CAMUS AND THE ABSURD

AN EXAMINATION OF THE CONCEPT OF THE ABSURD AS DEVELOPED IN THE WORKS OF ALBERT CAMUS

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INTRODUCTION

Before stating the purpose and extent of this thesis, it is perhaps necessary to justify writing a study of the thought of Albert Camus for a department of philosophy. I say perhaps, because the very fact that Camus has made a statement regarding the nature of reality is, in itself, sufficient to warrant an investigation into the nature of his thought; however, a number of thinkers would disagree. This is partly because the absurd and terms with which it is normally associated have questionable standing in the realm of academic philosophy due to the pervasiveness of post-logical positivism. This school attempts to analyze concepts into their simplest aspects, but thinkers who use terms such as the absurd do not feel compelled to examine them as linguistic concepts. Also, it is probably of the essence of such terms that they could not be analyzed in the way in which a term such as duty could be. This is because an experience such as the absurd would be subjective and non-communicable in a formal manner. Cruickshank gives a succinct expression of this aspect of the absurd:

> They are philosopher-dramatists and philosopher-novelists who set in motion situations which are available to direct personal experience but which, by the same token, cannot be adequately conveyed or discussed in the language of 'pure' philosophy. Such abstract and analytical discussion would entail a confidence in logical generalities which

> the nature of the absurd, as variously interpreted by Malraux, Camus, or Sartre, denies.[1]

Because the absurd cannot be expressed in the language of 'pure' philosophy, contemporary academic philosophers relegate the discussion of such concepts to literature. Jung gives a concise statement of this tendency: "The frightening revelation of abysses that defy the human understanding is dismissed as illusion, and the poet is regarded as a victim and perpetrator of deception."[2] However, if we want insight into these abysses, it is the artist or philosopher-artist that is going to provide it, rather than the formal philosopher, working with ordinary language and symbolic logic. As Geoffrey Clive says, "These glimpses into the hidden recesses of Being will always transcend a philosophy that sets out to reduce knowledge to explanation."[3]

The problem with formal philosophy is that, in its quest for certainty, it tends to cut itself off completely from the real concerns of life. Iris Murdoch points this out in her book on Sartre: "The 'world' of The Concept of Mind is the world in which people play cricket, cook cakes, make simple decisions, remember their childhood and go to the circus; not the world in which they commit sins, fall in love, say prayers or join the Communist Party."[4] Linguistic analysis, in going one step further than this, tends to turn philosophy into a semantic puzzle which is solvable only by the initiated. Durant points out that traditional philosophy

was much broader in scope: "They [traditional philosophers] understood that the field of philosophy is not some petty puzzle hiding in the clouds and destitute of interest or influence in the affairs of mankind, but the vast and total problem of the meaning and value and possibilities of man in this boundless and fluent world."[5]

Traditionally, philosophy has had two different, but closely related objectives: it aimed at a theoretical understanding of the world, and it attempted to discover and bring about the best possible life. Linguistic analysis is more concerned with the first aim of traditional philosophy - the understanding of the world, or more accurately, a propaedeutic to understanding, by clarifying our statements about the world. On the other hand, existential thought is more concerned with the second broad aim of traditional philosophy. Perhaps existential thought becomes too immersed in life, but it returns philosophy to man, and, in doing so, it concerns itself with a number of the traditional problems of philosophy; for example, the nature of being and non-being, the relation of self to other, the nature of matter and consciousness; and practical questions about good and evil, and the conduct of life.

Academic philosophers also err when they attempt to dismiss existential thought because it is a subjective response to experience. Subjectivity is the point of departure for existential thinkers, but it was also the point of depart-

ure for Descartes and a number of other traditional philosophers as well. It should be pointed out that existential thinkers do not deal with consciousness in the same way that Descartes does. For them consciousness is intentional. The thinking subject is not self-enclosed, but a being-in-the-world. Thus, it is evident that existential thought is more firmly grounded in the tradition of philosophy than it would initially appear to be.

The most anti-traditional aspect of existential thought is its method; however, its method would seem to be legitimate, due to the nature of the concepts that existential thinkers discuss. If we are going to consider concepts such as the absurd, we cannot expect to find the same formality as we would with a discussion of a concept such as causality. This is aptly pointed out in an incident reported in Kohl's Age of Complexity. Gabriel Marcel was attempting to explain ideas essential to theistic existentialism at a meeting largely composed of non-Continental philosophers. Moreover, he attempted to use terms that would be familiar to his analytic audience. Nevertheless, he continually met with resistance. Finally, after several unsuccessful attempts to communicate what he meant, he stated, "Perhaps I can't explain this to you, but if I had a piano here I could play it."[6] This incident illustrates that there are various levels of communication, but just because Marcel could not express himself in acceptable linguistic discourse, it does

not follow that his ideas are not worthy of philosophy.

Existential thinkers feel that the individual and all aspects of his experience is the proper subject matter of philosophy. This is why traditional linguistic forms are often inadequate for communicating their thought. As Kierkegaard says, "I cannot be fitted into a system, I exist." For this reason, the novel and drama seem to communicate existential concepts more adequately than a formal treatise.

Closely connected with the way in which existential thinkers utilize literature is the way in which they use myths to develop their philosophical conclusions. Sartre, in The Flies, reinterprets the Orestes tragedy to illustrate his philosophy. Camus also reinterprets a known myth, in The Myth of Sisyphus. This is foreign to formal philosophy but, as Hazel Barnes points out, it is analagous to Plato's use of myth: "As with Plato, the imagination is used to portray man in what is, from one point of view, a purely fictional situation but at the same time a revelation of man's actual philosophical or human condition."[7] Even though existential thinkers have chosen literature as their vehicle of expression, it does not follow that the ideas that they express are not communicable in a formal manner. This is illustrated by the fact that Sartre, in Being and Nothingness; Heidegger, in Being and Time; and Camus, in The Myth of Sisyphus and The Rebel have expressed certain as-

pects of their thought in treastise form. Nor is literature, as an expression of philosophical concepts, as foreign to the spirit of traditional philosophy as it might first appear. Surely Plato's dialogues come closer in spirit to the literary works of Sartre and Camus than the formal tomes of so-called bona fide philosophers?

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that I feel than an investigation into Camus' thought is justified from a philosophical point of view even though I shall conclude that Camus' use of the absurd, as the basic category of existence, is not philosophically tenable. However, it does not follow that everything else that Camus has to say is also untenable, even though most of his thought is based on the statement that existence is absurd. I do not think that Camus was really concerned with developing an ontology of the absurd. Rather, he was attempting to show that life is possible, even though it must be lived on the brink of the abyss. However, this aspect of Camus' thought takes us beyond the scope of the present study.

The subject of this study is the concept of the absurd as developed in the philosophical and creative works of Albert Camus. The study falls into two basic divisions: exposition and criticism of the concept. I shall primarily concern myself with Camus' earlier works for both the exposition and criticism of the absurd: The Myth of Sisyphus for the formal exposition of the term; the two plays, The

Misunderstanding and Caligula; and the two novels, The Stranger and The Plague, as artistic expression of the concept in various existential situations. I shall refer to The Rebel to show the way in which Camus uses the term in his later thought.

The criticism of the absurd is based on two distinct but related ways in which the term is used: its metaphysical sense and its social sense. I shall attempt to show that Camus' use of the absurd as a metaphysical principle is not justified. He gives various reasons to show that the absurd is a fundamental category of existence, but the reasons do not stand up when subjected to examination, and the consequences that Camus derives from his examination of the absurd are, therefore, also subject to doubt, from a strict philosophical point of view.

Camus' basic statement of the absurd is that there is a divorce between man's aspirations and the reality with which he is confronted. However, this divorce between what is and what should be, as an aspect of reality, is immutable: we cannot change any of the elements that constitute our metaphysical state. Thus, to bemoan our metaphysical state of affairs is futile, even though our situation may be characterized as absurd. Therefore, if we limit the absurd to its metaphysical aspect, Camus would simply be another Manfred shaking his fist at God, except that Camus would just be shaking his fist, as there is no God for him. Even

Meursault, the central character of The Stranger, realizes the futility of bemoaning his metaphysical status. In answer to the priest's comment that he must have hoped for an afterlife, Meursault states, "Everybody has that wish at times. But that had no more importance than wishing to be rich, or to swim very fast, or to have a better-shaped mouth. It was in the same order of things."[8]

Camus became much more aware of the short-comings of the absurd in his later writings. In Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, he states, "No everything is not summed up in negation and absurdity. We know this. But we must first posit negation and absurdity because they are what our generation has encountered and what we must take into account."[9] And in The Rebel, he goes so far as to state that the absurd is contradictory. However, Camus sometimes lacks the clear-sightedness that Meursault has obtained concerning the nature of metaphysical discontent. Thus, in describing metaphysical rebellion in The Rebel, Camus states, "Metaphysical rebellion is a claim, motivated by the concept of a complete unity, against the suffering of life and death and a protest against the human condition both for its incompleteness, thanks to death, and its wastefulness, thanks to evil."[10] This statement brings the metaphysical and social aspects of the absurd into perspective, and here Camus tends to unite the two. The danger of this is aptly stated by Sartre:

You revolted against death, but in the iron belts

> which surround cities, other men revolted against social conditions which raised the toll of mortality. Should a child die, you accused the absurdity of the world and this deaf and blind God which you had created in order to spit in his face. But the child's father, if he were a laid-off worker or unskilled laborer, accused men.[11]

This criticism is valid, up to a certain point, because the absurd, as a metaphysical concept, sometimes impinges on the absurd as a social concept; however, the two elements are separable, and Camus is most successful in developing the absurd when he considers it as an expression of man's social condition.

Camus' philosophy of revolt expresses his dissatisfaction with man's social condition. As I have pointed out, the metaphysical sense of the absurd expresses the divorce between what is and what should be; however, it cannot be. The social sense of the absurd expresses a similar divorce between what is and should be, but here there is a difference: What <u>should</u> be, <u>could</u> be. Achievement is possible in the social sphere. Camus states this in an introduction to a book on the Algerian question: "And no one either in Algeria or throughout the world can henceforth discuss the Algerian problem without having read what an understanding and cultivated woman has written about my misunderstood desperate native land, now stirred by a heart-rending hope."[12] I have purposely chosen this quotation because it contains the word "hope". In another place, Camus had said that we must give up hope, the last evil that the gods put into Pandora's Box. The apparent

contradiction disappears when we realize that Camus is using the word in two entirely different ways: social hope is acceptable, as attainment is sometimes possible; metaphysical hope is futile, because achievement is never possible. I have said that social achievement is sometimes possible because, as we shall see in The Plague, achievement is very difficult.

Because I am examining a small facet of Camus' work, the comments in this thesis will be very critical. However, as a whole, Camus' thought and art are admirable. This is even more evident when we realize Camus' essential message. In an article in The Atlantic Camus stated, "There exist a few men at the center of whose work, however dark, burns an indomitable sun."[13] Such a sun burns at the heart of Camus' work.

I

IS CAMUS A PHILOSOPHER?

Before examining Camus' concept of the absurd, it would be advisable to ascertain whether or not Camus is a philosopher. In the light of the comments that I made in the introduction, it should be evident that he is not a philosopher, at least in the sense of the term as understood by contemporary academic philosophy.

In a speech that is reprinted in Actuelles II, Camus states, "Do you know that over a period of twenty-five years, between 1922 and 1947, 70 million Europeans - men, women and children - have been uprooted, deported and killed?"[1] This is the type of data with which Camus was concerned and it is not, of course, the type of data with which academic and most traditional philosophers have concerned themselves. Camus is not concerned with the theoretical exercises and abstract thought of formal philosophers; nor does he share the epistemological and ontological concerns of Heidegger and Sartre, even though these are the thinkers with whose thought he is most closely associated. Historical circumstances weighed too heavily on Camus to allow him to consider formal matters. He felt that thought should be united with action; the thinker should be in the market-place rather than the ivory tower. Thus, even without looking at his work, it should be apparent

that Camus is not concerned with building a coherent philosophical system; nor will we be able to fit his thought into such a system.

Critics of Camus' work run the gamut on his status as a philosopher. For example, in an article on atheistic existentialism, Frederick Copleston, after examining a list of existential terms, one of which is the concept "the absurd", concludes by saying, "I can well imagine some British philosophers rejecting many of the theories which I have narrated as meaningless nonsense."[2] Benyon John lends support to this statement. With particular reference to Camus, he says, "So far as his philosophical forays are concerned, Camus is likely to remain something of an exotic in England. He typifies that marriage of intense intellectual abstraction and moral passion which excites across the Channel, whereas, in England, it more frequently exhausts."[3] An attitude that is diametrically opposed to this is put forward in an article by James L. Roberts. He states, "But other writers such as Kafka, Camus, and Sartre have argued from the same philosophical position [the absurdity of the human condition] . The essential difference is that critics like Camus have presented their arguments in a highly formal discourse with logical and precise views which prove their thesis within the framework of traditional forms."[4] Both of these statements are almost caricatures of Camus' position. Thomas Hanna gives a more accurate representation of Camus: "It seems that Camus

'feels' his way into philosophy. . . . He thinks existentially before he thinks rationally, and this is the mark of an artistic temperament. This could be called a lyrical method in philosophy, even as Camus himself can be most clearly described as a lyrical existentialist."[5] This is perhaps the best way of characterizing his thought, even though Camus attacks the existentialists in The Myth of Sisyphus; however, he is only attacking the theistic existentialists, those thinkers who attempt to escape the absurd by a leap into faith. It is true that on another occasion Camus states, "I do not have much liking for the too famous existential philosophy, and, to tell the truth, I think its conclusions false."[6] However, this would again refer to the theistic existentialists and the fact that they escape the absurd by a leap. In The Myth of Sisyphus, he actually allies himself with the atheistic existentialism of Heidegger and Sartre. Of Heidegger, he says, "He seeks his way amid these ruins."[7] Moreover, Camus' view of death is similar to Heidegger's. Also, he mentions Sartre's "nausea" as one of the ways of experiencing the absurd. It is true that Camus explicity stated, in an argument with Sartre, "Non je ne suis pas existentialiste."[8] However, Camus was more concerned with dissociating himself from a constant identification with Sartre than denying the existential nature of his own thought, as their positions were opposed, especially regarding politics.

A number of critics would save themselves the trouble

of their ignoratio elenchi arguments, if they would read what Camus has to say about his position as a philosopher. Thus, Walter Kaufmann states that Camus was a nightingale who thought that he was an owl.[9] Kaufmann gives a closer, but less epigrammatic, account of Camus' thought in Faith of a Heretic. He states, "Of course, Camus's novels are far superior to the arguments discussed here [referring to The Myth of Sisyphus]. He was a fine writer and a profoundly humane man, but not a philosopher."[10] The point is, Camus did not claim to be a philosopher. In Actuelles II, he says, "I am not a philosopher and I know how to speak only of what I have experienced."[11] Therefore, it is an injustice to treat his work as philosophy, at least as philosophy as understood by most contemporary academic philosophers. It is true that Camus studied philosophy in Algeria and even wrote a thesis on the influence of Plotinus on St. Augustine.[12] However, in all of his works, Camus fundamental questions revolve around man and the relation of man to his world. Camus wants to know the answer to the question, "What does it mean to be a man?"[13] His primary question is, therefore, metaphysical, even though he asks his question within his own historical and social context. This attitude is in direct opposition to academic philosophers who are primarily concerned with examining the apparatus, logic and language, with which man confronts the world.

The most common label given to Camus is that of "philosopher of the absurd". For example, Sartre says,

"Camus' philosophy is a philosophy of the absurd."[14] Sartre made this statement in 1945, two years before the publication of The Plague, but the statement is still not correct as it puts an undue emphasis on the very early part of Camus' work. Camus has explicitly stated, in the preface to The Myth of Sisyphus, published in 1942, that he is dealing with "an absurd sensitivity" and not "an absurd philosophy."[15] In The Myth of Sisyphus itself, where he gives the fullest treatment of the absurd, he states, "The climate of absurdity is in the beginning."[16] Moreover, even in his early works where he is most nihilistic, Camus moves beyond the nihilism of the absurd. It is also significant that, in 1938, Camus criticized Sartre's short story The Wall, stating that absurdity could only be a beginning and not an end. Camus does not remain in the absurd in any of his works, and it is perhaps because of the title, "philosopher of the absurd", and the desire to refute it, that Camus wrote in a preface to the American edition of The Myth of Sisyphus in 1955: "Written fifteen years ago, in 1940, amid the French and European disaster, this book declares that even within the limits of nihilism it is possible to find the means to proceed beyond nihilism."[17]

I would conclude that Camus cannot be called a philosopher because of the connotations involved in using the term, but this does not deprecate his thought. As John Wild says, "Academic philosophy has become a barren wasteland with little relevance to actual life and with little appeal, except to

careerists and technicians."[18] Nor is Camus developing a philosophy of the absurd. From his earliest statements, Camus wants desperately to proceed beyond nihilism. This is one reason why his arguments in The Myth of Sisyphus fail to convince us: he tries to give logical expression to something that is a moral choice. He is much more persuasive when he expresses the position developed in The Myth of Sisyphus in a lyrical manner.

II

ORIGINS OF THE ABSURD

In this chapter I propose to discuss why Camus would utilize the term absurd to describe man's metaphysical status.

Websters' Third International Dictionary gives two broad definitions of the word: "marked by an obvious lack of reason, common sense, proportion or accord with accepted ideas: ridiculously unreasonable, unsound, or incongruous; and, self-contradictory: fallacious by reason of self-contradiction." Used in the second sense, the term has a valid position in philosophical parlance. Thus, in his Vocabulary of Philosophy, Fleming states that the absurd is that which is logically contradictory; he cites a four-sided triangle as an example. He goes on to say, "What is contrary to experience merely cannot be called absurd, for experience extends only to facts and laws which we know; but there may be facts and laws which we have not observed and do not know, and facts and laws not actually manifested may yet be possible." It is obvious that this use of the absurd cannot be what is meant when Camus refers to it.

In The Myth of Sisyphus, Camus gives a brief examination of the way in which the term is normally used. He shows that in normal usage a judgment is made on two things;

for example, a virtuous man, on being told that he covets his sister, would say, "That's absurd", meaning that it is ridiculous because of the disproportion between the judgment and the terms of the comparison. Moreover, there is in every-day usage a correlation between the disproportion of a relationship and its absurdity: a situation can be "more or less" absurd. In applying the term to the situation of man-in-the-world, Camus retains the comparison aspect of the word: "The absurd is essentially a divorce. It lies in neither of the elements compared; it is born of their confrontation."[1] Thus, it is evident that the term, as used by Camus, is closer to its dictionary definition, rather than the philosophical use of the term. That this is the type of meaning that will be ascribed to the term is evident from the fact that, "It is poetry and art which introduced the absurd into European thought",[2] rather than philosophy proper. The etymological origin of the word is of assistance in showing the way in which the term is used to express man's situation: absurd comes from the French _absurde_ which is derived from the Latin _ab_ (from) plus _surdus_ (dull-sounding, harsh, or deaf). This Latin origin of the term is implied in Camus' play, _The Misunderstanding_. As R.W.B. Lewis puts it, "An absurd universe is a tuneless universe - a universe that is tone-deaf (the universal representative in _Cross-Purposes_ is fittingly, a deaf and harsh-voiced old servant.)"[3]

Malraux was one of the first contemporary writers to

utilize the absurd in his thought. In The Temptation of the West, published in 1926, he states, "at the core of European man, ruling the important movements of his life there is a basic absurdity."[4] At the end of the novel, Malrdux explains what he means by this absurdity:

> At the core of Western civilization there is a hopeless contradiction, in whatever shape we discover it: that between man and what he has created. This conflict between the thinker and his thought, between the European and his civilization or his reality, between the indiscriminate consciousness and its expression in the everyday world through everyday means--I find it in every aspect of contemporary life. Sweeping away facts and, finally, itself, this spirit of contradiction trains our consciousness to give way and prepares us for the metallic realms of the absurd.[5]

It will become evident that there are a number of similarities between Camus' and Malraux' conceptions of the absurd; however, Malraux' final emphasis is on death whereas Camus' is on life.

Celine's Journey to the End of the Night, published in 1932, which is probably the most pessimistic piece of inter-war fiction, also gives explicit expression of the absurd. The absurd also permeates Sartre's autobiographical novel Nausea, published in 1938, although it is more often expressed as Roquentin's awareness of de trop. Celine is really the only inter-war writer who tends to give in to the absurd; his writings are confined to a denunciation of life's absurdity. All of the other inter-war writers of fiction fight the absurd in one way or another. Thus, Sartre sees no place for himself

in a contingent universe; however, instead of despair, he gives man total liberty. Malraux and Saint Exupéry impose meaning on the absurd: Malraux by action in a cause, and Exupéry by joining an organization. Although the notion of the absurd is virtually omnipresent in inter-war French literature, this does not mean that the absurd appeared ex nihilo; the meaning behind the term is at least as old as Job and Ecclesiastes, and probably as old as recorded thought:

> Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.
> He comes forth like a flame and withers; he flies like a shadow and continues not.[6]

> Everything before them is vanity, since one fate comes to all, to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice.[7]

Nor is the absurd limited to an emotional response to experience; it can also be an intellectual response. Historically, this is expressed as the failure of the intellect to encompass reality, and this position has had a legitimate position in the history of philosophy. Thinkers as diverse as Pascal, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Husserl, Bergson, Jaspers, James, and even Whitehead have shown the shortcomings of reason in one way or another. It might seem difficult to understand how a notion such as the absurd could take hold in France, the traditional bastion of rationalism. French thought is normally characterized by Cartesianism;

however, an anti-Cartesian element has always been present in French thought, as evidenced by Pascal. This tendency continues into the present, and culminates in the thought of Bergson; however, it it should be pointed out that, although anti-Cartesianism denies the absolute power of reason, its exponents feel that the avenue to truth is accessible, although not by reason.

Camus' treatment of the absurd can perhaps best be brought into perspective by briefly mentioning the way in which Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche utilized the absurd in their thought, and relating their formulation of the absurd to Camus'. Lack of space prevents the examination of the way in which other thinkers deal with the absurd, and the way in which they influenced Camus. In this connection, Camus' readings, as cited in the Notebooks, read like a catalogue of existential thinkers, each of whom deals with the absurd, in one way or another.[8]

Pascal's Pensées abound in statements that could just as easily have been written by Camus; for example, he gives an anguish-filled expression of the contingency of existence: "When I consider the short duration of my life, swallowed up in the eternity before and after, the little space which I fill, and even can see, engulfed in the infinite immensity of spaces of which I am ignorant, and which know me not, I am frightened, and am astonished at being here, rather than there, why now rather than then."[9] He gives an

even more vivid account of man's fate that is parallel to Camus' statement that a mass death sentence defines the human condition. Pascal says, "Let us imagine a number of men in chains, and all condemned to death, where some are killed each day in the sight of the others, and those who remain see their own fate in that of their fellows, and wait their turn, looking at each other sorrowfully and without hope. It is an image of the condition of man."[10] Both of these aspects of existence are developed by Camus in his examination of the absurd. Thus Caligula, like Pascal, becomes aware of the contingency, and, therefore, absurdity of existence. And Pascal's execution metaphor aptly describes the action of The Plague. However, Camus parts company with Pascal because of the wager. Pascal states that either God exists or he does not exist. If we wager that he exists, and we subsequently find out that we have wagered correctly, we win eternal bliss. If he does not exist, we have not really lost anything. Camus sees this as an attempt to escape from the absurd.

Camus criticizes Kierkegaard for the same reason. Kierkegaard also deals with the absurd, but for him it is of a different nature. Helmut Kuhn points out that Camus' conception of absurdity is negative, whereas in Kierkegaard there is a positive and almost aggressive absurdity that is the basis of faith. Thus, in Fear and Trembling, God's commandment to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac is negative in

"unmeaning", but it is also counter to meaning, it is an affront to our desire for meaning and thus appears as evil; but Kuhn says, "Crisis is the burning bush out of which God speaks to man. The absurd seized upon by faith is an affirmative power and a particular absurdity."[11] This is Kierkegaard's "teleological suspension of the ethical". Camus cannot accept this position, because he cannot accept the leap of faith which is an integral part of Kierkegaard's thought: "But a paradox enters in, and a humble courage is required to grasp the whole of the temporal by virtue of the absurd, and this is the courage of faith."[12] This paradox is at the heart of Kierkegaard's thought: "The problem is not to understand Christianity but to understand that it cannot be understood."[13] However, we shall see that there is also a fundamental paradox at the basis of Camus' thought, although it does not involve God. For Kierkegaard, the supreme paradox is the fact that God was made man: "The absurd is - that the eternal truth has come into being in time, that God has come into being, has been born, has grown up, and so forth, has come into being precisely like any other individual human being, quite indistinguishable from other individuals."[14] Kierkegaard states that this is a paradox because the language of rationalism is unable to grasp existence. It is only when we realize that man is not just a <u>res cogitans</u>, but a living, willing, feeling thing as well, that faith can be achieved: "For it is the duty of the human understanding to

understand that there are things which it cannot understand, and what those things are."[15] We shall see that although Camus could not accept Kierkegaard's faith, he was equally adamant that reason could not grasp existence.

It should be pointed out that Camus does not disagree with Kierkegaard because of the concept of the God-man. Thus he states, in an address delivered to the Monastery of Latour-Maubourg, "I wish to declare that, not feeling that I possess any absolute truth or any message, I shall never start from the supposition that Christian truth is illusory, but merely from the fact that I could not accept it."[16] Moreover, in The Rebel, he states that Christ came to answer the two questions that occupy the rebel: suffering and death.[17]

Nietzsche, whose thought had a more profound influence on Camus than both Pascal and Kierkegaard, does not have the encumbrances of other-worldliness that were evident in the case of Pascal and Kierkegaard.

Nietzsche accepts the war-like world of Schopenhauer and Schopenhauer's will to live becomes Nietzsche's Will to Power. The Will to Power opposes the ordinary that Nietzsche sees as all prevalent in his age. In Beyond Good and Evil, he states, "One must appeal to immense opposing forces in order to thwart this natural, all-too-natural progressus in simile, the evolution of man to the similar, the ordinary, the average, the gregarious - to the ignoble."[18] Allied with his criticism of the average is a scathing indictment against

bureaucracy and mechanization because of their depersonalizing nature. Nietzsche hoped to rebuild culture on the basis of the exceptional individual, but, as he felt that such an individual did not exist, he was often compelled to define his terms negatively, and this aspect accounts for a good deal of Nietzsche's thought. The purpose of this aspect of his thought is aptly stated by Blackham: "What the philosopher can do is to understand the conditions of health and diagnose the disease of the age, and attempt to bring into existence conscious movements which will counteract any fatal tendency of the times."[19] We shall see that Camus' examination of the absurd is a diagnosis of his own age, and that, once he gives the diagnosis, he tries to suggest a cure for the disease.

Nietzsche's cure was his Dionysian ideal of vitality. Coupled with this was the doctrine of Eternal Recurrence: "His doctrine of Eternal Recurrence, expresses the crass senselessness of things, the eternal lack of telos in the universe; so that to will the eternal cycle with enthusiasm and without hope is the ultimate attainment of affirmation -amor fati."[20] In the same way, we shall see that, as Sisyphus accepts his burden, and Meursault wills to relive his life, Camus reiterates Nietzsche's Yea-saying to the universe. Moreover, their attitudes are also similar in that paradox is at the heart of this acceptance. As Slochower says, "The Nietzschean man, accepting pain, would

press it to his heart until it turns to joy."[21] However, the most important element in a comparison of Nietzsche and Camus is that both hoped to transcend nihilism. In The Will to Power, Nietzsche says, "The kind of experimental philosophy which I am living, even anticipates the possibility of the most fundamental Nihilism, on principle: but by this I do not mean that it remains standing at a negation, at a no, or at a will to negation.[22] Camus reiterates this by saying, "In the lower depth of our nihilism, I have searched only for reasons to transcend it."[23]

III

EXPOSITION OF CAMUS' USE OF THE ABSURD

Camus' formal expression of the lower depths of nihilism is given in The Myth of Sisyphus; however, he is at pains to establish that he is not dealing with the term in order to establish a philosophy of the absurd. As he says in the introduction, "The pages that follow deal with an absurd sensitivity that can be found wide-spread in the age—and not with an absurd philosophy which our time properly speaking has not known."[1] This is because, as I shall point out at a later point, the absurd is contradictory and cannot be used to establish a philosophy.

Moreover, the fact that Camus is not dealing with the traditional problems of philosophy is established in the very first sentence of The Myth of Sisyphus. He states, "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy."[2] Camus, like Hamlet, believes that to be or not to be is the question: "All the rest - whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories - comes afterwards."[3] It is true that the problem of suicide would not obtain much support from traditional philosophy, but it is of

the utmost importance in contemporary literature and existential thought. As Lewis says, in The Picaresque Saint, "Since Conrad, the novel in all languages has found in suicide one of the most revealing gestures of the modern world and of modern man."[44]

Suicide is a confession: "It is confessing that life is too much for you or you do not understand it."[5] In a more homely expression of this confession, suicide shows that "life is not worth the trouble". There are many reasons for terminating one's existence; however, Camus confines his examination to one particular aspect of experience. If one becomes aware of the ridiculous nature of the gestures demanded by existence, one may decide to end his life: "Dying voluntarily implies that you have recognized, even instinctively, the ridiculous character of that habit, the absence of any profound reason for living, the insane character of that daily agitation and the ugliness of suffering."[6] Camus acknowledges that such awareness is a sufficient condition for suicide; however, the important question is whether this awareness is a necessary condition for suicide; that is, if one is convinced of the meaningless nature of existence, does suicide inevitably follow this awareness? Camus' answer to this question is contained in The Myth of Sisyphus.

Camus states that up until now people "pretended to believe that refusing to grant a meaning to life necessarily leads to a declaration that it is not worth living."[7] This

is the first sense in which Camus uses the word absurd, as a synonym for meaninglessness, and his question, therefore, is, "Does the Absurd [meaninglessness of life] dictate death?"[8] Camus does not really question the absurdity of existence; for him, it is given. He states, "I am interested - let me repeat again- not so much in absurd discoveries as in their consequences. If one is assured of the facts, what is one to conclude, how far is one to go to elude nothing."[9] Nor does Camus purport to be saying anything new in pointing out the ways in which the absurd manifests itself. He is merely giving a "sketchy reconnaissance in the origins of the absurd."[10]

I have already mentioned that Camus uses the term absurd as a synonym for meaninglessness. This does not mean that we are automatically aware of the meaningless nature of existence. This is because we get into the habit of living before we acquire the habit of thinking. Habit is the key term. Most of life is: "Rising, streetcar, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm."[11] If we are not too immersed in this routine, if there is still the possibility of questioning, we ask "Why?". Camus states that two alternatives are possible if we maintain consciousness of the "why?": recovery or suicide. Another possibility is a return to our preconscious state; however, he gives a preference to the maintenance of consciousness: "nothing is worth any-

thing except through it."[12] Recovery is a return to the 'rising', 'streetcar' etc., with the difference that, by consciousness, we are aware of its absurdity. Suicide, like the return to pre-consciousness, negates our awareness.

The absurd is also shown by the nature of time.[13] Camus, like Heidegger, sees man as a time bound creature. Man lives with aims and concerns that are future oriented: "He weighs his chances, he counts on 'someday', his retirement or the labor of his sons."[14] Such a man never actually lives his life; he hopes for a tomorrow that will justify him, whereas he should oppose his time-bound nature and live in the present.

The absurd is also shown by the denseness and opacity of the world which is seen to be essentially other: "These hills, the softness of the sky, the outline of these trees at this very minute lose the illusory meaning with which we had clothed them, henceforth more remote than a lost paradise. The primitive hostility of the world rises up to face us across the millennia."[15] We attempt to personify the world: "Understanding the world for a man is reducing it to the human, stamping it with his seal."[16] By doing so we feel that we are making the world amenable to our purposes; however, when we are lucid, we see that the world is dense and, on occasions, it even seems to mock man's finitude.

Camus states that other people also secrete what he calls the inhuman: "This discomfort in the face of man's own

inhumanity, this incalculable tumble before the image of what we are, this 'nausea', as a writer of today calls it, is also the absurd."[17] Nor is the inhuman confined to others. The familiar and strange face that we encounter in a mirror or photograph is also the absurd.

The last experience that Camus mentions to show the affective nature of the absurd is death. The absurdity of death comes forward when we are made aware of the "mathematical aspect of the event", rather than the illusions surrounding it. Moreover, death is the most obvious absurdity. Everything "is given the lie in vertiginous fashion by the absurdity of a possible death."[18] The absurdity of death is increased by the fact that Camus does not accept the possibility of anything beyond death: "Death is there as the only reality. After death the chips are down."[19] Also, the absurdity of death is increased because of the uncertainty of the time of its coming: mors certa; hora incerta. This is why Camus says, "Let us state that the sole obstacle, the sole deficiency to be made good, is constituted by premature death."[20]

These are affective or tonal examples of the absurd, but Camus does not think that the absurd is limited to tonal aspects of experience. Thus, he states that the mind's inability to perform its function also shows the absurd. It cannot even perform its first step, to distinguish what is true from what is false, without contradiction. This, of course, is the familiar paradox of the Cretan, and Camus cites

Aristotle's expression of the paradox. He goes on to say: "This vicious circle is but the first of a series in which the mind that studies itself gets lost in a giddy whirling."[21] The mind, paralleling the unconscious, desires to unify the world; however, it is brought up short of its quest by the frustrations of its simplest operations. Thus we must despair of the mind's attempt to construct a familiar world. The mind confirms what the heart feels: "Of whom and of what indeed can I say: 'I know that!' This heart within me I can feel, and I judge that it exists. This world I can touch, and I likewise judge that it exists. There ends all my knowledge and the rest is construction."[22] Nor can science apprehend the world; it can only describe and enumerate phenomena: "So that science that was to teach me everything ends up in a hypothesis, that lucidity founders in metaphor, that uncertainty is resolved in a work of art. What need had I of so many efforts? The soft lines of these hills and the hand of evening on this troubled heart teach me much more. I have returned to my beginning."[23] Because of the mind's inability to unify, the individual is condemned to be a stranger to himself; because of science's inability to explain, he is condemned to be a stranger to the world.

Having said that the world is absurd, Camus backtracks: "I said that the world is absurd, but I was too hasty. This world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of this

irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world. . . . This is all I can discern in this measureless universe where my adventure takes place."[24] Man wants to be at home in the universe and he wants to know himself; this is impossible, and the result is the absurd: "The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world."[25] Thus, for Camus, the absurd is an "odd trinity"; it is not a thing-in-itself, but a relationship. It springs into being because of man's nostalgia and the realities of the world:

> I can negate everything of that part of me that lives on vague nostalgias, except this desire for unity, this longing to solve, this need for clarity and cohesion. I can refute everything in this world surrounding me that offends or enraptures me, except this chaos, this sovereign chance and this divine equivalence which springs from anarchy. . . . And these two certainties - my appetite for the absolute and for unity and the impossibility of reducing the world to a rational and reasonable principle. I also know that I cannot reconcile them.[26]

The absurd is Camus' cogito and, in The Rebel, he states that the absurd is "a point of departure, the equivalent, in existence, of Descartes' methodical doubt."[27] For Camus, the absurd is the indubitably given and, paralelling Descartes, he proceeds to build upon that which is certain; however, Camus does not claim to have made any original discoveries in his awareness of the absurdity of existence. He states that this theme has been present in diverse thinkers

and he examines those who have dealt with the absurdity of existence. However, Camus will claim to be the only thinker to retain the absurd in his thought once he has become aware of it.

Camus states that thinkers from Jaspers to Heidegger, Kierkegaard to Chestov, and from the phenomenologists to Scheler have been aware of the shortcomings of reason and have attempted to reassert a direct path to truth. Even though these thinkers have been opposed by their methods and aims, they are related by their nostalgia: "Whatever may be or have been their ambitions, all started out from that indescribable universe where contradiction, antinomy, anguish, or impotence reigns."[28] Camus refers to these various thinkers to show that there is a great deal of agreement regarding the absurdity of existence. However, he will criticize these same thinkers for forsaking their discovery of the absurd.

Camus states that Heidegger makes anxiety, nostalgia in Camus' terminology, primordial. Thus, it is the basis of his ontology: "He stands in this absurd world and points out its ephemeral character. He seeks his way amid these ruins."[29] Jaspers despairs of establishing any ontology at all because he feels that he cannot get beyond appearances and the mind ends in failure; however, he gropes about in this labyrinth and attempts to discover an "Ariadne's thread that leads to divine secrets."[30] Chestov, as well, tries to make his way in the "colourless desert where all certainties have become

stones."[31] These thinkers have discovered the absurd, and Kierkegaard goes one step further by living it, at least for part of his life. In the realm of method, Husserl reinstates the world's diversity and denies the transcendent power of reason. Reason becomes the focusing of consciousness: "What justifies thought is its extreme consciousness."[32]

Camus states that all of these thinkers give up hope: "These men vie with one another in proclaiming that nothing is clear, all is chaos, that all man has is his lucidity and his definite knowledge of the walls surrounding him."[33] Thus, the evidence of these thinkers shows that Camus' discovery of the absurd is not unique; however, he does not illustrate why they have posited the absurd. Rather, he is concerned with the consequences that follow from their awareness of it: "Living under that stifling sky forces one to get away or to stay. The important thing is to find out how people get away in the first case and why people stay in the second case. This is how I define the problem of suicide and the possible interest in the conclusions of existential philosophy."[34] People escape the absurd by suicide. The normal type of suicide is the termination of one's existence. Another type is what Camus calls "philosophical suicide".

In explaining "philosophical suicide", Camus states that he is going to limit himself to existential philosophies. He then examines certain themes of Chestov, Kierkegaard, and Jaspers. He suggests that all of these thinkers suggest es-

cape from the absurd: "Through an odd reasoning, starting out from the absurd over the ruins of reason, in a closed universe limited to the human, they deify what crushes them and find reason to hope in what impoverishes them. That forced hope is religious in all of them."[35] Camus states that Jaspers, in caricatural form, expressess the opinion that he is condemning. Jaspers cannot realize the transcendent, and experience for him is absurd; however, he deifies the absurd - "that inability to understand becomes the existence that illuminates everything."[36] What is perhaps even more difficult to accept is the passion with which he asserts his "Lord of the Absurd". The certainty of his presence is in direct proportion to the gap between his powers of explanation and the irrationality of the world and experience.

In the same way, when Chestov discovers the fundamental absurdity of experience, he does not say, "This is the absurd.", but rather, "This is God: we must rely on him even if he does not correspond to any of our rational categories."[37] Jaspers' certainty of God grows with the broadening of the gulf between the powers of explanation and the irrational nature of the world. Chestov's certainty of God increases with his incomprehensibility. Camus states that the leap into the irrational of Chestov is more evident in Kierkegaard. Antinomy and paradox become elements of the religious for Kierkegaard and Christianity becomes a scandal. He deifies the irration-

al: "Since nothing is proved, everything can be proved."[38]

The existentialists' attitude is "philosophical suicide". They all take the leap; that is to say, they all negate the absurd: "The leap in all its forms, rushing into the divine or the eternal, surrendering to the illusions of the everyday or of the idea - all these screens hide the absurd."[39] It has already been pointed out that these thinkers start from a position which states that the world has no meaning; however, they end up by finding a meaning in it. In doing so, they surrender their initial awareness of the absurd:

> If there is an absurd, it is in man's universe. The moment the notion transforms itself into eternity's springboard, it ceases to be linked to human lucidity. The absurd is no longer that evidence that man ascertains without consenting to it. The struggle is eluded. Man integrates the absurd and in that communion causes to disappear its essential character, which is opposition, laceration, and divorce. The leap is an excape.[40]

Husserl follows the existentialists in making a leap. He had originally confirmed absurd thought in stating that there is not truth but only truths. Nor does Husserl attempt to explain the world; he merely describes actual experience. Thus, reality can be drained, but not explained. However, Husserl goes beyong this. He transcends pure description by giving a unifying principle: the mind intends an essence for each object of knowledge, as well as the object. Moreover, even though Husserl originally denies the integrating power of reason, he ends up affirming an eternal Reason whose laws

would exist, in the same way that Plato's Ideas would exist, without individual minds to experience it.

If we accept Husserl's position, the world becomes clear, but our desire for familiarity becomes useless. With Kierkegaard, the desire for clarity is surrendered. Both thinkers suppress the absurd by denying one of the terms responsible for its coming into being. Camus does not want the leap of "philosophical suicide", whether it be the "triumphal reason" of Husserl or the "humiliated thought" of Kierkegaard. What he wants to do is keep the trinity of the absurd: "There can be no question of masking the evidence, by suppressing the absurd by denying one of the terms of its equation. It is essential to know whether one can live with it or whether, on the other hand, logic commands one to die of it. I am not interested in philosophical suicide, but rather in plain suicide."[41] "Philosophical suicide" is illegitimate because it masks one of the terms of the equation and Camus uses the same line of reason to show that suicide, the termination of one's existence, is also illegitimate as it eludes the problem:

> Living an experience, a particular fate, is accepting it fully. Now, no one will live this fate knowing it to be absurd, unless he does everything to keep before him that absurd brought to light by consciousness. Negating one of the terms of the opposition on which he lives amounts to escaping it. To abolish conscious revolt is to elude the problem. The theme of permanent revolution is thus carried into individual experience. Living is keeping the absurd alive.[42]

This concludes my exposition of Camus' formal exam-

ination of the absurd. I now propose to examine the way in which he uses the concept in his literary works.

Camus' first published work was a set of five essays published under the collective title L'Envers et L'Endroit. In these essays, Camus expresses the duality of existence: he is acutely aware of the riches of physical existence, l'endroit, but he is equally aware of the inevitability of death, l'envers. He states, "He questions the meaning of a world in which exist side by side death and beauty, suffering and joy, incomprehensibility and man's desire for clarity."[43] This dualism is maintained throughout the whole work and in the final essay he states, "Between these two sides of the world [l'envers et l'endroit] I don't want to choose. I don't like anyone to choose. Great courage consists in keeping your eyes open on the light as well as death."[44] However, it is despair and death, rather than joy and life, that receive the emphasis in these essays.

The dualism of the world is re-examined in Camus' next set of essays, Noces. The dualism is still present, but each term intensifies his experience of the other and raises the dualism to the level of a paradox: "My horror of death lies in my joy of living."[45] Also, as implied by the title, Noces is more concerned with the positive aspects of existence and celebrates the nuptials between man and earth; however, even the earth, the cause of Camus' joy, is a source of despair: "I know simply that this sky will last longer

than I."[46] This despair is reinforced because death is the complete end of everything: "I do not choose to believe that death opens on to another life. For me it is a closed door."[47] Thus, even in his earliest works, the feelings that he will later include under the absurd are present, although in embryonic form.

Camus deals with the absurd explicity, for the first time, in his plays Caligula and The Misunderstanding. The Misunderstanding is the most nihilistic of Camus' works. It concerns a man who has returned to his native Czechoslovakia, after achieving prosperity abroad. He wants to give some of this prosperity to his mother and sister whom he has not seen for a number of years, but, as he wants to see if they will recognize him, he checks into the inn run by his mother and sister without revealing his identity and has his wife stay at a nearby hotel.[48] He is murdered, as previous guests have been, by his mother and sister who hoped to escape to a land of sun with the money stolen from their murdered guests. When they realize the nature of their crime, the fact that they have murdered a son and a brother, the women commit suicide.

The play shows the nature of man's existence in the world: the absurd is built into the fabric of the world itself. This comes through with full force when Martha, the sister, tells her brother's wife that what has happened is the normal course of things:

Martha: But before I go to die, I must rid you of the illusion that you are right, that love isn't futile, and that what has happened was an accident. On the contrary, it's now that we are in the normal order of things, and I must convince you of it.
Maria: What do you mean by that?
Martha: That in the normal course of things, no one is ever recognized.[49]

The world frustrates any attempt at happiness; whether an individual is innocent or guilty, his striving comes to naught; "But fix this in your mind; neither for him nor for us, neither in life nor in death, is there any peace or homeland. . . . Try to realize that no grief of yours can ever equal the injustice done to man."[50] Thus, Camus offers us a picture of a universe that is blatantly hostile to man's aspirations. This takes him beyond the position, of The Myth of Sisyphus, that the universe is just indifferent to man.[51]

Camus continues the theme that misunderstandings are the normal course of things in his short stories The Silent Men and The Guest. In The Silent Men a group of workers demand higher wages from an employer who cannot meet their demands because of dwindling profits. Because of this they refuse him social amenities, and even when his child becomes very ill, they remain mute. The absurdity is primarily social, but metaphysical absurdity is implied in that Camus is saying that it is impossible to communicate in a world such as ours. This is brought out with more force in The Guest. An official brings an Arab that has been convicted of murder to a school-teacher in a deserted part of Algeria, and demands

that the teacher turn the Arab over to the authorities. Even though he does not sympathize with the Arab, the teacher shows the man the way to freedom; however, the man turns himself in. When the teacher returns to the school, he sees written on the wall: "You handed over our brother. You will pay for this."[52] Neither the Arabs nor the European understand the teacher and by implication, such is the normal course in an absurd universe.

The action of these stories and The Misunderstanding reveal the absurd nature of the universe. In Caligula the absurd determines what happens, rather than being revealed by the action. Camus takes his material for the play directly from Suetonius' Lives of Twelve Caesars. Caligula had an incestuous love for his sister Drusilla; he was a just ruler, but had a character reversal at the time of her death. Camus interprets Drusilla's death as triggering Caligula's encounter with the absurd. Caligula realizes, "Men die; and they are not happy."[53] Because of death all things are meaningless; existence is absurd, and there is complete lack of harmony between man and the universe. Caligula decides to press this aspect of our condition to its logical conclusion: he acts in a way as absurd as the universe by arbitrarily choosing victims for death. By doing so he feels that he will achieve freedom and, therefore, happiness. Cherea realizes what Caligula is doing: "He is converting his philosophy into corpses and - unfortunately for us - its a phil-

osophy that's logical from start to finish."[54] Caligula, like The Misunderstanding, is concerned with the attempts of an individual to secure happiness in a universe that spawns misery; however, like Martha, Caligula does not obtain happiness. This is because he has chosen the wrong path, but he discovers his error too late: "I have chosen a wrong path, a path that leads to nothing. My freedom isn't the right one."[55]

The Stranger contains Camus' most successful examination of the absurd because there is not the obvious desire to illustrate a set of ideas as there is in most of his other creative writing.[56] Meursault, as a functionary, personifies the absurdity of habit mentioned in The Myth of Sisyphus; however, he sees the illusions of these habits - "It happens the stage sets collapse."[57] It is perhaps difficult to reconcile the fact that Meurseult acts as if he were conscious of the absurd, with the fact that he appears to be semi-conscious most of the time; however, when we see that Meursault does not become conscious of the absurdity of existence, in a metaphysical sense, until his interview with the priest, the contradiction disappears. While free, he is well adjusted to the physical world and enjoys the pleasures to be found in such a world, and even when he becomes aware of the metaphysical absurdity of his condition, he still accepts the world; he gives himself to the"benign indifference of the universe."[54] However, throughout the novel he is aware of the absurdity of society. Meursault has actually

reached his state of awareness, regarding society, before the novel begins. In response to his employer's enquiry as to whether or not he would like to take a position in Paris, he says:

> I told him I was quite prepared to go; but really I didn't care much one way or the other.
> He then asked if a 'change of life', as he called it didn't appeal to me, and I answered that one never changed one's real life; anyhow, one life was as good as another and my present one suited me quite well.
> At this he looked rather hurt, and told me I always shilly-shallied, and that I lacked ambition - a grave defect, to his mind, when one was in business. I returned to my work. I'd have preferred not to vex him, but I saw no reason for 'changing my life'. By and large it wasn't an unpleasant one. As a student I'd had plenty of ambition of the kind he meant. But, when I had to drop my studies, I very soon realized, all that was pretty futile.[59]

This reference shows that Meursault, even though he does not often express such sentiments, is completely aware of the meaningless nature of social pretense, and as a result of his awareness, he shows a complete disregard for economic and social ambition.

Nor will Meursault cover up the incoherence of experience. He will not put categories between himself and this incoherence. Camus communicates his incoherence directly by the use of style. He uses a first person narrative and a non-analytic vocabulary, and the discord between the narrative method and the language of the novel sharpens the sense of incoherence at the heart of Meursault's experience. This incoherence is also emphasized by the lack of language

reflecting causality. There are few subordinate clauses or conjunctions joining sentences. The compound tense is used to show the lack of any real past surviving in Meursault's consciousness. Moreover, time, when he is aware of it, is merely a series of discontinuous moments.[60]

Meursault gets himself into trouble because he will not follow the conventions of society. When the defence lawyer asks him if he felt grief on "that sad occasion" of his mother's death, Meursault replies:

> The question struck me as an odd one; personally I'd have been much embarrassed by having to ask anyone a thing like that.
> I answered that in recent years I'd rather lost the habit of noting my feelings, and hardly knew what to answer. I could truthfully say I'd been quite fond of Mother - but really that didn't mean much. All normal people, I added, as an afterthought, had more or less desired the death of those they loved, at some time or other.[61]

The fact that Meursault will not say any more than he thinks or feels will aid in his condemnation.

Meursault's condemnation itself is also absurd. There are two distinct parts to the novel. Part I shows the every day flow of reality as seen from Meursault's point of view. Part II shows the reconstruction of this reality by the standards of moral absolutism. The performance of the crime is not in question. Nor would the murder of an Arab normally be a capital offence in Algeria. It is Meursault's character that is on trial and, from the standards of moral absolutism, he is guilty; he does not accept

society's arbitrary rules of conduct. As the prosecutor says, "'In short', he concluded, speaking with great vehemence, 'I accuse the prisoner of behaving at his mother's funeral in a way that showed he was already a criminal at heart."[62] Even Meursault realizes, from the point of view of moral absolutism, that he is guilty; he is condemned because he did not cry at his mother's funeral: the moral code says that such behaviour shows him to be a criminal. This application of an a priori moral code to his case is absurd because we know the facts. Thus, Meursault is condemned because of a misunderstanding, and Camus is reiterating the fact that such misunderstandings are of the very fabric of existence. Meursault reads the plot of The Misunderstanding from a newspaper fragment in his cell and sees the likelihood of such a thing happening.

Meursault is condemned by a legal code, acting through a judge, that is indifferent to his aspirations as an individual, and this social element of the novel is comically portrayed; however, his condemnation symbolizes the metaphysical aspect of the novel. All mankind is condemned to death, even though each person is innocent. This condemnation renders life meaningless and, therefore, death is the ultimate absurdity. Meursault reaches an awareness of this at the end of the novel:

> From the dark horizon of my future a sort of slow, persistent breeze had been blowing towards me, all my life long, from the years that were to come. And

> on its way that breeze had levelled out all the ideas that people tried to foist on me in the equally unreal years I then was living through. . . . All alike would be condemned to die one day; his turn too would come like the others. And what difference could it make if, after being charged with murder he didn't weep at his mother's funeral, since it all came to the same thing in the end.[63]

The overall effect of the absurd, up to this point, in The Stranger is that the desire for happiness in such a universe, is frustrated, thwarted, and eventually denied. This hostile nature of the universe is further examined in The Plague.

The Plague describes the human condition in a way that Pascal said was best symbolized by imprisonment. Camus quotes Defoe's preface to the third volume of Robinson Crusoe on the title page of the novel: "It is as reasonable to represent one kind of imprisonment by another, as it is to represent anything that really exists by that which exists not."[64]

The novel deals with an outbreak of plague in the city of Oran and the accompanying suffering and death. Throughout the novel, the sense of separation is emphasized. The people of Oran are separated from the outside world; lovers are separated from one another, and even within Oran, the people are separated from one another by the isolation camps. Rieux, the narrator of the chronicle, tells of the citizens finally becoming aware of this separation: "Yes, the plague had ended with the terror, and those passionately

straining arms told what it had meant: exile and deprivation in the profoundest meaning of the words."[65] "The profoundest meaning of the words" shows that the novel also symbolizes the nature of existence in general. The closed world of Oran is the absurd world man is forced to live in. As the asthmatic says, "But what does that mean - 'plague'? Just life, no more than that."[66]

The plague symbolizes the absurdity of premature death. This can be any type of premature death; for example, Tarrou identifies the plague with the principle of capital punishment, and he feels that all men carry plague within them in their capacity and desire to do evil. The plague can also be compared to the Nazis. There are a number of references that show that Camus had the Occupation in mind when he was writing the novel: the events reported take place in "194-". Moreover, the living conditions during the plague are more evocative of the living conditions in France during the Occupation than a plague-stricken community, and the first sermon of Paneloux suggests the position of the Church at the beginning of the Occupation. Lastly, the isolation camps and crematoriums suggest the Occupation. However, this last point shows that this interpretation cannot be carried too far: It was Rieux and his associates who established the isolation camps and crematoriums. Moreover, Camus probably wanted to suggest the suffering and death inflicted by any

dictatorship, although he used particular historical data relevant to the Nazi Regime.

In the novel, Camus also shows that the social order of Oran is absurd. The Oranese are a classic example of inauthentic existence and they illustrate the type of society from which Meursault is estranged. On the first page of the novel Camus describes their way of life:

> In our little town . . . everyone is bored, and devotes himself to cultivating habits. Our citizens work hard, but solely with the object of getting rich. Their chief interest is in commerce and their chief aim in life is, as they call it, 'doing business'. Naturally, they don't eschew such simpler pleasures as love-making, sea-bathing, going to the pictures. But, very sensibly, they reserve these pastimes for Saturday afternoons and Sundays, and employ the rest of the week in making money as much as possible.[67]

When the plague strikes, the normal routine of the Oranese is disrupted. After the plague leaves, Rieux says, "Tomorrow real life would begin again",[68] referring to the same "doing business" the Oranese had engaged in before the attack of plague.

In The Stranger, society's attempt to apply an abstract code of behaviour to an individual existent was shown to be absurd. In doing so, the officials showed their hostility to the members of the society. Camus criticizes this hostility of officialdom in The Plague. When it became certain that plague was present in Oran, the officials shut the gates to the city; however, the way in which this bureaucratic move was carried out shows the authorities' hostility:

"For actually the closing of the gates took place some hours before the official order was made known to the public, and, naturally enough, it was impossible to take individual cases into account."[69] Moreover, in the midst of the plague, the officials show a Victorianism that is absurd in comparison to the realities of the situation. Camus states that two large pits were dug for the plague victims: "One was reserved for the men, the other for the women. Thus, in this respect, the authorities still gave thought to propriety and it was only later that, by the force of things, this last remnant of decorum went by the board, and men and women were flung into the death pits indiscriminately."[70] The element that comes out most strongly in this "black humour" is the inconsequential nature of everything that the officials do. As Tarrou says, "Officialdom can never cope with something really catastrophic. And the remedial measures they think up are hardly adequate for a common cold."[71]

In The Plague, Camus has gone beyond the "I" of The Stranger to a "we", but the absurdity of existence still remains and, in this sense, The Plague symbolizes the universal fate of man.[72]

Conclusions

In the first part of this chapter, which deals primarily with The Myth of Sisyphus, I attempted to illustrate the diverse ways in which the absurd is revealed,

according to Camus. Thus, it is impossible to point to any one situation and say, "This is the absurd". Nor does Camus distinguish between the metaphysical and social aspects of the absurd in The Myth of Sisyphus; however, the various examples of the absurd are separable into these two aspects. I have also shown that Camus' answer to the question, "Does the absurd dictate death?" reinforces his statement that he had descended the depths of nihilism only to transcend it.[73] Camus will not accept intellectual or physical suicide as a possible course of action. Moreover, in The Myth of Sisyphus, he has concluded, by a paradoxical twist of reasoning, that life is all the more valuable because of its fundamental absurdity.

The second section of this chapter has been an attempt to show the way in which the absurd is developed in Camus' literary works. Here the metaphysical and social aspects of the absurd become explicit. The Misunderstanding and Caligula deal with the metaphysical nature of the absurd. The Stranger and The Plague continue the examination of the metaphysical nature of the absurd, but its social nature is also considered. Thus, in The Stranger, Camus satirizes the absurdity of society's attempt to cover up metaphysical chaos by the application of an absolute standard of values. Also, the pretensions and aims of society are shown to be absurd. Such a criticism of society is also present in The Plague, but it does not occupy a position of central importance.

There, Camus concentrates on the absurdity of evil: the plague conveys the notion of physical evil, and the oblique references to the Occupation and Tarrou's statements convey the notion of moral evil.

The comments in this chapter show that there are three areas of Camus' thought that come within the scope of this study that need to be evaluated: his use of the term absurd, his paradoxical conclusion that life is all the more valuable because of its absurdity, and the validity of the conclusions that Camus derives from his examination of the absurd. This last point may seem to be a digression from the central purpose of this study- an examination of the absurd. However, Camus does not give an unqualified statement of absurdity at any point in the development of his thought. This is true even of his most nihilistic piece, The Misunderstanding. Therefore, if we are to obtain a balanced view of his work, it is essential to see the way in which Camus responds to his initial awareness of the absurd. This is the purpose of the following chapter.

IV

CAMUS' RESPONSE TO THE ABSURD

We have already seen that, from a rejection of suicide in The Myth of Sisyphus, Camus established revolt as one of the few coherent philosophical postions. By revolt he means a refusal to accept man's condition: "It is not aspiration, for it is devoid of hope. That revolt is the certainty of a crushing fate, without the resignation that ought to accompany it."[1] The ability to engage in revolt raises the question of freedom, but Camus does not propose to discuss the problem of freedom in the traditional manner: "Knowing whether or not man is free doesn't interest me. I can experience only my own freedom."[2] Death negates the possibility of any eternal freedom; however, the absurd enlightens man as to his temporal freedom: "The divine availability of the condemned man before whom the prison doors open in a certain early dawn, that unbelievable disinterestedness with regard to everything except the pure flame of life- it is clear that death and the absurd are here the principles of the only reasonable freedom: that which a human heart can experience and live."[3]

In an absurd universe, an individual will be indifferent to the future and attempt to use up everything that is made available to him. The only obstacle to be over-

come is premature death, and Camus feels that this is more a matter of luck than anything else. His attitude implies that the best living is replaced by the most living. However, he would say that he is simply following his investigation to its logical conclusion: "It is not up to me to wonder if this is vulgar or revolting, elegant or deplorable. Once and for all, value judgments are discarded here in favor of factual judgments."[4] In this carpe diem attitude Camus has reached a third conclusion from the absurd- passionate awareness: "The present and the succession of presents before a constantly conscious soul is the ideal of the absurd man."[5]

The three conclusions of Camus' investigation into the absurd--revolt, freedom, and passion constitute his solution to the absurd. His investigation shows a way, and Camus would say the only way, of thinking if one is to remain true to the absurd. However, it is life, and not thought, that is the important thing, and Camus proceeds to give examples of men who live their awareness of the absurd.

The absurd man is a man without nostalgia; he accepts the conclusions of Camus' argument. He is without hope in respect to immortal life; however, he is not without hope in respect to life itself, even though he is limited to this life. He is aware of nostalgia, but he prefers courage, which teaches him to live without appeal, and reason, which informs him of his limits. In giving his ex-

amples of absurd men, Camus takes pains to point out that they are not necessarily presented as examples or models to be followed: "Let me repeat that these images do not propose moral codes and involve no judgments: they are sketches. They merely represent a style of life."[6]

The first example that Camus gives is Don Juan. He is an ordinary seducer, but he is also an absurd man. He goes from woman to woman, but not as a mystic in search of a total, all-consuming love. He cannot unify his feelings; he simply multiplies them by going from one conquest to another. In doing so, he achieves an ethic of quantity.

The actor is also engaged in an ethic of quantity. Camus feels that his profession is an excellent example of the absurd because the actor contradicts himself: "the same and yet so various, so many souls summed up in a single body. Yet it is the absurd contradiction itself, that individual who wants to achieve everything and live everything, that useless attempt, that ineffectual persistence."[7] The actor has three hours to be whatever role he has assumed; however, he will also die in three hours, under whichever of these masks he has assumed. Moreover, the actor tries to express a whole exceptional life in these three hours.

In his examination of the conqueror, Camus states that the previous greatness of a conqueror was measured by the area that he had accumulated in battle; however, for him, the term does not refer to a victorious general, but to

a man's protest against his fate. In this context, the conqueror is simply the absurd man lucidly living his revolt. Moreover, even though his victories are never final, his status as a conqueror is not diminished. Camus cites Prometheus as the first of the modern conquerors.

Camus uses the myth of Sisyphus as an archetype of the absurd man. Sisyphus was condemned by the gods to ceaselessly push a huge stone to the top of a hill from which it would roll down: "They [the gods] had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor."[8] However, Camus feels that Sisyphus surmounts his punishment because he is conscious. Moreover, he is the absurd hero par excellence because his whole being is exerted towards accomplishing nothing. Sisyphus, in that he is the proletarian of the gods, also symbolizes the fate of a great number of modern workers: "The workman of today works every day in his life at the same tasks, and this fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious."[9]

Although Sisyphus is the archetype of the absurd man, Camus maintains that the creator is the most absurd character of all: "All existence for a man turned away from the eternal is but a vast mime under the mask of the absurd. Creation is the great mime."[10] The absurd work of art will not attempt to explain and solve but to experience and describe: "If the commandments of the absurd are not respected, if the work

does not illustrate divorce and revolt, if it sacrifices to illusions and arouses hope, it ceases to be gratuitous."[11] Thus, the work of art is not a refuge from the absurd; it is an absurd phenomenon itself: "Creating or not creating changes nothing."[12] Thought cannot refine the real; thought, therefore, mimics it. Art, in this sense, is a mirror held up to nature.[13]

The positive response to the absurd that is developed in The Myth of Sisyphus is also present in Camus' fictional works.

The Misunderstanding is Camus' most nihilistic work. After she murders Jan, Martha counsels his wife to commit what Camus calls, in The Myth of Sisyphus, "philosophical suicide": "Pray your God to harden you to stone. It's the happiness He has assigned Himself, and the one true happiness. Do as He does, be deaf to all appeals, and turn your heart to stone while there is still time."[14] Martha goes on to say that if this is not enough of a compensation, the only other alternative is physical suicide: "But if you feel you lack the courage to enter into this hard, blind peace-then come and join us in our common house.. . . You have a choice between the mindless happiness of stones and the slimy bed in which we are awaiting you."[15] Maria cannot accept the alternatives offered, and she prays to God: "Oh God, I cannot live in this desert. It is on You that I must call, and I shall find the words to say. . .. Have pity on

those who love each other and are parted."[16] God, as He is wont to do, remains silent; however, an old manservant, who could represent God, appears, and Maria asks for his assistance. The play ends with his emphatic "No!".[17]

The point is that, even in such a world, the absurd can be dealt with. In an interview in 1944, Camus said, "Finally it comes down to saying that everything would have been different if the son had said: 'It's me, this is my name.' It comes down to saying that in an unjust and indifferent world, man can still achieve his own salvation and that of other people by the use of the simplest sincerity and the most precise language."[18] The world of The Misunderstanding is fraught with ambiguity. In such a world, Camus counsels us to act so as not to increase the ambiguity. Meursault reiterates this position when he reads about the incident that forms the plot for the play: "Anyhow, to my mind, the man was asking for trouble; one shouldn't play tricks of that sort."[19]

The contradictory reasons that motivate the mother and sister to commit suicide also give a positive solution to the absurd. Martha despairs of finding any happiness in this life: she states that even if she had known her brother's identity, it wouldn't have made any difference.[20] Therefore, she kills herself. On the other hand, the mother kills herself because she realizes that she has destroyed the one thing that counts, and that can sometimes be secured,

in an absurd world- human love.

Positive elements, in the midst of absurdity, are also present in Caligula. Caligula, like Martha, fails to see that life is of the utmost importance in a meaningless universe and, in his ignorance, tries to bring his absurd reasoning to its logical conclusion. Cherea states that Caligula's philosophy is completely logical; however, he is equally aware that "a man can't live without some reason for living."[21] Moreover, Cherea is equally aware of the fact that he cannot justify this position philosophically. This does not diminish his desire: "What spurs me on is not ambition but fear, my very reasonable fear of that inhuman vision in which my life means no more than a speck of dust."[22] Thus, Cherea joins the patricians who are planning to assasinate Caligula. He still realizes that Caligula's position is logical, but he maintains, "I'll have no part of your logic."[23] He opposes him, even though he cannot justify his opposition:

> Because what I want is to live, and be happy. Neither, to my mind, is possible if one pushes the absurd to its logical conclusions. As you see, I'm quite an ordinary sort of man. True, there are moments when, to feel free of them, I desire the death of those I love, or I hanker after women from whom the ties of family or friendship debar me. Were logic everything, I'd kill or fornicate on such occasions. But I consider that these passing fancies have no great importance. If everyone set to gratifying them, the world would be impossible to live in, and happiness, too, would go by the board. And these, I repeat, are the things that count for me.[24]

Cherea realizes that his position is a moral choice. His position cannot be logically validated, because there is no value inherent in the universe; however, he opts for man. This is exactly the position that Camus, Cherea-like, adopts when writing to an imaginary German friend who, Caligula-like, has chosen logic:

> I, on the contrary, chose justice in order to remain faithful to the world. I continue to believe that this world has no ultimate meaning. But I know that something in it has a meaning and that is man, because he is the only creature to insist on having one. This world has at least the truth of man, and our task is to provide its justification against fate itself. And it has no justification but man; hence he must be saved if we want to save the idea we have of life.[25]

Caligula works against life: "One cannot destroy everything without destroying oneself. . . . He [Caligula] consents to die, having learned that no man can save himself alone, and that one cannot be free by working against mankind."[26]

Caligula had revolted against the fact that men die without obtaining happiness. Meursault expresses a similar awareness about the nature of death:

> I was to die. Sooner than others, obviously. But, I reminded myself, 'its's common knowledge that life isn't worth living anyhow.' . . . Also, whether I died now or forty years hence, this business of dying had to be got through, inevitably. Still, somehow this line of thought wasn't as consoling as it should have been; the idea of all those years of life in hand was a galling reminder.[27]

In his initial awareness of death, Meursault states that life is rendered absurd because of it. He expresses this feeling in more detail when he revolts against the priest

and the possibility of immortality that he holds out to him. The certainty of death brings forth the full force of the absurd; Meursault's condemnation merely hastens the universal death sentence: "All alike would be condemned to die one day; his turn, too, would come like the others . . . it all came to the same thing in the end."[28] This despair is only temporary; his outburst awakens him to the fact that, as death is certain, life is the only thing of value:

> And I, too, felt ready to start life over again. It was as if that great rush of anger had washed me clean, emptied me of hope, and gazing up at the dark sky spangled with its signs and stars, for the first time, the first, I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe. To feel it so like myself, indeed so brotherly, made me realize that I'd been happy, and that I was happy still.[29]

This does not seem to give Meursault a great deal; all he has is "the pure flame of life." However, as Meursault says, "That certainty was something I could get my teeth into."[30] Actually, Meursault possesses the characteristics that Camus would say constitute a man. Meursault has revolted against death, and, in his revolt, he sees that he is free, as the future is contingent. He says, "I've been far too much absorbed in the present moment, or the immediate future, to think back."[31] Meursault also realizes that there is no preference in an absurd world: only "the pure flame of life" counts. This is why he says, "I've often thought that had I been compelled to live in the trunk of a dead tree, with nothing to do but gaze up at the patch of sky just overhead,

I'd have got used to it by degrees."[32]

In a meaningless world, only the pure act of living has any meaning. This is the message of The Stranger. However, Camus does not stop here. Meursault is innocent, but he has erred; he acts as if human relationships do not exist. Even if an authentic relationship is impossible in an absurd world, the murdered Arab has as much right as Meursault to "the pure flame of life".

Camus takes us beyond the picture of a solitary individual revolting against the absurd in The Plague. In The Plague there is a "we" against the absurd, whereas, in The Stranger there is only an "I" against the absurd.

The absurd cannot be defeated; all that can be done is to fight against it. In a conversation with Tarrou, Rieux expresses the futility of such an encounter, in stating that he had to see people die: "And then I saw that I could never get hardened to it. I was young then, and I was outraged by the whole scheme of things, or so I thought. Subsequently, I grew more modest. Only I've never managed to get used to seeing people die. That's all I know."[33] Rieux realizes that his struggle against the absurd is "a never-ending defeat."[34] He can only hope to diminish the suffering of the world; it cannot be removed. Nor does Rieux have any false pretensions regarding man. After the plague has left Oran, he decides to write a journal: "so that some memorial of the injustice and outrage done them might endure; and to

state quite simply what we learn in a time of pestilence: that there are more things to admire in men than to despise."[35]

Rieux does not counsel excape from "la condition humaine". This is what Father Paneloux, a Kierkegaardian Jesuit, does. In his first sermon, he says, "Calamity has come on you my brethren, and my brethren, you deserved it."[36] He sees the plague as God's flail, inflicted upon the people for their evil-doing; however, he also feels that the plague is a cause for rejoicing, as it shows "the will of God in action, unfailingly transforming evil into good."[37] Rieux states that Paneloux can speak with such confidence because he has not come into contact with death. He points out that, if the priest had known death, he would try to alleviate suffering rather than pointing out its excellences. Rieux is partially right. After witnessing the death of a child, Paneloux gives a second sermon. This time he speaks of "we" rather than "you". Also, it is evident that he is giving more thought to what he is saying. He states that there are some things that can be understood regarding God, and others that cannot. Needless suffering is one of the things that cannot be understood. Because of this he feels that the Christian must believe everything or deny everything, as far as belief is concerned. His thought is a Pascalian wager in the extreme: "It was wrong to say, 'This I understand, but that I cannot accept'; we must go

straight to the heart of that which is unacceptable, precisely because it is thus that we are constrained to make our choice. The sufferings of children were our bread of affliction, but without this bread our souls would die of spiritual hunger."[38]

Rieux cannot accept such a leap. When he and Paneloux were talking, after the death of Judge Othon's son, Paneloux said, "That sort of thing is revolting because it passes our human understanding. But perhaps we should love what we cannot understand."[39] Rieux cannot do this; he replies, "No, Father, I've a very different idea of love. And until my dying day I shall refuse to love a scheme of things in which children are put to torture."[40] Paneloux wrongly thinks that Rieux is working for man's salvation. Rieux corrects this impression: "Salvation's much too large a word for me, I don't aim so high. I'm concerned with man's health; and for me his health comes first."[41]

Rieux does not attempt to transcend his condition. He realizes that any solution to the absurd must be found within it: "Oh I know it's an absurd situation, but we're all involved in it, and we've got to accept it as it is."[42] Moreover, the only possible solution to such a situation is a fundamental humanism. He expresses this after the departure of the plague: "They knew now that if there is one thing one can always yearn for, and sometimes attain, it is human love. But for those others, who aspired beyond and

above the human individual towards something they could not even imagine, there had been no answer."[43] However, this humanism is a matter of choice rather than logic. This is why Rieux cannot criticize Rambert when he decides to escape from Oran. As he hoped to be reunited with his fiancée, Rieux could not put up any argument. He even condones his act: "For nothing in this world is it worth turning one's back on what one loves."[44] However, Rambert decides to stay, but he cannot justify his decision logically: "Until now I always felt a stranger in this town, and that I'd no concern with you people. But now that I've seen what I have seen, I know that I belong here whether I want it or not. This business is everybody's business."[45]

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have attempted to show the way in which Camus advances beyond the absurd. Moreover, I have attempted to show that his final response to the absurd is a fundamental humanism, in that there is no justification for man beyond man himself, even though Camus does not actually call his position humanism. On first analysis, it would seem that Camus could not justify humanism because of the absurd. He states the problem involved in The Rebel: "Awareness of the absurd, when we first claim to deduce a rule of behaviour from it, makes murder seem a matter of indifference, to say the least, and hence possible. If we

believe in nothing, if nothing has any meaning and if we can affirm no values whatsoever, then everything is possible and nothing has any importance."[46] However, this line of reasoning is only permitted by the "feeling" of the absurd. The "logic" of the absurd does not allow such a conclusion. Camus states that awareness of the absurd condemns murder for the same reason that it condemns suicide. Suicide would end the encounter between man and the universe. Thus, to maintain the absurd the conscience must be alive. Life is good, because it maintains awareness of the absurd. Moreover, as soon as life is recognized as being good, it must be seen to be good for all men:

> Murder cannot be made coherent when suicide is not considered coherent. A mind imbued with the idea of the absurd will undoubtedly accept fatalistic murder; but it would never accept calculated murder. In terms of the encounter between human enquiry and the silence of the universe, murder and suicide are one and the same thing, and must be accepted or rejected together.[47]

Any activity that regards man as a means is actually in collusion with the absurd, in that such activity would add to the absurdity of our condition, rather than revolting against it. Camus expresses his opposition to such a situation in Letters to A German Friend: "You saw the injustice of our condition to the point of being willing to add to it, whereas it seemed to me that man must exalt justice in order to fight against injustice, create happiness in order to protest against the universe of unhappiness."[48] Only by a

perpetual revolt will the absurdity of our condition be an injustice.

V

CRITICISM OF CAMUS' USE OF THE ABSURD

Camus develops two broad aspects of the notion of the absurd in The Myth of Sisyphus. The first is the absurd as revealed by feeling or emotion. The second is the absurd as revealed by the mind's shortcomings. Camus deals with the first sense of the absurd in his literary works as well, but the second sense of the absurd is dealt with primarily in The Myth of Sisyphus. As it is the second sense of the absurd that is most unsatisfactory, I shall deal with it first.

Camus states that the mind's inability to comprehend reality is shown by the fact that it cannot even perform its most essential function: distinguishing truth from falsehood. Moreover, he feels that the metaphorical structure of science shows that it is impossible to encompass reality. Thus, the mind reinforces the absurdity that is first experientially felt by the heart.

Camus cites the paradox of the Cretan to support his contention that the mind cannot distinguish between truth and falsehood; however, Aristotle, even while granting the existence of the paradox, still accepted the possibility of logical demonstration. Moreover, as Ryle has shown in his "Tarner Lectures", such paradoxes are not insurmount-

able, and even if we were to grant the cogency of the paradox, we would still have Ayer's solution to the problem: "All that it proves is that the terms of truth and falsehood cannot be significantly applied to the totality of all propositions, which is, in any case, an illegitimate expression; and, in modern logic, the difficulty has been met by the relegation of the terms 'true' and 'false' to the domain of semantics, and by the division of propositions into different logical types."[1] The mind has its limitations, but this is not a sufficient reason for despair. Even Kant pointed to the limits of reason, but he did not despair of reason.

Camus' comments on science's inability to encompass reality, to show the way in which the mind reveals the absurd, are even less satisfactory. He speaks of science in the manner of a popularizer, and his discussion utilizes the assumptions of nineteenth century physics. This neglects the discussion of probability curves of modern science. Moreover, if Camus accepts the "invisible planetary system" explanation of science, he has committed what Whitehead calls the "Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness": "This fallacy is the occasion of great confusion in philosophy. It is not necessary for the intellect to fall into the trap, though in this example there has been a very general tendency to do so."[2] Scientists, today, are aware of the tentative nature of their discipline; it is not perfect;

however, it may be perfectible, and in not examining the philosophy of science, as understood by contemporary scientists, Camus greatly weakens his case.

After showing the inability of reason and science to comprehend the world, Camus states that he is compelled to remain a stranger to himself and to the world. He sees a radical divorce between man and the rest of creation: "If I were a tree among trees, a cat among animals, this life would have a meaning, or rather this problem would not arise, for I should belong to this world. I should be this world to which I am now opposed by my whole consciousness and my whole insistence upon familiarity."[3] Camus has not really accounted for this divorce. He says that reason sets man apart from the world, but this is not really sufficient. He accepts as given what Whitehead calls the "bifurcation of nature"; this is an abstraction from the way things are, and, in accepting the abstraction, Camus shows his Cartesian heritage. Basil Willey's comment on Descartes, "What God had joined together, Descartes put asunder", could just as easily be applied to Camus.

Camus' comments on the inability of the mind to reduce the world to rational categories suggest a disillusioned Hegelianism; he looks about for Hegel's panlogism and he sees chaos. Thus, Camus' desire can be said to be a form of romanticism: " I want everything to be explained to me or nothing."[4] Camus wants clarity, and for the world to answer

his demands it would be necessary for matters of fact to be equivalent to logical necessity. This is a vain desire, because it is of the essence of a fact that it could always be otherwise; facts are contingent. Therefore, nothing in the world could satisfy his desire for clarity: he is beaten before he begins.

Camus' desire for clarity is similar to Roquentin's in Sartre's metaphysical diary, Nausea. Roquentin comes to a gradual realization that existence is de trop or absurd because there is no ultimate justification for the existence of any object. This is the way in which Sartre uses the term absurd: "I do not recognize the absurd in the sense of scandal and disillusionment that Camus attributes to it. What I call the absurd is something very different: it is the universal contingency of being which is, but which is not the basis of its being: the absurd is the given, unjustifiable, primordial quality of existence."[5] An individual's existence is absurd because it is contingent. This realm of existence is contrasted to the realm of mathematical objects that is seen to be necessary; reality is a deflection from this realm of perfection: "The world of explanations and reasons is not the world of existence. A circle is not absurd, it is clearly explained by the rotation of a straight segment around one of its extremities. But neither does a circle exist. This root, on the other hand, existed in such a way that I could not explain it."[6]

Roquentin feels that his nausea would be overcome if he could attain necessary being. His sole pleasure comes from listening to a recording of a mediocre song, and he feels that he would be satisfied if his life were similar to this representative of necessary existence: "Yes, it's what I wanted - what I still want. I am so happy when a negress sings: what summits would I not reach if my own life made the subject of the melody."[7] Roquentin finally attempts to justify his existence by writing a book; his solution is aesthetic and it is only a partial solution: "and they would think about my life as I think about the negress's: as something precious and almost legendary. A book. Naturally, at first it would only be a troublesome tiring work, it wouldn't stop me from existing or feeling that I exist. But a time would come when the book would be written, when it would be behind me, and I think that a little of its clarity might fall over my past."[8] This is also Camus' final solution. In The Myth of Sisyphus, the artist mirrors the absurd, but in The Rebel, where Camus gives his final formulation of aesthetics, his desire for clarity, like Roquentin's, is partially achieved in art: "The aim of great literature seems to be to create a closed universe as a perfect type. The West, in its great creative works, does not limit itself to retracing the steps of its daily life."[9]

Reason is unable to provide clarity, but this does not mean that Camus completely rejects reason; he appeals

to its use in areas where it is efficacious. Thus, in Resistance, Rebellion, And Death, he says, "We have a right to think that truth with a capital letter is relative. But facts are facts. And whoever says that the sky is blue when it is grey is prostituting words and preparing the way for tyranny."[10] Camus is not an irrational thinker, but an anti-rational thinker, of a certain type. It is true that Camus says, "To an absurd mind reason is useless and there is nothing beyond reason",[11] but what he means is that reason cannot satisfy his desire for clarity and, in opposition to other anti-rational thinkers, Camus feels there is no other way of obtaining clarity; however, he cannot validate this position.

Anti-rationalism has exerted a pervasive influence in French thought, along with Cartesianism; for example, Bergson felt that reason did not make contact with reality. Meyerson felt that a great area remains beyond the mind's scope when it attempts to make experience conform to its categories. Brunschvicg felt that the mind was only able to classify and describe, and not comprehend. Anti-rationalism is respectable as a philosophical tradition, and as a literary tradition it finds expression in the Symbolists and Impressionists. Camus differs from these thinkers in that he feels reality cannot be known. On the other hand, the anti-rationalists state that reality can be known, but not by reason; for example, intuition is the means of grasp-

ing reality in Bergson's system. Reason has its drawbacks, but reality can be known, for there is another way. This other way, although it is a different thing for different writers, is present in the majority of literature of the twentieth century. For example, one of the characters in Malraux's Man's Fate says: "'All suffer,' he thought, 'and each one suffers because he thinks. At bottom, the mind conceives men only in the eternal, and the consciousness of life can be nothing but anguish. One must not think life with the mind, but with opium. How many of the sufferings scattered about in this light would disappear, if thought were to disappear."[12]

Such a possibility is not available for Camus. He states that reality is unknowable. Any attempt to comprehend it is a form of "philosophical suicide". However, the argument that he advances to support this position is untenable because, when he states that the impenetrable nature of the world renders it absurd, Camus makes an illogical move from the statement that the world is unknown to the statement that it is unknowable. His first statement is: "I don't know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and it is impossible for me just now to know it."[13] This is a valid position; however, without justifying his transition, three sentences later, Camus states that the world is unknowable: "And these two certainties - my appetite for the absolute and

for unity and the impossibility of reducing this world to a rational and reasonable principle - I also know that I cannot reconcile them."[14] However, just because there does not seem to be a higher meaning, we cannot conclude there is no higher meaning. We are not justified in concluding that a higher meaning is not knowable, because a higher meaning is not known. When Camus states that we are justified in making this conclusion, he is going beyond the limits of what can be justified intellectually.

Camus is more successful when he expresses the absurd as a feeling. As Philip Thody says, "Camus is acutely and emotionally aware of the absurd but is unable to communicate this awareness in rational and persuasive terms."[15] In this connection, it is instructive that intellectual expression of the absurd comes after its affective expression. He gives emotional expression of the absurd in the plays Caligula and The Misunderstanding, and the novel The Stranger, before examining the term philosophically in The Myth of Sisyphus. In The Myth of Sisyphus itself he shows the absurd as a feeling before stating it as an idea.

In The Myth of Sisyphus, Camus does not claim to be giving an exhaustive definition of the absurd, as he feels that real knowledge is impossible. Thus, he can only enumerate events and the sentiments that go along with them; he can only give an enumeration of the feelings that may admit of the absurd. Nor does he feel that the absurd has been ex-

hausted when he finishes his enumeration. However, by the time Camus has finished his enumeration, the term, at best, is ambiguous. He states that the absurd is exposed by such diverse things as the mechanical nature of existence; the passage of time; the awareness of the alien nature of the "other"; whether it be the world, other people, or one's self. Last of all, the absurd is shown by death. Moreover, this list is further extended when we examine the ways in which the term is used in his literary works. The most general thing that can be said is; "By absurd Camus means primarily the whole scandalous paradox of the human condition."[16] These enumerations are merely aspects of the absurd and each enumeration possesses what Camus calls the trinity of the absurd - "I know what man wants, I know what the world offers him."[17] In each case the offering is below man's aspirations. It is evident that a situation can be rendered absurd only with the introduction of human categories. Moreover, Camus is correct in stating that, experientially, most people encounter absurdity at one time or another; however, this is very different from saying that all people are aware of the absurdity of existence. In other words, it is not the case that the absurd can be shown to be universal. Camus would probably say that people attempt to escape the absurd by masking it, and his three novels illustrate various ways in which people do this; however, even though people are aware of the absurd and try to escape it, it does not follow that

it is the basic category of the human condition.

As I have previously pointed out, Camus is attempting to show what follows from his awareness of the absurd, and he states that up until now, individuals that were aware of the absurd escaped from it. He sees two possible escapes from the absurd in his question, "Does the Absurd dictate death?" The first escape is "philosophical suicide". This move negates the reason that makes one aware of the absurd. Having examined a number of thinkers that deal with the absurd, Camus states that they all nullify the awareness of the absurd by a leap. This leap can take the form of the existentialists' "humiliated thought" or Husserl's "triumphal reason". It is true that Camus' interpretation of these thinkers is questionable; for example, Sartre says, "M. Camus shows off a bit by quoting passages from Jaspers, Heidegger and Kierkegaard, whom, by the way, he does not always seem to have quite understood."[18] Camus is probably gerrymandering in his references to the existentialists, but he is trying to show that his themes have had previous expression, even though the thinkers who have expressed these themes have not remained within the limits of the absurd. Moreover, Camus does not question the validity of their position. Thus, with particular reference to Chestov, he says, "Let me repeat that this attitude is legitimate."[19] However, Camus does not feel that Chestov remains "faithful to the commandments of the absurd", which for Camus is

the maintenance of the absurd.

Camus criticizes the existentialists because of their leap. "In fact, our aim is to shed light upon the step taken by the mind when, starting from a philosophy of the world's lack of meaning, it ends up by finding a meaning and depth in it."[20] Camus wants to maintain the absurd; he will not negate either of its terms. This is why he rejects suicide. Suicide suppresses the individual experiencing the absurd; this move negates, but does not refute the absurd.

The problem with Camus' position is that, just as surely as the existentialists, he leaps. By twisting his argument around, the absurd is changed into a way of life. As Cruickshank says, "Camus takes as his key to existence the very fact of not having a key."[21] Camus says:

> It was previously a question of finding out whether or not life had to have a meaning to be lived. It now becomes clear, on the contrary, that it will be lived all the better if it has no meaning. Living an experience, a particular fate, is accepting it fully. Now, no one will live this fate, knowing it to be absurd, unless he does everything to keep before him that absurd brought to light by consciousness.[22]

Camus uses the absurd as the source of value, and in doing so, he begs the question. This is pointed out succinctly by Waldo Frank: "One can say of the equation: one plus one equals minus one, that it is absurd, only because a value has been implicitly given to one. One can call life absurd only by a positive axiom or measure making it absurd. Camus, denying the measure of value, and yet employing it

to prove his case, begs the question."[23]

A problem that is related to the fact that Camus uses the absurd as his rule of life, is the fact that, in establishing the absurd as a rule of life, Camus changes the meaning of the term. Originally, the absurd signified the paradoxical nature of man's existence. Now, it becomes a situation we must maintain: "That revolt gives life its value."[24] Camus feels that revolt is given as a coherent philosophical position as a result of his investigations, but the absurd must be maintained in the latter sense, rather than the former to give validity to the revolt. Moreover, this attitude of revolt is a moral decision and does not logically follow from an awareness of the absurd, as Camus contends. Camus says, "What I believe to be true I must therefore preserve."[25] This is the language of ethics, not logic. Camus chooses to revolt because he wants to go beyond nihilism. In the same way he chooses consciousness, and its continuation, rather than suicide:

> If I judge that a thing is true, I must preserve it. If I attempt to solve a problem, at least I must not by that very solution conjure away one of the terms of the problem. For me the sole datum is the absurd. The first and, after all, the only condition of my inquiry is to preserve the only thing that crushes me, consequently to respect what I consider essential in it.[26]

However, as with his concept of revolt, the maintenance of consciousness cannot be logically validated. In Caligula, Camus has shown that Caligula's position is logical. It is

only by acting against logic that Cherea can achieve any happiness.

Camus wants to go beyond metaphysical nihilism and he tries to use logic to do so, and he fails. The tenuous nature of this method can be seen by briefly looking at the way in which he tries to overcome social nihilism in The Rebel. Here, he reiterates the fact that the conclusion of absurdist reasoning is acceptance of the encounter between human enquiry and the silence of the world, and he uses his reasons for rejecting suicide to reject murder: "From the moment that life is recognized as good, it becomes good for all men. Murder cannot be made coherent when suicide is not considered coherent."[27] Thus, as Camus' arguments against suicide are weak, his argument for humanism, which is based on the argument against suicide, also suffers. The "feeling" of the absurd, which is Ivan's "everything is permitted", is just as cogent as the "logic" of the absurd, which opposes suicide and murder.

Besides revolt, Camus draws two other conclusions from the absurd: freedom and passion. However, these two certainties are subject to the same sort of problems as his certainty of revolt.

Camus is probably right in maintaining that the value of life is infinite if it ends in death, and he would categorically say that it does. Thus, an individual should consciously live every moment of this life. This is the con-

text of the preface from Pindar to The Myth of Sisyphus: "O my soul, do not aspire to immortal life, but exhaust the limits of the possible."[28] Camus accepts the natural world as the source of his happiness. Therefore, like Meursault, he must accept death as the culmination of his individuality. This is somewhat paradoxical, as he has already said that death is one of the aspects of the absurd. Thus, he would seem to be acquiescing in the absurd, rather than revolting against it.

There is also a problem with Camus' concept of freedom, as revealed by the absurd. In contrast to Pascal, who says, "The future alone is our goal. Thus we never live, we hope to live."[29], Camus states that the absurd man has no future. This is because the inevitability of death nullifies his projects. Therefore, he lives in a succession of presents: "The present and the succession of presents before a constantly conscious soul is the ideal of the absurd man."[30] Therefore all value is given to the present - carpe diem. However, this can have no meaning, because, for the present to be meaningful, there must be a future. Therefore, Camus' freedom is empty.

In addition to the fact that Camus uses the absurd in an equivocal sense in The Myth of Sisyphus, he also exaggerates the facts of the situation when he says that existence is meaningless; to illustrate the meaningless nature of existence he says, "A man is talking on the telephone behind a

glass partition; . . .you wonder why he is alive."[31] As Sartre points out, this situation cannot be used to show the absurdity of existence: "The gesturing of a man who is telephoning and whom we cannot hear is really only relatively absurd, because it is part of an incomplete circuit. Listen in on an extension, however, and the circuit is completed; human activity recovers its meaning."[32] Perhaps, Camus would say that the situation would be absurd even if the glass partition were removed; however, this position could not be justified; it is only when there is a glass partition that such a situation is absurd. What Camus is doing can perhaps be clarified by comparing his glass partition to that used by Faulkner in The Sound and the Fury: "Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting. They were coming toward where the flag was and I went along the fence. . . . They took the flag out, and they were hitting. Then they put the flag back and they went to the table, and he hit and the other hit."[33] Benjy, an idiot, sees only the "meaningless pantomine" without knowing the rules of golf. He can register "how?" but not "why?". There is a glass partition that, in behaviouristic fashion, cuts off any possibility of "why?". We cannot help but think that, if the circuit were completed, Benjy would understand the "why?" of golf and it would not be rendered absurd.

Within a game, or any closed system, a particular move, if strategically planned, is not absurd. It is only

when you go beyond the system that the game is meaningless. Camus states, "I continue to believe that this world has no ultimate meaning."[34] This is true, but there is meaning within the world, and Camus is neglecting matters when he confines himself to "how?" questions and neglects "why?" questions, even though there may not be an ultimate "why?". Moreover an ultimate "why?" is contradictory: We have aims and goals, and, in trying to achieve them, we give a meaning to our actions, but we cannot say that there is an ultimate goal, as purpose has to be referred to something else. As Ayer says: "For the justification of an end consists in relating it to some further end; and from this it follows that to speak of justifying an ultimate end is to fall into a contradiction of terms."[35]

Camus concludes his "Absurd Line of Reasoning" in The Myth of Sisyphus by stating: "The preceding merely defines a way of thinking. But the point is to live."[48] I now hope to show that Camus' existential examples of the ideas that he has developed in The Myth of Sisyphus, are inadequate. The section entitled "The Absurd Man" gives examples illustrating his "absurd reasoning" incorporated in particular lives. Camus states that these illustrations are not necessarily examples to be followed, but merely represent a style of life. The four examples Camus gives are as follows: Don Juan, the actor, the conqueror, and the creator. However, there are problems involved in advancing these examples as styles of life.

Camus' description of Don Juan is closer to the Romantics' conception, than to that of Kierkegaard or Strauss. Camus states that Don Juan is an ordinary seducer, and that it is only the fact that he is conscious that renders him absurd. He attempts to achieve an ethic of quantity by repeating his achievement of total love by going from woman to woman. Camus states, "Don Juan does not think of 'collecting' women. He exhausts their number, and with them his chances of life."[37] In doing so, he fails to take other people into account; he is solipsistic, and he leaves a wake of individuals behind him who have an equal right to an ethic of quantity. This is similar to one of the problems of The Stranger: the climax of the novel is Meursault's act of murder, and the rest of the novel deals with the consequences of this act. Nothing more is said of the Arab, but he should have equal rights in a gratuitous world. If this is not so, Camus would have to support a Nietzschean "will to power" rather than humanism. Camus realizes this in his discussion of the conqueror: "There is but one luxury for them - that of human relations. How can one fail to realize that in this vulnerable universe everything that is human and solely human assumes a more vivid meaning?"[38]

Actually, the conqueror is Camus' most acceptable "absurd man", and from the above quotation it should be obvious that the conqueror is not a Superman treading on the oppressed. Camus uses Prometheus as an example of the type

of person he means: "In revolting against the gods, he expressed a revolt against his fate."[39] The conqueror is the man of action, but this does not mean that thought is foreign to him. The conqueror is the thinker engaged in action, and Camus states that such a course is necessitated by historical events: "But the era, its ruins, and its blood overwhelm us with facts."[40] In addition to being the most acceptable example of the absurd type, the exposition of the conqueror also contains Camus' Apology. Camus states that to-day everyone is mobilized: "At every form that miscarries in the trenches, at every outline, metaphor, or prayer crushed under steel, the eternal loses another round. Conscious that I cannot stand aloof from my time, I have decided to be an integral part of it."[41]

Camus' description of the actor as an absurd type is even less acceptable than his description of Don Juan, but for a different reason. Concerning the actor, Camus says, "The same and yet so various, so many souls summed up in a single body. Yet it is the absurd contradiction itself, that individual who wants to achieve everything, that useless attempt, that ineffectual persistence."[42] What Camus describes here would result in the complete absence of any self-identity. This can be shown by a reference to a story by Villiers de I'Isle-Adam, The Desire to Be A Man. After a life of acting, the main character in the story reflects, "Here it is nearly half a century that I have been imper-

sonating, that I have been play-acting the passions of others, without ever feeling them myself - for, deep down I myself have never felt anything. It's a joke to think I'm anything like those others! Am I then only a shadow?"[43] He tries to capture something that will belong to him. He says, "I must find some passions for myself, some real feeling . . . since that is the condition sine qua non, without which one cannot possibly pretend to the title of Man."[44] He sets fire to a large tenement building and causes hundreds of deaths, thinking that he will be able to feel remorse. However, "He felt nothing - but absolutely nothing."[45] The actor as expressed by de l'Isle-Adam and Camus is much like the café proprietor in Sartre's Nausea, whose head empties when the café empties. This is self-alienation at its worst. Therefore, the actor is not worthy of being advanced as an example of an absurd type.

Camus states, "All those lives maintained in the rarefied air of the absurd could not persevere without some profound and constant thought to infuse its strength into them."[46] This is the role of the artist; he reminds those about him that "all is vanity". Nor is the artist exempt from this vanity:" Creating or not creating changes nothing."[47] Camus states that creation is the great mime: "Incapable of refining the real, thought pauses to mimic it."[48] However, this is not really true. A work of art cannot be completely descriptive, because it would have to be

infinite in its description. All art is necessarily selective and when Camus asks whether an absurd work of art is possible, the answer must be negative. Camus realizes this and repudiates the aesthetics of absurd creation in The Rebel. There, he says, "What, in fact, is a novel but a universe in which action is endowed with form, where final words are pronounced, where people possess one another completely, and where life assumes the aspect of destiny?"[49] In The Myth of Sisyphus, art is realism. In The Rebel, Camus sees art as a balance between realism and formalism: "A story is never really moving and successful without the imperturbable continuity which is never part of real life, but which is to be found on the borderline between reality and reverie."[50] Camus states that by the use of style the artist recreates reality and gives a unity and boundary to this recreated universe, but it is evident that this theory of aesthetics takes us beyond that of The Myth of Sisyphus which presents art as a "great mime".

Camus uses the myth of Sisyphus as a symbolic expression of man's condition and a summary of the absurd men that he has been expressing in The Myth of Sisyphus. He gives various accounts of the reasons for Sisyphus' punishment, but states that it is the nature of the punishment that interests him. Sisyphus is condemned to push a huge boulder to the top of a mountain and then watch it roll to the bottom. This situation is literally repeated ad infinitum.

However, Camus does not feel that Sisyphus despairs. He feels that Sisyphus overcomes his fate by consciously scorning it. In this way, Sisyphus reinstates the dignity of man. As Killinger says, "In his scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life, all of which earned him the penalty of exerting his whole being toward accomplishing nothing, he was the absurd hero *par excellence*."[51] However, there are a number of problems in regarding Sisyphus as the epitome of the absurd man.

I do not mean to imply that the myth of Sisyphus, or any other myth, has an intrinsic meaning. Myths are public property and, therefore, amenable to any number of interpretations. However, in using Sisyphus as the mythical expression of the absurd man, Camus contravenes a number of statements that he has made regarding the nature of the absurd. In the first place, the myth loses its effectiveness because Sisyphus' punishment is eternal. In other parts of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, it is man's mortality that renders life absurd. This is not to say that immortality could not be used to illustrate absurdity. Thus, in Eliot's *Waste Land*, the Sybil of Cumae has been granted everlasting life and she says, "I want to die." It would have been more in keeping with the rest of *The Myth of Sisyphus* if Camus had focused on Sisyphus as a mortal and his transitory enjoyment of sun and sea, as a reprieve from Hades. Moreover, although it is a minor problem, Sisyphus strives towards an upward path,

and, even if it is obliquely, a meaning is given to a task that must remain gratuitous. A much better example of the absurd man who performs a gratuitous task would be the "man who counts peas" in The Plague. The most serious problem with the myth is Camus' conclusion: "One must imagine Sisyphus happy."[52] Dostoyevsky's conclusion, to a similar situation, is more likely:

> It once occurred to me that if it were desired to crush a man completely, to punish him so severely so that even the most hardened murderer would quail, it would only be needed to make his work absolutely pointless and absurd. . . .compel him to pour water from barrel to barrel or to grind sand or to shift a heap of earth to and fro and he is sure to hang himself or commit a host of crimes in a few days. Anything rather than live, anything to escape from this agony and humiliation.[53]

Sisyphus is effective as a mythological expression of the absurd man in that, as "proletarian of the gods", he symbolizes the modern factory worker whose fate, like Sisyphus', is tragic, if he is conscious. And, if he is conscious, we can say that he is free, in a paradoxical sense, but not that he is happy. In trying to ascribe happiness to Sisyphus' condition, Camus is reiterating his statement: "It was previously a question of finding out whether or not life had to have a meaning to be lived. It now becomes clear, on the contrary, that it will be lived all the better if it has no meaning."[54] It is only by an odd twist of reasoning that one can accept such a position.

Up to this point I have concerned myself with criti-

cizing the metaphysical nature of the absurd, as developed in The Myth of Sisyphus. Camus uses the absurd, in its metaphysical sense, in his literary works as well, and I now propose to criticize the concept as therein developed.

One of the most severe criticisms of the absurd is that Camus uses it to give an artificial account of experience, while purporting to describe reality. This is especially true in The Stranger. One could perhaps justify the artificial nature of experience, as established in The Stranger, as a stylistic device, except that this would contravene the theory of aesthetics that Camus establishes in The Myth of Sisyphus. There, Camus says, "All existence for a man turned away from the eternal is but a vast mime under the mask of the absurd. Creation is the great mime."[55] At a later point he reiterates this, when referring to the great "philosophical novelists", by saying, "Incapable of refining the real, thought pauses to mimic it."[56] Therefore, Camus is committed to saying that the style of The Stranger represents reality; this is a gross over-simplification. Camus puts a glass partition between himself and that which he is describing; he then renders the resulting filtering process as absurd.

Camus tries to establish the inability of language, and even thought, to reconstruct the amorphous flow of Meursault's experience by removing the normal pattern that we impose on events; for example, an average person would wait for an acceptable period of time after the death of a parent

before taking a mistress; however, Meursault neglects this nicety. This, in addition to the fact that he did not cry at his mother's funeral, condemns him. Camus is justified in presenting society's account of this situation as absurd; however, he errs when he states that Meursault's account of experience is an examination of the way experience presents itself to us. Camus stylizes Meursault's experience. He does not allow any effective past to survive in Meursault's consciousness. Camus achieves this by using sentences reminiscent of Hemingway. As Charles Rolo says, "Each sentence forms a self-enclosed whole, with the result that life is registered as a succession of perceptions with no meaning beyond themselves."[57] When it is necessary to join sentences, Camus uses simple conjunctions, rather than subordinating secondary clauses to the principal clause. By doing so he overcomes the possibility of giving any idea of causality. As Lewis notes, in The Picaresque Saint, the only place where causal relations are asserted is during the presecutor's speech at Meursault's trial, and Lewis states that this is why Meursault thought that the prosecutor was referring to someone else.[58] This use of causality shows that Camus acknowledges the existence of causal relations, but he neglects them in describing Meursault's experience. Camus would probably say that such causal relations are not inherent in the fabric of existence: the prosecutor simply utilizes the language of causality to mask the absurd. As an artist Camus

does not have to say that Meursault's experience is a picture of the nature of reality, because such a rendering of experience, even though it may not be correct for all people, is valid as an element of style. However, if such were the case, Camus would no longer be writing an absurd novel. Therefore, Camus is committed to saying that the style of The Stranger presents experience as it is, once we become conscious of the absurd.

Camus is correct in showing that most meaning is read into experience. As Kierkegaard put it, "Life must be lived forwards, but it can only be understood backwards." Moreover, society's attempt to apply an absolute to an individual existent is absurd; however, I think that Camus errs when he presents Meursault's experience and, implicitly, all experience as a "solipsism of the present moment".

This is an abstraction from the way in which reality is experienced. Experience is not initially a series of discreet units that are subsequently joined together in an artificial union. Experience is initially like a cinematograph: the abstraction occurs when we separate experience into discreet units. Thus, to state that all there is in experience is discreet units is an over-simplification. This can be shown by reference to Whitehead's discussion of the two modes of perception: "perception in the mode of presentational immediacy" and "perception in the mode of causal efficacy". "Perception in the mode of presentational immediacy" gives us

an immediate presentation of the contemporary world, and this type of perception corresponds to Humes's "impressions". However, this is only part of the story. It overlooks a much more important aspect of perception. As Whitehead says, "The notion of causation arose because mankind lives amid experiences in the mode of causal efficacy."[59] "Perception in the mode of causal efficacy", or meaning perception, is primordial. It is the type of perception that Hume and, of course, Camus neglect. Whitehead states that we have direct experience of causal efficacy; for example, when exposed to a bright light, an individual says, "The flash made me blink." Hume explains this on the ground of habit. However, Whitehead states, "Hume by a sleight of hand confuses a 'habit of feeling blinks after flashes' with a '<u>feeling of the habit</u> of feeling blinks after flashes'."[60] Thus, we have a direct apprehension of causal efficacy. The example of anger is even more evident. We feel anger surging from the past into the present. Thus, if we say that the elements of experience are discreet and ask how we can possibly combine them, we are "putting the cart before the horse". It is conformation, rather than discreetness, that is primitive: "The perceptive mode of immediate presentation affords information about the percepta in the more aboriginal mode of causal efficacy."[61]

Camus' falsification of experience can also be seen in the way in which he deals with time in <u>The Stranger</u>. For

Meursault, each moment is cut off from past and future, whereas in reality our awareness of time includes both past and present. Experience is vectorial in that it anticipates the future. As a sylistic device, the hypostatization of time is valid, but it is not acceptable as a description of real time.

To sum up, when Camus says that he is simply describing Meursault's experience, he is actually stylizing it. In doing so, Camus repudiates the position of description that he advances in The Myth of Sisyphus. In The Rebel, Camus will say: "Art is an impossible demand given expression and form."[62] However, he is not justified in saying, as he does in The Stranger, that experience is completely lacking in form and pattern-in a word, absurd.

Nor is Camus justified in signifying man's metaphysical condition as absurd, in the sense of being completely meaningless. Complete meaninglessness is impossible. Camus himself stated this at a later date: There can be no total nihilism. To say that everything is meaningless is to express something which has meaning."[63] Even if we say that everything is meaningless, we want to grant meaning to at least one thing: our statement that everything is meaningless. If everything were meaningless, action would be completely futile. Camus is correct in saying that such a state of affairs would not necessarily dictate death. A person completely convinced of the meaningless nature of life would

have to admit that, by committing suicide, he would be giving a meaning to life, by protesting against the lack of meaning in the world; however, by living, an individual also shows the contradictory nature of the absurd: "It's contradictory in its content because, in wanting to uphold life, it excludes all value judgments, when to live is, itself, a value judgment."[64]

The short-comings of the absurd, as an expression of man's being-in-the-world, can also be shown by an examination of its use in The Plague. The plague means suffering and death for the people of Oran and, in that it is incomprehensible and mysterious, we can say that the plague represents a metaphysical punishment for an unknown crime: the fact that the people are innocent, from a metaphysical point of view, makes the punishment meaningless and unjust. Camus is actually presenting a court-room analogy of existence. He is saying that, for an individual to be condemned, there has to be someone to condemn him. Moreover, as the people of Oran have been unjustly condemned, the individual who has condemned them is unjust. Camus is engaging in theology, but, for him, there is no God. Therefore, in denying God (the judge), but still maintaining that the universe is hostile to man (the Oranese suffer and die), Camus is committing the pathetic fallacy. This position can be clarified by contrasting Camus' implicit court-room analogy of The Plague with Kafka's court-room procedure in The Trial.[65]

In The Trial, Joseph K. is arrested without being charged for any specific crime. He spends a year trying to find out the nature of his offence and attempting to see the judge responsible for his case. He does not learn anything concerning his case and, on the anniversary of his arrest, he is executed and dies "like a dog". This is a valid procedure for Kafka, because he is sure that there is a transcendent, even though we cannot attain it. On the other hand, Camus' position is invalid in that he denies God, but still maintains that the universe is hostile to man. The plague can be seen as an example of divine grace, but, as there is no dispenser of it, Camus' analogy is invalid. Moreover, this position does not consider the problem that, even if there were a transcendent, we perhaps could still not apply the court-room analogy. This is evident in Kierkegaard's interpretation of God's commandment that Abraham sacrifice Isaac, and in Kafka's Castle, if we give it a Kierkegaardian interpretation.

Besides the problem involved in the implicit reference to the court-room analogy in the plague symbol as an expression of man's being-in-the-world, the symbol is inadequate in that plague is sporadic. Man's contingency, however, is an inevitable part of his nature, and the symbol is incapable of expressing this. Moreover, death is not even inevitable during the plague: it is only unpredictable.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have attempted to show that Camus' criticism of reason cannot be used to support his position that the world is absurd; that is, that it cannot be reduced to rational categories. Nor does his examination of the mind's shortcomings justify his conclusion that he is condemned to be a stranger to himself and the world. He has given up the possibility of clarity because of an invalid assumption: he has concluded that because something is unknown, it is unknowable. Moreover, his desire for clarity is impossible, because matters of fact would have to have the status of logical necessity to satisfy him. In The Rebel, Camus will obtain a surrogate for clarity in art, but in doing so he will reject the theory of art as a mirror of reality that he puts forward in The Myth of Sisyphus.

I have also attempted to show that the absurd is tenable as a feeling, but Camus has not been successful in showing it to be the fundamental category of existence. One of the most severe criticisms of the absurd is the fact that Camus attacks the existentialists for making a leap, yet Camus himself does precisely the same thing: he secures meaning from the fact that there is no meaning and, from his initial use of the absurd, transforms it into a rule of life. However, he errs when he states that the conclusions that he arrives at, as a result of his examination of the absurd, are logically evident. They are moral preferences. It is true that Camus'

conclusions are consistent with the way in which he develops the absurd: "Living is keeping the absurd alive." Moreover, he maintains his initial statement, regarding the absurd, when he develops his concept of revolt. However, I think that Camus' initial statement of the nature of the absurd is highly questionable. This is because he has overlooked the fact that there is meaning in existence.

I then attempted to show that, when Camus applied the concept of the absurd to concrete situations, both in "The Absurd Man", and his literary works, he presented us with a situation that was philosophically untenable.

VI

FINAL COMMENTS ON THE ABSURD

I have attempted to show that, as a metaphysical concept, the absurd cannot be validated. However, the absurd is effective as an expression of man's social condition. There is the same discrepancy between what is and what should be in man's social condition as there is in his metaphysical condition, but there is a difference between social absurdity and metaphysical absurdity. It is possible to reduce social absurdity, whereas it is impossible to change our metaphysical status. This does not mean that achievement in the social sphere is inevitable or easy. Camus points to the realities of the situation rather than to a facile solution. Thus, in his Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, he states realities rather than eulogizing: "Probably every generation sees itself as charged with remaking the world. Mine, however, knows that it will not remake the world. But its task is perhaps even greater, for it consists in keeping the world from destroying itself."[1] Camus illustrates the tenuous nature of any possible achievement in The Plague.

The Oranese do not learn anything from the plague, contrary to Reinhardt's evaluation of the situation: "But in the sea of general disintegration the eternally human,

the authentically 'existential' reappears and remains in great purity and lucidity. The 'self-estrangement' of man is conquered by the forces of neighborly love and unselfish friendship. Man rediscovers his true self in distress and suffering and in service to his fellow man."[3] If anything, the "eternally human" is shown in an eternally bad light. The "people" of Oran turn to religion, then to superstition, and finally to anything that will perhaps ward off the plague. They simply do not stand up under the duress of the situation. Camus wants us to sympathize with the people of Oran, but he develops them in such a way that it is very difficult to do so. The only real examples of strength under duress come from those who cannot, properly speaking, be called the"Oranese". Rieux and Tarrou form a "real" friendship during the course of the plague; however, Tarrou was aware of the nature of plague before coming to Oran, and is really an outsider. Also, even here, death has the last word. Paneloux sees the plague as a test of the faith that he already possessed. Rambert, like Tarrou, is an outsider and remains to fight the plague, but he cannot justify his decision.

Even the Oranese who figure fairly prominently in the novel do not learn anything from the plague. The old asthmatic who had said, "But what does that mean - 'plague'? Just life, no more than that."[3], simply returns to his diversion of counting peas after the departure of the plague.

And Grand, the character that Camus has called the hero of the story, returns to writing variations of the first sentence of his novel.

After the plague departs, the asthmatic says that the Oranese were "just the same as ever."[4] Rieux accepts this: he has no illusions about mankind, but he feels a sense of solidarity with the Oranese. This is why he decided to write the chronicle;"so that some memorial of the injustice and outrage done them might endure; and to state quite simply what we learn in a time of pestilence: that there are more things to admire in men than to despise."[5] There is no optimistic "brotherhood of man" in The Plague. Hudon's comment about Meursault is relevant here: "Meursault knows, profoundly and instinctively, that individuals are isolated from each other by their very human condition. We are all strangers, though most people try to make believe it is not so."[6] The Plague suggests that, in a time of adversity, it is possible to go beyond this situation, but any achievement is very tenuous. This aspect of the novel is developed by Tarrou in his response to moral evil.

Tarrou states, "I had plague already, long before I came to this town and encountered it here. Which is tantamount to saying I'm like everybody else."[7] He sees plague as the moral evil that people inflict upon one another, and he sees the almost natural propensity for such evil: "What's natural is the microbe. All the rest-health, integ-

rity, purity, if you like, is a product of the human will, of a vigilance that must never falter."[8] Tarrou, in refusing to side with evil puts himself on the side of the victims of evil: "All I maintain is that on this earth there are pestilences and there are victims, and its up to us, so far as possible not to join forces with the pestilences."[9] Tarrou realizes that he and Rieux are both up against "a never-ending defeat". He and Rieux could both have spoken Camus' final statement of the moral evil of the world, the absurdity of absurdities: "Even by his greatest effort man can only propose to diminish arithmetically the sufferings of the world. But the injustice and the suffering of the world will remain and, no matter how limited they are, they will not cease to be an outrage."[10] All men must die, but they need not die mutilated; death is a necessary part of our being, but premature death is not. Thus, Camus is correct in rendering our historical situation absurd. Moreover, he attempts to show ways in which this absurdity can be removed. Formal philosophy, of course, no longer concerns itself with such matters, but, if it were to follow the example of Camus and attempt to remove hindrances to happiness, it might once again become the "queen of the sciences".

Final Conclusions

I will now briefly recapitulate the results of this

investigation. I have attempted to show the way in which the absurd is utilized in Camus' thought. In this connection, I have attempted to show that such a concept should not be condemned, out of hand, as a concept that is not worthy of philosophical consideration. Moreover, even though I have stated that the concept is not philosophically tenable, as an expression of our metaphysical condition, I have attempted to show that it is effective as an expression of man's social condition; because effort is possible in the social sphere, whereas bemoaning our metaphysical condition and labelling it absurd is futile: it is a form of wishful thinking. In this conection, I have attempted to show that Camus is not constructing a philosophy of the absurd and, therefore, cannot be criticized for simply indulging in such wishful thinking.

Camus saw the absurd as an expression of his times, and he wanted to proceed beyond its implicit nihilism; however, his attempt to establish a rule of life, from an awareness of the absurd, is philosophically untenable. His revolt against man's condition must be seen as a moral choice; it is, moreover, an admirable choice. Because of such a choice, in the middle of a century on the brink of chaos, Camus has been able to state, "In the middle of winter I at last discovered that there was in me an invincible summer."[11] This is no small statement, and Camus shows us that, even in times such as ours, it is possible to dwell in the sun.

NOTES

The Myth of Sisyphus is herein cited as *Myth*.

Notes to "Introduction", Pages 1 to 10

1 Cruickshank, Albert Camus, p. 150.

2 Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, p. 160.

3 Clive, The Romantic Enlightenment, p. 30

4 Murdoch, Sartre: Romantic Rationalist, p. 42.

5 Durant, The Pleasures of Philosophy, p. 7.

6 Kohl, The Age of Complexity, p. 11.

7 Barnes, Humanistic Existentialism, p. 27.

8 Camus, The Outsider, p. 117.

9 Camus, "Pessimism and Courage", Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, p. 45.

10 Camus, The Rebel, p. 24.

11 Sartre, "Reply to Albert Camus", Situations, p. 74.

12 Tillion, Algeria: The Realities, frontpiece.

13 Camus, "What a Writer Seeks", Atlantic, (June, 1953), p. 73.

Notes to Chapter I, Pages 11 to 16

1 Camus, Actuelles II, p. 33.

2 Copleston, Contemporary Philosophy, p. 122.

3 Beynon, "Albert Camus: A British View", Camus, p. 85.

4 Roberts, "The Role of Society in the Theatre of the Absurd", Literature and Society, p. 229.

5 Cruickshank, Albert Camus, p. 214.

6 Camus, "Pessimism and Courage", Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, p. 44.

Notes to Chapter 1

7 Camus, Myth, p. 18.

8 "Les Nouvelles Litteraires", No. 954 (Nov. 15, 1945), 1.

9 Kaufman, From Shakespeare to Existentialism, p. 281.

10 Kaufman, The Faith of a Heretic, p. 367.

11 Camus, Actuelles II, p. 11.

12 Camus' thesis was an attempt to show the influence of neo-Platonism on Christian theology. Camus took the two basic themes of Christian concern with sin and salvation, and the Greek belief in innocence and the importance of this world, and integrated them into his own work.

13 Lanser, "Albert Camus", The Kenyon Review, XIV (Oct., 1952), p. 562.

14 Paru, December, 1945. Quoted by Cruickshank, Albert Camus, p. 45.

15 Camus, Myth, p. 2.

16 Ibid., p. 9.

17 Ibid., p. V.

18 Wild, The Challenge of Existentialism, p. 25.

Notes to Chapter II, Pages 17 to 26

1 Camus, Myth, p. 23.

2 Knight, Literature Considered As Philosophy, p. 62.

3 Lewis, The Picaresque Saint, p. 61.

4 Malraux, Temptation of the West, p. 40.

5 Ibid., p. 45.

6 Job 14: 1.

7 Ecclesiastes 9:16.

Notes to Chapter II

[8] The limitation of space also prevents showing the way in which literature influenced Camus' development of the absurd: One example must suffice. Melville's Moby Dick abounds in allusions that parallel Camus' conception of the absurdity of existence. Thus, Melville states that whaling expresses the routine that Camus finds so absurd: "that one most perilous and long voyage ended, only begins a second; and a second ended only begins a third and so on, for ever and for aye." p. 74. Melville also expresses the fact that death renders life absurd: "All men lie enveloped in whale-lines. All are born with halters round their necks; but it is only when caught in the swift, sudden turn of death, that mortals realize the silent, subtle, ever-present perils of life." p. 276. Lastly, Melville expresses the world's absurdity: "Were I the wind, I'd blow no more on such a wicked, miserable world." p. 526.

[9] Pascal, Pensées, p. 74.

[10] Ibid., p. 73.

[11] Kuhn, Encounter with Nothingness, p. 162.

[12] Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, p. 128.

[13] Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 122.

[14] Kierkegaard, Journals, p. 146.

[15] Ibid., p. 117.

[16] Camus, "The unbeliever and Christians", Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, p. 52.

[17] Camus, The Rebel, p. 32.

[18] Quoted by Blackham, Six Existentialist Thinkers, p. 34.

[19] Ibid., p. 32.

[20] Ibid., p. 35

[21] Slochower, op. cit., p. 6. Camus' statement, in The Rebel, is parallel to this: "The sore that is scratched with such concern finally becomes a source of pleasure."

[22] Blackham, op. cit., p. 33.

Notes to Chapter II

[23] Camus, "What A Writer Seeks", p. 73.

Notes to Chapter III, Pages 27 to 52

[1] Camus, Myth, p. 2.

[2] Ibid., p. 3.

[3] Loc. cit.

[4] Lewis, The Picaresque Saint, p. 75.

[5] Camus, Myth, p. 5.

[6] Loc. cit.

[7] Ibid., p. 7.

[8] Ibid., p. 8.

[9] Ibid., p. 12. In the same way, Rollo May, in The Meaning of Anxiety, does not attempt to prove that anxiety is a fundamental condition of modern man: "Hence to endeavour to 'prove' the pervasiveness of anxiety in our day is as unnecessary as the proverbial carrying of coals to Newcastle." p. 3.

[10] Camus, Myth, p. 10.

[11] Loc. cit.

[12] Loc. cit.

[13] Although Camus speaks of the absurd, this does not mean that he gives it the status of a thing.

[14] Camus, Myth, p. 10.

[15] Ibid., p. 11.

[16] Ibid., p. 13.

[17] Ibid., p. 11. The reference, of course, is to Sartre. Camus reviewed Nausea and extolled its artistic merit but criticized the use of absurdity as a conclusion.

[18] Camus, Myth, p. 42.

[19] Loc. cit.

Notes to Chapter III

[20] Ibid., p. 46.

[21] Ibid., p. 13.

[22] Ibid., p. 14.

[23] Ibid., p. 15.

[24] Ibid., p. 16.

[25] Ibid., p. 21. Schopenhauer expresses a similar notion in The World as will and Idea: "all these worlds exist only as our idea. . ., and which is the necessary supporter of all possible worlds and all times the condition of their possibility. The vastness of the world which disquieted us before, rests now in us; our dependence upon it is annulled by its dependence upon us." p. 218.

[26] Camus, Myth, p. 38.

[27] Camus, The Rebel, p. 8.

[28] Camus, The Myth, p. 18

[29] Loc. cit.

[30] Ibid., p. 19.

[31] Loc. cit.

[32] Ibid., p. 20.

[33] Ibid., p. 21.

[34] Ibid., p. 22.

[35] Ibid., p. 24.

[36] Ibid., p. 24.

[37] Loc. cit.

[38] Ibid., p. 29.

[39] Ibid., p. 67.

[40] Ibid., p. 26.

[41] Ibid., p. 37.

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[42] Ibid., p. 40. Camus uses the same line of reasoning to reject murder in The Rebel. It would seem that, if existence is absurd, murder would be a matter of indifference; however, murder is repudicated because it ends the encounter between the murdered individual and the universe. The absurd depends on this encounter, and the act would negate the premise of absurd reasoning. Life is seen to be good as it makes this encounter possible; without life, the absurd would have no basis. Also, if life is good for one, it must be good for all. Therefore, murder is repudiated: "If this world has no higher meaning, if man is only responsible to man, it suffices for a man to remove one single human being from the society of the living to automatically exclude himself from it." p. 281.

[43] Quoted by Cruickshank, Albert Camus, p. 17.

[44] Camus, L'Envers et L'Endroit, p. 124.

[45] Camus, Noces, p. 74.

[46] Ibid., p. 61.

[47] Camus, L'Envers et L'Endroit, p. 125.

[48] There is no plausible reason why Jan's wife should not accompany him to the hotel; however, there is a dramatic reason. The wife will go to the hotel when Jan does not return, and reveal his identity to the mother and sister. If she had accompanied him to the hotel originally, the play would have gained credibility, but lost dramatic force.

[49] Camus, "Cross Purpose", Two Plays, p. 154.

[50] Ibid., p. 155.

[51] As a dramatic device, the world's hostility is effective. As a philosophical position, it is untenable. This is why Camus states, in The Myth of Sisyphus, "I said that the world is absurd, but I was too hasty. The world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said." p. 16.

[52] Camus, "The Host", Exile and the Kingdom, p. 109.

[53] Camus, "Caligula", Two Plays, p. 34.

[54] Ibid., p. 47.

[55] Ibid., p. 97.

[56] Camus' plays, in particular, are so idea-laden

Notes to Chapter III

that they tend to suffer as drama. Even Camus' novels tend to become "thesis novels", rather than "philosophical novels".

57 I would not try to force a strict Heideggerian interpretation on the novel, as Lanser does. p. 568. He sees Meursault as Verfallen, estranged from authentic existence in the realm of das Man. This is not correct, because Meursault is beyond the realm of das Man. This is one reason why he is condemned: he threatens das Man's values. Lanser goes on to say that the voice of Care brings Meursault back to himself, his authentic self, when he accepts his guilt. The novel then becomes a Bildungsroman in inauthenticity. Lanser states that Meursault comes to an awareness of consciousness and, therefore, guilt, in five stages: When his employer looks at him askance for needing time off to attend his mother's funeral, Meursault says, "It's not my fault." Next, he says to Marie, "One is always a little bit guilty." After he empties the revolver into the Arab's body, he accepts responsibility for the crime. In court, he says, "I realized I was guilty." Finally, he accepts death as his own most possibility. Lanser has attempted to give a strict Heideggerian interpretation to the novel, and I think that the errors in his interpretation are glaring.

58 Camus, The Outsider, p. 119. Camus himself was at home in the universe on the level of physical existence. This is evidenced by L'Envers et L'Endroit and Noces. Moreover, Camus' sense of belonging in the universe is in direct contrast to that of other promulgator's of the absurd, such as Malraux, Kafka, and, especially, Sartre. Thus, things, as represented by the chesnut tree, repel Roquentin, whereas Meursault says that he would be perfectly content to spend his life in the trunk of a tree.

59 Camus, The Outsider, p. 48.

60 These comments have been made by most commentators, but Sartre was the first to point them out, in his "Explication of The Stranger" found both in his Literary Essays and Camus, Germaine Bree ed..

61 Camus, The Outsider, p. 68.

62 Ibid., p. 97.

63 Camus, The Outsider, p. 118.

64 Camus, The Plague, p. 3.

Notes to Chapter III

65 Ibid., p. 243.

66 Ibid., p. 250.

67 Ibid., p. 5.

68 Ibid., p. 242.

69 Ibid., p. 57.

70 Ibid., p. 144.

71 Ibid., p. 105. This is one of the many areas in which the mixed nature of the plague symbol can create ambiguity, The plague represents a real attack of bubonic plague on the city of Oran, and Camus satirizes the ineffectual efforts of the officials to deal with it. It is Rieux and his group that organize the attack on the plague. However, the plague also symbolizes the German Occupation of France, and Camus could be criticizing the failure of the government to oppose it. In this context, Camus would be equating the work of Rieux and his group to the Resistance.

72 A great deal of absurdity is historical, or social and Camus examines this type of absurdity at length in The Rebel.

Notes to Chapter IV, Pages 53 to 67

1 Camus, Myth, p. 40.

2 Ibid., p. 41.

3 Ibid., p. 44.

4 Ibid., p. 45.

5 Ibid., p. 47.

6 Ibid., p. 67.

7 Ibid., p. 61.

8 Ibid., p. 68

9 Ibid., p. 90

10 Ibid., p. 70.

Notes to Chapter IV

11 Ibid., p. 75.

12 Ibid., p. 72.

13 Camus changes his theory of aesthetics in The Rebel.

14 Camus, "Cross Purpose", Two Plays, p. 155.

15 Ibid., p. 156.

16 Loc. cit.

17 Loc. cit.

18 Camus, "Cross Purpose", Two Plays, p. 24.

19 Camus, The Outsider, p. 82.

20 Camus, "Cross Purposes", Two Plays, p. 146.

21 Camus, "Caligula", Two Plays, p. 47.

22 Ibid, p. 48.

23 Ibid., p. 76.

24 Ibid., p. 77.

25 Camus, "Letters to a German Friend", Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, p. 22.

26 Camus, "Caligula", Two Plays, p. 22.

27 Camus, The Outsider, p. 112.

28 Ibid., p. 119.

29 Ibid., p. 120.

30 Ibid., p. 118.

31 Ibid., p. 101.

32 Ibid., p. 79.

33 Camus, The Plague, p. 107.

34 Ibid., p. 108.

Notes to Chapter IV

35 Ibid., p. 251.

36 Ibid., p. 80.

37 Ibid., p. 83.

38 Ibid., p. 185.

39 Ibid., p. 178.

40 Loc. cit.

41 Loc. cit.

42 Ibid., p. 73.

43 Ibid., p. 244.

44 Ibid., p. 170.

45 Ibid., p. 17.

46 Camus, The Rebel, p. 5.

47 Ibid., p. 6.

48 Camus, "Letters to A German Friend", Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, p. 26.

Notes to Chapter V

1 Ayer, "Novelist-Philosophers", Horizon, (March, 1946), p. 157. Within a pre-established frame-work, a comment such as Camus' does not apply. As Kant points out, it is only when we attempt to go beyond the limits of reason that paradoxes and antinomies occur; however, the fact still remains that reason, because of its limits, cannot do anything regarding the solution of ultimate questions.

2 Whitehead, Science and the Modern World, p. 52.

3 Camus, Myth, p. 38.

4 Ibid., p. 20.

5 Paru, December, 1945. Quoted by Cruickshank, Albert Camus, p. 45.

Notes to Chapter V

6 Sartre, Nausea, p. 174.

7 Ibid., p. 55.

8 Ibid., p. 238.

9 Camus, The Rebel, p. 259.

10 Camus, "Socialism of the Gallows", Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, p. 126.

11 Camus, Myth, p. 27.

12 Malraux, Man's Fate, p. 357.

13 Camus, Myth, p. 38.

14 Loc. cit.

15 Thody, Albert Camus, p. 95.

16 Hall, "Aspects of the Absurd", Yale French Studies, XXX (1965), p. 26.

17 Camus, Myth, p. 23.

18 Sartre, "Camus' 'The Outsider'", Literary Essays, p. 26.

19 Camus, Myth, p. 26.

20 Ibid., p. 31.

21 Cruickshank, Albert Camus, p. 63.

22 Camus, Myth, p. 40.

23 Frank. "Life in the Face of Absurdity", New Republic, (Sept. 19, 1955), p. 20.

24 Camus, Myth, p. 40.

25 Camus, Myth, p. 38. The only way in which Camus' position can be said to be logical, is by using the word 'logical' in an extended sense. Ayer points this out: "The fact is that when Camus speaks of logic he is not necessarily referring to a purely formal discipline. He uses the word in a looser and more popular sense, in which it applies not only to all valid processes of reasoning, but also to consistency

Notes to Chapter V

of behaviour." op. cit., p. 156.

26 Camus, Myth, p. 25.

27 Camus, The Rebel, p. 6.

28 Camus, Myth, p. 3.

29 Pascal, Pensées, p. 112.

30 Camus, Myth, p. 47.

31 Ibid., p. 11.

32 Sartre, 'Camus' "The Outsider", Literary Essays, p. 36.

33 Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury, p. 23.

34 Camus, "Letters to a German Friend", Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, p. 22.

35 Ayer, "Novelist-Philosophers; Albert Camus", p. 159.

36 Camus, Myth, p. 48.

37 Ibid., p. 54.

38 Ibid., p. 66.

39 Garine, in Malraux's novel The Conquerors, is very similar to Camus' conception of the conqueror. At one point in the novel, Garine says, "I was obseesed by the vanity of life and of humanity as a whole. It seemed a prey to blind forces. Now this obsession recurs.. . . Yet it seems to me that in doing what I am doing here I am struggling against this vanity of life.. . . And that it is reasserting its rights." p. 125.

40 Camus, Myth, p. 63.

41 Loc. cit.

42 Ibid., p. 61

43 l' Isle-Adam, "The desire To Be A Man", The Existential Imagination, p. 92.

44 Loc. cit.

Notes to Chapter V

45 Ibid., p. 95.

46 Camus, Myth, p. 69

47 Ibid., p. 72.

48 Ibid., p. 75.

49 Camus, The Rebel, p. 263.

50 Ibid., p. 264.

51 Killinger, Hemingway and the Dead Gods, p. 62.

52 Camus, Myth, p. 91

53 Dostoyevsky, "Notes from House of the Dead", Alienation, p. 17.

54 Camus, Myth, p. 39

55 Ibid., p. 70.

56 Ibid., p. 75.

57 May, "Albert Camus: A Good Man", Atlantic, (May, 1958), p. 30

58 Lewis, The Picaresque Saint, p. 300.

59 Whitehead, Process and Reality, p. 266.

60 Loc. Cit.

61 Ibid., p. 270.

62 Camus, The Rebel, p. 271.

63 Camus, "What A Writer Seeks", p. 73.

64 Camus, The Rebel, p. 8.

65 At first glance it would seem more obvious to compare The Stranger to The Trial; however, the similarities between the two works are superficial. In The Stranger, Meursault finally accepts his condemnation - death - as that which gives meaning to life. On the other hand, it is crucial to the action of The Trial that K. does not accept his guilt. K. lives in the realm of inauthenticity and acceptance of his

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guilt could be seen as a Heideggerian call to authenticity. Meursault is conscious of his social authenticity and he becomes conscious of his Sein zum Tode at the end of the novel.

Notes to Chapter VI, Pages 68 to 103

1 Camus, "Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech", Atlantic, (February, 1961), p. 77.

2 Reinhardt, The Existentialists' Revolt, p. 233. I have mentioned that the Oranese are innocent, from a metaphysical point of view, if we grant the court-room analogy. At the social level, their innocence is another matter. At the beginning of the novel, the Oranese lead an inauthentic existence: "Certainly nothing is commoner nowadays than to see people working from morn till night and then proceeding to fritter away at card-tables, in cafes, and small-talk what time is left for living." p. 6. The innocence of the Oranese is, in the social context at least, problematic. As Bertocci points out, in his excellent article on The Plague, it is the Oranese that have turned their backs on the sea, one of the sources of meaning for Camus. pp. 33 - 35.

3 Camus, The Plague, p. 250.

4 Ibid., p. 25.

5 Ibid., p. 251.

6 Hudon, "The Stranger and the Critics", Yale French Studies, XXV (1965), p. 62.

7 Camus, The Plague, p. 201.

8 Ibid., p. 207

9 Loc. cit.

10 Camus, The Rebel, p. 203. Camus reiterates the tentative nature of any sort of achievement in his short story The Growing Stone. A French engineer has come to Brazil to build a bridge for a small community. He is greeted with official recognition, but the people do not really accept him. During a religious ceremony, one of the villagers, who had vowed to carry a huge stone to the church, falters, and D'Arrast takes the stone from him. However, he does not take it to the church, but to the man's home and puts it down on the threshold. The family returns and asks D'Arrast to join them.

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The stone is Sisyphus', but the task has not been futile; however, it has not been completely successful either, as he did not carry the stone to the church, but to the man's house. Achievement is partial, but two men have shared the burden.

11 Camus, "Return to Tipasa", Myth, p. 144. This essential duality runs throughout Camus' work. The duality of existence is seen as two sides of the same coin: l'envers and l'endroit. The earth is an exile, but it is also a kingdom. Moreover, the exile and the kingdom are inseparable from one another. This is, of course, a restatement of the old yin and the yang, Blake's marriage of heaven and hell, and Lawrence's plumed serpent.

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