmosphere of fear, he should still not flee from History, as that would be cowardice, but should confront History in order to improve it : "The task for men of culture and faith is not, in any case, either to desert historical struggles or to serve whatever is cruel and inhumane in them. His task is to stand firm, to help man against whatever oppresses him, and to buttress his freedom against the fates that encircle him. It is towards this condition that history makes its real advance and innovates." ⁴ Whatever is innovative in history must be surpassed. ⁵ Certainly such conduct implies courage that demands as much effort as heroic obstinacy. This is especially so in war, where courage stands out. ⁶ Holding steady in History without fleeing "requires endless tension and strained calmness... But true life is present at the heart of this disturbance. It is the disturbance itself." ⁷ This tension presumes clear-sightedness. ⁸

Now we must look at some of the evils that make men afraid and require courage, according to Camus.

bb) Death

Here we see death from an ethical perspective. Whether death is natural or caused by men, it is a fact that "we all live for death. This makes one think." ⁹ But this thinking should make one overcome one's fear.

On the one hand, there is some evidence : "One cannot deny... that men fear death. Deprivation of life is certainly the supreme penalty, and should arouse in men a very real fright. The fear of death is devastating, since it looms from the darkest depths of being ; the [p. 111] instinct for life, when it is threatened, goes berserk and struggles in the worst agonies." ¹⁰ This is particularly true in the case of capital punishment, where horrifying lucidity intensifies fear. ¹¹

¹ C I, 97.

² LAA 228.

³ MS 198.

⁴ *Conference*, II, 999.

⁵ *Lettre*, May 1952, II, 752.

⁶ LAA 232.

⁷ HR 705.

⁸ *Co*, September 1944, II, 272.

⁹ C II, 115.

¹⁰ RG 1032. C II, 196. C I, 191.

¹¹ Cf. C I, 141.

On the other hand, man should behave in a manner worthy of his nature : "One should not be afraid of death since that would be doing it too much honour."¹ Courage should be summoned, because "there is no freedom for man so long as he has not surmounted his fear of death. But not by suicide,"² Camus says more precisely : "Freedom in respect to death... means doing away with the fear of death and placing this accident in the order of natural things."³ "There is only one freedom, and that is coming to terms with death. After this, everything is possible."⁴ A certain indifference is necessary : "True courage is passive, since it is indifferent to death."⁵ One should even scorn it : "One cannot denigrate too much the holy appearance that invests it. Nothing is more contemptible than respect based on fear. And, by this token, death is not more respectable than Emperor Nero or the commissioner of my borough."⁶ One should even risk death in certain circumstances and give proof of indifference towards it : "That life is stronger may be the truth, but this is also the principle of all cowards. One should openly believe the contrary."⁷ This is the case during war : "risking my life while fearlessly betting on death,"⁸ for "the beings who know the price of life, and those alone, have the right by birth, to the nobleness of a death risked and accepted in lucidity."⁹

Lucidly waiting for death is another characteristic of Camusian courage. Here again we find an example of the virtue of lucidity. "I neither want to lie nor do I want other people to lie to me. I want to keep my lucidity to the end and regard my demise with the utmost jealousy and horror. To the extent that I separate myself from the rest of the world I have fear of death... Creating a conscious death means to lessen the distance that separates us from the world, and to share life's conclusion, without joy, conscious all the while of the exhilarating images of a world lost forever."¹⁰ One should wait for one's end, "knowing from the beginning that death frees no one from anything ;"¹¹ one should dream "of an uninterruptedly lucid end... so that at least it cannot be said of me that I was taken by surprise — and in my absence."¹² This is an attitude not lacking in grandeur.

Death can also be instructive about life and the attitude to be taken towards this life. "Only death is true knowledge. But at the same time it is death that makes knowledge useless."¹³ Whoever knows how to look it in the face should know how to make use of it : "Man should at least keep the power of his scorn and his ability to

¹ C I, 182.

² C II, 128.

³ C II, 196.

⁴ C II, 192.

⁵ C II, 87.

⁶ C I, 183.

⁷ C I, 41.

⁸ C I, 167.

⁹ *Lettre-préface*, June 1951, II, 722.

¹⁰ N 65. Cf. C I, 119.

¹¹ C II, 111.

¹² C II, 344.

¹³ C II, 65.

choose, in this frightful trial, that which serves his own greatness. [p. 112] He should accept the trial and everything that goes with it. But he should vow to use in this least noble of tasks only the noblest of gestures. And the substance of nobility (the true nobility, that of the heart) is scorn, courage and profound indifference."¹

cc) Suffering and Illness

Suffering and sickness are derived from death. Fear of them is very real, but it must be overcome and turned to good account. Since there is no God, man can only turn to his own courage and to other people to overcome it.

"The fear of suffering"² is innate in every human being. It is necessary to recognize "pain and its ignobility sometimes."³ Camus knew sickness and the fear of sickness;⁴ what he proposes is "to struggle against his body,"⁵ and "a struggle with sickness. What is waiting for me in the Alps is... consciousness of my sickness."⁶ Sick people play a major role in Camus's first works: *Mort Heureuse*, *Envers et Endroit*, and *Noces*.

One must overcome the fear of sickness and "exceed whatever is positive in it. I have emphasized, with so much insistence, the negative aspect of this thought only in the hope that we could then be cured, while making good use of the sickness."⁷ Indeed, "Sickness is a convent that has its rules, its asceticism, its silences and its inspirations."⁸ It "is a cross but perhaps also a handrail. The ideal would be, however, to borrow its strength and reject its weaknesses. Let it be the retreat that renders one stronger for the desired moment. And if we have to pay in money for suffering and self-denial, then let's pay it."⁹ Every thought is judged by the lesson it draws from suffering.¹⁰ Doctors know that certain sicknesses are desirable because they compensate, in their own way, for functional disorders.¹¹ The same may be true on the human plane. What, then, are the advantages to be drawn?

It has many advantages. First of all, it teaches the value of time: "Sickness and infirmity. There is never a minute to lose — which is perhaps the opposite of 'you have to hurry'."¹² There is something degrading in any kind of suffering, but one should not "give in to emptiness. It is better to try to win and to 'fulfill'. Time must not be lost."¹³ It teaches spiritual strength:¹ "When a serious sickness temporarily

¹ C I, 168.

² C II, 331.

³ C II, 330.

⁴ Fear of sickness (*EE* 32, 21, 33, 34, 39). Fear of old age (*EE* 19).

⁵ C I, 59.

⁶ C I, 60.

⁷ *Lettre*, May 1952, II, 752.

⁸ C II, 57.

⁹ C II, 73.

¹⁰ C II, 94.

¹¹ *E* 862.

¹² C II, 104. Cf. C I, 17.

¹³ C I, 118.

took away all the strength for living from me, transforming everything, despite the invisible ills and the new weakness that I had, I was able to know fear and discouragement, but never bitterness. This sickness undoubtedly added other restrictions, the hardest, to those that I already had. Finally, it favoured a certain freedom of the heart and slight distance from human interests that [p. 113] has always saved me from resentment. Ever since I have lived in Paris I have known their privilege to be kingly. But I have enjoyed it without limit or remorse, and at least up to the present it has been a great light in my life." ² Sickness favours solitude ; ³ in his *Rencontres avec Gide*, Camus states that he owed his calling as a writer to sickness : "A fortitude sickness had taken me away from my beaches and pleasures." ⁴ Sickness can also serve art : "But at first art can never do anything. Art is the distance that time gives to suffering." ⁵

dd) Poverty

Men are also afraid of poverty, ⁶ because it is associated with the uncertainty of the future, ⁷ with the fear of not having comfort or of losing it ; but, as with other adversities, "all is profit for the man who wants to profit." ⁸ Born in poverty, Camus knew affluence later on, but he asserts that from his poor childhood he gained "the best and most lasting lessons." ⁹ It must be emphasized, however, that desirable poverty is not destitution that wears out people : "What better thing could a man wish for than poverty ? I am not talking about the misery and hopeless work of the modern proletarian. But I cannot see how anyone could want more than poverty accompanied by an active use of leisure." ¹⁰ Indeed, "It is a sort of spiritual snobbery that makes people try to think that they can be happy without money". ¹¹ A living wage is necessary, and one should work for this. ¹² But poverty, just like wealth, has its lessons.

First of all, it is an aberration to pursue wealth for its own sake. "Any life whose goal is money is like death. Rebirth comes from indifference to money." ¹³ And this is also true in terms of the community : "The decadence of civilization is due to man's blindly desiring riches before all else." ¹⁴ Besides, death takes all meaning away from

¹ Cf. C I, 40.

² *EE*, Preface, 8.

³ Cf. C I, 76-77.

⁴ *Rencontres avec André Gide*, November 1951, II, 1118.

⁵ C II, 110.

⁶ 1. Cf. *Résistance ouvrière*, December 1944, II, 1546.

⁷ C I, 88.

⁸ C I, 97.

⁹ *EE*, Preface, 7.

¹⁰ C II, 88.

¹¹ C I, 97.

¹² Cf. C I, 97.

¹³ C II, 92.

¹⁴ C II 50.

the accumulation of goods.¹ If wealth had any meaning, it would be to increase happiness : "Being rich means having enough time to be happy when one is worthy of it."² A man, like Camus, can be nostalgic about lost poverty.³

Poverty is not a catastrophe to be feared for someone who knows how to take advantage of it : "Poverty... has never been a hardship for me,"⁴ Camus said after having tasted wealth. But it did teach him how to be indifferent to possessions : "Although I now live without any care for tomorrow.... I do not know how to possess."⁵ It makes one evaluate the price of everything, even if it causes loneliness :⁶ "I grew up by the sea, and poverty was luxurious then for me, and then I lost the sea and all luxuries seemed grey to me."⁷ The pleasures procured from wealth take one away from oneself : "Pleasure takes us away from ourselves just as Pascal's diversions took him from [p. 114] God."⁸ Poverty can give rise to social action : "Misery prevented me from believing that all was well under the sun and in history."⁹ It teaches disinterestedness, which is "liberation from money and from one's own vanities and cowardices."¹⁰ It favours freedom, "this freedom which disappears as soon as the excess of goods begins."¹¹ It stimulates courage in one's life or on an unfortunate trip,¹² and it also arouses courage to help surmount resentment about others' good fortune.¹³ "A heart of heroic and exceptional purity"¹⁴ is necessary to vanquish the shame of poverty ; courage is also needed to endure the temptation to settle down in comfort.¹⁵ In short, for poverty as well as for other adversities, "that which blocks the road serves to make a path."¹⁶

¹ [Note manquante, MB.]

² [Note manquante, MB.]

³ [Note manquante, MB.]

⁴ [Note manquante, MB.]

⁵ [Note manquante, MB.]

⁶ [Note manquante, MB.]

⁷ [Note manquante, MB.]

⁸ [Note manquante, MB.]

⁹ [Note manquante, MB.]

¹⁰ [Note manquante, MB.]

¹¹ [Note manquante, MB.]

¹² [Note manquante, MB.]

¹³ [Note manquante, MB.]

¹⁴ [Note manquante, MB.]

¹⁵ [Note manquante, MB.]

¹⁶ [Note manquante, MB.]

ee) judgment

Spiritual strength is also needed to deal with the judgment of others. Camus can speak about this from his own experience. Starting as an unknown writer, he went all the way to the fame of the Nobel Prize.¹ As a person, he had the reputation of being a lay saint.² Disapproved by some, excessively admired by others — what to think ?

Nature

Judgment is the reflection of oneself in others. But the latter are often unfaithful to the image that they reflect. They contradict this image and rarely portray it exactly. In respect to Christianity, for example, Camus says that simply declaring oneself in favour of it makes one seem superficial, while stating that one is against it makes one seem narrow-minded. That which makes a book famous is often a lie in the author's eyes.³ "Renown, in the best cases, is a misunderstanding," Camus declared after the failure of *Caligula*.⁴ If it comes and is justified, it should be considered for what it really is : "At the age of thirty I knew renown overnight. I do not regret it. I could have had bad dreams about it later. Now I know what it is. It is very little."⁵ Camus adopts Alexander Borgia's notion in an article entitled : "Like a Fire of Oakum" ("*Comme un feu d'étoupes*") ;⁶ he repeats this in *L'Été* : "Praised be... the society that, at so little cost, teaches us every day, even when it shows deference, that the greatness it acclaims is nothing. The louder its acclamation, the quicker it dies. He recalls the fire of oakum that Alexander VI often had burnt before him so that he would not forget that all the glory of this world is like the smoke that is blown away by the wind."⁷ In order not to suffer "the enslavement of reputation,"⁸ whether good or bad, one has to know the right way to deal with it.

[p. 115] Conduct

The first point is to do one's duty. "The secret of being is not trying to appear."⁹ One should do one's work without worrying about other people's comments : "Having the strength to choose what one prefers and standing firm."¹⁰ Worrying about others' opinions can hurt one's freedom of mind or action : "Artistic freedom is a difficult freedom which rather resembles an ascetic discipline."¹¹ Should one be opposed to the scorn of popular opinion ? Camus only has one cynical observation about this,¹²

¹ [Note manquante, MB.]

² [Note manquante, MB.]

³ [Note manquante, MB.]

⁴ [Note manquante, MB.]

⁵ [Note manquante, MB.]

⁶ [Note manquante, MB.]

⁷ [Note manquante, MB.]

⁸ [Note manquante, MB.]

⁹ *C I*, 92, 107.

¹⁰ *C II* 93.

¹¹ *Conf.*, December 1957, II, 1093.

¹² Cf. *C II*, 129.

he answers negatively, since scorn is the sign of a vulgar heart" ¹ and no great work has ever been built on it. ² "I will not take the superior air of someone who disdains opinion. Opinion, or judgment, is just as characteristic of men as indifference, friendship and hatred." ³ One should not seek honours, but if they come one should be silent and indifferent : "Reputation has changed many things. On this point I do not have many complexes. My rule has always been very simple : refuse everything it is possible to refuse without making noise ; in any case, never solicit anything, neither a reputation nor obscurity. Accept in silence one or the other, if they come and perhaps also one and the other..." ⁴ One should be satisfied with what one is," ⁵ and refuse the rest. Only the false reputation of virtue should be detested. ⁶

Camus refused various titles : philosopher, ⁷ intellectual guide for youth, ⁸ lay saint, ⁹ modern man, ¹⁰ existentialist, ¹¹ and humanist. ¹² "I have never sought honours, and I have refused them whenever I could, not because of virtue, but rather because of my faults. On this point my indifference verges on conviction." ¹³ One should keep quiet about one's deeds. ¹⁴

Courage must be exerted against various evils inherent in the human condition. But there is a resignation, which is suicide, and a summit, which is heroism.

c) The Resignation of Courage : Suicide

We have seen suicide considered as a possible answer to the absurd, and then as a justification of the violation of the principles of revolt occasioned by the murder of an oppressor. Now we must consider how suicide relates to the courage required to face the difficulties of existence.

aa) Camus and Suicide

Camus reports several instances of suicide in his writings ¹⁵ as well as his own temptation. ¹⁶ He knows the position of the Greeks who accepted suicide as a rebellious answer to destiny : "The Ancients, if [p. 116] they believed in destiny,

¹ Cf. *Introd. à Chamfort*, II, 1106.

² *Int.*, October 1957, II, 1900.

³ C II, 152. Cf. *EE*, Preface, 9.

⁴ *Réponses à J.-Cl. Brisville*, II, 1920.

⁵ Cf. *La Tunisie française*, II, 1466.

⁶ Cf. *Ch, Présent.*, I, 2010.

⁷ *Int.*, II, 1427 ; C II, 172 ; *Entretien*, II, 743.

⁸ *Int.*, II, 1920 ; *Int.*, II, 1925.

⁹ *Ch, Présent.*, I, 2010 ; C II, 250.

¹⁰ *Int.*, II, 1927.

¹¹ *Int.*, II, 1424 ; *Int.*, II, 1326.

¹² *Int.*, II, 742.

¹³ *Allocution*, II, 1905.

¹⁴ Cf. *La Gauche*, October 1948, II, 364.

¹⁵ Among others : *MS* 100, 102 ; C I, 33, 88, 131, 139, 163, 207 ; C II, 182, 199, 230, 232, 260, 343 ; *HR* 591 ; *Ch* 1511.

¹⁶ C I, 89.

believed first in nature, in which they participated. Revolting against nature means the same thing as revolting against oneself... The only coherent revolt, then, is suicide." ¹ But Camus rejected this type of suicide in his discussion on the absurd. He also knows the thinking of the moderns, Tolstoy for example. ² But Camus makes the same correction as Tolstoy : "The existence of death forces us either to renounce life voluntarily or to transform our lives in such a way as to give life a meaning that death cannot take away. ³ We are free to commit suicide : "Kirilov was right. Committing suicide gave proof of his freedom." ⁴ But this is a badly used freedom, since it would be more worthwhile if it were directed towards facing up to life's events. Hitler and his accomplices killed themselves underground in order not to fall into the Allies' hands, "But this death is death for naught... Being neither efficient nor exemplary, it endorses the bloody vanity of nihilism." ⁵ In his first novel, *La Mort heureuse*, Camus suggests instead Zagreus's attitude when he was paralyzed : "They help me with my daily needs. They wash me. They wipe me. I am almost deaf. Ah well, I will never do anything to shorten a life in which I believe so much. I would even accept worse." ⁶ Meursault kills Zagreus, but it is taken for a suicide ; then Martha says : "There are days when I would like to be in his position. But sometimes more courage is needed to live than to kill oneself." ⁷ It is easy to recall the terms that Camus used for suicide : escape, insult to existence, evasion and repudiation." ⁸

bb) Superior Suicide

Superior suicide is an exception, as has been emphasized, ⁹ because, far from being cowardice, it is a form of heroism because of the values to which it bears witness : "The outer limit of the reasoning on revolt is to assent to kill oneself in order to escape complicity with murder in general. ¹⁰ This was the case with the protest suicide in the Russian prisons where one's comrades were whipped. ¹¹ This was also the case with Kaliayev : "For him, murder coincided with suicide... One life is paid for with another." ¹² In a sense, this was the case with Caligula. ¹³

d) The Acme of Courage : Heroism

Camusian heroism is not religious. It is not faith stretched to its limits (Camus rejected the leap of faith in God), but rather human courage asserted in a normal life

¹ HR 439.

² Cf. C I, 242.

³ C I, 242.

⁴ C I, 141.

⁵ HR 591.

⁶ C I, 94.

⁷ MH 89.

⁸ Cf. Chapter I, III 1, d

⁹ Cf. Chapter I, III, 2.

¹⁰ C II, 260.

¹¹ HR 426. C II, 230.

¹² C II, 199.

¹³ Cf. *Cal*, Preface to the American Edition, I, 1730.

by a man determined to perform extraordinarily well his job of being a human being. Rieux and Sisyphus are examples of this.

[p. 116] aa) The Nature of Heroism

Negatively speaking, heroism is not an end in itself, but a means of advancing men's happiness. It should be justified by values : "We do not want just any kind of hero. The reasons for heroism are more important than heroism itself. The consequential value therefore comes before the heroic value."¹ It is true that men are prone to create examples and models whom they call heroes.² But a hero is only worthy, for Camus, if it can be said that "finally, at the end of a long effort, he has lightened or diminished the totality of enslavements that burden men."³ Therefore heroism should be assigned "the secondary place where it belongs, just after, and never before, the generous requirement of happiness."⁴ But calling heroism "a secondary virtue" cannot be done without nuances : "Heroism and courage should be considered as secondary values — after having given proof of courage."⁵ Nor is heroism blind. Camus perceives it only as being imbued with intelligence (here again we find another application of his virtue of lucidity) : "One cannot justify just any type of heroism, any more than any type of love."⁶ He reproaches his German friend for the misguided heroism of the Nazis.⁷ Nor does heroism consist in beautiful, spectacular actions — to the regret of the narrator of *La Peste*, who has no heroism to report in his chronicle.⁸ Why ? "The narrator is rather tempted to believe that by attaching too much importance to beautiful actions one ends in paying homage to evil, an indirect, powerful homage, because then one appears to suppose that beautiful actions are to be prized only because they are rare and maliciousness and indifference, in comparison, are much more frequent motivations in men's actions."⁹ One should not imagine that virility can be found in prophetic fibrillation nor greatness in spiritual affectation.¹⁰ Rieux was irritated, like Camus, by an epic tone or prize speeches. Meursault is a hero who, without attitudes worthy of history, agrees to bear witness for the truth against the lies of society (at least in Camus's perspective).¹¹

¹ C II, 189-190.

² P 1331.

³ *Int.*, II, 1900.

⁴ P 1331.

⁵ C II, 123-124.

⁶ *Entretien*, February 1952, II, 742.

⁷ Cf. LAA 242.

⁸ P 1325.

⁹ P 1326.

¹⁰ C II, 31.

¹¹ *Étr.*, Preface to the American Edition, I, 1928.

bb) The Heroic Life : Ordinary Man

Positively speaking, heroism consists of the life of an ordinary man. This is not everyday man who has sunk into mechanical habits,¹ but the ordinary man who uses his energy to remain a man. "There exists a certain greatness that does not lend itself to loftiness."² In terms of his personal life, Camus recognizes : "The only effort of my life has been... to live the life of a normal man."³ This is the basis of heroism : "Nobody realizes that some people spend a Herculean effort just to be normal."⁴ Camus favours the unknown heroes of daily [p. 118] life ; he said in an interview after the announcement that he had won the Nobel Prize : "I first of all feel solidarity with everyday man."⁵ There is already enough trouble in being a man.⁶ Camus wanted Meursault to approach the only great problem by way of the daily and the natural.⁷ The true hero is the Hungarian worker who struggles for his bread,⁸ the trade union secretary who keeps filing-cards up to date,⁹ the physician who conscientiously does his work,¹⁰ and the artist who struggles for the truth.¹¹ All of them follow the example of Sisyphus, who struggles every day,¹² or of Prometheus, who continues his revolt.¹³ "There should be no grimacing, but only what is natural."¹⁴ "Taking a swim in the sea is a worthy pleasure, even for a future saint."¹⁵ "Scrupulously accepting the burden of our daily life"¹⁶ is heroism. "What matters is simply being human. No, what matters is being true and then everything follows, both humanity and simplicity."¹⁷

cc) The Heroic Task : the Job Well Done

The heroic task consists in a job done well. For example, it consists in the work of a man like Grand, "this insignificant and self-effacing hero who had no more going for him than the goodness of his heart and an apparently ridiculous ideal."¹⁸ The only way to be useful is to do one's work well ; otherwise what is left serves no purpose.¹⁹

¹ Cf. *MS* 106, *P* 1315, *P* 1446.

² *E* 814.

³ *C* II, 275.

⁴ *C* II, 105.

⁵ *Int.*, October 1957, II, 1899.

⁶ *C* II, 152.

⁷ *C* II, 30.

⁸ *Message en faveur de la Hongrie*, II, 1781.

⁹ *RR* 1692.

¹⁰ Cf. *P* 1375.

¹¹ *Int.*, II, 800.

¹² *MS* 197.

¹³ *E* 841.

¹⁴ *C* II, 68.

¹⁵ *P* 1428.

¹⁶ *Sur une philosophie de l'expression*, II, 1681-1682.

¹⁷ *C* I, 22.

¹⁸ *P* 1331.

¹⁹ *P* 1330.

Grandiose objectives are not necessary : "It is enough just to begin without thinking of great goals." ¹ Heroism means honesty in one's work, "each person in his place," ² "painstakingly and without glamour." ³ Then man is like the "fighters of great wars, exhausted with their work, bent only on not failing in their daily duties, no longer hoping for either the decisive operation or armistice day." ⁴ This is so with Sisyphus, the modern worker, and any man of duty. But something else is needed. One must take one's work upon oneself : "There is dignity of work only in work that is accepted freely." ⁵ Everyone must also, each person in his own place, bear witness to his acceptance of his time ⁶ and his honouring of values ; Camus personally asserts that if he "tried to define something, it was nothing other than... that everyday life should set in the brightest light possible the obstinate struggle against one's own degradation and that of others." ⁷ Camus insists a great deal on the need to begin again ⁸ and to continue ; ⁹ this is heroism, even if it entails insensibility : ¹⁰ "To continue with regularity, if one can say so, this superhuman work." ¹¹

There is something Stoic in Camus's idea of heroism. There is also something Christian, even though the perspectives are different, that dovetails with the contemporary Christian heroism born out of faithfulness to the obligations of the human constitution.

Now it remains to look at another Camusian virtue, hope.

[p. 119] 5. Hope

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One would be tempted to believe that, with his work on the absurd, Camus emptied human life of hope. But, as much in the absurd as in revolt, if he took away hope in God and immortality, he made room for human hope. *L'Homme révolté* is presented as a book of hope, ¹² as well as *Lettres à un ami allemand*, ¹³ *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* ¹⁴ and the entirety of his work. He won the Nobel Prize precisely because of

¹ C I, 181.

² *Int.*, II, 386.

³ *P* 1367.

⁴ *P* 1374.

⁵ C I, 114.

⁶ *Int.*, II, 800.

⁷ *Int.*, II, 801.

⁸ *P* 1429, 1435, 1449, 1451. *E* 871.

⁹ *P* 1412, 1429, *E* 827.

¹⁰ Cf. *E* 871.

¹¹ *P* 1412.

¹² Cf. *HR*, *Notes et variantes*, 1635.

¹³ Cf. *LAA* 225.

¹⁴ He restores hope in the present life and its trials. But hope does not have the same value as in *L'Homme révolté*, which opens to others.

this.¹ The Ambassador of Sweden specified : "You are... a rebel who has been able to give meaning to the absurd and to maintain, from the depth of the abyss, the need for hope, even if it is a difficult hope, by giving creativeness, action and human nobility their proper due in this maddening world."² Camus edited the collection *Espoir*,³ and cooperated in launching the career of Simone Weil, in whom he saw a forerunner to loneliness filled with hope.⁴ Even in the midst of the Second World War, he uttered this cry of hope : "I would not like to change the period in which I live, because I know and respect its greatness. Besides, I have always thought that the greatest danger coincided with the greatest hope."⁵

Courage aimed at overcoming the fear felt while facing danger ; hope foresees a good capable of bringing salvation.

For Camus, there are false hopes : God and the future life ; and real hopes ; the present life, life as such, man, nature, and man's collective future.

a) False Hopes

aa) God

Camus broached "The Hope in God" of Saint Augustine and his contemporaries for the first time in his *Diplôme d'Études supérieures*.⁶ He analyzed it, à propos the existentialists, in *Le Mythe* : he asked this question about life : "Does absurdity require that one escape from it by hoping (in God) or by suicide."⁷ He noted that "Hope is the fatal sidestepping of life that forms the third theme of this essay (*Le Mythe de Sisyphe*)."⁸ He called this leap to God an avoidance⁹ of present life and its troubles. It was philosophical suicide.¹⁰ God is either non-existent or malicious or indifferent ; Camus objects to placing man's hope, collectively or individually, in a being that does not intervene in History. Man's salvation is in his own hands. We shall see this in the following section on Camus's Godless saint.

bb) The Future Life

This hope derives from hope in God. One must reject the "hope for another life that must be 'deserved,' or the cheating out of life of [p. 120] those who live not for life itself."¹¹ "The tragic work could be the one that described the life of a happy man

¹ Cf. *DS, Comm.*, II, 1893.

² *DS, Ibid.*

³ Jean Grenier sees the man of hope in Camus (*Albert Camus, Souvenirs, op. cit.*, p. 148.

⁴ Proposed preface to *L'Enracinement*, II, 1702.

⁵ *Int.*, October 1957, II, 1904.

⁶ *PA* 1235.

⁷ *MS* 103.

⁸ *MS* 102.

⁹ *MS* 124.

¹⁰ Camus dedicated an entire chapter to it : *MS* 119-135.

¹¹ *MS* 102.

without any hope for the future." ¹ If there is a sin against life, it would be to hope for another life that would steal the unalterable greatness of this life from us. ² "Immortality is a problem in futility. Our destiny certainly interests us, not 'after' but 'before'." ³ Because the experience of the future life eludes us, Camus writes : "The absurd clears up one point for me : there is no tomorrow." ⁴ For Don Juan, there is no other vanity than the hope of a future life. ⁵ Even if Camus did turn in his position on God, he remained unchanged in his position on immortality : it does not exist.

b) True Hopes

aa) The Present Life

Hope in man and human action is limited to this existence : "Yes, man is his own end... If he wants to amount to anything, it must be in this life." ⁶ There is no eternity to hope for, but just the presence of oneself in oneself. ⁷ The accounts that must be paid are to the people on this earth that we love. ⁸ If there is so much tenacious hope in the human heart, ⁹ then this should find hope within this mortal life : "To be deprived of hope does not mean to despair. The flames of the earth are certainly worth celestial perfumes." ¹⁰ That is why it is possible to live even in an absurd world ; ¹¹ even in a world taken over by evil, as symbolized in *La Peste*, there always remains hope : "Who is talking about despair ? Despair is a gag. The thunder of hope and the flashing of happiness disturb the silence of this seized town... Since hope is our only wealth, how could we deprive ourselves of it ?" ¹² But it is an earthly and human hope.

bb) Life as Such

Life in itself was the only value for Camus, and it was present in his rejection of suicide and murder. ¹³ The ultimate hope is in life : "In a man's attachment to his life, there is something stronger than all the miseries of the world," ¹⁴ as Zagreus shows in *La Mort Heureuse*. ¹⁵ The old woman of *L'Envers et L'Endroit* was "finally thrown deep, and without a chance of return, into man's misery in God. But let the hope, of

¹ MS 210.

² N 76.

³ C I, 51.

⁴ MS 141.

⁵ MS 153.

⁶ MS 166.

⁷ Cf. C I, 23.

⁸ C II, 95.

⁹ MS 180.

¹⁰ MS 169.

¹¹ RR 1641.

¹² ES 277.

¹³ For suicide, cf. Chapter I, III, 1, d ; for murder, cf. Chapter III, III, 2, a.

¹⁴ MS 102.

¹⁵ MH 70.

life be reborn, and God will have no force against man's interests." ¹ The same is true throughout History : "in the blackest moments of our nihilism, I only looked for reasons to overcome this nihilism... For millenniums, men have learned to acclaim life even in suffering." ² In *La Peste*, "There was no room left in anybody's heart except for a very old and very doleful hope, the hope that [121] prevents men from letting themselves die and is only a raw resolve to live." ³ For the tortured person, there always remains hope for an unharmed life." ⁴ But for the man condemned to death, there is no longer any hope ; ⁵ his punishment is irreparable because it takes away all hope for exoneration if he is innocent ⁶ or, if he is guilty, for making good the evil that he did. ⁷ This same hope of living, were it only to kill, is still a hope. ⁸

cc) Man

Man is the hope put forth by *Le Mythe* and proclaimed by *L'Homme révolté*. The following formulas recur frequently : "I am optimistic about man," ⁹ and "I have never been pessimistic about man." ¹⁰ Man's possibilities are immense : even if he knows the good and nevertheless does evil, ¹¹ he still lends hope to the struggle against evil, ¹² and to solidarity, ¹³ justice, ¹⁴ peace, ¹⁵ unity ¹⁶ and courage. ¹⁷ This is how "man is capable of great actions," ¹⁸ "men are rather good than bad," ¹⁹ and "in the midst of calamities... there are more things in man to admire than to despise." ²⁰ In History, if man's action is limited, it is nonetheless real : "this eternal confidence of man, which has always made him believe that one could get humane reactions from a man in addressing him in the language of humanity." ²¹ In History, the individual can do anything, ²² and if "we can no longer reasonably hope to save everything... we can at least try to save bodies, so that the future will remain a possibility." ²³ Therefore no

¹ *EE* 16.

² *E* 865.

³ *P* 1432

⁴ *C II*, 265.

⁵ *C II*, 60.

⁶ *RG* 1040.

⁷ *RG* 1055.

⁸ Cf. *C II*, 338.

⁹ *C II*, 160.

¹⁰ *Int.*, II, 1613.

¹¹ *HR* 689.

¹² Cf. *ES* 271-272.

¹³ *HR* 684. *RR* 1691.

¹⁴ *E* 838.

¹⁵ *Int.*, II, 384

¹⁶ *Int.*, II, 379.

¹⁷ *ES* 271.

¹⁸ *P* 1351.

¹⁹ *P* 1326.

²⁰ *P* 1473. *C II*, 181.

²¹ *NvNb* 331.

²² *C I*, 181.

²³ *NvNb* 335.

one is allowed to despair about one single man, except after his death, which fixes everything.¹

dd) Nature

Nature has a predominant place in Camus's thinking ; among other things, he thinks of happiness as a state of accord with nature.² "A title : 'Hope of the World'."³ Nature often became the only hope among the clamours of war and violence, along with the memory of a happy sea.⁴ "Neither despair nor joys seem to be well founded when I contemplate the heavens and the light and heat that come from them."⁵ The hope of once again finding peace in nature renews modern man's courage, while he is led astray in cities or inhuman work.⁶ "I was able to stay alive through this deadly period because I knew that the sea existed."⁷ "Not possessing anything, having given away all my money, camping next to all my houses, I am yet able to be fulfilled whenever I want, I make love when I feel like it, and I never know despair."⁸

[p. 122] ee) The Collective Future

One can have no hope in History as such,⁹ but only in its progress : "I am not among those who assert that the world is racing towards perdition. I do not believe in the definitive decline of our civilization,"¹⁰ "there is nothing to fear, since we have already put ourselves right with the worst. There are therefore only reasons to hope and struggle."¹¹ At the end of his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize, Camus declared : ... "'Let us rejoice' even in the midst of the noise and furore of our history,"¹² because "in the midst of the crash of empires," there always comes "the sweet commotion of life and hope."¹³ The voice of those that love and suffer resists, and their resistance justifies hope.¹⁴ What matters is everyone's going to work in his own place to create values, because "The motives of renewal and hope lead to maintaining what is worthwhile, helping what deserves to live, and trying for happiness so that the terrible taste of justice will be less bitter."¹⁵ One of these motives comes from knowing that "when nihilism reaches its extreme it strangles and

¹ RG 1055.
² Cf. Chapter IV, VII, 4, a.
³ C I, 28.
⁴ LAA 241.
⁵ C I, 30.
⁶ *Ibid.*
⁷ C II, 290.
⁸ E 880.
⁹ Cf. *Jeune Méditerranée*, April 1937, II, 1327.
¹⁰ *Int.*, *Rencontre avec Albert Camus*, II, 1339.
¹¹ *Int.*, II 383.
¹² *Conf.*, December 1957, II, 1094.
¹³ *Ibid.*, 1096 DHR 1096.
¹⁴ Radio broadcast, April 1949, II, 1487.
¹⁵ *Int.*, II, 386.

devours itself in its own contradictions." ¹ The good always ends up by defeating evil, just as the mind does the sword. ² Whoever despairs of man and life's events is a coward, ³ because, as for example in *La Peste*, the last hope for a serum can come, and hope itself is already a victory over the plague" ⁴ "Let us go forward. This is the wager of our generation." ⁵

But what are the reasons for despairing and those for rejecting despair ?

c) Despair

aa) Motives

With fulfilled people, a reason for hoping is always accompanied by reasons for despairing. ⁶ What are the reasons for despairing ? They are : demanding more from human beings than they are able to give, ⁷ not knowing enough people, ⁸ or not having enough action ⁹ or love. ¹⁰ But this is not really despair ; it even gives rise to joy. "Despair is very close to joy." ¹¹ There is another, more profound despair, and that is not having control over the objective order or metaphysical or historical conditions as such. "One can despair of the meaning of life in general..., and of existence, because one has no power over them." ¹² How can one avoid despairing over death itself and the death of others ? But if one cannot change this order of things, one can still change one's attitude about it : "Despair is a feeling and not a state. One cannot dwell on it. And the feeling should give way to clear-sightedness." ¹³ One can always find a way out. If there were a case of pure despair, it would be that of a man condemned to death because [p. 123] of the mathematical element of his situation. ¹⁴ Or, again, despair could come from lack of clarity : "Despair means not knowing the reasons for struggling when one just has to struggle." ¹⁵ But even here it is possible to overcome this by finding reasons to justify one's hope.

bb) Refusal

¹ *Int.*, II, 738.

² *E* 835.

³ *Lettre* II, 1689. *C I*, 106.

⁴ Cf. *P* 1441.

⁵ *Int.*, 1903.

⁶ *N* 84, 85.

⁷ Cf. *C I*, 27.

⁸ Cf. *C I*, 35, 38.

⁹ *C I*, 58.

¹⁰ Cf. *C II*, 178.

¹¹ *C I*, 146.

¹² *C I*, 181.

¹³ *C I*, 179.

¹⁴ *C I*, 141.

¹⁵ *C II*, 280.

Camus has a clear position about despair : not to let despair become a rule of life.¹ Camus rejected those who did not overcome despair.² "The first thing is not to despair. We should not listen to those who are preaching the end of the world. Civilizations do not die so easily, and even if our world should collapse, it would be after others had. It is certainly true that we live in a tragic time. But too many people confuse tragedy with despair."³ If evil seems to triumph, "this is not despair ! This is lucidity. True despair is blind ! True despair consents to hatred, violence and murder."⁴ The collapse of hope should be resisted and "resisted twice, first in refusing to give up... then in refusing to despair of the power of revolt and liberation that is at work in each of us."⁵ A power of persuasion and life is moving in the world, parallel to the power of constraint and death that darkens history.

cc) Struggle

Camus does not picture anything without struggle. "What is remarkable about man is not that he despairs but that he overcomes and forgets despair."⁶ Even "if one is really persuaded of one's despair, one should act as though one were hopeful."⁷ Camus wanted to bring to view the heart of his period, or prime mover, that struggles in unhappiness and in hope.⁸ Without hope, there is no peace,⁹ and respite can be sought only in the midst of battle.¹⁰

The three major virtues of Camusian ethics, lucidity, courage and hope, were treated more deeply in the works on revolt ; they were already present in the works on the absurd, in which man was confronted mostly in his metaphysical condition. But with the historical condition, encountered mainly in *L'Homme révolté*, clear-sightedness, energy and openness to other people were needed more through History in order to survive. In a Godless world, one could not see what else would be needed.

Camus was seeking moral perfection. Beginning with *La Peste*, he developed a type of moral ideal : the Godless saint.

¹ C I, 178.

² C II, 110.

³ E 836.

⁴ *Int.*, Radio-Alger, 1948, II, 1613.

⁵ *Moscou au temps de Lénine*, Preface, II, 790.

⁶ C II, 145.

⁷ C I, 41.

⁸ *Int.*, Paris-Theatre, 1958, I, 1719.

⁹ P 1459.

¹⁰ *Conf.*, II, 1096.

[p. 124] **VI. The Moral Ideal : Godless Saintliness**

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The absurd presented man as being "sane" without God and more concerned with quantity than with quality ; revolt, in contrast, presents man as a "saint" without God. It implies what was said about heroism, but the difference is that the Godless saint is concerned with men's salvation. An equivalent of the Christian saint, the Camusian saint does not, however, rely on "grace," but only on his own resources. Let us now look at Camus's concerns with saintliness and the need for salvation, as well as its task, which is to save men.

1. Concern with Saintliness

Camus sees in the nineteenth century a need for direction, without God : "How to live without grace is the question that dominates the nineteenth century." ¹ If one can judge by his *Carnets*, this also seems to be a concern for Camus : "What do I meditate about that is greater than I and that I feel without being able to define it ? It is a sort of difficult progress towards a saintliness of negation — a Godless heroism — finally, pure man. It includes all the human virtues, including solitude with respect to God. What is the only superior example of Christianity ? It is Christ and his saints and their search for a way of life. This work will include as many forms as it does steps on the way to a perfection without reward. *L'Étranger* is the starting point. So is *Le Mythe*. *La Peste* shows a progression, not from zero towards infinity, but towards a deeper complexity that remains to be defined. The last point will be the saint, but he has an arithmetical value which is just as measurable as man." ² Camus sees this same ideal of saintliness in Chamfort. ³ As for his own desire, it is embodied in a character of *La Peste* : ... "When all is said and done," Tarrou said simply, 'what interests me is to know how to become a saint.' 'But you do not believe in God.' 'Exactly, whether one can be a Godless saint is the only concrete problem that I know today.'" ⁴ How could a Godless saint save men ? This is a question that must be answered. But before that, there is the question of whether men need salvation.

2. The Need for Salvation

Since men are handed over to evil in their metaphysical, historical and moral condition, they need to be saved. Divine salvation, with its "grace," has shown itself to be ineffective in lessening evil except by removing it at its source. Consequently men must set to work with only their own abilities to forge a relative happiness :

¹ HR 629.

² C II, 31.

³ *Introduction à Chamfort*, Coll. *Incidences*, Monaco, 1944, II, 1106.

⁴ P 1427.

"Men [p. 125] are either weak or cowardly... They must be saved from themselves," ¹ and others must take up the task, since God is either non-existent or incapable.

a) Salvation

But what is salvation ? In general, it is being delivered from any kind of peril. This meaning is found in Camus's works. ² More particularly, the notion of salvation comes from men's religious awareness. They have the experience of living in a condition of suffering and sin from which they are incapable of delivering themselves. Then they appeal to a divine saviour. If he cannot extricate them from this condition of the present life, he promises to do so in a future life. Christianity adds that this state of congenital sin is accountable for human guilt (the doctrine of "original sin"), and it leads to damnation in the other life if divine grace does not intervene. Christ, as the intermediary between God and men, assumed this task, which human efforts could not perform.

b) Divine Salvation : Unjust Grace

Camus secularizes the notion of salvation : God is either non-existent or incapable ; salvation can be achieved only in present life and by human forces. The divine mediator is rejected : Christ is just one more innocent person crushed by God's injustice. ³ "Grace," with Camus, is always connected with the injustice of God, who saves whom he chooses ; God is like his representative, the king, who "distributes his aid and help if he wants to and when he wants to. Despotism is one of the attributes of grace." ⁴ On the one hand, there are the saved, on the other hand, the damned : "What Christ scorned doing was saving the damned." ⁵ "Perhaps Christ died for someone, but not for me. Man is guilty, but his guilt consists in not having taken full advantage of himself — this is a fault that has grown with time." ⁶ God was at the beginning of man's metaphysical condition, and therefore he was associated with injustice, as has been seen ; ⁷ before "God the father of death and the supreme scandal," ⁸ "man cries out for justice from deep within himself." ⁹ Prometheus wanted to save men. ¹⁰ Today others should take up his work for him.

¹ HR 647.

² Cf. EE 36, EE 37, EE 20, E 826.

³ Cf. Chapter III, II, 3, d.

⁴ HR 522.

⁵ C II, 110.

⁶ C II, 111.

⁷ Cf. Chapter III, II, 3, b.

⁸ HR 436.

⁹ HR 706.

¹⁰ E 842.

c) Human Salvation

"Because salvation cannot come from God, it should be won on earth."¹ "If the question of the century is whether salvation is in our own hands, I would answer yes, because of the power of reflection and the informed courage that I still sense in some men that I [p. 126] know."² Camus feels close to those without grace : "I do not see why I should apologize for finding those people interesting who live without grace. It is about time that we began to be concerned with them, since they are the most numerous."³ Camus considers the principal meaning of his work to be his concern for the damned. But saving men can only be an undertaking of relative salvation : "What matters, indeed, is man's salvation, but not by placing it outside the world but through history itself. It involves serving man's dignity by means that are still worthy in the midst of a history that is not... We know, indeed, that man's salvation is perhaps impossible, but we say this is no reason to stop working for it, and we say above all that it is not right to declare it impossible before having done once and for all what was necessary to prove it was impossible."⁴ Without believing in absolute solutions, one can still imagine a persistent improvement of the human condition.⁵ What, therefore, is the Godless saint's task ?

3. The Godless Saint's Task

Camus does not allocate any special task to the Godless saint, other than the one he proposed for all men of good will in their struggle against evil, as defined in the face of the metaphysical,⁶ historical,⁷ and moral⁸ evil. The Godless saint's task approaches that of the hero.⁹ If we read through Camus's works, we can also discover some values that explain the Godless saint's task : subjectively, he should sum up all the Camusian "virtues," and objectively, he should refuse to save himself alone and should cooperate in the salvation of others by establishing the right values.

a) Subjectively

Whoever would like to work for others should first be in complete control of himself : "In order to teach, one must know something. In order to direct, one must first direct oneself."¹⁰ Heroism lies in first conquering oneself.¹¹ "Can anyone who

¹ *HR* 487.

² *E* 843.

³ *Int.*, November 1945, II, 1425.

⁴ Cf. *C* II, 129-130.

⁵ Cf. *Co*, November 1944, II, 282.

⁶ Cf. Chapter III, II, 4, a.

⁷ Cf. Chapter III, III, 3.

⁸ Cf. Chapter III, II, 4, b.

⁹ Cf. Chapter IV, V, d.

¹⁰ *Rép. à J.-Cl. Brisville*, II, 1920.

¹¹ *LAA* 222.

has not made justice reign in his own life really preach it ?" ¹ The first thing to learn, therefore, is to master ² oneself. ³ Camus develops a morality of asceticism : "It is good to give oneself a certain discipline and thus enjoy the opportunity to prove oneself and learn how far one can go." ⁴ One should be able to say : "I only want to hold my life in my own hands," ⁵ and one should have the strength and lucidity necessary for creating one's happiness and dignity. ⁶ Here we come back to the mastery of passions that is necessary for any man who wants to struggle against evil : "One should not give in to hatred, concede anything to violence, or allow one's passions to make one blind." ⁷ [p. 127] The imprisonments, crimes and devastations contained in the self should not be spread throughout the world, but they must be fought within oneself and in others. ⁸

b) Objectively

The Godless saint refuses to save himself alone, like Ivan : "He shows solidarity with the damned and, because of them, refuses heaven. Indeed, if he believed, he could be saved, but others would be damned. Suffering would continue." ⁹ He works for others' salvation, like Rieux : "He wants to help men and, if not save them, at least do them as little harm as possible and even sometimes a little good." ¹⁰ But this does not mean men in general, the distant men for whom an abstract concern saves one from concrete effort : "'Man's salvation' is too big a word for me," said Rieux. 'I do not go so far. It is health that interests me, his health before all else.'" ¹¹ Camus makes an allusion to Christ and his vigilance for all men of good will : "We shall accomplish our duty as men and... we shall perhaps save what is so terribly threatened. There was once a night in the history of humanity when a man burdened with his own destiny looked at his fellows asleep and, alone in a silent world, declared that he should not fall asleep but should keep watch till the end of time. This time is still ours. Time has never been more severe or bitter for the solitary individual." ¹² The Godless saint also works for sincerity between men : "By using simple sincerity in an unjust and indifferent world, a man can save himself and others." ¹³ He also works for justice, because our condition is unjust ; ¹⁴ and for honesty : "What is man's ideal reliance when he is prey to the plague ?... It is honesty ;" ¹⁵ and for men's happiness, ¹ for

¹ *EE* II.
² *C I*, 173.
³ "This effort can dominate my life" (*C I*, 84).
⁴ *Lettre II*, 1669.
⁵ *C I*, 75.
⁶ *SR*, January 1940, II, 1384. *C I*, 76. *C II*, 266.
⁷ *Allocution*, March 1945, II, 315.
⁸ *HR* 704.
⁹ *HR* 466.
¹⁰ *P* 1425.
¹¹ *P* 1397.
¹² *SR*, January 1940, II, 1383.
¹³ *Mal*, Preface to the American Edition, I, 1731.
¹⁴ *C II*, 129.
¹⁵ Extract from *Carnets I*, 1958.

culture,² and especially for values : "Our work is to create universality or at least universal values, and to conquer conformity."³ The same is true for fraternity : "Those who are deprived of grace are obliged to be generous among themselves. Others do not lack anything, since they are well provided for ; or they act as though they were. For us, on the contrary, everything is lacking except the fraternal helping hand."⁴

Is such a goal realizable ? Camus knows that the perfect man will never exist. But what counts is coming closer to him ; besides, is not the philosophy of revolt "a philosophy of limits, calculated ignorance and risk" ?⁵ Be that as it may, one should "accept the simplest human tasks and duties,"⁶ and join other men who, "without faith or law speak up for men's children almost everywhere today without letting up."⁷ "Our hope is that this world can be saved from itself and that everyone will then find what gives value to life, the pre-[p. 128] carious happiness of every day, and the solitary destiny that every man pursues in silence."⁸

From a Christian point of view, this salvation of men through their own efforts is incomprehensible, since it lacks the grace of God the Mediator. But from Camus's human point of view, this ideal of personal saintliness as a factor in men's salvation is superb. It is the only possible attitude remaining for men of good will in a world and a History without God. Men must save each other in the present life. Through this the human condition will be improved. Camus is aware that this undertaking of earthly salvation will always remain relative : "If man could bring unity to the world by himself and if he could make sincerity, innocence and justice reign merely by decreeing them, he would be God himself."⁹ The Camusian Godless saint is a cry of hope in man, even if this hope is relative and limited.

¹ "Man's task is to create happiness" (C II, 156). LAA 240, 241 ; E 836.

² Cf. *Discours*, March 1957, II, 1784.

³ C II, 154.

⁴ *Rencontres avec André Gide*, II, 1120.

⁵ HR 693.

⁶ C II, 156.

⁷ *Exposé* II, 375.

⁸ *Profession de foi*, II, 1386.

⁹ HR 689.

VII. Godless Happiness

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Happiness is the finale of Camusian ethics, as much from the personal point of view as from the collective. How can one be happy without God ? This is the fundamental question. Camus was asked in an interview if it would be possible to found a pure morality on the idea of happiness. Camus answered : "Yes, on happiness ; but without being selfish." ¹ How does he picture happiness in the mataphysico-historical human condition, which is given over to evil in all its forms ?

1. Happiness, the Universal Objective

a) The theme of happiness permeates Camus's life and works. First, he seeks it subjectively : "When I happen to look for what is fundamental about me, I find it is my taste for happiness." ² As early as the beginning of his *Carnets* (1936) he suggested : "My writings will come from my happy moments." ³ He renews this wish when he writes *L'Homme révolté* : "An essay on revolt which first bases philosophy on anguish and then on revolt." ⁴ Objectively, he resolved to share this happiness : "I want the greatest possible number of men to be happy." ⁵ To attain this end, he put to work his talent as essayist, journalist, dramatist and writer. "At the centre of my work there is an invincible sun" ⁶ — a theme that recurs frequently. ⁷

b) A development occurred, however, regarding the nature of happiness. The first cycle of his works, concerning the absurd, conceives of a happiness that is egocentric and occasionally egoistic, a sort of quantitative, physical eudemonism. The second cycle, concerning revolt, does not repudiate the first, but grades it lower. [p. 129] True happiness in the world and in History cannot be envisaged any more without the happiness of others and, especially, without moral values. Kaliayev's happiness is clearly different from Don Juan's. However, even if happiness gives access to others, it does not give access to the Other.

¹ *Int.*, II, 379.

² *Int.*, II, 1339.

³ *C I*, 25.

⁴ *C II*, 75.

⁵ *C II*, 147.

⁶ *Rencontre*, II, 1339.

⁷ *E 874. N 75*, 57.

2. Possibility of Happiness

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Happiness, a need of human nature, is possible even in an absurd world. But it is achieved by human ability alone and it requires effort.

a) A Demand of Human Nature

There is an instinct for happiness in every man.¹ Everyone has a right to happiness in "a condition which, in certain circumstances, imposes on us the duty to be happy."² Happiness is linked to innate aspirations, among them being the aspirations for justice, life and liberty. "Mersault in *La Mort heureuse*, Martha in *Malentendu*, and Caligula all search for it, even at the price of crime. The individual acts accordingly : "Do something to be happy, and be happy about it,"³ "He wanted to be happy. He had the right to be happy."⁴ If one is in a world in which one cannot live,⁵ one nevertheless can say, along with Victoria in *L'État de Siège* : "Happiness seized me by the throat."⁶ The human community also demands it : "The ideal social order is founded on the people's happiness... We should not doubt that we all possess an altruistic passion for man's impossible happiness."⁷ And this holds true even in the midst of events opposed to it, like war.⁸ If one involuntarily enters this period of violence, it is "precisely to defend a certain idea of happiness... Let us therefore preserve the memory of this happiness and of those who lost it."⁹

b) In an Absurd World and Absurd History

If knowledge of History adds to the atrocious misery in the world,¹⁰ one should know how to live happily in the world. "Happiness is the greatest of conquests, the one that we gain against the destiny that is imposed upon us."¹¹ One must remain within the world, without vainly hoping in God, and within History, by hoping in man : "Aware that I cannot separate myself from my time, I have decided to incorporate myself into it."¹² Is the world absurd ? But "one does not discover the absurd without being tempted to write a manual on happiness. 'What ! with such limited means... ?' But there is only one world. Happiness and the absurd are two sons

¹ SR, January 1940, II, 1383.

² N 60.

³ C I, 96.

⁴ C I, 87.

⁵ ES 348.

⁶ ES 201.

⁷ Co, November 1944, II, 279.

⁸ Cf. Co, December 1944, II, 299.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ LAA 223.

¹¹ LAA 241.

¹² MS 165.

of the same earth." ¹ Is it tragic happiness when it results from the absence of hope ? ² But "it has not been said that happiness is necessarily inseparable from optimism. It is entwined with love — which is not the same thing." ³ "The universe of death. Tragic work : happy work." ⁴ Indeed, if one cannot be happy in seclusion or neglect, ⁵ one should put up with this condition and look for one's Place.

3. Happiness, a Human Work

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"Man's task is to create happiness." ⁶ Happiness is not a gift from God, but the work of men. Saving them means assuring them of happiness in a condition that does not lend itself to happiness. ⁷ There is no divine happiness : "I am learning that there is no superhuman happiness or eternity outside sweep of days." ⁸ One should not raise up one's eyes to heaven to wait for it. ⁹ In terms of the individual, it is up to each person to create his own happiness ; this is the rebel's logic : "to wager, in the face of men's pain, on happiness," ¹⁰ "one should add to happiness and joy because this universe is unhappy." ¹¹ When one has seen happiness just once in the expression of a loved one, "one knows that there can be no other vocation for a man than producing this light on the faces that surround him." ¹² In terms of the community, "nations are duty-bound to regard as sacred the happiness of each of their citizens." ¹³ There are some countries (like Algeria, which Camus knew better than others) which are given to happiness, although millions suffer from hunger ; ¹⁴ the political task is to assure a better distribution of goods in these countries, ¹⁵ in order to provide a minimum of the material conditions needed for happiness. Rambert asserts : "The public good involves everyone's happiness," and his statement could serve as the conclusion to Camus's report on Kabylia. ¹⁶ Statesmen should agree with Camus : "We fought so that free men could look at each other without shame and each man could be responsible for his own happiness." ¹⁷ But what is the nature of Camusian happiness ?

¹ MS 197.
² N 87.
³ N 86.
⁴ C I, 123.
⁵ Mal 127.
⁶ C II, 156.
⁷ Cf. E 843.
⁸ N 75.
⁹ Mal 171.
¹⁰ HR 688.
¹¹ C II, 129.
¹² C II, 274.
¹³ Co, May 1945, II, 1557.
¹⁴ Co, May 1945, II, 946.
¹⁵ "La famine en Algérie", II, 944-946.
¹⁶ Misère de la Kabylie, II, 903-938.
¹⁷ Preface to *L'Espagne libre*, 1946, II, 1608.

4. The Nature of Happiness : Agreement

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What made man unhappy, from the metaphysical standpoint, was the divorce between man and the world, which the absurd defined ; from the historical standpoint, the discord among men, which History defined ; from the psychological standpoint, the impossibility of agreeing on values. Thus it is logical that Camus now define happiness in terms of agreement with the world, with men and with oneself. "Feeling ties with the earth, loving one's fellows, and knowing there is always a place where one's heart will be at ease — these all bring a great deal of security to a man's life. And without doubt that is not enough. But, in this country of the soul, [p. 131] everyone longs for certain moments. 'Yes, we must go back there.' What is strange about finding this union that Plotin hoped for on the earth ?" ¹

a) Agreement with the World

— I am happy in this world because my kingdom is of this world." ² This is a formula used frequently by Camus. ³ For him the word "world" has many meanings ; but when he speaks about man's agreement with the world, he means the Greek '*fusis*,' or an understanding with physical nature and the earth. "A secret fraternity reconciles me with the world... I admired and I continue to admire this connection which unites man with the world, this double reflection in which my heart can intervene and dictate its happiness up to a precise limit at which the world can complete it or destroy it." ⁴ A great hymn of agreement between man and nature is sung in *L'Envers et L'Endroit* and *L'Été*, and especially in *Noces*, which tells of man's marriage with the world. This agreement with nature goes from familiarity ⁵ to kinship, ⁶ then to brotherhood, ⁷ and all the way to marriage : "This odour consecrates man's marriage with the earth, and makes rise, within us, the only truly virile love in this world, a love perishable and generous." ⁸ This is not only marriage, but also man's identification with and dissolution in nature : "When am I truer than when I follow the earth ?" ⁹ ; "Buffeted so long by the wind, shaken for more than an hour, dizzy with resistance, I lost consciousness of the pattern that my body was tracing. Like the pebble polished by the tides, I was burnished by the wind, worn down to my soul. I was a little bit this force with which I floated, then a great deal, and finally I was

¹ N 75.

² C I, 22.

³ Cf. EE 49, N 87.

⁴ N 88.

⁵ N 63.

⁶ Cf. N 75.

⁷ Cf. N 88.

⁸ N 76.

⁹ EE 49.

itself, confusing the beatings of my blood with the great, ringing strokes of the heart that is everywhere present in nature." ¹

— Happiness means abandoning oneself to the world, ² and consenting to the earth : "In its sky mixed with tears and the sun, I learned to consent to the earth and to burn in the dark flame of its festivities. The desert is a remedy for the heart, ³ and in the tragic times of History, it is a refuge from despair : "In the worst years of our madness, the memory of this sky never left me. It was ultimately the sky that prevented me from despairing." ⁴ To the extent that one separates oneself from the world, one is afraid of death. ⁵ There is the world's truth ⁶ which must be deciphered, ⁷ the "double truth of the body and the moment." ⁸ If one knows how to look well, one can see, "under the morning sun, a great happiness spreading out into space," ⁹ that presents us with its richness : the Algerian people, for example, put all their goods on this earth, goods which [p. 132] were perhaps ridiculous yet essential. ¹⁰ Happiness is not eternal, but a trembling attachment to the lessons of the earth. ¹¹

— The world has a soul which must be discovered. There exist "the same sight of the earth" ¹² and of the sea, ¹³ the "beating heart of the world," ¹⁴ "a resonance shared by the earth and man," ¹⁵ and "the world's melody that gets through to us." ¹⁶ Nature cries out, ¹⁷ the world speaks, ¹⁸ and the evening is inhabited. ¹⁹

— The world is God, "a god that caresses me." ²⁰ "In the spring, Tipasa is inhabited by gods and the gods speak in the sunshine ²¹ ; "the gods bursting out in the daylight will return to their daily death. But other gods will come. And to be more sombre, their ravaged faces will still be born in the heart of the earth." ²² One should be

¹ N 62.

² Cf. N 57.

³ N 88.

⁴ E 814.

⁵ E 874, 854-855, 880.

⁶ N 65.

⁷ N 87.

⁸ N 62.

⁹ N 82.

¹⁰ N 57.

¹¹ N 74.

¹² EE 27.

¹³ N 58.

¹⁴ N 61.

¹⁵ N 81.

¹⁶ N 57.

¹⁷ E 819. N 64, 75. E 882.

¹⁸ E 828-829.

¹⁹ N 55.

²⁰ EE 48.

²¹ N 55.

²² N 60.

converted to the world and draw one's religion from it,¹ and be initiated into the mysteries of Eleusis, Demeter and Dionysus.² One must put one's faith in the world.³ "The earth ! In this great temple deserted by the gods, all my idols have feet of clay."⁴ Is this animism for Camus, in which happiness would consist in uniting oneself with the Soul of the world ? Is this Camus's pantheism ? If it is, is it like Spinoza's,⁵ or like Holbach's ?⁶ It is certainly not, even if some critics have attributed one theory or the other to him. It is a question rather of a literary invention with more poetry than philosophy, of a mental attitude that represents Nature as a living whole, a unity, for which one celebrates a kind of worship service. One can find such texts as the above only in poetic works. Neither *Le Mythe* nor *L'Homme révolté*, Camus's two books of ideas, presents such a philosophical position. But the major reason is that this theory contradicts all his thinking on revolt, in which the only God imagined or denied is a personal God of the biblical sort, from whom the rebels personally demand an accounting of justice, a free God responsible for men's unhappiness in their metaphysical or historical condition.⁷ Moreover, Camus was aware of Spinoza's pantheism,⁸ and was hardly enthusiastic about it : "It is the given world once and for all, in which everything is as it is and necessity is infinite ; originality and chance have no place at all. Everything is monotonous."⁹

Camusian happiness is still agreement with men.

b) Agreement with Others

"Perfection is agreement with one's condition and recognition of and respect for man."¹⁰ There is an evolution in his thought ; in the works on the absurd, happiness was egocentric and individualistic.¹¹ In the works on revolt, happiness cannot be imagined without others : "One can be ashamed of being happy all alone,"¹² and [p. 133] ashamed for greater reason contrary to others :¹³ "Happiness is generous. It does not live on destruction."¹⁴ Being egoistic is a habit with man,¹⁵ as well as the temptation to turn away from the men of one's time.¹⁶ Never again should we be

¹ Cf. *N* 84.

² *N* 82, 57, 67, 68.

³ Cf. *N* 59.

⁴ *N* 88.

⁵ In which only God is real, and the world is a manifestation of Him, without any permanent reality or distinct substance.

⁶ In which only the world is real, while God is only the sum of all that exists.

⁷ Cf. Chapter III, II, 3, c.

⁸ *C* II, 46-48.

⁹ *C* II, 48.

¹⁰ *C* II, 27.

¹¹ Cf. *N* 58.

¹² *P* 1389.

¹³ Cf. *Cal* 106.

¹⁴ *Cal* 105.

¹⁵ *EE* 39.

¹⁶ Cf. *E* 856 ; *C* I, 173 ; *C* II, 135.

solitary,¹ as we are all interdependent in the same destiny and the same History ; the action of one leads to response from the other :² "You and I... united in the love that we bear for our earth, know that we are not enemies and that we could live happily together on this earth which is ours. For it is ours and I can no more imagine it without you and your brothers than you could separate it from me and those that resemble me. You said it very well, even better than I could : we are condemned to live together."³ One cannot claim only for oneself one's own agreement with the world, one must share it with the whole race.⁴ Being happy with one's friends⁵ and making happy those that one loves⁶ can conflict with private happiness ; taking upon oneself the unhappiness of others can extend to individual sacrifice, as experienced by those who, "facing the most elevated reasons for enduring, entertain till the end the painful thought of the happiness that they renounce and the duty that is going to kill them."⁷ Even art cannot be a solitary happiness.⁸ Even in the worst of times, a taste for happiness must be preserved.⁹ "There always comes a moment when people stop struggling and tearing themselves apart, and finally agree to love each other as they are. This is paradise."¹⁰

c) Agreement with Oneself

One should have the same agreement with oneself that one has with the world and with other men. "What is happiness other than the simple agreement between a human being and his existence ? And what more legitimate agreement could unite man with his life than the double consciousness of his desire to endure and his destiny to die ?"¹¹ It is a part of man's task in the world to replace disorder in oneself with unity.¹² "it is not so easy to become what one is or to find what one is really capable of,"¹³ "there is no human being... who, beginning with an elementary level of consciousness, does not become exhausted looking for formulas or attitudes that would give his existence the unity that it lacks,"¹⁴ but one must strive to reduce the fundamental disagreement that separates oneself from one's experience,¹⁵ or that which also defined one's absurd strangeness. One must love one's life and be proud of it,¹⁶ but not with a selfish love as exemplified by Clamence, who searches for his

¹ E 856.

² *Lettre* to Kessous, octobre 1955, II, 965.

³ *Ibid.*, 963.

⁴ N 60.

⁵ C I, 92.

⁶ *Mal* 127.

⁷ Preface to *Devant la mort*, June 1951, II, 723.

⁸ *Discours*, December 1957, II, 1071.

⁹ *Co*, December 1944, II, 299.

¹⁰ C II, 323.

¹¹ N 85.

¹² *HR* 665.

¹³ N 56.

¹⁴ *HR* 665.

¹⁵ *MS* 177.

¹⁶ Cf. N 58.

identity by giving himself to others,¹ nor with a pitiful feeling about one's unhappiness ;² only true love can make us be ourselves.³ Personal happiness cannot be conceived without lucidity, courage [p. 134] and hope. Nor can it be thought of without an agreement with the world and other people or without a certain wisdom.

5. Asceticism for Happiness

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"To be happy, a lot of time is needed. Happiness is patience and perseverance."⁴ Camus constantly restates the necessity of effort for happiness and for "the demand of happiness and the patient quest for it."⁵ Happiness cannot be won with symbols.⁶ One should long, not for the possession of happiness itself, but for the striving towards it :⁷ "What counts is the desire for happiness, a sort of enormous, always present consciousness. Everything else, women, works of art, and worldly success are only pretexts."⁸ It would be unrealistic to believe in a definitive happiness ; lengthy duration is inessential for Camusian happiness ; there are "brief and free interludes of happiness,"⁹ "a moment of happiness is inexpressible."¹⁰ It is transient : "Life's prize is precarious, daily happiness,"¹¹ "happiness is a chance that continues."¹² One should not wait for happiness to come from others, but instead should achieve it oneself ; this is what Camus wished for his readers during the war, on 1st January 1940 : "Create by yourselves your happiness and your dignity."¹³

¹ Cf. *Ch* 1509.

² Cf. *EE* 23.

³ *EE* 23.

⁴ *C I*, 97.

⁵ *C I*, 92.

⁶ *E* 836.

⁷ *Int.*, II, 379.

⁸ *C I*, 104.

⁹ *Discours*, II, 1074.

¹⁰ *C II*, 270.

¹¹ *Profession de foi*, II, 1386.

¹² *Co*, December 1944, II, 300.

¹³ *Ibid.*

[p. 135]

General Conclusion

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Our objective has been to provide an analysis of Camus's thought, centered on the problem of God. Here we shall discuss three points that seem to emerge from this study.

1. A Godless Wisdom

All of Camus's thinking tends towards a philosophy, or wisdom, with an ethical character. If he ponders the universe, History and man, this accords with behaviour adapted to an absurd metaphysical condition and to a nihilist historical condition, both of which are characterized by the injustice done to men. Camus defines wisdom thus : "The word 'wise' refers to the man who lives with what he has without speculating about what he does not have." ¹ What does he not have ? A world that meets man's needs, a History that respects man's rights, a just God, immortality and certitudes. What has he ? An impotent reason at once his grandeur and his weakness ; a real but relative hope in man. All of Camus's effort is concentrated on the definition of behaviour without weakness in a universe without future, employing principles based on human nature. "If I have tried to define something, it was nothing other... than the mutual existence of history and man, everyday life that should be illuminated with as much light as possible, and the persistent struggle against one's own and others' degradation." ² The man who has been abandoned in a condition of exile and handed over to evil, who turns his eyes away from a useless heaven, who looks to mankind for everything needed to bring about justice, this man is looking for wisdom. — For ethical wisdom, for if there is one intellectual effort on the part of Camus, this deals with the art of living in an absurd world and nihilist History : "The important thing, therefore, is not to go back to the root of things, but, the world being what it is, to know how to behave in it." ³ Camus is not a metaphysician, but a moralist. "The greatest saving that one can realize in the order of thought is to accept the unintelligibility of the world and be concerned with man." ⁴ How can one do this ? By following principles [p. 136] that assure happiness in a condition that does not lend itself to happiness : "Our task as men is to find formulas that will lessen the infinite

¹ MS 169.

² *L'artiste et son temps*, II, 801.

³ HR 414.

⁴ C II, 133.

anguish of free souls. We have to sew tip again what was torn and make justice imaginable in a world so obviously unjust and make happiness meaningful for people poisoned by the unhappiness of the age." ¹

Camusian wisdom does not lie in passive resignation, but in lucid and active acceptance. That may seem surprising in light of the importance he attaches to refusal and revolt. But his terminology makes this clear. There are some ambivalent expressions : "to arrange" "to accept," "to consent," "to become reconciled." ² But there is one which, except for rare exceptions, is always negative : "to resign oneself." Resignation implies passivity and cowardice, whereas acceptance includes rebellious lucidity. Camus gives this formula for wisdom : "Accepts what is, once it is recognized that it cannot be changed." ³ The wisdom of acceptance refers to that over which one has no control, and thus to the metaphysical and historical condition. What good does it do to speculate about what one does not have ? The wise attitude is therefore to make the most of what is. Should one accept only the place (*Endroit*) of things and their 'yes' ? No : "Become deeply involved, and then accept their 'yes' and 'no' with equal force." ⁴ This holds true for the metaphysical condition : "Agree to live in such a universe and get your strength from it ;" ⁵ "The world's order will not change for the sake of your desires ! If you want to change it, leave your dreams behind and take account of what exists." ⁶ This also holds true for the historical condition : "We are interdependent with this world... We do not know if this is evil, but we know that it is so. The conclusion is that one should come to an agreement with it." ⁷ This is also valid for personal destiny : "Finally, the best thing is to accept what we are. But this should not prevent us from being clear-sighted." ⁸ Any event, even war, can help : "Choose in the frightful test whatever helps your own greatness. Accept the test and everything that goes with it. But vow to perform in the least noble of tasks only the most noble deeds." ⁹ One can even speak of an evolution in Camus's attitude to death. First it was a matter of "dying unreconciled," ¹⁰ but gradually it became rather a question of accepting death with lucidity ¹¹ and without bitterness. ¹² For the wise man, it is not a question, therefore, of wishing to change the impossible order of things, but regarding the existing order with a universal lucidity so as to perform the task which is possible : "Desiring is nothing. Accepting is everything. With the condition that in the most humble and disturbing experience, man should

¹ E 835-836.

² HR 1641 ; C II, 172 ; MS 143, MS 138.

³ E 870.

⁴ C I, 38.

⁵ MS 142.

⁶ ES 290.

⁷ E 835.

⁸ About *La Vallée heureuse* by J. Roy, *L'arche*, February 1947, II, 1483.

⁹ C I, 168.

¹⁰ MS 139.

¹¹ Cf. N 64, 65 ; HR 689.

¹² C II, 128.

always be 'present' and bear it without yielding while fortified by all his lucidity."¹ Such is the [p. 137] position of the hero, the Godless saint and the happy man ; for Camus, happiness, heroism and saintliness are inseparable from wisdom. Everything has its reverse side (*Envers*) and its place (*Endroit*), everything is exile (*Exil*) and kingdom (*Royaume*), and the world is ambivalent in all its aspects : "I recognized the world for what it was and I decided to accept that its good was at the same harmful and its crimes beneficial."² Everything is good. Camusian wisdom goes back to ancient wisdom.³

2. The Greek and Christian Influences

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Albert Camus cannot be understood apart from the influences he received. Two great currents of thought underlie his work and largely explain his position on God : Greek philosophy and Christian thought. Camus had studied the nature and the differences of Christianity and Hellenism in his *Diplôme d'Études supérieures*. If he was able later to deepen his studies of one or the other, his fundamental position stayed the same ; one could say about this *Diplôme* what he said about *L'Envers et L'Endroit* ; "Even if I have done a lot of walking since this book, I have not made much progress.

a) Greek Philosophy

Camus retains a lot of the Greek philosophers. First, the world is conceived as beauty : "Their gospel said : our Kingdom is of this world. It is Marcus Aurelius's 'Whatever suits you, Cosmos, suits me.'"⁴ Then the world and man are conceived as self-sufficient. Since the supernatural did not exist, the gods were only a higher science, everything was concentrated on man, and the wise man was the equal of the gods ; moral evil was either done in ignorance or an error, and Sin and Redemption were incomprehensible to them.⁵ Destiny was in man's hands even if fate was imposed by the gods or by the universe (as with Sisyphus). Camus gets his notions of limit, equilibrium and harmony from them ; he even applies these to revolt. He often said that he obtained his idea of human nature from the Greeks, unlike the existentialists. From them he also inherits the worship of nature and of the human body. The same thing is true for reason : without it, neither the absurd nor revolt would be comprehensible ; even if the universe is considered irrational by Camus, as opposed to the Greek concept, it is because of the unsatisfied demands of reason. Differing from Aristotle, however, he finds metaphysics without value and doomed to failure.⁶

¹ C I, 172.

² E 883.

³ MS 197.

⁴ PA 1225.

⁵ PA 1226.

⁶ *Lettre*, January 1943, II, 1666.

But it is the Stoics that he approximates the most. He disagrees with them on many points : he rejects suicide ; the order of the world [p. 138] is no more than disorder and chaos ; God is no longer benevolent, but unjust. Even if one must lucidly accept the order of the world which has its reverse side (*Envers*) and its *place* (*Endroit*), rebellious protest must be sustained. The world's Soul becomes a literary fiction or a poetic animism. For the Stoics, evil entered into the natural order of things ; whereas for Camus evil is disorder and unnatural. It is no longer the world's perfection celebrated by Epictetus, for example, or great, universal sympathy. But Camus retains their accord with physical nature. Happiness is defined in terms of an agreement with the world ; it is not at the mercy of circumstance but creates itself. He repeats the following Stoic themes : importance of self-control ; knowledge of one's own condition ; indifference to reputation ; silence in the face of adversity ; and the effort of daily duty carried out in lucidity and silence.

b) Christian Thought

Christianity contrasts a historical concept with the Greek cyclical concept : "The meaning of history is the idea that the world is headed towards a goal as though it were the conclusion of a tragedy."¹ It introduces two essential themes, the Incarnation and Redemption : the divine entered the human in the person of Jesus Christ, man-God, who took human sin and misery upon himself.² By his death and resurrection Christ paid for sin but left its effects in time, deferring all absence of evil and suffering to eternity, after the resurrection and in immortality. Camus understands this and reproaches Jesus for not having taken evil out of time. From Christianity Camus retains the need of salvation for men, the need for saintliness, the concept of men doing evil while wanting to do good, and the idea of a collective guilt underlying the absurd, which describes the state of an unbalanced world in a state of sin, but all this without God.³ The same goes for collective participation in men's salvation, faithfulness to daily duty, and the values of justice and brotherhood.

Camus was torn between Hellenism and Christianity, between Greek reason and the basic principles of the Christian faith. He recognized this himself : "It is a hard fate to be born on a pagan earth in Christian times. This is my case. I feel closer to the values of the ancient world than I do to Christian values."⁴ This partially explains his position in regard to God.

¹ PA 1265.

² PA 1231.

³ MS 128.

⁴ *Int.*, *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, May 1951, II, 1343.

3. Camus and God

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Some say Camus was drawn toward atheism and some say toward Christianity. To call Camus an atheist or a Christian is to lack [p. 139] objectivity and, in Camusian language, justice. Distinctions and nuances must be made.

a) Evolution

One first fact is not debatable : Camus's evolution with regard to God. In his earliest works on the absurd, God's non-existence seems to be an admitted fact that could pose no problem. Especially in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, God's existence is denied, on the one hand, because of the metaphysical reason of evil in the universe ; he is in a state of sin, but without God. On the other hand, the earth speaks without respite of a God that does not exist,¹ and nostalgia for God is inscribed even on the heart of Camus's concept of the absurd.² In the works on revolt, culminating in *L'Homme révolté*, there is a deepening of the problem and a difference in perspective. For the ethical reason of justice the metaphysical rebel rejects God, whom he could have postulated at the beginning ; but because of God's injustice he denies his existence ; the rebel is not an atheist at first but a blasphemer.³ The need for salvation overrides the need for order as such : "Since man's salvation cannot be made in God, it must be made on earth."⁴ Thus begins "the essential undertaking of revolt which is to substitute the kingdom of justice for that of grace."⁵ But his long analysis of History proves to Camus that "the kingdom of grace has been defeated, while that of justice also collapses."⁶ Then there is distress : "Who can picture," Camus writes in his *Carnets*, "the distress of a man who has sided with the creature against the creator and, losing belief in his own and others' innocence, judges the creature and himself to be as criminal as the creator ?"⁷ Men are not saved nor are they more successful than God in assuring their salvation. But Camus does not give up in bitterness. He utters a cry of hope, not in God, but in the man of good will with his ethics of revolt finding an example in the hero and the Godless saint. After *L'Homme révolté*, published in 1951, there is a five-year silence until *La Chute*, then Camus's death in 1960. Except for *La Chute*, nothing different was brought forward in the way of ideas ; in this book, the need for salvation is no longer metaphysical or historical, but individual. Clamence topples from his virtuous image and discovers his congenital guilt. Does he appeal to God and his grace ? Perhaps he would be in Kirilov's position : "He feels

¹ N 80.

² This was the conclusion on God and the absurd, cf. Chapter I, Conclusion, 2.

³ HR 436.

⁴ HR 487.

⁵ HR 465.

⁶ HR 684.

⁷ C II, 281.

that God is necessary and that he has to exist. But he knows that he does not exist and that he cannot exist." ¹ Why ?

[p. 140] **b) Objections**

— The same stumbling block with God remained constant with Camus : the problem of evil. A great deal of suffering and many injustices would have to be attributed to God. Camus does not distinguish between the god of the philosophers and the God of the Christians. At the end of the present study, we believe we can affirm that a First Cause god or Unmoved Mover god of the Aristotelian sort would be unthinkable for Camus, since he was so concerned with justice. The only conceivable God for him is the God of the Christian type : "Revolt can personally demand a reckoning from a personal God," ² but this God keeps quiet ; thus "a god without reward or punishment, a deaf god, is the rebels' only religious conception." ³

— Even Camus's method also raises an objection. Even if he has recognized that he cannot wash his hands of metaphysical cares, ⁴ have nostalgia for the Word that would sum up everything, ⁵ he affirms the failure of the metaphysics that could lead to Being, ⁶ and he limits the requirements of reason to pragmatic verification and description of factual experience. ⁷ Does he, however, refuse to go towards Being ? "I do not refuse to go towards Being, but I do not want a route that takes me away from human beings. Knowing if one can find God at the end of one's passions." ⁸

— Admitting the existence of God, in this perspective, would be to make a leap of faith and sacrifice intellect. ⁹ Following the example of Kierkegaard and the thinkers he refuted in *Le Mythe*, can one find "a proof by the absurd" of God's existence ? In the preceding state of his thought, Camus is explicit : no, one cannot. This "route" towards God's existence is excluded, unless there is a rupture with his previous thinking (a possibility). God cannot leave obscurity and suffering. ¹⁰ The god who came into the world "with dissatisfaction and a taste for pointless pains" ¹¹ does not appeal to Camus. The existential leap was condemned in *Le Mythe*. "It is vain to come to God because you have become detached from the earth and suffering has separated you from the world." ¹² Religion relieves man of the weight of his own life. Hope of redemption through suffering and humiliation (as with Faulkner) was

¹ MS 183.

² HR 443.

³ HR 441.

⁴ *Lettre*, January 1943, II, 1666.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ MS 176.

⁸ C II, 97.

⁹ MS 126.

¹⁰ *Étr* 1209.

¹¹ MS 197.

¹² C II, 108.

explicitly rejected by Camus in 1956.¹ But the "yes" to God's existence was not excluded either: "The secret of my universe is imagining God without human immortality."² However, perhaps that could be done by another way. Camus has an innate sense of the eternal, and the absurd was only this nostalgia for eternity, for the absolute, which was not fulfilled in the world as it is now experienced.

[p.141] c) Between YES and NO

Such was Camus's philosophical position at the time his life ended: between the YES and the NO to God's existence. "It is true that I do not believe in God. But, for all that, I am not an atheist."³ Camus answered the interviewer who asked him to clarify his thought about "imagining God without human immortality:" "I have a sense of the sacred and I do not believe in a future life. That's all."⁴ After the publication of *La Chute*, some readers wondered if he was going to come round to the spirit if not the dogma of the Church. Camus replied energetically: "Really nothing allows them to think that. Does not my penitent judge say clearly that he is Sicilian and Javan? Not the least bit a Christian. Like him, I feel a great friendship for the first of them. I admire the way he lived and died. My lack of imagination prevents me from following him further."⁵

Could Camus have written, after *L'Envers et L'Endroit*, of things, after *L'Exil et le Royaume*, of people, after *Le Masque et le Visage* (the mask and face) of God? This is a hypothesis, and like every hypothesis, it can receive multiple answers depending on conditions. If one remains with the first elements in Camus's thought, the answer is certainly "no": God and evil do not go together. But if one admits a break in the chain of thought, which is always possible in the human mind, then the answer would perhaps be "yes". The most honest position, however, is certainly the one that takes Camus's thought where it stopped: between the YES and the NO. One cannot say that he is an atheist, since he has a sense of the sacred, nor can one assert that he is a Christian, since he denied it. He did not conclude either, as he was torn between Greek reason with its love for clarity and his innate sense of the sacred implying obscurity. He did not distinguish between the god of the philosophers and the God of the Christians, the god of reason and the God of faith. His work could be an example of what the philosophers call "the natural desire for God," a desire crushed by the exigencies of reason.

[p. 142 à 171, notes de fin converties en notes de bas de page.]

¹ Int., *Le Monde*, August 1956, I, 1880.

² C II, 21.

³ Cf. Int., I, 1881.

⁴ *Réponses à J.-Cl. Brisville*, 1959, II, 1923.

⁵ Int., *Le Monde*, I, 1881.

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