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CAMUS AND THE CHALLENGE OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

Between Despair and Hope

Patrick Hayden

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Camus and the Challenge of Political Thought: Between Despair and Hope

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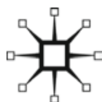

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To Zoë, the littlest rebel, and Katherine,
my sheltering sea

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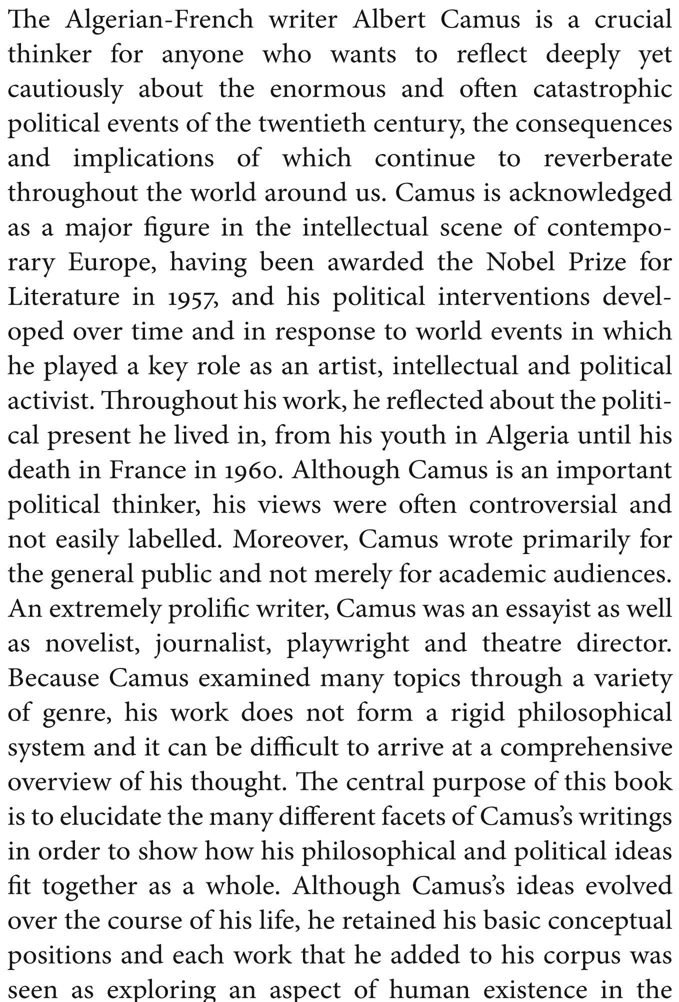
Prologue



The Algerian-French writer Albert Camus is a crucial thinker for anyone who wants to reflect deeply yet cautiously about the enormous and often catastrophic political events of the twentieth century, the consequences and implications of which continue to reverberate throughout the world around us. Camus is acknowledged as a major figure in the intellectual scene of contemporary Europe, having been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957, and his political interventions developed over time and in response to world events in which he played a key role as an artist, intellectual and political activist. Throughout his work, he reflected about the political present he lived in, from his youth in Algeria until his death in France in 1960. Although Camus is an important political thinker, his views were often controversial and not easily labelled. Moreover, Camus wrote primarily for the general public and not merely for academic audiences. An extremely prolific writer, Camus was an essayist as well as novelist, journalist, playwright and theatre director. Because Camus examined many topics through a variety of genre, his work does not form a rigid philosophical system and it can be difficult to arrive at a comprehensive overview of his thought. The central purpose of this book is to elucidate the many different facets of Camus's writings in order to show how his philosophical and political ideas fit together as a whole. Although Camus's ideas evolved over the course of his life, he retained his basic conceptual positions and each work that he added to his corpus was seen as exploring an aspect of human existence in the

modern world that refracted across his other works, propagating multifaceted portraits of the human condition. Central to his understanding of existence were two firmly held beliefs: first, that the human condition is absurd insofar as consciousness confronts the felt absence of meaning in a world divested of absolute standards – infusing modernity with a cultural and political crisis – and, second, that life is nonetheless worth living when motivated by a rebellious ethos that affirms the possibility of creating shared values. These two ideas, absurdity and revolt, provide the framework for Camus's attempts to illuminate a world where the constant disintegration of the past and the uncertainty of the future seem to exhaust our capacity to make sense of historical and political events.

Scholarly interest in Camus's work has generated a voluminous and wide-ranging secondary literature. While only limited references to this literature surface in the pages to come, it must be made immediately clear that this book has no pretensions to participate directly in this larger secondary industry in order to avoid getting mired in the disputes and presuppositions of that literature. In interpreting Camus for this series, my aim is to focus the reader's attention on, first, Camus's own work to more succinctly draw out its central themes and meanings and, second, how the great range of Camus's writings can indeed be seen as offering a compelling account of political coexistence that remains relevant today. The following six chapters therefore present a number of his key texts and ideas, locate Camus within his own social and historical setting, and demonstrate how his work directly addresses questions of ethics and politics. It also takes up the challenge of Camus as a political thinker from another angle, and argues that his closely related notions of the absurd and rebellion provide a provocative but unfamiliar perspective on cosmopolitanism in the contemporary context of global integration and fragmentation. In order to make the book as accessible as possible, my preference has been to use widely available English translations of Camus's work. When necessary, I slightly modify the existing translations or provide my own when citing from texts not yet published in English. While no book of this length can adequately address all of the ideas that Camus has become famous for, I hope that the present volume can in some small way stimulate the reader's encounter with the political thought of Albert Camus.

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1
Situating Camus

Abstract: *Hayden establishes the relationship between the life of Albert Camus and the social-political contexts of his thought and work. The chapter explores Camus's diagnosis of the human crisis of modernity, which also introduces several of the themes crucial to his ethical and political thinking – the absurd, nihilism, truth, dignity and revolt. Setting out the principal elements of Camus's life in order to better understand the nature of his work, this chapter offers an important overview of the central historical events that informed his development as a writer, artist and politically-engaged public figure.*

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In a lecture delivered at Columbia University in March 1946, Camus sought to convey an account of the 'human crisis' defining the twentieth century which had a particularly powerful impact on the literary, artistic, philosophical and political attitudes of his generation. Like many others 'whose minds and hearts were formed during the terrible years' (Camus 1946–7: 20) between the First and Second World Wars, Camus shared his generation's suspicion of the grand moral and political hypocrisy of the era of nationalism, imperialism and fascism. For this 'interesting' generation, Camus wryly observes, the belief that European civilization reflects the rational development of humankind, and that the modern epoch ultimately will deliver universal emancipation and enlightenment, is but an illusion shattered by the political, economic and military calamities striking not only at the heart of Europe, but within virtually all countries in the world. Drawing upon four disturbing examples of actions committed by various parties during the Nazi occupation of Europe – including that of a mother in Greece who is forced by a German officer to choose which one of her three children would live, and thus which two would be shot – Camus attends to the paradoxical experience of how the categories of guilt and innocence have become increasingly indistinguishable in the post-War period. The murderer's status as outside the boundaries of 'civilized' law and political order, and the victim's self-understanding as essentially blameless within the bounds of morality, were rendered equally meaningless by the realities of totalitarian states.

However, Camus does not simply bracket the problem of shared meaning and common standards as a kind of symptom of the violence which, for so-called 'realists', is inherent in the body politic as a kind of natural fact. Rather, he proposes to locate the causes of the crisis within several phenomena that are intellectually and politically formative of the character of the era, and which touch at the heart of modern life. According to Camus, the value of 'success' now supersedes the value of human dignity; or, stated otherwise, dignity is regarded as something predicated on success (1946–7: 22). High ideals such as the intrinsic dignity of human beings are widely inscribed in political documents today, while the actual lives of those who 'fail' are regarded with scorn or indifference. Additionally, the belief that politics can be understood according to the inflexible logic of an abstract idea or theory has resulted in a second problem, Camus observes, because it has led to the view that differences of opinion can be settled by an exclusive assertion of truth rather than an inclusive process of dialogue and persuasion. As a result,

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political practice increasingly requires denouncing rather than convincing those with whom one disagrees. Camus goes on to suggest that placing blind faith in ideological truth correlates as well to the impersonal bureaucratic mechanisms which are emblematic of the modern state (1946–7: 23). With the spread of impersonal bureaucratic rationality throughout the integrated spheres of social, economic and political governance, reason of state relies on instrumental techniques and functional intermediaries to achieve outcomes that can be reproduced by anyone who follows the rules. For Camus, the bureaucratic machine introduces a distance between individuals and the state that signals an end to genuine human interaction and contact, dissolving the sense of the self's significance and inducing feelings of isolation, loneliness and anonymity. Finally, Camus describes how the factors above help to set the scene for mass movements and grandiose collective doctrines to offer a sense of meaning and purpose to the mass of otherwise isolated individuals in modern society. Ideologies define group identity around sameness and supplant individual beliefs, opinions and conscience. Yet they remain effective only by buttressing an outlook of mutual exclusion: one must necessarily be categorized as either for or against such doctrines, and thus one stands politically either inside or outside the collective. Camus sums up the mid-century crisis as the dominating entanglement of 'the cult of efficiency and abstraction' (1946–7: 24).

The danger of the crisis, Camus argues, is that an 'absurd world' in which the bottom has dropped out of traditional values leads to a double temptation: either nothing is true or historical progress is the only truth (1946–7: 25). One way out of the crisis, then, could be to deliberately reduce the sum total of the everyday experience of modern life to a nullity. This solution was chosen by many artists and political figures of Camus's generation. Believing in nothing, bereft of meaningful lives, they chose the path of nihilism. Yet others chose another option, overcoming doubt about the actual value of existence by investing completely in the idea of a heroic engagement with universal history, fully endorsing the potential to direct the course of world civilization. But the contradiction between the two solutions is only apparent. Both lead to the same conclusion: anything can be done in the name of power and domination, consequently politics has no limits. A kind of fatal desperation therefore reverberates as the impetus for both positions, and each remains beholden to the lingering suspicion that nothing really matters in the absence of a higher purpose.

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Camus, however, eschews both options. The question then becomes whether another value can be found that allows for drawing limits around what can be done, and for making discerning judgements about what matters. Here, against the grain of the post-totalitarian epoch of repudiation, Camus finds in the phenomenon of revolt a form of justifiable resistance. What leads some people in one part of the world, he asks, to revolt on behalf of strangers on the other side of the world? Surely such actions are absurd, since rationalist morality can provide no explanatory basis or predictive capacity to determine such an outcome. And yet revolt is a paradigmatic experience, a manifestation of the ceaseless desire to be free that cuts across vastly diverse societies and epochs, appearing in, for example, the Roman and Haitian slave uprisings, the Paris Commune, the American Revolution and the Hungarian workers' councils. More importantly, revolt opposes and affirms simultaneously: in denouncing tyranny and degradation, revolt experientially substantiates that 'something' of positive value is common to all persons. It follows, for Camus, that the sense of common dignity can be treated as an objective existential reality of general human significance. The defence of common human dignity, the preserving and sustaining of a particular quality and condition of existence can be regarded, in his view, as the 'baseline' value upon which we can rely in a world in crisis. Through the upwelling of resistance and rebellion, not only is existence itself imbued with meaning and importance, but other values associated with freedom and justice may also be saved from existential irrelevance (Camus 1946–7: 26–8). Without articulating a programmatic vision, Camus nonetheless anticipates a number of positive actions that can grow from the contemporary crisis: speaking and acting truthfully in politics; refusing fatalism and *Realpolitik*; promoting a sense of collective responsibility; denouncing terror; creating new universal values of trust, respect and communication across cultures; and deflating the absolute prominence given to politics over all other aspects of modern life.

Camus concludes his lecture by pointing out that the continued existence of humanity, in spite of the profoundly destructive forces it has inflicted upon itself, bestows some degree of hope to forestall complete despair. Simply put, we may look to the sheer fact that humanity, and therefore human freedom and its many possibilities, continues to begin anew in the world in order to temper the desperation and despondency haunting late modernity. At the same time, given the prevalent miseries and atrocities also born from that very existence, Camus cautions that

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espousing naive optimism 'would be scandalous' (1946–7: 30). For these reasons, it is incumbent upon us to continue living within the space of insoluble contradiction, holding together both sides – yes and no, hope and despair intertwined – rather than simply advocating one and evading the other. This situation, in which everything hangs in the balance, Camus proposes, is none other than the fragility of the contemporary human condition.

The work of Camus thus can be understood as a critical exploration of the human condition which consistently pursued his commitment to two intertwined values: truth and liberty. Reflecting on the circumstances of his life and his conception of the role of the writer, in his Nobel acceptance speech Camus addresses issues of responsibility, which also concern power, oppression and resistance. The general aim of the writer in the modern world, Camus (1957) explains, must be to make the silence imposed by oppression 'resound by means of his art', and 'to unite the greatest possible number of people' across the ideological divisions that 'breed solitude'. The viability of Camus's position for the writer rests on a sense of obligation that binds the artistic enterprise to 'the service of truth and the service of liberty'. Because 'lies and servitude', propaganda and terror, have become commonplace instruments of contemporary geopolitics, human existence is continually at risk of limitless manipulation and degradation. Here several key ideas of Camus's thought come together: the role of the writer is an activity that can only take place given the presence of others who are free to receive, to think through, and to debate the image of reality and with it the 'picture of common joys and suffering', offered to them. If the writer seeks to communicate and bear witness to a wider audience, this activity presupposes not only a reader able to respond openly to the work of the writer, but also a degree of human connectedness that sustains a sense of shared reality that can never be fully hidden behind some supposedly higher purpose, forces or agency. The activity of writing for Camus is thus not only a question of aesthetic creativity, but of a wider moral and political resistance to domination and ideological obfuscation. Hence he states (1957) that 'the nobility of our craft will always be rooted in two commitments, difficult to maintain: the refusal to lie about what one knows and the resistance to oppression'.

Camus's speech, like his earlier lecture, makes clear that his work was conditioned by his lived experience of the intellectual, cultural and political crises that defined the twentieth century. For this very reason, the

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entirety of Camus's work supports the importance of the free exchange of ideas and opinions, of crafting diverse perspectives and interpretations about the world and the meaning of human existence, and of fighting for the right to speak truth to power. Camus believed truth is not something that can be imposed, and neither can the claim to possess the truth legitimate the suppression of dissent. Rather it is arrived at, circulated, shared and protected through conversation or dialogue that always begins and never ends – an intersubjective and public process that is unachievable without freedom. Because of this, it is also often deeply contentious. Camus's voice as a public intellectual resonates at the start of this century as much as it did in the middle of the last one, because it remains tied to the question of what it means to be human and to have a properly human political life under the complex conditions of the present. The political dilemmas Camus faced were always at the centre of his life's work and, like many other writers of his generation, Camus turned to literature, drama and the art of the essay in order to come to some understanding of a world whose excesses often seem senseless. From savage world wars to exterminatory concentration camps, from totalitarian governments to nuclear weapons, and from colonial subjugation to the global expansion of ideologies of violence, Camus's life story thus remained intimately bound up with the most transformative and traumatic events of recent political history. Similarly, his life and his work are fruitfully, yet sometimes painfully, interwoven.

Early years

For Camus, a great writer always brings his world into his art, and the twofold nature of the world – conjoining absurdity and revolt, solidarity and misunderstanding, happiness and misery – delineates the parameters of his personal biography and its relation to his work. As a writer and thinker intensely driven to explore both the problems of everyday existence and the great themes of philosophy, Camus's feelings towards the world are anchored in the Mediterranean coasts of North Africa. Camus was born in the Algerian town of Mondovi (now Dréan) on 7 November 1913, where Lucien Auguste, the father he never knew, was a foreman at the Saint-Paul vineyard. Eight months after Camus's birth, Lucien was called up to the French army at the outbreak of the First World War. Seriously wounded at the Battle of Marne in September

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1914, he was evacuated to Saint-Brieuc in Brittany for treatment but died on 11 October. After his family relocated to the working class district of Belcourt (now Belouizdad) in Algiers, Camus lived with his mother, maternal grandmother, uncle, and older brother in a three-room apartment without electricity, running water or bath (a squat toilet was on the landing outside the apartment). His mother, Catherine Hélène, like Camus's grandmother, was illiterate. She was also deaf and, because she rarely spoke, was often mistakenly believed to be mute. Catherine Hélène worked as a domestic cleaning woman to supplement the meagre widower's pension she received from the state. Camus's uncle, Etienne, made barrels at a cooperage in the neighbourhood, and his brother, Lucien, took assorted jobs after completing primary school in order to bring some much needed income to the household.

Camus's paternal grandfather and great-grandfather had emigrated to Algeria from the Bordeaux and Ardèche regions of France in the mid-nineteenth century, while the maternal side of his family was of Spanish origin (his mother's family name was Sintès) from Minorca. Algeria became a French colony in 1830 and many poor immigrants from France and other European countries were lured by the prospect of a better life on African soil. For many of them, as it was for Camus's family, the reality fell far short of the dream, and opportunity turned out to be another phase of poverty. Camus's relation to his Algerian identity and his understanding of the status of poverty are complex and important issues that informed his philosophical, literary and political views. Although born and brought up in Algeria to an assimilated family of French (and Spanish) descent, Camus was neither simply French nor Algerian. He was, rather, a *pied-noir* or 'black-foot', a term originally coined to refer to any white settler born in Africa, later evolving into a slang name for French settlers in Algeria. For Camus, this was an identity imposed on him from the outside, a label applied to him negatively by both 'real Frenchmen' and 'real Algerians'. But Camus did not recognize himself in either term of this dichotomy, and while he was culturally and intellectually immersed in the French and European heritage, he considered himself the 'offspring' of Algeria, to which he was passionately loyal throughout his life. Equally, the label 'poor' had a different status for Camus than it did for wider society. Although he was well aware of the economic hardships faced by his family, out of a condition of poverty Camus developed not only a healthy distrust of excess and a high regard for simplicity and modesty, but also a deep appreciation for the abundance offered by an

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eternally blue sea, an immense landscape brightened by the sun, and the generous affection of family and friends. As he later recalled:

> Poverty ... was never a misfortune for me: it was radiant with light. Even my revolts were brilliant with sunshine. ... There is no certainty my heart was naturally disposed to this kind of love. But circumstances helped me. To correct a natural indifference, I was placed halfway between poverty and the sun. Poverty kept me from thinking all was well under the sun and in history; the sun taught me that history was not everything. I wanted to change lives, yes, but not the world which I worshipped as divine. ... In any case, the lovely warmth that reigned over my childhood freed me from all resentment. I lived on almost nothing, but also in a kind of rapture. I felt infinite strengths within me: all I had to do was find a way to use them. It was not poverty that got in my way: in Africa, the sun and the sea cost nothing. The obstacle lay rather in prejudices or stupidity. (Camus 1970: 6)

Camus was expected to finish his education after completing primary school and begin to learn a trade. However, one of his teachers, Louis Germain, had taken an interest in Camus and his academic potential, and managed to convince his domineering grandmother that he would be able to obtain a better job if he remained in school. Germain tutored Camus with a small group of other talented students and, after sitting entrance exams, he was awarded a scholarship to the prestigious Grand Lycée d'Alger in June 1924. It was at the Lycée that Camus first 'discovered' his poverty, in the form of a social stigma that differentiated him from many of the students from wealthy families. Camus would rise at 5:30 in the morning in order to travel across the city in time to eat the free breakfast to which his scholarship entitled him, and he would stay up late into the night studying after completing his chores at home. Despite the long hours, Camus relished the intellectual challenge of being exposed to new languages, literature, classical studies, philosophy and history. He was also an avid and skilled athlete, with a special passion for swimming and football. Moreover, Camus came under the influence of one of the most crucial intellectual forces of his life, the philosopher and writer Jean Grenier, who taught Camus at the Lycée and later held a chair in aesthetics at the Sorbonne. Although Camus and Grenier developed a close and enduring friendship, their relationship did not get off to a promising start. In a book of recollections published nearly a decade after Camus's death, Grenier (1968: 9) recounted his initial impression of his young pupil: 'I will always remember that encounter I had with Albert Camus when he was hardly seventeen years old. ... Was it because

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he looked naturally undisciplined? I had asked him to sit in the first row so that I could keep an eye on him.'

Shortly after that encounter, in the autumn of 1930, a sudden attack of tuberculosis forced Camus to withdraw from school. After being hospitalized and undergoing painful pneumothorax treatment, Camus remained at home to recuperate. Upon learning of Camus's illness, Grenier paid an unannounced visit to the family apartment in Belcourt. Surprised and embarrassed, Camus remained aloof and uneasy in Grenier's presence. The awkwardness and uncertainty dissipated, however, when Camus returned to school the following year. Grenier offered intellectual guidance regarding literature, philosophy and politics, encouraged Camus's ambitions to write, and soon became his acknowledged mentor. At the same time, however, a dark shadow had been cast over Camus's happy existence. Where swimming and football once represented the vitality of Camus's body and a passionate connection to the natural world – between 1928 and 1930 Camus played as goalkeeper for the prestigious Racing Universitaire d'Alger junior football team – they now threatened not only to disable but to kill Camus. Recurring bouts of tuberculosis became a defining feature of Camus's life and introduced him to the contingency of suffering and the inevitability of mortality.

The writer emerges

Following the onset of tuberculosis, and in order to avoid infecting his brother, Camus moved in with his uncle and aunt, Gustave and Antoinette Acault. Gustave owned a butcher shop but was also fascinated with literature and politics. As middle-class business owners, the Acaults were able to provide Camus with an allowance, new clothes and even the use of their car. In 1933, Camus met Simone Hié, the partner of Camus's friend, Max-Pol Fouchet. Simone had a reputation as mysterious, strong-willed seductress who was also addicted to morphine, which had been given to her to ease menstrual pain when she was fourteen. Her relationship with Camus was tempestuous, and Simone was prone to disappear for days at a time. Because Gustave did not approve of Simone, Camus was forced to leave his aunt and uncle's home and find odd jobs to support himself, including as a private tutor, a clerk with the Registry of Motor Vehicles, and an assistant at the Algiers Geophysics Institute. That same year, Camus enrolled at the University of Algiers, where Jean Grenier

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had received an appointment as professor of philosophy. In 1935, Camus received his *licence de philosophie* (BA), and in May 1936 he received his *diplôme d'études supérieures* (MA) with distinction after completing a thesis on Plotinus and Saint Augustine titled *Métaphysique chrétienne et néoplatonisme* (*Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism*) (Camus 2015).

On 16 June 1934, Camus and Simone married. Camus believed his relationship with Simone would offer her enough security that she would be able to break her morphine addiction and settle down. Unfortunately, Simone remained caught in a cycle of drug use and convalescence in various medical clinics. While the pair was on holiday in Europe in July 1936, Camus discovered a letter addressed to Simone from her doctor, which revealed he was not only supplying drugs to Simone but was her lover. Returning to Algiers in September, the couple separated and were divorced four years later. Two further events during this period informed the direction of Camus's life and thought. First, Camus attempted to obtain a teaching position but his application was rejected because he was unable to pass the mandatory medical exam. As a result, Camus was forced to reassess his plans for further advanced study (leading to the *agrégation* or doctorate) and for a career as a philosophy teacher like his mentor Grenier. Second, in 1935 Grenier advised Camus to join the Algerian Communist Party or PCA (*Parti Communiste Algérien*) even though, as Camus later learned, Grenier himself had serious reservations about the Communists. For Grenier, however, it was important for Camus to have the 'experience' of a 'conviction' that would allow him to learn about the discrepancy between 'an ideal of justice' and 'stupid ideas' (Camus and Grenier 2003: 11, 98, 242 n.2).

Camus's role in the PCA was to disseminate political propaganda, which he did through delivering lectures, organizing study groups and, primarily, forming the *Théâtre du Travail* (Workers' Theatre), a theatre troupe in which he wrote, produced, directed and acted. One play the group intended to perform, *Révolte dans les Asturies* (*Revolt in the Asturias*), about striking miners in fascist Spain, was prohibited by the far-right-wing mayor of Algiers, Augustin Rozis. The primary attraction of the Party for Camus was that it had initially supported the anti-colonial *Parti du Peuple Algérien* (Algerian People's Party/PPA), a moderate nationalist party founded by Messali Hadj. As the prospect of war in Europe began to loom, however, the Party shifted its stance, at the direction of the Communist International dominated by Stalin, in order to maintain French military strength. The PPA was suppressed by

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the French authorities and many of its members, including Messali, were imprisoned. Disgusted by 'such infamy' (Camus and Grenier 2003: 153), Camus continued to support the activities of the *Mouvement pour le triomphe des libertés démocratiques* (Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties/MTLD), founded by Messali as the successor to the outlawed PPA. Camus was then denounced as a 'Trotskyist agent provocateur' and expelled from the PCA in 1937 for his opposition to the 'party line' (Todd 1997: 62). His brief experience of politics within the framework of the PCA was central to his intellectual development because it presented Camus with a striking realization about the cynical willingness of political movements to subordinate the ends of justice to the means of efficacy. It also galvanized his belief that the basic human values of honesty and integrity should never be overwhelmed by political conviction. As Camus put it in a letter to his friend, Claude de Fréminville, 'I believe there is more truth in the human relations between Communists than in what they declare their beliefs to be' (Todd 1997: 39).

Although difficult and in many ways discouraging for Camus, the events of the early to mid-1930s also cleared the way for him to pursue seriously his ambitions as a writer and artist. Reconstituting the *Théâtre du Travail* in 1937 as the non-aligned *Théâtre de l'Equipe* (Team's Theatre) for the purpose of bringing quality theatre to working class audiences, Camus not only directed and performed – including playing the role of Ivan in an adaptation of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* – but began writing plays of his own, including the script of what would become *Caligula*, completed in 1939. His script of *Révolte dans les Asturies* was published in 1936 by Charlot, a small publishing house in Algiers established by Edmond Charlot, a former student of Grenier at the Lycée. In 1937, Charlot also published the original edition of Camus's first collection of essays, *L'Envers et l'endroit* (*The Wrong Side and the Right Side*), dedicated to Grenier, then in 1938 the original edition of a second collection of essays, *Noces* (*Nuptials*). All of these essays drew upon Camus's personal experiences and memories, including of his modest home in Belcourt, his silent mother, and the painful discovery of Simone's infidelity while in Prague, and were imbued with his intense Mediterranean imagery of the rugged North African landscape. Both publications attracted little attention and few copies were sold. Between 1936 and 1938, Camus also worked on his first novel, *La mort heureuse* (*A Happy Death*), which remained unpublished until after his death because he was never satisfied with it, and sketched out the preliminary ideas for another novel

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that would eventually become *L'Étranger* (*The Stranger*). Although somewhat disappointed by his early efforts and the initial reactions to them – Camus confided to Grenier that he felt 'a little disoriented' and sought Grenier's advice as to whether he should continue writing (Camus and Grenier 2003: 16) – they confirmed nonetheless Camus's intense desire to devote his life to writing.

Another defining event in Camus's development as a writer dates from this period. After another failed attempt at securing his medical certification for the *agrégation*, Camus accepted a job in October 1938 as an editorial assistant and writer at *Alger Républicain*, an independent leftist newspaper directed by Pascal Pia (one of the pseudonyms of the writer and journalist Pierre Durand). An all-purpose reporter initially assigned to writing 'articles about dogs run over' and 'a few literary articles as well' (Camus and Grenier 2003: 19), Camus soon focused on writing a series of detailed investigative reports about the discrimination, degradation and subjugation suffered by the indigenous Arab and Berber populations under iniquitous French rule. Camus made extensive trips across Algeria, notably in the region of Kabylia, to document the cruelty of French policies that deprived the indigenous population of adequate housing and education, authorized unequal and inadequately low wages, and induced famine and malnutrition in the poorest regions. Camus also covered a number of criminal trials that exposed more injustices arising from flagrant corruption, racism and disregard for basic rights within the judicial system. Following the British and French declaration of war on Germany on 3 September 1939, Pia decided fuller coverage of news about the war required a new, evening newspaper called *Le Soir Républicain*. Camus was appointed editor-in-chief and immediately announced in the lead editorial of the first issue that the paper's policy was to be unwaveringly 'faithful to the truth'. True to his word, Camus continued to print reports about the dire situation of Arabs and Berbers, and editorials defending proposals for disarmament and peaceful settlement of the conflict with Germany against militaristic claims of the inevitability of total war. Continually testing and often circumventing the official press censorship regulations imposed by the authorities at the start of the war, *Le Soir Républicain* came to an end on 10 January 1940, a mere four months after its creation. On an order issued by the governor of Algeria and executed by Rozis, the mayor of Algiers who had banned the performance of *Révolte dans les Asturies* five years earlier, the newspaper was forced to cease publication and all copies in print were seized by

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the police. Unable to find another job because of his blacklisting by the government, Camus was forced to leave Algeria for Paris where Pia had found a position for him as assistant editor with the newspaper *Paris-Soir*.

Exile, resistance and the burden of fame

Camus arrived in Paris on 16 March 1940. His duties for *Paris-Soir* were editorial rather than journalistic – as *secrétaire de redaction* he was responsible for the paper's layout – which enabled Camus to dedicate substantial time to completing what he now conceived as the first of a 'cycle' of works devoted to a specific theme. Each cycle was to consist of at least three core texts: a philosophical essay, a novel and a theatrical play. The first cycle of his work was devoted to the theme of the absurd, crafting a diagnosis of the human condition given the apparent meaninglessness of life in the face of human mortality and the absence of a transcendent God. Camus's work at this time reflected several overlapping developments and their corresponding uncertainties in his personal life and the broader socio-political stage. With the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, Camus attempted to enlist in the French military but was rejected for reasons of poor health. Motivated by a desire specifically to oppose Nazism rather than by a general militarism, he struggled with a sense of humiliation about his inability to take up arms against fascism. He also continued to struggle with self-doubt, wavering between optimism regarding his ambitions as a writer and pessimism about whether he was 'wasting his life' (Todd 1997: 106). Moreover, Camus was deeply unhappy in Paris. He despised, perhaps in equal measure, both the grey, gloomy weather and the pretentiousness of the Parisian intellectual elite.

Camus's first stay in Paris was short-lived, however, as the offices and staff of *Paris-Soir* were evacuated to Clermont-Ferrand (then to Lyons and Marseilles) in May 1940, a few days in advance of the German occupation of the city. In September, Camus's marriage to Simone Hié came to an official end. He had requested a divorce so he could marry Francine Faure, a gifted pianist and mathematics teacher whom Camus met in the summer of 1937. Camus was ambivalent about committing himself to marriage again, and already he had a reputation as a 'Casanova'; indeed, the many love affairs he conducted throughout his life proved later to be a source of great distress for Francine. Nonetheless, Camus and Francine

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married in Lyons on 3 December 1940. Shortly thereafter, with Camus having been laid off by *Paris-Soir* – a relief to Camus because it was now publishing articles in support of Marshall Pétain's authoritarian regime based in Vichy – Francine and he returned to Algeria.

By early 1941 Camus had completed the three core texts of his absurd cycle: *L'Étranger* (*The Stranger*), *Le Mythe de Sysiphe* (*The Myth of Sisyphus*), and *Caligula*. After sharing the manuscripts of *L'Étranger* and *Caligula* with Grenier and Pia, they were forwarded to André Malraux, one of Camus's literary idols, who recommended them to Jean Paulhan, chief editorial adviser for the leading French publisher, Gallimard. The manuscripts were warmly received by the head of the publishing house, Gaston Gallimard, who offered to publish all three works. *The Stranger* was published in France in May 1942, and *The Myth of Sisyphus* appeared in October of the same year (without a chapter on Franz Kafka, which had to be removed because of the German and Vichy anti-Jewish policies), while *Caligula* was first published in May 1944. The appearance of *The Stranger* produced a state of excitement and fascination in Paris, as Camus was an unknown author from the colonial periphery, and it met a widely positive reception – including an enthusiastic review by Jean-Paul Sartre (1962), which announced the arrival of a striking new voice in modern literature. At the time of the book's publication, Camus and Francine were teaching at private schools in Oran, western Algeria (permitted, in Camus's case, because of a shortage of teachers due to the war). Yet after a relapse of tuberculosis, Camus and Francine returned to France in August 1942 after his doctor prescribed a period of rest at high altitude. Recuperating in the mountain village of Le Panelier, where Francine's aunt and uncle lived, Camus began to concentrate on his next writing projects, the works of his 'second cycle' dedicated to the theme of revolt. In mid-October Francine returned to Algiers in order to look for teaching jobs and a place for the two of them to live. Camus intended to follow in late November. On 8 November, however, the Allies began their invasion of North Africa and in response the German forces occupied the Vichy 'Free Zone' of southern France. Camus suddenly found himself forcibly separated from his home in Algeria and unable to communicate with Francine for several months.

Between December 1942 and November 1943, Camus received a small monthly stipend from Gallimard in exchange for reading manuscripts. Based in Le Panelier, he made occasional visits to Paris while continuing to work on the first book of the second cycle, the novel *La*

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Peste (*The Plague*), and finish two plays from the first cycle, *Caligula* and *Le Malentendu* (*The Misunderstanding*). In the summer, Camus attended the opening of Sartre's play *Les Mouches* (*The Flies*). Now having a certain celebrity status, Camus was welcomed into the circle of Parisian intellectuals, associating with figures such as Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Malraux, Georges Bataille, André Breton, Arthur Koestler and the actress Maria Casarès, with whom Camus would maintain a lengthy love affair. He was also able to meet often with Jean Grenier, who was appointed to a professorship at the University of Lille in early 1942. Sartre and Camus became acquaintances who socialized regularly although, contrary to many later accounts, they were never close friends. What personal relationship they did have, however, would come to a definitive end following publication of *L'Homme révolté* (*The Rebel*) in 1951. In November 1943, Camus moved to Paris and began working officially for Gallimard as a manuscript reader. There he became close friends with Michel Gallimard, nephew of Gaston and who, like Camus, suffered from tuberculosis.

After his arrival in Paris, Camus also became involved with the clandestine Resistance movement. Through the intermediary of Pascal Pia, Camus was invited to join the underground newspaper, *Combat*, published by the National Resistance Committee. Camus published numerous articles in *Combat* (under the *nom de guerre*, Beauchard) and helped coordinate its editorial policies, including plans to publish it as a daily paper following the liberation of France. Because Camus was suspected to be working for the Resistance, he was issued with false identity papers and was compelled to change residence regularly (on one occasion only narrowly evading police capture, when they failed to properly identify him at a roadblock where he was stopped with Maria Casarès). During this period Camus also wrote his series of four *Lettres à un ami allemand* (*Letters to a German Friend*), which defended the necessity of resistance, and the first stage production of *Le Malentendu* took place in June 1944. Following the liberation of Paris in August 1944, Camus coordinated the transition of *Combat* into a public, daily newspaper – now openly publishing the names of its writers and editors on the masthead – and wrote a number of editorials urging the creation of a free, equitable and European-oriented post-war France that would keep alive the spirit of solidarity fostered by the struggle against National Socialism.

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Camus and Francine were reunited in Paris in October 1944. In April 1945, Camus returned to visit his family in Algeria while also conducting research for a series of articles on the post-war Algerian situation, in which he condemned the return of colonial 'business as usual' and warned of the dangers of ignoring the grievances of oppressed Algerians. On 5 September 1945, Francine gave birth to twins – Catherine and Jean. Now that the author of *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus* was known for his involvement in the Resistance and *Combat*, Camus was starting to become a household name both in France and abroad. Desperate to return to work on *The Plague*, Camus nonetheless accepted an invitation from his American publisher to speak at several universities in the United States between March and June 1946. Upon his return to France, he was awarded a Resistance Medal. After several months of concentrated writing, *The Plague* was finally finished and delivered to Gallimard in December. Published in June 1947, the novel was an instant critical and commercial success, selling nearly 100,000 copies by the end of the year and winning the Prix des Critiques. As Camus put it, 'my book is selling like a sob story for young girls' (Todd 1997: 295).

After resigning from *Combat* in June 1947, Camus then turned his attention to the remaining works of the second cycle: the plays *L'État de siege* (*The State of Siege*) and *Les Justes* (*The Just Assassins*), and the lengthy essay *L'Homme révolté*. *L'État de siege* was completed in early 1948 and first performed in October, while *Les Justes* was completed the following year and premiered on 15 December 1949. *L'État de siege* closed after only a few weeks – 'The failure was total', declared Camus (Camus and Grenier 2003: 128) – while *Les Justes* (starring Maria Casarès) enjoyed moderate success. Despite his disappointment with the bad reviews, Camus managed to retain his sense of irony: 'Naturally, I prefer that my plays be successful. But I also find a number of subtle satisfactions in such a failure. Example: I have fewer appointments' (Camus and Grenier 2003: 128). Between June and August 1949 Camus embarked on another lengthy lecture tour, this time to Brazil, Argentina and Chile. Exhausted by the strains of travel and public speaking, and disheartened by his celebrity status and the ceaseless socializing, Camus suffered from depression, insomnia, bronchitis and eczema throughout the trip. In his journal entries he notes darkly that, despite the 'shrinkage' of the globe due to modern communications and transport technologies, we are nonetheless 'in the age of separation' (Camus 1987: 132). Struggling with the fear that he would die before completing his works, Camus managed

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to complete the manuscript of *L'Homme révolté* in early 1951. He marked the occasion with the following entry in his *Carnets*: 'Finished the first writing of *The Rebel*. With this book the first two cycles come to an end. Thirty-seven years old. And now, can creation be free?' (Camus 2010b: 270).

The Rebel was Camus's most provocative and divisive book. Developing a complex analysis of the relationship between rebellion and revolution, and criticizing the totalitarian tendencies of twentieth-century communism while advocating for a leftist alternative informed by libertarian socialism and anarcho-syndicalism, the book (which Camus dedicated to Grenier) provoked an impassioned response in the highly-polarized Cold War context. Even though he was prepared for criticism, Camus was astounded by the hostile reception given to the book by some sections of the French Left. Most notably, Francis Jeanson published a vitriolic critique in the May 1952 issue of *Les Temps modernes*, the journal founded by Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir in 1945. His pride wounded by the harsh review, Camus responded with a lengthy letter addressed formally to Sartre, pointing out a number of what Camus took to be flaws in Jeanson's interpretation of the book. This provoked caustic replies from both Sartre and Jeanson, with Sartre publicly announcing the end of their friendship. While he and Sartre were never in fact intimate friends, they had been close colleagues and compatriots during the war (Camus invited Sartre to join *Combat*). Despite their philosophical and political divergences, however, Camus did not expect Sartre to become his enemy and the two intellectual giants of the twentieth-century never reconciled.

In the aftermath of the bitter polemic with Sartre, Camus was to experience further controversy and make yet more enemies. On 1 November 1954, the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) launched a series of guerrilla attacks across Algeria and proclaimed an armed uprising for Algerian independence. For the next seven years the Algerian War was brutally waged with the widespread use of terrorism, torture and massacres by both sides to the conflict. Different elements of the Algerian nationalist movement were fractured between those advocating armed revolution and those favouring nonviolent resistance, and French intellectuals and society were split along similar divisions. Moderate voices on both sides were soon marginalized as the conflict escalated and positions hardened into uncompromising extremes. For Camus, his longstanding anti-colonial activism was grounded on a conviction that Algeria was

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the home of all ethnic and racial groups living there – whether of Arab, Berber, European, Muslim, Christian or Jewish descent – and that the end of French colonial rule should be brought about through peaceful democratic means, leading to a new French-Algerian federal arrangement extending equal rights and liberties to all citizens. Speaking out against the atrocities committed by both the French and rebel forces, and worried by the dangers to his family in Algeria, Camus condemned the indiscriminate use of violence against civilians which, he believed, would destroy any hope of eventual intercommunal reconciliation. However, Camus's interventions were met, first, with hostility by left-wing intellectuals such as Sartre, and then, increasingly, by silence and indifference as his views were portrayed by militants as obsolete and out of touch with political reality.

However, the 1950s had not been entirely unkind to Camus. In 1954 he published a collection of essays called *L'Eté* (*Summer*), composed over more than a decade, and in 1955 he returned to journalism when he accepted a position contributing articles for the weekly news magazine, *L'Express* (which opposed the war in Algeria). Camus also remained active on the political scene. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s he supported a number of alternative political movements oriented towards European integration and international unity, such as the *Groupes de liaison internationale* (International Liaison Groups), *Comité Français pour la Féderation Européenne* (French Committee for the European Federation), and Altiero Spinelli's *Movimento Federalista Europeo* (European Federalist Movement), as well as frequently intervening in the anarchist and syndicalist press (such as in *Le Libertaire*, the newspaper of the Fédération Anarchiste, and *La Révolution prolétarienne*). In parallel, he spoke and published widely to denounce various injustices, including capital punishment and the detention of prisoners of conscience around the world, the Franco dictatorship in Spain, and the Soviet Union's crushing of the Hungarian workers' uprising in 1956. Camus also was busy at work on a collection of short stories, one of which subsequently developed into a separate novel. Initially intended for publication in a single volume, the novel *La Chute* (*The Fall*) was published by Gallimard in 1956 and *L'Exil et le royaume* (*Exile and the Kingdom*), a collection of six short stories, was published the following year.

On 16 October 1957, while having lunch with his mistress Patricia Blake, whom he had met during his visit to the US in 1946, Camus received the news he had won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Stunned by the

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announcement – Camus appeared to 'suffocate' and kept repeating that Malraux 'should have got it' (Todd 1997: 371) – his initial reaction was to decline the honour, but his family and Gaston Gallimard soon convinced him otherwise. At the age of 43, the *pied-noir* outsider from working-class Algiers became the second youngest Nobel Prize laureate (only Rudyard Kipling was younger). The Nobel award ceremony was held on 10 December at the Stockholm Concert Hall. At a debate arranged at the University of Stockholm two days later, an Algerian student supporting the FLN heatedly questioned Camus about his unwillingness to endorse the pro-independence movement. Camus expressed sympathy for the Algerian nationalists as well as anguish about the armed conflict engulfing the country as a whole, but the conclusion of his response attracted considerable notoriety: 'People are now planting bombs in the tramways of Algiers. My mother might be on one of those tramways. If that is justice, then I prefer my mother.'[1] Camus's refusal to countenance any form of justice that requires, and thereby legitimizes, the killing of innocent people solidified his polarizing reputation – extolled as a man of honour and integrity by his admirers, and berated as a hypocrite and coward by his detractors.

In the wake of the incident in Stockholm, Camus assembled all of his editorials and essays on Algeria, along with a new preface explaining his non-doctrinaire position on the conflict, into a volume titled *Actuelles III*: *Chronique algérienne 1939–1958*, published in mid-1958. Gradually Camus recovered from the intense anxiety brought on by the Algerian controversies, and began planning the next stage of his work. His plan was to write a third cycle dedicated to the theme of love and the figure of the goddess Nemesis. For Camus, Nemesis embodied the ability to balance between yes and no. With this in mind he had started writing an autobiographical novel, *Le Premier Homme* (*The First Man*), which he conceived as an account of his 'moral learning' (Camus and Grenier 2003: 168, 188). He also longed to return to the theatre work that made him most happy. One of his theatre projects was an ambitious adaptation of Dostoevsky's novel *The Possessed*, which premiered at the Théâtre Antoine in Paris in January 1959. It was perhaps Camus's greatest achievement in this field, and under his direction it ran for over 600 performances. Shortly thereafter, Malraux, who was then serving as France's first Minister of Culture, offered Camus the directorship of a state-funded experimental theatre group, with productions set to commence the following year. Camus also found refuge from his hectic public life at the

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tranquil rural farmhouse in Lourmarin, overlooking the countryside of Provence, he had purchased with his Nobel Prize funds. It was here he met and became close friends with the poet, René Char. After spending Christmas of 1959 at the farmhouse, Camus, Francine and the children planned to return to Paris by train in the new year. The plan changed, however, after Michel Gallimard persuaded Camus – who did not like to travel by car – to drive back up with him, his wife Janine, and their daughter Anne. On Sunday, 3 January 1960, Camus departed with the Gallimards and drove north, intending to reach Paris in two days. The following day, after stopping for lunch in Sens and then resuming their journey, Michel lost control of the car, which swerved off the road, struck two trees and smashed into pieces. Camus was propelled through the rear window and died instantly of a broken neck. Michel died of a brain haemorrhage five days later, while Janine and Anne suffered only minor injuries. Camus's briefcase was discovered in the wreckage and inside it investigators found, among other things, the unfinished manuscript of *Le Premier Homme* and his unused train ticket.[2] In Algiers, Catherine Hélène Camus was informed of her son's death the same day as the accident. Punctuating the melancholy silence in which she was customarily shrouded, she whispered: 'Too young' (Todd 1997: 414).

Notes

1 Unfortunately Camus's reply to the Algerian student was reported in *Le Monde* (14 December 1957) through an inaccurate and distorting paraphrase: 'I believe in justice, but I will defend my mother before I defend justice.' The paraphrase has been seized on by many critics of Camus, who claim that it shows Camus did not care about justice for the Algerian people. This gross misinterpretation of Camus's position remains common even today. For more on the 'Stockholm Polemic', see Camus (2013, 17–18, 213–16).

2 The book was eventually edited by Camus's daughter, Catherine, and posthumously published in 1994.

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2
Human Existence and the Tragic Beauty of the Absurd

Abstract: *This chapter analyses of one of Camus's most widely read works,* The Myth of Sisyphus. *It outlines in detail two aspects of his general argument that open up the central pathways into his moral and political thought; first, his meditations on the absurd, and second, his critique of nihilism and dogmatic foundationalism. It also provides a first point of contact with Camus's use of literary and dramatic texts, including* The Stranger *and* Caligula, *alongside philosophical essays to elucidate his ideas about modern society, morality and politics. In doing so, Hayden posits the dominant theme of Camus's account of the absurd as a critical post-foundationalist account of the human condition. The chapter thereby demonstrates that the disorienting limits or boundary-situations of human existence challenge the lingering tendency towards foundationalism in modern philosophy, ethics and politics.*

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This chapter offers an analysis of one of Camus's most widely read works, *The Myth of Sisyphus*. It outlines in detail two aspects of his general argument; first his meditations on the absurd, and second his critique of nihilism and dogmatic foundationalism. These are key elements of Camus's thought as a whole, and the reading of *The Myth of Sisyphus* offered here aims to open up the central pathways into his moral and political thought that will be followed in subsequent chapters. It also provides a first point of contact with Camus's use of literary and dramatic texts, including *The Stranger* and *Caligula*, alongside philosophical essays to elucidate his ideas about modern society, morality and politics. The dominant theme of Camus's account of the absurd is expressed, I posit, as critical thought regarding the disorienting limits or boundary-situations of human existence. Such limits not only prevent attaining certain knowledge of any deep or absolute meaning beneath the contingency of existence, but also supply the conditions enabling the creation of particular historical, moral and political meanings and values.

Introducing the absurd

Commenting on the motivations of writers, the literary critic Roland Barthes once remarked: 'The world exists and the writer speaks' (1972: 258). For Barthes, the writer is compelled by an inner force to create meaning in the world, to give coherence to what is intrinsically incoherent. This passionate relationship between philosophy and literature, meaning and the world is, I believe, a useful way to characterize Camus's writing on the absurd. The concept of the absurd is of the utmost importance for Camus, because it affords us a direct view not only of the equivocal desire for union between individual and world, but also of the dizzying fracture between human consciousness and the universe. The world and its meanings, in other words, rest upon two kinds of relations and their inclusive disjunction: those of consonance and those of dissonance. It is the ineradicable tension as well as the inseparable counterbalancing between these two relations that defines the absurd and drives Camus to speak of the world or, better, to give voice to the experience of a universe that is otherwise silent. In this way, Camus's writings on the absurd serve as general statements about the paradox of the human condition.

Camus considered *L'Étranger*, *Le Mythe de Sysiphe* and *Caligula* to constitute the 'cycle' of the absurd, published between May 1942 and May

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1944. Yet the theme of the absurd that relates each of these works has a genesis that reaches back far earlier. Intimations of the absurd appear in the writings of the young Camus as he defines his task as a writer and hones his aesthetic sensibility against the rough edges of life's inherent contradictions and dualities, 'ridiculous as well as sublime' (Camus 1990: 205). More substantively, an entry in Camus's *Notebooks* from December 1938, titled 'On the Absurd', contains fragments of a narrative reflecting the thoughts of a prisoner awaiting execution, which later will be incorporated into *The Stranger*. Here Camus records that the absurd flashes up when the condemned clearly grasps the certainty that his life will end, and thus that life itself is impermanent. This knowledge, gained at the expense of the illusory hope that the prisoner may somehow elude the flow of time hastening towards death, is both useless and complete. That the prisoner, like all human beings, is condemned to die is certainly true, but that truth does not get him any closer to some indispensable meaning of life. It is unserviceable for solving the puzzle that life comes to an end. The motif of capital punishment and the figure of the condemned man appeared as figurations of absurdity in a number of other entries from May 1935, to which Camus insists he 'must bear witness' (2010a: 4, 12). By May 1936 Camus (2010a: 27) had formulated the plan for a cycle of philosophical and literary works that treat the common subject of the absurd through different yet complementary styles. Camus believed a cycle of different works was required because the absurd could not be reduced to a single image. Thus the parallels and contrasts between these works express both a commitment to exploring a precise theme and an aspiration to thinking through the problematic of the absurd with the resources supplied by diverse genres. What is more, Camus maintained a conception of art and writing predicated upon a deep relationship between literature and philosophical reflection, because people 'can only think in images'. Consequently, Camus (2010a: 10) believed that 'If you want to be a philosopher, write novels'.

The Myth of Sisyphus conveys the experiences and anxieties of an entire generation. It offers an account of how the sense of the modern individual, society and its values remain ambiguously informed by inherited philosophical and theological traditions that modernity itself has either called radically into question or consigned to the past. In this situation, where ossified metaphysical categories and religious principles have fractured under the pressure of modernity's contradictions and critical self-analysis, a pervasive unease defines the contemporary worldview.

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It is this quality or condition of unease, this 'intellectual malady' or 'absurd sensitivity', which Camus (1991: 2) seeks to diagnose and understand in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and to portray in the literary writings of his first cycle. Yet Camus is interested in understanding not only the absurd itself and how it is manifested but, even more importantly, what consequences it has for action, for how we live in the world. It is for this reason Camus (1991: 2) insists that the absurd is considered in his essay as a 'starting point' rather than a conclusion, because his ultimate interest is with the moral and political consequences generated by the widespread sense of the absurdity of existence. Focusing on the consequences of the absurd is justified, Camus argues, because this reflects upon the most urgent of all philosophical questions: 'Judging whether life is or is not worth living' (1991: 3).

Despite the urgency of this question, it is difficult to provide an absolute representation or objective description of the absurd. The analysis of the absurd is no simple operation, because it often permeates personal impulses, indeterminate feelings and vague impressions, and is reproduced in thoughtless behaviours and repetitive habits. The sense of absurdity can be brought to the fore through elusive and unpredictable passions of love, hatred and desire, as well as unexpected illness and misfortune. Camus recognizes that we have no criterion for the truth of the absurd apart from the experiences of everyday life, that we cannot specify the nature of the absurd once and for all, and thus that our ability to speak of the absurd is always relative to those lived experiences. The modern world therefore presents abundant evidence of a paradoxical situation: everywhere, human conduct is characterized by seemingly secure faith in moral, intellectual and material progress, yet the ultimate meaning of this activity is unclear and about the intrinsic nature of reality we have nothing definitive to say. For Camus, while it may be easier to speak of absurdity in the face of major disasters and large-scale atrocities than it is to perceive in our ordinary routines, it is nonetheless the case that the distressing sense of the absurd may strike at any moment of everyday life, 'born on a streetcorner or in a restaurant's revolving door' (1991: 12). This is particularly true when our customary projections into the future, the indistinct 'tomorrow' and 'later on' that sustain our daily existence, intermittently come up against the absurd walls (*les murs absurdes*) that place us back into the grip of time: the circumscription of work, the unstoppable process of aging, the unfathomable depths of nature, and the inevitability of death. Camus describes this ongoing,

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unconscious dependence on daily habits and routines as the background from which absurdity appears, like a shock that unsettles the sense that all is well and thereby 'awakens consciousness and provokes what follows' (1991: 13) – namely, either the affirmation or the renunciation of existence in a world devoid of transcendent meaning.

Camus concomitantly dramatizes the ebb and flow of the absurd in everyday life in *L'Étranger*. Camus's novel is set in colonial Algeria, and concerns an office clerk, Meursault. After receiving word of his mother's death, Meursault travels from Algiers to the village of Marengo to attend her funeral, where he mechanically performs the required tasks with little effort, awareness or grief. He is unable to recall his mother's exact age, he refuses to view the body, and the only emotion he exhibits is discomfort from the sun and heat. Returning to Algiers that same night, Meursault feels 'joy' when the bus he is riding enters 'the nest of lights' illuminating the city (Camus 1989: 18). The following day Meursault goes swimming and to the movies with Marie, a former colleague from work, who then becomes his lover. Camus portrays Meursault as a man who lives his life almost instinctively, absorbed in satisfying his simple physical needs of eating, drinking, sleeping, swimming and sex. Meursault is, in essence, indifferent to the ambitions and dissimulations of normal society, a figure lacking any strong preferences towards his career, marriage, or even his friend, Raymond – 'I don't have any reason not to talk to him', Meursault pronounces soberly (Camus 1989: 28). None of it, he thinks, 'really mattered' (Camus 1989: 41). Surprisingly, given the passing of his mother, even death plays no role in his life or thoughts. The scenario transforms in the second part of the novel, however, after Meursault, impulsively and without premeditation, kills an unknown Arab on the beach, under an overpowering sun that was 'the same as it had been the day [he'd] buried Maman' (Camus 1989: 58).

Meursault spends months in prison, with little other than memories to occupy his time. As the days pass monotonously, the impression slowly forms that Meursault's life before the murder – when each day resembled the one before and the one after, seemingly without any conscious choice – closely parallels his life in prison: 'For me, it was one and the same unending day that was unfolding in my cell' (Camus 1989: 80). Even at his trial, Meursault acknowledges, everything 'was happening without my participation' (Camus 1989: 98). Only when Meursault faces execution, condemned to the naked reality of losing his head, does he then begin to contemplate the fact that while existence brings life, it

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does not save from death. Rationally, Meursault realizes, 'it doesn't much matter whether you die at thirty or at seventy.... Whether it was now or twenty years from now, I would still be the one dying' (Camus 1989: 114). Yet at the same time, nothing matters more than the difference between thirty and seventy. As Meursault awaits the outcome of his appeal, every additional twenty-four hours gained brings him frantic relief while, imagining some miraculous escape from the 'arrogant certainty' of his death sentence, his heart fills with 'a delirious joy' at 'the idea of having twenty more years of life' ahead of him (Camus 1989: 114). All the same, Meursault also accepts the prospect that his appeal will be rejected. Meursault's final thoughts show that learning to live with the knowledge that we are all condemned to die requires relinquishing hope, since such hope evaporates the temporality of the present upon the distant 'dark wind' of the future (Camus 1989: 121). In the same way, conscious awareness that sooner or later the beating of one's heart will cease forever need not lead to despair. This is because the vital particularity of one's life bears witness against the unfairness of an oblivion that asserts itself absolutely. Camus's is a story that warns against the tyranny of social convention, of course, and the perverse injustices that arise from uncritical conformism. Meursault is condemned as much (if not more) for being 'foreign to the society in which he lives' (Camus 1970: 336), as he is for the actual crime he commits. Yet in addition, it illustrates core ideas concerning human existence when the comfortable fabric of our lives is torn asunder. *L'Étranger* exposes the truth of death and the sense of absurdity it provokes, but it also opens the possibility of finding a meaningful existence in light of 'the gentle indifference of the world' (Camus 1989: 122).

The absurd, strangeness and the limits of the human condition

The experience of 'strangeness', of being 'foreign' to conventional societal norms and expectations, embodies simultaneously negative and positive aspects. On one hand, since the 'stranger' exists on the margins of or outside society – existentially if not physically or geographically – then he or she does not fully belong and therefore may be marginalized socially, politically and legally. On the other hand, being outside society enables the stranger to remain at a critical distance from the conformist tendencies that condemn those perceived as radically 'Other'. These

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two aspects are exemplified in the figure of Meursault in *The Stranger*. Meursault is not simply a deliberate rebel who revolts against the normalizing conventions of society – who refuses, in Camus's (1970: 336) words, to 'play the game'. Nor is he just a target of the power to marginalize and exclude wielded by a legal and political system that sustains itself as guardian against unsettling otherness. Camus's consideration of the experience of strangeness embodied in Meursault, in contrast, seeks to hold these two aspects together in a state of constant tension. On the one hand, Meursault 'refuses to lie' or 'hide his feelings', he abstains from the bread of convention upon which daily life customarily feeds. On the other hand, therefore, Meursault's inability to compromise means that 'immediately society feels threatened' (Camus 1970: 336), and his desire to live simply and freely – always consistent with himself – makes him dangerously incomprehensible to the authorities entrusted with ensuring the intelligibility of social order. In the end, then, Meursault is 'a man who, without any heroics, agrees to die for the truth' (Camus 1970: 337). His fate was not inevitable, however, and it is unclear whether all truths should be privileged over life.

Strangeness and estrangement are central to Camus's description of the absurd in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. For Camus, the absurd poignantly denotes the relational dissonance binding the human longing for rational certitude with the unyielding muteness of the cosmos. As Camus (1991: 6) puts it, 'It happens that the stage set collapses ... in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy, since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity'. The sense of the absurd, that human living is emptied of all non-contingent meaning, engenders both a profound disorientation and a rupture in worldviews that link human purpose with an immutable, higher outcome. However, the sense of absurdity that initially arises as an impression or feeling that the world is unreasonable and that existence is unbearable can be further analysed in terms of thought, intelligence, understanding, reason; in terms, that is, of the human 'appetite for clarity' and 'unity' (Camus 1991: 17). The absurd reveals itself not only at the level of unconscious intuition or sensitivity but also at the level of reason and comprehension. Indeed, it is precisely at the level of the intellect, where the ability to understand or comprehend seems to require unifying inner thought with external reality, that the concept of the absurd can be rendered most accurately. The

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feeling of the absurd is a kind of sense that the world itself – its hidden secrets and unfathomable laws, its implacable processes of cause and effect, its sheer inanimate being-in-itself – is the source of life's absurdity. Yet, Camus explains, this is not entirely correct:

> I said that the world is absurd, but I was too hasty. This world *in itself* is not reasonable, but 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. (1991: 21, emphases added)

In other words, the absurd resides neither in human beings nor in the world, but is the result of a tension between these two elements. The absurd is, in Camus's view, what links or 'binds' the two together, without thereby creating a synthesis that transcends their irreducible difference. The absurd typifies a crucial relationship that conjoins the human heart and intellect to a world which they cannot do without, yet which ultimately remains unfathomable and incapable of revealing the ultimate meaning and purpose of human existence. That is why Camus describes this relationship in terms of 'confrontation' as well as 'contradiction', 'tension' and 'divorce'.

It is this antinomy of the absurd that engenders a sense of estrangement within and from the world. When human understanding seeks to clarify the nature of things it reaches its inherent limits. It is unable to penetrate the innermost workings of the universe or to resolve all of its contradictions. This does not mean that we cannot explain and understand many things about the world, but there comes a point where the operation of thought and the coherence of rational categories can proceed no further. Science accumulates an increasing number of explanations but this knowledge both rests upon and generates further hypotheses, trading one uncertainty for another. There is always something that escapes comprehension. The human mind then turns to myth, religion, philosophy, poetry and art to compensate for 'the unreasonable silence of the world', and even the descriptions of science are nourished by images and the imaginary which help to 'fill in the blanks' of a 'measureless universe' (Camus 1991: 28, 21). The situation is further complicated because different explanations, descriptions and images of the world can seem equally valid, and these different standpoints on reality cannot be resolved by a definite, absolute truth. Camus thought that the desire for unity is the key to the absurdity of the relationship between human beings and the world. Without this desire or appetite for unity, the world

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would not assume the appearance of something unknown, hostile and opposed to humanity. Yet the 'human nostalgia' for familiarity is persistently disappointed (Camus 1991: 28), leaving us with an acute awareness of our limitations and a gnawing sense that something is not right, that we are, after all, exiles and foreigners in the world that surrounds us. Comprehension slides into apprehension, in the dual sense of understanding and of dread, anxiety or foreboding.

The sentiment of alienation is triggered by a loss of the feeling of familiarity and belonging to the world. In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger traces the ontological constitution of human existence, or *dasein*, in terms of 'being-in-the-world'. For Heidegger, the meaning of 'in-the-world' is not fundamentally spatial, in the sense of one object being inside another (such as dishes in a cupboard). Rather, it refers to a relationship of familiarity, in the sense of living, inhabiting and being acquainted with a sustaining environment. The constitutive structure of human existence, Heidegger points out, presupposes an original symbiotic relationship with the world (consisting of the natural environment and the built environment of human artifice). Humans cannot 'be' independent of the world, they cannot exist and then choose whether or not to relate to it; if one exists, then one is already 'in' the world (Heidegger 1962: 80–3). As a consequence, an individual already possesses an experiential familiarity with the world even before coming to self-reflective awareness of that familiarity. Like Heidegger, Camus situates human existence 'in-the-world', but he also puts into sustained relief the experience of dislocation that arises from the loss of comforting familiarity attendant upon our efforts to peer behind or beyond its source – to ask the question 'why?' when interrogating the meaning of self and world, and finding that the world itself replies with an enigmatic silence.

Defining the absurd as a relational dislocation between humans and the world that induces the experience of strangeness can be conceived as what Karl Jaspers calls 'limit-situations' (*Grenzsituationen*). The concept of limit-situation or boundary situation, according to Jaspers (1970: 201–3), refers to the fact that every situation, as a meaningful reality for human beings, contains both opportunities and limitations. Because humans are always 'situated' beings, in a sense close to Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world as constitutive of human existence, it is impossible to exist outside of all situations as such; one can never leave the condition of 'situatedness' and freedom is always situated. However, situations are dynamic rather than static and thus inclined to change over time.

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Moreover, it is possible not only to occupy multiple situations but also to leave one situation and enter another. Thus, situations are paradoxically both open and closed; situations contain their own internal limitations and also function as limits at the boundaries of other situations. In being immersed within situations, therefore, every human is surrounded and defined by limits, including human finitude. It is impossible for human existence to include, to know or to feel everything – to be limitless, in other words. But, precisely because of these limits, there is always the possibility to include, to know or to feel something *otherwise*. As Jaspers (1970: 179) mentions, the 'word *limit* implies that there is something else', namely, the possibility of an 'other side' to any particular limit. Limits can function 'as a wall on which we founder' (Jaspers 1970: 178), but they also can serve to open up new possibilities; both potentials inhere in limit-situations and enable human existence. Some limit-situations can be actively changed while others are much more resistant; some can be approached willingly and voluntarily while others (such as suffering, guilt, war and death) are contingent, arbitrary, unforeseen or unbidden.

The point of the limit-situation, for both Jaspers and Camus, is that limit-situations place human beings in a field of irresolvable tension, a tightrope of continual metamorphosis, in relation to the world. The positive and the negative, coherence and incoherence, unity and chaos, refusal and consent, strangeness and familiarity are mutually constitutive and mutually limiting. The experience of familiarity would be vacuous without the sense of strangeness, yet equally, strangeness would carry no force or impact without the potential for familiarity. As expressed in the title of Camus's first published set of essays, *L'Envers et l'endroit (The Wrong Side and the Right Side*), human existence is never situated only on one side of a duality but is (re)born of their common presence: both 'the wrong side and the right side' and 'between yes and no'. From this perspective, the absurd is not to be understood as solely negative. If the 'absurd walls' of existence were seen only from a negative aspect, as if they were borders that could not be crossed or limits that could never be reached, then time and the world itself would have no bearing on the living. But, as Camus argues, from an encounter with the feeling of absurdity it is possible to develop a conscious relationship to the absurd and, from this, a new heightened attitude of awareness towards existence. Choices, however temporary and unfinished, can be made and just as the absurd characterizes a kind of discomforting incompatibility of humans with the world, so too it discloses situations in which it is

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possible to create different pathways within a finite world and thereby make existence relatively meaningful. The absurd always has both a negative and a positive character; both poles are necessary for existence to have significance. The relations of consonance and dissonance are entangled together at the limit, then, where human existence, freedom and choice are situated within the surrounding world. As Camus (1991: 27) summarizes: 'The mind, when it reaches it limits, must make a judgement and choose its conclusions.'

The problem of nihilism and the absurd as post-foundationalism

In her 1948 essay, 'Was ist Existenz-Philosophie?' ('What is Existential Philosophy?'), Hannah Arendt (1994: 165) underscores that the emphasis on the self in existentialist philosophy is a product of the modern individual's experience of estrangement from 'the world's discomfiting nature', of the feeling of not belonging to the world or of being wrenched out of a familiar context. Arendt argues that while the philosophy of existence is indeed preoccupied with this strange experience of isolation or 'world alienation' that dehumanizes the individual, which then evokes a 'philosophical shock', it is for the reason of illuminating how it might be possible to retrieve a sense of belonging, a 'positive path' to return from exile (Arendt 1994: 174) – or at least a return from absolute exile *outside* the world to a relative exile *in* the world. In order to do so, however, it is necessary to partake of rather than flee from the limit or boundary situation. This is because, as Jaspers (1970: 183) understood, the limit-situation is 'the backdrop from which human freedom declares itself distinct, becomes, as it were, the stuff from which it takes fire'. This insight, I suggest, is precisely what Camus invokes in his provocative meditation on absurd consciousness and the crisis moment in modern life when the familiar world, the prevailing views of reality, dissolve and become estranged. Camus's 'absurd man' is alive, 'on fire', worldly and capable of thinking because he crosses over from one side to the other, verges on the limit between the familiar and the strange, between life and death. The absurd, in other words, stimulates a kind of borderthinking, a restless questioning that cannot settle permanently on any absolute, comforting answer but instead remains 'on that dizzying crest' (Camus 1991: 50). This mode of absurd consciousness is another way

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of characterizing the urgency of moral and political thinking, because the self that is aware it is situated within the limits of life and the world begins to consider the enormous significance of comparative *options*. But, as Arendt (1994: 174) warns, this 'new serious engagement with life that uses death as a point of departure does not, however, necessarily imply an affirmation of life or of human existence as such'.

Much of *The Myth of Sisyphus* is concerned with the connections between thinking, acting, judging and valuing. The antinomical structure of the human condition means that humans need to think, choose and act one way or another, thereby excluding other thoughts, choices and acts. Camus understands that this intimate link between living and choosing can serve as a motivating force to action and creation, or it can lead to dogmatism, paralysis, frustration, cynicism and destruction. A person may attempt to escape the disappointment of the absurd world by building 'a mansion of ideas and forms' (Camus 1991: 52), by placing faith in 'higher' authorities both religious and secular, by adhering to a single ideology with total conviction, and even by committing suicide. We can recognize here one of the central themes of the philosophy of existence: the constant search for meaning in a world without apparent meaning, and the struggle to know whether one can live with this situation. The key point for Camus is that, with the dislocation of transcendent sources of value and axiomatic starting points in metaphysical and moral truths, nihilism becomes widely ingrained in the fabric of modern socio-political life. The problem posed by nihilism is that it is both dogmatic and paradoxical: nihilists not only value their own lives, by eschewing suicide, but they also believe that all lives are of equally little value. Camus thought that this temptation towards relativistic equivalence – meaning that the lives of others can be legitimately sacrificed for one's own life – made the rigidity of nihilism an issue of pressing moral and political concern. In essence, through the substitution of one life for another or one freedom for another, nihilism presumes possession of a certain knowledge that authorizes one to negate finitude, to step outside the limits of the absurd world. In the words of Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov, it amounts to the belief that 'everything is permitted' (Camus 1991: 104–12; 2010a: 118). Nihilism is an overpowering of limits and if, in the process, all existence should be destroyed then the consequence is no worse than if all had been spared.

In his play *Caligula*, Camus explores the consonance between the discovery of the absurd and the turn to nihilism. Here the emperor

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Caligula experiences a dislocating limit-situation following the death of his beloved sister, Drusilla, which leads him to radically question the familiarity of his previous way of life. From the moment Caligula encounters the unreasonable destiny of all human beings, this felt absence of meaning, marred by doubt and despair, leads him to a harsh realization: 'Men weep because ... the world's all wrong' (Camus 1984: 47). Yet Caligula is unable to accept this fact. Instead, he dreams of 'making the impossible possible' by changing the world itself in order to banish misery and death. 'I shall eliminate contradictions and contradictors', he declares, and the whole world shall be 'called to judgement' (Camus 1984: 45, 44, 49). As Caligula's lover Caesonia observes, wanting to alter the scheme of things is to emulate the gods. For Caligula, the secret to eliminating death is to empty life of its own value by dispensing a kind of divine grace. 'When all is levelled out', when life and death are on a par, Caligula will have given humanity 'the gift of equality' (Camus 1984: 48). For Caligula, despotic excess is justified because his actions aim to 'bring about the one real revolution in this world of ours', an absolute transformation that would wash away all trace of the world's absurdity (Camus 1984: 65). Attempting to divorce himself from the absurd experience, Caligula paradoxically would extinguish the world and all of its inhabitants instantaneously, in order to save them from consciousness of their eventual destruction. Caligula's nihilistic salvation must condemn the world itself because he cannot bear its suffering. Since the world, in the end, will amount to nothing, Caligula adopts a logical doctrine which holds that 'mankind, and the world we know' therefore count 'for nothing' in the present as well (Camus 1984: 53).

Like other philosophers of existence, Camus sought to develop a type of critical thinking which contests the repudiation of the world at the hands of nihilists. To Camus, the strange, uncanny, even terrifying condition of absurd existence is simply the price that must be paid for the wonder, beauty and joy that also comes with life. Both potentials are always present in human experience, but only in relation to their mutually constitutive duality. It is in this sense that Camus can refer to the absurd in terms of a positive distinction: he speaks of death, simply put, in order to speak of life. If life and death were equivalent, then all limits would be erased: finitude would be transformed into the eternal, and men into gods. Keeping limits and, therefore, the absurd alive, is the condition that allows for the possibility of (re)creating meaning (Camus 1991: 54). The logic of nihilism, according to Camus, amounts

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to surrendering to belief in the purity of 'all or nothing'; nihilism, in other words, is bitter scorn of the world as it is in all its dualities and contradictions. In contrast, from affirmation of the absurdity of the human condition, Camus (1991: 31) discerns the necessity for 'a confrontation and an unceasing struggle', meaning that the refusal to *negate* the absurd is complemented by a need to be *reconciled* to it as the limit of the human condition. On one hand, accepting the absurd as defining the human condition entails a transformation of consciousness away from the view of life as inherently rational or meaningful, while on the other hand, refusing dogmatism and nihilism prevents the sense of the absurd from leading to paralysis, suicide or murder. Simultaneously with and against the absurd, lucid thinking and acting revolts against servility to nothingness without either hoping finally to overcome the incompleteness of the human condition or despairing that this boundedness cannot be transcended. Camus grasped that the human freedom to give life its value is made meaningful by conscious confrontation with the absurd world 'in all its splendour and diversity' (1991: 55, 65).

Another way to frame Camus's notion of the absurd as a response to dogmatism and nihilism is to conceive of it as a post-foundationalist account of the human condition. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus challenges the lingering tendency towards foundationalism operative in modern philosophy, ethics and politics. This is a feature evident in their aspiration to 'grasp' the underlying essence of both human nature and history, an essence that is thought to transcend or govern human experience. Yet as Camus insists, this kind of foundationalism has been discredited in our time due to a series of historical, political and social events as well as the influence of new intellectual and artistic movements, including existentialism. Jointly, these philosophical and practical changes have produced a 'crisis' for traditional epistemic and metaphysical foundationalism.

As defined by Joseph Margolis (1986: 38), foundationalism is 'the belief that we possess a privileged basis for cognitive certainty'. The traditional justificatory strategy for securing epistemological certainty has been to posit certain fixed essences whose 'cognitively transparent' formal properties ensure both the coherence of the world and the validity of our privileged representations of that world. This epistemological certainty relies upon the assumption of rationalist synthesis between contingent human experience and the underlying essences which ostensibly ground and guide all valid theory and practice. For Stanley Fish (1989: 342),

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foundationalism can thus be described as 'any attempt to ground inquiry and communication in something more firm and stable than mere belief' so that our activities 'become anchored to it and thereby rendered objective and principled'. By assuming the mantle of epistemological certainty, foundationalism asserts its privilege above the fray of 'subjective' concerns and disputes with an authority ultimately 'located outside society and politics' (Herzog 1985: 20).

However, Camus offers an alternative to both foundationalist and anti-foundationalist accounts of thought and action. The absurdity of the human condition, in Camus's account, is neither foundationalist nor anti-foundationalist. Anti-foundationalism presupposes at least the veiled presence of foundationalism in order to maintain its status; as such, it fails honestly to confront the historical rupture of foundationalism. In contrast, Camus's position is best viewed as *post*-foundationalist. Post-foundationalism counters the foundationalist approach not by rejecting foundations as such but by turning our attention to the historically conditioned, limited and provisional character of our ethical judgements and political principles. Unlike anti-foundationalism, post-foundationalism encourages the articulation of 'new foundations for political life' while highlighting the constructedness, plurality, imperfection and ambiguity of these new foundations (Isaac 1992: 106). Camus's post-foundationalism thus grounds political thought and action in existentially immanent foundations in relation to the background of essentialism's demise.

Camus's account of the post-foundationalist experience of the modern human condition shows how the absurd arises from the 'confrontation' between the human desire for a rational explanation of the world and a world whose 'unreasonable silence' defies any such explanation. The primary structure of contemporary human existence, Camus argues, consists of an awareness of the limits of the mind faced with a world that appears irrational and indifferent to human interests. Absurdity resides neither in the world nor in humanity's 'longing for clarity', but in the paradoxical space between that simultaneously joins and separates them in 'an unceasing struggle' without consummation (Camus 1991: 21, 31). The world as such, 'without the aid of eternal values' (Camus 1991: v), offers no underlying justification or answer to the question of how, or even whether, we should live. In a world without ultimate foundations, then, 'there are truths but no truth' (Camus 1991: 19). The post-foundationalist conclusion to be drawn is clear to Camus. 'I don't know whether this

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world has a meaning that transcends it,' he acknowledges. 'But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it. What can a meaning outside my condition mean to me? I can understand only in human terms' (1991: 51). Of particular relevance here is Camus's insistence that post-foundational thinking is a generative rather than paralysing force, insofar as it aims to rearticulate moral and political claims (or value judgements broadly) beyond mutually exclusive binary oppositions. Camus's emphasis on the dualistic character of human existence is meant to encourage an approach to thought and judgement which sees them as always moving between contrasting poles in such a way that they can never settle with uncritical certainty upon an absolute or ultimate truth. Absurdism instigates an interplay between foundations and the absence of foundations, such that the dynamic and tense relationship between consciousness and the world can never be fully resolved. The appeal to conventional binaries always privileges one term over another through an either/or logic – either universal or particular, either nature or history – in order to elude the paradoxes of the human condition. Camus, in contrast, stresses that the human condition unfolds or traverses back and forth between dual terms, such that both terms in tandem – 'both/and' rather than 'either/or' – are necessary and neither takes *a priori* precedence.

Camus (1991: 50) therefore illuminates the modern predicament of searching for meaning and a way to live when encountering a 'fragmented universe' upon which we can assume no privileged, absolute knowledge. Yet Camus's emphasis on the demise of traditional foundationalism is not a rejection of all foundations, for this would lead directly to the nihilism that he so trenchantly critiques. Rather, Camus insists that the adoption of absurd reasoning calls for us to move beyond the consolations of foundationalism in order to recreate the grounds for dignified human existence, without relying upon nostalgia for the certainties of religious faith and philosophical dogma. Awareness of the absurdity of the human condition entails consciousness of the loss of certainty 'without remedy', and for Camus (1991: 6) it is this consciousness which becomes the post-foundational 'foundation' for continuing to live. Absurd reasoning, in other words, affirms the tensions and contradictions of existentially immanent foundations and thus insists on living with 'the regular hiatus between what we fancy we know and what we really know', the 'gap that will never be filled' between 'the certainty I have of my existence and the content I try to give to that assurance' (Camus 1991: 18–19).

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Camus's post-foundationalism requires, then, that consciousness consists of a constant lucidity or rigorously honest awareness concerning the limits of thought and action. Our thoughts, judgements and actions are experienced as provisional precisely because we cannot attain privileged certainty regarding ultimate meaning and value. Yet the human condition is not thereby meaningless or without value; rather its meaning and value emerge from purely human sources and therefore are subject to the limitations of existing in a world that 'in itself is not reasonable' (Camus 1991: 21). In this way, the absurd is the condition for the possibility of all properly post-foundational ethics and politics. It is, Camus stresses, not the end to thinking and acting, but the very basis for thinking and acting at all. As he maintains in his review of Sartre's *Nausea*, the 'realization that life is absurd cannot be an end, but only a beginning' (Camus 1970: 201).

The tragic beauty of the absurd

Camus's reflections on the absurd imbue the philosophical analysis of the question of the meaning of life with a tragic sensibility. For Camus (1991: 28), the absurd persists in the form of a tension that arises from a comparative contradiction between consciousness and its need for reasons, and 'the unreasonable silence of the world'. Where suicide is the voluntary renunciation of consciousness, nihilism is the voluntary repudiation of the world. Suicide willingly sacrifices the self, and nihilism willingly sacrifices all others. This characteristic of voluntariness is crucial to understanding both responses to the absurd. Although suicide and nihilism would appear to embody dissent, they actually represent consent because they accept everything, they settle all questions, and rush into the arms of dreadful fate. Revolt, on the contrary, is a refusal to settle, a defiance that acknowledges 'the certainty of a crushing fate, without the resignation that ought to accompany it' (Camus 1991: 54). The constant awareness that, at a definite point, there is no future means that life receives its entire value in the present. The absurd both limits and liberates (Camus 1991: 57–9). The struggle against the absurd condition of human existence is, in Camus's deeply Hellenic view (see Archambault 1972; Zaretsky 2013), also a willingness, even a passion, to live in that condition. It is possible to say 'no' only if one also says 'yes'. The logic of the absurd leads therefore to a tragic situation: revolt against

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the oppressive unreasonableness of the world is at the same time an affirmation of being-in-the-world. Precisely for this reason, faced with the promise of a better, perfected world to come, an individual consciously bound to the absurd will always prefer the flawed reality of the present world. What is tragic is that the misery and the beauty of the world are inseparable and complementary.

The fact that the human condition is limited allows that condition to be recognized as properly human. According to Camus, from 'the moment absurdity is *recognized*, it becomes a passion, the most harrowing of all' (1991: 22, emphasis added). This claim emphasizes the iterability embedded in the very structure of the word re-cognition, which implies the desire to come to know or comprehend again and again, making that which seemingly defies comprehension meaningful in human terms. This also implies that in our search for meaning in our lives we arrive at something like the experience of 'reversal and discovery' through recognition – where change or difference has an effect on our sense of 'this is so-and-so' – which Aristotle (2013) discusses as an indispensable aspect of tragedy in his *Poetics*. Recognition of the absurd becomes a 'harrowing passion' because it affirms both poles or sides of life, the negative and the positive, as necessary while forestalling their definitive reconciliation. A few examples from *L'Etranger* should help to clarify what is meant here. In *The Stranger*, Camus employs a narrative structure that contrasts a minimalism of expression, conveyed by the austereness of Meursault's thoughts and feelings and by his own preference for silence, with the lushness of a lyrical, almost poetic style. Consider, for instance, the following exchange between Meursault and an undertaker: 'I said, "What?" He pointed up at the sky and repeated, "Pretty hot." I said, "Yes." A minute later he asked, "Is that your mother in there?" Again I said, "Yes." "Was she old?" I answered, "Fairly," because I didn't know the exact number' (Camus 1989: 16). The conversations with Marie are similarly laconic. Even when discussing the prospect of marriage, Meursault is content to say barely more than 'yes' and 'no'. Yet the restrained and indifferent feature of these social exchanges is complemented by the tender and even sensual quality of Meursault's interactions with the primordial aspects of the world. Preparing to set out on the funeral procession, Meursault's interest is drawn to the density of the landscape rather than to the desolation of death:

> I was looking at the countryside around me. Seeing the rows of cypress trees leading up to the hills next to the sky, and the houses standing out here and

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> there against that red and green earth, I was able to understand Maman better. Evenings in that part of the country must have been a kind of sad relief. (Camus 1989: 15)

Later, Meursault is overcome by yearning for his lost communion with the Mediterranean Sea and sky now made impossible by the unforgivingly mute prison walls. Acutely aware of the absurd divorce between the free play of his desires and the elemental forms of everyday life beyond his reach, Meursault becomes increasingly sensitive to the fragile beauty of the world, the evoked images of which assume a greater significance for him than the ponderous trial proceedings. This is the heightened lucidity of a condemned man longing for a worldly home in which to dwell:

> As I was leaving the courthouse on my way back to the van, I recognized for a brief moment the smell and color of the summer evening. In the darkness of my mobile prison I could make out one by one, as if from the depths of my exhaustion, all of the familiar sounds of a town I loved and of a certain time of the day when I used to feel happy. The cries of the newspaper vendors in the already languid air, the last few birds in the square, the shouts of the sandwich sellers, the screech of the streetcars turning sharply through the upper town, and that hum in the sky before night engulfs the port: all this mapped out for me a route I knew so well before going to prison and which now I travelled blind. Yes, it was the hour when, a long time ago, I was perfectly content. (Camus 1989: 97)

In *L'Etranger* we can again observe Camus's emphasis on a play of movement and reversibility of relations between different terms set against the North African environment. The sun, beach and sea symbolize both the positive space of Meursault's and Marie's bathing, and the negative space of the Arab's murder. In the positive space, the details of Marie's breasts, hair, lips, taste and scent are pronounced, while in the negative space such details are blurred or indescribable and the Arab remains a spectral, anonymous figure – an unspoken trace of the strangely speechless and nameless condition of a colonized people. Such anonymity, Camus seems to suggest, is like a hole, a void in Meursault's conscience that replicates the colonial erasure of identity. The familiarity of Meursault's daily rituals with Marie, which take place without any reflective questioning, as something appropriated as a matter of course by Meursault, contrasts sharply with the appearance of an Other that resists assimilation into the comfortable reality that Meursault takes for granted. As Meursault and the Arab encounter one another as strangers

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the continuity of Meursault's situation is interrupted, which exposes him to his own otherness and gradually leads him to glimpse differently, however fleetingly, upon his manner of being-in-the-world. This conversion of fluid and ambiguous relationships between contrasting elements was already a central motif in Camus's early writings, such as 'La Maison Mauresque' ('The Moorish House'): 'For a long time I watched the lights of a steamship in the dark waters. My uneasiness returned then, as I watched this primordial mixture of water and light about which one could not have said whether the water was stirring up the light or the light was drowning out the water. Uneasiness, too, before the conflict between two elements. A binary rhythm...' (Camus 1990: 182–3). As presented in *Noces*, the intermingling of conflict and nuptials – the conjoining of the wrong side and the right side, of yes and no, of positive and negative – is evocative of the absurd as a conjunction of 'the conscious certainty of a death without hope' with 'the splendour of the world' (Camus 1970: 76–7). Similarly, Camus defines the tragic in terms of the entwined ambiguities that signal the irrevocable limitations of the human condition: 'Tragedy is born between light and darkness and rises from the struggle between them' (1970: 303).

Aware that existence sustains itself between tenderness and anger, lucidity and pretence, beauty and despair, Meursault mirrors the tragic figure of Sisyphus, the mythical symbol of Camus's absurdist philosophy. According to Greek legend, Sisyphus was punished by the gods for assorted acts of cunning, condemned to roll a huge stone repeatedly up a mountain only to have it roll back down every time he reaches the summit. Yet what makes this 'futile and hopeless labor' tragic, Camus (1991: 121) observes, is the fact that Sisyphus is conscious of his fate, he 'knows the whole extent of his wretched condition'. Despite the futility of his 'hopeless labor', however, Sisyphus is not consumed by grief, but rather experiences joy 'from the moment' he becomes aware of his fate (Camus 1991: 119, 122). By acknowledging his all-too-human destiny in the present, Sisyphus eschews consolatory belief in a new life to come that will release him from the limitations of his condition. Instead of being overwhelmed by the strangely gratuitous nature of his existence, Sisyphus finds strength in freely embracing it as fully his own – even as that decision rests upon a limit-situation, an otherness, which is beyond his control. The stone, after all, is indifferent to whether Sisyphus endures or not. Yet in accepting his condition, Sisyphus's actions involve a number of refusals: a refusal to be seduced into a leap of faith, to be

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blinded by metaphysical or religious foundations and the notion that there is a 'deeper' truth behind his reality and, on the positive side, a refusal to despise the world. Nourished by the struggle to bring meaning to his life in all its contingency, Sisyphus 'concludes that all is well' (Camus 1991: 123). For Camus, then, although human existence is absurd and not infrequently agonizing, it can also be magnificent, endowed with beauty, happiness and love. This insight suggests that life is indeed worth living on its own absurd terms.

Conclusion

Camus's work offers a sustained attempt to craft philosophical, literary and dramatic variants of the Sisyphean myth as images of the twentieth-century experience of the absurd. It seeks to warn readers about the dangers of imposing totalizing theories onto an absurd world, and about wishing to remake the world no matter the cost, thereby diagnosing the existential impact of dogmatism and nihilism. The cycle of the absurd is therefore meant to provoke critical reflection on what it means to be human, to inspire creative engagement with the question of whether life is worth living in a cosmos shorn of meaning, without relying upon the comforting foundations of transcendent truths and faith in an inevitably better world to come. Camus's aim to speak directly to the limits or boundaries that circumscribe human existence also explains why he characterizes life as tragic. Finding ourselves thrust into a world given to us rather than chosen by us, it is impossible to know in any complete and full sense how the events of the present relate to those that came before and to those that will come after. Instead, the meaning that our lives have is born, precariously and uncertainly, from the ambiguous circumstances of the temporally unfolding present. In relating ourselves to the world, we occupy a field of tension charged by the oscillations between contrasting terms, finding at one and the same time both love and anguish, splendour and desolation, familiarity and exile, hope and despair. The beautifully simple yet difficult truth of the absurd is that we have to live with all the limits, including those of human finitude and a silent universe, through which the meaning of existence can be asserted within a horizon of contradictory forces. As Camus discerns, there 'is no sun without shadow, and it is essential to know the night' (1991: 123).

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3
Rebellion and an Ethics of Measure

Abstract: *This chapter examines the possibility for meaningful ethical and political action in light of the strange indifference of the world. It argues that what makes ethics and politics meaningful for Camus is tied to the question of revolt or rebellion, which challenges the perception of the futility of both existence and political life. Hayden interrogates how Camus's notion of rebellion developed, how it influenced his critical views on revolutionary ideology, and how those views challenged received wisdom. In doing so, the chapter also illuminates the important parallel Camus draws between rebellion and measure (or balance and equilibrium). As the condition* sine qua non *for rebellion, an ethics of measure aims to maintain a creative tension between rebellion and the limitations of human understanding and political possibility.*

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The theme of this chapter refers to Camus's understanding of the human as a being who revolts against the strange indifference of the world, yet who refuses to find solace by turning a blind eye to the absurdity of the human condition; as opposed to an understanding of the human as a being who is defined fundamentally by the capacity to discern a rational truth hidden behind a reality that is only apparently absurd. Camus believed that, in the modern world, the spectre of meaninglessness cast a dark shadow most broadly over human existence, and more particularly over ethics and politics. At this point it is worthwhile to explore why Camus did not think it was impossible to act ethically and politically in a meaningful way. For Camus, the question of what makes ethics and politics meaningful is tied to the question of revolt or rebellion, which challenges the perception of the futility of both existence and political life. This chapter interrogates how Camus's notion of rebellion developed, how it influenced his critical views on revolutionary ideology, and how those views challenged received wisdom. In doing so, it also examines the important parallel Camus draws between rebellion and measure (or balance and equilibrium). Recognition of the need for measure is, for Camus, *sine qua non* for rebellion, since the extremist pursuit of absolutes betrays the original impulse of revolt, namely, to protest against injustice. Revolt signifies the affirmation of a limit: saying 'yes' to life and 'no' to injustice simultaneously. An ethics of measure therefore aims to maintain a creative tension between rebellion and the limitations of human understanding and political possibility.

From the absurd to rebellion

For Camus, the absurd describes the ways in which the sense and meaning of our existence is put into question with the demise of traditional metaphysical, religious and moral foundations. The absurd is unlocked through a lucid awareness of the silent chasm that separates yet conjoins humanity and the universe. Consciousness of the absurd thus can shatter automatic acceptance of traditional moral values, conventional social norms and customary political rules. All aspects of our existence become compromised: we may no longer accept what we had previously believed, the world may no longer seem as intelligible as we had formerly supposed, and our sense of belonging to a coherent and logical social order may give way to feelings of doubt, isolation, vulnerability and

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purposelessness. Despite all this, Camus insists on preserving awareness of the absurd, and on refusing to elude the question of what a meaningful existence might be like in a world without intrinsic meaning. The figure of Sisyphus provides a key example, according to Camus, of how we can turn the experience of the absurd inside out: rather than an example of futility and resignation, Sisyphus reveals that choosing to live with *and* against the absurd allows for the reinscription of meaning from within human existence. Yet refusing to be the plaything of impersonal forces such as God, Destiny, Progress and History is a posture that only can be maintained by keeping alive the critical spirit of the absurd. For Camus, the absurd is the vector of human action: lucid awareness of the human condition inspires simultaneous acceptance and rejection of the absurd. For this reason, Camus refuses both pessimistic despair and idealistic hope, since each ignores the contradictions of the human condition. To act, he argues, embodies a choice in favour of the contradictions of existence, and social action encompasses resistance because human freedom is never a final achievement. Camus's post-foundationalism concerning the conditions of possibility for thinking and acting therefore flows directly into consideration of the 'consequences and rules for action that can be drawn from' the absurd (Camus 1970: 202). Within and against the limitations of the human condition thinking and acting must revolt, without either hoping finally to overcome those limits or despairing that such limits are inescapable.

The imperative question Camus poses is how to respond ethically and politically to the absurd condition of modern human existence? As the precondition for meaningful thought and action, the absurd 'remains a first necessary step in the development of properly human values' (Foley 2008: 13). As such it is an indispensable existential ground for revolt. This is another way of saying that the ethics and politics of rebellion follows from the experience of the absurd. Yet, as we will see, another key argument that Camus makes about ethics and politics is that awareness of the absurd entails limits to our actions. Limits, he suggests, are the condition for all responsible thinking and acting in a world without transcendent meaning or purpose. The basic problem with modern ethics and politics is that they lose touch with the experience of the absurd, and too often rebellion gives way to the revolutionary promise of perfecting an imperfect world, of overcoming absurdity once and for all. Like Caligula, the revolutionary aspires to become a god and to make reality bend to his will.

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Where Camus's first cycle of work uses the figure of Sisyphus to symbolize the individual refusal to succumb to resignation and suicide in the face of the absurd, Camus's second cycle – the central works of which are *L'Homme révolté* (*The Rebel*), *La Peste* (*The Plague*), *L'Etat de siège* (*State of Siege*) and *Les Justes* (*The Just*) – appeals to the figure of Prometheus to express the tension exerted between rebellion and revolution, between revolt that can give life a value and an excess that turns life back on itself. Given his wariness of rationalist systems of thought, Camus often interpreted the human condition and the tensions between an absurdism of limits and a messianism without limits, through figures and myths of classical antiquity. Ancient myth resonates with Camus because, he says, 'Greek thought is not historical' (1987: 49). The Greeks, in other words, did not invoke an evolutionary conception of history to explain and thereby justify the 'real meaning' of their actions. Prometheus, in this respect, embodies both the temporal openness and unpredictability of the possibility for change, and the potential for freedom of action to bring about violence when it sees itself serving a higher purpose or power. In Aeschylus's tragedy *Prometheus Bound*, the Chorus asks Prometheus to recount the 'crimes' for which he has been condemned:

PROMETHEUS: Of wretched mortals [Zeus] took no notice, desiring to bring the whole race to an end and create a new one in its place. Against this purpose none dared make stand except me – only I had the courage; I saved mortals so that they did not descend, blasted utterly, to the house of Hades. ...
CHORUS: Did you perhaps transgress even somewhat beyond this offence?
PROMETHEUS: Yes, I caused mortals to cease fearing their death.
CHORUS: Of what sort was the cure that you found for this affliction?
PROMETHEUS: I caused blind hopes to dwell within their breasts.

On the one hand, by stealing fire from the gods and giving it to humankind, Prometheus rebelled against Zeus in the name of human empowerment and the 'noble promise' of human emancipation (Camus 1956: 22). On the other hand, by exalting human mastery of the world and by worshiping a vision of messianic transcendence – delivering humanity from the weakness of mortality and instilling 'blind hopes' of certainty into their hearts and minds – Prometheus undermines the idea of balance. For Camus, however, the myth of Prometheus does not express a simple Manichaean dichotomy between good and evil; rather, Prometheus evokes the inherent ambiguity of revolutionary humanistic politics. The Promethean aspirations of revolutionary humanism embody

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both the promise of a cure for present and future ills, and the menace of ideologies that unleash intellectual, economic and political servitude as the price of 'development' (Camus 1956: 245; 1970: 138–42). Prometheus's gifts are inescapably ambivalent: Prometheus the dissident can all too easily morph into Caesar the despot (Camus 1956: 245). Prometheus, in a word, 'is both just and unjust' (Camus 1970: 310).

Contrary to viewing rebellion teleologically, as the inevitable unfolding of history's underlying processes, Camus suggests that we see it as an expression of generalized human refusal in response to specific situations of oppression and suffering, and thus as an action that is initiated anew in the face of every situationally-unique injustice. There can be no rebellion 'once and for all' that settles the future, but instead continuous rebellions suited to the injustices of every present without finality. Although Camus obviously does not reject the aim of achieving greater freedom and justice (see Crowley 2002; Herzog 2005), he refuses the notion of the 'implacable reign of necessity' as the motivation for political action (Camus 1956: 80). Rather than the goal of attaining the 'end' of history, it is the reality of suffering in particular contexts that motivates rebellions in the present. Rebellion, as Camus envisions it, seizes chances for justice in the here and now rather than deferring justice to an ideal future, the terminal 'what is to come' to which revolutionary judgement and action are subjugated 'in order to obey history' (1956: 79). Camus in effect calls for permanent rebellion as delimited confrontations with specific attempts to deny human freedom and dignity. Consequently, Camus's account of rebellion is best understood as post-teleological insofar as it endorses the conditional character of human judgements and actions which, for that reason, can never be absolute or final. Rebellion, for Camus, contains an inherent measure limiting what can be done in the pursuit of freedom and justice. It does not disallow political projects but renders them provisional, partial and always contestable, subject to an ethical and political imperative of resisting any attempt to project the grand concept of overarching 'progress' onto worldly political commitments. Rebellion thus has its own specific reasons and outcomes, relative to the irreducibly plural spectrum of contexts and periods of time (Camus 1956: 19).

Camus argues, then, that in the absence of transcendent foundations, revolt both 'gives life its value' and constitutes 'evidence of man's sole dignity' (1991: 55, 115). Starting out from the experience of the absurd, individual revolt is an affirmation of perseverance, and thus of enduring

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the challenge of human existence without appeal to the illusions of eternal values and eternal life. Yet it is also simultaneously a refusal to submit to whatever will crush or destroy one's absurd freedom. Such defiance draws upon and rekindles freedom of action, and in so doing dignifies the human condition. Moving to the standpoint of collective resistance in his 1951 work, *The Rebel*, Camus proposes a decidedly non-teleological mode of ethical and political action. Pursuing 'a train of thought which began with ... the idea of the absurd', Camus admits that rebellion must 'find its reasons within itself, since it cannot find them elsewhere' (1956: 5, 10). This conceptual link between the absurd and rebellion discloses the coherence of his post-foundationalist reflections in the first cycle of works with the later post-teleological texts of his second cycle. This connection also helps explain why Camus saw the concept of rebellion as illuminating the existential meaning of values that enable us to make judgements and choices between the morally desirable and undesirable, the politically permitted and forbidden.

How does Camus make the transition from individual revolt to collective rebellion, and thereby arrive at a value judgement to distinguish between right and wrong? For Camus, genuine freedom begins with the absurd, since it liberates the individual from the weight of metaphysical and historical necessity. At the same time, new limits are introduced since the individual is delivered into the responsibility that accompanies freedom of choice and action at each moment. Nonetheless, Camus acknowledges that the problem of nihilism still remains. Where nihilism at the individual level poses the question of suicide – why should *I* live given the absurd? – nihilism at the collective level poses the question of murder – why should *anyone* live? If, as Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov asserts, there is no transcendent scale of values, then seemingly everything is permitted and any choice is justified. Not only would there be no prohibition of murder, but murder could be given logical coherence. This problem is especially acute in modernity, Camus argues, because of the widespread appearance of ideologies that legitimize violence and murder in the name of a future purpose or goal that transcends the lives of those presently living. The question then becomes, does revolt confirm belief in the total absence of values or does it, on the contrary, offer a value to our actions that disallows the deliberate destruction of others?

In answer to this question, Camus charts a course in *The Rebel* between nihilism and historicism by beginning with rebellion as a sensible phenomenon which bespeaks a context of human coexistence resulting

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from our situatedness in the world with others. Given the experience of the absurd, Camus proposes a phenomenology of rebellion that describes what he takes to be the actual human experience of being violated and degraded. Through a critical appropriation of Hegelian thought that sheds its historical-dialectical pretensions, Camus maintains that the master-slave relationship brings to light that in daring to defy the oppression of the master, the rebel urgently 'affirms the existence of a borderline' or experiential limit between the tolerable and the intolerable (1956: 13). The rebel both asserts the value of some aspect of his or her being – prior to any theoretical formulation of systematic morality – and condemns any assault on this aspect of self beyond the limit of the tolerable; the rebel thus 'says yes and no simultaneously' (1956: 13). More importantly, however, the rebel's simultaneous affirmation and rejection is directed not only at being enslaved individually, but at 'the condition of slavery' more generally (1956: 14). Every act of rebellion thus contains within it a relative judgement of a particular situation that directs upon it a concretely universal concern for mutual recognition of the freedom and equality of others. Rebellion is an appeal for reciprocal recognition of a common right not to be subjected to conditions of exploitation and oppression, which expresses the sense of 'a dignity common to all men' that 'must always be defended' (1956: 18–19). In this way the root causes of the rebel's experience of solidarity with others in defence of human dignity builds upon the absurdist conclusion that because for each of us 'human life is the only necessary good' it hence 'becomes good for all men' (1956: 6, 10).

Rebellion thus affirms the positive value of life for all persons and ascribes to others a right to rebel in rejecting the injustices of the world without, however, condemning the world itself. From this Camus concludes that through rebellion the tyranny of the 'either/or' in the master-slave relationship is reconstituted as an emancipatory 'neither/nor' – neither master nor slave – which can serve as a basis for judging the limits that action must establish for itself. This concurrent expression of both refusal and assent, both 'yes' and 'no', constitutes a balance or tension – what Camus calls 'measure' and portrays as the figure of Nemesis (Camus 1991: 187) – that animates the continual interrogation of everyday ethics and politics. Camus argues that the joint experience of the limit between the tolerable and intolerable, keyed to our physical integrity and recognition of our autonomous status, constitutes the socially fashioned minimum of a broadly shared meaning of what

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makes for a properly human existence. Yet the condition of the absurd always shrouds such meaning in ambiguity, leaving it open to plural and sometimes clashing interpretations. This view therefore sets aside any assertions of transcendent law, nature and history, but it does provide the existential ground for dialogue, debate and critique about the meaning of the human condition, capable of fostering both differing views and at least some minimal shared beliefs on ethical and political matters across diverse communities.

From revolt to the critique of revolution

Rebellion possesses a dual aspect through which the individual perceives a connection with others, however tentative: on one hand, denunciation of a given situation that causes anyone suffering, degradation and humiliation and, on the other, affirmation of a common integrity and dignity that should be preserved. In this way rebellion is an expression of two initial values conjoined as a limit condition: on one side, that which is acceptable in human existence, and on the other side, that which is unacceptable. Rebellion simultaneously protests against unjust circumstances, and asserts a right to exist free from oppression and deprivation. However, the experiential awareness and affirmation of these shared values whose validity transcends the single individual does not guarantee their implementation nor ensure their realization. As an incessant movement of contestation and struggle, rebellion occupies a field of tension that continually tests and occasionally transgresses the limits between affirmation and negation, creation and destruction. Much of *The Rebel* is preoccupied with the ways in which revolt and revolution are linked to the effort to counterbalance these two aspects inherent to rebellion, an effort that can come terribly and tragically unbalanced.

In *The Rebel*, Camus describes this ongoing, tension-filled movement of rebellion in terms of the historical motivations for and the implications of revolt and revolution, in order to draw out the similarities and differences between them. Beyond that, however, he endeavours to show that modernity is characterized by increasingly comprehensive deviations from the spirit of revolt, leading him to condemn revolutionary extremism. Out of the void left by the radical break between modern society and the classical and medieval worldviews, potent ideologies have emerged that embody a new faith in political power to change

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and improve the world to the point of surmounting injustice, and consequently the absurdity of the human condition, completely and definitively. The modern world therefore presents abundant evidence of a dangerous paradox: everywhere, individuals and groups have come to value rebellious protest against oppression in defence of their rights and liberties, but the further ambition to break free from all limitations of the existential, worldly human condition utilizing any means possible has sanctioned the most extensive injustices in human history.

Camus's account traces the conceptual and political development of two distinct modes of the phenomenon of rebellion in modernity: metaphysical and historical. Metaphysical rebellion is defined by Camus as 'the movement by which man protests against his condition and against the whole of creation' (1956: 23). Camus's previous description of revolt in terms of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, characterized as an interpersonal struggle for mutual freedom and equality, here takes the form of a confrontation between two impersonal and vastly unequal adversaries. The metaphysical rebel protests not only against the conditions that define and delimit human existence but, by implication, against the supposed creator of those conditions as well. This form of insurrection refuses to accept an order of being that is full of misery, frustration and death – an order that is in fact chaotic and disorderly – and rejects the very notion of a sovereign God that could establish such an abject reality. In rejecting the human predicament, metaphysical rebellion also thereby affirms a positive value judgement, namely, the claim for justice, order and unity. Yet a perilous conflation is inherent in this claim. The metaphysical rebel begins by condemning the injustices and suffering to which innocent human beings are subjected in their daily lives, and ends by denouncing the universe itself as the ultimate source of the evils to which humanity must submit. Thus metaphysical rebellion presupposes that there is and indeed should be a definitive reason for the order of things, a supreme entity responsible for creation, and a power capable of completing and perfecting all that exists. Metaphysical rebellion believes, in other words, that the absurd, or an indifferent universe, is an anomaly amenable to correction, if only the source of that anomaly can be conquered. In short, at the same moment that one supreme power is denied, another is deified in its place. What began as human rebellion, writes Camus, 'ends in metaphysical revolution' (1956: 25).

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In Camus's interpretation, metaphysical rebellion first assumed the form of an individual protest against misfortune and mortality, a solitary cry of discontent that one is personally offended by 'a cruel and capricious divinity' (1956: 33). Romanticism exemplifies this approach where revolt is animated solely by a concern for the grandeur of one's own life, and 'heroic' individualists dream of escaping the confines of established authority through the passionate exertion of imagination. The Marquis de Sade, for instance, produced a literature from the solitude of his prison cell that exalts spiritual freedom and unappeasable physical yearning, by means of a sacrilegious debauchery that rejects the entirety of established society. Sade pursued a 'monstrous dream of revenge' against God and the universe (Camus 1956: 36), which amounted to a will to destroy the system of morality, and with it the guilty human being as well, created in the image of God. In the name of unbridled freedom, Sade sanctioned crimes of passion in a battle to avenge the crimes of morality. At the extreme, then, Sade's vision unleashed a 'forbidden' logic that equated liberation with degradation, and power with murder. In seeking the greatest degree of destruction possible, Sade's work also initiated a transition whereby metaphysical revolt began to speak on behalf of a universal community – that of an abstract humanity portrayed as deceived and repudiated by an indefensible, and ultimately dethroned God.

This last claim suggests that, in Camus's view, first Dostoevsky and then Nietzsche gave expression to the passage from metaphysical rebellion – the refusal to approve conditions leading to suffering and death – to metaphysical revolution – the elevation of man into the role of supreme being who claims the right to create or destroy. According to Camus (1991: 110), Dostoevsky attributes the disenchantment and alienation of modern society to the rejection of foundational, religious values that bind individuals together in a meaningful community. The absence of such guiding principles was, for Dostoevsky, tantamount to the loss of any external reason for living. This provided an opening for revolutionary movements committed to the progressive power of reason to attempt to fill the moral vacuum with their own absolute principles of universal emancipation. The confrontation between the metaphysical problem of nihilism and the moral-political problem of violence is foreshadowed in Dostoevsky's novels. In *The Devils* (*The Possessed*), which Camus regarded as one of the 'four or five supreme works' in all of literature (Todd 1997: 396), the character Shigalyov (Chigalev) embodies the revolutionaries'

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modernist faith in their ability to direct the course of history towards the realization of an objectively meaningful future:

> Having devoted all my energies to the study of the social organization of the society of the future which is to replace our present one, I have come to the conclusion that all the inventors of social systems, from the ancient times to our present year, have been dreamers, story-tellers, fools who contradicted themselves and had no idea of natural science or the strange animal called man.... But as the future form of society is of the utmost importance now that we at last are all ready to act, I am submitting to you my own system of the world organization so as to make any further thinking unnecessary. (Dostoyevsky 1971: 404)

The significance of this worldview is summed up by Camus in a 1951 entry to his *Carnets*: 'Dostoevsky's thesis: The same paths that lead the individual to crime lead the society to revolution' (2008c: 94). Although Camus agrees with Dostoevsky's diagnosis that the rebellious pursuit for an affirmative meaning to life gradually mutated into the mad impulse to impose absolute truth upon the world, bringing with it ideologies susceptible to extremes of violence, he deeply disagrees with his vision of a redemptive return to Christian metaphysics. For Dostoevsky, only the symbol of Christ's love is capable of placing reliable limits on the pursuit of justice and delivering salvation to a fallen humanity, as expressed through the parable of the Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov* (Camus 1956: 59–61). Camus, in contrast, believes that in choosing to live, one simply affirms in practice that life itself is an earthly ground for the existence of common, positive value, without the need to cloak it in religious language.

According to Camus, the idea that modernity remains under the sway of the illusion of God is traceable back to Nietzsche, and to the condition of 'positive' nihilism that he inaugurated. For Nietzsche, it is axiomatic that 'God no longer exists and is no longer responsible for our existence', and consequently 'man must resolve to act, in order to exist' (Camus 1956: 67). Camus's work is very close to Nietzsche's philosophy – Nietzsche, like Camus, always proclaimed loyalty to the earth – and on many occasions in his journals he describes his readings of Nietzsche as expanding his personal and intellectual spirit. Yet Camus's admiration for Nietzsche was not unqualified, and the discussion in *The Rebel* strikes the most strongly critical note (while at the same time defending Nietzsche against the Nazi misappropriation of his name). The reason why Nietzsche's thought is so decisive for metaphysical rebellion is that

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with it, in Camus's view, nihilism for the first time becomes conscious philosophically. What had once silently stirred behind the scenes of the history of philosophy now exploded into the open. Nietzsche wrote with a relentless determination to expose every trace of nihilism hiding in the dark corners of modern society and the innermost recesses of 'modern man'. Like Dostoevsky before him, Nietzsche understood that nihilism was a cancer destroying society from within. For Nietzsche, however, the only cure possible was radical: to accelerate the destructive process to the point that, when the old world and its values had disappeared, a new world with new values could then appear. Only total destruction without moral constraints – beyond good and evil – can pave the way to genuine freedom to create life anew. Crucially, then, Nietzsche transforms the relationship between nihilism and rebellion. Nihilism is no longer merely an impotent contempt and despair, but a restorative act of total affirmation.

Nietzsche was able to place metaphysical rebellion on its most revolutionary footing by turning around the problem of meaninglessness and violence. Instead of asking how the value of life and the pain of death form a contradiction, Nietzsche asks why pain should not be equivalent to happiness. He contends that happiness and suffering must be accepted as comparable manifestations of life within the external flux of a universe without direction or purpose. Both phenomena embody a primordial 'will to power', meaning a will to affirm life as it is, however intolerable or unacceptable it may have seemed according to the previous scale of values. In this philosophy, the claim that rebellion is incessant resistance against reality is replaced by the belief that rebellion is unremitting submission to the inevitable (Camus 1956: 72–3). Nietzsche's significance thus derives from the fact that, in accepting everything, rebellion succeeds precisely by surrendering its own *raison d'être*. Freedom, in other words, is servitude – but to the cosmic law of eternal return rather than to the decadent law of mortal man. Therefore, where Sade's rebellion consisted of saying no to everything, and forgot its original affirmation of creative freedom, Nietzsche's consisted of saying yes to everything, and forgot its original disavowal of the world in its present state. The end result is the same in that they express 'two ways of consenting to murder' (Camus 1956: 76).

The proliferating expression of metaphysical rebellion that comes to a head with Nietzsche has, Camus tells us, its parallels within historical rebellion. Indeed, given social and political developments within

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modernity, in particular the growth of highly ideological mass movements nourished by the experiences of commodity capitalism, imperialism and total war, historical rebellion can be seen as the logical successor of metaphysical rebellion. But where metaphysical rebellion moves on an abstract philosophical plane, historical rebellion aspires to build the practical instruments needed to root out and concretely correct the misery of the world. It aspires, in other words, to 'build a Church' worthy of the deification of 'Man' in the wake of the death of God (Camus 1956: 103). This new mode of revolt therefore represents a transformation of the rebellious spirit into the material intervention in and determination of the course of history itself. It is a call to action and not merely imagination. Nonetheless, at the most basic level metaphysical and historical rebellion share a common motivation, namely, longing for a rational justification for whatever suffering exists on earth:

> Human insurrection, in its exalted and tragic forms, is only, and can only be, a prolonged protest against death, a violent accusation against the universal death penalty. ... The rebel does not ask for life, but for reasons for living. He rejects the consequences implied by death. If nothing lasts, then nothing is justified; everything that dies is deprived of meaning. To fight against death amounts to claiming that life has a meaning, to fighting for order and for unity. ... In the eyes of the rebel, what is missing from the misery of the world, as well as from its moments of happiness, is some principle by which they can be explained. (Camus 1956: 100–1)

Historical rebellion takes up the challenge of remaking the world, in order both to oppose unjustifiable suffering and to supply 'some principle' that henceforth explains the continuation of whatever suffering remains in the world. In historical terms the rebel is caught in a dilemma: the presence of evil in the midst of humanity is the key reason for insurrection, yet in practical terms the complete eradication of evil is impossible. Consequently, revolts that espouse the future-oriented doctrines of modernity typically are predicated on a distinction between suffering that is *unjustifiable* and suffering that is *justifiable*, between a 'greater' evil that can be fought by means of a 'lesser' evil. Camus believes that many modern revolutionaries suppose they can attain rational and conclusive truths about specific practical ends, like those in science, which can be used to guide the means purportedly needed to realize those ends. Rebels, for Camus, acknowledge a line between what is acceptable and unacceptable and refuse to cross it; they find their justification, in other words, internal to the experience of rebellion itself and thus subject to its

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limitations. Revolutionaries differ from rebels in claiming that the practice of insurrection must be unrestricted and that present moral lines – including the distinction between guilt and innocence – are merely illusory; they believe that any means must be at their disposal because these are justified in advance by the external vision of a better future. From this perspective, where immediate experience is denigrated as a mere point on the historical trajectory, murder today is logically justifiable as an efficacious means to the realization of the goal of some future liberation. Camus's point is not that rebellion must eschew the transition to political practice. He holds, rather, that rebellion must remain steadfast in its resistance to all acts that impermissibly oppress others, irrespective of whether such acts are allegedly 'good' for the march of history.

Revolutionary movements informed by teleological conceptions of history are, in Camus's critique, more inclined to forget the injustices of current reality because of their boundless enthusiasm for brighter ideals of future self and society. This explains, for example, his criticisms of Hegel and Marx. For Hegel, social and moral evil is manifest in the very process of reality as the negation of the good. World history – or as Hegel puts it, the 'slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of States, and the virtue of individuals have been victimized' (2004: 21) – unfolds in large part through disease, disasters, massacre, slavery, war, and other seemingly unintelligible atrocities that appear to overwhelm the good, the true and the beautiful. Yet Hegel also asserts that evil exists only as a moment within the dialectical movement of universal reason, which reaches its completeness or unity through the reconciliation of good and evil in the rational and teleological self-becoming of spirit (*Geist*), and therefore in a superior positivity. Evil, in other words, is the momentarily destructive yet ultimately positive fuel that drives the motor of historical progress. In this way, Hegel's theodical philosophy of history dissolves evil into a kind of 'collateral damage' that guarantees the inevitably progressive triumph of reason – no matter who must be dragged along. Hegel thus coupled his vision to the milestone of the French Revolution, which he saw as a step on the way to the 'concrete universal' of humanity. From the seeds of the Jacobin Reign of Terror sprang the Rights of Man (Camus 1956: 133). According to Camus, for Hegel the deification of man is interchangeable with the deification of history, on the belief that the totality of history is more amenable to rational explanation than transitory experience. Through the progressive

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unfolding of history all darkness is illuminated, every event is justified, and the world itself is transfigured from something absurd into something meaningful. Moreover, the rational truths and values of the 'end of history' then become more real than what occurs in present circumstances. As Camus points out, this approach 'justifies every ideological encroachment upon reality' (1956: 135).

In telling the story of historical rebellion, Camus claims that the 'ideological encroachment upon reality' appeared most prominently in the thought of Karl Marx. Although Camus realizes that the Marxist tradition did not lead inevitably to twentieth century totalitarianism, he argues that its insistence on the necessity of consolidated revolutionary power to destroy the inherent contradictions in bourgeois society did exert a formative influence on the totalitarian movements of the right and left, and on the association of revolutionary politics with the capacity to achieve a totality of long-range goals. For Camus, Marx's central theoretical innovation was to transform the Hegelian dialectic away from the evolution of spirit towards the evolution of matter. All of historical reality is fundamentally defined in Marxist terms by economic activity and its progressive development. Because cultural and political institutions are understood as forms determined by the structural means of production, transformation of the social order as a whole is predicated on changing the underlying material order. Yet Camus also points out that Marx's materialism is 'impure', because the transformation of material reality is itself dependent upon the exertion of human will (1956: 198). The will is the means by which humanity can control, master and manipulate reality; it is the spring for revolutionary victory.

With Marx, the revolutionary is confirmed as both agent and author of history, and history becomes the only intelligible path to salvation for all of humanity. On the whole, Camus suggests, modern revolution assumes the guise of a kind of cyclical rotation, with one religion promising deliverance replacing another: man takes the place of God, and world history takes the place of divine creation. Yet this secular religion becomes the site of a perfectionism that eluded even God: human suffering, killing and dying are not simply symptoms of an irremediable fallen condition, but curative catalysts for the advent of heaven on earth. Similarly, rebellious thought is transmuted into prophetic ideology that renders all immediate sacrifice both comprehensible and necessary under the sign of a future value. The core catechism of this revolutionary faith is the notion that the end always justifies the means. Inasmuch as

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the rationalization of violence is at the service of a historical mission, then everything involved in the revolution can be imposed and justified in the name of a closed model of a future society – the burning of heretical dissidents begets domination of the earth, which in turn begets the kingdom of man. Such militant logic becomes all the more imperative the more that historical progress is deemed to be 'going too slowly' (Camus 1956: 217). From this point of view, according to Camus, modern revolutionary doctrine unwittingly reaches its own limit – embodied in the twentieth century's authoritarian dictatorships and concentration camps – and collapses into contemporary nihilism: 'pure movement that aims at denying everything which is not itself' (1956: 224).

Towards an ethics of measure

For Camus, the process of modern revolutionary thought introduced a deviation from the basis and aims of revolt. Wanting to make determinate justice reign over a deified humanity, it consecrated an absolute value in the form of a transcendent historical process. The failure to set any limits to what is either possible or permissible is the gravest political problem of modernity because, Camus writes, the 'logic of history, from the moment that it is totally accepted, gradually leads it, against its most passionate convictions, to mutilate man more and more and to transform itself into objective crime' (1956: 246). Nonetheless, despite Camus's critique of the development of the modern revolutionary framework, it is a mistake to view him as mounting a wholesale denunciation of revolution as such, or of rejecting the noble emancipatory aspirations of many modern revolutionaries. In fact, he argues that revolt and revolution belong together in a relationship of irresolvable tension, joined together at the limit where rebellion relies upon both experiences in order to be nourished and inspired. Revolt is grounded in the immediacy of lived experience and is characterized as an oppositional demand of the will to live on the part of the individual who suffers from being subjugated. The rebel's negative rejection of subjugating powers and degrading conditions opens up space for the positive affirmation of a life that is properly human, yet this awareness is neither predicated upon nor formulated as a formal system of morality. Revolution, by contrast, takes up the rebel's demand for a human existence driven by a particular experience or situation and seeks to transform it into a generalized movement that takes the form

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of a system of thought and corresponding rules of practice. Revolution equates the oppression and humiliation of specific individuals with the oppression and humiliation suffered by society at large. According to Camus, the positive force of opposition and resistance engendered in revolt can end in the 'extremity of solitude' and 'destruction', if not counterbalanced by the forms of reciprocity and co-responsibility identified with revolutionary organization. Similarly, the positive force of collective solidarity to overcoming both individual and group oppression can end in the 'nihilism of efficacy' and 'terror', if not counterbalanced by the freedom and anti-authoritarianism identified with the spontaneity of revolt (Camus 2004: 210).

Revolt and revolution therefore function as mutually implicative limit conditions, and each stands in a constitutive relation of critique to the other by posing the question: Which limits are necessary and which may be transgressed? For Camus, this question must be posed perpetually because the contradictory tendencies of revolt and revolution cannot be entirely resolved or finally overcome. The idea of rebellion contains both attitudes at once, and its strength lies in holding on to both poles of this non-dialectical antithesis. Indeed, the 'severe' yet 'fruitful' tension between revolt and revolution can be seen as the fundamental basis of Camus's political outlook (Camus 2004: 212–13). Camus thought that the modern revolutionary tradition sought to confront the hypocrisy of a society that celebrates yet also suppresses freedom and equality; but by pinning its faith on a set of doctrines deemed to be rationally tied to the authority of historical progress it prepares the ground for abolishing all limits in the quest for absolute liberation. Whenever revolutionary movements have tried to define political transformation in terms of historical necessity, they have done so by placing revolt under suspicion – denouncing its contingency and unpredictability, closing the spontaneous openings it offers – and setting up revolution as the exclusively legitimate mode of rebellion. Not only this, but Camus also finds that modern revolutionary doctrines become preoccupied by the notion of imposing meaning upon the world in terms of the higher purpose of human progress, which purportedly can be known objectively and to which all social and political goals must be subordinated. In so doing, however, they foster a thoroughly instrumental view of human being, whose value lies in contributing to the fulfilment of that single, overriding purpose. The desire for unrestricted progress simultaneously becomes the desire for unrestricted power. Revolution in this sense

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becomes the practical spirit of modern nihilism. It is this misuse of revolt in the struggle against oppression in modernity that Camus sees as most destructive of the idea of rebellion and most conducive to violence and terror. 'If we give up our capacity to reject', Camus writes, 'our consent becomes unreasonable, and without counterbalance, history becomes servitude' (2004: 215).

Camus thus aims to keep alive the critical spirit of revolt and not simply to reject or abandon the idea of revolution. Because of this, he disrupts the vocabulary of historical necessity that is commonly used to justify exceeding the limits, moral and political, of what is permissible in a specifically human existence. He also stresses two further ideas – human nature and measure – inspired by classical Greek thought, which are meant to renew commitment to the vital tendencies of rebellion. Camus, as we have seen, claims that historicism was unknown to the Greeks. We have also seen that he conceives of rebellion as an affirmation of the basic goodness of life for all persons. Camus's post-foundationalist sensibility eschews, on one hand, reliance upon metaphysical or religious ideals to provide a secure transcendent source for this value and, on the other, cynical reversion to apathy, pessimism and nihilism. Instead, Camus takes lived experience and facticity as his point of departure and works out a kind of phenomenology to try to find some ground for everyday ethics, some existential basis upon which to defend and create positive values that cuts a path between foundationalism and historicism. Beginning with the phenomenal reality of rebellion, Camus speaks of it as an impulse that is continually on the verge of disclosing an objective precondition for rebellion, namely, existence itself. The act of rebellion is a choice to engage in resistance made possible by human existence; human existence is the 'given', in other words, which forms the basis for that rebellion and from which it takes its meaning. For this reason, Camus argues, rebellion 'reveals the part of man which must always be defended', something 'permanent in oneself worth preserving' (1956: 20, 16). Without this 'something', why would anyone rebel and how could we account for rebellion's continual recurrence across vastly different periods and situations? Viewed in this light, he says, the analysis of rebellion 'leads at least to the suspicion that, contrary to the postulates of contemporary thought, a human nature does exist, as the Greeks believed' (1956: 16).

With this Greek inflection to his phenomenology of lived experience, however, Camus's conception of human nature describes the facticity of

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human existence rather than a transcendent essence. For Camus, facticity refers not only to the social and material conditions of a pre-existing world into which we are thrown, but also to the embodied consciousness or subjective being from which the self is constituted, yet which is not of our choosing. The mutable surface aspects of the self – language, race, gender, culture, class status – presuppose some given aspect of our being that is itself untouchable and inviolable. If the entirety of our being was indeed capable of being produced solely by human activity, then the last remaining vestige of human integrity or dignity would be effectively neutralized by historicism and nihilism. According to the logic of historicism, since the world is thoroughly historical, so too is the human being that operates within it. When conjoined to modernist revolutionary doctrine, historicism releases humanity from the limits of any given nature. Yet at the same time, Camus suggests, it also dissolves the basis for meaningful and responsible rebellion. If humans have no nature of any kind, then conceivably they can be made and remade in every possible way, and those who are being 'built' by others have no grounds for either consenting or dissenting to their fabrication; they are quite literally nothing independently of the outcome of a process of fabrication (itself determined teleologically in accordance with a predetermined ideological end).[1] Although historicism opens up the dream of ever-new dimensions of human freedom, it ends in the nightmare of a total power imposed on life.

Not surprisingly, Camus contends that the historicist way of defining humanity as pure plasticity misses the essential question of revolt, the question of what it is that makes innumerable individuals refuse and resist any attempt to reduce them to mere objects or ideals. Yet even on this score, Camus remains attuned to the ambiguity of the notion of human nature today. We are entitled to the 'suspicion' that human nature exists, but we should not conflate this with a 'theoretical confidence' which is able to see through the mists of phenomenal reality in order to decipher with certainty an immaterial, static and uncomplicated essence divorced from the concrete determinations of existence (Camus 1956: 18). Thus, for Camus, the validity of the notion of human nature is not proven, but it is imputed or presupposed; existence implies both being and becoming. In acknowledging that there is something given as a condition for the possibility of experience and not purely invented in human being, rebellion discloses some clues about the general existence of a human nature that otherwise cannot be definitively defined. Further,

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affirmation of human nature rests on the line between the universal and the particular. It is partly universal because it is a characteristic feature of human beings throughout time, which forms a 'common ground where all men ... have a natural community' (Camus 1956: 281). It is also partly particular because it concerns the unique and inherently situated needs, abilities and beliefs of differentiated individuals. Another way to put this is that Camus's appeal to human nature is meant to single out a constant condition of possibility for every particular lived experience of rebellion. Whether or not there is a human nature can never be known indubitably, therefore, but something like it can be described negatively through the excesses and transgressions that violate our integrity. Perhaps most significant of all, by reference to it, we can circumscribe a primary value or dignity from which to impart certain limits to our actions (Camus 1956: 281).

The revolutionary abandonment of any sense of human nature that gives meaning to revolt, and thereby to a radical unbalancing of rebellion, leads Camus also to embrace the notion of measure (*mesure*). 'Rebellion', he declares, 'at the same time that it suggests a nature common to all men, brings to light the measure and the limit which are the very principle of this nature' (1956: 294). Measure and limit are interconnected terms for Camus. Where 'limit' refers to the boundary between both poles of a non-dialectical antithesis or contradiction, such as the 'yes' and 'no' of rebellion, 'measure' refers to the appropriate balance, harmony or proportion struck between the two poles (a notion that echoes the Greek concept of *sophrosyne*). Accordingly, measure has a stronger prescriptive connotation than the more descriptive sense of limit. Camus thus emphasizes that failure to achieve *mesure* results in *démesure* or 'excess' (disproportion, disequilibrium), which destroys the situations or fields of tension upon which human existence and therefore rebellion depends. Given this ramification, it is important to search for ways of remaining faithful both to the rebellious impulse and to the need for limits. The challenge here is that the human condition is characterized by constant vacillations between two poles, and thus its limits vary relative to situation or context. According to Camus, however, ethics and politics arise from and must remain rooted in this conditional ground insofar as political action and political responsibility originate as interrelated polarities in human experience. Rather than fixing ourselves completely to one of two poles, which is exactly what we attempt to do in the throes of extremism, by way of measure we voluntarily endeavour to

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establish a fragile equilibrium or balance that must of necessity remain approximately – that comes as near or approaches as closely as possible (*proximus*) – halfway between them (Camus 1956: 290; 2004: 213–16). Camus describes this type of 'intermediate reasoning', embodied 'in an active consent to the relative' where 'contradictions may exist and thrive', as a mode of 'thought at the meridian' (1956: 279, 290; 2004: 216). This is a process of thinking that remains situated in the 'erratic arc' or relational measure between two poles and which, through the tension of their interaction, becomes imbued with the features of both. Thought at the meridian transposes the dichotomy of life into action that gives rise to provisionally stable ethical relations and political arrangements which serve to limit, and thereby to respect and regenerate, the very rebellious freedom from which they originate (Camus 1956: 294).

Thought at the meridian is, we might say, a measure of equality, whereas excess is a kind of 'immoderate' thought that finds no other equal. Although the ethics of measure cannot provide a formal system of rules and fixed guidelines by which to determine unequivocally the most appropriate course of action in all circumstances, it does disclose a basic 'law of moderation' that 'extends to all the contradictions of rebellious thought' (Camus 1956: 295). The law of moderation teaches through creative example and through never-ending trial and error, which stimulates the imaginative capacity to envision as many alternative positions as possible in order to search for the optimal balance for a given situation. But arriving at balanced political decisions and actions requires revolving around the limit between contending viewpoints as well as the primary limit of human nature. Without an appeal to these limits, one loses one's balance, becomes blind to other possibilities and other voices, and this lack of imagination may then prove fatal. Here the ethics of measure is the stuff of tragedy, staged in the conflict between freedom and necessity, imagination and rationality, where limits serve as the liminal crossroads intersecting different choices and actions. On this point Camus discerns a recurrent existential motif in the classical Greek concern with the problem of measure, 'symbolized by Nemesis, the goddess of moderation and the implacable enemy of the immoderate' (1956: 296). In Greek myth, Nemesis is the goddess who maintains equilibrium in human affairs by distributing or dealing out both happiness and suffering, ensuring that neither one becomes too frequent or excessive. As 'dispenser of what is due' (*némein*), she further personifies inescapable retribution, avenging those who recklessly pursue excess

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and upset the world's balance through their hubristic disregard of limits, thereby restoring just measure or equilibrium (Smith 1844: 1152). As Camus puts it in his *Notebooks*: 'Nemesis – the goddess of measure. All those who have overstepped the limit will be pitilessly destroyed' (2010b: 156). This is why, Camus writes,

> the chorus in classical tragedies generally advises prudence. For the chorus knows that up to a certain limit everyone is right and that the person who, from blindness or passion, oversteps this limit is heading for catastrophe if he persists in his desire to assert a right he thinks he alone possesses. The constant theme of classical tragedy, therefore, is the limit that must not be transgressed. On either side of this limit equally legitimate forces meet in quivering and endless confrontation. To make a mistake about this limit, to try to destroy the balance, is to perish. (Camus 1970: 301–2)

Camus in effect proposes that the modern Promethean will to transgress the ultimate limit of mortality vis-à-vis the revolutionary culmination of the historical process increases the chances that crimes against humanity will be committed with apparent impunity. The impetus to the deification of history undermines humanity's mortal condition and, with it, the reason for valuing human dignity. Yet as a pivotal experience of defending something which deserves to be saved from perishing – that vital aspect of human being which is shared in common with others – rebellion must be cast in a different light dispensed by Nemesis. In an age of ideological extremism, Camus suggests, Prometheus must be counterpoised by Nemesis and rebellion must find 'its equilibrium through them' (1956: 301).

Throughout *The Rebel*, then, Camus makes it clear that in all spheres of political coexistence the question of limits and measure assumes a fundamental significance in three ways: first, in terms of how to prevent rebellion from undoing itself with the very means it employs, how to prevent it from becoming self-destructive as it attempts to protest against threats to the integrity and dignity of self and others; second, in terms of how to keep rebellion from assenting too much to life, how to keep it from accepting virtually any condition such that its refusals become inadequate or impotent in the face of threats to dignity and integrity; and third, how to avoid rebellion from descending into comprehensive metaphysical or teleological assertions that justify in advance certain actions in the name of some abstract final ends, how to prevent it being reduced to the inevitable unfolding of reason or history's underlying processes, or ascribed to the totalizing dictates of deterministic 'necessity'. These

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post-foundational, post-teleological variations on the question of limits and measure are, for Camus, indispensable to any modern ethics and politics that strives to respond positively to oppression and injustice, without themselves adding 'to the injustice of the human condition' (1956: 285). They should thus remain at the heart of all rebellious thought that uncompromisingly refuses to betray itself, even as balance or equilibrium can never be completely attained.

Conclusion

Camus's argument in *The Rebel* traces the dark side of modernity and takes an exceptionally critical view of revolutionary thinking that fetishizes an abstract historical process presumed to be inescapably progressive. Writing in the shadows of twentieth century revolutionary projects that led to unimaginable cruelty, Camus aims to show that limited revolt rather than total revolution is the largely forgotten crucible of the rebellious impulse. While the modern revolutionary attitude originated in rejection of one supreme power that unacceptably oppresses and humiliates, by the twentieth century it ultimately ended up endorsing another supreme power – the prophets of a brave new world – that promised to put an end to suffering on earth no matter the cost. A power regarded as illegitimate relative to a specific context and time was then regarded as legitimate when translated into an abstract, absolute principle. Camus's assumption is that we need to understand and revitalize the ancient Greek conception of the non-teleological temporality of existence that has natural and not only social limits, in order to make sense out of the experience of rebellion. The ebb and flow of the endless cycle of time stands, he believes, in stark contrast to the smooth edifice of linear 'History'. This view also helps to explain Camus's reasons for holding an ethics of measure in such high esteem, if rebellion could be liberated from the modernist blackmail of historicism and nihilism according to which one must be for everything or nothing. Rebellion, for Camus, is Janus-faced; the practice of revolution also requires the exercise of revolt, and vice versa. If revolutionary practice builds coalitions and solidarity between diverse people, then revolt counters its totalizing and repressive tendencies. And if revolt is the intensifying force of individual dissent and refusal to submit that empowers socio-political struggle, then revolution counters its rupturing and atomizing tendencies. Rebellion

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thus occupies the paradoxical 'limit where the two confront each other in their greatest tension' (Camus 2004: 214; 1956: 301), and creates itself within the process of aiming for a measure that may never be fully or finally achievable. Consequently, rebellion must be construed as an absurd tension midway – at the meridian – between hope and despair ceaselessly played out in a variety of contexts, which both animates and limits our political coexistence.

Note

1 Camus distances himself from the label of existentialism for similar reasons. He was critical, for instance, of Sartre's maxim that 'existence precedes essence'. In *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre argues that human beings are 'nothing more than the sum of [their] actions' (2007: 37). For Camus, the emptiness of Sartre's existentialist subject means that it lacks a centre of reference for the ethics and politics of rebellion, and thereby comes dangerously close to nihilism.

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4
Politics and the Limits of Violence

Abstract: *This chapter examines Camus's position on the relationship between politics and violence in general, and on political violence in the form of revolutionary insurgency, wars of liberation, torture and terrorism in particular. Hayden first outlines the controversial Camus-Sartre polemic in order to take up the question of political action and its relationship to violence and history. He then considers how Camus's insistence that the means-ends relation remains inseparable from the responsibility of judgement and choice sustains his disavowal of terrorism and torture, with a particular focus on the Algerian war of independence. In this way, the chapter also shows how violence serves as a limit-situation for the political. The chapter concludes by considering Camus's opposition to capital punishment and nuclear weapons as instances where the inscription of disproportionate violence within the authoritative institutions of the state engenders political conditions that degrade human freedom.*

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The previous chapter examined Camus's account of rebellion as individual and collective endeavours to protest against violations of human nature (or humanity), and to protect the limits of human integrity and dignity. Because these endeavours have ethical and political effects on the existence of self and others, the question of measure must figure prominently in our choices and actions. This chapter examines more closely Camus's position on the relationship between politics and violence in general, and on political violence in the form of revolutionary insurgency, wars of liberation, torture and terrorism in particular. When Camus published *L'Homme révolté* in 1951, his critical ethics of rebellion was at odds with the mainstream political ideologies of the time, on both the left and right, prompting a bitter public polemic with Sartre regarding the role of violence in political life. I begin with a sketch of the controversial Camus-Sartre polemic in order to take up the question of political action and its relationship to violence and history. I then turn to how Camus's insistence on the integrity of means and ends as inseparable from the responsibility of judgement and choice sustains his disavowal of terrorism and torture, with a particular focus on the Algerian war of independence. The chapter concludes by considering Camus's opposition to capital punishment and nuclear weapons as instances where the inscription of disproportionate violence within the authoritative institutions of the state engenders political conditions that not only degrade human freedom and innocence but condemn all of humanity to living under the spectre of universal death.

Murderous times

In any assessment of Camus's political thought and practical engagements, one event unquestionably overshadows all others: the break with Jean-Paul Sartre. And, in contextual terms, one question lies at the heart of their confrontation: is violence resulting in murder a legitimate instrument of politics? The question of generalized violence permeated the immediate post-war environment because of two key political phenomena of the time: totalitarianism and communism. Beneath their immediate political differences, Camus detected that both ideological movements had a penchant for exclusive control of the label and process of revolutionary struggle, and both aimed to set in motion total revolution under the sign of a grand narrative of history with a single meaning.

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As Camus maintains in *The Rebel*, the fundamental problem posed by these two movements surpasses the 'matter of fact' violence involved overtly or covertly in most social orders – itself regrettable and often terrible – and rises to the level of 'rational' or 'logical' murder. At this level, power, force and violence are rooted in universal 'truths' of some sort, by which they are transmuted into an expression of some higher principle or predefined absolute. Here, the logic Camus describes serves to disguise violence by giving it an abstract form and, at the same time, to legitimize its ubiquitous, premeditated use as an instrument serving a larger political end. Camus finds the *logical* operation of violence to be so perilous because it introduces a boundless imperative into the realm of human affairs; if politics is thought to be at the service of a transcendent truth that *a priori* authorizes wielding violence on its behalf, then violence becomes not only inescapable but mandatory. Portrayed as a matter of historical necessity rather than moral choice, mass political murder loses the character of deplorable criminality and assumes the mantle of progressive social transformation. Human suffering today is justified as the price of progress tomorrow.

The response by Sartre and Francis Jeanson to Camus's worry about the enthusiastic adoption of a politics of violence by the left as well as the right was, as with the violence itself, marked by extremes. Jeanson, Sartre's colleague and secretary at *Les Temps modernes* – the influential journal established by Sartre, with Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, as a vehicle devoted to producing what Sartre termed *littérature engagée* ('engaged literature' created to serve socially useful ends) – published a scathing review of *The Rebel* in the May 1952 edition of the journal. The title of Jeanson's review, 'Albert Camus ou l'âme révoltée', is an ironic homophone that plays on the title of Camus's book, *L'Homme révolté*, in order to imply that Camus is a 'beautiful soul'. The term 'beautiful soul' evokes Hegel's criticism of German romanticism in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where he mocks the self-centred attitude of the aesthete who, retreating into himself, 'flees from contact with the real world' in order to 'preserve the purity of its heart' (Hegel 1977: 400). Hence, Jeanson's title is meant to ridicule what he takes to be Camus's moralizing and ultimately fatalistic 'purity'. This accusation of quietism forms the unifying theme of his review. Jeanson admits that from 'a strictly literary point of view' *The Rebel* borders on perfection. Yet even this is a cause for complaint, since he believes the book to be 'too beautiful', too 'carried away by stylistic considerations' to be seen as a credible

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work of protest (Jeanson 2004: 81). Rather than concrete prescriptions for fighting the injustices heaped upon the working class, Jeanson observes, Camus offers little more than a 'Red Cross morality' – that is, a charitable humanist comfort to the oppressed masses rather than a 'real world' solution for destroying the root cause of their subjugation (2004: 84). For Jeanson, such a 'beautiful expression of moralism' turns misery into a noble virtue to be hypocritically exploited by the bourgeois status quo (2004: 91–2).

But the crucially fatal flaw of *The Rebel*, Jeanson contends, is that it attempts to reduce the idea of 'revolution' to the concept of 'divination of man' (2004: 87), and therefore condemns in advance all attempts at revolutionary social change as inherently inclined to end in terror. On his reading, Camus would rather retreat into a 'mystery of inefficacy', the idealism of a 'pure thought' doomed to failure (2004: 93), than take up the historically necessary task of pragmatic action which runs the risk of violence in order to emancipate the oppressed. In this way, Jeanson also dismisses Camus's supposed 'superiority' in presuming to judge the enterprise of modern revolutionaries, claiming in contrast that his 'systematically ineffective attitude' of limited rebellion 'cannot provide any criterion for practical action' (2004: 99–100). In sum, Camus advocates nothing more than an escapist 'disengagement' from history that allows him to keep his hands unsullied by the violence required to wage revolutionary struggle against oppressive adversaries (2004: 97). Violence is the price of real change and Camus, Jeanson insinuates, is too cowardly to pay this price.

Camus wrote a substantial rebuttal to Jeanson's review, which was published in the August 1952 edition of *Les Temps modernes* along with equally lengthy, yet even more vehement responses from Jeanson and Sartre. Echoing Jeanson's characterization of Camus as a beautiful soul in the grip of conceptual confusion and political paralysis, Sartre further intensifies the polemical criticism of Camus's position on revolution and violence in *The Rebel*. Where Jeanson's ire is driven by what he perceives to be Camus's underlying bourgeois weakness, Sartre's is provoked by what he takes to be his 'philosophical incompetence' (Sartre 2004: 139). Camus, he reproaches, has 'a mania for not going to the source' and 'detest[s] difficult thought' (2004: 145). Since Camus is not a properly trained philosopher, like Sartre himself, he misunderstands major thinkers and texts, and his entire reading of Hegel and Marx, for instance, is amateurishly suspect because it is 'hastily assembled' from 'secondhand

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bits of knowledge' (2004: 139). As deplorable as Sartre finds this scholastic deficiency, however, most inexcusable is that it leads Camus, 'like so many people', to 'confuse politics and philosophy' (2004: 146). For Sartre, this means that Camus retreats into the idealistic 'desert' of pure thought in order to maintain an unrealistic distance from the impurity of political action. As the character of Hoederer says in Sartre's *Dirty Hands*, 'Purity is an idea for a yogi or a monk' (1989: 218). In contrast, Sartre maintains that politics in the real world requires 'accepting many things, if one wants to try to change a few of them' (2004: 147). According to Sartre, Camus confounds moral and political concerns, essentially forming a barrier against political action that will need to resort to violence against the existing system in order to bring a new society successfully into existence. Yet Camus's mistake is more than a harmless intellectual blunder; it poses a threat to the revolutionary project of social transformation itself. The failure to support the communist movement despite its moral flaws means, from Sartre's perspective, that Camus thereby implicitly legitimizes capitalist exploitation. Sartre's stinging condemnation of Camus's cardinal sin is unequivocal: 'you have become a counter-revolutionary' (2004: 132).

While there are numerous important philosophical, political and historical issues underpinning Sartre's dispute with Camus, which cannot be discussed fully in this chapter, the basic points sketched above tie into the wider horizon of Sartre's evolving commitment to Marxist existentialism. In the early existential phenomenology of *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Sartre presents a theory of consciousness and its intentional relationship to the world in order to establish that the individual being-for-itself (*pour-soi*) is free. Sartre holds that because consciousness is both a part of and separate from the world, it is able to bring negation or nothingness to the world – such as by excluding certain objects from our attention, by valuing some things rather than others, by distinguishing between the I and the not-I, and by assuming an identity by reference to a non-existing future or past state of affairs. This quality of negation supports an understanding of human reality as characterized by radical freedom. Even though consciousness is always situated in relation to the world, it is always capable of transcending mere facticity; the human being 'is what it is not and is not what it is' (Sartre 2003: 81). Sartre contends, in other words, that facticity in all its social, political and historical configurations can only condition but not determine human existence. Thus, for Sartre, 'there is no situation in which

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the given would crush beneath its weight the freedom which constitutes it as such'; indeed, 'even the executioner's tools cannot dispense us from being free' (2003: 549, 587).

In his 1945 lecture, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre argues that his existential ontology establishes a foundation for a 'humanist philosophy of action, of effort, of combat, of solidarity' (2007: 39). Sartre's treatment of human freedom was aimed, in part, against the sort of crude materialist determinism espoused by orthodox Marxism. Yet the radical freedom he ascribes to the subject in *Being and Nothingness* sits uneasily with a call to political action. If all individuals are always free regardless of historical circumstance, then there seems little point in acting to change existing social conditions. Having concluded that his earlier position had been insufficiently attentive to historicity, and turning towards openly supporting (though with some ambivalence) the French Communist Party (PCF), Sartre increasingly formulates his conception of freedom as historical freedom: freedom is to be located in, and made meaningful by, historical reality. In a series of works spanning from 'Materialism and Revolution' (1946) to *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960), Sartre develops his views concerning the legitimacy of violence for the sake of human freedom from a strongly Marxist standpoint.[1] Of immediate relevance here, he conceives of revolutionary violence as, in the end, inherently positive action, because it entails 'affirmation of human freedom in and through history' (Sartre 1962b: 253). In *The Communists and Peace* (1969a), the first instalment of which originally appeared in *Les Temps modernes* a month before his 'Reply to Camus', he depicts violence, including revolutionary killing, as the only definitive way to stop systemic exploitation and oppression. Sartre later tempers his remarks on necessity following his critique of the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 – pronouncing 'In politics, no action is unconditionally necessary' (1969b: 17) – and aims to restore the 'dialectical unity of freedom and necessity' to his account of history in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Yet even in the *Critique*, Sartre posits that conflicts 'are the motive force of history' – resonating with Marx's sentiment that violence is the 'midwife' of history – and hence that violence is a requisite mode of negation in the course of historical *praxis* (1976: 15). By conflict, he means the 'fundamental' or 'original' violence of life and death which compels in historical circumstances the strict 'alternative: kill or be killed' (1991: 31). 'Non-violence', Sartre therefore concludes, 'is the choice of complicity' (1991: 30).

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Here we arrive at the crux of the dispute between Camus and Sartre, and at their divergent views on political violence. Sartre's argument boils down to the claim that Camus, in turning his back on history, endorses nonviolence which capitulates to servitude and fatally compromises revolutionary *praxis*. But is this in fact what we find in Camus? After all, not only did Camus assert that being prepared to fight moral and political evil was at the root of the spirit of rebellion, but he also became actively involved in the Resistance. Indeed, many of his articles in *Combat* are expressed as a vigorous call to arms against 'the most implacable of enemies' (Camus 2006a: 8). Commenting during the battle to liberate Paris in August 1944, while 'freedom's bullets continue to whistle through city streets', Camus exhorts his readers to take up the fight in which 'justice must be redeemed with men's blood' (2006a: 17, 16). It should be stressed, however, that Camus's endorsement of violence here is – in addition to serving as a rhetorical morale booster – a proximate, limited response to an unprovoked, total threat to scores of innocent lives. It will be recalled that Camus opposed the war during his time with *Alger Républicain* and *Le Soir Républicain*, and he only gradually came to accept that armed force could be used as a last resort against aggression. Despite his disavowal of revolutionary violence and murder, Camus was not a pacifist as such. A better sense of the complexity of his position can be gleaned from a statement he made a year before publication of *The Rebel*:

> I preach neither nonviolence ... nor, as the jokers say, saintliness. I believe that violence is inevitable, the years of Occupation taught me as much. ... So I shall not say that we must do away with all violence, which would be desirable but is actually utopian. I say only that we must refuse all *legitimization* of violence, whether this legitimization comes from absolute reasons of state or from a totalitarian philosophy. *Violence is inevitable and at the same time unjustifiable*. I think we should set a limit to violence, restrict it to certain quarters when it is inevitable, dampen its terrifying effects by preventing it from going to the limit of its fury. I loathe comfortable violence. (Camus 1950: 184, emphases added)

Camus reiterates this point in *The Rebel*, 'recognizing the inevitability of violence' yet admitting 'that it is unjustifiable' (1956: 169). Consistent with his broader philosophical approach, Camus attempts to hold together both terms in a relationship of tension – violence *and* nonviolence – rather than 'take refuge by ignoring one of the terms of the dilemma' and postulating an absolute either/or dichotomy (1956: 169).

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Violence and nonviolence set limits for each other. Camus understands, on one hand, that violence is an inescapable feature of human history, and that 'only a philosophy of eternity could justify non-violence' as an absolute principle (1956: 287). Yet he also states, on the other hand, that 'the freedom to kill', assumed as an undeniable historical imperative, 'is not compatible with the sense of rebellion' (1956: 284). Consequently, if rebellion is to remain faithful to its dual commitment of resisting degradation, subordination and slavery while also refusing to add to the injustices of the world by the means it employs, then it must countenance the use of violence in certain limited situations but accept that this use can never be legitimized or justified in advance by any doctrine that would ascribe to it some higher redemptive purpose. To do so would be to turn a dilemma of situated moral and political judgement into a principle of logic or strategic policy. Instead, Camus adopts a kind of contingent or conditional form of pacifism, which provisionally accepts the exceptional use of violence or armed force strictly to defend or save innocent lives against aggression. Rebellious violence, he insists, 'must always be bound'; it 'can only be an extreme limit which combats another form of violence', and it 'will only consent to take up arms for institutions that limit violence, not for those which codify it' (1956: 292). Moreover, those resorting to violence are responsible for their actions; even the cause of justice does not confer complete freedom, and accountability is needed when ethical boundaries are crossed. Yet Camus pointedly refrains from devising any systematic moral reasoning that would presume to offer a theoretical procedure for justification, such as with many just war theories, concerned that this would imply the ability to 'comfortably' resolve what must remain an uncomfortable judgement.

From this perspective, Camus makes a decisive distinction between politics and violence, even though they are drawn together at a limit and cannot be separated absolutely or in a simple manner. They are each other's mirror image, reflecting seemingly similar yet ultimately contradictory forms of human interaction. Each has the potential to be converted into the other, but they cannot be superimposed on each other. This is why he insists violence cannot be a general rule of action. To equate politics with violence is to yield to the absurd, inasmuch as systematic violence would diminish and destroy the very basis of human interrelationships that sustain the collective spirit of political action and solidarity. Violence, for Camus, can only be understood as a contingent weapon of defence, not as a normalized instrument of liberation. The contrast to Jeanson and

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Sartre is clear. They claim that the political field is necessarily divided into friends and enemies, and that politics demands choosing between one side and the other since they cannot coexist (Sartre 2004: 144, 157). By portraying politics in such a Manichean fashion, they install violence as a legitimized strategy for imposing a decisive outcome upon an otherwise contingent history. This position is rooted in Sartre's conception of engagement or commitment, which insists on taking sides in the conflict between different historical forces. Only then can revolutionary goals be pursued in a manner capable of transforming an oppressive world. 'One *must* make a choice', Sartre insists (2001a: 283, emphasis added), and in so doing participate in altering the course of history in one direction or another. Camus, however, *subverts* the conflict-based form of political engagement. In his view, it not only subsumes human freedom into a vast and all-embracing history, but it subordinates the uncomfortable process of moral and political judgement about what constitutes better or worse means of political transformation to an abstract and totalizing end. If the end justifies the means, Camus asks, then what justifies the end? Politics so conceived under the sign of historical mission will, he thinks, almost certainly lapse into absolutist dogma, an irresolute refusal to compromise, and gratuitous violence. Even though Camus acknowledges the merit of commitment as a political act, he stresses that such acts should be seen as the exercise of freedom rather than as a categorical prescription. If engagement or commitment were compulsory, then the freedom constitutive of the human condition would be effectively lost, held hostage to another necessity: 'Courage in one's life and talent in one's work – this is not so bad. And moreover the writer is committed when he wishes to be. His merit lies in his impulse. But if this is to become a law, a function, or a terror, just where is the merit?' (Camus 2010b: 140–1).

Violence is not inevitable, then, because freedom is not reducible to an immutable dialectic of history. Thus, it is possible (but also not inevitable) to renegotiate tensions between political rivals in ways that do not lead to the kind of mortal combat that Sartre foresees. Sartre's conflict theory of history does not sufficiently appreciate the role of tension in the political field, because it reifies political relationships into hostile and opposing camps. The potential for violent conflict is always latent within politics, of course, since the capacity for injustice and evil is an intractable aspect of human reality. Yet to admit this possibility is not the same as holding that conflict and violence

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are the essence of the political; the prevalence of the latter view has made 'modern times' (*Les temps modernes*) into 'murderous times' (*Le temps des meurtriers*) (Camus 2008a: 351). As Camus sees it, the human condition places limits on a correlation between politics and violence that goes largely unacknowledged by Sartre. Politics remains viable, for Camus, only insofar as the constant and permanent tensions between different positions are kept alive rather than destroyed. Tensions produce legitimate disagreement and dissent but, equally, create grounds for agreement and consensus. Crucially, however, political interaction is to be regarded as a never fully achieved enterprise, one that eludes the terminal end of history no matter how many enemies are defeated. Conflict may break out and violence may become a tragic choice in certain situations, but for Camus these must remain contingent exceptions rather than generalized prescriptions. The key is that the relative potential for (more or less) agreement and disagreement pivots dynamically around a limit that helps constitute both possibilities: respect for the nature, integrity and freedom of others, and a refusal to add to the injustice of the world. Retaining this limit means forging a generous sense of measure – of a difficult balance between compromise, (re)negotiation and dialogue alongside contestation, critique and struggle – whose profound tension enriches and extends rather than undermines freedom and the opportunities for political engagement.[2]

Resisting terror

In Camus's understanding of political life, violence cannot guide politics for in the former there is an assertion of unbridled force that wreaks havoc on the limits – the balanced tension – needed to establish political freedom and sustain human dignity. For Camus, modern revolutions that embrace the dictum that violence 'begets' history, where 'making' history by any means necessary is the driving intention, typically descend into terror. Further, the more that revolutionary activity divorces politics and limits, the greater the likelihood that it effectively dispenses with moral oversight for choices having life-or-death consequences. The notion that the revolutionary possesses the only true path to future salvation encourages individuals to do whatever is necessary to make that path a reality, but often at the expense of a reckoning with the counterbalances

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of responsibility and accountability. Justifying the use of violence in advance, on the basis of a predefined future goal, transforms political struggle into premeditated mass terror. When conceived as the motor of political progress, in other words, violence becomes indiscriminate. It comes unmoored from the proximate circumstances in which relative choices and actions with respect to others are situated, making it less likely that the revolutionary agent will be bound by a sense of accountability for the more or less 'inevitable' evils committed on behalf of the struggle. In escaping the limits of accountability in the here and now, violence thereby becomes ruthlessly, terrifyingly irresponsible. That terrorism ends in devouring freedom is precisely the injustice that Camus rebels against.

Camus probes these issues relating to the passage of revolutionary violence into individual and group terrorism in his 1949 play, *The Just* (*Les justes*). The play, which expresses Camus's desire to explore in dramatic form the severe tension between the means and the ends of justice within radical politics, is based on the historical figure of Ivan Kaliayev, a Russian poet and member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (AKP). The play also prefigures Camus's philosophical discussion in *The Rebel* of the 'fastidious assassins' of the AKP who, confronted with the stark contradiction between their demand for universal justice in the future and their advocacy of terrorism in the present, could resolve the absurdity of their position 'only in the double sacrifice of their innocence and their life' (Camus 1956: 164). As dramatized in *The Just*, a small cell of AKP members including Kaliayev (also called Yanek) plot to assassinate Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich, the son of Emperor Alexander II and uncle of Emperor Nicholas II, in February 1905. Kaliayev assumes responsibility for throwing a bomb at the Grand Duke's carriage, but he aborts his initial effort when he realizes that Sergei's wife, Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna, and their young nephew and niece are also in the carriage. Following the failed attempt, Kaliayev and his lover Dora defend the decision not to murder innocents, while Stepan, a former political prisoner, insists that the revolutionary cause must not yield to any moral scruples:

STEPAN: The Organization ordered you to kill the Grand Duke!

KALIAYEV: Yes, but I wasn't ordered to murder children! [...]

DORA: Open your eyes, Stepan, and try to realize that the Organization would lose its power and influence, if it tolerated for a moment the idea of children being blown to pieces by our bombs.

Stepan: I'm sorry, but I don't suffer from a tender heart! Not until the day comes when we stop being sentimental about children, will the revolution triumph and we be masters of the world.

Dora: When that day comes, the revolution will be loathed by the entire human race.

Stepan: What does that matter if we love it enough to force our revolution on it, to rescue humanity from itself.... (Camus 1984: 185)

Stepan's words call to mind Hoederer's claim in Sartre's *Dirty Hands* that 'Purity is an idea for a yogi or a monk'. Similarly, Stepan is suspicious of Kaliayev's motives for becoming a revolutionary. On being told that Kaliayev is also called 'the Poet' because he believes 'that all poetry is revolutionary', Stepan retorts that 'Only bombs are revolutionary'. Later, when Stepan insinuates that Kaliayev is only 'dabbling with revolution' because he's 'bored', Kaliayev protests, 'I joined the revolution *because* I love life!' In contrast, Stepan declares, 'I don't love life ... I love something higher than mere life ... I love justice'. Kaliayev replies, 'Man does not live only by justice' (Camus 1984: 167, 172–3). Kaliayev's idealistic 'purity' is reflected in the fact he believes that 'life is a glorious thing', and that love, beauty and happiness can still be found even in an unjust world. Kaliayev's struggle seeks to do justice both to beauty and to the oppressed. From the perspective of Stepan's realism, however, these experiences and even life itself will remain meaningless 'until every man on earth is free!' (Camus 1984: 174, 166). Camus juxtaposes in this way the opposition between political idealism and political realism – as well as between love for concrete others and love for an abstract humanity – in order to demonstrate how the deliberate choice to use indiscriminate violence to attain a specific political end constitutes a nihilistic surrendering of free choice and responsibility. In Stepan's view, the decision to kill the Grand Duke as well as the children is justified because, he presumes, it will serve to bring about a new human order. Therefore the use of any means whatsoever – 'Nothing that can serve our cause should be ruled out', Stepan emphatically asserts (Camus 1984: 186) – is unconditionally legitimated by unyielding necessity, whether the compulsory force of superior orders or humanity's irresistible need for redemption. Yet Stepan's messianic conception of the revolutionary mission actually conceals a deeply resentful misanthropy. While Kaliayev wishes to engage in direct action because of his love for 'the men who are alive today', Stepan does not have the strength to love but only to hate everything in the present: 'I don't love

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anything... I *hate*, yes I hate, my fellow men. Why should I want their precious love?' (Camus 1984: 201).

Where Sartre became the apostle of a *Realpolitik* whose ideological motives for terrorism and murder are sanctified by the promise of a just world to come, Camus sought to emphasize the distance separating contingent crimes of passion (as with Meursault in *The Stranger*) from logically preordained terrorist attacks. This distance becomes all the more demanding when it comes to questions of political commitment, which bind individuals together into a collective enterprise that takes its warrant from the effects that it has on the lives of others. For Camus, political commitment detached from the values of mutual freedom, integrity, dignity and honour can only lead to a nihilism that is willing to sacrifice the innocent along with the guilty. Unlike Stepan, Kaliayev accepts that the struggle against tyranny must carry within it an ethics of moral boundaries limiting the means that can be used, if it is to remain 'honourable' and not betray its own basis in freedom. 'Even destruction has a right and a wrong way', Kaliayev admits, 'and there *are* limits' demarcating the acceptable from the unacceptable – no matter how ambiguous this line may be in any given circumstance (Camus 1984: 187). In a word, when the politics of violence culminates in terrorism, the agonizing dilemma of attempting to judge between the acceptable and the unacceptable, and to restrain one's actions in response, is conjured away by unwavering faith in the maxim that 'all is permitted' for the sake of revolutionary ends. Kaliayev's position is essentially a demand for *mesure* with respect to the unity of the means-ends relationship, and therefore comes closer to rebellion than to revolution. This demand presupposes that overstepping certain limits – most importantly, not harming the lives of the innocent – carries with it an ineradicable moment of accountability. Nemesis must have her due. Thus, when Kaliayev eventually succeeds in assassinating the Grand Duke, he insists on paying for his actions with his life, even when offered a pardon by the Grand Duchess. He then becomes, for Camus, a personification of the tragic temptation of regarding violence as the only effective political instrument with which to eliminate injustice. As Camus puts it in *The Rebel*: 'Thus Kaliayev climbs the gallows and visibly designates to all his fellow men the exact limit where man's honor begins and ends' (1956: 286).

The problem of strategic violence mutating into indiscriminate and even gratuitous terror reappears for Camus in another tragic context: the

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armed struggle for Algerian independence, and the vicious counterinsurgency by the French government, which ravaged his native land. Camus had long been engaged with Algerian political issues, with a special concern to publicize the degrading and oppressive conditions imposed on the majority Muslim population by the French colonial authorities. He not only published a series of reports in mid-1939 exposing poverty and famine in the region of Kabylia, but he also wrote numerous articles condemning the government's imprisonment of Arab workers and activists while a journalist with *Alger Républicain*. In May 1945 Camus published a further series of reports in *Combat* on the 'crisis in Algeria'. These reports were written in the immediate aftermath of the Sétif massacres, where one hundred *pieds-noirs* were murdered by Muslim rioters after clashes between police and protest marchers, and then several thousand Muslims were slain in reprisal attacks by the French military. Camus noted that the material condition of the Arab and Berber population had not improved since 1939, and warned that their unequal treatment and 'the fact that their hunger is unjust' had contributed to 'the political awakening of the Muslim masses' (Camus 2006a: 200–2). Camus favoured the idea of Algeria becoming an autonomous bi-national state within a larger French federation, with full democratic entitlement and equal rights for all inhabitants of Algeria, regardless of their social origin or ethnic descent (Camus 2013: 181–4). To Camus, it was clear that 'the era of Western imperialism is over'; consequently only honest, inclusive discussion would lead to a just solution to the situation (2006a: 216).

However, following the government's regular suppression of reformist nationalist groups – such as the Algerian Muslim Congress initiated by Abdelhamid Ben Badis, the Democratic Union of the Algerian Manifesto founded by Ferhat Abbas, and the Algerian People's Party led by Messali Hadj – the nationalist movement became increasingly disillusioned with the prospect for peaceful political reform, and more militant ideals and organizations appeared. On 1 November 1954, the National Liberation Front (*Front de Libération Nationale*, or FLN), an armed political and guerrilla movement formed through the merger of numerous nationalist groups, launched a series of attacks against government installations across Algeria. The FLN also broadcast a proclamation calling on Algerians to take up arms in the fight for the 'restoration of the Algerian state, sovereign, democratic, and social, within the framework of the principles of Islam'. François Mitterrand, as French minister of the

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interior, declared that 'Algeria is France' and 'the only possible negotiation is war' (Naylor 2000: 138).

The war quickly descended into a spiral of ruthless retaliatory atrocities, with both the French authorities and the FLN employing indiscriminate violence against civilians. After France declared a state of emergency throughout Algeria, the police and military made widespread use of arbitrary mass arrests, indefinite detention, population transfers (*regroupement*) to internment camps in remote areas, extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances, against FLN militants as well as civilians suspected of aiding the FLN. Torture was also used extensively by the security forces, both as a method to obtain information and as a means of psychological warfare against the general population. The practice of torture became so prevalent and systematic that tens and possibly hundreds of thousands of Algerians were subjected to various methods of torture (Horne 2006: 195–207; Vidal-Naquet 1963). On the other side of the conflict, the FLN's National Liberation Army (ALN) initially focused its guerrilla insurgency on sabotaging military targets, but soon also concentrated on 'soft targets', such as kidnapping, mutilating and murdering *pied-noir* farmers in the countryside. At the same time, the ALN targeted rival independence groups – most notably the Algerian National Movement formed by Messali Hadj – and also 'purged' (tortured and killed) numerous 'traitors' and 'collaborators' in the Muslim population (such as the *harkis*, an irregular militia recruited by the French military). The FLN then concentrated on a campaign of indiscriminate urban terrorism, carrying out random shootings and bombings that killed dozens of civilians in Algiers, setting the stage for the notorious 'Battle of Algiers' in 1956 and 1957 (Horne 2006: 183–92).

Although Camus tirelessly denounced the entrenched injustice of the colonial system, he was equally compelled to denounce the injustice of terrorism employed by the nationalist insurgency. For Camus, the insurrection in Algeria was highly probable, given that, as he proposed in *The Rebel*, there comes a moment when those who are subjugated and oppressed will act to resist an unacceptable situation and refuse to be treated any longer as something less than human. In doing so, however, rebels also affirm and defend the value and dignity of an existence that is shared with every other individual. Consequently, while Camus supported various modes of nonviolent direct action and civil resistance in the campaigns against colonial injustice (including protest marches, strikes and boycotts, public statements and declarations, symbolic

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public acts and performances, civil disobedience and non-cooperation, and international appeals and persuasion), he could not sanction the methods of the FLN since the indignity of terrorism cannot be reconciled with rebellion as protest against oppression in the name of the equal value of human life. Once again, then, Camus and Sartre assumed diverging positions. Sartre endorsed the view that the terrorist acts committed by the FLN were justifiable instruments of the struggle for national liberation. In his 'Preface' to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Sartre argues that colonial oppression is a dehumanizing terror internalized by the colonized, forming a kind of 'colonial neurosis' of subjugation (2001b: 148). The colonized must therefore 'drive out colonialism by *any* means' in order to reconstruct their humanity individually and collectively; the violence inherent in colonial structures of oppression begets a 'purifying' and ultimately liberating counter-violence that returns dialectically to destroy it (2001b: 147). Hence the terrorism of the Algerian revolutionaries is a legitimate moral exercise, Sartre contends, because it will 'heal the wounds it has made' (2001b: 155). In this way, Sartre saw Fanon as bringing 'back to light the midwife of History' for the Third World (2001b: 142). Fanon himself, as a member of the FLN, defended the organization's actions as needed to demystify European humanism and overcome the disabling racism imposed upon Algerians by the French. For Fanon, the Algerian people must perpetrate terror against their oppressors for the dual purpose of cathartically purging the terror they have suffered and creating a new society ultimately free of violence (Fanon 2001: 237). Moreover, given the 'necessities of combat' in the face of numerically superior French forces, 'the revolutionary leadership found that if it wanted to prevent the people from being gripped by terror it had no choice but to adopt forms of terror which until then it had rejected' (Fanon 1965: 55).

Camus's interventions into the escalating conflict, on the other hand, decry the foreclosure of political space and the hardening of positions into a spiral of terrorism and counter-terrorism as the situation degenerated into a contest for political power. From his perspective, both the government and the FLN chose a 'politics of reaction' whose polemics minimized the limited efficacy of violence and exaggerated its intended or actual political effects (Camus 2013: 110). In his account of revolt, Camus wished to draw a fundamental distinction between a form of struggle that relinquishes hope as metaphysical faith yet which does not fall into despair and struggle governed by despair, because circumstances

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are so bleak as to crush all prospect for reasonable hope. The appearance of terrorism in Algeria therefore did not arise *ex nihilo*, but from social and political circumstances that were allowed to degenerate to the point of a fatalistic absence of hope and excess of despair. In other words, the decision-making processes of the government and insurgent forces alike surrendered to the logic of failure. This logic accentuates that only the total defeat of one's adversary will produce success, and anything short of success is a complete failure. Driven by despair at the prospect of failure, of 'losing Algeria', both sides narrowly focused on the 'methods' considered most efficacious to avoid such an outcome, yet neither side considered the long-term consequences of their actions. Short-sighted repression thereby fed short-sighted terrorism, which in turn further fed short-sighted repression in an 'infernal dialectic' (Camus 2013: 153). Camus's insight is that terrorism is invariably self-defeating, for at some point its 'all or nothing' attitude leads it blindly to consume both its external enemies and its internal advocates: 'Those who call for such massacres, no matter which camp they come from and no matter what argument or folly drives them, are in fact calling for their own destruction' (Camus 2013: 137). 'But that', he still insisted, 'is not a reason to despair', and practical steps could be taken to 'try not to add to the bitterness that exists in Algeria' (2013: 112).

For Camus, the incredible fatalism implicit in the excess (*démesure*) of torture and terror could be remedied only by establishing preparatory conditions that would gradually develop a reformed basis for joint political action with reference to something of positive value outside despair – namely, the preservation of equal dignity and life. In late January 1956, Camus returned to Algiers to present his appeal for a 'civilian truce' in response to the rapidly escalating bloodshed consuming Algeria. Appearing at the Cercle du Progrès meeting hall in Algiers, surrounded by a crowd of hostile *pieds-noirs* and nationalists, Camus's appeal aspired to 'prevent the general feeling of discouragement from ending in passive acceptance of the worst' (Camus 2013: 149). In his speech, he called on both sides to disavow all violence directed towards civilians in order to 'restore a climate that could lead to healthy debate' (2013: 155). Provided each side 'were to make an effort to think about his adversary's justifications' – to take the full measure of the other side's claims no matter how seemingly incompatible or in tension with one's own – then 'a useful discussion might at least begin' (2013: 152). For Camus, the prospect of saving lives and avoiding unnecessary suffering rested on the possibility,

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fragile though it was, of dialogue through a roundtable involving all the opposing factions. His position was forthright: ' "No further discussion is possible." This is the attitude that kills any chance of a future and makes life impossible' (2013: 154). Camus understood that many caught up in the conflict were unaccustomed to thinking in these moderate terms, and in the highly charged atmosphere he stressed that the potential for a political solution based on dialogue and negotiation could be realized only if a first, pragmatic and 'modest' step was taken to limit the effects of the war itself: 'We want the Arab movement and the French authorities, without entering into contact with each other or making any other commitment, to declare simultaneously that as long as the troubles continue, civilian populations will at all times be respected and protected' (Camus 2013: 152). The radicalized mob thronging the hall responded with bitter outbursts, and chants calling for Camus's death rang out as he was hustled to safety by his bodyguards. As his proposal fell victim to the prevailing sense that total war was inevitable, Camus became acutely aware of the limitations which political conditions, contingent though they are, can impose as they overtake even the most determined efforts to find nonviolent solutions that sustain equal freedom and justice for all. His intervention proved to be a painful lesson in the stubbornness of the absurd.

For Camus, the nihilism incarnated in the phenomenon of terrorism sacrifices meaningful moral and political distinctions, most centrally that between 'the relative notions of innocence and guilt' (Camus 2013: 134). Terrorism, in ignoring the fundamental distinction between combatants and civilians, renders the very notion of innocence meaningless. Conversely, setting limits to political actions manifests a morally significant distinction that proscribes the arbitrary killing of innocent people. In Camus's opinion, theorists such as Sartre and Fanon who approvingly legitimate terrorist methods exhibit a dangerous insensitivity to distinctions, blurring differing human qualities and modalities of political action: terrorism becomes simply another name for resistance, hostility another name for liberation, complicity another name for disagreement, and the vanquished another name for victims. Yet Camus insists that innocence is a moral quality that exists independently of any physical or mental harm caused by acts of terror; innocence, in other words, is not determined by the mere failure to be the victim of a terrorist attack – just as the fact of being a victim is no assurance of actual guilt. For this reason, politics must embody the presumption of innocence if it is to

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prevent a collapse of the distinction between justice and injustice, for only the latter lies on the other side of the 'limits beyond which one cannot approve'. Without a resolute commitment to defend both the principle of innocence and the actual lives of the innocent, and thereby to deny the legitimacy of organized murder, a politics of terror will decide in advance that the only innocents 'are the dead' (Camus 2013: 134).

Neither Sartre nor even Fanon 'belonged' to Algeria; the former never stepped foot in the country, and the latter, while spending much of the last eight years of his life there, knew it only as a Manichean battlefield. For Camus, however, Algeria was much more than a laboratory for the experiment in militant revolution. It was his country and his home, the land of his physical, intellectual and spiritual birth and maturation, the visceral source and exemplar for him of love as well as loss, for hope as well as despair. Despite the fact that Algeria was riven by a constellation of aggrieved ethnic groups, he characteristically distanced himself from the extremes of political opinion and repeatedly sought to preserve the fragile promise of a larger republican body politic that would establish a culture of peace, freedom and equality for all those living in Algeria whose 'destinies are so closely intertwined' (Camus 2013: 116). The 'European' and 'Arab' communities both had legitimate claims to a place in a shared Algerian homeland, claims that if recognized could sanction public deliberations about Algeria's future political institutions and at the same time constrain the despotism of violence. Yet as this promise began to die beneath militant ideals and terror, Camus was driven to 'the edge of despair' by the terrible price such ideals and terror exacted from their supposed benefactors and actual victims. As he acknowledged in an open letter published in the newspaper *Communauté Algérienne* in October 1955, the double alienation separating Algerians from one another and him from Algeria was a source of acute anguish: 'Believe me when I tell you that Algeria is where I hurt at this moment, as others feel pain in their lungs' (2013: 113). Camus believed that a platform of national reconciliation was required because 'in Algeria the French and the Arabs are condemned either to live together or to die together' (2013: 123). Camus's approach arguably was prescient in this respect. Algerian independence in July 1962 triggered threats and attacks against the *pied-noir* community – given the choice between '*la valise ou le cercueil*' (the suitcase or the coffin) – leading to the mass exodus of nearly a million *pieds-noirs* to France (Stora 2005: 12, 77). In the newly independent Algeria, the FLN rapidly consolidated its control over the state into a

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single party dictatorship, banning political opposition and violently suppressing political protests and civil activism into the 1980s (such as Berber protests against the government's Arabization measures, and Islamist calls for creation of an Islamic state). Between 1991 and 2002, the Algerian Civil War pitted the government against various militant Islamist groups. The conflict bore a strong resemblance to the war of independence, with both sides widely resorting to torture, assassination, bombings and indiscriminate massacres resulting in tens of thousands of civilian deaths (Roberts 2003). In 2007 one of the militant Islamist groups, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), renamed itself Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). In a cruelly ironic twist of fate, the Algerian and French governments subsequently have cooperated in military operations against this common terrorist foe.

Protesting the right to kill

Cutting across all of Camus's engagements with the problem of political violence is an unwavering loyalty to the principle that no one – whether the individual, the group or the state – can claim for itself the privilege or right to kill. The intensity of his outrage at a politics that arrogates to itself 'the power of life or death over others' (Camus 1956: 246) is evident not only in his writings on revolution and terrorism, but also permeates his treatment of capital punishment and nuclear weapons. Camus's fervent pleas for the abolition of the death penalty are doubtlessly drawn from rebellion's rejection of the absurd condemnation of human existence to nothingness. As he notes: 'Nihilistic passion ... kills in the fond conviction that this world is dedicated to death. The consequence of rebellion, on the contrary, is to refuse to legitimize murder because rebellion, in principle, is a protest against death' (1956: 285). In Camus's view, capital punishment is a particularly egregious form of political violence because it is based on passive adherence to the state's prerogative authority to legally sanction murder. The shocking effects of this authority were made clear to him during the 1944–6 'purge' (*épuration*) of those accused of collaborating with the Nazis during the Occupation. Initially swept up in the post-Liberation fervour for revenge – declaring that collaborators 'could expect neither forgiveness nor indulgence from France' (Camus 2006a: 14) – Camus soon moderated his stance. His position was that while 'the purge is necessary' it must also 'respect the general principle

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of justice' which 'lies in proportion' or balance. Thus he supported prison sentences rather than executions for those found guilty (Camus 1956: 77).[3] As Camus recounted in a letter to Jean Grenier about a purge trial he attended, the 'absolute condemnation' contained in a death sentence is 'revolting' because it disdains the 'innocent part' that remains in 'every guilty man' (Camus and Grenier 2003: 112). A criminal, in other words, is always more than the crime he or she commits.

Camus subsequently became an eloquent spokesperson for the world-wide abolition of capital punishment.[4] In his 1957 essay, 'Reflections on the Guillotine', Camus suspends the dominant assumptions thought to justify punishment – including rehabilitation, retribution and deterrence – in order to disclose how the experiential reality of legal murder has become distorted and made normal or 'familiar' in modern democratic societies. If rehabilitation is the primary reason for punishment, for instance, then the use of capital punishment implies that some humans are regarded as wholly irremediable and 'permanently dangerous'; hence the simplest 'solution' is deliberate and calculated elimination of the threat (Camus 1960: 210–1). Retribution, according to which the guilty suffer in proportion to the magnitude of their crimes (and thereby receive their 'just deserts'), allegedly reinforces social responsibility. Yet capital punishment then functions as organized hypocrisy, in Camus's view, since the state becomes the instrument of the very acts of humiliation, degradation, torture and murder that it supposedly condemns. Further, the association of capital punishment with deterrence is belied by modern state practices, which shield executions behind the walls of isolated institutions. Thus the sanitization of death obscures the full reality of the horrific acts of a state authorized to kill its own citizens (Camus 1960: 180–7).

Camus's argument about the death penalty is part of his larger argument about the dominance of violence in modern society, and its erosion of a public realm characterized by political bonds with diverse others built upon persuasion, negotiation and compromise. Two disturbing aspects of capital punishment are therefore commonly overlooked. First, no matter how 'humane' the actual administration of death itself becomes, the institutionalization of capital punishment 'adds to death a rule, a public premeditation known to the future victim'. This phenomenon constitutes a collectively-imposed torture, terror or 'devastating, degrading fear' upon not only the body but the mind of the condemned, which is 'a punishment more terrible than death' (Camus 1960: 199–200). Second, this process

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discloses a fatal immoderation (*démesure*) at the heart of modern society (poignantly dramatized, it will be recalled, in *The Stranger*). By presuming an infallible capacity to judge absolutely between life and death – and to assume a stance above all possible ambiguity, uncertainty, doubt and error – the state privileges its sovereign right to act without limits on its knowledge, interests and judgements. Yet as Camus argues, 'no one among us can pose as an absolute judge and pronounce the definitive elimination of the worst among the guilty, because no one of us can lay claim to absolute innocence' (1960: 222). The absurd paradox here is that the crimes of the modern state have resulted in infinitely more death and suffering than the crimes of individuals. In essence, those 'who cause the most blood to flow are the same ones who believe they have right, logic, and history on their side' (Camus 1960: 227).

Likewise, the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 constituted an important juncture for the consolidation of the 'death-centered' state (Morisi 2011), and the geopolitical aftermath added a new urgency to Camus's discussions about the political status of violence and the modern state's assertion of a sovereign prerogative over the life and death of innocent civilians. For Camus, the creation, use and spread of nuclear weapons – which opened up the very real prospect of states asserting the unassailable right to destroy humankind as a whole – threaten to subdue human freedom under a geopolitical balance of terror. Indeed, Camus underscores that nuclear weapons arguably represent the consolidation of the state's presumptive right to kill into its most excessive, lethal and disastrous form by stating that after Hiroshima and Nagasaki 'the civilization of the machine has just achieved its ultimate degree of savagery' (2006: 236). The prospect of catastrophic atomic annihilation exposes the modern nihilistic absurdity of political self-destruction taken to the extreme of omnicide. That there is no possibility of calculating a determinate scale of appropriateness or effectiveness for nuclear weapons – since their intrinsic excessiveness overspills all boundaries of meaningful human evaluation and proportionality – poses an unprecedented existential challenge for humanity. There is no such thing as 'too little' or 'not enough' when it comes to nuclear weapons; not only their use but their mere presence is always 'too much' and therefore they create circumstances in which balance or measure in human affairs potentially ceases to be possible. Much like a prisoner anticipating eventual execution, humanity cast under the shadow of the atomic bomb reels between submitting to the tyranny of fear and closing its eyes to the peril

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of extinction at hand: 'Torture through hope alternates with the pangs of animal despair' (Camus 1960: 200).

Even if nuclear weapons were amenable to 'localized' tactical use, their effects would result in numerous civilian deaths. Such weapons are inherently indiscriminate and their use will invariably kill many innocents. Moreover, in a world of nuclear states it is highly likely that an attack with nuclear weapons would set off a chain reaction of retaliatory strikes and counter-strikes. If they are used at all, then, nuclear weapons cannot be used without massive civilian casualties, of friend and foe alike. Given the impact their presence, much less their use has on innocent civilians, nuclear weapons are instruments of terror closely tied to the debasement of contemporary life by holding the world in contempt. It is doubtful that any political mechanism can effectively manage this lethal threat to human existence indefinitely, let alone fully comprehend the overwhelming effect it has had on the modern human condition. Further to this, Camus points out: 'There can be no better illustration of the increasingly disastrous gap that exists between political thought and historical reality' (2006a: 269). Because the nuclear state 'has dedicated itself to organized murder' on a previously unimaginable scale, in a way that stretches beyond limit the notion of the rational calculation of violence as a means to a worthy end, Camus affirms that 'the battle for peace is the only battle worth fighting' in the nuclear era (2006a: 237). The fact that the architects and strategists of nuclear weapons of mass destruction are also those who talk of peace is proof that even the most absurd paradox can be rendered intelligible by the conventional categories of political necessity.[5] Thus the only way to avoid a devastating nuclear war resides, however precariously, in an ethics of measure: the human willingness to stubbornly refuse to think and speak in such ignoble categories, and to defiantly challenge the rational justification of such homicidal weapons as a line that should not be crossed.

Conclusion

Camus focuses on rebellion through words and deeds that dare to go against the grain of the prevailing understanding of violence as an indispensable tool in the arsenal of political action. In the same way, he refuses to compromise the experience of freedom which joins us to others in the trials and beauty of everyday life, and insists on bringing measure into

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struggles for human dignity. Because violence serves as a limit-situation for the political, the rebel must take care never to do anything that would make it impossible for those with different perspectives to be reconciled. Political action and discourse delimited by the sensibility of measure, of humbling limitations, can help constrain or override ideological extremism in politics, which in turn can help to mitigate or diminish mutual opposition and enmity – without surrendering the galvanizing tensions that creatively inform thinking and acting otherwise. In making this point, it is important not to confuse measure with the uncritical tendency to simply accept the views of others no matter the cost; that would only be another form of excess. Rather, measure turns the focus away from the unalterably conflictual character of political relationships and towards a more restrained or balanced assessment of the lived positions, beliefs and claims of others. It also makes it more possible to establish a range of appropriate means of working toward mutual recognition, engagement and persuasion. Measure thus shifts the vision of politics from 'engagement against' to 'engagement with'. Arguably, the ground of any common interests constructed might only be narrow, and significant disagreement might remain on other points. It is also not entirely clear that all tensions can be navigated without erupting into hostility; if not, the resulting violence would be the morally and politically tragic outcome of failed politics. However, abandoning ideological grand narratives of some culminating historical *telos*, along with corresponding appeals to violence as the key to expedient success, may reduce such tragic occurrences. Political action that follows from knowing its limits, Camus believes, will be nourished by strength of modest courage rather than force of heroic violence – a rebellious courage to refuse the conviction that violence is the very essence of politics itself.

Notes

1 An important influence on Sartre's evolving views at this time was Merleau-Ponty's 1947 book, *Humanism and Terror*. In this work, Merleau-Ponty argues that Marxism provides the only reasonable framework for revolutionary *praxis*, historically incarnated in the Russian Revolution. Acknowledging the widespread terror and retribution pervading the Soviet Union – forced labour, show trials, purges and mass executions – Merleau-Ponty nonetheless defends the revolution on the grounds that its actions can only be properly judged from the standpoint of the end of, an as yet unfinished, universal

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history. From this perspective he draws a distinction between 'progressive' and 'regressive' violence. Progressive violence contributes to 'making history' and a new humanity, while regressive violence perpetuates the governing exploitation of existing (capitalist) regimes. He argues, then, that 'we do not have a choice between purity and violence but between different kinds of violence' (1969: 109). Because all politics involves violence of one form or another, Merleau-Ponty concludes, 'history is cruel'.

2 Both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty ultimately became much more ambivalent about the justification of revolutionary violence as a necessary means to progressive social change. In later formulations that resonate with Camus's own language, they suggest that totalizing historical ideologies legitimate dogmatism which, in turn, legitimates violence. See, for example, Merleau-Ponty (1973) and Sartre (1996).

3 Camus based his rejection of death sentences on grounds of justice rather than charity (2006a: 168–70). In yet another political disagreement with Sartre, Camus signed a petition requesting (unsuccessfully) clemency for Robert Brassilach, a collaborationist journalist sentenced to death in January 1945. Sartre and Beauvoir refused to sign the petition.

4 Capital punishment remains a problem throughout the world. Amnesty International (2015: 6) estimates that at the end of 2014 at least 19,094 people worldwide were awaiting execution.

5 A prominent example of this view is the realist International Relations scholar Kenneth Waltz, who asserts: 'Those who like peace should love nuclear weapons. ... Those who advocate a zero option argue in effect that we should eliminate the cause of the extensive peace the nuclear world has enjoyed' (2010: 93).

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5
From Justice to Solidarity

Abstract: *This chapter brings together two areas of Camus's thought regarding the renewal of human freedom and dignity from the perspective of a politics of rebellion and measure. It first outlines the broader principles of reciprocal human rights and egalitarian socio-economic participation endorsed by Camus as the basis for a politics that strives for balance between the values of liberty, justice and equality. It then explores how Camus's argument that political freedom and social equality complement each other is linked to his ideas that ethical and political attachments entail more than formal structures of government. Focusing on the powerful relations of love, friendship and solidarity, Hayden examines how these affective dispositions and felt social commitments embody an ethical-political opposition to injustice that implies a love of existence and the world itself.*

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In his 1940 essay, 'The Almond Trees', Camus (1970: 135) comments on the challenge of thinking how to act in a world caught between the force of political realism and the futility of moral idealism:

> I do not have enough faith in reason to subscribe to a belief in progress or to any philosophy of history. I do believe at least that man's awareness of his destiny has never ceased to advance. We have not overcome our condition, and yet we know it better. We know that we live in contradiction, but we also know that we must refuse this contradiction and do what is needed to reduce it. Our task as men is to find the few principles that will calm the infinite anguish of free souls. We must mend what has been torn apart, make justice imaginable again in a world so obviously unjust, give happiness a meaning once more to peoples poisoned by the misery of the century.

How then do Camus's arguments speak to broader principles and practices of a politics that aspires to 'make justice imaginable again' and to 'give happiness a meaning once more'? This chapter brings together two areas of Camus's thought regarding the renewal of human freedom and dignity from the perspective of a politics of rebellion and measure. I first consider his ideas about striving for balance between the values of liberty, justice and equality within democratic societies, and in particular his belief that both 'bread and freedom' are of equal importance and therefore that each must be affirmed relative to the other. With this in mind, Camus endorses practices of reciprocal human rights and egalitarian socio-economic participation. Along with this attention to Camus's account of how freedom and justice mutually complement and limit each other, I also trace his ideas about the types of attitudes and affective sentiments that embody the ethical-political ability to balance generously between yes and no. Achieving such balance is a way of reconciling with, and therefore loving without denying, the contradictions of the world. Rebellion is related to love, in other words, because opposition to injustice implies a love of existence and the world itself. This love can be embodied in both grand and small everyday actions, exemplified by friendship as a product of moral choice exercised in the midst of uncertainty and ambiguity. Similarly, a rebellious ethos is committed to solidarity with the suffering of others. In this regard *The Plague* (*La Peste*) serves as an allegory not only of the failure to rebel against the politics of nihilism, but also of what love, friendship and solidarity can mean in a world where the work of upholding freedom and dignity always remains unfinished.

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Justice between freedom and equality

Throughout his life's work, Camus remained committed to political struggles for justice. Because he was not a political philosopher or theorist, however, he did not – and did not intend to – produce a comprehensive treatise about justice. Rather, his references to justice are scattered across his writings; at times enigmatic, at others pragmatic, but always compelling. Eschewing the metaphysical temptation to offer direct guidance as if a model of justice could be bestowed assuredly upon the world, Camus asks instead what sort of human existence would be deserving of the appellation of justice if indeed it were bestowable at all. To be sure, existence is shot through with misery and injustice. Yet beyond these Camus discerns the possibility for justice, the potentiality for a dignified human life that is also manifest in the world though varying in its degree of substantiality, and which in turn animates human aspirations for freedom and equality. Moreover, inasmuch as both the ends and the ways in which these ends are pursued embody the principle of justice then, in Camus's parlance, the ethics of rebellion will be implicit in political choices and actions – because it is the manner that truly expresses the refusal of oppression and acceptance of responsibility for concrete human beings. To this end, Camus recognizes that the problem is, first and foremost, how justice can exist at all; in other words, the issue is how to preserve the very source of meaningful human lives shared with others, namely, freedom itself.

Camus argues that resistance against injustice, violence and domination signals a powerful acknowledgement of the *contentious* value of justice: the struggle for recognition of dignity, one's own as well as that of others, announces the politically imperative claim for justice derived from or brought about by revolt as its mobilizing force (1956: 17). Justice does not erase or neutralize rebellion, but instead always begins from and is reanimated by it. Just as rebellion is punctuated repeatedly by the demand for justice, so too justice is (re)born incessantly from the rebellious impulse. Neither rebellion nor justice can come to any definitive rest. From Camus's perspective, justice is less a formal concept than a term of contentious politics; justice is axiomatically assumed when rebellion challenges domination in a particular time and in a particular place, and human experience attests to it and demonstrates it in practice. This makes justice something paradoxical, because its appearance

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is always tied to the disruptive 'impropriety' of rebellion and therefore it never occurs in a pure state. There is always something incomplete, disputable and provisional about justice. This also means that the aspiration for justice is politically charged and it may even be dangerous when it is made into a substantive goal that either incites total revolution or constrains all other values. The aspiration for justice without limits may lead us into a moral or political quagmire; but if limits are taken to be integral to the process of *doing* justice then we may discern the interplay between constraints that oppress and exclude and limits that enable resistance and the creative fashioning of alternative forms of being free in the lives of self and other, in works of art and in political communities. As Camus tells us: 'Justice is both an idea and a passion of the soul. We must learn to take what is human in it without transforming it into the terrifying abstract passion that has damaged so many men' (2006a: 119).

The relevant part of Camus's thinking for justice thus revolves around the poles of rebellion as a concurrent longing for freedom and profound dissatisfaction with domination and oppression. The meaning of justice lies in a sense deeper than any higher ends or goals that we might strive to realize by means of politics; justice, in other words, is not merely a function of the socio-juridical order or an attribute of governmental institutions. Camus locates the most general meaning of justice, in contrast, in freedom as an existential feature of the human condition and the relations of equality that concrete human beings establish among themselves. Justice is called into being through freedom practiced between equals. Conceived in this way, justice is no longer a superior category as such, to which freedom and equality are subordinated as instrumental means. Rather, the plenitude of possibilities of freedom among political equals is the *raison d'être* of justice. Justice, we might say, is pointless without the concrete experience of freedom and the political equality created through freedom exercised together with others. Simply put, justice comes into being through the fluid back-and-forth of working on the limits between oppression and freedom, lived as the active yet always precarious balance struck between freedom and equality.

Freedom is central to Camus's approach to politics, most fundamentally because human existence is conditioned but it is not determined. Likewise, human existence is not governed or under the sway of higher forces or laws such as destiny or fate. The 'whole history of the world', he writes, 'is the history of liberty' (2010b: 109). The contingency, unpredictability, transience and ambiguity of the world are characteristic of the ethical and

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political realms as well. Yet human freedom is intransigent rather than transcendent. It is 'only' human after all, and it cannot escape its worldly conditions into the infinite expanse beyond; it cannot evade the limits of its own finitude and incomprehension. We can, however, act in alternative ways within whatever limits condition our existence; we can question and transform various limits of our ways of being, but always by redrawing and recasting new limits. Nevertheless the very limits defining of the human condition are what open us to awareness of and appreciation for the manifold possibilities – both good and bad – of the experience of freedom, that is, of the reality of situations in which to act. From Camus's perspective, freedom is a condition for the possibility of human existence, since the appearance of each new life in the world is itself unnecessary and unprecedented – in short, unique – while existence and the possibilities present at any given time, in any given place serve as spurs to practice freedom, without determining its specific content. Freedom, for Camus, marks the foundation of the political, insofar as it is the condition for human action and interaction, and in turn its intrinsic import subtends the human dignity entailed by the freedom we practice with others: 'When one knows of what man is capable, for better and for worse, one also knows that it is not the human being himself who must be protected but the possibilities he has within him – in other words, his freedom' (1960: 102).

Yet Camus's commitment to freedom works hand-in-hand with his commitment to equality. According to Camus, although he has 'a very keen liking for liberty', he also finds it 'necessary to defend the reconciliation of justice with liberty' (2010b: 110). As a consequence of his thinking about rebellion, Camus's politics aims not for a world of unlimited or absolute freedom but to prevent the struggle for freedom from reifying into hierarchical relations of domination:

> Far from demanding general independence, the rebel wants it to be recognized that freedom has its limits everywhere that a human being is to be found – the limit being precisely that human being's power to rebel. The most profound reason for rebellious intransigence is to be found here. The more aware rebellion is of demanding *a just limit*, the more inflexible it becomes. The rebel undoubtedly demands a certain degree of freedom for himself; but in no case, if he is consistent, does he demand the right to destroy the existence and the freedom of others. He humiliates no one. The freedom he claims, he claims for all; the freedom he refuses, he forbids everyone to enjoy. He is not only the slave against the master, but also man against the world of master and slave. (Camus 1956: 284, emphasis added)

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While the sense of total freedom, as a limitless capacity to do whatever one wishes, undoubtedly serves as a blind impetus for revolt, it also manifests as an unhindered capacity to elevate oneself above all others and hence to maim and dominate other freedoms. 'One is always free at someone else's expense', asserts Caligula (Camus 1984: 60). To be bound to the absoluteness of one's own freedom is an unjust limit, then, insofar as it is an imposition that destroys the possibility of freedom for others. However, a 'relative' notion of freedom allows Camus to explain how limits function positively to constitute human beings as both free and equal subjects. The entanglement of the freedoms of all means that every 'human freedom, at its very roots, is therefore relative' (Camus 1956: 284), on the assumption that we have a responsibility to maintain the perpetual openness of such freedoms to each other. Camus thus aims to navigate between a freedom that resists and a freedom that imposes, knowing that the one always shadows the other. A just limit arises therefore from freedom of choice; it is a self-imposed constraint that restricts the possibility of absolute freedom while simultaneously serving as the basis for becoming free as an ongoing practice in relation to particular circumstances, situations and the coexistence of others. Relative freedom is the price we pay for acknowledging and respecting the equal freedom of others, yet also the plenitude bestowed on us when others render their freedom relative as well (Camus 1990: 101). To be clear, freedom does not diminish when it is relative or limited; to have freedom, all must be free. Yet relative freedoms tied together at the limit multiply the value and nourish the meaningfulness of freedom for everyone both individually and collectively.

Another feature of Camus's attempt to reconcile justice with liberty is his refusal to regard social equality as something essentially separate from political freedom. This is because, in effect, freedom and equality emerge out of the creative tension that is present at the very core of rebellion as 'a struggle for the common dignity of man' (1956: 292). His approach to the political ideals of freedom and equality as grounded in a view of humans as irrepressibly rebellious beings appears clearly in his important 1953 speech, 'Bread and Freedom'. There Camus claims that, although freedom and equality may be antagonistic at certain times and in certain places, they are also complementary and mutually implicated: 'We cannot choose one without the other. If someone takes away your bread, he suppresses your freedom at the same time. But if someone takes away your freedom, you may be sure your bread is threatened, for

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it depends no longer on you and your struggle but on the whim of a master' (1960: 94). Camus's conception of justice is universal in a formal sense, in that it signifies that specific ideologies and social orders can be criticized by means of the ideas of freedom and equality, and on the basis of the universal value of human dignity which is denied in each case. Rebellion, as an ethical-political practice, takes its force from its redescription of social relations in terms of civic-political oppression and socio-economic inequality. In this way it can be both general and inclusive, since the universalisms of the principles of freedom and equality serve as motivating aims for political struggle by anyone anywhere, and also relative and concrete, in that the dynamics of actual struggles are generated by particular patterns of domination and humiliation that are contested in specific contexts.

Camus himself took the implications of this approach into the political field by challenging the unjustly constraining limits of both liberal (bourgeois) capitalist societies and communist regimes. Each prevailing system, Camus argues, draws a binary 'either/or' distinction between freedom and equality and posits one ideal as ultimately having absolute priority over the other. A zero-sum outcome privileging the advantage of some over others is then as much imposed, forcing individuals to choose between the unequal freedom of the marketplace and the unfree equality of collectivism. The end result is a double despotism, a 'cynical dialectic which sets up injustice against enslavement while strengthening one by the other' (1960: 92). Rejecting ways of thinking that propagate the damaging perception of irreconcilable values, Camus insists that freedom and equality are bound up together in a state of tension – a tension that is not easily navigated to be sure, but one which in its open-endedness prevents the dual demands of freedom and equality from hardening into a permanent and rigid opposition. What this means, in terms of balancing the tension between the two poles of freedom and equality, can be mapped first negatively – 'poverty increases insofar as freedom retreats throughout the world, and vice versa' – and then positively – 'the economic revolution must be free just as liberation must include the economic' (1960: 94).

Camus remained sceptical about the ability of any system of government to fully institutionalize the principles of freedom and equality. By their very nature these principles elude reduction to any given institutional order and its strategic interests. Moreover, doing justice calls for the practice of rebellion, whose critically resistant and contentious

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work is ceaseless. Therefore the potential sphere of political activity, for Camus, goes far beyond official juridical-political institutions. Nonetheless, justice requires engagement with the political, economic, social and legal arrangements of society, inasmuch as these are the sites for political struggle animated by claims to freedom and equality. Camus thus actively promoted social movements and other progressive initiatives at the institutional level as well as within civil society, and he endorsed the broadly egalitarian logic of human rights norms and social-democratic processes further intensified by anarcho-syndicalist sensibilities. Pragmatically, then, Camus wanted to ensure that people had the substantive freedom and social goods required to live their lives as they wanted, and the capacity to protest and resist violations of their dignity and integrity.

Because justice is not 'pure', Camus believes that the pursuit of freedom and equality within the collective life of political society requires sharing a commitment to uphold certain fundamental rights as the expression of a desire for reciprocal equality of freedom. 'There is no justice in society', he maintains, 'without natural or civil rights as its basis' (1956: 290). Rights are understood by Camus as collectively shared and mutually guaranteed entitlements to political, economic, social and cultural freedoms. They are properly defined as human rights, both because they are the fundamental rights of all individuals within larger wholes – local communities, societies, states and the international community – and because they are to the benefit of everyone. Camus speaks of a cluster of interrelated rights, encompassing negative and positive freedoms, beginning first with the paramount right to life. The right to life publicly proclaims 'that society and the State are not absolute values' and that 'the individual is above the State' (Camus 1960: 228, 229). Revolt, for Camus, finds its justification in life rather than death, and life is the only absolute 'factual value' since all other values are made possible by it (2010b: 149). No one, then, has a right to deprive another of his or her life. Because life is a site of freedom deployed in history, the right to life also validates the right to freedom. The fact that it is only 'for the sake of freedom' that people are willing to surrender their lives voluntarily, means that freedom 'is the only imperishable value of history' (1956: 291). Freedom spans a spectrum of options, of course, and Camus regards a number of rights as expressing and safeguarding the liberty of individuals: freedom of thought and expression, including freedom of the press; freedom of action and assembly, including protest and civil disobedience; freedom

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of movement; equality before the law; conscientious objection; and the prohibition of degrading treatment and capital punishment. Freedom is inconceivable without expression because, on one hand, expression 'preserves the power to protest' even 'when justice is not realized' and, on the other, it 'guarantees human communication' as the wellspring for a lively public sphere and for empowering participatory political processes (1956: 291).

Just as Camus is drawn to support rights to life and freedom, so does he endorse rights to equality or social justice. In Camus's view, as articulated in an article in *Combat* from October 1944, social justice is defined 'as a social state in which each individual is granted every opportunity at the outset and in which the majority of the country's population is not kept in a shameful condition by a privileged minority'. He insists, further, that 'the reign of justice must be ensured in the economic sphere while liberty is guaranteed in the political sphere' (2006a: 55). A new understanding, he hopes, will arise from lucid awareness of the need to strike a balance between freedom and equality, at whose core human liberty will be dignified by rights to work and a living wage, to robust unemployment protection and social security, to education, housing assistance and healthcare, and to form and join unions. Such rights provide individuals and their collective enterprises with a tangible degree of social and economic power, which enhances their dignity and integrity by contesting exclusion and inequality at the same time that it further enables them to check or curtail abuses by states and corporations. As Camus puts it elsewhere, the oppressed 'are well aware that they will be effectively freed of hunger only when they hold their masters, all their masters, at bay' (1960: 94). For Camus, the combined search for freedom and equality also means vigorously taking up participatory collective action and cooperative strategies across the social and cultural fields (1990: 103). While the rights to social justice are sufficient to launch the claim to equality, this claim can only be genuinely realized by retaining autonomy over productive and distributive activities, and refusing to subordinate humans either to bureaucratic domination or capitalist exploitation. Camus's understanding of justice thus comes very close to libertarian and anarcho-syndicalist movements (see Marin 2008). Indeed, his critique of authoritarian Marxism culminates in a plea to recapture 'the syndicalist and libertarian spirit' and to reanimate the traditions of the self-governing 'commune or of revolutionary trade-unionism' (1956: 298, 300). On the whole, Camus championed worker

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ownership, worker cooperatives, voluntary unions, cultural societies and community organizations, believing they offer viable socio-economic alternatives to the communist and liberal capitalist paradigms, equitable popular access to material and symbolic goods, and the opportunity for individuals as peers to determine democratically the shape of collective life without being shackled to party politics.

Love, friendship and solidarity

For Camus, freedom and equality signify the exemplary conditions that arouse the aspiration to live justly. This aspiration shows a willingness to think and act ethically and politically, a continual effort to respond to others with mutual respect for their rights and freedoms, and to look at matters from others' perspectives. Justice emerges from actions that are always relative to limits: on the one side, challenging and working against oppressive limits imposed by dominating political institutions, systems and parties; on the other side, acknowledging and measuring up to the complex relations between self and other, thereby opening us to the possibilities of political coexistence. Only enactments of justice that affirm their limits, Camus argues, sustain the idea of human dignity and the realities of freedom and equality. Yet Camus's reflection on the creative potentials for sharing a world with others goes beyond formal and institutional considerations. His conception of justice as free yet responsible action also evokes the principles of love, friendship and solidarity that hold together rebellious thinking and acting. Indeed, the one experience that Camus associates with the feeling of existing beyond or without limits is that of love. 'Excess in love', he reveals, is 'the only desirable' (2008c: 68). Love does not triumph over all limits, however, but proceeds to the very limit of our being where we affirm the beloved and, in so doing, embrace our interdependence, a temporary and imperfect fusion, in a world of contingency and finitude.

Love is a constant theme in Camus's work, and he even entertained the prospect of a cycle of works devoted to it (2010b: 158). In his 1958 Preface to *L'Envers et l'endroit*, Camus reflects that love is an appetite for life 'at its best and at its worst' (1970: 14). In this sense, it is not improper to speak of 'a justice or a love' as synonymous (1970: 16), in that each epitomizes the grandeur and folly of the human condition. It is for this reason Camus is adamant that love without limits is an incessant yet

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ultimately unattainable aspiration. The desire of and for love continuously pushes the self to surpass its limits, to form intimate relations with others and the world, only to demonstrate the sheer impossibility of exceeding all limits. This is both because others and the world embody their own limits, and because to overcome or erase limits would in fact be the end of love. Love possesses the peculiar quality whereby we recognize ourselves only in another, but by way of affirming rather than dissolving the differences between us. The possibility of love depends on recognition of the liminality where beloveds are joined together. That is why love has such a positive value in Camus's eyes: as the reconciliation of two different yet convergent beings it comes as near as is possible to the miracle of equilibrium or balance in an absurd world. However, just as Camus portrays love as taking us right up to the limit of our limits, exposing us to the openness of the other, so does he depict its passion as magnifying consciousness of those aspects of life beyond love which do not have measure, which 'exude excess only in hatred', animosity and misery (2008c: 68). The experience of love makes palpable that there is much in human society that inhibits or actively celebrates the absence of love, and disavows the reconciliation of plural selves and others. In Camus's words: 'There is no love of life without despair of life' (1970: 56).

Camus's understanding of love bears close resemblances to his notions of the absurd and revolt. Just as the absurd arises from a longing for unity and familiarity within an estranged universe, so too revolt arises from an impassioned yearning for an integral value common to all human beings. By the same token love stems from a burning desire to create for oneself intimate connections that enhance the experience of life; the secret of those who love is that they know the feeling, the beauty, of freedom is greatest when shared with another. Camus thus suggests that 'the passionate affirmation that underlies the act of rebellion' is 'the very essence of love' (1956: 19). What, then, for Camus is the political significance of love? Love is multifaceted and has numerous aspects – maternal, romantic and erotic love as well as love for friends, for partners in sport and the resistance struggle, and also for art, truth and the world itself – which appear throughout his writings. There are two ways that something notably political emerges from the relational experience of love. First, the experience of love speaks powerfully to the possibility of ethical-political encounters driven by twin desires: passion for a common good shared between self and other, and yearning for an interactive balance between freedom and equality. Yet the experience of love also offers a lesson in the

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fragility of such relational encounters. Love helps us to recognize that we must negotiate and not impose our relationships with others, and that we must nurture and care for them in the fleeting present if we hope for them to endure through time. Even then, however, it is still possible for loving relationships to unravel, and understanding this prevents us from reducing ethical and political encounters to any illusory certainty. In *The Just*, for example, the love that Dora and Kaliayev have for each other collapses under the weight of their love of justice and the revolutionary movement. Too late do they realize they 'need time for love' when they 'scarcely have time for justice' (Camus 1984: 200).

Second, the experience of love also discloses how ethical and political encounters involve turning attention towards others and the world rather than towards the (sovereign) self. Love is an expression of wanting the other to be, as other, which resonates with a political receptivity to the existence and actions of others in all their plurality. Even more, love of the world is politically pertinent inasmuch as the world constitutes the very givenness of a pre-existing reality that is the condition for the possibility of human existence and freedom. To love the world and the richness of existence it provides, despite its imperfections and injustices, is to test the limits of our gratitude and generosity. According to Camus (1970: 6–8), exposure to the expanses of sun, sea, sky and landscape offer the human heart a lightness that does not abandon reality but apportions a proper balance to the darkness of despair, bitterness and resentment. Moreover, the indifference of the natural world to human suffering can help us to reconcile with our fate. If the tragic beauty of the world consists of the encounter between human finitude and natural eternity, then rebellion against the injustice of mortality manifests simultaneously as affirmation of the world whose unpredictable hazards have also given birth to our existence. Camus proposes love of the world as an orientation that is at once sober and generous, bold and lucid, a Sisyphean resoluteness that is tragically aware yet affectionately embracing of our relationship to the cosmos which both gives and takes away life. Camus (1970: 72) makes this clear in a striking passage from 'Nuptials at Tipasa':

> Sea, landscape, silence, scents of this earth, I would drink my fill of a scent-laden life, sinking my teeth into the world's fruit, golden already, overwhelmed by the feeling of its strong, sweet juice flowing on my lips. No, it was neither I nor the world that counted, but solely the harmony and silence that gave birth to the love between us. A love I was not foolish enough to claim for myself alone, proudly aware that I shared it with a whole race born in the sun

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> and sea, alive and spirited, drawing greatness from its simplicity, and upright on the beaches, smiling in complicity at the brilliance of its skies.

In Camus's terms, love of the world exemplifies another way of living together in shared acknowledgement of and gratitude for the miraculous gift of life. Politically, then, the point is 'to change lives ... but not the world' itself (1970: 7), thereby rebutting nihilism's desperate denunciation of the world as accursed source of a futile human condition. For Camus, a fragile and finite existence lived in this sensuous world – and accordingly in defiance of anti-worldly despair as well as otherworldly hope – remains our first and last bittersweet love: 'I am happy in this world', he confesses, 'for my kingdom is of this world' (2010a: 9). 'In the kingdom of humanity', Camus adds, 'men are bound by ties of affection' (1960: 239).

The highly variable manifestations of love, which may prove to have a mobilizing force ethically and politically, are also pregnant with inherent ambiguities and perils. For all love traverses the borders between too little and too much, and involves an excess that remains both unifying and fragmenting. Insofar as love is a kind of desire that can never be satisfied completely, it may appear as if it were an inexorable force sweeping away all other concerns from its path. It may also succumb to simplistic romanticism and cheap sentimentalism, or be sapped of emotional depth and reduced to physical sensuality. Further, love can become obsessively singular; lovers often are devoured by a kind of selfish joy, an extravagant exclusivity that turns away from the world, a furtive fusion from which the rest of humanity vanishes. Love, it seems, can give birth to injustice as well as justice. As observed wryly by Jean-Baptiste Clamence, the duplicitous judge-penitent of *The Fall* (*La Chute*): 'That's the way man is, *cher monsieur.* He has two faces: he can't love without self-love' (1963: 33–4). But Clamence also gestures to the possibility of a 'self-limiting' form of love which affords an alternative mode of relating intimately to others, and of exchange with the world, without forfeiting political commitment: 'You see, I've heard of a man whose friend had been imprisoned and who slept on the floor of his room every night in order not to enjoy a comfort of which his friend had been deprived. Who, *cher monsieur*, will sleep on the floor for us?' (1963: 32).

Without underestimating the difficulties involved in loving others, then, Camus insists that the bonds of friendship and solidarity can produce life-affirming relationships that strengthen political coexistence and moderate love of self. In friendship and solidarity, love undergoes a

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metamorphic transformation; its delimitation into affective attachments brings about transformative civic and political relationships capable of assuaging the damage wrought by injustice, inequality and social exclusion: 'Not giving in to hatred, not making any concessions to violence, not allowing our passions to become blind – these are the things we can still do for friendship' (Camus 1960: 63). Through binding love to particular others, places and times, both friendship and solidarity enable the multiplication of a love for concrete others without the need for exclusivity; friends may be many and various but friendship also stands for a certain reliable constancy through change.

Camus's view of friendship follows a classical Greek and Hellenist conception about the nature and terms of reciprocity and mutual equality whereby, as Aristotle (1976: 294) puts it, the 'friend *is* another self'. In Aristotle's influential account, friendship answers to the deep human need for community; 'friendship [*philia*]', he tells us (1932: 219), 'is the motive of social life'. Friendship may be based on mutual advantage and utility, on the mutual pleasure derived from being in one another's company, and on mutual appreciation of each other's character, that is, on who each person is and becomes (1976: 261–4). The mutual recognition of personhood embodied in friendship is premised therefore on acknowledgement that two (or more) persons see themselves in and through the eyes of the other. If the friend is someone who mirrors the self, this is not as an expression of essential sameness but of irreducible plurality – there must always be more than one person for friendship to exist as a mode of reciprocity between different yet equal partners. Similarly, friendship underscores that plurality is internal to personality, in that what makes us distinctive as persons may alter in the temporal movement between past and future. The ascription of identity between friends can only ever be partial rather than complete, embodying similarities as well as differences, for otherwise it would be impossible for one self to recognize a friend as *another* self with a distinctive identity and perspective on the world; the friend importantly retains an element of the non-self or stranger that evades complete identification. The mutual recognition embodied in friendship thus models the type of positive or just relation between self and other in social contexts that Camus regards as admirably political. In friendship, domination is disallowed, and the self is granted the same freedom from the other that the other is granted from the self.

Camus affirms the ethics of 'the understanding glance of shared friendship' (2010a: 18) uncovered by the Greeks. It is 'the primary virtue' (2010b:

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115) inasmuch as it is an attitude that encourages recognition and defence of personal integrity conjoined with a desire for relations of reciprocated self-revelation, trust, compassion and open communication. Without the mutuality of friendship – and its promise of an emotional commitment to equality, shared decision-making and political interaction – then 'even suffering is solitary' (Camus 1956: 144). Friendship therefore symbolizes measure as the creative tension of being-in-the-world-with-others, which balances caring respect for the counterpart's freedom with an affectionate openness to the unifying bonds of human community. For this reason, any doctrine that refuses the possibility of friendship to a fellow human being, which insists 'that friendship ... must be sacrificed and postponed' for the sake of ideology or power (1956: 161–2), should be rejected as anti-political. The phenomenon of friendship makes manifest the reality that we depend upon each other to share the pleasures as well as the burdens that accompany human affairs. Friendship allows us to humanize our relationships to others by speaking our hearts and minds, as well as to change the way we see the world, which is virtually impossible in solitude. Friendship, then, has at least two pertinent political characteristics. Friendship emerges from an enjoyment of the company of others in their plurality and, at the same time, is a source of resilience given the ever-present reality of estrangement, domination and injustice. Because of the uncertainty and despair that come about when we feel alone and impotent, Camus confides in a letter to René Char, 'we must rely on the friend, when he knows and understands, and walks the same pace' (Camus and Char 2007: 148).

Camus further finds that intimate relations of love and friendship may also develop into similar yet widening social experiences that transform feelings of indignation against various forms of humiliation suffered even by more distant others into mutual concern, sympathy and respect. Feelings of moral indignation, in other words, act as a motivating force that generates solidarity among 'strangers'. Solidarity is, for Camus, an expression of justice as an existential affect and not merely an abstract ideal: 'if justice has any meaning in this world', he writes, 'it means nothing but the recognition of that solidarity; it cannot, by its very essence, divorce itself from compassion ... [the] awareness of a common suffering' (1960: 217). Camus's conception of solidarity arises from his account of rebellion. While the motives for rebellion are perceptions that the limits of human integrity and dignity are being violated, every rebellious struggle must be measured in terms of the negative or positive contribution

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that it makes towards the conditions for social solidarity. From a normative point of view, solidarity is the desire 'to serve justice so as not to add to the injustice of the human condition' (1956: 285). Rebellion, then, amounts to a solidarist disposition on behalf of any human being, existentially founding the immanent first value of ethics and politics: 'I rebel – therefore we exist' (Camus 1956: 22). This concrete principle of solidarity is applicable to all specific social contexts, setting rebellion's internal limits on what can be done in struggling collectively for freedom and justice. Insofar as solidarity reflects the limits on what can be done, it entails a willingness to be self-critical and capable of judging one's chosen means and ends from an absurdist perspective; the rebel is determined, Camus reiterates, 'on laying claim to a human situation in which all the answers are human' (1956: 21). The compassion that we may have for the suffering and humiliation of others must be joined with a refusal to contribute to further injustice in the world in order to realize the solidaristic spirit of rebellion.

Compassion is a component of solidarity in that it motivates the move from simple acknowledgement of and sympathy for the suffering of others, to the choice to take a stand against the source of their suffering even if we are not directly affected by it. In this way it is a kind of 'insane generosity ... which unhesitatingly gives the strength of its love and without a moment's delay refuses injustice' (Camus 1956: 304). Compassion also punctures the dehumanizing detachment hidden behind moral abstraction and bureaucratic rationality. Solidarity is, in effect, a sign of the rebel's critical, judging recognition that the world is shared with others and that one is able selectively to put oneself in the other's place. This can be seen, for example, in Camus's claim that rebellious thought 'cannot dispense with memory' (1956: 22). By this Camus seems to mean that memory is not only the retrieval of one's past experiences but an imaginative capacity to put oneself in another time and place, and thereby include the perspectives of others in one's thinking, judging and struggling against oppression. Resistance to domination is predicated on not forgetting the injustices that others have undergone, while self-consciously sustaining in 'a perpetual state of tension' lucid awareness of past experiences, present possibilities, and future horizons of collectively shared freedom and equality (Camus 1956: 22). In this sense, solidarity for Camus is indicative of a capacity for critical, reflective judgement that resists the dual pressures of conformism and the lure of forgetting the human experience of suffering.

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Building solidarity in the face of the absurdity of the human condition is, for Camus, a key ethical and political responsibility. Camus's participation in the French Resistance, his support for workers and prisoners of conscience throughout the world, and his denunciation of capital punishment exemplify his commitment to solidarity. For Camus, solidarity means acting to support others when they are threatened by injustice, exclusion and coercively imposed inequality. He emphasizes that 'men are not alone and that when faced with hostile conditions, their solidarity is total' (2006a: 56). This understanding of solidarity as a kind of shared responsibility is, of course, given dramatic expression in *The Plague*. There the narrator, Dr Bernard Rieux, evokes in solidarist terms the shared experience of the residents of the Algerian city of Oran when it is besieged by an outbreak of bubonic plague. After the city is placed under quarantine, Rieux finds that 'following the dictates of his heart, he has deliberately taken the victims' side and tried to share with his fellow citizens the only certitudes they had in common – exile, suffering and love. Thus he can truly say there was not one of their anxieties in which he did not share, no predicament of theirs that was not his' (Camus 1948: 301–2). *The Plague* consequently serves as a reflection not only on the evils that humans inflict on one another, but on the friendship and solidarity that restores meaning to life even 'in the very midst of catastrophe' (1948: 108).

The relentless prospect of death in *The Plague* provokes metaphysical, ethical and political crises as well as corresponding forms of resistance. For most of the novel's characters, an understanding of the absurdity of their condition is coupled with an awareness of the absence of God; stripped of, indifferent to or disavowing faith in transcendent salvation, they find hope only in the relationships through which they tie themselves together – even if forced to do so by the appearance of a common threat. Father Paneloux, scrupulously faithful to the notion of community bound only through God, is an exception. The first sermon Paneloux delivers draws upon the Book of Exodus to preach that the appearance of plague in Oran is a divine punishment sent by God to rehabilitate the 'sinners' amongst the faithful: 'He hoped against hope that, despite all the horrors of these dark days, despite the groans of men and women in agony, our fellow citizens would offer up to heaven that one prayer which is truly Christian, a prayer of love. And God would see to the rest' (1948: 99). Later, Rieux angrily lashes out at Paneloux's belief in divine grace after witnessing the agonizing death of an innocent child:

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> "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."

Despite their profound differences of belief, however, Rieux refuses to turn his back on Paneloux. More important still is to establish connections between two people who must confront the darkness of senseless death:

> "What does it matter? What I hate is death and disease, as you well know. And whether you wish it or not, we're allies, facing them and fighting them together." Rieux was still holding Paneloux's hand. "So you see" – but he refrained from meeting the priest's eyes – "God Himself can't part us now". (1948: 218–19)

Paneloux ultimately succumbs to the epidemic, and on his deathbed Rieux offers to stay with him. 'Thanks', he says with difficulty, 'But priests can have no friends. They have given their all to God' (1948: 233).

This image of negative solidarity contrasts ambiguously with the critical role of friendship and positive solidarity shared between Rieux and Jean Tarrou, a visitor to Oran caught by the quarantine, blurring the boundaries between given and chosen ties of affiliation. Thrown together into a contingent situation that appears determinate because of the limits it imposes, the two men also share a similar sense of everyday, worldly responsibility that opens up the possibility for freedom, truth and meaning in terms of how they respond to that situation: Rieux struggles against the plague because he considers it his moral duty to heal as many bodies as possible and thereby ameliorate human suffering in the present, even though all individuals will die eventually, while Tarrou feels obliged to combat evil without becoming complicit in death and suffering through his actions, even though this aspiration seems impossible in the world as it presently is. Tarrou organizes the voluntary sanitary squads and, alongside Rieux, tirelessly drives the frontline of daily resistance to the plague that has infected the city. Their opposition to the plague gains an affirmative character when they invest themselves in and carry out tasks

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that work upon and transform its limits. Accordingly, they acknowledge the dignity and humanity shared with others, and also demonstrate that there is something to fight for in life and not only something to fight against. One evening Tarrou suggests that he and Rieux 'take an hour off – for friendship' (1948: 245). Tarrou's view of humanity and the world then comes out in a lengthy conversation, in which he tells Rieux about his childhood and of how the experience of hearing his father, a state prosecutor, seek the death penalty for a criminal gave shape to his convictions: 'All I maintain is that on this earth there are pestilences and there are victims, and it's up to us, so far as possible, not to join forces with the pestilences' (1948: 253–4). It is clear that Tarrou has survived despair and sees a fragile hope in life, despite the fact that confronting evil is ceaseless, through the strength afforded by solidarity. Breaking off, Tarrou proposes they go for a swim in the harbour, 'for friendship's sake' (1948: 255). Slipping into the inky coolness of the sea, 'a gently heaving expanse of deep-piled velvet' under a night sky gently illuminated by the stars and the moon, 'a strange happiness' possesses Rieux; turning to Tarrou, 'he caught a glimpse on his friend's face of the same happiness, a happiness that forgot nothing, not even murder' (1948: 256).

Conclusion

The specific forms of ethical-political relationships associated with Camus's concern for, and practices of, rebellion often are only implicit in his writings. This chapter has traced Camus's various accounts of how freedom as an ethical and political exercise can be effective in a world where inhospitable conditions and unjust institutions often meet. It has shown how Camus poses the question of justice in terms of taking a contentious stand that sets one simultaneously in opposition to domination and inequality and in support of freedom and equality. It has also shown how he opens the possibility that we need not choose either political freedom or social equality, but that we can establish a measure between the two as the common basis for human dignity. In this sense, he draws upon interrelated notions of individual rights and collective socio-economic self-determination to refuse the false dichotomy of capitalism and communism. Finally, I have looked at Camus's proposal that ethical and political attachments entail more than formal structures of

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government, and can be woven out of powerful relations of love, friendship and solidarity. Although these affective dispositions and felt social commitments do not elude ambiguity, they nonetheless promote mutuality of recognition, compassion and support that give life to everyday forms of responsibility and animate political coexistence in a radiantly precarious world.

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Cosmopolitanism without Hope

Abstract: *This chapter argues that Camus's thought is pertinent to engaging critically with current global political existence framed within the historical condition of globalization, as well as with the moral and political doctrine of cosmopolitanism. In doing so, it reconstructs Camus's notion of the absurd in order to elucidate his critique of historical teleology. In his work, Camus endeavoured to develop a fallibilist historical sensibility suitable to a cosmos shorn of meaning, which led him to reject ideas of progress and their traces of messianism when elaborating his treatment of rebellion. By making use of Camus's ideas about the absurd and rebellion, Hayden suggests that these two themes productively unsettle contemporary cosmopolitanism as a teleological orthodoxy of human progress and fruitfully if paradoxically lie at the heart of a post-teleological conception of cosmopolitanism 'without hope'.*

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This chapter examines some of the points of contact between Camus's political thought and one of the most compelling ideas linked to contemporary theory about global politics today: cosmopolitanism. The recent revitalization of cosmopolitanism appears to be motivated largely by the wish to make sense of and respond to intensifying global interdependence and its (dis)integrative effects, including transformations of sovereignty, cultural hybridity, complex patterns of identity and attachment, and multiple scales of economies (Fine 2007: 1–6; Vertovec and Cohen 2002: 4). Despite differences of interpretation and normative emphasis, cosmopolitan discourses share a common sense of belonging to the world as a whole, a distinctive 'way of being in the world' (Waldron 2000: 227) underscored by the traditional cosmopolitan notion of the *polites* of the *kosmos*. In what follows I argue that Camus can serve as a compelling source for a certain rebellious notion of cosmopolitanism that runs against the grain of recent accounts of cosmopolitan ethics and politics. In particular, I contend that Camus's ideas about the absurd and rebellion bring a provocative, but nonetheless cosmopolitan perspective to bear on our understanding of being at home in an enigmatic world ruptured by absurdity and injustice. I also explore the ways that Camus's radical critique of historical teleology unsettles contemporary cosmopolitan theory as an orthodoxy of human progress, and propose revising the cosmopolitan outlook by putting aside the teleological temptation and delineating a Camusian cosmopolitanism 'without hope'. I conclude by examining several dispositional characteristics involved in cultivating an attitude or ethos of rebellious cosmopolitanism. By developing Camus's post-foundationalist and post-teleological perspective on politics towards the issue of global transformations, the chapter shows that cosmopolitanism must strive against the injustices of a deeply divided world yet at the same time accept theoretical, factual and moral limits on its vision and actions.

Camus's cosmopolitan sensibility

Camus's thought is pertinent to engaging critically with current global political existence framed within the historical condition of globalization, as well as with the moral and political doctrine of cosmopolitanism. While cosmopolitans have been among the most vocal and robust critics of many aspects of globalization – particularly concerning global

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economic inequality – contemporary cosmopolitanism has by and large too readily endorsed not only the widespread perception that already we are living in 'one world' (Singer 2004), but also the ambitious project of developing powerful global institutions meant to integrate the world under a single model of (liberal capitalist) justice (Mouffe 2005). And it is here that the work of Camus is perhaps most instructive at present. For although the idea of cosmopolitanism has long historical antecedents, it also can be understood as a considered ethical and political response to globalization which has achieved prominence from within the circumstances of global interdependence itself (Beck and Sznaider 2006). Camus also was intimately familiar with the post-Second World War transformations towards a global order that constitute the precursors for much of today's increased interconnectedness and interdependence among peoples, and he too reflected upon the need for a more just world shared with others. But more importantly, Camus also provided vigorous criticisms of the dangerous consequences that can attend the political folly of ideologically deifying these concerns, criticisms that are well worth returning to today.

Whether defined in ethical, legal or political terms, the idea of cosmopolitanism has, with the advent of globalization, captured the imagination of many political theorists and activists seeking an alternative to the nation-state paradigm. The cosmopolitan vision, though conceived in various guises, endorses the fundamental ideal of 'the worldwide community of human beings' (Nussbaum 1996: 4). Broadly speaking, cosmopolitanism today has come to embody an oppositional stance to globalization's dark side; the deep 'discontents' and divisions provoked by entrenched political exclusion and economic exploitation, by pervasive social inequalities and global poverty (Pogge 2010). However, it is notably unremarked that the invoking of the cosmopolitan idea by those who wish to change the world is a perilous game that can easily lose its way when cosmopolitans forget the limits of rebellion. Commentators have pointed out, for instance, that 'cosmopolitanism might turn into an ideology' facilitating or rationalizing a kind of 'cosmopolitan crusade' (Cavallar 2011: 1; Fine 2007: 21).

When seen in this light, Camus's work provides a way of deepening theoretical appreciation of the limits of cosmopolitanism. It is critically important to see the relationship between the force and appeal of cosmopolitanism, on the one hand, and the limits to the idea and its oppositional potential, on the other. Camus offers a prescient warning

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about the dangerous directions in which ethical and political doctrines can lead, when they fail to remain connected to the ambiguities of the human condition and to the specific experiences of suffering and oppression that animate the search for justice. What Camus objected to about 'ideology' in its broadest sense is its exaltation of a general ideal at the expense of losing grasp with particular reality. In this context, contemporary cosmopolitanism flirts with the temptations of foundationalism and an excessively teleological spectacle of history. It runs the constant risk of transmuting from an inspiring vision into an inviolable doctrine of universal salvation. In this way, cosmopolitanism could be yet another threatening modernist ideology of human betterment – a new political religion of immutable truth.

Camus's post-foundational and post-teleological reflections on the human condition offer valuable insights for cosmopolitanism. Nevertheless, I want to be clear that it is not my intention here to argue that Camus explicitly considered himself a cosmopolitan theorist. To my knowledge, he never specifically employed the term 'cosmopolitan' to describe his thought. In any event, categorizing himself or his work in terms of a fixed, singular identity would have been anathema to Camus. There are, however, numerous instances of an implicit cosmopolitan 'sensibility' in Camus's work. The recent literature on cosmopolitanism emphasizes that all human beings enjoy equal status as the fundamental units of moral concern and that the interests of each should be extended equal concern and respect by all other human beings (see Brown and Held 2010). Similarly the ethics of rebellion, as Camus advances it, actively invokes the value of each person 'to be treated as an equal' and moreover it is 'for the sake of everyone in the world' that the rebel protests against injustice (Camus 1956: 14, 16). More dramatically, in conveying the sense of eroding boundaries attendant upon modernity's intensification of global social relations, Immanuel Kant (generally regarded as the principal initiator of modern cosmopolitanism) writes that the 'peoples of the earth have thus entered in varying degrees into a universal community, and it has developed to the point where a violation of rights in one part of the world is felt everywhere' (1959: 46). In a remarkable echo of Kant's evocation of the emerging cosmopolitan condition of political life, Camus (2006a: 146) commented in December 1944:

> Today we know that the nations of the world share a common destiny, and when a Czech is slapped in the face in Prague, the repercussions are felt by the prosperous residents of Fontainebleau, the collective farmers of the Ukraine,

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> and the cotton growers of Texas. We know that when one country experiences industrial growth, or when poverty increases in another, the effects are felt in the farthest corners of the globe.

Camus elaborated on this theme in an essay published as a series of articles in *Combat* in November 1946, under the title 'Neither Victims nor Executioners'. As in most cosmopolitan conceptions of the post-Second World War era, Camus avers 'the new world order that we are seeking cannot be merely national or even continental, much less Western or Eastern. It has to be universal' (2006a: 267). Camus was deeply distraught by the violence, fear and poverty that were quickly entrenched in the aftermath of the Second World War and exacerbated by the ensuing global conflict between the twin ideological camps of communism and capitalism. Camus warned against modernist ideologies that foster polarized views of the world and a generalized distrust of humanity, sundered into opposing camps of allies and enemies. From this perspective, he writes, 'we know that there are no more islands and that borders are meaningless ... There is no longer any such thing as isolated suffering, and no instance of torture anywhere in the world is without effects on our daily lives' (2006a: 266). If the new world order is not to be divided into 'victims' and 'executioners' by ideals that legitimize injustice and suffering as 'necessary evils' for the price of unquestionable progress, it can only arise from a genuinely 'international democracy' (2006a: 267–8). International democracy, as Camus sees it, must be characterized not merely by an international law 'made and unmade by governments', but by a World Parliament open to all peoples and 'constituted by means of worldwide elections' whose supranational legislative capacity would truly usher in 'universal law' above governments (2006a: 268–9). Working for the creation of a new world order of justice and freedom amounts to entering into 'a new social contract' to unite people across borders, and resisting the anachronistic choice of 'being asked to love or to hate one or another country or people' (2006a: 272–4). While Camus's cosmopolitan sensibility is grounded in his ethics of rebellion, concrete political issues connected with the question of global integration/fragmentation as the experiential horizon of our historical moment greatly preoccupied him.

In conjunction with his theoretical vision in favour of cosmopolitical democratization and justice, Camus also was actively involved at this time in support of Garry Davis. Davis, a US Air Force pilot in the Second World War, renounced his US citizenship while in Paris in 1948

and declared himself a 'world citizen'. Davis attempted to gain entry to the Palais de Chaillot, the United Nations' temporary headquarters, in order to seek recognition of world citizenship status but was ejected from UN 'territory' and eventually deported from France. Camus joined the 'Council of Solidarity' with Davis's world citizens initiative, even though mainstream opinion dismissed such a cosmopolitan vision as little more than naïve idealism.[1] Camus's rejoinder turned the criticism on its head. Stressing the increasingly globalized conditions of trade, finance, governance, militarization, communication and resource use, Camus perceptively points out that crises on a world scale 'cannot be resolved without a universal solution' (2006a: 272). This observation, he notes, 'is perfectly objective' in taking 'only reality into account' (2006a: 266); in contrast, so-called 'realist' critics of Davis's efforts are in fact beholden only to the inflexible logic of their 'anachronistic political thinking' that 'finds itself overtaken by events' (2006a: 270, 268). It is the critics, then, who are hopelessly idealistic in supporting an ideologically distorted misappraisal of changing political conditions. Those 'seeking a way of life' consistent with the fact that 'borders are now abstractions', on the other hand, are 'acting not in a utopian way but rather in accordance with the most genuine realism' (2006a: 269, 273). Camus's cosmopolitan sensibility here is existential-sociological; it springs, in other words, from concrete and existing socio-political processes rather than from an abstract ideal. Camus thus draws again on his post-foundationalism, on a 'reason that knows its limits' (2006a: 274), to justify his cosmopolitan approach to the new realities of the international system and human interaction. 'Neither Davis nor his supporters claim to be bringing *the* truth to the world', Camus remarks (2006a: 308, emphasis added), but rather a reasonable hope for resisting the world's lines of division, provided ethical-political action is conducted in light of the realities of emerging global interconnectedness. Therefore, to those who so readily dismiss the cosmopolitan vision as idealistic, Camus vigorously counters, 'are they so sure of themselves, and so prodigiously infallible, that we must concede everything to them?' (2006a: 304).

Cosmopolitanism and the teleological temptation

The preceding section illustrates the affirmative aspect of Camus's cosmopolitan sensibility. At the same time, Camus found deeply unpalatable the

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teleologically driven metaphysics of historical progress inscribed within the dominant ethical-political doctrines of modernity. In his analysis of the absurd and rebellion, he deals with how philosophical, moral and political systems sustain or legitimate their claim to authority by reference to the course of historical processes. In contrast, given the absurdist dislocation of transcendent sources of value and metaphysical truths, Camus concludes that the values of integrity, dignity and rebellion are socially fashioned – although this does not mean that they are merely arbitrary or incapable of being shared by diverse others. Human beings require meaning in order to make sense of the world, and Camus argues that the meaning that we derive from and ascribe to our experience is constructed. Yet he holds that this does not make meaning arbitrary because we find ourselves always already situated within and conditioned by historically-formed constellations of meaning. These given meanings provide our fundamental bearings in the absurd world and help sustain us in that world, but at the same time, Camus maintains, we must accept that they are contingent and therefore amenable to contestation and transformation. For Camus, this worldly fabric of meanings provides the creative materials for iterative practices of interpretation of our moral and political claims, and exhibits a conditioned freedom that both shapes and limits ethical and political potentials. In maintaining this moderate or fallibilist historical understanding, he insists there can be no appeal to a *telos* to ground our sense of history and search for meaning, no endpoint that justifies everything (or indeed anything). He suggests that the modern temptation to view history as the totality of progress associated with strictly objective 'laws' – of historical, economic, or developmental necessity – is a kind of 'secularization of the ideal' which all dominant political forces of the twentieth century, whether of the left or the right, championed in their desire to claim 'the direction of the future of the human race' (Camus 1956: 77–8). Here Camus comes remarkably close to Walter Benjamin's description of 'messianic time' as a progressivist model of history developing into a final meaning, which then provides a transcendent meta-causal reference by which to legitimate events in the past and ethical-political choices in the present (Benjamin 1999).

Framed in this manner, I suggest, Camus's sense of the absurd has great resonance for contemporary cosmopolitanism. Camus alerts us to the implicit or explicit teleologies that lurk within modern political doctrines that propound narratives of the progress of world history toward the fulfilment of the latent promise of humanity, and which have

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a direct bearing on the normative character of interpersonal and political relations. The cosmopolitan vision is no stranger to this lure of teleology. Most notably, in 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose' and 'Perpetual Peace', Kant takes up the task of reconceptualizing history as the actualization of the *telos* of human freedom in the form of a cosmopolitan world-republic. Kant's account portrays the process of human history as the gradual manifestation of universal reason in concrete legal, economic and political institutions, such as a federation of republican nations and a system of human rights, which progressively encompass the globe as a geospatial totality. Throughout his writings on cosmopolitanism, Kant speculates about how this teleology might be at work in society and history – as expressions of 'a plan of nature aimed at a perfect civil union of mankind' (1991: 51) – to assist in bringing about perpetual peace. While he admits that we can only reflectively impute such teleological development to be at work, he is clear that the ultimate goal of cosmopolitan right should be regarded heuristically as the purposive unity of nature that gradually drives historical progress, and in the end will prevail (Brown 2009: 37–44; Wood 2006: 245). Kant never relinquishes the hope that 'after many revolutions ... the highest purpose of nature, a universal *cosmopolitan existence*, will at last be realised as the matrix within which all the original capacities of the human race may develop' (1991: 51). Kant's concern with imputing 'providential' teleology to the moral improvement of the human species leads him cunningly to portray war and humanity's 'unsocial sociability' as natural mechanisms of definitive historical progress (1991: 108–11). This assumption strongly reflects the modern drive to ascertain stable, unambiguous epistemological foundations and ethical standards, and a corresponding inability to conceive of absurdity as an inherent aspect of the ethical-political moment.

While Kant advocates adopting a teleological conception of historical change as a matter of shoring up the sense of moral purpose behind the development (or improvement) of political society – even going so far as to bemoan an attitude that eschews historical teleology as 'truly the stone of Sisyphus' (Kant 1991: 88) – Camus's absurdism would reject such an approach. Rather than fully accepting the limits of reason and what is knowable, the imputation of teleological evolution suggests the metaphysical need to rely on 'eternal' knowledge in order to make sense of present values, choices and actions. It is essentially an unwarranted belief in an indiscernible, higher purpose that ostensibly guarantees

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the meaningfulness of whatever happens in the present, whether war or peace, injustice or justice. Because this purpose remains a 'hidden' mechanism in history it can be known only as an article of faith – a 'sorry comfort', to appropriate Kant's own terms. Moreover, historical teleology actually is a denial of temporality, a way of diverting human existence from the reality and limits of finitude by assuming a 'view from nowhere', that is, beyond mortality. Following Camus's critique of the deformities of rebellion, then, we can say that any variant of cosmopolitanism reinforced in teleological terms would lead to 'a world of abstraction ... of absolute ideas and of messianism without subtlety' that delivers humanity 'entirely into the hands of history' (Camus 2006a: 259). Even if we were to entertain the fiction of the 'inevitability' of a perfected cosmopolitan end-state, Camus would argue, I suggest, that this posited end itself tells us nothing about the *means* that can be used to bring it about – most significantly, either by means of totalization 'from above' via coercion or force, or by means of unification 'from below' via free agreement between equals. What actual means are chosen, a decision which rests on morally-significant value judgements, is a crucial issue obscured by the teleological perspective.

Kant's teleological legacy became further entrenched in the modernist cosmopolitan imaginary through the work of numerous influential figures. Hegel's cosmopolitanism, for instance, coincides with a philosophy of world history as the progressive movement of states towards ever higher stages of freedom, culminating in the rule of Reason circumscribing the totality of the world and, with it, the end of history (Hegel 1975; Fine 2007: 29–38). Similarly, Marx and Engels (1979: 476–7) envisioned communism as a materialist, dialectical and emancipatory project of cosmopolitan collective subject-formation arising alongside the borderless expansion of capital 'over the whole surface of the earth', which thereby ensures the 'impossibility' of all 'national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness'.

More recently, Jürgen Habermas (1997) has taken up Kant's argument that a developmental trend to strengthen the republican constitutions of states internally will gradually limit hostility within and between nations. Of course, Habermas is aware that the consolidation of a cosmopolitan public right of and for humanity poses numerous complex issues beyond the regulation of conflict, but he foregrounds his assumption that a cosmopolitanism anchored in a universal core of democracy and rights constitutes a condition of possibility for the progressive development

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of humankind. Other contemporary cosmopolitans, such as Andrew Linklater, while eschewing any crude historical causality, nevertheless remain willing to ascribe a progressive developmental course to human history as a whole. Increasing global interconnectedness and a concomitant universal consciousness of humanity's capacity to harm and be harmed, Linklater claims, are part of a 'scaling up' of human organization indicative of a world historical evolution that is 'almost certain to continue' to a cosmopolitan endpoint (2010: 27).

Camus sought to undermine such understandings of history as a developmental process towards a universalist end amenable to rational control. Modern approaches to politics, he argues, share a particular teleological form, combining belief in the efficacy of instrumental rationality with faith in the ability to lead humanity to its singular historical destiny. From world communism to global capitalism, from pan-nationalism to 'new' cosmopolitanism, hope in the future ultimately presupposes the flow of a historical process towards a privileged endpoint. For Camus, both feeding into and sprouting from such doctrines is a desperation to endow the cosmos with absolute meaning, which can only be disappointed. It is striking that even Kant concludes, near the end of 'Idea for a Universal History', that it 'is admittedly a strange and at first sight *absurd* proposition to write a *history* according to an idea of how world events must develop if they are to conform to certain rational ends; it would seem that only a *novel* could result from such premises' (1991: 51–2, first emphasis added). Kant and his cosmopolitan descendants have largely turned their backs on this inkling of the absurd.

Cosmopolitanism without hope

I have suggested that modern and contemporary cosmopolitan theories often presuppose an explicit or tacit teleology, as if all historical events are somehow heading for the arrival of a rationally integrated system of global cosmopolitanism and universal humanity. As Richard Falk opines, the 'idea about making the world better through a set of proposals', prevalent within modern cosmopolitanism, 'implies a utopian confidence in the human capacity to exceed realistic horizons' (1994: 140). This is an uneasy yet worthwhile observation, insofar as many (though certainly not all) cosmopolitan theorists pronounce their vision to be unproblematically 'progressive' in both descriptive and normative senses. Yet

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in constituting cosmopolitanism in historically progressivist terms, the actuality of multiple forms of cosmopolitanism in the present becomes subordinated to the possibility of a singular form of cosmopolitanism in the future. The belief in the historical progression of cosmopolitanism towards ever more rational, justifiable and efficient forms sets the tone for a discourse that ends up portraying cosmopolitanism as a normative ideal circumscribed by an inevitable *telos*. Placing our hopes in bringing about a cosmopolitan global order by means of rationalist efficacy conceals an escapist 'leap of faith', which inevitably carries the burden of a deterministic teleology. The teleological imperative displaces the ambivalences and ambiguities of what it may mean to 'be' cosmopolitan onto an agenda of problem-solving projects, and thereby treats the present merely as a vehicle for implementing the future.[2] It is not my (or Camus's) purpose simply to condemn these projects or the positive accomplishments of, for instance, movements for human rights and social justice. But it is crucial to note the dangerous slippage within modernist versions of cosmopolitanism from the aspiration of global political success to the temptation to formulate teleologically-weighted policy prescriptions and rationally efficient outcomes. In its drive to prove its 'practical worth' by focusing on policy and 'problem solving' as legitimating its ethical and political efficacy, the 'value' of cosmopolitanism becomes tainted by the modernist imperative to intervene in socio-political existence for purposes of creating ever more certain futures (Held 2010).

Can one detach cosmopolitanism from a *telos* of historical ontology, from its deeply ingrained teleological idea of progress? We have seen that, given his wariness of rational systems of thought, Camus often interprets the human condition and the tensions between a moderate historical sensibility of limits and a teleological messianism of boundlessness, through mythical figures of classical antiquity because, he claims, Greek thought does not equate temporality with actualized historical progress (1987: 49). Sisyphus in particular symbolizes the refusal of utility and achievement in the face of the common human condition of the absurd. Camus concludes of course that we 'must imagine Sisyphus happy' (1991: 123). This is because Sisyphus powerfully portrays reconciliation with the absurd, on one hand, and thus embodies a non-pessimistic judgement of human existence that goes 'nowhere', as well as non-reconciliation with teleological doctrines that aspire to escape the absurd, on the other hand, and hence enacts a liberation from the worship of history as something

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instrumentally directed towards a hopeful end. Sisyphus's activity is not divine: it leads nowhere, it perfects nothing, it produces neither linear development nor ultimate redemption. And yet it refuses the negative judgement of that state of affairs as futile. It assumes responsibility for an absurd existence rather than attempting to step out of it by forcing it to fit into a historical process, and it affirms the present without relying on the anticipatory hope of a future better world. The most sweeping yet significant implication for cosmopolitanism of Camus's reading of Sisyphus is that we must make a choice about which vision is to be given primacy: a teleological cosmopolitanism of hope, or an a-teleological cosmopolitanism without hope.

Camus offers a way of thinking about existence that preserves a cosmopolitan sense of ethical and political resistance to domination and inequality while illuminating contingent moments in the present where cosmopolitan attitudes and practices can be enacted, without totalizing them into a teleological metaphysics of progressive reason. Such a cosmopolitan disposition is cultivated, I suggest, through the appropriation of the image of Sisyphean 'hopelessness' which, Camus stresses, 'has nothing to do with despair' (1991: 31): live for the world today without any consolatory faith in transcendent ontologies of history. The notion of relinquishing 'hope' – which is an idea that suggests the value of the present is fulfilled only by the realization of a potential in the future, and which therefore becomes endlessly deferred to 'tomorrow' – needs to be emphasized in cosmopolitan thinking. Throughout his *Notebooks*, Camus writes that the postulate of freedom becomes illusory when it is justified with a view to achieving predefined 'future goals', and is conferred meaning solely by the functional transformation of the present into a future grandeur. From this point of view, the present is reduced to nothing. Consequently, to refuse the subordination of freedom and affirm the present is to adopt a posture of living 'without tomorrows [*sans lendemains*]' (Camus 2010b: 86). It is pertinent to ask whether contemporary cosmopolitans fully consider how awareness of the absurd limit of finitude may derail our taking responsibility in the present, when so much emphasis is placed on the eventual arrival of a better tomorrow. 'Hope' in the future is not a brute fact, and it may in fact appear in consciousness as the *inability* to answer to the present from the secure vantage point of an aspirational future. As Camus puts it, 'hope, contrary to popular belief, is tantamount to resignation' (1970: 92). If the concept of 'progress' is a disease of reason, then the idea of 'hope' is the

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contagion. We may push this Camusian line of thinking to argue that only a coherent absurdist sensibility occasions a genuinely cosmopolitan sense of responsibility, because it demands unwavering fidelity to the world as it is while constantly discriminating between decisions and actions that either humanize or dehumanize the world in the present. Put in a different way, cosmopolitan responsibility to the 'here and now' eschews justificatory logics of 'hope' where the present can always be redeemed in the limitless certainty of the 'next world'.

If cosmopolitanism is to 'abolish hope' (Camus 2010a: 105) and thereby shed the tyranny of *telos*, then its choices, commitments and actions can rest only on the fleeting moments of time no longer conceived under the unifying arc of world history. Where some theorists like Martha Nussbaum think of cosmopolitanism as a rationalist tradition whose universalist and impartial duties are premised on the primacy of reason inherent in every human being (1996: 4), Camus's thought suggests instead that a cosmopolitan outlook issues from a mad love of the world as it is in spite of the absurdly tragic character of its many injustices. Ethically and politically, love of the world limned by the absurd is the first step towards refusing to accept all that degrades liberty and justice in present circumstances – which is a conviction that cannot be dictated by 'formal virtue'. Rebellion, Camus goes on to say, 'cannot exist without a strange form of love. Those who find no rest in God or in history are condemned to live for those who, like themselves, cannot live: in fact, for the humiliated' (1956: 304).

Such a view has deep consequences for cosmopolitanism because, with its normative vision unsettled, one can claim with Camus that existence ought not to be assimilated into an abstract universal *telos*, but should open itself up to 'the fixed and radiant point of the present' (Camus 1956: 305) shared in common by the humiliated and the humiliators, the oppressed and the oppressors. Rather than isolating the ethics and politics of rebellion to sovereign domestic spheres, Camus argues that defending and promoting human freedom and dignity across borders are necessary aspects of the rebellious ethos today. Rebellious acts that do not acknowledge this cosmopolitan disposition towards the meaning of the common human condition of a global age implicitly renounce the claim to rebellion (Camus 1956: 22). Rebellion demands that we engage, where necessary, in reflection and action to help build the kinds of cross-border relationships that are most conducive to the freedom and integrity of others. Nonetheless, rebellion also entails respect for the intrinsic

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limits of thought, judgement, and action in the face of the absurdity of the human condition. Again, we see that the absurd constitutes the condition for a responsible ethics and politics of rebellion, including a rebellious cosmopolitanism. Camus's position here matches his rejection of politics based on the inevitable unfolding of history's underlying processes. Just as Camus argues that rebellion is an expression of generalized refusal in response to specific situations of oppression and suffering, so too rebellious cosmopolitanism will confront specific attempts to deny human freedom and dignity without appealing to an 'end' which infuses the course of history with some objective 'progress'.

To capture further the attitude or ethos of rebellion within and across borders, I will briefly trace some aspects of Camus's thought which speak to the dispositional characteristics that can be harnessed by a cosmopolitanism without hope, focussing on the features that make for contextually-grounded choices and actions in a Camusian cosmopolitanism. What must be underscored is that these characteristics are not to be conceived as means to the larger end of advancing history, insofar as they find their rightful place in human relationships in the world as it is now. The first of these is an acknowledgement of difference and the experience of strangeness as resisting the reduction of human plurality to uniformity. Camus introduces this theme in *The Myth of Sisyphus* when he writes, 'Forever I shall be a stranger to myself' (1991: 19). For him, strangeness is inherent to identity, indicating an existential quality of 'foreignness' that dislocates us from ourselves, a difference that, while always singular, is a universal existential trait. As Camus observes, 'this feeling of strangeness is shared with all men' (1956: 22). Throughout his interest in strangeness and estrangement – *The Stranger* and *The Plague*, for example, explore both the vulnerability of the outsider and the capacity to resist forced separation – Camus proposes what can be regarded as a compellingly cosmopolitan notion of belonging and relating to others that transforms experienced contradictions into narratives of our paradoxical condition. In order to live with 'strangers' without fearing or erasing their existential difference, Camus suggests, we must acknowledge the stranger within ourselves and the strangeness that is exposed by the absurdity of the human condition. The point here is to both accept and refuse the status of 'stranger' as a heightened sensibility of cosmopolitanism. The cosmopolitan is attentive to the ways that we traverse the fine line between critical distance and exclusion, between a belonging with others that respects difference and a separation from

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others that debases plurality. This disposition is needed for a coexistence sensitive to the divisions, exclusions, and deprivations of a world of strangeness (see Appiah 2007 for a different approach to this issue).

The second feature of a Camusian cosmopolitanism is devoted to solidarity as well as to the deepening and widening of hospitality. As discussed in the previous chapter, for Camus solidarity means acting to support others when they are threatened by injustice and coercively imposed inequality. It is a kind of mutual responsibility motivated by the desire 'to serve justice so as not to add to the injustice of the human condition' (Camus 1956: 285). Solidarity is, moreover, an expression of justice as a form of love and not merely an abstract ideal. Inasmuch as it reflects an a-teleological relinquishing of hope, the move from justice to solidarity means 'laying claim to a human situation in which all the answers are human' (1956: 21). Thus solidarity is a sign of the cosmopolitan's critical, judging recognition that the world is shared with others and that one is able selectively to put oneself in the 'stranger's' place. The imaginative capacity to put oneself in another time and place, when linked with solidaristic concern for the suffering and humiliation of others, reinforces the compassionate bonds needed to strengthen hospitality as an existential affect, rather than simply a formal rule or principle. This is because the conjunction of strangeness and solidarity points to a process of inversion between the roles of guest and host; self and other are shaped by their exchange of different perspectives which then recasts their relationship as a form of mutual giving and receiving – a welcoming of the strange. As explored in Camus's haunting short story, 'The Guest' (*L'Hote*), the convergence of different horizons of experience unsettles the neat separation between 'native' host and 'foreign' guest, even as hospitality cannot escape from the dilemmas confronting every concrete space of ethical encounter (Camus 2006b: 43–55). The cosmopolitan thus remains a stranger in search of transitory refuge and hospitality in an even stranger yet perplexingly familiar world.

A third aspect of a Camusian cosmopolitanism is expressive of his commitment to an aesthetic or artistic, rather than strictly philosophical, method. Camus considers the act of contemplating experience to be a fundamentally aesthetic encounter with the absurdity of existence, as well as a creative process of interpreting and translating the interplay between (inter)subjective experience and the world as a carrier of differences (Camus 1960: 249–72). Hence, cosmopolitan dispositions can be viewed not just as formal moral imperatives, but as complex everyday

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aesthetic interactions that witness, imagine and stimulate our critical attention towards and awareness of others and our varied places in the world without furnishing unified answers. Moreover, this way of framing our encounters with the world prompts attention to the crucial role of communication and dialogue. For Camus, the prospect of avoiding unnecessary suffering always rests on the possibility, fragile though it is, of dialogue. The dialogical exchange of positions and perspectives helps avoid distorting others' experiences and imposing solutions that undermine the freedom of interlocutors. Dialogue offers a way out of the impasse between a privileged access to rational truth and a fundamentalist incommensurability of conflicting ideologies. Both positions, for Camus, foster totalizing visions of the world and its perfectibility. In contrast, he suggests that we must understand ourselves as existing constantly in the midst of uninterrupted dialogue, an attitude that reflects the acknowledgment of fallibility that comes from embracing the absurd. Camus adds that dialogue is a 'perpetually renewed' opening to the different and the imperfect at the limits of our existing forms of thinking and acting with others (1960: 264). Dialogue can open up spaces for questioning and change without postulating transcendent values to which our thinking and acting must conform. There can be no guarantee that dialogue will deepen solidarity within and across borders. Yet cosmopolitanism, if it abandons its teleological hopes, will invite 'untrammelled dialogue through which we come to recognize our similarity' (Camus 1956: 283) as partners living in a common world without pursuing a determinate endpoint.

A final feature to mention here is that solidarity, compassion, hospitality and dialogue open the pathway to friendship as a material manifestation of the cosmopolitan disposition. Against the assumption that friendship signals a bond premised upon homogeneity, Camus's understanding points to the fact that friendship is always a relationship and negotiation of differences that subverts any sense of unconditional identity purified of the strange or foreign. Camus invites us to envisage friendship as an encounter between self and other(s) that offers an affective alternative to the rule-bound and institutionalized practices of formal politics; to befriend another is to enter into the familiarity of strangeness. To turn to friendship as a place of cosmopolitan encounter thus serves as a point of resistance against the teleological problem-solving model of political efficacy according to which contemporary normative cosmopolitanism

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has increasingly defined itself. Friendship is not a given, but is a product of moral choice exercised in the midst of uncertainty and ambiguity, which thus avoids the extremes of 'natural' enmity for other peoples and 'natural' chauvinism for one's own (Camus 1956: 161–2). As the examples of his *Letters to a German Friend* and his endeavour to negotiate a 'civilian truce' during the Algerian conflict attest, Camus believes that friendship is coextensive with the juxtaposition of mutual dependency, equality and deep plurality that is constitutive of a just social coexistence – even if that coexistence takes threatening turns. Friendship is thus an integral element of a cosmopolitan sensibility that remains 'faithful to the world' (Camus 1960: 28). In other words, friendship preserves the world as the only common ground that is shareable by the whole of humanity even as it is saturated by the absurd.

Conclusion

Contemporary cosmopolitanism makes a valiant attempt to rescue the individual from the vicissitudes of global injustice and inequality. But there is something awry in a philosophical-political enterprise that construes itself as engaged in the Promethean realization of a new, preconceived humanity, fuelled by the reassuring ardour of inexorable progress. In treating humanity as a technical problem to be solved, it amounts to 'an accusation of earthly things and man' and hence is 'without love' for the world as such (Camus 1987: 53). For Camus, by contrast, the lucid acceptance of the absurd predicament of the human condition is entwined with a refusal of any idea of progress that promises to evade the absurd with the mastery offered by millenarian political projects. 'Real generosity toward the future', Camus declares, 'lies in giving all to the present' (1956: 304). It is only once we acknowledge that there is no conclusive basis for hoping that a definitive global cosmopolitan society will be achieved at the end of an unbroken chain of 'tomorrows' that an a-teleological cosmopolitan disposition 'free of all messianic elements and devoid of any nostalgia for an earthly paradise' comes into its own (Camus 2006a: 261). To validate an absurd love of the world and dislocate the authority of a calculated future, then, let us reclaim Camus's Sisyphean understanding of the cosmos and bid farewell to teleology.

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Notes

1. Davis subsequently founded the 'World Government of World Citizens' movement in 1953, which began issuing World Passports, meant for stateless persons and refugees as well as any interested person, in 1954. More than half a million World Passports have been issued since then; six states have recognized it as an official travel document while 180 states have accepted it on a case-by-case basis (see http://www.worldservice.org/visas.html).
2. Catriona McKinnon offers the following gloss on what she refers to as the 'duty' of cosmopolitan hope: 'The cosmopolitan objective exists in the future, and is believed to be good and possible by cosmopolitans who desire it in virtue of their belief that it is good, and yields a disposition in them to act so as to make the realization of the cosmopolitan objective more likely, all else being equal' (2005: 240).

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Epilogue

Hayden, Patrick. *Camus and the Challenge of Political Thought: Between Despair and Hope*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. DOI: 10.1057/9781137525833.0009.

Camus's short story, 'Jonas or the Artist at Work', depicts the predicament of Gilbert Jonas, a struggling painter who suddenly finds fame. As a result of his newfound success, Jonas is inundated with public demands and soon his apartment is besieged by numerous visitors. He is even thronged by 'a school' of disciples: 'The disciples explained to Jonas at length what he had painted, and why. Jonas thus discovered in his work many intentions that rather surprised him, and a host of things he had not put there' (2006b: 64). His time is consumed by conversing with admirers, answering fan mail, taking phone calls, giving interviews and meeting political figures. He begins to neglect his wife and children. Witnessing the public's increasing encroachment in Jonas's life, his oldest and faithful friend, Rateau, tells him, 'You're such a fool. They don't really love you' (2006b: 73). As time passes Jonas's artistic output inevitably declines and his sterility precipitates a critical backlash; critics who had formerly praised him now begin to deride his talent as 'overrated and outdated', to celebrate that he seemingly is 'on the way out', and his reputation wanes (2006b: 74, 70). Jonas begins to avoid 'the haunts and the neighbourhoods frequented by artists' (2006b: 75), takes long walks alone, and patronises only cafes where he is unknown. He then builds a small loft in the apartment, into which he retreats in order to meditate and to rediscover inside him the inspiration to paint again. After several days in the loft without food or sleep, Jonas eventually creates an ambiguous painting and shortly thereafter collapses from exhaustion. Rateau finds the canvas turned towards the wall of the loft. It is entirely blank except for a single word in the centre written in tiny characters, which could be read as either *solitary* (*solitaire*) or *solidarity* (*solidaire*) – or, in fact, as both (2006b: 80; 2008b: 83).

'Jonas' portrays not only Camus's own struggle with success and the doubts that haunted him following the controversy that surrounded publication of *The Rebel*. It also reflects his persistent attentiveness to the principal challenge of political thought: the awareness that solidarity, and the refusal to remain silent in the face of manifest suffering, can grow only out of the silence that simultaneously frustrates and nourishes our freedom. We are born into a universe that cannot speak to us of any larger plan, purpose or meaning. Our very existence is a question mark. It might seem that recognition of the finitude and absurdity of our existence condemns us to nihilistic lament, to a bleak resignation that sees life and the world in wholly negative terms. Yet through persistent rebellion, resistance and working together at the limits of human

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existence, shared meaning and shared forms of life can be fashioned. But it remains the case that, while we are not left entirely without hope, we must decisively leave behind the notion of hope as a leap of faith into redemptive political schemes under the sway of a progressivist course of history. Hope that aspires to replace this world and that hankers after a higher destination which triumphs over all imperfections and injustices, is itself a largely negative dismissal of our worldly existence. By the same token, any attempt to completely master the world would suppress the very wellspring of human creativity – the rebellious impulse that resists the denial of dialogue, the freedom that opposes the imposition of silence. A modest, measured hope, however, accepts that our absurd world is the only one there is, and affirms that it is only because of our human limits, because of our finitude, that a meaningful life shared with others can emerge. To lose blind faith in the future perfection of the world, is to find lucid hope in the real yet also limited political possibilities of the present.

In both his life and his work, Camus consistently challenged the modern crisis and sought a new way of understanding the ambivalent symbiosis between politics and human existence, between the absurd and revolt, and between despair and hope. His conception of human existence, I have argued, therefore serves as a necessary counter to the claims of foundationalism and teleology in contemporary ethics and politics. Camus's rejection of foundationalism stems from his recognition that the authority of metaphysical and religious claims has conspicuously eroded in modernity, giving rise to the living reality of the absurd. His rejection of historical teleology derives from his understanding of how totalizing political doctrines have stepped into the void spawned by the demise of foundationalism, exacerbating the conditions of nihilism and threatening human freedom and dignity. Through his questioning of foundationalism and teleology, Camus provides us with an approach to ethical and political issues that involves the experience of limit conditions arising from the tragic sense of the absurd and challenging present instantiations of inhumanity. In contrast to those who respond to the immense emptiness of death by giving it the calculation of political violence or the excuse of historical reason, Camus counsels love, compassion, friendship, respect for the rights and dignity of others, and solidaristic resistance to social deprivation and political inequalities as the vital counterbalance to the absurdity of our situation. Although Camus's ethical and political sensibility is broadly cosmopolitan in this regard, it also runs contrary

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to the teleological view of cosmopolitanism as a continuously developing project paving the way for an ever better world somehow beyond the absurd. Camus discerns a more ambiguous relationship between history, humanity and matters of politics that leaves him deeply sceptical of misguided confidence in steady rational progress. Cosmopolitanism, for Camus, is another way of describing the ceaseless acts of revolt whereby people assert their human equality or dignity against whatever modes of domination and exclusion exist in present times and places, while simultaneously reaffirming the world as such.

In this book, I have attempted to demonstrate that Camus offers a mode of thinking that remains well adapted to a world where the constant tensions between hope and despair, justice and injustice, exile and belonging, and solitude and solidarity continue to define the human condition. This is a mode of thinking that requires balancing courage and compassion without the final resolution of the triumphal march of progress. It also finds a place in humanity only by embracing simultaneously yet precariously the universal and the particular, never fully at home in a strange world yet nonetheless refusing to denounce the world as it is. But if this thinking with and against the absurd exposes us to estrangement and ambiguity, it also opens up the possibility of such life-affirming experiences as beauty, love and solidarity. In the end, a fierce sense of rebellion is the most difficult and also the most dignifying form of thought and action capable of creating a meaningful existence.

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