

## Vetoing Transcendence: Albert Camus as a Philosopher of Immanence

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Camus popularized the notion of the absurd and the response of metaphysical rebellion. He argued the case of modern man condemned to live without transcendence after Nietzsche declared the death of God. Highlighting his critique of theism and theodicy and analyzing his basic assumptions regarding man's state in the world, his alienation, and meaninglessness of life, and absence of God it is argued that his conclusions are not warranted and there are a lot of philosophical difficulties in his thesis.

It is with Albert Camus' name that the term absurd and absurdism is popularly associated. In fact he gave it a currency and respectability though he only restated, in a compelling tone, contemporary mood and despair of reason in solving the problems of knowledge and life and didn't invent it. His is a classical case for modern man's rejection of transcendence. He wrote both literary and philosophical works. His is a lucid statement of pessimistic absurdism in modern literature and philosophy.

Camus's problem is how can man be happy without God or transcendence or how to escape from the paralyzing consequences of nihilistic despair ingrained in the world without transcendence. More than absurdism it is fighting absurdism which threatens to reduce to nothingness and vanity all human endeavours which preoccupies Camus. Camus takes modern man's declaration of the death of God for granted. The question is why does modern (post-Nietzschean) man find God dead? Is theodicy impossible or fraud?

### The Absurd Universe

Camus' fundamental assertion is that "absurdity" is the key description of the universe as man experiences it and the proper response to it is metaphysical revolt. He thus describes his point: "Metaphysical rebellion is the means by which man protests against his condition and against the whole of creation. It is metaphysical because it disputes the ends of man and creation (R: 29). Thus he is making grand metaphysical and philosophical claims. A scrutiny of these claims in these pages is proposed here, especially of the response that he suggests. For Camus it is evil and injustice of the creation that entitles man to revolt against whatever power planned and organized this universe. Camus' problem is to search for human happiness and a response worthy of man in the face of incomprehensible and alien universe. The eternal injustice revealed in the confrontation of man and his human condition could only be resisted; it can't be accepted or tolerated or changed. It is bleak tragedy. His revolt is primarily "against the sky rather than against the world." The metaphysical revolt is revolt against the creation as man finds it. His statements about God and evil clarify his conception of metaphysical revolt. In his *The Rebel* he says that God's existence would imply that he was "indifferent, wicked or cruel" (MS: 29). He asserts that "...a longer contemplation of this injustice, a more bitter approach transformed the 'even if you exist' into you don't

deserve to exist,' therefore you don't exist'" (MS: 74). This is not philosophy, mere sentimentalism and therefore need not be commented upon. He declares that "If evil is essential to creation, then creation is unacceptable" (MS: 50). He finds no principle by which the misery and happiness of the world can be explained (MS: 63).

Camus distrusts the myth of progress, the metanarrative of science and science driven enlightenment and claims of purely rationalistic philosophy. Nothing can lift the veils of dark mystery and incomprehensible logic of life for him. "The universal reason practical or ethical, that determinism, those categories that explain everything are enough to make a decent man laugh" (MS: 29). Seeing the impotence of rationalistic science and philosophy a direct path to truth has been recovered by Jaspers, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Chestov, phenomenologists and Schiller as Camus notes but he is not convinced of their claims. He asserts that they all grant the fundamental premises of absurdist philosophy. They all see clearly the fundamental absurdity at the heart of our existence. He is not convinced that they have really discovered the 'Ariadne's thread' that leads to divine secrets in this "ravaged world in which the impossibility of knowledge is established, in which everlasting nothingness seems the only attitude (MS: 31).

For Camus the "rhythm of abstract depersonalized, uncreative activities crumbles into absurd chaos before the question 'What does it all mean?'" Some of the elements of the absurd as Camus envisions in his *The Myth of Sisyphus* are infirmity, ignorance, irrationality, nostalgia, the impossibility of distinguishing the true from the false, our radical inability to know ourselves or others and the implacable mystery of the world. It is the sum total of all the antinomies and contradictions man is heir to. It arises from reason's inability to induce motives of hope, unity and harmony. The logic of the absurd necessitates suicide. However he rejects this conclusion as it is an act of cowardice, of bad faith. To live is to defy absurdity according to Camus. "To live is to make the absurd live" says Camus. "To make it live is, above all, to face it squarely. Unlike Eurydice, when we avert our gaze, the absurd dies. Thus, revolt is one of the few philosophical positions." Like the mystical hero Sisyphus man must accept limitations of his condition. He must accept absurdity with lucidity and conquer it through sincerity and loyalty. In the face of the absurd the values of love, justice, loyalty, courage and compassion are foregrounded in Camusian ethics – Camus' *The Plague* is impregnated with charity. It is hardly understandable why Camus is perceived (and he himself is responsible for this perception) as antichristian, especially his ethics. These are all Christian values. In his *The Plague* Camus is concerned about a strange form of martyrdom, a martyrdom that both approximates and parodies religious conception of martyrdom, "a kind of religion of happiness through atheistic sanctity." It is only the western philosophical and theological tradition that is disturbed by the problem which Tarrou thus formulates: "Can one be a saint without God?"

For Camus salvation in an absurd universe could be possible only in knowledge, in a sort of gnosis which negates the absurd. But that knowledge doesn't come at the rational philosophical plane. But he is adamant like a hardcore rationalist in his demand for solving the riddle and mystery of Existence:

I want everything to be explained to me or nothing. And the reason is impotent when it hears this cry from the heart. The world itself, whose single meaning I

don't understand, is but a vast irrational. If one could only say just once: 'all is clear' all would be saved (MS: 34).

Commenting on the notion that the beloveds of gods die young Camus remarks that the world of gods is ridiculous as if he knows what it means to be in the world of gods. Why he disagrees with this notion is because he doesn't wish to lose "the purest joys which is feeling, and feeling on this earth. The present and the succession of presents before a constantly conscious soul is the ideal of the absurd man."

In his journal he told himself that the step beyond the Absurd and Revolt was compassion: *l'amour et la poesie*, but he felt that demanded an innocence he no longer possessed. All he could do was to survey the road which led to it, and "let the time of the innocents arrive." He concluded: "See it, at least, before I die." In conversation with Ceresol Camus said that a Catholic told him that death was moral and he had been indignant, for death was not moral. It was not that he wished to live to be as old as Metusthusella, he said. But he was placed on earth to live, not to die. One didn't ask to be brought into the world; it was unthinkable to have to leave it.

Inscription on a stone memorial to Camus at Tipasa shows this terrible fact that glory and love will not last and man dies and is heard no more. The inscription states:

Here I understand what  
They call glory:  
The right to love  
Without limits.

In "Pessimism and Courage," an essay that is contained in his book *Resistance, Rebellion and Death*, he takes up this same point. Camus writes:

We want to think and live in our history. We believe that the truth of this age can be found only by living through the drama of it to the very end. If the epoch has suffered from nihilism, we cannot remain ignorant of nihilism and still achieve the moral code we need. 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.

Exile for Camus served the author to signify the existence of a permanent wall that separates man from any true penetration into the mystery of life and death. But exile also means Camus' understanding that the ontological and fundamental condition of man is always to live one's life alone. Exile from "the deadly order of the world" pins him against an alien world from which thought offers no respite.

The absurd born of the confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world must not be forgotten. The absurd must ever be kept alive. This is the fundamental tenet of absurdist philosophy. Carrying the absurd logic to its conclusion he lists the implications as follows: "...a total absence of hope (which has nothing to do with despair), a continual rejection (which must not be confused with renunciation), and a conscious dissatisfaction" (MS: 26).

## Camus the Rebel

He protests against the incompleteness of human life, expressed by death, and its dispersion, expressed by evil (MS: 30). The metaphysical rebel is not an atheist but a blasphemer. "He simply blasphemes, primarily in the name of order, by denouncing God as the origin of death and as the supreme disillusionment" (MS: 30). "The rebel defies more than he denies. Originally, at least, he doesn't deny God; he simply talks to him as an equal. But it is not a polite dialogue. It is a polemic animated by a desire to conquer" (MS: 31). "It (death) for me is a closed door. I don't say that it is a step to be crossed but that it is a dirty and horrible adventure" (MS: 63). He finds the conscious certitude of a death without hope between horror and silence (MS: 63). As the order of the world is shaped by death, "mightn't it be better for God if we refuse to believe in Him and struggle with our might against death, without rising our eyes toward the heaven where He sits in silence" (MS: 117).

The rebel's desperate wish is to "create, at the price of sin if necessary, the dominion of man" and thereby "justify the fall of God" (MS: 31). The rebel's incurable alienation and his tragic condition are thus depicted:

...man rejects the world as it is, without accepting the necessity of escaping from it. In fact men cling to the world and by far the greater majority doesn't want to abandon it. Far from always wanting to forget it, they suffer, on the contrary, from not being able to possess it completely enough, strangers to the world they live in and exiled from their own country (MS: 226).

Camus' concept of rebellion goes beyond resentment though one cannot always distinguish these two. He emphasizes the passionate affirmation that underlies the act of revolt and which distinguishes it from resentment. His rebel rejects the disordered, imperfect and unjust universe and attempts to put justice, order and perfection into this universe. Camus wants to preserve the individual human being, the human life as it is lived naturally on a purely physical plane (Thody, 1961: 66).

It is Dostoevsky's Ivan who seems to be spokesperson of Camus' rebel. Camus quotes him mostly approvingly in his *The Rebel*. "If the suffering of children serves to complete the sum of suffering necessary for the acquisition of truth, I affirm from now onwards that truth is not worth such a price." "I would persist in my indignation, even if I were wrong." "All the knowledge in the world is not worth child's tears." As Camus puts Ivan's position: "He doesn't say that there is no truth. He says that if truth does exist it can only be unacceptable. Why? Because it is unjust." Modern man refuses salvation or he demands heaven of his own making; he dictates terms to Reality. He not only refuses to acknowledge his sin but also any saviour or need of salvation. He wishes to rewrite the logic of Existence. Even if offered eternal life he is not ready for the surrender to God. Ivan is an outspoken and defiant spokesperson of this Promethean viewpoint. To quote Camus from *The Rebel*:

Ivan incarnates refusal to salvation. Faith leads to immortal life, but faith presumes the acceptance of the mystery and of evil and resignation to injustice.

The man who is prevented by the suffering of children from accepting faith will certainly not accept eternal life....He would accept grace unconditionally and that is why he makes his own conditions.

In a world where everything is absurd, meaningless and impossible "the only ultimate significance must be one which includes, or accepts, the meaninglessness of all recognized values and concepts." There is indeed certain heroism in the absurd hero of Camus. He doesn't despair, he doesn't hope. He is in no need of any consolation. He accepts fate though he is not resigned to it. Camus believes that this revolt is the certainty of a crushing fate, without the resignation that ought to accompany it (MS: 31). It is metaphysical revolt that gives life its value "...it restores its majesty to that life. To a man devoid of blinkers, there is no finer sight than that of the intelligence at grips with a reality that transcends it" (MS: 34). He doesn't wish to be relieved of the weight of his life. He can carry it alone. He rejects the possibility that a sceptical metaphysic can be joined to an ethics of renunciation. He can drain everything to the bitter end and deplete himself. He is ready to die unreconciled. His truth consists in defiance (MS: 53). The great truth of self knowledge, the truth that delivers, counts hardly for Camus. "Socrates' Know thyself has as much value as the 'be virtuous' of our confessionals. They reveal a nostalgia at the same time as an ignorance. They are sterile exercises on great subjects" (MS: 54). He can't take the leap that Kierkegaard, Jaspers and many others ask us to take. He is too much a rationalist to betray it when it comes to encounter its limits, its impotence. The mind will be satisfied only if it can reduce Existence to terms of thought. A crude animistic anthropomorphist assumption rather than a sound philosophy is discernible in his declaration that "If man realized that the universe like him can love and suffer, he would be reconciled" (MS: 54). Nostalgia for unity and appetite for the absolute he wishes to satisfy on his own imagined terms. He drags the Absolute to his own relative and finite level. He, without caring to philosophically justify his position, assumes subject-object duality to be absolute. His following assertion is in line with the dualistic Western philosophical thought:

For if, bridging the gulf that separates desire from conquest, we assert with Parmenides the reality of the One (whatever it may be) we fall into the ridiculous contradiction of a mind that asserts total unity and proves by its very assertion its own difference and the diversity it claimed to resolve. This other vicious circle is enough to stifle our hopes (MS: 54-55).

The important point is that the rebel doesn't and cannot rebel against life itself. He consents to live despite logic. As Camus quotes Ivan: "I live in spite of logic." Logic demands suicide but neither Ivan nor Camus would accept this. Ivan will live, then, and will love as well without knowing why. When the meaning of life has been suppressed, there still remains life." The point is what religion demands if not only life, more life, larger life.

To the plea for taking the leap Camus the rebel has a polite answer:

He [absurd man] doesn't fully understand, that it is not obvious. Indeed he doesn't want to do anything but what he fully understands. He is assured that this is the sin of pride, but he doesn't understand the notion of sin; that perhaps hell is in store, but he has not enough imagination to visualize that strange future; that he is losing immortal life, but that seems to him an idle consideration. An attempt is made to admit his guilt. He feels innocent. To tell the truth, that is all he feels -- his irreparable innocence....what he demands of himself is to live *solely* with what he knows, to accommodate himself to what is and to bring in nothing that is not certain... he wants to find out if it is possible to live without appeal (MS: 29).

Camus' romantic celebration of this worldly life willn't substitute man's love for God, for eternity and immortality. His *Noces (Nuptials)* sings a paean to the sea and the Algerian earth, supplemented by equally rapturous prose canticles in honour of the "invincible summer." His sings the pagan song of life's splendour and majesty. He celebrates the body. The motto is a pagan and passionate affirmation of this world and a vehement denial of any longing for another life. He concludes his *Nuptials* with the oft quoted statement "The world is beautiful and outside it, there is no salvation." He writes with great passion of the "beautiful face of the world" and his own sun drenched youth amid the "vast libertinage of nature." He celebrates desires and love. "To embrace a woman's body is also to retain, close to one, that strange joy which descends from the sky to the sea.... I love this life with abandon and I want to speak of it freely." Here Camus echoes Gide's *Fruits of the Earth*, Montherland and Giono wanting to suck all the juice from the life like Fitzgerald's Umar Khayyam. The notion of hell appears as a pleasant joke, as Marlow's Dr. Faustus had once imagined. Camus' zest for life is founded on the principle that life is irreplaceable and irreducible to any abstraction. He believed that life with all of its tribulations and indignities was his only love, only faith.

His concern had always been for what Unamuno called the individual man of flesh and bones in the latter's book *The Tragic Sense of Life*. The individual, Camus argued, ought to be the main concern of all genuine humanism and not an abstract ideological rendition of man. It is because he esteems individual over everything that he is led to absurdity because nature doesn't respect individual. Individuality is an evil, a problem that needs to be overcome. The individual of flesh and bone is a product of sin or fall and any philosophy that bases itself on it is only a product of delusion. Nothing has degraded man more than humanism by severing his ties with genuine transcendence.

Czeslaw Milosz has observed in *To Begin Where I Am: Collected Essays* that Albert Camus was a modern-day Cathar in that if he denied the existence of God, it was perhaps because of his love for God, and his inability to justify such a being. This argument gets certain validation by consideration of the overall tone of *The First Man*. Milosz as well as others critics have speculated that perhaps Camus was beginning to soften up his views on God and the absurd at the time of his death.

Camus laments that we lack man's pride which is fidelity to limits, lucid love of his condition (MS: 171). He praises precisely those elements in "Helen's Exile" which perennialists also hail and in fact the perennialist critique of modernity converges on many points with Greek's. "Admission of ignorance, rejection of fanaticism, the limits of the world and of man, beloved face, and finally beauty – this is where we shall be on the side of the Greeks" (MS: 171). He laments that

...through all her diverse ways, she (Europe) glorifies but one thing, which is the future rule of reason. In her madness she extends the eternal limits, and at that very moment, dark Erinyes falls upon her head and tear her to pieces. Nemesis, the goddess of measure and not of revenge, keeps watch. All those who overstep the limits are pitilessly punished (MS: 167).

He says that the Greeks didn't negate sacred but we did (MS: 167). He wishes that "dreadful walls of the modern city will fall to deliver up - 'soul serene as the ocean's calm'- Helen's beauty" (MS: 171) He deplores the absence of myth in modern philosophers who are imprisoned in reason (MS: 169). He points out that we have deserted great Hellenic heritage and are its renegade sons. Placing history on the throne of God we have turned barbarians. The myth of progress that perennialists and Camus detest follows from this faith in history. Like perennialists he finds such Hegelian deification of history and modern age detestable. "Only the modern city offers the mind a field in which it can become aware of itself." He notes that in this world of world of big cities we have been deprived of all that constitutes its permanence such as

nature, the sea, hilltops, evening meditation. Consciousness is to be found only in the streets, because history is to be found only in the streets this is the edict. And consequently our most significant works show the same bias. Landscapes are not to be found in great European literature since Dostoevsky. History explains neither the natural universe that existed before it nor the beauty that exists above it (MS: 169).

He notes insightfully: "It is Christianity that began substituting the tragedy of the soul for contemplation of the world. But, at least, Christianity referred to a spiritual nature and thereby preserves a certain fixity. With God dead, there remains only history and power (MS: 171). For He seems to express his own feeling by quoting Saint-Exupery's remark "I hate my time" (MS: 171). But "But this time is ours and we can't live by hating ourselves."

#### Mystical Romanticism against Nihilism

Camus has refuted the charges of nihilism levelled against his thought. He wants to go beyond nihilism. But the point is that he can't do so. One can proceed beyond nihilism only through negation of it through a vision of God who incarnates or symbolizes triple values of goodness, beauty and truth. Only Eternity can show us that time doesn't exist or is relative and doesn't count and thus show us the way to proceed beyond time, to transcend time which is the realm of sorrow or evil. Nihilism gets its warrant only if we constrict our vision to the domain of time. Only one who has tasted the bliss of heaven can accept/ justify all the suffering of the world, can walk countless billions of miles through hell for getting a moment in heaven. There is no escape from the plague of life for the man who can't see the light at the end of the tunnel. Only life eternal justifies this life, the vale of tears. Nihilism can't be transcended at the plane at which Camus is situated. Life is the only good according to both Camus and Christ. But

one identifies life with alienated fragmented creaturely existence and that extends to a few years or only to a few moments and yet believes it to be heaven while the other extends it to all eternity. In the kingdom of heaven there is no time, no becoming, no want, and no misery. Christ rebels against the God of Camus who is lame, blind and miserable in the name of his God who is synonymous with life, with the infinitude of Self and does see the God as supreme principle of Beauty and Truth (God is in fact the other or ideal pole of man, the Father of man in traditional religious perspective). Christ rebels against the rule of gods in whom modern man (Camus) believes amongst which the chief one is human ego, who alienate and enslave man. If man's problem consists in pursuing the expansion of his existence and in recovering this very effort as an absolute as Simone de Beavoir says then Camus fails to solve the problem. For Camus man's problem consists in transcending the absurdity that haunts life. This problem can't be solved from a perspective that can't move beyond absurdism or reject it as metaphysical principle. Thorough going absurdism is self-defeating. It can't escape the hell of nihilism and pessimism. Everything is cursed except the remembrance of God and everything is liable to be destroyed save the face of God, as the Quran says. There can be no bliss in things finite as the Upanisads declare.

He is all praise for man and the beauty of the world. "It is because life so completely ends in death, and because there is no transcendence to give it significance, that its price is infinite" (Thody, 1961: 9). Human individual's life as lived on a purely physical plane is infinitely valuable to him and needs to be preserved against the absurdity of the universe. He ignores human wickedness and foregrounds the fact of human suffering. He refuses to accept that men are responsible for evil.

Camus' ideal of freedom and life is perhaps best expressed in the following words of de Beavoir:

To wish man free is to wish for being, it is to wish for the revelation of being in the joy of existence....It is when our movement towards freedom takes on the consistency of pleasures or happiness, that it assumes its real and palpable form in the world....if we do not love life in our own selves and through our fellow man, it is useless to try to justify life (Qtd. in Doubrovsky, 1960).

The absurdist doesn't believe in the ultimate triumph of goodness. He isn't optimist regarding man's destiny. The universe is a nightmare. The Darwinian-Hobessian-Nietzschean world is a disenchanted world. There can be no goodness, no absolute goodness in such a world. Neither goodness nor justice nor wisdom nor providence is there in such a world; there can be no question of theodicy in such a context. Absurdism can be construed as a philosophy which is logical implication of agnosticism and atheism. Camus has consistently drawn all the conclusions from the Nietzschean thesis that God is dead. Absurdism and pessimism are logical corollaries of such a postulate. Critique of theism mostly takes the form of a critique of theodicy, especially for such critics of it as Camus. So far we have been exploring grounds for Camusian absurdism and pessimism as far as it is based on reflection on the idea of God. Now we will come to his critique of theodicy in the strict and technical sense of the term to point out limitations of his philosophical position more pointedly.

Camus' romanticism is almost mystical. "I shall take little girl by the hand and have her sit beside me. There she will look at me steadily and in the eyes of one another we shall follow the slow sea journeys toward unknown waters...." Here unknown waters seem to symbolize transcendence. For the mystics depth perception of phenomena leads to unknown essences the vision of which lifts man out of the world of ego with all its cares.

According to Camus a nihilistic approach ought not to make human beings and human life valueless. On the contrary, it demands that one place particular value on these things. The argument is that because man is "the one creature whose desire [for value and meaning] is constantly thwarted in the world," it follows that "man himself possesses value and meaning." It is precisely by reference to value and meaning that he judges his human condition to be valueless and meaningless. However as Cruickshank has observed Camus is not claiming objective and absolute meaning for man. What he is saying is that man has value and meaning for other men.

Camus has revolted against the absurd and positively reacted to nihilism in *The Plague* and *The Rebel* and traveled far from the initial nihilistic phase of *Caligula* and *Cross Purpose*.

How should we respond to death according to Camus? Here Camus takes recourse to irrational leap of faith that he resisted otherwise in other contexts. For an absurdist death consumes everything; it levels everything. There can hardly be any logical ground for rejecting Caligula's reaction to his sister's death

Opposing trend toward nihilism in European thought Camus attempts to resist despairing consequences of nihilism. According to him absurdity is not to be encountered with disgruntled heart. Man has meaning. Absurdity of life doesn't render it absolutely meaningless. There is enough meaning in ordinary experiences of life, enough joy in them not to let down man. Even Nietzsche seeks "meaning" in life, but not in manners familiar to most. "For Camus, meaning was in the human experience. Absurdity does not render life meaningless -- people have meaning because they interact with each other, while remaining in control of their own destinies." He has enough faith in human relationships to worry about the loss of his relationship with God.

For Camus, the absurd was "not negative, not a synonym for 'ridiculous,' but the true state of existence. Accepting the view that life is absurd is to embrace a 'realistic' view of life: the absence of universal logic." According to him living the absurd... means "a total lack of hope (which is not the same as despair), a permanent reflection (which is not the same as renunciation), and a conscious dissatisfaction (which is not the same as juvenile anxiety)."

Although Camus probably intended Caligula as a mistaken response to absurd as Cruickshank has argued yet he has to own this possible response which seems to follow from his premises quite logically and here many things find expression which are so dear to Camus. The following dialogue captures the problematique of absurd man that Camus saw as his hero.

Caesonia : You can't prevent the sky from being the sky, or a fresh young face from ageing, or a man's heart from growing cold.

Caligula [with rising excitement]: I want ... I want to drown the sky in the sea, to infuse ugliness with beauty, to wring a laugh from pain.

Caesonia [ facing him with an imploring gesture]: There's good and bad, high and low, justice and injustice. And I swear to you these will never change.  
 Caligula [in the same tone]: And I'm resolved to change them... I shall make this age of ours a kingly gift – the gift of equality. And when all is leveled out, when the impossible has come to earth and the moon is in my hands – then, perhaps, I shall be transfigured and the world renewed; then men will die no more and at last be happy (C: 48).

Camus is content to live life at its abysmally low pitch because he feels condemned to love on dualistic plane. The mystic is after greater and greater fulfillment, more and more intense life. The following quote shows he is resigned with far smaller things than life offers to more adventurous souls of mystics.

When I was young, I asked more of people than they could give: everlasting friendship, endless feeling. Now I know to ask less of them than they can give: a straightforward companionship. And their feelings, their friendship, their generous actions seem in my eyes to be wholly miraculous: a consequence of grace alone.

This shows Camus' faith in human relations and his longing for love and friendship. But only a truncated version is possible for those who deny that Love is God and that love justifies everything.

Camus is not a consistent absurdist. For him something does endure. There is certain meaning to man. Values are important and realizable even in the absurd world. All these points are evident as we see him endorsing the following quotation of Nietzsche.

It clearly seems that the chief end in heaven and on earth is to obey at length and in a single direction: in the long run there results something for which it is worth the trouble of living on this earth as, for example, virtue, art, music, the dance, reason, the mind – something that transfigures, something delicate, mad, or divine" (MS: 62). Oriental thought teaches that one can indulge in the same effort [that Camus upholds of revolt) of logic by choosing against the world. That is just as legitimate ... But when the negation of the world is pursued just as rigorously one often achieves (in certain Vedantic schools) similar results regarding, for instance, the indifference of works.. In a book of great importance, *Le Chiox*, Jean Grenier establishes in this way a veritable 'philosophy of indifference'"(MS: 62).

Comparing absurd and mystical conceptions of freedom Camus' remarks show how gloriously he has misunderstood mysticism. He observes:

By loosing themselves in their god, by accepting his rules, they become secretly free. In spontaneously accepted slavery they recover a deeper independence.... Likewise, completely turned towards death (taken here as the most obvious absurdity), the absurd man feels released from everything outside that passionate attention crystallizing in him" (MS: 57-8).

Knowing whether or not one can live without appeal (MS: 59) is what interests him.

### Critique of Theodicy

His critique of theodicy is on Epicurean-Humean lines who argued that the presence of evil of such a magnitude is incompatible with the belief in omnipotent and good God. Camus follows especially Dostoevsky's presentation of the problem in his *The Brothers Karamazov* through Ivan. The test case of suffering of innocent children is so poignantly argued by Ivan. *The Plague* of Camus echoes it.

Camus presents his case through the hero of *The Plague*, Dr. Rieux. One of the most poignant scenes in it concerns the death of a child in the plague in presence of Rieux and Father Paneloux. As the child dies in great agony Rieux leaves the room hurriedly but Paneloux stops him. Rieux turns on the priest fiercely, saying, "Ah, that child, anyhow, was innocent and you know it as well as I do." Rieux leaves the building, and Paneloux follows him outside, where he finds Rieux sitting on a bench:

"Why was there that anger in your voice just now? What we'd been seeing was as unbearable to me as it was to you."

Rieux turned toward Paneloux.

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

"I understand," Paneloux said in a low voice. "That sort of thing is revolting because it passes our human understanding. But perhaps we should love what we cannot understand."

Rieux straightened up slowly. He gazed at Paneloux, summoning to his gaze all the strength and fervor he could muster against his weariness. Then he shook his head.

"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."

Paneloux representing traditional Christian attitude (though he is no metaphysician or great theologian to defend this position against Rieux) accepts this evil as disguised good even though it is beyond his understanding how God will, in the end, transform it in accordance with his purposes. Rieux, the mouthpiece of Camus, can only revolt against what he has seen. This is unlike Ivan's attitude who wanted to return the ticket to God. I quote Thomas L Hanna's formulation of Camus' argument to such a test case of evil.

Camus' response to this problem is simple. That is, if this is world in which innocents must be tortured and if there be a God who rules, guides, or sanctifies this world, then God is unjust. The given evidence of evil is there and if the idea of God is introduced, then there is no other conclusion. If men are to speak of God, a personal and sovereign God, then there is introduced into human experience an infinite gulf between the sufferings of men and the designs of God—a tension which demands submission or revolt. If God rules, the God is responsible: this is a first consequence of the idea of a personal God which first appeared in the Old Testament."

His solution consisted first of all in taking on their condition. The God-man suffers also – with patience. Evil and death are no longer absolutely imputable to him in as much as he suffers and dies. The night on Golgotha has so great an importance in the history of men only because the divinity, ostensibly abandoning its traditional privileges, lived through to the end the anguish of death and despair. Thus is explained the *lama sabactani* and the awful doubt of the Christ in agony. The agony would be light if it were sustained by eternal hope. That God might be man it is necessary that he give up hope (Hanna, 1956).

Camus is “optimist about man but pessimist about his destiny.” For Christianity and for all religion the ultimate character of the universe is good, and in this he finds his hope and the ability to transcend and accept, to a degree, the evil in the world. But for Camus the ultimate character of the universe is evil and if there is any goodness it is in men alone who always feel uncertain and threatened in this evil world. He acutely feels the discord between man and the world. Although he was romantic at heart and sang a pagan song of deliverance, abandoned himself to the “happy lassitude” of his “nuptials with the world” and felt the “poetic luxuriance,” there is an undercurrent of anguish and absurdity in his work. He is always disturbed by “the conscious certitude of a death without hope.” Because he has concluded that there is no God and no afterlife and has abandoned all hope he must come to terms with the hell man is in and try to cool its flames. If despair and hopelessness is *kufr* or disbelief as the Quran says then Camus is an inconsolable committed disbeliever. Indeed his most original revolt is against hope, indicating it as a form of resignation, robbing man of energies which he needs. Torrou in *The Plague* dies without having known hope. For him hope is resignation and “to live is not to be resigned.” Thoeicies have usually made much of hope and they stand on it. Hope springs eternal in the human breast and it alone sustains man. It is another name of faith and trust in existence and its mystery. God symbolizes hope. Hope is the bread of soul and man doesn’t live by bread alone. (Hope here is not to be understood in the sense that rests on future promise or reversal of fortune. It is faith in life or trust in existence. There is a sense in Osho’s oft repeated declaration that religious man is hopeless as he has no need of hope having renounced the hoping self which is a form of desiring self. He lives in the present and not in the future. There is no time and thus no hope in his world. He is utterly contented with his fate and has no need of consolation. Truth is his consolation.) From this perspective it is difficult to understand Camus’ statement “We consent to be deprived of God and of hope, but not to do so easily without man.” Camus’ whole thought is contained in a single question: What value abides in the eyes of the man condemned to death who refuses the consolation of the supernatural? Or in other words one who has no hope (in the goodness of life or God and in the eternal life). Disbelief in hope may be connected with his disbelief in salvific function of action and history. It is being and not existence that counts for Camus. Actions don’t save; it is faith and not action which saves man. Camus opts for an ethic of being against the ethic of action unlike other existentialists.

Camus rejected heroism or supermanism. He is for simple but absolute affirmation of life, the life as pure disjointed unorganized moment to moment experience – life dictated by no organizing principle of ego and consistency as Mersault exemplifies.

He, in Nietzschean tradition, kills God so that man may live peacefully, and with dignity. In the footnote to his article "Portrait d'un élu" in *Cahiers du Sud*, April 1943 he thus described the nature of twentieth century disbelief of which he is himself the spokesperson: "Contemporary unbelief doesn't rest on science as it did toward the close of the last century. It denies both science and religion. It is no longer the scepticism of reason in the presence of miracle. It is a passionate unbelief."

Camus rejects Christianity because it can't justify the ways of God to man, because it is unable to appropriate evil in the world or account for it in rational terms. As Camus puts it in *The Rebel* : "...in its essence, Christianity (and this is its paradoxical greatness) is a doctrine of injustice. It is founded on the sacrifice of the innocent and the acceptance of this sacrifice." Paradoxical greatness of this attitude lies in "the metamorphosis of injustice, minimization and transcendence of the abiding reality of human suffering." Thomas L Hanna rightly notes:

It is here that are found the fundamental motives of the Christian faith as well as Camus' own thought, that is, in the problem of evil and death. For Camus the first data of religion and morality are the evil and death that are part of the abiding condition of men. Whether or not there be goodness or God is not a primary evidence of human existence -- suffering and death are. The question is what this primary evidence teaches us and what we do about it. Only after the reality of human evil is given does the question of God and ultimately man's submission to or revolt against God arise. These theological questions have neither meaning nor reality without this primary reference (Hanna, 1956).

Camus takes up the case of innocent suffering as particularly compelling evidence of evil and the justification of the response of revolt. His response to this problem is simple and "logical." Echoing Ivan Karamazov he argues that if this is a world in which innocents must be tortured and if there be a God who rules this world then God is unjust. The presence of evil creates an unbridgeable gulf between the innocent victims and the designs of an omnipotent and good God. This creates a tension which demands submission or revolt. Needless to say he opts for revolt (and it is this response to evil that is here critiqued as far as it informs Camus' absurdism and pessimism and unbelief). He points out that with the appearance of a personal God to which he attributes a juristic character in the tradition of anthropomorphic theology there also appears religious guilt, crime and revolt. The prototype of this is Cain and we according to Camus are the children of Cain by way of this inheritance. The New Testament and Christ are interpreted as responses to this condition:

The Christ came to solve principal problems of rebels. His solution consisted first of all in taking on their condition. The God-man suffers also – with patience. Evil and death are no longer absolutely imputable to him in as much as he suffers and dies. The night on Golgotha has so great an importance in the history of men only because the divinity, ostensibly abandoning its traditional privileges, lived through to the end the anguish of death and despair. Thus is explained the *lamma sabactani* and the awful doubt of the Christ in agony. The agony would be light if

it were sustained by eternal hope. That God might be man it is necessary that he give up hope (Hanna, 1956).

Thus to the response of revolt Christianity substitutes another response of suffering God. The accused (God) acknowledges his guilt and suffers. Man is reconciled to God because He has shared man's condition and with this knowledge man can accept his condition without revolt. But although he speaks very sympathetically of Christ's response and the paradoxical greatness of it (though its deeper symbolic significance and metaphysical meaning eludes him), its unique strategy of closing the gulf between heaven and earth, he ultimately rejects it because it is based on injustice – why should innocent suffer. He sees signs of revolt in Christian attitude as he declares that faith isn't so much a peace [there can be no peace (as it comes only through submission or Islam) for the rebel who is not at peace with himself, with his being in the world) as a tragic hope (*Actuells*). A Christian loves the world with all the evil in it, although he believes that God will lead the world from its given condition to a chosen condition when there will be no evil. The paradoxical greatness of this faith is that 'it poses the "should" against the "is" of this world but yet can't bring itself to despise the "is." "Rebel despises the "should" and can't accept the "is".' That is why he is alienated from God, from the world and ultimately from his self. Ivan Karamazov can't accept the ticket of life; he wants to return it. The rebel because he has no ultimate concern having rebelled against the very Ground of being is necessarily pagan (paganism is absolutization of the relative). He can only despair as he can't submit or hope. Revolt is Luciferian response and needless to say it costs him hell, an eternal hell. Hell is a state of despair, a state of loathing, a state of bad faith, a state of burning with resentment, with anger against one's ignoble or fallen state and resolute attempts to hide, to conceal the Truth which necessarily fails.

Camus allows only "all or nothing response" to the existence of evil. As a Christian, Father Panleux is driven to the wall by the horrors of plague. He maintains his faith that God is the ultimate ruling force, bringing good out of all the evil which he allows to afflict men (either plague is a punishment for sins or a part of incomprehensible design of God).

or he takes his place with Dr Rieux, Tarrou and all the rebels of the earth in maintaining that this evil and this death are unbearable and that either there is no God and men must ceaselessly struggle with their single powers against the plague of life or else, if there be a God, he is murderous, unjust and incomprehensible being who is the supreme enemy of man. Given human evil and death, God is innocent and men are guilty or else God is guilty and men are innocent. The death of a child poses the alternative of all or nothing for the Christian Faith (Hanna, 1956).

However Camus himself has a strange "theodicy." One must imagine that all is well even if nothing is well. Faith in the absurd dissolves it, the absurd's spirit-killing character. Life is tragic. Things couldn't have been otherwise. Wisdom lies in imagining that all is well. This is the absurd logic of Sisyphus which Camus upholds. According to Camus Sisyphus concludes that all is well. The universe henceforth seems neither sterile

nor futile.”(MS:110). It is Odeipus’ remark that all is well which Camus endorses as sacred.

Camus shows the same outrage and indignation that is felt by Gilgamesh on the death of his best friend Enkidu. Camus is above all a moralist and that is why he judges the universe in moralistic terms. Existence, metaphysicians and mystics, have seen amoral. It is anthropomorphic, anthropocentric bias. But this metaphysical outrage is fortuitously transformed and elevated into an appreciation of the sublime. For him man is condemned to be alone, to live and fight the absurdity of his condition alone. He was a great Hellenist, a great devotee of universal beauty. It is because of his Hellenism that he abhorred ugly and “tortured and aimless” modern art.

### Art as Salvation

Camus expressly states that art sustains him and it is faith in art that makes life endurable for him: “What has helped me bear an adverse fate will perhaps help me accept an overly favorable outcome — and what has most sustained me was the great vision, the very great vision I have of art.”

It is the “very great vision” of art which sustains Camus in the face of misfortune. Here he appropriates something like the religious vision. What is religion if not a sort of art? For Zen it is an art. It is simply changed perception of reality. Mountains are mountains at the end of the mystical path but one no longer is the same subject. One moves with one foot above the ground. Art is a mode of perception that creates an imaginative space beyond the normal one.

Camus’ defense of artist against those who live in bondage to history and utopia is that he fights for freedom. And he links this with passion for beauty (MS: 170). He rightly says that “Man can’t do without beauty”(MS: 170). Only one remark may suffice here that aesthetic view that Keats famously expressed in the words “Beauty is Truth and truth beauty” is specifically Eastern attitude. A. K. Coomaraswamy has expounded this masterfully in his magisterial works on art and aesthetics.

Following Schopenhauer and Nietzsche both Camus and Beckett see art as one of the ways of salvation. It is through art that the moon that Caligula sought is brought to earth by Camus. Camus paid a tribute to spiritual value of music in *Sud Essai sur la musique* “In general and to conclude really fertile Music, the only kind which will move us and which we shall really relish, will be a Music of Dream which will banish all reason and all analysis.” Here he comes close to the mystic and the ecstatic. Nietzsche was precisely an ecstatic mystic and unconditional affirmation or yes saying is possible by virtue of mystical ecstasy and love alone as Giles Fraser has also argued.

Camus thought that salvation was possible but not through the unfathomable, the mystical, but “through man’s own will.” This seems to be echo of Nietzsche whose superman wills in that heroic moment that everything eternally recur.

We see Camus opening to transcendence is evident in his reflections on music, on art, on beauty despite his antitranscendence rhetoric. His youthful passionate lyricism is a move towards transcendence. The note he left beside his sleeping wife hints at this.

Camus unlike mystics doesn’t find love eternal. “All the specialists in passion teach us, there is no eternal love but what is thwarted. There is scarcely any passion

without struggle. Such a love culminates only in the ultimate contradiction of death” (MS: 70).

There are various ways of committing suicide, one of which is the total gift and forgetfulness of self. (MS: 170). Mysticism’s call for the denial of the self is thus a kind of suicide. The self is too dear to Camus to love universe with all its pains and trials. The self is too dear to him to be consumed in the fire of love, the love of non-Self, the One or All.

Camus asks “...Is there something behind the wet skies?” (MS: 71). Though his head refused to entertain any such thing his heart did feel that there is a secret meaning to everything. However the problem with modern way of life is that it refuses to have trucks with this secret. It seeks to avoid encounter with the Light, the knowledge that negates modern man’s cities and his comforts. Modern man has chosen to live without the sacred, to be earthly and true to the dust of earth and Camus though inwardly unhappy over this choice, over tremendous uglification in Europe that has exiled Helen, he chooses to be with modern man, with all his illusions and untruth and his blindness to the world above that alone contains answers to all his problems, all his sorrows.

Camus’s narrator Jean-Baptiste Clamence, in *The Fall* notes that what future historians will say of us. A single sentence will suffice for modern man: he fornicated and read the papers” (F: 7). This is Camus’ estimate of our times. Indeed modern man has no heroism, no dignity, no beauty, no charity, no love to boost off. He has knowledge and therefore newspapers suffice for him. He doesn’t know what is love, love eternal that Jesus worshipped as God. He knows only ugly lust and a poor image of that love of which Plato speaks and of which mystics speak. What makes Camus and Beckett pessimistic is the wretched state of modern man who distrusts all claims from traditional philosophers and mystics that love is eternal and fails to replace traditional God with his manufactured idols. Opting for mangodhood instead of Godman which is traditional status of a saint by modern thought beginning with Nietzsche failed to deliver as Dostoevsky had forewarned. Man can also read the scripture of the world. God is accessible to him. He is the Truth, Brahman. Ironically Clamence’s judgment applies to Camus as well. Refusing knowledge of God which is available to the Intellect and not to the reason he reduces all knowledge to newspaper gossip and trash, to news of the present day, trivial things of mundane life that alone interest him. Though not a lustful man he wouldn’t mind fornicating either. And he didn’t find love eternal.

Camus shows absurdity and its wrecks. He resolutely fights against despairing consequences of nihilism which is a presupposition of modern thought that he largely takes for granted. Deprived of transcendence how man faces the world, creates values and chooses to live. Although he stands for the forlorn abandoned man in the face of the “incomprehensible” and apparently indifferent if not hostile world he fails to convince by his logic and rhetoric

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